

Elevatorgate

A Documentary Satire

By an Atheist
17.08.2017



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Time I travelled, web I dug
Cursed the muse who kicks my butt!
Back I am from foreign sea
Covered in slime
And porcupine spine
I offer my treasure to thee.

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Bigotry is neutral ground, on which the most opposite sects may meet.

– Prescott, History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic, p. 404.

Teaser

Roll on, thou endless, often surging,
abyss-abundant
teacup.

Internet, roll on!

And bring ye forth new content
for my song and my amusement.

Show me, what news is there
of that worthy subject
I am bound to sing about?

But first, let me give due praises
to your ample folly
which is so entertaining.

Internet. Never before was so much argued
so much
about so little.

Praise be upon:

- Blogs
- Forums
- Comment functions

Praise be upon:

- That sense of being right
- That desire to persuade
- That wish of being heard

Praise be upon:

- Trolls
- Dazzlement
- Misunderstandings

But curses on:

- Fairness
- Politeness
- And patience most of all!

Well, so much for that.
Show me now, what news is there
of that heavy argument
that's been a-shaking these four years
the atheist community?
What news is there
of Elevatorgate?

Elevatorgate! Just like herpes
Or like athlete's
Persistent and irritating
Always burning
And returning
Shit- by shitstorm generating
Much old friendship
Followership
Just like ice they melt away
Pettiness
Self-righteousness
Keep reason here at bay.

But I sense you are, dear reader, wondering
what might it be, this seminal
all-important
Elevatorgate.
O lucky reader! How I wish I might be able
to keep you in sweet innocence,
but then, what am I to report?
So listen up, and don't blame me,
if you should feel, while reading,
a certain staleness in your mouth.

First Installment.

How Richard Dawkins and Rebecca Watson came to disagree, and Rebecca Watson disappointedly turned her back at Richard Dawkins.

Of displeasure sing, keyboards, the displeasure
of feminist Rebecca Watson,
that caused much hate among atheists,
and good thinkers to say stupid things
but made themselves subject
for mockery – thus the debate was bound to evolve –
since that day when fell out because of falderal
Richard Dawkins, greatest of atheists,
and bellicose Rebecca Watson.

What event did separate them?
The World Atheist Convention 2011 in Dublin.
For there Paula Kirby had spoken,
the eloquent British journalist,
at a panel discussion titled
"Women in Atheism."
Felicitous Grania Spingies did organize it,
the co-founder of Atheist Ireland.
And to the participants she posed this question:
Why, in their opinion,
were few women in the atheist movement,
and what could one do against it?

[Then Paula Kirby spoke to the attendant atheists:](#)

Well, I think I might be going to start by being controversial at the very beginning, because I actually sort of feel I'm here under false pretenses. Because I'm a bit of a skeptic as to whether this is actually a topic that deserves a place on the program at a conference like this at all. My own feeling is that, as women – I would like to feel we've moved beyond this kind of discussion.

[...]

But over and over again we hear this idea that somehow women are being put off atheism, because the names we've all heard of, the faces we all know are male names and male faces. And I have to say from my perspective, that I regard this as an insult to women. It may even prove to be true, I mean it would be quite interesting to know to which extent real women really are put off by this, but to me it conjures up a picture of women who are so terrified, and so nervous and so feeble, and so overawed by men.

[...]

Now I see all this would be quite different, and I would be arguing differently, if I had seen anything to suggest that women actively were deliberately held back by the men in the movement. All I can say is that in my years of being part of all this I've seen nothing to suggest that. I certainly don't feel that any of the men in this room or anywhere else are trying to hold me back ... actually on the contrary, I think quite often just because there is this perception that there aren't enough women, I think in this field as in many others, you know sometimes we can actually find ourselves reaching great prominence simply because we're women and a rarity in that sense. So I certainly don't feel in any way I've been held back or disadvantaged by being a woman in this field.

[...]

I think women often are quite reluctant to speak up, I've seen this over and over again in meetings, in conferences, and even looking here at the portion of any women asking questions, even allowing for the imbalance in the audience, and as an event organizer myself I know how hard it can be to get women involved. But I do think, women, we just need to take a deep breath and do it, and not be shy and not hold back. Because if we feel that we're being ignored, then it's just down to us to work on ways of making sure we can't be, and to learn to speak more clearly. And I don't think we can claim equality and then ask for special treatment.

This displeased Rebecca Watson, of Skepchick fame, which later on, when herself appearing at a similar panel titled "Communicating Atheism", [led her to declare:](#)

Well, I'm really happy to be here. I was a little unsure about what I would be speaking about because the topic of communicating atheism is such a large one, and I wasn't really exactly sure what I should narrow it to. And then I saw the really interesting panel earlier today on women, women atheist activists, and I was going to ask a question at the Q & A, and then I realized I don't have a question so much as an hour long lecture. So I'd like to give that now.

Specifically I took issue with something that was said by the esteemed Paula Kirby, whose work I really enjoy. But she made a comment that she felt that there was no problem with sexism in the atheist community because she's never experienced any sexism in the atheist community. In the skeptical movement we refer to that as an argument from ignorance, and in the feminist community we refer to it as an argument from privilege. I'm really genuinely happy that she hasn't experienced any sexism, but I don't think that's a proper basis to make a judgment on whether or not there is a problem with sexism in atheism.

She also later said that she didn't think that there was some great conspiracy to keep women out of the atheist community. Well, I don't think anyone thinks that, I think that's a bit of a straw person, if you will. I think, unless you want to consider "The Patriarchy" in general as a conspiracy, which I don't – I don't think that there is any club that's getting together "How can we get less women involved?" No, that's not happening.

But there is an issue with sexism, and I thought that, because the topic of this panel is communicating atheism, I thought that maybe I could offer my perspective as someone who communicates atheism, while being a woman. Because it differs from Paula Kirby's experience, and I think it's important that you know that her experience isn't my experience.

Now, one might ask here
([as did](#) smart Jean Kazez
of The Fellowship of Freethought Dallas):
Did Paula Kirby actually say,
as Rebecca Watson claimed,
"I did not experience sexism, therefore, there is no sexism." ?
(The answer is no.)
Or did she say: "This is my experience."
As Rebecca Watson said, "This is my experience." ?
(The answer is yes.)

So, a few weeks ago, I – I have a podcast, called The Skeptics Guide to the Universe, and, if you're not familiar with it, you know, mostly it's skeptical topics, science topics, but we do occasionally discuss secularism, things like that. I talked about, very briefly, about these talks I've been given recently in the States at atheist conferences, in which I describe the religious Right in the US and their war on women, that they've been waging very recently. To give you just a quick idea, in the first three months of this year state legislators in the US have passed ninehundredsixteen – sorry, not passed, introduced – ninehundred and sixteen bills that restricted reproductive rights.

[...]

So, then the emails started coming in. The first email was addressed to "The female" on the podcast. My name is at the top of the show, everybody calls me by that name, it's Rebecca. It's on the website. But it was just "The female" and he was wondering why I was encouraging people to kill babies. He was an atheist.

Another email I got was addressed not to me but to the men of the podcast, it was basically: "Dear guys, won't one of you do something about that Rebecca?" This isn't the first time, I get those emails all the time, they're not addressed to me, they're addressed to the men, asking them to shut up that girl. And it most often happens when I talk about feminist issues, women's rights issues, things like that.

I also note briefly that that email was terribly misspelled, moronically incorrect, and ended with "you should all just grow up" and then "with great power comes great responsibility". So my response was simply "Thanks for your email, it takes a lot of courage for a semi-literate adult male to quote Spiderman, and then tell us to grow up."

So I wish I could say these emails were rare but they're not, I get a couple of them a month, usually, more if I'm talking about women's issues. They range in sexism, from extraordinarily sexist to "This is probably kind of sexist." And it's quite disheartening to get these emails from people who actually agree with me on 98% of everything else that's important, but not on this.

Then there were the emails from people who seem to agree with me one hundred percent of the time, they are – I get fan mail, and a certain percentage of that fan mail is graphically sexual. You're laughing, I hope a little bit out of discomfort, and if you're not uncomfortable, I'm going to make you uncomfortable. Because some of these emails describe in graphic detail what these men would like to do to me sexually.

These are from the people who agree with me and they think they're complimenting me by sending me these emails, these tweets, Youtube messages, things like that. So these are from atheists, and they don't necessarily understand that they're horribly misogynistic, but they are. Because misogyny isn't something that's just relegated to religion, religion can certainly bring it out and it can strengthen it, but it's a cultural problem and even atheists, even rational people haven't necessarily rationally looked at their own ideas of gender and equality and sex.

So that's one of the things I like to do on Skepchick, that's one of the things that Skepchick as a website stands for. It's a place where we combine skepticism and atheism and secularism and humanism and feminism. And through that we hope to, sort of, let people know about what their privileges are and how they can help be more welcoming to women, how they can get rid of the biases they hold, that they might not even realize they hold. So, that's what it's like to deal with other atheists as an outspoken atheist woman.

During this speech, however,
great Richard Dawkins
was sitting to her left,
which soon will be of relevance.

But now the man I sing
(and coffee, as will be evident),
whom fate predestined to spark
the atheist community's infight
by way of doltish faux pas.
He, whose behaviour was bitterly discussed
in blogs and fora of the anglophone world,
lastingly, across nations and oceans,
till discord was complete.
It, from which the antagonized camps originate,
that today keep facing each other,
and yet are in agreement
on 98% of everything that's important.
Can godless minds such anger feel?

To your nerves, dear reader, I'll be kindly,
report the incident
in little words:

At the place where the convention was hosted,
the hotel O'Callaghan Alexander,
there is an elevator.
That Rebecca Watson chose
to return to her room, late at night.
And a man stepped in with her
(no one knows his name, no one personal detail,
which is pretty good for him),
and – invited her for coffee.

And yes, that was all.
But for Rebecca Watson it produced uneasiness,
which, having returned to the States,
[she did mention in a Youtube video:](#)

So, thank you to everyone who was at that conference, who engaged in those discussions outside of that panel, you were all fantastic. I loved talking to you guys – um, all of you except for the one man who didn't really grasp, I think, what I was saying on the panel...? Because, at the bar later that night – actually, at four in the morning – we were at the hotel bar, 4am, I said, you know, "I've had enough, guys, I'm exhausted, going to bed," so I walked to the elevator, and a man got on the elevator with me, and said, "Don't take this the wrong way, but I find you very interesting, and I would like to talk more; would you like to come to my hotel room for coffee?"

Just a word to the wise here, guys: Uhhhh, don't do that. You know. I don't really know how else to explain how this makes me incredibly uncomfortable, but I'll just sort of lay it out that I was a single woman, you know, in a foreign country, at 4am, in a hotel elevator with you, just you, and – don't invite me back to your hotel room, right after I've finished talking about how it creeps me out and makes me uncomfortable when men sexualize me in that manner.

This led to an objection
on the part of Stef McGraw, student blogger
for UNI Freethinkers and Inquirers
at the University of Northern Iowa.

[She wrote:](#)

"Since when are respecting women as equals
and showing sexual interest
mutually exclusive?"

And: "What's wrong with that?
How on earth does that justify him as creepy?
Are we not sexual beings?"

Adding that Rebecca Watson's comment
struck her as hypocritical, because
if a woman were thusly to engage a man
no one that claim would make.

It which slept uneasily, Rebecca Watson's displeasure,
awoke when these words met her eyes
a few days later on. Just one hour it did happen
before appearing as a keynote speaker
at the Center for Inquiry Student Leadership Conference
in Amherst, New York.

And since Stef McGraw, as she knew, belonged to that circle,
and would participate, presumably, at the conference,
Rebecca Watson, like an insulation
incendiarily fails under voltage too high,
departed from her keynote's theme,
the religious Right in the US, and their war on women,
[to criticize Stef McGraw in front of the public.](#)

First she spoke another time
out against Paula Kirby, who allegedly had said
that there was no problem with sexism
in the atheist community,
for atheists were rational,
and rational people weren't sexist
– which was Rebecca Watson's invention,
and never said by Paula Kirby.

Examples of hate mail from (alleged)
skeptics and atheists
Rebecca Watson showed, like that sent by a man
who did not agree with her considering
male circumcision
less bad than female genital mutilation,
writing: "Honestly, and I mean honestly, you deserve
to be raped and tortured and killed."

A comment from below the video in which she spoke
about her experience in the elevator
she showed as well,
beginning: "You are an annoying cunt."
And closing:
"How dare a man talk to you alone.
You sound like the fundamentalist muslims that you hate,
due to their positions on women. Congratulations."

These associations established
she spoke to the assembled students:

There's another comment I found on a blog, from actually one of your own, and I wanted to use it as an example, not to embarrass this person, but to point out that we have a serious problem when young women are this ignorant about feminism. So let me read it to you. This is from the UNI Freethought blog. Stef McGraw, she posts a transcript of the story I just told you, the elevator story, and she writes:

"My concern is that she takes issue with a man showing interest in her. What's wrong with that? How on earth does that justify him as creepy? Are we not sexual beings? Let's review. It's not as if he touched her, or made an unsolicited sexual comment. He merely asked if she'd like to come back to his room. She easily could have said, and I'm assuming did say, 'No thanks, I'm tired, and would like to go to my room to sleep.'"

So there are many things wrong with this paragraph. I won't really go into them all. I'll mention that asking someone back to your hotel room, at 4 in the morning, who you've never spoken to, is the definition of unsolicited sexual comment. And, in the transcript that Stef posted, she conveniently edited it to begin after I told everyone at the bar that I was exhausted and going back to my room. Kind of an important point, in which I state exactly what my desire is. Because later, this man in the elevator is specifically trying to talk me out of doing that. So I did actually make it quite clear that I was tired, and going to my room to sleep.

(Later prompting Stef McGraw [to clarify](#):

"In all honesty, transcribing is a bit tedious, [...] any left out details were completely unintentional, and her assumption that I had a clear ulterior motive is misguided.")

But the real problem is actually in the first sentence, and it's sort of the same problem that the other commenter has: "My concern is that she takes issue with a man showing interest in her." This is, unfortunately, a pretty standard parroting of misogynistic thought. And it's not new, it's something that feminists have been dealing with for ages. In fact, it's Feminism 101. [...]

But in this case, what we're talking about is the difference between sexual interest, sexual attraction, versus sexual objectification. Objectification has a few things about it that separate it from interest. For instance, focusing on the physical aspects of a person; ignoring their individuality, and their stated desires (for instance, my desire to go to sleep, my desire to not be hit on, which is all I had been talking about all day); and also a disinterest in how your actions will impact the "object" in question. And that's a really serious point, that I think you all should consider, especially if you want to encourage more women to join your groups.

Because there are people in this audience right now who believe this: that a woman's reasonable expectation to feel safe from sexual objectification and assault at skeptic and atheist events is outweighed by a man's right to sexually objectify her. That's basically what these people have been telling me, and it's not true. [...] You know, since starting Skepchick, I've heard from a lot of women who don't attend events like this because of those of you who have this attitude. They're tired of being objectified, and some of them have actually been raped; quite a number of them have been raped, or otherwise sexually assaulted. And situations like the one I was in, in an elevator, would have triggered a panic attack. They're scared, because they know that you won't stand up for them. And if they stand up for themselves, you're going to laugh them back down. And that's why they're not coming out to these events.

Rebecca Watson would go on [to claim](#)
not having attacked Stef McGraw
personally, merely her ideas.
But is it not personal attacking
– as one blogger would dryly [paraphrase](#) –
to say:

"So women are staying away from conferences because of you!
You won't stand up for women
who genuinely need support!
You'd laugh at them instead!"
Or saying that she "conveniently" left something out?
Or putting her next to that commenter,
literally even, on the same PowerPoint slide,
who called Rebecca Watson an annoying cunt?

Indeed some listeners were displeased
by Rebecca Watson criticizing Stef McGraw
in that manner, and complained to her on Twitter.
For example Trevor Boeckmann,
he too of UNI Freethought Blog,
an intern at the Center for Inquiry,
and previous fan of Rebecca Watson,
who had told Stef McGraw about her video.

Wrote Trevor Boeckmann: "It's one thing
to call out a public figure,
it's another to spend your keynote
calling out a student."
And Rebecca Watson snappishly replying
to have only used about
two minutes out of sixty for that,
which could hardly qualify as "spending" her speech.

And in a blog post, upset
about these critical voices
Rebecca Watson [defended herself](#):
She did not (see above) ridicule Stef McGraw,
but attack her opinion;
it would have been condescending to spare her
merely because she was a student,
for she was a grown up woman;
and to call her out by name, for which people
now were blaming her, Rebecca Watson,
had been a question of courtesy,
so that Stef McGraw would not need to guess
that it was her being meant, for she,
Rebecca Watson, hated passiv-aggressive behaviour,
and so that everyone might read up
Stef McGraw's words, to decide
if she had been correctly represented.

Trevor Boeckmann's criticism she rejected, her accusations against Stef McGraw she stated anew, and brought up similar ones against Rose St. Clair, a student, who to Rebecca Watson's video a video response [had made](#) angering Rebecca Watson the night before giving her speech, which might have played a role in her reaction to Stef McGraw.

Up till then, the argument was between Rebecca Watson and some ("three or four" she said) people on Twitter. But it didn't stay that way, when like a contamination plume a big river and the sensitive band of creatures therein it reached the readership of Skepchick, Rebecca Watson's website. Heatedly did the commenters argue.

Bookitty proclaimed:

Rebecca stated that she wanted to go to sleep. Elevator dude wanted to talk. He decided to make this clear in an elevator that was going to open on a floor with no witnesses. His needs trump her needs, he has the physical advantage, the location provides him with cover. That is at the very least creepy.

[...]

Using this event to illustrate "But teh poor menz! How will they meet women?" is completely disrespectful. It's saying "If you're at a conference and you think someone is hot, go for it! It doesn't matter if they've been saying they don't want that. It doesn't matter if it's 4 AM. It doesn't matter if you haven't said a word to them. Just weasel them into the most uncomfortable social situation you can find on short notice and pounce!"

But azinyk answered:

What did the man do after Rebecca declined his invitation? He left her alone, right? You imply that he wanted to put her in physical peril, but we know from her safe exit that that wasn't the case. I don't think people have a right not to be unintentionally intimidated. If they did, racists would have a right not to ride elevators alone with black men, homophobes would be provided straights-only washrooms, etc.

[...]

I don't think it's disrespectful or misogynist to offer an alternative to someone's previously stated plans. [...] If the offer to chat was indeed an offer for sex, then that could change a person's decision calculus. It's new information. He didn't take away her right to choose for herself, he just offered a new possibility, one she was free to decline.

[...]

Can you guess why he waited until they were alone to make his invitation? I think it's very likely that he didn't want anyone to see him being rejected. Asking a woman to share your company, even for coffee, can be very stressful. Romantic invitations are even more so, which is probably why he offered to talk instead, if indeed romance was his goal – plausible deniability. It's likely even harder to ask a celebrity surrounded by her fans. If Rebecca had told him to get lost in front of a crowd, could he ever show his face again?

Previously airbornemint
already did question, more directly even
than azinyk, if the man
necessarily must have had
sex in mind.

So Glow-Orb wondered, rhetorically:

I don't understand this game where we pretend that asking someone back to your hotel room in the middle of the night is not a sexual advance.
Intentionally being obtuse?
Insulting my intelligence?

And John Greg answered, petulantly:

Yes, indeed. We men are all unquestionably, irrevocably, constitutionally guilty of predatorial sexualisational behaviour in early morning elevators until proven otherwise.

Are any of you people familiar with the concept of, oh I don't know, curiosity, wanting to meet someone for reasons other than sex while working hours that do not fit the norm and hence 4 a.m. is early afternoon?

[...]

The complacent and oh-so-comfortable assumptions of hostile intent are, well, frankly, they blow me away.

And yes I know that my incomprehension of these great fears makes me an evil mean and nasty sexist white male privileged person because disagreement and different perspectives are NOT ALLOWED, but Jeebles....

Earning him Glow-Orb's contempt,
and well-railing Improbable Joe's:

At this point, the people who are still defending Elevator Guy are just being ridiculously misogynistic and dismissive of Rebecca as a person. [...] The fact that this thread is several steps removed from that initial encounter and there's no room in their brains to address the backlash to the video or the speech shows what this is really about: preserving their personal right to impose themselves on women whenever they want without regard to a woman's feelings. In the name of avoiding passive-aggressiveness... that's you, John Greg. You're parents must be so proud of your constant defense of a man's right to proposition women without having to listen to or care about how women feel about it.

But with better measure airbornemint
did answer Glow-Orb:

I have in the past invited recently-met people (men and women) to my hotel room in the middle of the night without it being a sexual advance, and without it being taken as such. Sometimes, the middle of the night is when I am talking to someone. Sometimes, my hotel room is the most convenient comfortable space.

And generally northerner remarked:

As far as naming poeple, of course McGraw can handle it. Even if this is the first time for such a spotlight, she can handle it.

Stef McGraw, as it happened, was perfectly fine with getting criticized by name.

The problem, [in her view](#), was a different one:

Namely Rebecca Watson attacking her from a privileged position, that didn't offer adequate opportunity to defend herself

– merely the Q&A,

that she did not want to fill with incidental stuff, having more respect for a speaker than to do so.

A blog post however wouldn't reach everyone who had been at the conference.

Wrote she:

Had Ms. Watson instead chosen to write a scathing review of my position on her blog [...], I honestly would have no complaints. My reasoning in saying this is that in the blogosphere, we are on an equal playing field. [...] there is not the obvious imbalance of power which is present in the speaker/student attendee situation.

Below Stef McGraw's statement

Rebecca Watson [left a comment](#),

starting: "I have 10,000 readers on Skepchick.

There were 100 in the audience at the conference, who you could have addressed during Q&A in your defense.

How is criticism on the former more 'even?'"

The behavior of Rebecca Watson, especially that final comment, enormously displeased

Abbie Smith, the naughty virologist who runs the blog ERV.

And using well-calculated profanity [she let her opinion be known](#):

Rebecca broke one of The Rules of the internet: Do not bring MySpace drama into Meat Space.

Do not do this.

Ever.

No one gives a crap about what treefrog72 said about you on livejournal. No one gives a crap about what Stef McGraw said about you on YouTube.¹ No one. [...] You bring that crap up in a speech, and literally two people in the audience know wtf you are talking about. Its no more appropriate to do that in a speech than it is to tell inside jokes most of the audience wont get, or use scientific jargon the audience wont get. Its just *bad speaking*.

Furthermore, because the audience has no clue what youre talking about, they just kinda have to take your word for it that the situation is what it is.

But thats not always the case, is it?

[...]

How would they know if Watson *totally* quotemined McGraw? [...] And so what if she didnt? What if what Watson posted was a 100% accurate depiction of McGraw?

This wasnt a fucking debate. McGraw was called out, but was never and would never be given the exact same platform to respond. Very bad form, Watson.

[...]

Even granting the premise that what Watson did was technically 100% 'not wrong', what she did was *bad form*.

And worst of all... dammit worst of all – Watsons comments in her speech re: McGraw were apparently *completely unnecessary*. The audience appeared to view her McGraw comments as separate from her actual speech, and Watson herself said that it was leik, only two minutes, for reals. *So why the fuck did she bring it up at all? Why???* Cause it was the *bitchy* thing to do! McGraw said something Watson thought was bitchy, so Watson did something bitchy right back. *Goddammit*. As a woman in skepticism, Rebecca Watson, thank you so much for that. I really appreciate it. I *really* do. Irony is one of my favorite sources of lulz, and nothing is more ironic than someone *embodying* the stereotype they purport to be combating, especially when I myself am trying to combat those stereotypes. Faaaaantastic.

Trevor Boekmann too, whose temper was failing, spoke out, [in an open letter to Rebecca Watson](#):

1 Here Abbie Smith seems to confuse Stef McGraw and Rose St. Clair.

Dear Rebecca,

Fuck you.

It's quite an adventure our friendship has taken to get to this point. When I first took my internship with CFI in May, I'll admit, I really didn't know you. We met briefly at my first pot-luck. You referenced being internet-famous, but I didn't realize how true it was.

As part of my job, I felt like I needed to keep abreast of atheist happenings on the internet. I started reading Skepchick and – holy shit – I was blown away at how awesome your commentary was. [...]

You embraced politics, and activism, and issue advocacy. You told everyone in New York to call their Senators about gay marriage. You told the secular movement to get involved with women's reproductive rights. You pushed for the activism that no one else is talking about. You should know. You're the one who shaped my opinion on that.

You were the epitome of what I wanted to see in the secular movement.

[...] At the start of your talk, you decided to call Stef out. I despise you for that.

[...] I despise you because you were given a platform to change the secular movement – these were over 100 organizers in the audience that had the power to bring activism, and gay rights, and reproductive rights to the forefront of the movement – and instead, you decided to play a petty tit-for-tat game because you can't handle people disagreeing with you.

[...] You assured that half the audience didn't care what you said in the rest of your talk. They had already dismissed you. They loathed you. They didn't want to hear from you. One leader even walked out.

Fuck you for valuing your online drama over far more important issues.

Abbie Smith and Stef McGraw [got endorsed](#) in the comment sections by Edward Clint, PhD student in anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, bound to [cross swords](#), the coming year, with Rebecca Watson, and prolific Jerry Coyne, professor of biology at the University of Chicago, well-regarded in his discipline, author to the blog Why Evolution Is True (which however, deeming "blog" an ugly word, he prefers to call a website), a nightmare of academic theologians.

Wrote he: "Yes, it was very bad form, dragging that stuff into a completely different talk. I'm always amazed how easily small sparks get blown up on the internet into huge conflagrations. Some people love to blow on the embers."

For sure did Jerry Coyne not sense
what he was yet to see about!

For in the approaching shitstorm did mingle
biologist Paul Zachary (PZ) Myers,
from Morris, Minnesota,
author to the reverberating blog
Pharyngula, whose words spring forth like shrapnel.

(Or rather, given that in face-to-face talk
[he is said to be](#) surprisingly mild-mannered,
considering the way he writes,
maybe this should better read:
Who wields his keyboard
like a club.)

Faithful people of all confessions
hated PZ Myers, but Catholics especially so,
since he did, in solidarity
with student Webster Cook, [desecrate a host](#).
For Webster Cook had tried to smuggle
a host from out of mass,
to be accused of that intention,
and was facing much hostility
on the part of the Catholic church,
displeasing PZ Myers. [Quote](#):
"It's a goddamned cracker!"

The blunt style of PZ Myers
was popular among atheists,
and his readership tremendous.
Like the last drop of acid
during titration,
that causes the mixture to change,
[he now added his opinion](#).
"There is", he wrote,

an odd attitude in our culture that it's acceptable for men to proposition women in curious ways [...] women are lower status persons, and we men, as superior beings, get to ask things of them. Also as liberal, enlightened people, of course, we will graciously accede to their desires, and if they ask us to stop hassling them, we will back off, politely. Isn't that nice of us?

It's not enough. Maybe we should also recognize that applying unwanted pressure, no matter how politely phrased, is inappropriate behavior.

[...]

[Rebecca Watson] specifically discussed a criticism by one of the attendees, Stef McGraw, quoting her and saying where the argument was found, and a few people were angry at her for that, and demanded that she apologize to McGraw. Which is, frankly, bizarre.

[...]

Name names, always name names, and always do your best to be specific. It is right and proper as good skeptics to confront and provoke and challenge, and you have to be direct about it.

Heatedly did the commenters argue.

Fundip wrote:

a man tries to get laid. what is this world coming to?

Disqualifying himself in the eyes of many.

Jeeringly Rorschach replied:

You might want to apply for a a role in the next Jurassic Park movie. Looking good there.

Abbie Smith wrote:

"As Watson says, she loathes passive-aggressive behavior."
So she did NOT confront the supposed propositioner.

So she did NOT confront Stef McGraw.

She 'confronted' them via the safe confines of her blag, or from the power-unbalance of the podium.

Thats not the opposite of being 'passive aggressive'.

And sardonically she added, to commit the same uncharitableness as Rebecca Watson, when accusing Stef McGraw of convenient omission:

Here is Stefs response, btw, since PZ 'missed' it.

lautrec85 did answer her:

Would it be better if she had confronted him via the unsafe confines of the elevator, where the creeper could have done very ugly things to her if a fight had kicked off between them?

DeusExNihilum wrote:

I fail to see how this man committed some atrocity against human social etiquette, let alone Feminism, are people now so paranoid and untrusting that any conversation with a stranger must be accompanied by means of "Escape"? I keep seeing that excuse brought up, that she "Had no Escape", are all men rapists now? Assumed to be one unless proven otherwise? Are we that scared of other people that "What means of escape do I have?" is a thought that goes through peoples minds? [...]

Does this only apply to sexual paranoia? For example, same situation and someone asks for the time in a lift, Can I feel justified in thinking this a social faux pas? After all, he could be a mugger and I have no escape!

Leading moochava to reply:

Yes, if you are a woman, it's a very good idea to have escape routes planned in case someone tries to rape you.

[...]

If you're a man, you probably don't need to care.
Someone should invent a term, like "privilege," for the difference.

Once more fundip came forward:

oh no, men want sex.
how dare they ask for it.
jeebus.
you all are a idiots.

[...]

"even though i have thick glasses and a unibrow, i'm still sexy enough to get hit on"

guess what sweetheart, no body cares.
except the reactionary moron's on this site that think all men are bad....

Which went badly down with The Janine Is A Lonely Hunter, OM:

Fundipshit, what you fucking do not understand is this; how could Rebecca know his intention and how could she get away if she wanted to. [...]
I hope I never meet you in a closed elevator or in a dark alley, you fucking creep.

StevenbradleyLewis wrote:

If the world was just, the dick who hit on Rebecca would have been called out by name.
[...] IMHO it was harassment plain and simple.

And prophetically chigau (happy):

This is going to be a long one, isn't it?
and there is no popcorn, here.

PZ Myers wrote:

I hear too much talk about a "power imbalance". There isn't one. Being a speaker at a conference does not suddenly grant you grand dictatorial powers over the audience. The speaker is put into a *vulnerable* position, where her opinions are being weighed. McGraw's complaint is that she has been placed in the same vulnerable position as the speaker, where now her ideas are exposed to the same criticism.

The speaker does have a temporary place of influence, where she can bring matters to the audience's attention. Watson did McGraw a favor – her opinions were given greater attention than if Watson had cravenly concealed her identity.

To get a reply from Abbie Smith:

Bullshit.

Then, like an asteroid downfalling catastrophically shakes a planet's ecosystem, to let it changed emerge, beginning another era, happened what nobody could have foreseen:

From the heights of intellectual pre-eminence remote and peaceful ones, did Richard Dawkins step down to the discussion's level – and the following words [he chiseled](#) into the movement's memory:

Dear Muslima

Stop whining, will you. Yes, yes, I know you had your genitals mutilated with a razor blade, and ... yawn ... don't tell me yet again, I know you aren't allowed to drive a car, and you can't leave the house without a male relative, and your husband is allowed to beat you, and you'll be stoned to death if you commit adultery. But stop whining, will you. Think of the suffering your poor American sisters have to put up with.

Only this week I heard of one, she calls herself Skep"chick", and do you know what happened to her? A man in a hotel elevator invited her back to his room for coffee. I am not exaggerating. He really did. He invited her back to his room for coffee. Of course she said no, and of course he didn't lay a finger on her, but even so ...

And you, Muslima, think you have misogyny to complain about! For goodness sake grow up, or at least grow a thicker skin.

Richard

This came surprising to several commenters. Ogvorbis, Fully Defenestrated Emperor of Fire and Steam, [asked](#):

Did you just make the argument that, since worse things are happening somewhere else, we have no right to try to fix things closer to home?

Similarly were asking: Forbidden Snowflake;
The Janine Is A Lonely Hunter, OM;
Antiochus Epiphanes;
and Rorschach sharp of tongue.

[So that Richard Dawkins](#)

did what better he should not have done,
adding a clarification:

"Did you just make the argument that, since worse things are happening somewhere else, we have no right to try to fix things closer to home?"

No I wasn't making that argument. Here's the argument I was making. The man in the elevator didn't physically touch her, didn't attempt to bar her way out of the elevator, didn't even use foul language at her. He spoke some words to her. Just words. She no doubt replied with words. That was that. Words. Only words, and apparently quite polite words at that.

If she felt his behaviour was creepy, that was her privilege, just as it was the Catholics' privilege to feel offended and hurt when PZ nailed the cracker. PZ didn't physically strike any Catholics. All he did was nail a wafer, and he was absolutely right to do so because the heightened value of the wafer was a fantasy in the minds of the offended Catholics. Similarly, Rebecca's feeling that the man's proposition was 'creepy' was her own interpretation of his behaviour, presumably not his. She was probably offended to about the same extent as I am offended if a man gets into an elevator with me chewing gum. But he does me no physical damage and I simply grin and bear it until either I or he gets out of the elevator. It would be different if he physically attacked me.

Muslim women suffer physically from misogyny, their lives are substantially damaged by religiously inspired misogyny. Not just words, real deeds, painful, physical deeds, physical privations, legally sanctioned demeanings. The equivalent would be if PZ had nailed not a cracker but a Catholic. Then they'd have had good reason to complain.

Richard

As does, when cooling has failed, a nuclear power plant
the argument now contaminated, after Richard Dawkins'
maximum credible misstep,
the anglophone atheistic blogosphere.
For many an atheist admired Richard Dawkins,
and disappointment was great among
the champions of Rebecca Watson.
All of a sudden Richard Dawkins became
prime example for these, for everything wrong
within the movement,
and just like a God, who, to suffer
for other people's sins, was coming down to earth,
he got crucified taught about his mistake.

But why did Richard Dawkins act dismissively?

It was, so smart Jean Kazez
[speculated](#), because Rebecca Watson had insulted
Paula Kirby, who occasionally writes for his website,
and because, after listening to her talk, he found she was
overusing the word misogyny.

Show me now, you search engines, that have overview
of the endless crowd of servers – without you no mortal could hope
for success in his research – who the umbrage takers were,
bashing Richard Dawkins.

Hardly their vast numbers I could name and describe,
if ten petabyte I had and ten thousand years,
a never-failing keyboard as well, and fingers of iron;
opinion makers only, and their blogs, I will name.

First there did complain, like conquerors stepping on
newly discovered land, [Jen McCreight](#) and [Adam Lee](#),
on the very same day;

their blogs are Blag Hag and Daylight Atheism.

From the network Science Blogs there did complain: [Greg Laden](#) the choleric,
who even previously [had taken](#)

Rebecca Watson's side concerning Stef McGraw

– his blog is Greg Laden's blog – and [PZ Myers](#) of Pharyngula,
confirming, what some were doubtful of, that the comments
were actually made by Richard Dawkins. Further did complain
softspoken [Phil Plait](#), on his blog Bad Astronomy.

And [Ophelia Benson](#) on Butterflies & Wheels.

From the network Patheos there complained, apart from Adam Lee:
[Hemant Mehta](#), whose blog is called The Friendly Atheist.

And [Amanda Marcotte](#) of the blog Pandagon did complain,
whose feminist name sounds louder even than Rebecca Watson's.

These were the spokespersons keen on Richard Dawkins' apology.

But silence kept the woman in whose name they spoke,
around whom revolved the overheating argument,
who held the power to slow it down, bringing it to save revolutions,
Rebecca Watson, prone to overkill.

She kept her silence, waiting, so the unkindly disposed [say](#),
to see how the mood was swinging
until she could gauge how far she might go.

Not until the fourth day, after Richard Dawkins left his first
of three comments in total,

before learning, like a good boy, to shut up,
did pugnacious Rebecca Watson answer him.

To little avail Richard Dawkins [had tried once more](#)
to explain his position on PZ Myers' blog:

Many people seem to think it obvious that my post was wrong and I should apologise.
Very few people have bothered to explain exactly why. The nearest approach I have
heard goes something like this.

I sarcastically compared Rebecca's plight with that of women in Muslim countries or
families dominated by Muslim men. Somebody made the worthwhile point (reiterated
here by PZ) that it is no defence of something slightly bad to point to something worse.
We should fight all bad things, the slightly bad as well as the very bad. Fair enough. But
my point is that the 'slightly bad thing' suffered by Rebecca was not even slightly bad, it
was zero bad. A man asked her back to his room for coffee. She said no. End of story.

But not everybody sees it as end of story. OK, let's ask why not? The main reason seems to be that an elevator is a confined space from which there is no escape. This point has been made again and again in this thread, and the other one.

No escape? I am now really puzzled. Here's how you escape from an elevator. You press any one of the buttons conveniently provided. The elevator will obligingly stop at a floor, the door will open and you will no longer be in a confined space but in a well-lit corridor in a crowded hotel in the centre of Dublin.

No, I obviously don't get it. I will gladly apologise if somebody will calmly and politely, without using the word fuck in every sentence, explain to me what it is that I am not getting.

Richard

When she did, Rebecca Watson [answered](#) with heavy artillery:

[Y]es, Richard Dawkins believes I should be a good girl and just shut up about being sexually objectified because it doesn't bother him. Thanks, wealthy old heterosexual white man!

And she did imply, that Richard Dawkins was dismissive not only of this one experience, but her hate mail and rape threats as well, that might, in situations like these, cause her very reasonable concern – for didn't he sit next to her, as she was talking about them? Further, in dismissing her experience, Richard Dawkins was dismissive of other women, who had been victims of rape.

And like a statesperson proclaiming the construction of a border fence, she wrote:

You, dear reader, have been incredible. You posted in response to Dawkins on the Pharyngula thread, bravely battling both him and the hoards of clueless privileged people who didn't get it. You emailed me to tell me to keep talking. You introduced yourself at SkepchickCon and told me how much you loved Skepchick and SGU. You wrote blog posts and made videos and were kick ass, and you made me realize that Dawkins is not the present. He is the past.

So many of you voiced what I had already been thinking: that this person who I always admired for his intelligence and compassion does not care about my experiences as an atheist woman and therefore will no longer be rewarded with my money, my praise, or my attention. I will no longer recommend his books to others, buy them as presents, or buy them for my own library. I will not attend his lectures or recommend that others do the same. There are so many great scientists and thinkers out there that I don't think my reading list will suffer.

Despite the fact that I've seen hundreds of comments from those of you who plan to do the same, I'm sure Dawkins will continue to be stinking rich until the end of his days. But those of us who are humanists and feminists will find new, better voices to promote and inspire, and Dawkins will be left alone to fight the terrible injustice of standing in elevators with gum-chewers.

And like a continent gets ripped apart
by a new oceanic basin,
the atheist community, that is its anglophone
US-american part, split in two and drifted
in opposite directions.

Chronology:

- 04.06.2011: World Atheist Convention. Paula Kirby's talk; Rebecca Watson's talk; elevator incident.
- 20.06.2011 Rebecca Watson's video about conference and elevator incident.
- 21.06.2011 Rose St. Clair's reply.
- 23.06.2011 Stef McGraw's reply.
- 26.06.2011 CFI Student Leadership Conference. Rebecca Watson's talk with criticism of Paula Kirby, Stef McGraw.
- 28.06.2011 Rebecca Watson's justification with further criticism of Stef McGraw, Rose St. Clair, Trevor Boeckmann.
- 01.07.2011 Stef McGraw's reply; Abbie Smith's reply.
- 02.07.2011 Trevor Boeckmann's reply; Hemant Mehta defends Stef McGraw; Greg Laden and PZ Myers defend Rebecca Watson; Richard Dawkins' "Dear Muslima" comment and first explanation; Jen McCreight and Adam Lee criticize Richard Dawkins.
- 03.07.2011 Greg Laden und PZ Myers criticize Richard Dawkins; Richard Dawkins' second explanation.
- 04.07.2011 Ophelia Benson criticizes Richard Dawkins.
- 05.07.2011 Phil Plait, Hemant Mehta, Amanda Marcotte criticize Richard Dawkins; Rebecca Watson announces her boycott of Richard Dawkins.

Second Installment.

How the bloggers fought each other.

Unleashed civil war in the atheistic blogosphere
I sing, ideological strife, how the reason-serving people
mauled each other with their victorious tongues;
allies fighting allies, as the idols
declared mutual animosity;
careless words, burning bridges,
to the cause's detriment, as the bloggers antagonized;
dear reader, oh the drama!

Are there no better things to do for you?
The boundary between church and state
is being gnawed on, Darwin's theory
is threatened in our schools, yet you
terminate your cooperation?
With an atheist as president
wage this nefarious war, but not till then.

Now see both sides in this conflict
vowing, forthrightly or in silence,
to never support the other, bloggers smearing,
commenters cursing each other:
To no fundamentalist was given
to strike thus deeply; but alone [the narcissism](#)
of small differences dealt that wound.

Incessantly does the question appear: What drove
the raging bloggers to shun one another,
and from the movement struck peace away?
Each side provides a different answer: [For some](#)
it's the fault of sexists and misogynists, eager to keep
the status quo of a male-dominated atheism,
and screaming at the mere word feminist.

[For others](#) it's dogmatic feminists, confusing
critical questions with sexism and misogyny,
and eager to make arbitrary rules of conduct.
Along these lines, like oil and water separating,
did the fighters take position, [a few neutral voices](#) exempt.

Presumably it's [safe](#) to think that most of the involved
held previous biases, which automatically
made them more accepting of one side
or the other. But what did further polarize
the bloggers and commenters?

Maybe Rebecca Watson's "Guys, don't do that" was deemed an attempt to sell her preference as the preference of all women? Maybe the objections by Stef McGraw and Rose St. Clair, and those defending them were deemed an attempt to denounce Rebecca Watson and feminism as being sex-negative?

For that was how Rebecca Watson [had taken their remarks](#):

I hear a lot of misogyny from skeptics and atheists, but when ancient anti-woman rhetoric like the above ["My concern is that she takes issue with a man showing interest in her."] is repeated verbatim by a young woman online, it validates that misogyny in a way that goes above and beyond the validation those men get from one another.

Was it people, just like Stef McGraw and Richard Dawkins, were starting to defend the Elevator Guy, only less politely? Perhaps it was Rebecca Watson and others calling the dissenting views misogynistic? Was it comments like [the following](#), left by blogger Skeptifem at Abbie Smith's blog, after with indignant fingers the latter rebuked Rebecca Watson?

Yawn. Enjoy your fate as a gender traitor, erv. You'll find out eventually, same as the rest of us, that its a game you can't win. You'll never really be one of the guys and you can never really overcome what being a woman in this culture means. The high fives and social approval you get from sexist jackasses won't be worth it in the end.

However that may be: Reader, let me tell you now the course of those vast events which took place in the month of July 2011, after Richard Dawkins metaphorically reached for the running buzz saw.

Of Justicar I sing, surpassing all mortals in wit, who coined the nickname "Rebecca Twatson". Little after Richard Dawkins put himself in doo-doo, there showed up Youtube blogger Justicar in the same thread, and like a western hero challenging the whole of a city to duel, he plunged himself into battle with the other commenters, who by majority were championing Rebecca Watson.

It's not that often, [he wrote](#), that a woman gets raped in an elevator, like another commenter was claiming, and thus you couldn't say there were "good statistical reasons" to be afraid of it.

(For by now the debate had shifted from "Was it sexualization / objectification" to "Is a woman in this kind of situation right to be afraid of getting raped", which made Richard Dawkins' comment twice as badly timed.)

And Justicar asserted: The irrational fears of an emotionally crippled person are that person's problem, but not the problem of those strangers she is afraid of. Rebecca Watson didn't speak for all women, and wasn't it telling what happened when a woman spoke out against her speaking in her name?

As might be expected, that view went poorly down with some other commenters, such as: Forbidden Snowflake; Andyo (who proposed to Justicar, not knowing that he was a mathematician, to go and read something about statistics); Therrin (Ben S); John Morales; and Caine, Fleur du Mal, who finally, exasperated by Justicar and other dissenters (for Justicar had some strong confederates) wished for the debate to simply go away:

PZ, would you please kill this thread? It's another Menz™ fest and some of us won't be able to sleep until they go the fuck away.

Like dust when blasting a huge edifice, so did rise distortions, insults, and excessive rhetoric. Two days, three nights, and one morning lasted the battle in the comment threads of blog Pharyngula, until its host, imperious PZ Myers, became tired of it and, fulfilling the prayers of Caine, Fleur du Mal, shut down comments for the relevant posts.

But the Justicar repaired to his blog Integralmath. There he drew conclusion about what he'd experienced at Pharyngula and other places in the last couple of days. I am gay, he exclaimed, what makes you fuckers assume I couldn't know how it's to be to be afraid of other people? But the possibility of someone beating me up, it does not mean I can expect everyone to alter their behaviour. Moreover I consider that Rebecca Twatson must be destroyed:

My specific and explicit purpose is to start a campaign to have Rebecca Twatson excluded from the selection of people who are paid to speak at our events. Her presence is a net drain in time and money. [...]

[...] of course, it'll all be reduced to the fact that I'm white. And male. And hate all women. Let me be patent: I do not hate women. I am not attacking women. I am attacking you, Rebecca Twatson, for things you say and do, not because you exist and have a vagina.

[...]

I am currently working on researching everything she's written and publicly said. This is a long process, so anyone who has long-known of her who might have some recommendations for good reading to help tear her asunder, please e-mail me.

Indeed Justicar needn't dig far,
to find a corpse in Rebecca Watson's cellar,
and [triumphantly did he inquire](#):
How was it again, three years ago, Rebecca Twatson,
when you got suspended from
the James Randi Educational Foundation forum,
for using a sockpuppet, acquiring rights of moderator
by accident, as the suspension was lifted,
which [you then did use](#) for banning people
you didn't like, earning yourself
[a permanent ban](#)? Is what happened to Stef McGraw
really that surprising?
(Back then, Rebecca Watson [claimed](#) to have had informed
the admins of her "promotion", which they, however, [denied](#).)

Look here, he wrote, this person gets paid
to speak at atheist conferences,
to lecture you on proper behaviour:

A lot of you may not have realized it, but I was actually suspended and unable to post on this forum for the past month or so. Something about impersonating a radial tire,² I don't know. Sounds ridiculous. I mean, like I would ever, ever do something so immature! And as I would think that's funny. And as I'd think it's even funnier to get kicked off the forum for it! Those of you who truly know me know that this is not like me at all. But, hey, bygones.

[...]

Then today at last my suspension was up, and I logged back on to the forum. I was pleased to see that my good behaviour during my suspension was rewarded with a promotion to moderator. Yay! So I logged on to the mod section to see if anyone was talking about me: [deleted screenshot]

And then I went about banning people I don't like: [deleted screenshot]

2 Rebecca Watson's sockpuppet account was named RadialTire.

Then I did a few other things just for laughs, and then I got all tuckered out and took a nap. I had a pretty great month, and I hope all you did, too. It's nice to be back!

Love,

Rebecca.

Justicar was following an honourable tradition of digging up dirt to Rebecca Watson's detriment, which can be traced in time back to the Stef McGraw incident, as reported by an eye witness at the Student Leadership Conference:

Rebecca's credentials as a prominent atheist were disputed. Her "fanclub", PZ Myers foremost among them, was disparaged. Negative anecdotes about Rebecca's behaviour in other situations were shared.³

And not alone did Justicar stay in his endeavor: Like wasps at a person perceived to threaten their nest, did atheists dash at Rebecca Watson, poking, and finding stuff in her past.

Ain't it funny, [they wrote](#), that Rebecca Watson, who complains of being sexualized by her fans, is making money [posing for erotic calendar photos](#), that target those very same fans? [Ought she not](#) further, [being an objectifier of women](#), be rather careful on this topic?

Thus they applied the principle of critical examination to Rebecca Watson, and her reputation sank among those who didn't like her to begin with.

But the name Twatson was adopted by Abbie Smith. Two weeks had passed since Rebecca Watson had tried to excommunicate the great Richard Dawkins, when the latter's charitable organisation, the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, announced that they were going to provide free child care during future atheist events.

3 I'd like to thank Nathan Grammer alias Malimar for a copy of his article "Extra, Extra, Read All About It: Rebecca-watsongate Shakes Atheism To Its Core!" which is not longer accessible.

[Gleeful Abbie Smith took notice:](#)⁴

ERV translation:

You all keep throwing your [...] parties and getting drunk all the time and acting like overall jackasses in the name of 'supporting women in skepticism'. Im going to actually support everyone, including women, by providing childcare at future TAMs.⁵ *flipseveryoneoff*

[...]

Apparently this move has been in the works for a long time, [...]. Apparently before Twatson fell down and threw a temper tantrum and demanded everyone kiss her invisible boo-boo.

She made her move. A rash decision.

Dawkins made his. Carefully planned for some time.

Check-mate.

As a stock exchange crashes, after preliminary heavy losses, so this day proved fatal to the atheist blogger's solidarity. Of the frightful battles I'll sing, which took place in the depths of the following thread, as, like ex-partners on their ex-partner's wedding, there showed up several pro-Watson-bloggers.

For on the blog ERV did gather, like exiled politicians in a neighboring state's capital, those who felt put off by Rebecca Watson and her sympathizers, prepared to voice their resentment.

Never could retelling do justice to what I am, therefore, going to show abbreviated, but without commentary:

Greg Laden | July 19, 2011 12:17 AM

Good for Richard, I'm glad he did that. But you do realize that this was not a "follow up" to Rebeccapocalypse, having been planned for a very long time in advance.

4 The original of this text and of the following comments is no longer available, but can be found in the zip-archive linked to above.

5 TAM: The Amaz!ng Meeting, an annual skeptics' event held by the James Randi Educational Foundation.

Justicar | July 19, 2011 12:25 AM

Greg, she knows. She said as much. That's what makes this even better – it's not a response for PR damage control. It just shows that despite what that camp is saying of him, this is just one of the many things he does that actually support making events open to women.

Greg Laden | July 19, 2011 1:19 AM

Jusicar, thanks for speaking up for ERV. But my "follow-up" comment was responding to [another commenter]. I was probably a bit unclear.

Richard has a mixed relationship with feminism [...]. His comments on PZ's blog were unconscionable. But I don't think anyone "on that side" (give me a break please) vilifies him, and he deserves credit for having his foundation cover day care. [...]

And, frankly, Rebecca deserves a little more respect. Adults can respectfully disagree and use a person's name in unmangled fashion.

Jen [McCreight] | July 19, 2011 1:40 AM

[...] I was the first person to tweet how happy I was when Dawkins made that announcement. [...]

Not to mention after the announcement, I personally went up to him during the Speaker's reception, shook his hand, and told him how thankful I was about the funding. We had a very friendly conversation. [...]

Please don't take a good thing and use it to spit in our faces. It's immature.

Justicar | July 19, 2011 5:41 AM

No problem, Greg. [...] Imagine that? A miscommunication happened in the comment section of a blog – the end is nigh!

If you're honestly representing that what Dawkins wrote on Pharyngula is "unconscionable", then that word has immediately become useless. [...] Further, your claim that "that side" isn't vilifying Dawkins is counterfactual; it is not a statement that is congruent with reality. Saying he's not a humanist, that he hates women (that's what misogyny means incidentally), and that he's contributed so little to the cause of atheism, philanthropy, humanism, feminism that he's easily dismissed because Rebecca Watson and her coterie of people have outshone him? This isn't vilifying and nullifying him?

Phil Giordana, FCD, aka Schroedinger's Dog | July 19, 2011 5:43 AM

Jen [...] I can't even start to comprehend how you managed to have a friendly chat with that disgusting misogynist pig, rich old white privileged man. Must have been hell for you!

Walton | July 19, 2011 6:59 AM

In the wake of Elevatorgate, it also seems that parts of the atheist blogosphere [...] are intent on defending Dawkins' idiotic sexist comments to the hilt. The amount of casual contempt for Ms Watson's feelings and experiences (and those of other women who have experienced harassment or unwelcome/creepy advances) is breathtaking.

Notung | July 19, 2011 7:33 AM

Walton:

Dawkins' idiotic sexist comments

Maybe I'm dimwitted, but I still don't understand how Dawkins' comments were even slightly sexist. You may disagree with him that RW's complaint was "bad", rather than "zero-bad" but that still doesn't make what Dawkins said "sexist".

Walton | July 19, 2011 7:50 AM

It was sexist because he is speaking from a position of male privilege and of ignorance about women's lives and experiences; and because he decided to arrogate to himself the right to dictate to a woman how she "should" feel about being approached sexually by a stranger in an elevator at 4am.

We live in a society where women are, statistically, substantially more likely to be sexually assaulted than men are (except in prisons). [...]

With this in mind, Dawkins, being a man, is not entitled to tell a woman that she is "over-reacting" by feeling uncomfortable in that kind of situation. It's incredibly arrogant, and it stems from a position of clueless privilege.

Notung | July 19, 2011 8:17 AM

The trouble with this is that it is a simple ad hominem. If one makes a point, that point should stand regardless of the position that the person making the point finds themselves in. After all, the person making the point is contingent – somebody else in an entirely different position might have made the exact same point.

[...]

With this in mind, Dawkins, being a man, is not entitled to tell a woman that she is "over-reacting" by feeling uncomfortable in that kind of situation.

You put the words "over-reacting" in quotes, but he never actually used those words. Actually I don't think he did tell her what to feel or anything like that. I get the feeling that he was responding to the disproportionate brouhaha created as a result of the initial complaint.

I don't agree that because he is a man he loses any special rights about what he can say to anybody else. I wonder if whether I (or another man) made the same complaint about a woman and PZ wrote two posts on the matter Dawkins would have made the same comments. If not, then his action was sexist. However, I strongly suggest he would have done, perhaps with even more punch.

Sexism is discrimination on the basis of gender, not "telling a woman what to feel". If you say "you cannot tell a woman what to feel because you're a man", then that is sexist!

ERV | July 19, 2011 8:28 AM

Jen – [...]

This post was directed towards bloggers who lead/contributed to a lynch mob. Which you were a part of.

I fully recognize that you at least had the guts to post, plainly, "Dawkins is not a misogynist". Others have lacked that ability.

Well, some commentary perhaps:
Indeed Jen McCreight had written [a follow-up](#) to her initial accusatory post, explaining that Richard Dawkins was no misogynist, merely privileged, and therefore could not really understand the particular anxieties of women. Checking your own privilege was, admittedly, a hard thing to do, especially after getting called out for it in public, but one day, if he could overcome his wounded pride, he would, hopefully, see the way and the truth.

Her remark "Please don't take a good thing and use it to spit in our faces." is, one has to add, ironic insofar as Jen McCreight [would later on](#), when herself reporting on Richard Dawkins' announcement, venture a guess that, maybe, as Abbie Smith did say in jest, it was meant to deflect from him putting his foot in. Though she should have been aware, with Abbie Smith and many other people saying as much, that it had been in the works for a long time before. And in the comment section of her post Elisabeth Cornwell, the executive director of the Richard Dawkins Foundation, took exception with Jen McCreight:

It is discouraging, given the efforts RDFRS has made to support this movement to suddenly suggest that our motivations are less than sincere.⁶

Thus Jen McCreight was alternately pouring
oil on the waves and oil on the fire,
and with that we get back to ERV:

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 10:23 AM

I am dismayed. Richard Dawkins did a genuinely commendable thing, something that deserves high praise, and you've tainted it by using it to launch an unwarranted and scurrilous attack on a skeptical activist woman and to give a forum to the raging misogynists you've fostered here.

[...]

All this petty sniping at Watson is incomprehensible, and beneath you. She is a talented and eloquent activist for skepticism: she has been writing and speaking on this subject for a long time, and has been a catalyst for events and online activism. She's not a do-nothing or someone who's only famous for being famous, as some idiots have claimed – she has put a lot of work into this movement. When you demean her, you demean Abbie Smith, who is just a woman with a blog; you demean Richard Dawkins, who is just a guy who wrote some books.

In particular, this – "Twatson fell down and threw a temper tantrum and demanded everyone kiss her invisible boo-boo" – is inexcusable and dishonest. Everyone has seen her "tantrum", since it's on youtube, and all it was was a woman calmly asking that guys don't hit on her. No tantrum. No demands. No hysteria. It was actually a reasonable request in a reasonable context. And all the people raging over it are indicting themselves, not Rebecca Watson.

ERV | July 19, 2011 10:35 AM

PZ – You have shown exactly **zero** interest in learning my perspective on this issue. You had an opportunity to ask/discuss this with me in a private conversation weeks ago and you didnt care. You dont care. You dont care why I hold the opinion I hold. All you care is that Im 'wrong'.

shrug

But you, like everyone else, are more than welcome to comment here.

Since the thread is closed at your place.

Really is a shame about NatGeo censoring commentors, huh? Oh wait, they arent, nor are they asking us to, and you actually are.

shrug

⁶ Original unavailable. For a copy see note 4, file E-3 Dawkins-final, comment 425.

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 10:44 AM

As you well know, the scienceblogs software can't cope with long threads very well – I have to close threads that reach 700-1000 comments or the load drags the whole site down. [...]

As for a private conversation: I read your blog every day. What would you tell me in email that would be different or more persuasive than what you've written on ERV?

ERV | July 19, 2011 11:00 AM

1. I **do not care** about Watson and Elevator Guy.

2. I don't air all my personal business and my life history on my blog.

I also stated quite plainly, to you, that I had not voiced all of my personal issues or reasoning on this particular incident to **anyone**. I said that. To you. Directly. So why would you think you could get that information from my blog?

Notung | July 19, 2011 11:00 AM

to give a forum to the raging misogynists you've fostered here

Harsh and unjustifiable. This, for me is the problem. If you disagree on this issue, you're a misogynist. Why can we not discuss this issue in the spirit in which we discuss other things?

[...]

Everyone has seen her "tantrum", since it's on youtube, and all it was was a woman calmly asking that guys don't hit on her.

Agreed. However, when Abbie said "tantrum" I assumed she was referring to "The Privilege Delusion"⁷ which really did seem to me to be a tantrum (bringing up Dawkins' wealth, race, sexuality, age, announcing a boycott of his lectures and books, saying humanists and feminists should turn to new, 'better' voices, and saying that Dawkins is 'the past').

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 11:09 AM

I do not support any campaign against Dawkins; [...]. But I also understand how Watson can be personally very angry with Dawkins for trivializing the concerns of some women – and yes, rape threats are genuinely demeaning and worrisome.

[...]

[...] I've been accused of censoring opinions on my blog. Counter-evidence: Justicar is not banned, despite being one of the most idiotic, shrill, dishonest, contemptible scumbag liars on this subject anywhere on the interwebs.

7 Rebecca Watson's article on Richard Dawkins.

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 11:22 AM⁸

I also stated quite plainly, to you, that I had not voiced all of my personal issues or reasoning on this particular incident to **anyone**.

This is not a personal issue. I'm engaging in your public discussion of the subject. If it's confidential and not to be made public, it's irrelevant to this whole debate.

I also have some personal, private information about some of the participants in the argument, facts about some of the people on the anti-Watson side, that make their comments look self-serving and prejudicial to me. They're personal and private, though, so they are irrelevant, and I'm not going to take the cheap shot of revealing them.

ERV | July 19, 2011 11:21 AM

But I also understand how Watson can be personally very angry with Dawkins for trivializing the concerns of some women – and yes, rape threats are genuinely de-meaning and worrisome.

Did you stop to think for half of a fucking second that maybe, just maybe, I had ACTUALLY been in a situation where I could have been raped ON MULTIPLE OCCASIONS and I thought Watson (or anyone) comparing her absolutely BENIGN encounter on the same level as the HELL I went through one of THE MOST DISGUSTING things I have ever personally witnessed? AND THEN she goes on to attack a student. AND THEN she goes on to attack one of THE BEST proponents of EVERYONE in science and skepticism, EVER.

Did you ever stop and THINK why I would be so pissed off about this?

NO.

IM WRONG.

End of fucking story!

There was no discussion about this. There was NEVER any discussion.

IM WRONG.

Everybody just MOVE ALONG.

No ones personal lives or experiences matter if they dont agree with you.

IM WRONG.

DAWKINS IS WRONG.

EVERYBODY IS WRONG but you.

⁸ Based on context and time stamp, PZ Myers was already working on this comment before the following one by Abbie Smith was posted. It is accordingly relocated here.

Justicar | July 19, 2011 11:29 AM

Yes, rape threats are. It's a good thing that Dawkins didn't mock actual threats of rape. That makes this line of non-reasoning irrelevant here (except for being able to loosely knit rape with Watson's shindig so as to craft a nice blunt instrument to whack people with).

[...] you may call me a liar, and stupid and vile, what you cannot do is support that I've been remotely dishonest at any step along the way, or that my argument fails. You've had every opportunity, as has everyone else. Not a single argument that isn't contingent on emotional exploitation has sprung forth.

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 11:37 AM

The problem here is this bizarrely exaggerated claim that Rebecca Watson equated, as you say, benign encounter with being threatened with rape.

She did not. Anywhere. At any time. Her reaction was mild annoyance, which she expressed, and polite rejection, which she expressed, and a public discussion of courtesy to women at atheist meetings. There were no rape whistles, no screams, no police called, no temper tantrums. And this measured and entirely appropriate response launched a howling mob on her, and that's the greatest concern: that even the mildest of suggestions about a minor event can get such a condemning reaction from the atheist community is a worry.

It's obvious that this event has touched one of your triggers. I suggest, though, that your rightful anger is misdirected, and it shouldn't be aimed at a woman who made a mild complaint about a minor incident, but at the hate-mongers who are so incensed that a woman spoke up at all.

Peter | July 19, 2011 11:49 AM

The problem here is this bizarrely exaggerated claim that Rebecca Watson equated, as you say, benign encounter with being threatened with rape.

Actually, the problem I have is the same as Dawkins, who responded to some of the more colourful comments on your blog with the Dear Muslima comment, a call for those colourful commentators to get some perspective and recognise that their exaggeration and conflation of minor events does no justice to what misogyny really is, and belittles the term and experience of women who really physically suffer.

That's why he responded in the comments thread. Why else would he not just respond directly to Watson, unless he intended the reply to be to the commentators?

Then Watson pretended that Dawkin's comment was directed at her belittling her experience because other women suffer more. It's almost the opposite of what he said when you look at where and who he responded to instead of pretending he responded to Watson on his own website or hers.

Carlie | July 19, 2011 12:04 PM

The serious experience that you've had, and those like it, are made more socially acceptable if all of those more minor experiences are let go without comment. [...] The reason to nip these things in the bud is to try and make it more socially unacceptable to do the worse things, not just to nitpick.

ERV | July 19, 2011 12:14 PM

No, the serious experiences I had were complicated due to little girls and boys crying "WOLF!" with sexual violence. That is not a hypothetical maybe, THAT HAPPENED. There was no criminal prosecution of one of my perps because the cop said 'So what?' He assumed I was pulling a 'OMFG HE ASKED ME OUT AND HE WAS UGLY!!! OMG WHAT IF HE RAPES ME??? OMG I WAS SO UNCOMFORTABLE!!!' and he closed the file.

But again, my experiences dont matter. Im WRONG.

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 12:25 PM

Again, Rebecca Watson did not cry wolf.

It's all on youtube. You can see for yourself exactly what she said. Her actions are a matter of record.

I agree with you that if there had been a shrieking over-reaction, it would have been a disservice to women who have had real traumatic sexual encounters. But the only hysterical over-reaction was from people who repeatedly scream about what a horrible thing Watson did, and who have to exaggerate it to make it worth complaining about.

"Guys, don't do that" is not a false accusation of rape. Women being cautious in many otherwise innocuous situations because they have had threats of rape is not a false accusation of rape.

Justicar | July 19, 2011 12:33 PM

"Women being cautious in many otherwise innocuous situations because they have had threats of rape is not a false accusation of rape."

It is also not a license to dictate to the rest of the world that we have to tiptoe around one's emotional problems. Because Rebecca Watson is uncomfortable for reasons that fail to make many women uncomfortable (some of whom have been actually raped incidentally) gives her no warrant to tell me to do fuck all about anything. Let alone whom I may greet, or the contours of the conversation another person and myself might have.

Hey, black guys: I have some friendly advice about approaching white people at night – "don't do that". Just a word to the wise so you blacks will know how to make us whites feel more at ease.

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 12:35 PM

Rebecca Watson experienced something mildly annoying, and she made a polite request that people stop doing it. To which Richard Dawkins effectively said, 'Well, I know people who had their genitals mutilated, so your complaint is too trivial to bother with.'

I should think you'd identify more with Watson here. This is another woman whose complaints were dismissed because others brought up more serious issues to trivialize her.

ERV | July 19, 2011 1:43 PM

PZ, you keep saying over and over and over that you 'disagree' with Dawkins. Dawkins is 'wrong'. But you have the exact same opinion as him.

Elevator Guy massively less than Other Shit.

Elevator Guy does not equal rape.

But when **you** say it, its 'calm and reasoned', and when **Dawkins** says it, hes 'painfully unaware', and when **anyone else** says it they are misogynists and gender traitors, as their gender warrants.

Why?

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 2:06 PM

Because there's another claim that you omitted. Dawkins said that Watson's problem was "zero bad". This is not true. Just because there are greater problems in the universe does not mean that small ones should be ignored completely.

[...]

And anyone who tells a woman to shut up when her entire investment in addressing a problem is 30 seconds of commentary on a youtube video actually is being a misogynist.

PZ Myers | July 19, 2011 2:20 PM

I'm done. People aren't listening, and are still straining to justify the noise of the last few weeks. I'll leave it to women to speak and recommend [this one comment](#).⁹

⁹ Dead link. For an excerpt see note 4, file E-5 Have-final, comment 3037. It was an answer to Abbie Smith posted on the Pharyngula blog, beginning: "Did you ever think for half a fucking second that maybe, just maybe, **I** had actually been in a situation where I was raped on multiple occasions and I thought Watson (or anyone) was spot on to appropriately use her relatively BENIGN encounter to point out the level of male privilege/rape culture that still exists, that can still, in some cases, lead to the HELL I went through."

ERV | July 19, 2011 2:43 PM

PZ – Go fuck yourself.

Adam Lee | July 20, 2011 9:55 PM

"Twatson"?

Shame on you now and forever, ERV. You've forfeited your right to be listened to on this issue when you use this kind of obscene and vile sexist language.

In the very same place belongs the following struggle between PZ Myers and Russell Blackford, the Australian philosopher of the blogs *Metamagician* and *The Hellfire Club*. He had commented on the blog *Butterflies & Wheels* of Ophelia Benson, co-author, jointly with Russell Blackford's co-blogger Jeremy Stangroom, [of a book](#) indicting postmodern philosophy.

[There stated Russell Blackford:](#)

Just to remind us all, the huge shitstorm broke out when:

1. Stef McGraw criticised Watson in a civil way on a student blog.
2. Watson took the opportunity to attack McGraw from the podium at a CFI conference for student leaders, where Watson was a keynote speaker McGraw was one of the delegates and had no real opportunity to defend herself. (Watson had previously behaved pretty badly towards Paula Kirby in Dublin, when she went off-topic on a panel to use her time to attack Kirby.)
3. PZ wrote a blog post supporting Watson's action in abusing her power to humiliate McGraw at the CFI conference.
4. Dawkins made a comment on PZ's blog in which he (rather sarcastically) suggested a bit of perspective.

A lot of us think that Elevator Guy must have seemed creepy (irrespective of what he really intended or didn't intend), but we don't think McGraw did anything so wrong that it justified how Watson treated her, let alone PZ praising Watson for it from his bully pulpit. We may also believe that Dawkins' initial comment was a bit dismissive of a genuine issue of people not creeping each other out at conferences, but we agree with him that it was OTT for PZ to write a blog post in support of the humiliation of an up-and-coming leader in our movement at a conference put on to nurture such people. And we don't believe that Dawkins did anything so wrong as to justify the demonisation he's received or particularly the calls for him to "Shut up," on the basis that he's white and male and "doesn't get it".

Attracting disagreement

of imperious PZ Myers:

Oops. Here's the problem. In #1, McGraw criticized Watson in a civil way. In #2, the language changes dramatically: now Watson is "attacking". She's denying McGraw an opportunity to defend herself. [...]

This has been a consistent pattern. The anti-Watson camp relies on gross misrepresentation [...]

One week later, on the blog ERV, the commentator Mr. DNA favourably linked to Russell Blackford's comment. Which displeased PZ Myers. Wrote he:

Scroll down a little further on that B&W post, Mr DNA, to comment #105, where I point out the rhetorical game Blackford played in that comment you liked.

Claiming that it is the McGraw/Dawkins lynching that has raised hackles is simply a lie, a barefaced, dishonest revision of history. McGraw was not in any way lynched; Dawkins was raked over the coals, that's for sure, but only after he made a painfully unaware comment. Most of the sturm and drang occurred over Watson's youtube video, which you now desperately struggle to ignore in order to pretend her angry reaction was unjustified. I can't fault people for telling you apologists for sexism, you hysterical serial exaggerators, you dishonest rationalizers to fuck off. You do realize that you can lie calmly and clearly, too, and it doesn't make it any prettier?

(Which was in answer to Mr. DNA's complaint about Pharyngula's conversational atmosphere:

I don't think that anyone here is too bothered about the "guys, don't do that" stuff. It's the McGraw and Dawkins lynching that has really riled us. And attempting to say so on your blog, in a calm and clear manner, results in Caine, Fleur de Mal et al. calling us all "misogynists" and telling us all to "fuck off"!)

For calm and clear Russell Blackford, this was displeasing:

For the record, Paul, I do not play "rhetorical games" and I am not a liar. [...] I criticised your actions and views relating to this particular issue. I did so in rather mild and impersonal terms, and I did not attack you personally. I'd imagined until I saw your comments here that we were friends, despite having a disagreement on the merits of this particular issue – not **close** friends, granted, since we've only met at a couple of conferences, but still friends.

I believe that what I wrote on Ophelia's site was true. Even if I was mistaken, that does not make me a liar – we all make genuine mistakes. At my end, I think that you're making some serious errors of judgment in this whole debacle, but I haven't accused you of being a liar. You're doubtless calling it as you see it. Well, so am I.

You do "get" that publicly calling someone a liar is a friendship-breaker and a bridge-burner, right? I don't see how I've done anything to deserve that kind of language. Nor do see how I can go on being friends with you after you've said that in public.

Mate, you seriously owe me an apology.

And even though PZ Myers
didn't hear him anymore,
he was acerbically comforted by Abbie Smith:

'Liar', Russell? Pffff. Could be worse. He could have called you a **whispers** twat.¹⁰

Twatson however was a word displeasing
to Ophelia Benson who, in that respect, is sensitive;
[plaintively did she register](#) on her blog.
An irony, in that she herself had been mocking Richard Dawkins
for his plea to not swear in every other sentence –
"tone trolling" [did she call it](#), that is the refusal to engage an opponent
under pretext of their language.
(Ophelia Benson however would probably object
that gender-specific slurs are much more harmful
than simple swearing, as the latter are contributing
to a universal social climate
of sexism.)

Thus began the radicalization of Ophelia Benson,
who up to that point had been sitting
between both camps, [chiding](#), on the one hand, Richard Dawkins
for his comments, and on the other [Rebecca Watson](#)
for her "wealthy old heterosexual white man!"

Like a martyr delivering herself to the infidels
did she confront the ERV folks,
initially because of an unrelated matter:
For prolific Jerry Coyne had meddled in a way
displeasing to Ophelia Benson.

And in the following conversation did meddle
contradictory Ophelia Benson:

¹⁰ See note 4, file E-3 Dawkins-final, comments 169, 175, 767 and 776.

Myrna | July 21, 2011 9:58 AM

So touching to see that all you manly whingers have found a mighty warrior-princess to nurse the thousand little hurts that those awful femtards have inflicted on your tender souls. Just stay here, ok?

TylerD | July 21, 2011 12:51 PM

Why do I always get the impression that feminists can be the most misogynistic and sexist peeps in the world when they face dissent from females?

ERV | July 21, 2011 1:00 PM

Oh definitely. I got some doozies from adult females, from their **work** email addresses, containing some of the most arrogant, dismissive, sexist language I have **ever** experienced. **No one** in science addresses me that manner. **No one**.

And when I didnt respond 'favorably' to them, they emailed Jerry Coyne (?????) in the hopes that he would 'get me in line'. Because going to a socially superior male and demanding he control a lower female is SUPER FEMINIST. (I have no idea where the Jerry thing came from, but True Feminists regularly go to **him** about my behavior. It creeps both of us out. Im assuming its because I was obviously just parroting PZ before, and because a female cant have her own opinions, Jerry must be the dominant male I follow now. SUPER FEMINIST!!!!)

Ophelia Benson | July 21, 2011 1:53 PM

Abbie,

First of all, for the record, I like and admire you. I hate this post, really hate it, but I like you.

But also for the record, since you brought it up:

And when I didnt respond 'favorably' to them, they emailed Jerry Coyne (?????) in the hopes that he would 'get me in line'. [...]

Maybe so, but that's not the only direction the SUPER FEMINIST advice and pressure has been going. As you know, because I told you, Jerry Coyne also emailed me to scold me very aggressively for not responding harshly enough to a comment by a third party on my blog about you and Miranda. I responded sarcastically and he ejected me from his universe. What about that? Is that SUPER FEMINIST?

The comment in question didn't call you twats or the Bitch Brigade. It called you morons and gender traitors. I did disagree with it, in a mild way ... but I didn't jump up and down on it, and that omission was enough to earn me a dam' good scolding and then termination. Is that SUPER FEMINIST?

[cue the torrent of garbage from the lovely crew here]

ERV | July 21, 2011 2:40 PM

It was absolutely unnecessary for Jerry to contact you. I also have no reason to ask you to moderate comments on my behalf – no one did anything illegal or threatening, etc.

But I can see how Jerry is friends with you and friends with Miranda and friends with me and he wanted to say something.

[...]

I do think that is different than someone who I have never met or interacted with, and someone who Jerry has never met or interacted with, asking Jerry to get me 'in line'.
[...]

Ophelia Benson | July 21, 2011 6:01 PM

Yes, but it wasn't a matter of saying something; it was scolding me as if I were the scullery maid. And you use the present tense – you say "Jerry is friends with you" when you know he very forcefully said the opposite in an email to undisclosed recipients which he forwarded to me. You know Jerry isn't friends with me now – because (apparently because) I failed to apologize for not protecting you and Miranda strongly enough from a single criticism on my blog.

[...]

At any rate I think both of you are a good deal too selective in what you're creeped out by.

Justicar | July 21, 2011 7:16 PM

Jerry Coyne banned you from his blog for not agreeing with him?

If that is the case, then it is as egregious a breach of the importance of dissent as it is when Greta does it, when PZ does it, when Blaghag does it, when Skepchick does it as when you do it.

Thus Justicar, the principled, rose to the defense of Ophelia Benson, adding just one minor jab in the process: He was pleasantly surprised, he wrote, to not have been banned from Butterflies & Wheels, especially considering that she had nudged Miranda Celeste Hale to do the same to him.

forced to be anonymous | July 23, 2011 8:53 AM

[cue the torrent of garbage from the lovely crew here]

Oh, Ophelia, you poor little victim ... you poor little hypocritical and dishonest victim. I'm sure that you have been checking in regularly to see if your expectations have finally been met. What? No? You haven't? Exactly.

That, while unpleasant (and self-invalidating) remained the only such abuse of Ophelia Benson herself, at least in this thread; [her disgust](#), however, did rise throughout the following days:

Look, I wasn't crazy about "gender traitor" two weeks ago or whenever it was, but given the "Twatson" thread, it now looks pretty descriptive.

[...] I think "Twatson" and "fucking bitch" are a great deal worse than "gender-traitor."

[...] As a person I like Abbie (in some sense, given that I've never met her, and I don't read her regularly etc) – I like her nerve and pugnacity. But I detest the content of that thread, and I report on some of it – certainly not every single sexist comment, good god – because I think sexist commentary matters. That's not new; I've written about it at length here and elsewhere before.¹¹

I now want to tell you how Ophelia Benson happened to fall out with Russell Blackford and Jeremy Stangroom for Abbie Smith, the naughty virologist's sake. For the latter [had been denigrated](#) at Butterflies & Wheels by well-railing Improbable Joe:

All I get from her is that she's mad because Rebecca Watson isn't as smart as Abbie, or as good-looking as Abbie, and yet Rebecca gets all the attention and therefore needs to be taken down a few notches.

Which [caused protest](#) of the (normally) calm and clear Russell Blackford:

Improbable Joe that is absolutely fucking ridiculous, and you owe Abbie an apology.

Abbie has been one of the few people in this whole mess who has been steadily clear-headed and sensible. What you just described Abbie as doing is what Watson did to Stef McGraw. [...] What I don't understand (or "get") is why so many people are being pro-

¹¹ The above is a joinder of three individual comments (18, 51, 53).

tective of Watson, who clearly abused her position and seems to be a nasty piece of work. Yet what is being experienced by anyone who makes the slightest criticism of poor little dear sweet self-aggrandising Rebecca is that we're shouted down as liars, misogynists, gender traitors, old privileged white men, or whatever else serves the purpose. I've found this whole episode very disillusioning.

[...]

And yes, I know there are some nutjobs commenting on Abbie's thread [...]. That's hardly surprising. Both "sides" in this dispute have more than their share of nutjobs. For balance, read any thread on this at Pharyngula, where there's a whole army of lunatics cheering for Watson. What astonishes me is that PZ Myers (who ended our friendship by calling me in almost so many words a barefaced liar when I set out what looks to me to be the truth of all this) and Greg Laden are sounding like nutjobs themselves. So are quite a few usually-sensible people here at B&W such as yourself – e.g. with that attack you just made on Abbie.

Russell Blackford in turn
thus displeased Ophelia Benson
and quite a few commenters,
especially, of course, Improbable Joe:

Ophelia Benson | July 29, 2011 at 5:01 pm

Russell – you have got to be kidding. Abbie has been calling Watson Twatson and a fucking bitch for days, and cheering on those goons who call her all that and a cunt and all the rest of the Misogynists' Dictionary. Nobody owes Abbie any apology. "steadily clear-headed and sensible" – are you fucking kidding me?

Improbable Joe | July 29, 2011 at 5:11 pm

Hey Russell? Not in this existence, or any other possible alternate universe. You should be ashamed... [...]. Abbie has been an embarrassment. Whatever her personal issues with the other parties, her eagerness to host a misogyny party has been a disgrace. Your defense of her isn't any better. [...]

And ostentatiously Improbable Joe [did wonder](#) why Russell Blackford had answered, of all people, him. Might that be because he was a weak link, which Russell Blackford thought fit to attack with impunity? [Replied Ophelia Benson:](#) "Russell's going after all of us, Joe [...].", her as well, for was it not her blog he had come to for "pitching a fit"? And a previous comment he made on her blog he had linked on Facebook, to summon "The Allies" to go "gang up" on her.

Them answered Russell Blackford, of long suffering:

Really, Ophelia – I'm "going after" people by sticking my nose in here to put a view that will be unpopular (though I stand by it)? So any dissent is "going after people"? I'm conducting a one-person witch hunt of the whole lot of you?

Mate, I wish I had that sort of power.

And you're being absurd, Joe. I replied to your comment because it was the most recent one at the time I started typing and it was the one that struck me as so unfair (in this case to Abbie) that it made me feel I had to say something. See, this is one of the annoying things: the constant accusations of bad faith.

Thus ended Russell Blackford and retreated from Butterflies & Wheels. Three days later he commented on the blog ERV, where Abbie Smith had opened a new thread for discussion.

He wrote:

Hey, Naughty Abbie – any bets on how many comments this thread can attract?¹²

Provoking much displeasure of Ophelia Benson, aggravated once again, when Russell Blackford befriended commentator Phil Giordana, who, a sarcastic man, earned himself a bad reputation like a comic book villain, on Facebook.

Thus wrote Ophelia Benson:

I'm done with Russell. Now that I am, I'll remark that he's been making obnoxious coffee jokes and elevator jokes at Facebook ever since this started – sometimes on other people's threads and out of absolutely nowhere. People talk about carrot soup and up pops Russell to say well at least it's not in an elevator hahaha. The sustained venom and contempt are just mind-boggling.

And it scares me, to tell the truth. It looks to me as if it could happen to any woman. Put a foot wrong and all of a sudden bam you find formerly sane men and even some women vomiting bile all over you for weeks on end.

12 See note 4, file E-4 Monument-final, comment 646.

Russell Blackford however was defended by Jeremy Stangroom, regarding a different comment which he had left at Miranda Celeste Hale's blog, causing much indignant uproar (not, mind you, on the part of Miranda Celeste Hale who belonged to the anti-Watson camp, [accusing](#)¹³ Rebecca Watson of attempted character assassination of Richard Dawkins).

Russell Blackford had written that personally he was not thrilled about gender-specific slurs as well, and could see how they might possibly reproduce sexist attitudes, but there were nuances, and "twat" for instance meant primarily "fool".

[Approvingly wrote Jeremy Stangroom:](#)

And the idea it isn't possible to look at why everything isn't the same, the idea it isn't possible to take a different view about how a word such as "twat" functions, without being immediately dismissed as a misogynist by a mob is ridiculous (and the antithesis of anything that could be considered free enquiry).

[Earning him the disdain of Ophelia Benson.](#)

Who, incidentally, closed the post in which she expressed the same by writing "Fuck you, Miranda."¹⁴

For Miranda Celeste Hale did insinuate, by her reading, that the speakers of a CFI conference scheduled for the following year titled "Women in Secularism" had been invited simply because of their genitalia. (Instead of "Fuck you, Miranda." soon it only read "Godalmighty.")

And on smart Jean Kazez' blog Abbie Smith, the naughty virologist, explained [her reasons](#) for using the word Twatson:

Yup! I used the word 'Twatson'. A very mild political jab in response to 'Dear Dick'.

¹³ Miranda Celeste Hale is quoting herself from a blog post that is no longer available.

¹⁴ According to Miranda Celeste Hale. See note 4, file E-4 Monument-final, comment 1849.

Ophelia Benson too had been told that Twatson was a response to "Dear Dick" and that she was being inconsequential in fretting about Twatson while ignoring the "Dear Dick campaign." (Ophelia Benson subsequently shot the messenger, that is, removed the comment of the questioner, [allegedly](#) for saying bad things about her on the blog ERV. To this the commentator [objected](#) in a [fervid manner](#), while in the relevant ERV threads there is indeed no trace of it.)¹⁵

What however is the meaning of "Dear Dick"? This refers to [an open letter](#), published on the blog Almost Diamonds by Stephanie Zvan, entitled "A Letter to Professor Dawkins from Victims of Sexual Assault", demanding his apology to Rebecca Watson and every co-signatory, and beginning, an unlucky choice, with the salutation "Dear Dick". Which, as you know, is both short for Richard and slang for penis and, derived from that, an expression for scumbag. So the use of this ambiguous salutation gave offense to Abbie Smith, which, being a victim of sexual assault she probably is well entitled to.

The demand, by the way, is somewhat ironic (at the very least) in that Richard Dawkins in his youth had been [the victim of sexual assault](#) by a priest.

Similarly, [Jen McCreight](#) and [Adam Lee](#), [Phil Plait](#) and [Dana Hunter](#), the temperamental geologist of the blog En Tequila Es Verdad, had lectured Richard Dawkins on his inability to understand the fear of being raped (which, to remind you, Rebecca Watson in her original video did not claim to have experienced).

[Caustically Justicar commented:](#)

I think even if we held Dawkins down and gang raped him with concrete dildos while chewing gum it wouldn't count to these people.

¹⁵ That is, in all four ERV threads on Elevatorgate existing at that time. For a copy of the censored comment see note 4, file E-4 Monument-final, comment 750.

[Other parties objected](#) that Richard Dawkins was outshining, for sure, all other atheists when it came to hate mail – [which could be true](#) and is ironic considering how much emphasis Rebecca Watson, sitting next to him, placed on hers. So why, [came the question](#), didn't he complain as well? And, given that he, and the other males of the movement, did not feel daunted by this, was it not sexist to claim that for the women it meant a crucial problem?

The author wants to add: Does not Richard Dawkins, the world's most prominent opponent of organized religion, run a small but realistic chance of being shot some day? And might therefore have, were he so inclined, good reason to feel uncomfortable in the presence of strangers – e.g., in an elevator?

What else may be reported from the devastating mudfight of bloggers? Of the little squirmish I sing which took place between Hemant Mehta and forthright Amanda Marcotte. Because the former had [defended Stef McGraw](#), even before Richard Dawkins did make his appearance, causing displeasure on the part of Amanda Marcotte, who [accused](#) Hemant Mehta of "sexist paternalism" towards Stef McGraw.

This in turn displeased Hemant Mehta who calmly and clearly, and this time paternistically indeed [argued his position](#):

When a student says something you know is wrong, you don't correct the mistake by humiliating her in front of her classmates. You acknowledge the parts she got right and then gently guide her toward the way she ought to be thinking.

These words, though merely patronizing and paternalistic, not necessarily sexist, provided, in theory, a beautiful new opening. But Amanda Marcotte, usually not of the mincing type, did not pursue, be the reason that her interests turned to a different matter, be it that Hemant Mehta by criticizing Richard Dawkins renewed his feminist credentials, or simply because the chemistry of negatives did not work between those two;

be that as it may, like a short summer storm, whose force
is spent with a little rumbling,
thus abated the quarrel between Hemant Mehta, the Friendly Atheist,
and Amanda Marcotte of blog Pandagon.

Of more entertaining feuds let me sing:
Franc Hoggle, the Australian, versus PZ Myers; Stephanie Zvan,
Greg Laden, and Jason Thibeault versus Maria Maltseva.
Both different, yet both revealing.

Franc Hoggle, of the blog grey lining:
No better does he have in polemical language
and just one equal: Imperious PZ Myers.
Like fire with fire did these two fight
after Franc Hoggle
[dared to voice](#) his disappointment in PZ Myers
and Rebecca Watson:

Happiness is a warm scapegoat. Nothing makes a person feel purer than decrying impurity in others. I can't think of a better root cause for the religious impulse than this dumbness, but it is also a testament to how deeply ingrained into our species' psyche it is that the godless cling to this same kind of addiction to villifying those that transgress the tribal taboos – the new secular heretics – with the same mindless tenacity. *The more things change, the more they stay the same* as the saying goes.

The latest moral panic / fart-in-a-bathtub comes, rather depressingly, via Skepchick's Rebecca Watson, who you could be excused for expecting to be above such trite games-personship. In this case exploiting a perceived atrocity against that most terrifying of socio-theo-politico-morasses: the sacred temple of the divine yoni and all of its sensitivity and delicateness. A blasphemy against the purity of the holy of holies, the supreme goddess-hood, the sublime and perfect eternal feminine, the *über*-she who's poop smells like cinnamon buns...

Yeah, perhaps that is stretching the point. But there is no other way to try and get a handle on the way conventional reality simply vaporises and all commonsense ceases to play any role when the deadly combination of pussy, circumstance, insecurity and a readily available male patsy to blame everything on combine in surreal Grand Guignol – especially when the masses rally behind it and give it a good head of indignant steam. This is all grist for the misandrist blog industry, but it is particularly disheartening seeing it become such a staple amongst the godless and allegedly "freethinking" rationalist communities.

[...]

As much as I love PZ Myers, his consistency leaves a lot to be desired. Whilst he may have the spine of a Triceratops when facing down the Catholic Church, it is disturbing to see how easily it turns into credulous jello as soon as gender politics come into the picture.

[Displeasing PZ Myers](#), unexpectedly,
like the daily rise of the sun:

This was posted under the category "shrieking hysteria". I think it was self-referential.
[...]

Let me remind you what really happened, without the "divine yoni" and "Grand Guignol" and self-righteous accusations of misandry. A woman was awkwardly propositioned. She said no. She later briefly addresses atheists in a youtube video to say, "guys, don't do that".

So let's just be clear here. If your version of the events requires comically strident exaggeration in order to make a case, you're definitely wrong, and you are to blame for the discord and confusion. You are lying. And, by the way, if you even mention the words "misandrist blog industry", you're a flaming conspiracy nut.

[To which replied Franc Hoggle:](#)

Only thing that is really evident here immediately is that PZ didn't actually read what I have written (I assume someone pre-digested it for him), and also appears to suffer what most of the 'net also suffers – the inability to understand variable use of the serious versus satiric without the ample and explicit use of smilies (very sad how linguistic subtlety is a dying art). Just a trite dismissal, without answering a single point, of one that is too lowly to even consider seriously...

And to show PZ Myers
what, exactly, was rubbing him
the wrong way, he [quoted from Rebecca Watson](#)
in disowning Richard Dawkins:

So to have my concerns – and more so the concerns of other women who have survived rape and sexual assault – dismissed thanks to a rich white man comparing them to the plight of women who are mutilated, is insulting to all of us.

This is the language of propaganda handed down through the ages – establishing a tenuous connection between a trivial social incident and the violent act of rape – in order to cynically exploit the generated emotions.

It is the selling of one's own inherent moral superiority and just cause as the only civilised human condition, as opposed to the other – who is a subhuman brute that considers rape as sport. And the other is anyone who dares criticise or object.

[...]

Dawkins saw this nonsense for what it was – and you fed him to the wolves. I'm sure he appreciates your friendship.

And you use your large established audience to assist you in legitimising and endorsing this nonsense [...]. To say this is somewhat disillusioning is to say black is a shade of grey. [...] I have no hesitation in stating this – this ideological jihad being driven by Watson in this case has no consideration for the welfare of the greater atheist and skeptic communities. It is the kind of one-eyed zealotry that would be content with absolute ruin of all as an acceptable second choice option to not getting its own way. And you promote it, uncritically and as a true believer.

PZ Myers:

I read the blog post in question. I also read this one. Recall that my criticism was this:

"If your version of the events requires comically strident exaggeration in order to make a case, you're definitely wrong, and you are to blame for the discord and confusion."

Your post was exhibit #1 as an example of comically strident exaggeration. What was all that nonsense about a "divine yoni", "Grand Guignol", and on and on? None of that was in the video that set the manly world aflame.

It wasn't Rebecca Watson who made atheists look misogynistic. It is people like you who rant and rave about your god-given right to hit on women and make them uncomfortable any time you feel like it, and who express such inflated outrage at a woman calmly mentioning that she was made uncomfortable (nothing more) by one guy. You represent the creepy segment of the atheist community; are you proud?

Franc Hoggle:

So I take it [...] [t]hat your implications that anyone that disagrees with you or Watson is sexually impotent, insecure and has a tiny penis meets all acceptable standards of public discourse as far as you are concerned, whereas I do not, and have not earned enough stripes to take such liberties? Thanks for the tip.

[...]

If it's by your definition of "creepy", damn right I'm proud. I am especially proud of the "creepy" women who are similarly coming forward and challenging this repugnant nonsense for what it is. [...]

PZ, it is time to call you and your bullshit for what it is – BULLSHIT.

At least you have shown beyond doubt that you are neither a free- nor a clear-thinker, and that for the perceived benefit of some short term advantage, you are quite prepared to spit on the entire community, including old supposed friends like Dawkins. For what? For pussy that uses crocodile tears and whining as a business model – and itself treats many female community members like shit. [...]

You sir, are a fucking disgrace. QED.

Thus, as by treading
uncautiously, a sleeping dog is wakened
(a simile that Franc Hoggle, being a disciple
[of the cynic school of philosophy](#),
may find acceptable),
PZ Myers laid the beginning
to a beautiful enmity.

One other hassle I sing,
as promised:
The one between Maria Maltseva,
the inconvenient lawyer
who calls herself bluharmony,
and three prominent bloggers:
Greg Laden of Greg Laden's blog,
Stephanie Zvan of Almost Diamonds,
and Jason Thibeault of Lousy Canuck.
Because Maria Maltseva's case is illuminating,
though she was, at that time,
no established blogger yet: First because,
like hardly any other in the argument, it shows
the mechanism of dogpiling,
in which one critical person
is set on by a "pack" of detractors,
and second because Maria Maltseva
had been raped
yet still was opposed to Rebecca Watson
and her advocates.

Such as Greg Laden. For the same had decided
to enlighten the men in the atheist community
about how the man in the elevator had been creepy, and
how men had to go about to not creep out women.

(In a similar manner [PZ Myers](#) and [Greta Christina](#)
of Greta Christina's blog
had decided to announce rules on how
to best approach a woman, and how
it would be best to listen to them,
because, in the words of Greta Christina,
"We are trying to help you get laid.")

[Wrote Greg Laden](#): [...] most women
are justifiably afraid of men."
And that's "Because very few women get away
without something happening in their lifetime."

And the following he told the men,
of his own behaviour as a teenager
when walking at night:

So I learned this trick. Cross the street about a block back and "pass" the lady that way. Same with a potential head-on encounter. If you see a woman walking towards you in the middle of the night on a lonely urban street, my practice in those days was to cross the street to not stress her out.

[...]

All men. ALL men who have given sufficient consideration to women's position in our society do this walking trick. If you are a man and you do not know about this trick then there is a problem with you.

And, while some agreed enthusiastically:

SallyStrange | July 6, 2011 12:12 AM

Look, until straight guys get off their fucking asses and work to change this rape culture that we're all living in then yes, the onus is on you to show that you're considerate, kind, and yes, not rapey.

Don't like? Then be a feminist and change society so women aren't living in fear. Otherwise, STFU and stop complaining about it. Fuckers.

[Maria Maltseva objected](#).¹⁶

[W]hat are you going to do if there's a lone, weak, vulnerable, helpless, frightened, irrational woman on both sides of the street? Walk in the middle of the road? If you want to be considerate, here's advice you can actually follow: when you pass a woman, try to give her as much room as possible. Or don't. It's up to you.

In any case, I'm not afraid of men. Please quit speaking on my behalf or acting like I need to be "educated" about women's issues. Many, if not most, educated women feel like me.

Thus displeasing Stephanie Zvan,
who didn't like "educated women"
and accused Maria Maltseva of classism,
whereas a different commentator
pointed out to her that she was asking
not to speak in her name, but then spoke
in the name of educated women.

¹⁶ The exchange starts at comment 380. Spanning a lot of individual comments, not every single one is linked in the following, with only sources for direct quotes given.

Explained Maria Maltseva: She was only speaking for herself, and for women who agreed with her. But many, if not most women she knew did, and those were educated.

Countered Stephanie Zvan: What was her basis to generalize from that tiny sample to educated women as a whole? Plus she did not even demonstrate sufficient imagination to think that women of a lower social-economic status were much more vulnerable.

Answered Maria Maltseva: She did not need imagination, since she came from a family of low social-economic status, and had also spent a total of seven years dealing with court cases of sexual assault.

To this responded Stephanie Zvan: She had been generous to think of Maria Maltseva as being ignorant. She did not have much sympathy for people who failed to acknowledge the effect of birth on life perspective. Hereupon Maria Maltseva accused Stephanie Zvan of using ad hominem attacks: To call her ignorant was no proper way to invalidate her arguments.

This was followed by a long and vicious argument about the proper way of defining an ad hominem attack, wherein soon got mixed Greg Laden, and Jason Thibeault:

Greg Laden | July 18, 2011 10:02 AM

I also think that the argument that ad ho-mi-nem trickery is being done is almost always a code word for "I'm a baby and can't handle rough conversation unless I'm the one dishing it out and everyone else is agreeing with me like good girls should" or words to that effect.

Jason Thibeault | July 18, 2011 2:44 PM

Hell, half the time when I try to really rub it in that they're wrong, I'll throw in the insult just to see if they cry "ad hominem" instead of dealing with the substance. Objective observers will note that bluharmony deserves every insult that comes her way in this thread because she repeatedly and with aplomb makes the same mistakes over and over again, despite the fact that she should know better (ahem), due to being in this conversation for as long as she has and being told as often as she has that she's wrong.

Getting an [exasperated reply](#)
from Maria Maltseva:

Jason you are seriously an idiot. And that's not an ad hominem because it's true. And, further, you deserve every insult that anyone tosses your way because you're a bully using the comfort of being surrounded by people you know to indulge in shameful behavior.

[...]

And Greg, I'm supposed to just accept ad hominem attacks and "suck it up" then? Then may I suggest, you sexist male chauvinist bully, that women do the same fucking thing when there's a guy on their side of the street or when someone happens to be on an elevator with them.

At the same time, those four did argue about just every single point comprising Elevatorgate:
The treatment of Stef McGraw, whether Rebecca Watson had been sexualised respectively objectified, Richard Dawkins' comments, the concept of privilege, which, allegedly, kept the privileged from getting it, and of course the elephants in the room, the societal ills of sexism, misogyny, rape.

And whereas Maria Maltseva initially had spoken [quite conciliatory](#):

There's room for all of us. Wasn't this supposed to be about getting women to participate in the community? If so, then why ridicule them (or, as Rebecca did in her Dublin speech, tell them how awful it is and how all you get is hate mail)?

[It sounded very different](#)
by the end:

Feminist dogma is inconsistent with skepticism. No dogma is. Find yourself a group of radfems, join, and leave the rest of us alone. There are many schools of feminism, and I find myself supporting Stef and Rose St. Clair because they believe in equality, which is what most of us have been fighting tooth and nail for.

Only with Greg Laden she parted
[in diplomatic agreement](#),
which, however, was not meant to last;
but that is a different story.

Dear reader, I will close for now,
leaving it, just as PZ Myers
recommended, for women to speak.
First Abbie Smith,
on smart Jean Kazez' blog,
[drawing her conclusion on the matter](#):

Everyone and anyone on Watsons 'side' has been exposed as a hypocrite. From the image of Watson 'branding' (her phrase) 'FUCK YOU, PUSSY – REBECCA' on a mans chest, to PZ 'mansplaining' my/McGraws/any females opinion (and of course its not hard to find examples of him being non-PC), to Nanny Ophelia telling another female to "Fuck off" (and then deleting it without saying 'my emotions got the best of me, i shouldnt have dont that. im sorry'). You know what? I do use 'naughty words'. And I will continue to do so. I dont ask anyone to condone it. But to dismiss someone saying 'twat' in one sentence while comparing women who dont agree with you with sex-addicted non-human primates in the next breath (theyre only trying to get attention of the boys, and eliminate 'the competition', you see),¹⁷ I cant help but think those tut-tutting about 'naughty language' and how it 'degrades women' are crying crocodile tears.

And lastly, Rebecca Watson,
who for long had kept her silence,
around whom revolved the overheating argument,
who held the power to slow it down,
bringing it to save revolutions.

More than two weeks it was, after throwing
like a burning cigarette into dry underwood
her declaration of boycott amongst them,
that Rebecca Watson rose to speak again,
and in a new Youtube video
[told the expectant atheists](#):

And I just wanted to address some of the questions you've all had. Um, I don't really have a lot of time right now, but I thought I would just address the one big question, the one that I keep seeing over and over and over again. Which is something along these lines: "I'm a man, and I don't see the problem in cornering a woman in an elevator and inviting her back to my room, despite the fact that she said she's tired and going to bed, despite the fact that she said she didn't want to be hit on and despite the fact that I've never talked to her before. I don't see a problem with the situation. So if you say I can't do that, then, how can I possibly get laid?"

17 This probably refers to a post by blogger Skeptifem, "Inside the Mind of a Gender Traitor", indicting Abbie Smith.

And the answer to that, is that... you probably can't. You probably can't get laid. Because, I think most normal people see that situation, and they realize "Oh okay, yeah, that's not an appropriate time to ask a woman to come back to my hotel room." And those of you who didn't see that right away, you know, there's another subset of normal people, who said "Oh, well, it didn't occur to me that that would be seen as creepy or weird or undesirable. So thank you for pointing it out; I will not do that in the future." So you know, most normal people get that, and they can then go forward and flirt with members of the opposite sex in a normal manner that may or may not result in sex for them.

But you know, those of you who are asking that question obviously can't do that. So, I would recommend that you look at other ways to maybe get your rocks off. Like, I dunno, maybe one of those dolls? They, they sell those... (*indicates a vague shape*). They're kind of expensive I think, I dunno, I've never priced one myself, but I've seen a documentary on it, and they're really... They're lifelike, but... their mouths are only used for sucking you know, so no worries about them... very calmly... giving you advice on how to approach a woman or how not to approach a woman.

[...]

The point of me uploading that video previously wasn't necessarily to give sex advice but to give advice on how we, as a community, might go about making our community a more inviting one to women. You know, but a lot of you just have no interest in that, you just wanted the sex advice. So there it is, my advice to you is to buy one of those really expensive dolls and fuck that. So I hope that helps.

So the two armies did battle
on the field of ~~honour~~ being right,
each convinced of having gained
the moral high ground.

And just like concrete,
which initially stays malleable,
so did the frontlines harden
among the fighting atheists.

Attachment

The controversy known as Elevatorgate started at the turn of July 2011. On the 14. – 17. of July there was going to be another atheist-skeptic conference, the James Randi Educational Foundation's annual The Amaz!ng Meeting (TAM), with both Richard Dawkins and Rebecca Watson having already announced their participation. On the 8th of July, three days after Rebecca Watson's abjuration, the author of the blog Sneer Review [posted](#) the following spoof:

The Amaz!ng Meeting 2011 TAM 9

Revised Schedule

Due to unforeseen circumstances some late alterations have been required to the order and content of talks at TAM 9.

Please note the new talk schedule

12.00 . Announcement of newly agreed policy on the use of chat up lines at atheist and skeptic conventions. Don't Ask, (so we) Don't Tell (you no).¹⁸

13.00 Expert Panel discussion:

'Women in the Atheist movement, are we being denied a voice?'

(With panelists PZ Myers, Greg Laden and Jeremy Stangroom)

14.00 Open discussion:

"Is suppression of dissention becoming a problem in the modern skeptic movement?"

This question will be answered by a show of hands amongst attendees.

14.15 Those who voted 'Yes' will be lined up, maced by Amanda Marcotte and escorted from the premises.

14.30 Apology to the Religious.

The Atheist movement as a whole (well, at least those unmaced by Amanda) announces an official apology to the religious community.

"We have previously stated that people do not have the right not to be offended by others. We realize now that we were wrong and offer our sincerest apologies. We promise to avoid all behavior or public statements that offends others because to do so in future would make us hypocrites of the highest order."

15.00 Book Burning

Please bring along your copies of 'The Ancestors Tale, The Selfish Gene, The God Delusion and The Greatest Show on Earth.

Professor Dawkins, will be at hand to sign your copy before it is tossed on the pyre.

Please come early as Professor Dawkins can only stay for one hour.

¹⁸ From 1994 to 2011, don't ask, don't tell has been the US army's official policy regarding homosexual soldiers. Eventually, it became general parlance for avoiding the topic of sexual orientation.

16.00 Richard Dawkins Burning.
Sponsored by 'Accomodationists-R-Us'¹⁹

16.30 Stoning of the gender traitors

17.00 2011 Anti-Misogynist award.

The presentation of the 2011 award for those individuals showing true example in avoiding privileged white male behavior towards women at atheist conferences. This years award goes to the five Islamists who attended the Dublin Convention to promote Sharia Law.

17.30 The Winners of the James Randi 1 Million Dollar Challenge²⁰ will be present-
ed their prize. The 1 million will be divided evenly between the 500 individuals on
the Pharyngula and Skepchick messageboards for their demonstration of perfect
psychic abilities, mind reading exactly what was going on in the head of Elevator
Guy.

18.00 Keynote Speaker. Rebecca Watson

"Misogyny in the atheist movement: What some random commenters on my you-
tube channel have to say."

(Rebecca's 60 minute talk will be followed by a 1 minute period for questions and
macing.)

22.00 - 4 AM 'Annual Skepchicks Keg Party'

The Skepchick 2011 'Hot College Girls Tickle Fight' will be judged, as usual, by
Rebecca Watson.

(The conference [went smoothly](#), Rebecca Watson and some followers sitting out in a bar the pro-
gram speech of Richard Dawkins; on that occasion, Richard Dawkins announced his foundation's
future sponsoring of child support. 40 percent of participants and 50 percent of conference speakers
were women.)

19 Accomodationists is a term used by "confrontational" atheists for other atheists favouring an obliging, compromi-
sing approach towards religion. Richard Dawkins, the most prominent confrontational atheist, is often strongly criti-
cized by accomodationists.

20 The James Randi Educational Foundation's "One Million Dollar Paranormal Challenge" offers said sum to the first
person who, under controlled experimental conditions, demonstrates paranormal abilities. Despite over a thousand
applications, none has been successfull so far.

Chronology:

- 02.07.2011: Richard Dawkins' "Dear Muslima" comment; Justicar starts commenting at Pharyngula; Hemant Mehta defends Stef McGraw.
- 03.07.2011: Blogger Skeptifem calls Abbie Smith a gender traitor; PZ Myers publishes a "Decent Human Beings' Guide" for talking to women at conferences; Abbie Smith parodies his guide.
- 04.07.2011: PZ Myers closes comments under his posts, citing "excessive length and prolonged stupidity"; Ophelia Benson criticizes Richard Dawkins, calling his request for polite engagement "tone trolling".
- 05.07.2011: Rebecca Watson announces the boycott of Richard Dawkins; Greg Laden publishes a "Man to Man Talk" to explain women's fears of men; Amanda Marcotte criticizes Hemant Mehta: Hemant Mehta's answer; Stephanie Zvan publishes the open letter "Dear Dick".
- 06.07.2011: Additional open letters from rape victims addressing Richard Dawkins are released at Skepchick and En Tequila Es Verdad.
- 07.07.2011: Miranda Celeste Hale criticizes Rebecca Watson; Justicar coins the word Twatson and announces a campaign to "destroy" Rebecca Watson.
- 09.07.2011: Franc Hoggle criticizes Rebecca Watson and PZ Myers.
- 10.07.2011: PZ Myers' answer.
- 12.07.2011: Greta Christina criticizes Rebecca Watson's opponents, saying "We are trying to help you get laid."; Ophelia Benson criticizes Rebecca Watson; Russell Blackford comments at her blog, and is criticized by PZ Myers.
- 14.07.2011: Maria Maltseva comments at Greg Laden's blog, getting into a two-week argument with Stephanie Zvan, Greg Laden and Jason Thibeault; in Las Vegas the four-day TAM 9 conference starts, during which Richard Dawkins announces his foundation's sponsoring of child support.
- 18.07.2011: Abbie Smith cheers Richard Dawkins, mocks Rebecca "Twatson" and her followers.
- 19.07.2011: Argument between bloggers Abbie Smith, Justicar, Notung and Greg Laden, Jen McCreight, PZ Myers; PZ Myers calls Russell Blackford a liar.
- 20.07.2011: Ophelia Benson laments the use of the word Twatson at Abbie Smith's blog.
- 21.07.2011: Ophelia Benson comments at Abbie Smith's blog, complains about the commenters' rudeness and Jerry Coyne; Russell Blackford announces the end of friendship with PZ Myers.
- 22.07.2011: Rebecca Watson releases her new Youtube video; Franc Hoggle answers PZ Myers.
- 24.07.2011: PZ Myers answers Franc Hoggle.
- 25.07.2011: Franc Hoggle answers PZ Myers.
- 29.07.2011: Russell Blackford defends Abbie Smith at Ophelia Benson's blog, and is criticized by Ophelia Benson.
- 01.08.2011: Russell Blackford's "Naughty Abbie" comment and befriending of commentator Phil Giordana at Facebook.
- 02.08.2011: Ophelia Benson announces the end of friendship with Russell Blackford.
- 04.08.2011: Jeremy Stangroom defends Russell Blackford against accusations of misogyny.
- 06.08.2011: Ophelia Benson mocks Abbie Smith, Russell Blackford und Jeremy Stangroom, insults Miranda Celeste Hale; Abbie Smith explains her position at Jean Kazez' blog.

Third Installment.

How the Slimepit, and Freethoughtblogs came into being.

Beyond myself the monument I have erected,
Commenters go the beaten path, the dust won't settle there,
Its obstreperous middle finger's poke directed
At Twatson's balloon of hot air.

Thus wrote Abbie Smith, in the fourth of her posts
on Elevatorgate, and the first made solely
and explicitly to provide her visitors,
the raging misogynists,
with a platform of discussion.²¹

For on the blog ERV did gather,
like exiled politicians in a neighboring state's capital,
those put off by Rebecca Watson
and her sympathizers, eager to voice their resentment
– a thing that was, as we have seen, often met by opprobrium
on blogs of the pro-Watson camp:

I can't fault people for telling you apologists for sexism, you hysterical serial exaggerators, you dishonest rationalizers to fuck off.

And threads of the posts in which Abbie Smith
mocked Rebecca Watson and PZ Myers
soon mutated into unofficial fora;
almost as soon [as they were charged with](#)
blatant misogyny –
on the one hand, for using the word Twatson
and other gender-specific slurs,
on the other, as [one observer speculated](#), to discredit
all legitimate criticism, but not least
presumably, because of overall
recalcitrant refractoriness:²²

bluharmony

FYI, I see nothing wrong with EG's request. [...] What kind of person would make a fuss out of this? Do guys find her attractive so infrequently that she needs to tell us? Anyway, hey guys, ask me for coffee in an elevator any time. I don't mind.

²¹ See note 4, file E-4 Monument-final.

²² See note 4, file E-3 Dawkins-final, comments 1170, 1173, 1213 and 1280 (Raging Bee).

As for RW's subsequent conduct, she has no excuse. Character attacks on Dawkins and Stef were the ugliest behavior I've seen from anyone, short of physical violence.

Phil Giordana, FCD, aka Schroedinger's Dog

Since you're quite the hottie (with a reached max friends limit on facebook, such a shame), I wouldn't mind sexualizing and objectifying you in any vertical or horizontal means of transportation, as you see fit.

Or I could ask you for coffee. Along with my girlfriend. Who likes to talk, as I do.

ya know...

bluharmony

Please objectify and sexualize me till your heart's content. If I didn't want that to happen, I would've worn a burqa.

Thus Abbie Smith's sympathizers were subjected for one, to comments like the following:

Raging Bee

Incidentally, if you "men's rights" advocates need better arguments than the ones that have already been debunked here, you might get some ideas from another misogynist in Norway, a Breivik something or other. He has a huge manifesto on the Web, and he even killed a few people to get our attention; so you might give his work a look. It can't be worse than the crap you've already dumped here.

But those threads they used to comment in were [also called](#) a "pit o'slime" by a commenter on Butterflies & Wheels. Which was picked up by the commenters on Pharyngula, and converted into "slimepit".²³ And, since every decent struggle is in need of excluding terms for the entirety of opponents, be it "[Watsonistas](#)", "[Pharyngulites](#)" or "slimepit" and, derivational, "pitters" for its members, did the latter enter the vernacular of Rebecca Watson's followers, but the former, among others, that of her detractors.

²³ According to [this source](#). As comments at Pharyngula before August 2011 are no longer available, the claim could not be verified. The first use of the term slimepit at Butterflies & Wheels is in [this comment](#).

Of hostility and attempts at censorship
I want to sing, against the blog ERV
and other outspoken critics
of the Skepchick-Pharyngula camp.
But first I need to report on
the establishment of the Freethoughtblogs network
by PZ Myers and Ed Brayton
of the blog Dispatches from the Creation Wars
(renamed, after its move, into
Dispatches from the Culture Wars), like PZ Myers
a member of the network Science Blogs.

A rather interesting collaboration, considering that these two
had vigorously clashed some years ago, ironically
because of PZ Myers [defending Richard Dawkins](#)
against, in his opinion, unwarranted accusations made
by Ed Brayton. For Richard Dawkins,
without realizing the implication, [had signed onto a petition](#)
urging the British prime minister to outlaw
the religious indoctrination of minors
until the age of 16. Which Richard Dawkins took as referring
to teaching at public schools,
but might also be taken for encroachment
upon parenting, as an attempt to suppress religion
by governmental force.

Thus Ed Brayton decided to take it,
thereon calling Richard Dawkins
[a totalitarian](#), who should henceforth be removed
from discussion between reasonable people.
And in the following argument
between Ed Brayton and PZ Myers,
before Richard Dawkins
went to [clarify](#) his position, and Ed Brayton,
put at ease, [apologized](#) it transpired
that Ed Brayton was [calling PZ Myers](#)
"a first class, double-barrelled, fully automatic asshole."

Five years later, these two erstwhile enemies
now reconciled, were founding
the network Freethoughtblogs. And the announcement
of this move, which had been [in the works for months](#),
did co-incide with Elevatorgate.

[Wrote Ed Brayton:](#)

I started Freethoughtblogs.com with the idea that it would become the central gathering place for atheists, agnostics, humanists, skeptics, freethinkers, heathens and infidels. I think we're well on our way.

And imperious PZ Myers
[gave one additional reason](#) why the move
to an independent network
seemed like a good idea: For the network Science Blogs
had been bought up by the National Geographic Society,
whose "more conservative ethos"
might result in a clash
given his style of blogging.
(For PZ Myers [was well known](#)
to be a heathen and a rowdy, and not just
since Elevatorgate. Though until then he was aiming
at the right people, as far as atheists were concerned,
which might explain them looking not too closely
when his methods, at times, [overstepped the line.](#))

Freed from such concerns
[PZ Myers proclaimed the rules](#)
for the new Pharyngula:

Through me the way to the city of woe,
through me the way to everlasting pain,
through me the way among the righteous.
Science, atheism, equality and social justice
moved my maker on high, ruling in here
with highest wisdom and with primal love.
Abandon all hope, you who beg to differ.

This is a rude blog. We like to argue – heck, we like a loud angry brawl. Don't waste time whining at anyone that they're not nice, because this gang will take pride in that and rhetorically hand you a rotting porcupine and tell you to stuff it up your nether orifice.

Among others, this referred
to creationists and climate change denialists,
proponents of pseudo science and religious proselytizers,
but also to persons of faith
at large: "faith is a failing – not a virtue –
which will be scorned and spat upon"
and, as it were, to everyone opposing
social justice and equality.
With PZ Myers [leaving not much doubt](#) as to his placing
of Rebecca Watson's critics:

What this one incident did was expose a small, fringe group of obsessive sexists who suddenly had the privileges they took for granted questioned... and oh, how they did squeal, and continue to squeal.

Thus, as if using stones
fit to build a pyramid,
PZ Myers erected a wall
between himself and scrutiny.
And whereas Abbie Smith allowed
even comments like the above, by Raging Bee,
PZ Myers, one by one, [banned](#)
many prominent slimepit members,
often for much lesser offences.²⁴

A couple theories were proposed why PZ Myers
closed his ears to any objection:
[Some believing](#) it to be a result
of his years-long experience with religious fundamentalists,
who can't be rationally engaged – experience,
that, with less justification, he was now applying
to disagreeing atheists and skeptics;
others, less charitable, simply [took it](#) for the result
of general self-righteousness;
and others yet, not at all charitable,
[called PZ Myers](#) a toilet slave
of gender-feminist ideology.

Freethoughtblogs was likewise joined
– not counting all those who, to their merit,
have no part in this story –
by other bloggers who during Elevatorgate
took the part of Rebecca Watson:
Tender-eared Ophelia Benson,
choleric Greg Laden,
helpful Greta Christina,
Jen McCreight and Stephanie Zvan,
Jason Thibeault and finally, a few months later,
self-confident Richard Carrier
who [caused some stir](#) the following year.

Like armies deployed for battle, facing each other
now were the members of the slimepit
and what one blogger [calls](#) "the Usual Suspects"
of the network Freethoughtblogs.

Of hostility and attempts at censorship
I want to sing, against the blog ERV
and other outspoken critics
of the Skepchick-Pharyngula camp.
I want to sing how PZ Myers and Greg Laden
declared Maria Maltseva, the inconvenient lawyer,
mentally deranged.
For she had written a Facebook post
doubting Rebecca Watson's account
of the elevator incident.

24 For an example see note 4, file E-3 Dawkins-final, comment 1815.

It was a time-honoured tradition Maria Maltseva was following here, dating back to the first days of the controversy.

Because, since the man in the elevator never came forward to tell his version of the story there [soon arose speculation](#) if maybe, after all, he did not quite exist, or [was not after all a participant](#) of the conference and member of the atheist respectively skeptic community and similarly inconvenient questions. Furthermore, when asked whether she was able to identify the man in question on a [photo](#) made by PZ Myers of that nightly gathering at the bar Rebecca Watson [answered](#) that she was suffering from [prosopagnosia](#), what made her altogether incapable of recognizing faces. [Which was doubted in some places.](#)

[That Facebook post](#) of Maria Maltseva's sadly is no longer accessible, though its contents can be reconstructed in part from comments at the slimepit.²⁵ Apparently Maria Maltseva had written to the hotel O'Callaghan Alexander, learning that Rebecca Watson had had her room on the second floor with the elevator riding just approximately five seconds, which seemed not quite enough for the alleged conversation.

Whatever she wrote, however, [was displeasing](#) to Greg Laden and PZ Myers, and even though the original post and, there being only a short extract, the context of their discussion are missing, it is well accepted that to say "she must have provoked it somehow" is deeply misogynistic, and anyway it'd be hard to imagine a context which could possibly justify the following comments.

Wrote Greg Laden:

Maria, Rebecca is a good person and she's also a good friend of mine. I fully support her in this matter, and I plan to continue to work with her and the other skepchicks towards our common goals. You, on the other hand, are a sick puppy. You need to seek psychiatric help as soon as possible, and so do half of your friends.

25 See note 4, file E-5 Have-final, comment 3866.

With PZ Myers adding:

What Greg said. Your vendetta against Rebecca Watson is baseless and says nothing good about you. Frankly, it's just plain weird and looks like derangement.

PZ Myers and Greg Laden, it should be noted, were, however, not discriminating in their accusations of derangement. For just one day before there occurred a discussion on Greg Laden's blog, when Greg Laden [meant to clarify](#), that Rebecca Watson may have announced a *personal* boycott of Richard Dawkins, but wasn't *calling* for one.

[To which John Greg answered:](#)

Given Watson's influence in the so-called skeptical / atheist / feminist community, the popularity of her blog, her own personal popularity, and the public evangelical support and endorsement she receives from such popular and influential individuals as Laden, PZ Myers, [...] and many others, to suggest that Watson's statement to personally boycott Dawkins, couched as it was within a series of strongly evangelical anti-Dawkins posts, was anything other than an implicit call for a general public boycott of Dawkins is either blatant deceit, or the blindness born of a True Believer who is willfully persisting in avoiding critical thinking.

Leading to Greg Laden calling him a sick puppy too, and getting urged by [Greg Laden](#) and [PZ Myers](#), to go seek help, and getting banned by Greg Laden, as he wished to protest.²⁶

Of Franc Hoggle I want to sing, the Antipodean peril,
enfant terrible of the anti-Watsonistas,
who was called all sorts of things by his opponents,
and called his opponents all sorts of things.
For hardly did the wrangling end
between Franc Hoggle and PZ Myers, when
he started to describe the latter and his followers
as [baboons](#) and [fascists](#), and what else seemed fitting.

[And according to one intriguing theory](#),
confirmed by Franc Hoggle
personally, if this was nasty
yet there was method in't.²⁷

26 As stated by himself, see note 4, file E-5 Have-final, comment 3889.

27 See note 4, file E-6 Periodic-final, Periodic Table of Swearing erv-pg105.htm, comment 79.

[...] Because moral supremacists are fairly easy to undermine (since they almost always will trip over their own hypocrisy at some point), he deliberately chose to become their bogeyman by being as obscene towards them as he could possibly get – not for the lulz, not for the sake of being obscene, but to deliberately trip them up; or more accurately, to have them trip over their own hypocrisy. In order to do this he kept giving them ridiculous things to get outraged about – and these things were bait that they kept biting.

Believing that they possessed the moral high ground (due to Franc's obscenities and incessant scathing criticisms on his blog), they became bolder in entertaining all manner of ludicrous grievances from hard core feminists among the horde. In attempting to address these increasingly bizarre grievances, FTB began to come across more and more unrealistic, and above all, more dogmatic. With their lust for 'misogynist' blood now at fever pitch, they manufactured melodrama after melodrama in order to quench their now insatiable thirst for more dissenters to take down. [...]

[...] With each new manufactured controversy they continue to burn more and more bridges, and pretty soon they're going to find that they are completely isolated from the mainstream movement (if they aren't already).

(This was written in 2012,
and the "manufactured melodrama" that occurred
in the meantime will be treated soon.)

The biggest achievement of Franc Hoggle,
accepting this interpretation,
was the following comment
deep within the slimepit's bowels,
where one needed to look for it quite hard:

#3388 munkhaus – but what I`m posting about [are] the calls to "stamp out" the evil comments here by complaining to National Geographic or something.

#3389 Abbie – Now that I am more familiar with their behavior, it is more surprising the idea hasnt been brought up sooner, rather than that the idea emerged.

Why? Because the baboon board had not fully relocated. Of course, the attentive will have noted at the time that there was plenty of paranoid narcissistic mewling from The Naked One that the **reason** for the move was fear of censorship **by** Nat. Geo. – a claim laughed at with great glee, not by us, but by others in the science community.

I would encourage this move to censor Abbie. Bring on the Streisand effect. Let's show the baboon board archives on SB [Science Blogs] in all their glory to the world.

Ophelia is a poor woman's Catharine MacKinnon. If I was a girl, I'd kick her in the cunt. Cunt.²⁸

28 See note 4, file E-5 Have-final, comment 3396.

For at Butterflies & Wheels the commenters
– not, admittedly, Ophelia Benson
herself, who on the other hand
was not objecting either –
[were having a discussion](#) whether the slimepit
might be shut down by complaining
to the National Geographic Society, Abbie Smith's host
(of this soon more).

As expected, what he said was mightily displeasing
to Ophelia Benson, [who in response wrote](#),
for example:

[...] I think the potential for serious danger to Rebecca Watson has risen sharply thanks
to a ton of anonymous name-calling, and less sharply for various other bystanders, in-
cluding me.

In other words "Hoggle" is engaged in what's called "inciting hatred." Inciting hatred is
well known to have the potential to lead to violence. [...]

Which does indeed sound a tad histrionic,
especially considering that on the blog Pharyngula
[it was good etiquette](#) to rhetorically hand someone
a rotting porcupine and tell them to stuff it up their nether orifice.

Franc Hoggle, thanks to this and other – according to him –
well-calculated abuses, soon took the place
as the language-watching Freethoughtblogger's ~~bogeyman~~
sympathy disadvantaged person. Soon Franc Hoggle was seen
behind every brush, to be [accused of sock-puppeting](#)
at the blog Pharyngula,
never – [according to him](#) – having commented there,
though prophylactically banned by PZ Myers.
Not only this: Indeed Franc Hoggle thus provoked them
into acts of astonishing misconduct:

A few weeks after talking
of his hypothetical kick in Ophelia Benson's cunt,
and largely in reaction to it, there transpired
[a discussion at the blog Almost Diamonds](#)
whether Franc Hoggle, whose real name
wasn't that one, had forfeited his right to anonymity
which, after all, he was only misusing
to spew hate and "threats". One of his acquaintances,
wrote Stephanie Zvan, had been leaking
his personal information to Ophelia Benson and now
there was the question what to do with it –
many supposing then that his behaviour
should finally have consequences in his real life.

And imperious PZ Myers [interjected](#):

Just to throw out another point: When we had an atheist meeting in Montreal, there was legitimate concern that Mabus could be disruptive, and we definitely wanted the organizers to know that he's persona non grata at the meeting.

This spring, the Global Atheist Convention is being held in Melbourne. Hoggle is somewhere in Australia (I won't say precisely where). Should I be notifying the GAC organizers that this loon is loose down there, and that he definitely could be disruptive if allowed to attend?

[David Mabus alias Dennis Markuze](#), to whom PZ Myers thus compared Franc Hoggle, is an anti-atheist internet stalker, a notorious sender of death threats, who in August 2011, following a campaign by the atheist community, had been arrested and charged, to be eventually sentenced to 18 months suspended time. At the Montreal conference in 2010 Dennis Markuze had turned up in person, and this shift in his obsession towards "meatspace" had been cause for legitimate concern.

Though one might object here that Franc Hoggle, after all, had compared the members of the network Freethoughtblogs [to the Manson family](#) and other bad persons, that, clearly, had been hyperbole and no attempt to create the narrative of real threat potential, now joined in by other Freethoughtbloggers and commenters:

NewEnglandBob November 3, 2011 at 1:50 am

Out him. Creeps and trolls don't deserve anonymity.

hotshoe November 3, 2011 at 2:37 am

Why does Hoggle's desire to be hateful under the assumed protection of his false name deserve respect from Stephanie, or any of us ?

It's not his "right" to be hateful while being protected by a false anonymity from any kind of personal/social response.

Rorschach November 3, 2011 at 5:42 am

I suggest "Hoggle" gets the same courtesy extended to him that every other pseudonymous person on the internet should get, in that their pseudonymity is respected and preserved. But I also suggest that we keep this person's details ready, to hand them over to Federal Police should any real life threats to real people eventuate, or if his impersonations of real people or people's internet nyms (like mine) get to the point of becoming a real life problem.

Stephanie Zvan November 3, 2011 at 7:35 am

Yes, linking this kind of obsessive, hateful behavior to someone's real name could affect their employment. There's a reason for that. Employers have an obligation (legal and ethical) to create a safe space for their employees to the reasonable best of their ability.

Similarly, I have some ethical obligations by virtue of being in possession of limited knowledge. It sounds like some of you would like to suggest that this obligation is to follow Hoggle's actions and pass the knowledge along in a limited fashion. I won't do that. Moreover, I can't. Hoggle isn't someone I can watch in meatspace, where I think the bulk of my obligation lies. The people who encounter Hoggle there aren't plugged into this little network that can pass information quietly. Do they deserve less warning than we have?

Raging Bee November 3, 2011 at 9:45 am

[...] I'd have no problem outing people who routinely insult or threaten others, or who spread obvious lies and incite hatred. [...]

franchoggle November 3, 2011 at 9:17 am, 9:48 am

What a sack of chickenshits. "Out" me all you like. [...]

I insist, that beyond insinuation, you show me where I have ever made a threat, without selective editing. "This is the sound of silence".

You are all devoid of humanity. Just another lynch mob. No different to any other. Just with cooler t-shirts.

Jason Thibeault November 3, 2011 at 10:01 am

[...] You'll have every right to go on suggesting you'd kick Ophelia Benson "in the cunt", once your words are associated with your real name. You'll have every right to go on your one-man crusade against Rebecca Watson, once your words are associated with your real name. The only thing that'll change is, when people want to see what you're up to on the internet and Google your real name, there's a slim chance that your more slimy attacks will actually come back to haunt your real life identity. You know, the way your actions online actually reflect on PZ Myers, Ophelia Benson and Rebecca Watson's real life names.

Greg Laden November 3, 2011 at 11:08 am

Declaring a lack of humanity of those you fear or disagree with is the first step in a lot of very bad scenarios. If you really think that the people you are complaining about are truly devoid of humanity, that makes you a bit of a dangerous person.

Ophelia Benson November 3, 2011 at 11:18 am

If you really think that the people you are complaining about are truly devoid of humanity, that makes you a bit of a dangerous person.

Well this is the point, isn't it – this is the point about the whole cuntin-g-bitchin-g-mangina-ing slime-fest. It's dehumanizing, and that's what it's for. That's what degrading epithets do, and that's why people who want to degrade others use them. "Hoggle" fantasized in public about kicking me in the cunt; that's another first step; that too makes him a bit of a dangerous person.

And of all the Freethoughtbloggers only Greg Laden [objected](#), saying that to out people on the internet generally was a bad idea, because, once started, one risked doing so arbitrarily.

The next day, after PZ Myers had mulled the question and decided on it, [he notified the assembly](#):

The GAC organizers have been informed of Hoggle's identity, and have had his pages of hate shown to them. It's their decision now.

[Clarifying](#) later that it was not him who had done so, but women in Australia who were not keen on the idea of Franc Hoggle being at the same conference with them.

And Franc Hoggle, presumably well aware that ideologues lack a sense of humour and accordingly would react, turned the screw, at the blog ERV, a little more, answering, to another commenter's question, if his daughter and him might have the honour to share a table with Franc Hoggle at the conference dinner:

[...] Alas, if I am to accomplish any stalking, it would be foolish to make myself so readily identifiable. I will seek to surreptitiously besmirch as many baboons as possible by sitting next to them without them realising anything is amiss and then silently wandering off after a happy snap is taken.

It would be a grave disservice on my behalf to not feed their collective derangements and paranoias. They are martyrs remember? They have turned me into a hairshirt. I have obligations to live up to. PZ should keep checking his pockets too. I will deposit a strange, yet entirely innocuous and harmless, token of my affection for him in there. It's up to him to catch me.

Doo-doo-doo-doo, they are entering the Twilight Zone... If they choose to make themselves insane, it's entirely none of my concern.²⁹

Which finally, on the 9th of December 2011, [led imperious PZ Myers](#) to call Franc Hoggle a "slimy stalker" and reveal, accompanied by a photo, his alleged real identity, neither confirmed nor disputed by Franc Hoggle.³⁰ A post that was followed by a thread full of shouts of triumph and quips about Franc Hoggle's alleged body odour, matching the worst writings of Franc Hoggle.

Thus, if accepting aforementioned, quite plausible theory, Franc Hoggle, together with their sense for proportionate retribution undermined the Freethoughtblogger's image, precipitating them into extreme after extreme, and churning paranoia, by and by to cost them acceptance among outside viewers.

What, though, was Franc Hoggle's motivation for this months-long crusade? It was his belief that the atheist community was at risk of being damaged by intolerant dogmatists. How, [he asked](#), does the moral cudgel so boisterously wander? You offer ourselves to the enemy's mockery, and proving right those who think the rejection of god means rejection of morals as well, yearn to show this kind of behaviour?

²⁹ See note 4, file E-6 Periodic-final, Periodic Table of Swearing erv-4995.htm, comment 492.

³⁰ According to commenter Lsuoma however, a friend of Franc Hoggle's, his assumed real name "Victor Ivanoff" was yet another pseudonym. See *ibid.*, comment 869.

I can tell you who really is happy watching all of this – and that is the conservative xtian blogging community. Right now they are looking at us and laughing with sadistic delight. They are looking on us as jellyfish spined buffoons, hypocrites, hysterics and just general all round losers and loving every second of it. Watching this community eat itself with malice, backbiting and slander. Seeing all of their assumptions of where godlessness can lead manifest before their very eyes just for them – a gift from their god...

Indeed there had appeared,
at the height of the controversy,
several [articles in mainstream media](#)
picking up Rebecca Watson's claims
of problematic sexism in the atheist community
and Richard Dawkins' condescending attitude
towards female members of the movement.

Furthermore, at a time when the dispute
already was facing the threat
of subsiding, Rebecca Watson and PZ Myers
gave interviews for yet another article
in USA Today, most widespread of newspapers,
[the former saying](#) among other things:

I thought it was a safe space. The biggest lesson I have learned over the years is that it is not a safe space and we have a lot of growing to do.

And even though [many of her critics](#)
do not disagree
that sexism exists, and in the atheist community
as well, they deem
[such allegations rather unduly](#).

So this kind of claims it was
that abrasive Franc Hoggle protested against.
but whatever his role in the process, the degeneration
of the "Usual Suspects" was,
indeed, quite dramatic.
A small episode from the following year
may serve as an example:

Prolific Jerry Coyne, in travelling,
had been groped by flight security staff,
[in his opinion](#).
About this Justicar made a Youtube video,
which Greg Mayer, co-blogger of Jerry Coyne,
amused by it, [uploaded](#)
at Why Evolution Is True.

Wrote Ophelia Benson:

It's bizarre enough to see him commenting regularly at WEIT. It's beyond bizarre to see him get a whole post to himself.

I sing at last of the attempts at censorship
made against Abbie Smith, and the blog ERV
by Greg Laden the choleric and Rorschach,
sharp of tongue.

Soon after Abbie Smith had posted
her scandalizing Twatson post
it was that Rorschach, on his blog Furious Purpose,
[requested](#) Jerry Coyne, Russell Blackford,
Miranda Celeste Hale and "anyone else"
to distance themselves from Abbie Smith,
adding:

And if I dont hear from any of these people, that message will be just as loud and clear,
in that they do in fact approve of Abbies hate trip against Rebecca Watson, the one she
authorised to be conducted on her blog for the last month. One that has done far more
damage to the atheist or skeptic movement than any timid appeals by Watson for Guys,
dont do that.

Some months later, at Butterflies & Wheels,
there was, as mentioned already, a discussion
on shutting down the slimepit, by complaining
to the National Geographic Society, gaining much steam
after Franc Hogle, in reaction, made his infamous comment.

Wrote Rorschach, on the blog Pharyngula:

I do think that the buck stops with Abbie Smith, those other clowns dont have blogs that
anyone reads unless they can promote their shit via ERV, so if she closes comments, the
haters will fade into obscurity. If it takes a campaign to NatGeo to achieve that, Im in.

And on his blog Furious Purpose [he started a petition](#),
collecting complains to Science Blogs
and the National Geographic Society. But this, (at first)
was having no effect, and the slimepit existed and existed
and existed, to the Freethoughtblogger's displeasure.
Finally, the next year, [Greg Laden](#) came, to end
what had been begun by Rorschach:

[...] A while back Abbie Smith and some of her commenters made some very specific and terribly offensive remarks related directly to me (as usual) but that also brought in a completely innocent bystander, someone potentially vulnerable to this sort of cyberstalking, and the only reason that person was brought into their comments was because of a vague and ephemeral on-line association with me (we wrote similar posts and linked to each other). Previously I never thought complaining to management about the "slime-pit" was worthwhile or appropriate, but this time I did make a complaint because of the potential damage to a third party. [...]

By the way, I also made a complaint about that specific issue, at the same time (along with a couple of other points of interest) to the chair of Abbie Smith's academic department. Like it or not, this is how blatant professional misconduct is often managed in academia. [...]³¹

[Stephanie Zvan too was taking the line](#)

in form of a letter to Seed Media,
the actual operators of the Science Blogs network:

I know that Seed Media has previously been made aware of the four comment threads at ERV that are in gross violation of the ScienceBlogs code of conduct. I know that they were made aware of the problems in these threads quite some time ago. I have been patient in waiting for Seed to live up to the commitments it has made to the public and to other individuals. I'm not patient anymore.

Your platform is being used as a base of operations to cyberstalk and defame me and several other people. I have no intention of being remotely diplomatic about that fact any longer. You may wish to read this: <http://freethoughtblogs.com/almostdiamonds/2012/06/28/is-cyberstalking-abuse/>

I sincerely hope that talking about this publicly will be enough to finally get someone at your network to take some responsibility for it. I don't want to have to take this further, but I will do what I have to do.

With Stephanie Zvan (and Greg Laden,
judged by his comment)
coming from an unconventional definition
of cyberstalking,
as apparent in Stephanie Zvan's
recommended reading for Seed Media,
linked to in her email:

31 Greg Laden [would later state](#) that Abbie Smith had "started up serious on line harassment campaigns against at least one graduate student, [if I recall correctly] an undergraduate student, and a couple of senior academics." That claim could not be verified, but may in part refer to Abbie Smith's [abuse](#) of Jen McCreight.

[...] These are people who get together to talk about what we write, our speeches, our tweets, our postings on Facebook, pictures of us available on the web. They glean the personal information we use to make ourselves and our topics more relatable and go back years to try to dig up dirt. They lie when they can't find anything ugly enough for them. They built a wiki dedicated to us. Not only that, but every bit of them talking about this stuff is meant to damage us. We have cyberstalkers.

Which would also make, [as someone noticed](#), journalists cyberstalkers.

At ERV, Abbie Smith commented on the situation:³²

These people are fucking nuts.

Laden is a disgusting piece of shit who tried to get me fired for his online butthurt. Benson cant get enough of people calling her BAD WURDZ (its fucking weird). These creepy fucks sneak into facebook private facebook walls (sometimes even walls they are blocked from) and consider that 'content' for their blogs.

They are fucking NUTS.

And decided not to test her host's patience any longer.

[It was resolved](#) to move the slimepit to an independent site – hosted by the commenter Lsuoma, a good friend of Franc Hoggle – so as not to be associated any more with Abbie Smith and Science Blogs. Abbie Smith removed the threads which had served for discussion, recommissioning her blog for science topics exclusively, as discussion continued [at the new site](#).

In honour cherished she will stay among her people
Because her keystrokes their noblest instincts have inflamed;
In dismal hours she lit their hearts with fires of freedom,
Defended students that were blamed.

To this very day, the 'pit maintains that legacy,
Strives not for approval, nor cares about disdain,
Unmoved receives her enemies' scorn or mockery,
And turns their foolishness to pain.

32 See note 4, file E-6 Periodic-final, Periodic Table of Swearing erv-pg94.htm, comment 91.

Now, dear reader, that you've been informed
of events surrounding
the slimepit and its members
is the time for telling you, as promised,
of the manufactured controversies emanating
from Skepchick, and the network Freethoughtblogs.

I sing of DJ Grothe, the outrageous,
who does not know to shut up like a brave boy
and bite on it, when the thing he's working for
is damaged by another's actions.

Nothing else but willfull refusal
to keep his head down
drove DJ Grothe,
president of the James Randi Educational Foundation,
[to declare](#), in the run-up to the TAM 2012 conference:

It is true that harassment issues are much discussed in some quarters of the skeptics and atheist and other allied movements [...] but to my knowledge there has never been a report filed of sexual harassment at TAM and there have been zero reports of harassment at the TAMs we've put on while I've been at JREF.

[...]

Last year we had 40% women attendees, something I'm really happy about. But this year only about 18% of TAM registrants so far are women, a significant and alarming decrease, and judging from dozens of emails we have received from women on our lists, this may be due to the messaging that some women receive from various quarters that going to TAM or other similar conferences means they will be accosted or harassed. (This is misinformation. Again, there've been on reports of such harassment the last two TAMs while I've been at the JREF, nor any reports filed with authorities at any other TAMs of which I'm aware.) We have gotten emails over the last few months from women vowing never to attend TAM because they heard that JREF is purported to condone child-sex-trafficking, and emails in response to various blog posts about JREF or me that seem to suggest I or others at the JREF promote the objectification of women, or that we condone violence or threats of violence against women, or that they believe that women would be unsafe because we feature this or that man on the program. I think this misinformation results from irresponsible messaging coming from a small number of prominent and well-meaning women skeptics who, in trying to help correct real problems of sexism in skepticism, actually and rather clumsily themselves help create a climate where women – who otherwise wouldn't – end up feeling unwelcome and unsafe, and I find that unfortunate.

Which in and of itself
would have been
bad enough.

And when [asked](#) by Rebecca Watson to be more specific, please, who it was who was creating a climate where women ended up feeling unwelcome, DJ Grothe, on top of it all, [went on](#) (meriting the approval, technically, of PZ Myers) to name names: Rebecca Watson, Stephanie Zvan, Jen McCreight and Stephanie Zvan once again.

For Rebecca Watson, after all, [did declare](#) the atheist / skeptic community unsafe, in a well-respected newspaper. While [Jen McCreight](#) and [Stephanie Zvan](#), especially the latter, just then were leading a campaign against the, allegedly frequent, harassment at atheist and skeptic events, in particular by male speakers towards female participants.

So this kind of accusations, leaving those aside that were made against himself – more of them presently – were displeasing DJ Grothe, who now, upon request, reproached with the same Rebecca Watson, Jen McCreight and Stephanie Zvan (whose blog was serving for that discussion).

Though no first it was for DJ Grothe to show a similar lack of judgement: As after all he dared, the previous year, to contradict Greta Christina, who was criticizing the artist Ryan Grant Long.

For Ryan Grant Long too [did contradict her](#), when Greta Christina, frustrated by a nasty comment about Rebecca Watson left on her Facebook page after linking with approval to one of the latter's talks, did write:

"So apparently if you want your comment thread to draw hostile, entitled, misogynist trolling, all you have to do is say the words, 'Rebecca Watson'. It's like magic! Horrible, stupid magic."

Answered Ryan Grant Long, he did not need to be a troll
to disagree with Rebecca Watson,
and there had been trolling on both sides.

The latter displeasing one other commenter,
who accused Ryan Grant Long
with equating Rebecca Watson's statements
to the rape and death threats made against her.

And when Ryan Grant Long, understandably,
took offence,
and started to argue with the commenter
and called them a troll,
and persisted furthermore, in answering
Greta Christina, who emphasized
not to talk of disagreement per se
but of trolling, that he'd seen a lot of "crap"
on the pro-Watson side as well, Greta Christina
accused him of becoming "Exhibit A"
for the behaviour in question, making
everything about himself, and his hurt feelings.

The irony here being that Greta Christina
interpreted many of his replies
addressing other commenters, as addressed to herself,
in an attempt to lead her astray
from the topic of her choosing.

From this point onwards the discussion,
just as a freight train, out of control,
eventually will overshoot a turn,
could only get worse, until Ryan Grant Long,
the rather thin-skinned,
finally lost his temper:

The magic worked? So now you're accusing me of "hostile, entitled, misogynist trolling"? Like the kind you claimed you were trying to address, which included death and rape threats?

Fuck you Greta. You're the troll. You posted for the sole reason of trying to bait a sexist into writing something threatening. You didn't find one, but I dared to disagree with you, so you and your brainless followers thought "eh, fuck it, close enough. We'll attack him instead." You've been capitalizing on this for months and perpetuating vicious stereotypes about both men and women, under the guise of "feminism". I used to think you had something to contribute. Now I see you're just a pathetic attention seeker who isn't interested in anything other than stirring up shit.

Displeasing, as one might imagine,
helpful Greta Christina,
who took that insult and dedicated
[a blog post](#) to it,
as an example of hostile behaviour
of men
not only to herself, but
to female writers in general:

Because when professional female writers write things that a particular man agrees with,
we have something to contribute... but when we say things this particular man doesn't
agree with, it's just a self-serving attempt to get attention.

Though not mentioning, to her honour,
Ryan Grant Long's name,
until the latter came to [reveal himself](#)
in the comment section:

Why don't you post the entire conversation in which you repeatedly lied and your idiot
readers called me "stupid" and "insane" and accused me of wanting all women to be
"kicked in the cunt". Eh? Let's see the whole story you lying fraud.

Greta owes me a public apology for repeatedly misrepresenting my views, misquoting
me, and characterizing me as someone who wishes to silence the voices of women.³³

[To be banned](#) on the spot by Greta Christina.
[Asked](#) DJ Grothe, if those remarks
did really merit Ryan Grant Long's banning?
And Greta Christina [clarifying](#), no,
that had been for his original comment on Facebook.

[Voiced](#) DJ Grothe, to him it seemed like bullying
to quote Ryan Grant Long,
moreover, as he thought, out of context,
but not allow him to defend himself.

And Greta Christina [resolving](#)
to take the exchange with DJ Grothe
to the medium of private mail,
while closing the comment section of that post,
in concern of "cyberbullying".
And with that the matter was closed for a time.

33 This is a joinder of two individual comments (43, 50).

The last public words though which DJ Grothe wrote to Greta Christina, [were the following](#):

Wiser people than me just avoid such discussions as being far too risky, and too prone to divisive "us vs them" thinking.

Verily, how correct was that self-diagnosis!
How imprudent it had been to lay his head on the block for Ryan Grant Long proved itself, when a full month later Stephanie Zvan, as a ton of rocks breaking away from a mountain slope, does strike the surface of a peaceful lake, revisited the incident, [to accuse](#) DJ Grothe of showing "a pattern" of problematic acts.

For did he or did he not defend the physicist Lawrence Krauss, from [accusations](#) by Rebecca Watson of defending a sexual offender?³⁴

Did he or did he not like a Facebook post by the Center for Inquiry Michigan, defending the invitation of a controversial speaker, who, despite objections by Stephanie Zvan and the Skepchick-associated entomologist Bug Girl was going to give a talk on the evolutionary causes of rape?

And did he not defend Ryan Grant Long?
All told, shouldn't he

consider the fact that he still heads the JREF, because this most recent incident was the first time I heard several people say they weren't sure they wanted to speak again at TAM while he was in charge.

And in conclusion, she wrote:

Yes, DJ Grothe has a problem, an ongoing problem with a pattern, and that problem is him.

³⁴ This refers to a friend of Lawrence Krauss, billionaire [Jeffrey Epstein](#), who in 2008 pleaded guilty on the charge of paying a 14-year-old girl for erotic massage; with some reports, such as Rebecca Watson's, also alleging his recruiting of underage prostitutes. The rumours mentioned by DJ Grothe "that JREF is purported to condone child-sex-trafficking" probably originate from his twice removed association with Epstein.

In short, there was a history between DJ Grothe and certain bloggers. And his alleged blindness on the privileged male eye, in combination with aforementioned campaign led by Stephanie Zvan, and Jen McCreight ([among others](#), who came to join them), now, seemingly, was responsible for the drop in female participation of the TAM conference. Which, if true, once more would be exceedingly ironic.

But DJ Grothe the outrageous he would regret his suggestion that the messages of "a small number of prominent and well-meaning women skeptics" were all in all, possibly, maybe counterproductive.

Like birds of prey at a suicide's corpse those very same skeptics and their male counterparts did plunge at DJ Grothe. Who, as they thought, was attempting to sweep the, as they said, wide-spread problem of inappropriate behaviour towards women under the rug.

[Wrote Stephanie Zvan:](#)

So, DJ, what should we be doing instead? Just shutting up and letting it all happen without comment?

[Wrote Jason Thibeault:](#)

Oh, I see. Identifying existing problems is letting people know that they're there, and therefore warning people away. I get it. So everyone should ignore the problem and it'll go away, like Stephanie said. That's really a great strategy – silence the critics, rather than amending the problems. I can't help but think you're not a small part of the reason there was such a huge decline. [...]

Wrote Greta Christina:

[T]his may be part of the answer to your question of why attendance from women at TAM is so far down this year. When you talk about these questions, it often comes across as trying to get people – especially women – to shut up about sexual harassment and other threats, since these conversations make the conference and the movement in general look bad. It certainly came across that way in this comment.

And wrote Greg Laden: "Perhaps it is time that DJ Grothe resign as the president of the JREF", since

as it turns out, large areas of the Skeptics movement are very unfriendly to women, and there is an overall anti-women undercurrent ranging from a simple lack of active feminism, which is bad enough, to a vocal denial that there is a problem, to downright intentional misogyny. And, against this backdrop, DJ Grothe has positioned himself, explicitly, right in the middle, which is exactly where a leader in this movement at this time should not be.

And very soon, DJ Grothe stood accused of having a somewhat selective memory when stating that there had been no reports of harassment at TAM during his presidency.

Ashley F. Miller,
PhD student of communication sciences
at the University of South Carolina,
came to remind him of the harassment
suffered by herself, Jen McCreight
and another woman by a drunk person
at last year's conference.

DJ Grothe himself, so she'd been told,
had been involved in evicting that man,
a claim corroborated by other witnesses.
While DJ Grothe did state that although
he was sorry to hear about it,
he had no recollection of that incident;
displeasing Ashley F. Miller.

And she wrote:

I feel like I'm an embarrassment or something that he's trying to hide. Like they are annihilating me, intentionally or not, because it doesn't fit with their "There's no problem" line of thinking. Like I'm a liar! Like I don't exist! Like I don't matter! Like someone touching me against my will isn't wrong!

Whereas DJ Grothe, having consulted the files, [was able to clarify](#) that the man in question had been asked to leave for being at the private reception of the conference speakers.

He had also not been relegated from the conference itself, as some claimed, and how for sure it would have happened had the organizers known about his actions.

For it emerged that Ashley F. Miller and the other women involved didn't file any report on the incident, apparently believing, that when the organizers came to remove the man, they had known and it'd be not necessary.

It was a horrible story [wrote DJ Grothe](#), he was mortified, and sincerely wished he would have known, and would Ashley F. Miller like to file a belated report?

[Which she did](#), harrumphingly remarking that DJ Grothe would now supposedly go on to say there had only been a single report ever.

Whereas Rebecca Watson went on [to accuse](#) DJ Grothe of "gaslighting" Ashley F. Miller, that is to manipulate a person into thinking that her memories of a given event are not correct.

And on Skepchick [she proclaimed](#) that, and why, she would not be at TAM that year:

So when it comes to DJ Grothe, I can no longer support someone who is so incredibly dismissive of women's experiences. I can't give my time and money and energy to a man who blames women for speaking out about their own harassment, and I can't give my time and money and energy to the organization he runs.

In particular she took exception to DJ Grothe's listing of herself among the persons making women feel unwelcome:

Over the past several years, I've been groped, grabbed, touched in other nonconsensual ways, told I can expect to be raped, told I'm a whore, a slut, a bitch, a prude, a dyke, a cunt, a twat, told I should watch my back at conferences, told I'm too ugly to be raped, told I don't have a say in my own treatment because I've posed for sexy photos, told I should get a better headshot because that one doesn't convey how sexy I am in person, told I deserve to be raped – by skeptics and atheists. All by skeptics and atheists. [Constantly](#).

[...] I should apparently put on a smile and pretend it doesn't happen, because by reporting on my treatment, I am creating "a climate where women – who otherwise wouldn't – end up feeling unwelcome and unsafe."

DJ says I am the one doing that. Me, who has never discouraged people from attending TAM and in fact has given thousands of dollars to the JREF in order to send more and more women to the event. Me, who has never said that TAM is a dangerous place for women. *I'm* the problem.

Sympathy for Rebecca Watson was professed by [PZ Myers](#), [Jason Thibeault](#), and [Ophelia Benson](#), who chose the following, idiosyncratic comparison with DJ Grothe's statements:

As Jews in Germany circa 1936 might have created "a climate where Jews – who otherwise wouldn't – end up feeling unwelcome and unsafe."

Immediately adding that of course this was not to compare TAM with Nazi Germany.

Thus displeasing blogger Orac, alias David Gorski, of Respectful Insolence fame.

[So he wrote:](#)

Nonsense, Ophelia. That's exactly what you just did, compare TAM to Nazi Germany and women to Jews in Nazi Germany. Denying that you did so doesn't change that. It just makes you sound disingenuous.

In answering, Ophelia Benson [said](#) no, it was a matter of "parallel logic". Her point being that DJ Grothe would never make similar statements concerning other oppressed groups such as Jews. Why did he make them in respect of women?

And sarcastically she gave thanks to Orac, for having read her words so carefully and generously. She was looking forward to meet him at TAM.

While declaring in [another post](#), after having thought some more about it, that Orac had been right, even though his tone had been rude and a bit thuggish, she could not help but wonder why Orac, who usually never used to comment on her blog, had done so now, of all times. [Could it be](#) that someone had nudged him, [could it be](#) that he was trying to pressure her not to go to TAM?

Indeed Ophelia Benson would refrain from going to TAM 2012, having assumedly received [a threatening email](#), which soon [turned out to be](#) a misunderstanding, though this did not alter her decision, [having been](#) on edge already due to the anticipated hostility she expected to be met with.

DJ Grothe, in the meantime, like an oil company does after one of their tank ships has run onto a hidden reef, was trying yet to control the damage [by apologizing](#) to Rebecca Watson –

But Stephanie Zvan [replied](#) that this by now was far from sufficient:

How about explaining [his claim](#) that many of the tales of sexual harassment by conference speakers were due to a few women who, after a sexual exploit with them, eventually deemed said speakers were "skeezy" and should not speak at conferences any more?

How about apologizing
to Ashley F. Miller for having said, she said
she did not think the incident
worthy of reporting? [While actually](#)
she did so very much indeed, but also thought
it had been reported already? For DJ Grothe
[did in fact](#), probably not by intention,
though none felt charitable enough
to assume as much, spread that misinformation.

How about apologizing, last not least,
to herself and to Jen McCreight?

Though Stephanie Zvan, tellingly, did not complain
about Rebecca Watson, who in answering DJ Grothe
did also fail to mention her
and Jen McCreight, making it seem as if
he had only spoken of herself, Rebecca Watson.

So DJ Grothe the outrageous
was torn apart for his impudence
and presumption, lacking all respect
and reverence.

DJ Grothe's demonizing
was displeasing, however,
to a lot of other persons,
and they went to raise their voices.

Smart [Jean Kazez](#) spoke out,
pointing out the consistency
of worrying about a problem
being overstated,
and taking actual victims seriously.

[John W. Loftus](#) spoke out,
who once belonged to Freethoughtblogs,
and [Chris Hallquist](#), who yet belonged there,
but was not bound to stay.

Russell Blackford and Jeremy Stangroom spoke out,
[displeasing, once again](#), Ophelia Benson.

But first and foremost, eloquent Paula Kirby
spoke out, who for long
had remained silent, never saying much, wisely,
except for one lengthy comment on the [blog](#) website
of prolific Jerry Coyne, one year ago
in the first days of Elevatorgate.

So long had she kept her mouth shut,
but could not keep it any more, [and she wrote](#):

Of course assaults of any kind are always totally unacceptable – and, indeed, illegal; but to give the impression that such assaults are commonplace is to do a disservice, both to the women who will be put off attending as a result, and to the vast majority of men, whose decency is thereby grossly maligned.

To tear a movement apart, to provoke massive divisions within it, to malign the people in it, to distract it from the very purposes that brought the movement together in the first place, over something that is just a feature of life in general and not specific to the movement itself, is a tragic waste. Not just tragic, but deeply irresponsible.

Unwisely, Paula Kirby, just before publishing this, did also use the words "feminazi" and "femistasi" on Twitter, to illustrate, as she explained, "certain totalitarian attitudes and the intolerance and suppression of dissent."

Thus providing her detractors with a perfect excuse to ignore any other words. Swiftly she was mocked by [Ophelia Benson](#), [PZ Myers](#), and [Rebecca Watson](#), while Ed Brayton [commented](#), Paula Kirby should henceforth be shunned by the atheist community.

In short, one did amuse oneself. The tears and fright at TAM 2012 however, that were caused by a critical T-shirt logo, you may find, dear reader, [chronicled elsewhere](#).

But I will let the last word have the aforementioned observer, whose [appraisal](#) of Franc Hoggle you do for sure remember:

The attacks on Grothe introduced a new level of absurdity to the debate on gender politics within the atheist-skeptic community, and many who were previously silent [...] felt compelled to speak up more openly. The blogosphere outside of the FTB enclosure was exploding with criticism of FTB's dogmatic feminism, as was YouTube and other forums. All of a sudden, it became clear to casual on-lookers that those actively opposed to FTB dogmatism were not just the alleged fringe elements at ERV, but that this opposition was actually widespread and *building*.

[...]

[T]hese skeptics, remember, are now speaking out because of the recent excesses from the FTB-Skepchick gang (e.g conference harassment hysteria and crucifixion of DJ Grothe), which are largely the result of the deliberate prodding over the months by people like Franc and others [...] in the Slimepit who cared little for civility and were not shy to use language intended to shock and offend. They made the FTB horde paranoid – and look at what happened. The horde tripped over themselves and fell hard.

And tripping they did, [again](#) and [again](#),
to hit their reputation.

Now that the Freethoughtblogger's sins
have been dwelled upon in so much detail,
is the time to ask, what about the other side?

Apart from that which has been mentioned
already, there [were claims](#) of slimepit members
making rape and death threats
– on no conclusive evidence however, and although
[even Franc Hoggle](#), that poster child of misogyny
did call the perpetrators of the threats
made against Rebecca Watson
– the frequency of which, unfortunately, [had increased](#)
dramatically since Elevatorgate –
pea-brains.

Which by the way [did not stop](#) Rebecca Watson
from throwing together anonymous threats
and insulting criticism the like
of Franc Hoggle's and Abbie Smith's.

What slimepit members did indeed
was to voice their intention, to try and harm
Rebecca Watson's future prospects
on speaking contracts,
for example Justicar, and Maria Maltseva.³⁵

This is a really stupid idea, but is there any chance of starting a petition to get her removed as an atheist speaker for (1) lack of any credentials, (2) objectifying women, and (3) inserting and conflating radical feminist propaganda with atheism? I know this is a silly suggestion, but it's really bothering me because there are SO MANY qualified women to fill the role. Abbie, for one. [...]

Which certainly is not ok, but on the other hand
does not appear to have reached the level
of the Usual Suspect's machinations
against Abbie Smith.

³⁵ See note 4, file E-4 Dawkins-final, comment 1352.

Finally, mention should be made of that inglorious time when Abbie Smith [called](#) Jen McCreight [a loser](#) on her own Facebook page.

Apart from that, though the slimepit members in terms of insult, misrepresentation and omission for sure don't have a clean record, there seems to be nothing that did not have equivalents at Freethoughtblogs and nothing that would justify to call all "pitters", a diverse group, indiscriminately [trols](#) and misogynists (quite ironic, as [some Freethoughtbloggers](#) rightly did object if slimepit members took the Usual Suspects as representating the whole network), whose criticism one needs not to address.

And much of their initial criticism, was it not justified?

Did not Rebecca Watson show to handle criticism very poorly, and from her anonymous threats – which, [as some told her](#), all celebrities will receive and which, by frequent allusion, will become self-fulfilling – was inadmissably deducing a misogyny problem in the atheist community?

Did not PZ Myers show to handle criticism very poorly, and from that criticism was inadmissably deducing a misogyny problem in the atheist community? Further did not he, who allegedly was so much in favour of respecting women, treat both Stef McGraw and Abbie Smith in a very dismissive manner?

Did not Stephanie Zvan in the name of victims of sexual assault arrogantly demand an apology from a victim of sexual assault?

Did not Greg Laden hand out rules of conduct which, if given to black people, would have rightly been called racist?

Did not Phil Plait [write](#):

This wasn't a guy chewing gum at her. *This was a potential sexual assault.*

And did not Greta Christina [write](#):

You want to know how to not have huge Internet blowups every time women in the atheist movement complain about sexism? LISTEN TO WHAT THE WOMEN ARE SAYING.

[...]

What created this firestorm was not feminists pointing out sexism. What created this firestorm was sexist men perpetuating it.

[Though many dissidents were women?](#)

On the other hand, was there not also [a real need of discussion](#) about the status of women in the movement, which by all this shock and awe got pushed into the background, and discredited quite unnecessarily?

Was there not much laudable concern and work on the part of Freethoughtbloggers, who were now tuned out [by many](#)?

Smart Jean Kazez on her blog [gave her take](#) on the probable cause of this failure to communicate, to wit, that actually there were two very different groups protesting Rebecca Watson and the Usual Suspects, who, inadmissibly, were being conflated:

The respectable skeptic may be on board with all substantive feminist goals, but they lean very liberal on sexual issues and libertarian-ish on rules and codes. They may also have distinctive positions on purely empirical matters, like how often harassing incidents occur, and what the impact is of discussing them at blogs. Their views on what will advance the status of women may also be distinctive. It strikes me as inflammatory and distorted to accuse these people of misogyny, or even of being anti-feminists. Even if some of these people dress their views in provocative clothing, underneath it all they do not have troubling attitudes toward women.

The second group is another matter. These are people who are seized by a desire to attack women when there's the least hint of a question about male behavior at blogs and conferences. The notion of codes being imposed on their behavior sends them into a rage. These are the people whose existence you have to find surprising ... and very disturbing.

And I, the author, will in closing let
(not meeting with approval, probably,
of PZ Myers),
speak a man, who, I gather, may shed
some additional light on the cause
of that fierce reaction received
by Rebecca Watson and her followers:
The author Robert Gernhardt, who in 2011
had been dead five years,
but decades earlier had eloquently written
just what about some varieties
of feminism made him uncomfortable:

Anyone who as a young person nearly did suffocate in the kraken arms of religion, who had to spend most precious lifetime to cut off one arm after the other, to finally step free and leave it all behind, damnation and salvation, original sin and angelic choirs, adversary and apologists, is, like me, twice shy. Such a person will feel their hair instinctively stand on end if suddenly they come face to face with a baby kraken.

Chronology (1):

- 18.07.2011: Abbie Smith posts "Dawkins coup de grâce in Vegas", using the insulting nickname "Twatson" coined by Justicar.
- 23.07.2011: A commenter on Butterflies & Wheels calls Abbie Smith's blog a "pit o'slime", which eventually morphs into "slimepit".
- 29.07.2011: "Dawkins coup de grâce in Vegas" reaches 2000 comments; with some commenters complaining about long loading times, Abbie Smith opens a new thread, calling the previous one "a monument to everything I hold dear."
- 01.08.2011: Ed Brayton announces the establishment of Freethoughtblogs. Along with PZ Myers, Ophelia Benson, Greta Christina, Greg Laden, Jason Thibeault, Jen McCreight and Stephanie Zvan, among others, join the network during the following weeks.
- 07.08.2011: Rorschach requests members of the atheist community to distance themselves from Abbie Smith.
- 17.08.2011: Dennis Markuze, alias David Mabus, is arrested in Montreal.
- 15.09.2011: USA Today publishes an article based on interviews with Rebecca Watson and PZ Myers, representing their view of the Elevatorgate controversy.
- 01.10.2011: Commenters on Butterflies & Wheels discuss possible complaints about Abbie Smith to the National Geographic Society.
- 14.10.2011: Franc Hoggle's "kick her in the cunt" comment on Abbie Smith's blog.
- 17.10.2011: Rorschach starts a petition inviting complaints about Abbie Smith to the National Geographic Society.
- 23.10.2011: John Greg calls Rebecca Watson's declaration of boycott of Richard Dawkins an implicit request for public boycott, and is called deranged by PZ Myers and Greg Laden.
- 24.10.2011: Maria Maltseva questions Rebecca Watson's claims about the elevator incident, and is called deranged by PZ Myers and Greg Laden.
- 02.11.2011: Stephanie Zvan asks her readers for input on whether to disclose Franc Hoggle's true identity; PZ Myers compares Franc Hoggle to David Mabus.
- 03.11.2011: PZ Myers announces that the organizers of the Global Atheist Convention 2012 in Melbourne have been warned about Franc Hoggle.
- 15.11.2011: Abbie Smith calls Jen McCreight a loser on Jen McCreight's Facebook page.
- 09.12.2011: Franc Hoggle jokes about stalking PZ Myers and other Freethoughtbloggers at the Global Atheist Convention; PZ Myers discloses his presumed identity.
- 28.06.2012: Greg Laden announces to have made complaints to the National Geographic Society and Abbie Smith's department chair; Stephanie Zvan makes a complaint to Science Blogs.
- 04.07.2012: The slimepit moves to an independent website.

Chronology (2):

- 30.11.2011: Greta Christina's argument on Facebook with Ryan Grant Long, who calls Greta Christina "a pathetic attention seeker".
- 01.12.2011: Greta Christina posts the anonymised insult on her blog; the next day, Ryan Grant Long discloses his authorship in the comments.
- 03.12.2011: Greta Christina bans Ryan Grant Long from her blog; DJ Grothe criticises Greta Christina.
- 03.01.2012: Stephanie Zvan posts "Dammit, DJ", reproaching DJ Grothe for this and other deeds.
- 09.01.2012: DJ Grothe's response in the comments to Stephanie Zvan's post excites further criticism by Greta Christina.
- 20.05.2012: Stephanie Zvan starts a campaign against harassment at atheist-skeptic conferences; Jen McCreight and others join her.
- 23.05.2012: DJ Grothe supposes the negative representation of conferences and himself may discourage women from attending TAM 2012.
- 30.05.2012: Stephanie Zvan posts on DJ Grothe's supposition; at Rebecca Watson's request DJ Grothe names herself, Stephanie Zvan and Jen McCreight as originators of "irresponsible messaging"; Greg Laden suggests DJ Grothe to resign; Ashley Miller F. reminds of the harassment case at TAM 2011.
- 31.05.2012: John W. Loftus defends DJ Grothe; Ashley F. Miller clears up the misunderstanding between herself and DJ Grothe.
- 01.06.2012: Rebecca Watson announces her withdrawal from TAM 2012; Ophelia Benson criticises DJ Grothe, using a Nazi comparison; Chris Hallquist defends DJ Grothe.
- 03.06.2012: After being criticised by blogger Orac, Ophelia Benson retracts her Nazi comparison.
- 07.06.2012: PZ Myers announces his withdrawal from TAM 2012.
- 15.06.2012: Ophelia Benson denies having compared TAM and Nazi Germany; Orac argues with Ophelia Benson and Greg Laden.
- 18.06.2012: Russell Blackford and Jeremy Stangroom defend DJ Grothe, are criticised by Ophelia Benson.
- 19.06.2012: After assumedly receiving a threatening email, Ophelia Benson announces her withdrawal from TAM 2012; Jean Kazez defends DJ Grothe.
- 21.06.2012: Ophelia Benson clarifies to have misinterpreted the email, send by a fan expressing concern for her safety.
- 30.06.2012: Paula Kirby defends DJ Grothe, criticises Skepchick and Freethoughtblogs using the words feminazi and femistasi; Ophelia Benson and PZ Myers criticise Paula Kirby.
- 01.07.2012: Rebecca Watson criticises Paula Kirby; Paula Kirby publishes "The Sisterhood of the Oppressed", containing more criticism of Skepchick and Freethoughtblogs.
- 12.07.2012: Start of TAM 2012.

Attachment

The [following](#) twitter exchange took place on August 17, 2012, about three months after beginning of the controversy surrounding DJ Grothe, and one month after TAM 2012.

- James MacDonald** How are you defining "anti-feminist"? Opposing a particularly virulent brand of feminism is not misogyny.
- Amanda Marcotte** Anyone who thinks women not wanting to be sexually harassed are "virulent" is a misogynist.
- James MacDonald** That isn't what is being opposed. FtB and Skepchick represent more than just opposition to sexual harassment. I can oppose sexual harassment and find their general brand of feminism to be virulent and counter-productive.
- Amanda Marcotte** Since their "brand" is "opposing sexual harassment", not really, no. Unless you're feeble.
- James MacDonald** So you think I have to agree with everything they stand for if I oppose sexual harassment? That's absurd.
- Amanda Marcotte** All they've said is they're against sexual harassment. So yes, if you disagree, then uh, you're for it. I welcome in-context evidence for this "virulent" feminism you oppose, of course, but good luck producing it.
- Ophelia Benson** Connecting the word "feminism" with the word "virulent" ... is misogyny.

Hiatus Notice

Oh please, dear reader, now don't you fret:
I'm aware, there was no ending yet.
My mind was set to reach the [ugly goal](#).
Not halfway there, my muse she went AWOL.
That end as well'd be artificial,
Forced by me, and far from official.
Because, so things are in real life:
The end won't come for every strife.
The heroes and the villains meet
As good as never full defeat.
And oftentimes, 'stead further clashes,
A fight will simply turn to ashes.
Later then, if the occasion's right,
Folks are ready for another fight.
So things may be, as here it is:
There was no ending yet for this.
Meself I discomfitted sit
And see, no curtain falls on it.
Each day, as if never abating,
The drama factory's creating.
(Albeit they [arn't](#), if still annoying,
Their previous regard enjoying.)
Now, dear reader, if you still want more
You can look yourself for further lore:
You know the background of the actors
[And find them here for further lectures.](#)

About

From deep sleep I now am risen;
The thing was deep,
And much I had been missing.
FTB
Says: It's not me!
But this clique needs scrutiny,
Needs critical, critical scrutiny!

I discovered Freethoughtblogs in the summer of 2012, without knowing about the turmoil that had preceded its inception. It was, ironically, via Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, where I read about PZ Myers' "Courtiers Reply". That was some years earlier, at a time when Pharyngula was still at Science Blogs, and back then I looked up the post in question, but only that one, without delving deeper. In 2012 then I had a second look, and this time I got hooked. I became a regular reader, and extended my list with some of the other blogs found on the network – first Butterflies & Wheels; Greta Christina's Blog; Richard Carrier's Blog; and En Tequila Es Verdad.

All these, of course, belong to the group of "Usual Suspects" at the heart of this controversy. But I didn't come for the social justice issues, I came for science and atheism. I noticed and even read the posts concerned with the infighting within the movement, yet for quite some time these didn't raise any warning flags. I even thought "Well, I always hear so much about dogmatic, overzealous feminists. It's nice to see there are so many moderate ones, too." You may laugh at me, if you want.

There are several reasons why I didn't smell fish at first: I knew nothing about the people being smeared, had no prior sympathy for them, so didn't care to find out if the accusations were actually true; and honestly, who of us follows up the links to the originals if we see someone getting amusingly trashed?

I'm also not a native English speaker, and – as I found out when translating the quotes for the original German version of this work – the logical flaws are just not as glaring, the bullshit detectors not as finely tuned, if you read in a foreign language. That I didn't try to comment and almost never read the comments helped, as well.

And finally, though I hate to admit it: The claims about epidemic sexism and harassment appealed to my prejudiced view of the US: A prudish society filled with inhibited people, craving for sex, who eventually have to lose control.

The one of their targets I did now and did have sympathy for was Richard Dawkins. And thus, just as it was he who brought me there in the first place, the attacks on him were the reason why I turned my back on Freethoughtblogs again, a year and a half later.

I can't remember when and where I first learned about his "Dear Muslima" comment – stripped, naturally, of all context and used to cast him in a very bad light indeed. I even bought the interpretation of this being a serious blunder, a sign of ignorance about women's issues, and was a bit disappointed to see it coming from him.

What I couldn't understand was the outrage, the shrieking demands for purity. So he was, in this one respect, not as progressive as you would like him to be. So what? [Heinrich Heine](#), one of my favourite writers, apparently was a blackmailer, extorting money from composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (and attempting the same with Franz Liszt) under threat of writing unfavourable reviews, praising him lavishly as long as he paid, turning to vicious mockery after, one day, Meyerbeer told him to fuck off. This doesn't make Heine less of a genius, nor diminishes it my pleasure in reading him, or my respect for all the great things he achieved. And Dawkins didn't come even close to this.

Gradually my reading list shrunk again. The first site I got put off by was The Crommunist Manifesto, pretty soon after discovering it, because of a post by co-blogger Haifischgeweint skinning Richard Dawkins – for want of a stronger term – for referring to the Muslims who burned down the library of Timbuktu as barbarians. Apparently, that was racist.

I turned my back at Butterflies & Wheels, mainly because there were too many posts that didn't interest me. But seeing the petty mocking of Richard Dawkins, for things as unrelated and inconsequential as getting angry at flight security procedure, didn't help.

I was put off by En Tequila Es Verdad, to my regret, as I consider Dana Hunter a great writer, by a post accusing Richard Dawkins of trivializing child abuse – not only that, but pre-emptively telling everyone who might object to stuff their "hero worship" right away. Strong criticism I could accept, but outrightly denying all discussion?

Finally, I stopped reading Pharyngula. The bashing of Dawkins was not the ultimate reason this time; it simply became quite time-consuming to keep up with his output, which at the end of the day did not seem worth it.

It was not until the [smear campaign](#) against Michael Nugent, half a year after I had already stopped reading them, that the Freethoughtbloggers began to really look bad in my eyes, and when a commenter at his site provided a link to James Onen's [excellent analysis](#) of the Elevatorgate controversy, I was thoroughly disabused. It was at that time the idea for this epic was born.

Now, one might accuse me of a double standard: If I can still enjoy Heine or Dawkins despite their flaws (I hasten to add that today I see Dawkins' comments in a very different light), why not these authors?

Fact is, I do still enjoy them – some of their works are archived on my computer – but to read them daily as before would now cause me too much grinding of teeth while sorting wheat from chaff.

In short, if you want to know if I'm biased: Yes, I am. It's not because I believe this infighting is harmful to the atheist movement, and that the Watson-Myers faction is largely to blame – though I do believe that. I can see how atheists in the US, who in many places face bigotry and resentment, may come to see the movement as a second home and react very emotionally to all this, but for me as a German there is nothing at stake here.

What I do resent is having been duped, having been lied to, having my trust misused. That's my personal motivation for writing this. I'm aware of my bias, but I hope my desire to make the impartial reader flinch, which works best if showing the escalation on both sides, has compensated for it to some degree. If nonetheless it has led me to misrepresent something, please feel free to contact me.

I am cured all right.