

Examining Expressions of Belief in the Jian Ghomeshi Case

by

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Abstract

In late October 2014, accusations of sexual assault levelled against Jian Ghomeshi dominated the Canadian news cycle. This case offers an opportunity to examine the public's struggle to determine whether to believe Ghomeshi's alleged victims, to make sense of how that belief matters, and ask what responses these beliefs demand.

This project is a narrative study of expressions of belief in the Ghomeshi scandal. In this project, I use a multi-step approach to explore what it meant for participants to say they believed or did not believe Ghomeshi or his alleged victims. In order to first characterize the context in which those comments were made, in Chapter 1 I sketch a broad timeline of events that make up the Ghomeshi scandal using news articles and publicly available online media. In Chapter 2, I detail a discursive analysis of Ghomeshi's Facebook post which publicly triggered the scandal. In Chapter 3, I provide a thematic analysis of the responses to the Facebook post made by commenters on the same platform. Finally, in Chapter 4 I present a discursive psychological analysis of what the expressions of belief in these responses might mean, an analysis I augmented with a discussion of Charles Taylor's strong evaluations. I conclude with a discussion of this work.

Keywords: Jian Ghomeshi, sexual assault, discursive psychology, Charles Taylor, Facebook

Dedication

Pour Maman et Papa, qui m'ont toujours encouragé de poursuivre mes élans, même quand ils m'emmènent en Alberta.

Pour mon mari, sans qui mes élans se seraient épuisés, et avec qui tout est possible.

And for those who have experienced sexual violence. May we never complacently accept it as normal. May you find support and resolution. And may those still searching keep faith you will find what you need.

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Introduction

In a paper summarizing research on outcomes for survivors of sexual assault, Lonsway and Archambault say

the two specific behaviors that seem to have the most significant positive effect on victim well-being in the aftermath of a sexual assault are having someone to talk to and being believed. Victims who are believed and encouraged to talk about their experience – and who view these responses positively – have fewer physical and psychological symptoms than victims who do not receive such reactions or consider them to be negative.

(Lonsway and Archambault, 2013, p. 2)

This kind of research has inspired a number of public awareness campaigns intended to encourage more positive outcomes for sexual assault survivors. One example can be found from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services (AASAS). Since 2015, the AASAS has run the #IBelieveYou social media campaign in the fall. Its object is to have “a tangible impact on the health and safety of our province,” by encouraging people to “start by believing” survivors’ sexual assault disclosures (AASAS, 2018, para. 4). Indeed, “believing” is an essential part of the recommendations AASAS lists for persons to whom a sexual assault survivor is disclosing their experiences:

- If someone discloses to you, the best response is to start by *believing*. *Believing* [emphasis added] is something you can show, do, and say.
- Unless a child is involved, reporting to police is optional, and there is no time limit on reporting.
Respect their decision, whatever it may be
- The role of friends and family is not to play judge and jury, but to start by *believing* [emphasis added]. When people start by *believing* [emphasis added], due process can happen, but the choice to report belongs to the survivor.
- Avoid asking “why” questions. Even people with the best intentions can sound accusatory.
- Let them know it’s not their fault. No one asks to be sexually assaulted. Other positive words include I’m sorry that happened, and how can I help.

- If you've doubted someone in the past, remember it's never too late to start *believing* [emphasis added]. (AASAS, 2018, para. 9)

Given how important 'believing' is held to be for outcomes for sexual assault survivors, and that it therefore features so importantly in recommendations for how to respond to sexual assault disclosures, it would be helpful to have a clearer understanding of what it means to "show, do, and say" believing, or conversely what it means to not do this. There are many cases that offer us the opportunity to examine what it means to believe or not believe the alleged survivors or perpetrators of sexual assault, to make sense of how that belief matters, and to examine what responses follow from holding such beliefs.

In late October 2014, one such case dominated the Canadian news cycle: the Jian Ghomeshi scandal. In a matter of days, due to allegations of sexual assault Ghomeshi went from being known as a favourite popular radio host to being discussed as a sexual predator, was fired from a high-profile job, and would even eventually face a number of criminal charges. The process by which this dramatic change in public profile took place was recorded in news articles and in discussions on social media platforms like Facebook.

This project is a narrative study of expressions of belief made by persons reacting to the Ghomeshi scandal, with the intention of exploring what it meant for social media commenters to say they believed or did not believe Ghomeshi or his alleged victims. In order to examine these expressions while remaining faithful to their intended meaning, it is vital to also examine the context in which they are made: accordingly, before considering specific expressions of belief in the Ghomeshi scandal I will first elaborate the context within which they emerged, proceeding from the coarsest level of detail to the most granular, while also considering how the events unfolded over time.

In Chapter 1, I will sketch a broad timeline of events that make up the Ghomeshi scandal using news articles and publicly available online media. In Chapter 2, I will detail a discursive analysis of Ghomeshi's Facebook post which triggered the scandal and evoked a strong public response. In Chapter 3, I will provide a thematic analysis of the responses to the Facebook post made by commenters on the same platform. Finally, in Chapter 4 I will discuss a discursive psychological analysis of what the expressions of belief in these Facebook responses may mean.

On Qualitative Methods and the Narrative Approach

For this project, my research interest was in exploring expressions of belief while remaining faithful to the commenters' expressive intentions. I exclusively used qualitative methods to accomplish this, including as described above: discursive analysis, thematic analysis, and discursive psychological analysis. In the following section I will discuss why this design was the most fitting approach to answer my research question.

Research methods are “the systematic tools used to find, collect, analyze and interpret information” (SAGE Research Methods, 2017). They can broadly be divided into two categories: quantitative and qualitative. The approach to information and therefore the practice of research is very different for the two sets. The two categories can broadly be sketched as follows:

Quantitative research involves the collection of numerical data for analysis, which can be

durations, scores, counts of incidents, ratings, or scales. Quantitative data can be collected in either controlled or naturalistic environments, in laboratories or field studies, from special populations or from samples of the general population. (...) Quantitative research tends to be associated with the realist epistemology (...) That is, real things exist, and these can be measured, and have numerical values assigned as an outcome measure, and these values are meaningful. These values can only be meaningful if researchers accept some of the criteria associated with the positivist standpoint.

Gaining numerical materials facilitates the measurement of variables and also allows statistical tests to be undertaken. (...) Changes over time can be more easily tracked using quantitative methods, as measures of the same properties can be taken at several points during an intervention. (Garwood, 2011, p. 250)

Qualitative research, on the other hand,

is often based upon interpretivism, constructivism and inductivism. It is concerned to explore the subjective meanings through which people interpret the world, the different ways in which reality is constructed (through language, images and cultural artifacts) in

particular contexts. Social events and phenomena are understood from the perspective of the actors themselves, avoiding the imposition of the researcher's own preconceptions and definitions. There is also often a concern with the exploration of change and flux in social relationships in context and over time.

The methods used in qualitative research, often in combination, are those which are open-ended (to explore participants' interpretations) and which allow the collection of detailed information in a relatively close setting. (...) It is in the nature of qualitative research, with its emphasis on depth and detail of understanding and interpretation, that it is often small-scale or micro-level. (Sumner, 2011, p. 250)

The fundamental difference between hypothesis testing (in quantitative research) and exploratory research (in qualitative methods) is the result of the different kinds of questions researchers are asking: "...quantitative researchers tend to be interested in whether and to what extent variance in x causes variance in y. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, tend to ask how x plays a role in causing y, what the process is that connects x and y," (Maxwell, 2013, p. 31).

Maxwell identifies three goals of qualitative methods: to generate "results and theories that are understandable and experientially credible, both to the people you are studying and to others," to conduct "research that is intended to improve existing practices, programs, or policies," and to engage "in action, participatory, collaborative, or community-based research with participants in the study," (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 31-32). My research question is aligned with Maxwell's first listed intention in that I intend to explore expressions of belief.

The choice of a specific qualitative method to use in a project depends on the sort of research question being asked, what form the examined phenomenon takes, and what access there can be to that phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013, p. 100). In developing this project, all of the data I collected consisted of publicly-available written or audio-recorded uses of language: more specifically, I am referring to news articles, Facebook posts, podcasts, and radio segments related to the Ghomeshi case. Recognizing this allowed me to specify that the most fitting research methods I could use would be forms of narrative analysis.

Narrative analysis “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 70). The object of this qualitative approach is to analyze how a spoken or written account “is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity” (Huberman and Miles, 2002, p. 218). This family of methods are a means by which we can examine how we understand ourselves, each other, and the world through story, and through these stories how we “impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in [our] lives” (Huberman and Miles, 2002, p. 218). This may involve focusing on particular elements of stories such as chronology, place or scenes, or persons, or expressions involved in order to reorganize them into a more general – and better understandable – framework (Cresswell, 2013). The particular ways in which specific kinds of narratives are approached, what elements become focal, and what sorts of new understandings can be generated depend on the more specific narrative-type methods being deployed. Each chapter in this project involves the use of a different narrative method to best meet the specific purpose of the chapter (those specific purposes and methods will be discussed in more detail within each chapter).

That this sort of research involves qualitative explorations and interpretations of phenomena may raise the question of the value of such projects: how can we possibly assess the ‘correctness’ or the ‘soundness’ of any findings? In quantitative research, this is understood as a concern for validity, a notion closely tied to those of “reliability, objectivity, and generalizability,” concerns typically addressed by adopting “specifically prescribed and well-entrenched procedures and strategies” (Miller, 2012, p. 2). The idea is to use previously tried and tested methods to accurately capture something about the phenomenon of interest, and what is captured can then be tested for its correspondence to the actual phenomenon, often so what is captured can be further probed or can justifiably be used to make inferences. In contrast (and somewhat predictably at this point), specific forms of ‘validity’ in qualitative research depends on the sorts of research questions being asked and on the sorts of data that are being examined. Broadly speaking, instead of trying to produce ‘valid’ findings, qualitative researchers are concerned with “notions such as trustworthiness, credibility, authenticity, transferability, and plausibility” in their findings (Miller, 2012, p. 2). This is accomplished by “ensuring that research procedures remain coherent and transparent, research results are evident, and research conclusions are convincing.” (Miller, 2012, p. 3): in other words, concerns about the ‘validity’ of

qualitative research projects are best understood as concerns for developing an interpretation or analysis that is ‘fitting’ of the data under examination.

Part of what allows qualitative researchers to generate fitting analyses without set external or objective criteria is the practice of reflexivity. Broadly speaking, reflexivity is the practice of “engaging in processes of self-awareness and self-criticism as an intrinsic feature of the research process,” (*SAGE Research Methods*, 2017). It involves an ongoing effort at keeping explicitly clear a qualitative researchers' engagements and influence on the project throughout the research process. There are many kinds of reflexivity, but the one most relevant to this project because it is the one I have endeavoured to maintain is epistemological reflexivity. This involves more specifically asking questions about my “methodological decision making,” and thinking about “epistemological decisions regarding the research and its findings” (Dowling, 2012, p. 2).

In this project, because my intention is to explore the meaning of expressions of belief, I am concerned with producing an analysis that is faithful to the intentions of those expressing those beliefs: ‘validity’ in this project will concern whether my analyses shed light on what is being expressed, without distortion. In an effort to practice reflexivity and thereby honour the intentions of this project, I kept research notes in which I documented my own thoughts, beliefs, and rationales for my research decisions. Throughout this project, I will make these decisions explicitly clear (having already begun this disclosure in this introduction by situating the methods I have used). I am also making available a formalized summary of these notes in the interest of remaining transparent not only to readers, but to keep myself accountable as a qualitative researcher (see Appendix 1).

With these preliminary comments out of the way, I will begin to report on the content of this project by elaborating a timeline of events that make up the Ghomeshi scandal. Spanning from early in 2014 until the time of this writing, this timeline will emphasize key events to which I will refer in the remainder of the project.

Chapter 1: Detailing the Ghomeshi Scandal

For this chapter, I loosely collected 1,038 news articles, blog posts, podcasts, and editorials from before, during, and after the Ghomeshi scandal. I have condensed the information they communicated and arranged it chronologically, with the intention of briefly sketching the events which make up the scandal since these form the context within which social media users expressed belief on Facebook.

Who is Jian Ghomeshi? An Outline of a Public Persona

Jian Ghomeshi was born in 1967 in England to Iranian parents. His family moved to Thornhill, Ontario in 1975 (Gains, June 1 2010). As an adult, Ghomeshi obtained a BA in History and Political Science with a minor in Women's Studies from York University, where he was also active in student politics. He was offered a scholarship to continue studying political science at Stanford University, but declined it in favour of pursuing a career in music with some high school friends in the band Moxy Früvous (Doody, October 21 2009). The band became successful, touring extensively and recording seven albums selling over 500,000 copies through the 1990s (Gains, June 1 2010).

By the end of the decade, Moxy Früvous disbanded, and Ghomeshi began a solo tour of the United States in 2001. He wrote articles about his experiences for the major Canadian newspapers the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* (Gains, June 1 2010). This and other work in Canadian media caught the attention of the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's* (CBC) *Newsworld* producers: they were looking for a host for a new television show *Play* (sometimes seen spelled as *>play*) (Gains, June 1 2010). Although Ghomeshi was hired on and *Play* launched, and the show was well-received at first, it was ultimately cancelled in 2005 due to poor ratings; after this, Ghomeshi was kept on at the CBC and given temporary hosting jobs (Wheeler, July 14 2012).

Around this time, a study of *CBC Radio's* listenership found that 70% of the audience members were over the age of 50: with an interest in increasing their reach to a wider audience, *CBC Radio* decided to prioritize recruiting fresh new talent and developing new shows that would appeal to a younger audience (Shea, January 28 2014). With support from Chris Boyce,

the then-head of radio program development, and with the corporation's new youthful direction in mind, Ghomeshi was encouraged to bring changes to existing shows in his temporary hosting jobs, and gained enough visibility and a large enough following to warrant co-creating and hosting a show of his own, *Q*, which debuted in spring 2007 (Wheeler, July 14 2012).

The show was designed as a culture, entertainment, and current affairs show, driven by Ghomeshi's personality as host. It opened with a scripted audio essay on a current topic, followed by guest appearances from artists or public figures whom would be interviewed in-depth, most often by Ghomeshi himself (Shea, January 29 2014). In keeping with the *CBC*'s intention to attract a young and internet-savvy audience, the episodes were also made available online as podcasts, and there would eventually also be weekly video-recorded episodes aired on *CBC Television*, with video clips also made available online ("Jian Ghomeshi earned a loyal," October 26 2014). As *Q*'s audience grew, the *CBC* moved the show to a coveted time slot, weekday mornings at 10:00AM right after the news (Wheeler, July 14 2012).

In April 2009, *Q* – and Ghomeshi more particularly – attracted international acclaim following an interview debacle with the touring band the *Boxmasters*, of which American actor Billy Bob Thornton is a member. Thornton objected to Ghomeshi mentioning his acting career in the band's introduction (which, Thornton maintained, was against an agreement he had with *Q* producers) and became belligerent, sabotaging the interview by providing nonsensical responses to Ghomeshi's questions ("Billy Bob loves Canada," April 9 2009). Ghomeshi's professional handling of the difficult guest garnered much praise, and the viral international publicity following the incident made *Q* and Ghomeshi known to a whole new audience: conversely, the *Boxmasters* eventually had to cancel the remainder of their Canadian tour because of the negative reaction they received (Shea, January 29 2014).

As *Q*'s star rose, Ghomeshi's popularity soared: he quickly became "... public broadcasting's poster boy" (Wheeler, July 14 2012). A large part of *Q*'s success was attributed to Ghomeshi's skill as an interviewer and to the public persona he cultivated: "You have a host in Ghomeshi who comes with an exotic cultural background, a radio-friendly baritone, and who's cocky and well-read enough to take on a variety of issues and interview subjects in an in-depth way" (Wheeler, July 14 2012). Moreover, he was successful in drawing a younger

audience, and so became a *CBC* darling: as a *Toronto Life* writer put it, “At the youth-starved *CBC*, he has become the go-to cool guy. His bosses put him in front of a mike or camera whenever possible” and those opportunities gave him even more visibility (Shea, January 29 2014). He received a number of awards and accolades, and his presence in the small-ish world of Canadian media was strongly felt as he frequently attended “parties, openings, concerts, screenings, debates, awards ceremonies, panels” (Shea, January 29 2014).

Among his colleagues and coworkers, Ghomeshi also had a reputation for being a difficult star, for having a swollen ego combined with a moody disposition, and of being demanding of the people with whom he worked (Wheeler, July 14 2012). He was also known to carefully curate his public persona and *Q*'s products, not sharing the limelight the show afforded him and jealously claiming the best interviews with the most interesting guests for himself, minimizing the producers' roles in generating content (Shea, January 29 2014).

At its height, *Q* was one of the most popular radio shows in Canada and aired in more than 120 public radio stations in the United States (Wheeler, July 14 2012). The weekly televised version of *Q* boasted 300,000 viewers and the podcast was downloaded about 250,000 times per week (Shea, January 29 2014). According to the *Globe and Mail*, at the *CBC Q* ranked “first out of all network programs in website traffic, audio-on-demand listens, podcast downloads, and Facebook and Twitter followers” (Wheeler, July 14 2012). At the acme of this success stood Jian Ghomeshi, a man who had become a powerful and influential cultural force in Canadian media, and at the *CBC* even more so, with a platform tailored to the scale of his ambitions.

Timeline of the Scandal

A storm brewing for Ghomeshi

On March 24 2014, *Q* responded to a spate of news articles about sexual assaults on university campuses in Canada by hosting a debate: Heather Macdonald, a research fellow from the conservative think tank the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, and Dr Lise Gotell, then-chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Alberta, were asked to discuss the term 'rape culture' and whether it was a useful concept to help understand

sexual violence (*Q*, March 24 2014). The discussion was polarized from the start, and devolved quickly: to many listeners' astonishment, with strong language Macdonald argued that not only was rape culture a myth trumped up by hysterical feminists abusing statistics, but campus sexual assaults could be eliminated virtually overnight if women students abstained from consuming alcohol and boycotted sex (*Q*, March 24 2014). *Q* listeners responded swiftly to express their anger and dismay at the way the show was conducted, and spoke out loudly against Macdonald's views as glaring instances of the very rape culture that should have been better discussed. On the next episode the following morning, Ghomeshi and a *Q* producer spent the first ten minutes of the show reading some of these reader responses on the air, as a way of soothing the ire of the fiercely loyal but riled up *Q* listenership (*Q*, March 25 2014).

Around the same time, an anonymous woman approached Canadian journalist and *Canadaland* podcast founder Jesse Brown by email. She alleged an unnamed person prominent in Canadian media had sexually abused her. Brown said from the details she described, it was obvious she was referring to Ghomeshi (Brown, Nov 2 2014). Over the next few months, Brown would investigate and uncover more allegations of the same sort from other anonymous sources, and by his account even validate parts of them (Sufirin, October 30 2014).

In April 2014, a pseudonymous Twitter user with the handle @BigEarsTeddy posted thirteen tweets over three days suggesting she had been sexually assaulted by Ghomeshi (Daro, October 30 2014). These included the following troubling tweets:

BREAKING NEWS: @jianghomeshi keeps an impressive anthology of videos and photos of the young girls he chokes out... #howromantic #rapecultre (Georgina, April 10 2014a)

and

Yes, a friendly FYI @jianghomeshi to cement your great depression, snuck a vidy of you punching me – OOPS this is my confession #staytuned, (Georgina, April 10 2014b)

Also around the same time, friends approached Ghomeshi to let him know a reporter and a former girlfriend of his were contacting them and asking questions about his sex life (Bradshaw & McArthur, October 31 2014). Concerned there may soon be a published exposé, in mid-May

Ghomeshi met with Chris Boyce (who by then had become executive director of *CBC Radio*) to warn his employer there was “...an ex-girlfriend threatening to make public ‘embarrassing’ details of his sexual preferences,” and assured Boyce that he had “... never crossed any ethical or legal line” in his sexual life (Kamlani & Subramaniam, November 28 2014). Ghomeshi hired Navigator, a crisis communications firm, which coordinated with *CBC* public affairs head Chuck Thompson to manage the company’s public relations (Kingston, December 10 2014).

Meanwhile, without libel insurance to protect his nascent crowdfunded podcast, Brown was warned by his attorneys that he risked the devastation of a lawsuit from Ghomeshi if he published the story he had put together so far (Sufirin, October 30 2014). To avoid this, around the same time Ghomeshi went to Boyce in May 2014, Brown approached the established newspaper the *Toronto Star* with his research, which by that time included interviews with three anonymous women who alleged they were sexually assaulted by Ghomeshi and one anonymous woman who alleged she was sexually harassed by Ghomeshi while working at *Q* (Donovan, November 2 2014). *Toronto Star* editor Michael Cooke tasked staff investigative reporter Kevin Donovan with ensuring due diligence was done on the story, and the latter proceeded to re-interview Brown’s anonymous sources.

Questions are raised

By the end of June 2014, Brown and Donovan had enough information from their interviews to warrant contacting Ghomeshi by phone, and sent a letter requesting Ghomeshi’s comment on the specific anonymous allegations. Ghomeshi’s attorney replied in his stead: not only did Ghomeshi deny he engaged in any form of non-consensual sex, he had materials such as emails and text messages that would support this. They refused to make those materials available to the newspaper, and threatened legal action against the *Toronto Star* if they published the four anonymous women’s allegations (Donovan and Gallant, October 31 2014).

Also at the end of June 2014, the *Toronto Star* reached out to *CBC Radio* staffers by email for comment to build their story. Two *Q* producers reacted by bringing their concerns about the allegations reported in the *Toronto Star* email, their observations of Ghomeshi’s behaviour and comments, as well as the @BigEarsTeddy Twitter account to Boyce and *CBC*'s

then-head of human resources, Todd Spencer: in response, Boyce and Spencer began an internal investigation into Ghomeshi's human resources file, conducting informal conversations with various *Q* employees who worked with Ghomeshi (Kamlani & Subramaniam, November 28 2014). The report of a *CBC* workplace investigation by Rubin Thomlinson LLP into how the *CBC* treated Ghomeshi would eventually find that during this internal investigation,

Mr. Ghomeshi's managers were all too ready to believe his version of the truth. Indeed, no one involved in the pre-investigation appeared to carefully and objectively assess the veracity of the information gathered during this process or the sufficiency of it. (Rubin & Nikfarjam, 2015, p. 33)

Indeed, an investigation in November 2014 by the *CBC*'s own documentary television show *The Fifth Estate* conducted a survey of all the *Q* employees known to have been working with Ghomeshi in the summer of 2014: nearly all the employees responded, and "They were asked if anyone from management had approached them with questions about Ghomeshi. Not one of them reported being approached by anyone from management or HR" (Kamlani & Subramaniam, November 28 2014).

And so with only half-hearted efforts to respond to staff concerns about Ghomeshi by *CBC* management, and no action from them against Ghomeshi, or supporting evidence as to whether the sexual assault and harassment allegations against Ghomeshi were true or false, or witnesses who were willing to attach their names to their story, or police reports filed by the alleged victims, or a comment on the allegations from Ghomeshi or his coworkers, and with the threat of legal action against them, the *Toronto Star* said it decided the story fell "...far short of the *Star*'s standards of accuracy and fairness" and set it aside, unpublished (Cooke, October 26 2014). Brown took the story to *VICE News*, but they too refused to publish the story under those circumstances (Brown, November 2 2014).

An imminent crisis

The next few months would pass without incident. Then, on Sunday October 19 2014, as part of his regular *Canadaland* podcast, Brown said his show's crowdsourcing funding strategy

was successful, and they were now financially independent. In his introductory remarks around the 00:02:40 mark of the episode, he then said:

I'm once again getting contacted by people uh who want to share with me some *incredible news stories that have been hidden so far* [emphasis added]. And I'm working on one right now, that, I, I think it's a monster, it's a huge revelation. It will appear soon as a post at Canadalandshow.com, *and this is a story that is, uh, worse than embarrassing for certain parties* [emphasis added]. And I want to flag that now, because I think that what is very likely to happen is, that I will be targeted, that my credibility will be called into question, that my journalism will be challenged, who knows. Now, I expect that, *when you're saying things about people who have a lot to lose* [emphasis added], but there is a new element to this, now that I am being paid directly by listeners of this show. It used to be that when powerful people wanted to do something about a reporter, they would complain to that reporter's editor and try to get the reporter fired. You know? They would talk to the reporter's boss. You are now my boss, and *I would not be surprised if there was some sort of public appeal to the listeners of this show, based on some of these revelations that are forthcoming* [emphasis added]. (Brown, October 19 2014)

Brown would later say these comments had nothing to do with the Ghomeshi story he had pursued, but were a teaser for his upcoming October 23 2014 show about the *CBC's* failure to report on Edward Snowden leaks (Brown, Nov 2 2014). Not long after the podcast in which these comments were made was aired, Ghomeshi scheduled an emergency meeting with Boyce and Thompson for Thursday October 23 2014 at his attorneys' offices, possibly in anticipation that Brown would publish the story on which he and Donovan had worked over the summer (Donovan & Gallant, October 31 2016). *Q* aired what would be Ghomeshi's last radio essay that Thursday, a reaction to the shooting at the Canadian parliament buildings that had occurred on Wednesday October 22 2014 (Canadian Press, October 24 2016).

At the scheduled closed-door meeting that Thursday, Ghomeshi's lawyers offered to show the *CBC* executives evidence Ghomeshi said proved his sexual partners had been consenting and therefore had not been sexually assaulted (Bradshaw & McArthur, October 31 2014). As Anne Kingston pointed out: "The fact that Boyce was accompanied by Thompson,

and not a lawyer, suggests they'd already determined it was a PR issue" (Kingston, December 10 2014). Ghomeshi reportedly showed the executives texts, emails, and photos related to his sexual encounters (Bradshaw & McArthur, October 31 2014). A video of a woman with bruising and an apparently cracked rib caused by Ghomeshi was also reportedly shown on his personal phone (Donovan, November 12 2014). In a memo later emailed to *CBC* staff, Executive Vice-President of *CBC* English Services Heather Conway would write:

After viewing this graphic evidence, we determined that Jian's conduct was a fundamental breach of *CBC*'s standard of acceptable conduct for any employee. (...) Jian's conduct in causing physical injury to a woman was inconsistent with the character of the public broadcaster, was fundamentally unacceptable for any employee, was likely to bring the reputation of his fellow employees and *CBC* into disrepute and could not be defended by *CBC*. (Hasham, October 31 2014)

A sudden break

On Friday October 24 2014, Jian Ghomeshi was not on the air. A flurry of confusion was expressed in the Internet activity from fans and followers. In the afternoon, Brown tweeted:

SOURCE: @jianghomeshi on indefinite leave from *CBC*. Q staff on PR lockdown&all reporter inquiries to be directed to crisis management expert. (Brown, October 24 2014a)

Followers protested at what they interpreted as Brown's insensitivity: Ghomeshi's father had recently died (on October 2 2014), and it was assumed that any leave of absence Ghomeshi may have taken would be due to grief (Ghomeshi, October 12 2014). Brown quickly responded to the backlash with another tweet:

My info on @jianghomeshi is unverified but from a highly credible source. @CBC should deny now if inaccurate and I will retract immediately. (Brown, October 24 2014b)

Within a matter of minutes, Thompson responded

.@JesseBrown @jianghomeshi @CBC Jian Ghomeshi is not on indefinite leave from the *CBC*. (Thompson, October 24 2014)

Yet less than two hours later, after Ghomeshi was informed of the *CBC*'s decision in reaction to the revelations from the day before, Thompson released a statement indicating Ghomeshi was taking a leave of absence for an "... 'undetermined' amount of time to deal with 'personal issues'" (Canadian Press, Oct 24 2014). As the public expressed support for Ghomeshi as well as confusion through social media, Ghomeshi took to Twitter to say

Thanks for all the well wishes, you guys. I'm ok. (Canadian Press, Oct 24 2014)

On Sunday October 26 2014 around midday, Ghomeshi had one last meeting with *CBC* executives: he brought along his lawyer and a representative from Navigator, while *CBC* sent Boyce and Spencer; the latter was authorized to fire Ghomeshi if it was deemed necessary. As Ghomeshi held to his original position that he had done nothing wrong in his sexual life, he was fired then and there (Bradshaw & McArthur, October 31 2014). The *CBC* then published the following – rather reserved – statement:

The *CBC* is saddened to announce its relationship with Jian Ghomeshi has come to an end. This decision was not made without serious deliberation and careful consideration. Jian has made an immense contribution to the *CBC* and we wish him well. (CNW Group, October 26 2014)

Soon thereafter, Brown – rather cryptically – tweeted:

What I have learned about @jianghomeshi after months of investigation will be reported responsibly as soon as possible. Patience please. (Brown, October 26 2014)

The Facebook post

Only hours after officially being fired by the *CBC*, Ghomeshi updated his public Facebook status with a 1,586-word essay (Ghomeshi, October 26 2014). The post publicly revealed for the first time that Ghomeshi had been fired by the *CBC*, and moreover announced that he was suing them. He confessed his sexual preferences tend towards rough sex and BDSM (Bondage-Discipline; Dominance-Submission; Sado-Masochism) -type sexual activities – which he stressed were all consensual— but a “jilted ex girlfriend” was “reframing what had been an ongoing consensual relationship as something nefarious” and threatened to make those

allegations public with the help of a “freelance writer.” He said the *CBC* fired him because they were of the opinion “that this type of sexual behavior was unbecoming of a prominent host on the *CBC*,” and they did not want to weather the fallout of his private sexual life becoming public. Ghomeshi’s lawyers also announced he would be filing a fifty five million-dollar lawsuit against the *CBC* seeking “...general and punitive damages for breach of confidence and bad faith,” and would file a grievance through his union to be reinstated” (Donovan & Brown, October 26 2014).

There followed an immediate and vocal response from the public, characterized by shock at the salacious news, outrage towards the *CBC* for their decision to fire Ghomeshi, and support for the now former broadcaster, all communicated on his Facebook post and on Twitter as well as in news stories published at that time. Public relations specialist Taylor Mann opined that the reaction might be the one strategically sought through Ghomeshi’s post:

It turns it into more of a PR battle, right, because now it’s not simply um, is this a case of an employer dealing with an employee, but it’s them having to liaise with the public. And, I think his Facebook post has a hundred thousand likes now, nearly 40,000 shares, that is a significant amount of people going to bat for him, or sharing his side of the story and allowing him to control the narrative, which really does play against the *CBC* (...) I think that his strategy has been almost a complete success. (As It Happens, October 27 2014, 52:48)

The *Toronto Star* also responded to the Facebook post by publishing the article it had begun vetting in the summer. In an open letter, editor Michael Cooke explained:

In view of Mr. Ghomeshi’s extraordinary statement on Facebook on Sunday evening, and his high public profile in Canada, we now believe it is in the public interest to detail those allegations, which appear to have led directly to his sudden firing from the *CBC*. (Cooke, October 26 2016)

Put more plainly, Brown would say “... once [Ghomeshi] did that, once he went public, the *Star* could too. (...) Because Jian published, we published. If he hadn’t, we wouldn’t have” (Brown, November 2 2014).

In the article published by the *Toronto Star*, four anonymous women’s allegations of sexual assault by Ghomeshi were outlined:

The three women interviewed by the *Star* allege that Ghomeshi physically attacked them on dates without consent. They allege he struck them with a closed fist or open hand; bit them; choked them until they almost passed out; covered their nose and mouth so that they had difficulty breathing; and that they were verbally abused during and after sex. A fourth woman, who worked at CBC, said Ghomeshi told her at work: “I want to hate f--- you.” (Donovan & Brown, October 26 2014)

The article also explained that the women – younger than Ghomeshi by 20 years—had not filed police complaints because they feared “...they would be sued or would be the object of Internet retaliation” and feared “... a police report would expose their names and worries that their consent or acceptance of fantasy role-play discussions in text or other messages with Ghomeshi would be used against them as evidence of consent to actual violence” (Donovan & Brown, October 26 2014).

The immediate reaction

On Monday October 27, *CBC* staff were busy erasing all reminders of Ghomeshi: “After an oversized portrait of Mr. Ghomeshi in the Canadian Broadcast Centre in Toronto was whitewashed, his visage and name were removed from the *Q* website and social-media feeds” (Haupt, October 31 2014). *Q* itself did not skip a beat, carrying on without its host; producer Brent Bambury hosted the Monday show, opening with a sigh and an essay:

I know for the many of you who love and look forward to the show, this is a very hard day. I understand that because I’m one of those people too. I love *Q* for the same reasons you do. But remember: there are dozens of people who work hard to bring you *Q*. They – individually, and collectively – share in the success of this show. They’re a big part of *Q*’s intellect, and heart. They’re still here. They’re still committed, and they’re determined to bring you the best show they can. And that’s because of you. Without you, without the great *Q* audience and your appetite for cultural conversation, your openness to discovering new things, your willingness to be challenged, *Q* could not exist. So, it is

you, Q listeners, who all the people behind this show work for each day, and that fact will never change. Today we're doing what we do as producers, as broadcasters, and as people. We. Move. Forward. I hope you come with us. (*Q*, October 27 2014)

As for the public, over the two days after Ghomeshi's Facebook post went live they appeared to be struggling to find ways to make sense of the scandal. News articles from those days exemplify this struggle. Some articles explained the sequence of events leading to Ghomeshi's dismissal as they happened, without offering an assessment of the truth or validity of any claims made by either Ghomeshi or his accusers (McCoy, October 27 2014; Kane, October 27 2014). Others selected one facet of the scandal and subjected it to scrutiny, without commenting on the truth of the claims: for instance, whether Ghomeshi could possibly win his lawsuit and if not what its purpose might be (Haupt & Gray, October 27 2014; Krishnan, October 28 2014), or the legal framework around consent and BDSM practices in Canada (Cossman, October 27 2014). In the minority, there were written pieces in which authors were definitive about believing Ghomeshi had sexually assaulted the women who had come forward, and supported their claims: "For the past few days, Ghomeshi has been hard at work trying to create a bias against his as-yet-unnamed accusers—and so far, he seems to be succeeding" (Thériault, October 27 2014); "Jian beats women" (Pallett, October 28 2014).

Overall, the tone of the written pieces made available at the time was perhaps best exemplified by Anna Duckworth's October 28 2014 article "Why I'm waiting to pass judgement on Jian and his accusers": as an acquaintance of Ghomeshi's, the author says she was quick to support him and commented on his Facebook status update when it first came out, but started struggling with her position when she learned of the anonymous women's allegations from the *Toronto Star*, and so resolved – somewhat uncomfortably –not to take sides either way any further.

The alleged victims speak back

On Wednesday October 29th, the *Toronto Star* published an updated version of their earlier article (Donovan and Brown, October 29 2014). It contained many more details of the allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment against Ghomeshi, and featured new

allegations from four women who had not come forward previously and were not connected to each other. One of the women identified herself as Lucy DeCoutere, a Canadian media personality best known for her role on the television series *Trailer Park Boys* and a captain in the Royal Canadian Air Force. A video still of an interview with DeCoutere headed the article, and a portrait of her was the thumbnail image on links made to the article in social media: her face was made to be the face of all the women's stories.

In this updated version of the article, DeCoutere alleged that during a date with Ghomeshi he: "... without warning or consent, choked her to the point she could not breathe and then slapped her hard three times on the side of her head." She said she came forward to media because "... it was time for someone to speak publicly about the matter." Also according to the article, an anonymous woman alleged that when getting a ride to her car from Ghomeshi, he "...reached over to the passenger seat, grabbed her hair and 'yanked it hard'" and on a second occasion at Ghomeshi's home "...without consent he grabbed her hair and pulled her down to the floor. Then, she alleges, he delivered three sharp punches to the side of her head while she lay on the floor." Another anonymous woman alleged she and Ghomeshi had run into each other at a cultural event, then went "for a walk when the event was over and, according to the woman, Ghomeshi attacked her while they were sitting on a bench. He began kissing her forcefully and then "put his hands around my neck and choked me." The authors added that "Two of the women who allege they were physically assaulted also say that before the alleged assaults in his home he introduced them to Big Ears Teddy, a stuffed bear, and he turned the bear around just before he slapped or choked them, saying that 'Big Ears Teddy shouldn't see this,'" (Donovan and Brown, October 29 2014). Prompted by the mention of Big Ears Teddy in the article, followers of the scandal reported Ghomeshi's therapist had recommended he use the stuffed animal to help manage his anxiety disorder, and stumbled on the @BigEarsTeddy Twitter handle and the troubling tweets issued from it earlier that year (Ferreras, October 29 2014).

On the same evening as the updated article was published, one of the anonymous women's allegations were featured in an interview on the *CBC* radio show *As it Happens* (*As it Happens*, October 29 2014). The anonymous woman would later identify herself as Linda Redgrave (Chin, April 19 2016). In the interview, Redgrave recounted her alleged experiences of sexual violence by Ghomeshi, then was asked for her reaction to his Facebook post, in which he

says that any implication that his sexual activities are non-consensual is a lie. To this she responded:

That's what made me... infuriated me, because there was nothing to to prepare me for this. Nothing. There was no talk, other than what I said in the the in the car, when he pulled my hair, I think he mighta been saying do you like it rough but there was no we're going to engage in this type of play. We were we were fully clothed. We weren't having sex. We weren't even. We weren't even at that point (laughing) y'know of y'know in in our our time together, our relationship, so there was nothing, there was -- it came out of nowhere. (As it Happens, October 29 2014, 0:10:30.5).

When asked what she wanted from coming forward with her allegations, the Redgrave said "...now that it's not just me against him, I wish that there was some way that I could press charges against him now, it's been a long time. I don't know that I can anymore" (As it Happens, October 29 2014, 0:12:00.3).

The next morning, an interview with DeCoutere was aired on the *CBC* radio show *The Current* (The Current, October 30 2014). She too was asked for her reaction to Ghomeshi's Facebook post, and she said:

God, it's been so interesting, hasn't it? Um, I've been thinking a lot of things, obviously ah first of all, it was to me the world's smallest surprise. And then I read Jian's rebuttal that was written – I'm presuming by his PR team – on his Facebook page and, the first thing that I thought was this is reading like a guy who's a n- who's literally a narcissist and he is.. because... immediately he puts himself in the position of a victim. He's in grief, because of his father's death. His ex-girlfriend is vindictive because she wanted more of him 'cause he's so luscious, and she made all of her friends turn against him, I'm just like, I was just reading it and I'm like, are you kidding? And then, he's... saying that he is being ostracized because of his sexual preferences, and I'm just like... no... No, this is not... correct! Um, I don't really think anybody cares what Jian does in his own bedroom, unless he's hurting people who don't wanna be hurt. (The Current, October 30 2014, 0:14:28.9)

When asked why she was coming forward with her allegations, she said:

I don't have anything really to gain from Jian, and I don't feel like I have anything to lose from this situation. He's not someone who's in my life. I'm not after anything he has, I don't want to rekindle our_whatever, I'm not looking for his job, I don't want anything that he's got. And also my story to me, to talk about it- it's a little upsetting but it's not traumatic. I wasn't terribly hurt by him, and if the women who are talking about this won't come forward with their names, they're obviously feeling like they'll be targeted in some way and- and that their lives will be impacted negatively. I'm okay with that. (The Current, October 30 2014, 0:15:36.7).

In reaction to DeCoutere's interview, Toronto lawyer and parenting book author Reva Seth wrote an article in which she alleged she had been sexually assaulted by Ghomeshi too -- her article brought the rapidly increasing count of sexual assault allegations against Ghomeshi to nine (Seth, October 30 2014). Breaking his silence, Ghomeshi took to social media long enough to say "I want to thank you for your support and assure you that I intend to meet these allegations directly" (Bradshaw & McArthur, October 31 2014).

The tide turns

The new allegations – in all their detail – sparked a strong reaction in the media. Very few commenters like Christie Blatchford expressed support for Ghomeshi's right to not have allegations of criminal activity levelled anonymously and "tried in the court of public opinion" (Blatchford, October 30 2014). This public support garnered a visceral response from persons like Glen Canning (father to Rehtaeh Parsons, a victim of sexual assault who died by suicide in 2013), who blasted that Blatchford's apologetics for accused sexual assaulters are part of the reasons victims of sexual assault refuse to come forward – anonymously, or at all – and charged "there will probably never be a complaint filed with the police by any of the women involved. Why would they bother? The system's a joke" (Canning, October 30 2014). Even colleagues of Blatchford challenged her, pointing out the many allegations against Ghomeshi seemed to reveal a compelling pattern:

Eight women, ostensibly strangers, echo the same chilling pattern. For many, it starts with the charm. Then, Ghomeshi offers an excuse to head back to his place — his contacts are bothering him, a tour of his new house, he needed to discuss something

important — where he catches them off guard, they allege, with a fist, a slap or a hand around the neck. Two of the women reported Ghomeshi turning around his teddy bear, which he dubbed Big Ears Teddy, saying, “Big Ears Teddy shouldn’t see this.” And in almost every case, the women say they either ended up on their knees, or were forced down on them. (Urback, October 30 2014)

It is the details of the accounts that are persuasive for Urback, who concludes “It is a stretch to suggest that these women have meticulously plotted to take down the once-star, and further, that Lucy DeCoutere would lend her name and her reputation to the allegations” (Urback, October 30 2014). Vinay Menon commented that it was the very court of public opinion derided by Blatchford and others that made it possible for women to come forward:

On Sunday night, the jury was split. By Friday, the evidence seemed overwhelming: a monster had been lurking in the spotlight for years. What we heard was ugly and unsettling. The bit about Big Ears Teddy made us nostalgic for the more innocent days of Rob Ford smoking crack. (Menon, November 1 2014)

Similarly, a column by popular sex and relationship columnist Dan Savage was widely recirculated: it featured an account of a woman who reached out to him because she wanted to support Ghomeshi with her story of consensual BDSM sex with him, but Savage strongly challenged her characterization in light of the allegations of the women who had spoken with the *Toronto Star*:

My theory is that Ghomeshi's MO has been to initiate rough sex—become violent in the lead-up to a sexual encounter—and that he either believes or intends to argue that *this* was how he got a woman's consent. If he became violent and they didn't respond negatively or didn't leave or if they returned, he saw that as consent. If they reacted negatively, if they were unhappy, he stopped.

The problem with that? Or one of the many problems with that? Only an idiot or a sociopath would interpret actions that could be read one way or another—she came back because she likes this kind of roughness, she came back because she's starstruck and is willing to overlook or hopes to deflect this kind of roughness—as consent to the kind of

extreme shit Ghomeshi apparently enjoys. Only an idiot or a sociopath would interpret someone's vague and non-verbal consent to some mild roughness ("I pulled her hair and two weeks later she came back to my apartment...") as consent to being *punched repeatedly in the head with a closed fist*. (Savage, October 27 2014)

Others writers discussed the lawsuit Ghomeshi was levelling against the *CBC*, and concluded it was based on frivolous grounds and must have been serving an ulterior motive. For instance, Howard Levitt explained he thought the lawsuit was most likely a strategic public relations tactic against the *CBC* which would get "his story onto the public record, without any possible recourse" explaining: "Statements of claim are privileged; through this claim, Ghomeshi, like any litigant, can get anything he wishes onto the public record with absolute legal impunity." More disturbingly, Levitt suggested the \$55-million action might also have been intended to deter other anonymous accusers from going public and risking a civil suit of their own, effectively silencing them (Levitt, October 28 2014).

The change in tone in the public reaction was also recorded in social media. On Facebook, Ghomeshi's original post was losing *likes*, with a marked drop numbered in the thousands between Wednesday October 29th and Thursday October 30th, and remained on a downward trend, prompting commenters to call it a "classic tipping point for anger around the treatment of women that has been on a slow boil for the better part of a year and is now bubbling over" (Boesveld, October 31 2014). On Twitter, tags such as #IBelieveLucy and #BeenRapedNeverReported emerged as a response to DeCoutere's account, and survivors of sexual assault came forward in droves to share their support for the women alleging they had been assaulted by Ghomeshi, as well as to share their personal stories of assault and their reasons for not reporting (Zerbisias & Montgomery, November 4 2014). The #BeenRapedNeverReported tag in particular was used nearly 20,000 times between October 30th and 31st (*CBC News*, October 31 2014). Some commenters sought to characterize the narrative that emerged on social media using quantitative means (Gormley, October 30 2014), while others followed a single user through their rapidly changing reactions over the week in an effort to exemplify the narrative (Allen, November 1 2014). Social media also remained the means by which DeCoutere communicated with the public. Noting she was surprised at the kindness she was receiving

rather than the vilification she had expected, she invited sexual assault survivors to continue speaking about their stories:

If you have been carrying a secret, now is a good time to share it with someone you trust. If that person is me, I'll keep your story safe. That is what private messages are for. #ibelieveyou #ibelievereva #ibelievelucy.” (Jancelewicz, October 31 2014)

One by one, from October 30 into October 31 Ghomeshi’s professional relationships were severed, including with: Navigator (a public relations and crisis management firm); The Agency (a live booking agency); Penguin Random House Canada (the intended publisher of Ghomeshi’s upcoming children’s book); and Rock-It Promotions (Ghomeshi’s publicity company). Even his former bandmates from Moxy Früvous and musician Lights (whose career was managed by Ghomeshi) publicly distanced themselves from Ghomeshi through social media (Donovan & Gallant, October 31 2014). Even former guests of *Q* were signing petitions explicitly in support of the women making allegations against Ghomeshi (MacNeil, October 31 2014).

Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair took to media to invite witnesses of the alleged sexual assaults (which, in sexual assault cases, often means survivors of sexual assault themselves) to come forward to file a report, without which an investigation could not take place (Visser, October 30 2014). The outreach was successful: by November 1, *CBC News* would confirm 3 women had filed formal complaints with police (“Jian Ghomeshi investigators hear from,” November 1 2014).

The public discussion

Over the next three weeks, details of the scandal continued to unfold: it was hard to read the news without encountering numerous Ghomeshi scandal-related articles. And, in a stark shift in tone from the first days after he was fired, Ghomeshi’s name became synonymous with ‘sexual predator.’ One of the reasons this is so is that new allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment by Ghomeshi kept emerging. Allegations from three women who were current or former employees at *Q* were published on November 4 2014 (“More workplace allegations made,” November 4 2014). A former fellow student from York University who

worked for Ghomeshi while the latter was president of the student federation alleged he “grabbed [his] genitals and fondled them” and recalled that even back then Ghomeshi was widely thought to be a “sexual predator” (Donovan & Hasham, November 4 2014). The *Globe and Mail* reported Ghomeshi had had an inappropriate relationship with a female teenaged Moxy Früvous fan between 1999 and 2002. Reportedly, when the by-then 19 year old woman broke into Ghomeshi’s email account in anger in 2002, he retaliated by pushing for her to be banned from the band’s fan community and punished by her college (whose Internet servers she had used to access his account). He reportedly only relented when the young woman’s father called him, confronting him with the inappropriate nature of their relationship (Doolittle, November 15 2014).

Similarly, accounts of a ‘culture of fear’ around Ghomeshi at the *CBC* due to his reportedly temperamental nature circulated, and curious readers found this corroborated by a rediscovered document authored collectively by *Q* staffers, codenamed the “Red Sky” document; while it was eventually shared with management and Ghomeshi himself in an effort to address that ‘culture of fear’ and poor working conditions, few changes were ultimately brought to the workplace (Bradshaw & McArthur, November 6 2014). Forced to address the growing number of criticisms of how it handled Ghomeshi as an employee, the *CBC* announced it hired Janice Rubin to lead an independent investigation into how it had handled the allegations against Ghomeshi in the workplace (*CBC News*, November 4 2014).

More unflattering and even concerning portraits of Ghomeshi were painted at this time. For instance, Donovan continued to make new details of his share of the *Toronto Star* journalistic investigation available for readers. One of the more memorable such articles featured Donovan’s account of his last attempt to get Ghomeshi’s side of the story while investigating the allegations. In the article, Donovan recalls a number of specific details of his experience with Ghomeshi: that Ghomeshi’s handshake was “moist and limp;” that he seemed pleased when Donovan reassured him that he was not fat; that Ghomeshi appeared to have an emotional tantrum from the stress of being asked about the allegations; and that Ghomeshi allegedly told Donovan he had no story to pursue, and he ought to back down because, as Donovan reports him saying: “People in this city need to understand that I have a long memory. You need to understand that and be very, very careful” (Donovan, November 2 2014).

In some articles, Ghomeshi was depicted as having likely — if not certainly — done the things he was alleged to have done, and his personal character was described as an extrapolation from that. Candace Plattor wrote that the public could no longer think of Ghomeshi as a successful “ladies man,” but could only now recognize him as a man who “may have been thinking and acting like a spoiled child who totally believes the world revolves around him -- and that he may feel completely entitled to have all of his needs met, sexual and otherwise” (Plattor, November 7 2014). Michael Laxer went further, calling Ghomeshi a “predator,” as well as a “misogynist, alleged serial abuser” who was able to “rise to and feel comfortable within the halls of media and fame, despite the now known and clear indications that he abused his power with women all along and that many, many people could have done something about it but did not” (Laxer, November 10 2014). Others like psychologist Gabor Maté offered a diagnosis for Ghomeshi’s alleged criminal behaviour, saying that his thinly-veiled “narcissism” was just an instance of a wider social problem of “narcissistic male rage” towards women, and referred to Ghomeshi as an “apparently disturbed and charismatic individual” that had inflicted pain on others (Maté, November 5 2014). Similarly, a forensic psychologist identifying themselves as having examined sexually-motivated serial killers including Paul Bernardo, Robert Pickton, and Russell Williams, opined about Ghomeshi’s alleged behaviour, saying that persons can develop a preference for non-consensual sex, then expressed curiosity in what meaning Big Ears Teddy might actually hold for Ghomeshi (Smith Cross, November 14 2014). In short, calling Ghomeshi all variations on “sexual predator” or presenting him adjacent to infamous sexual criminals gained momentum, given the volume and frequency with which it occurred or was intimated at this time.

Most of the other articles at the time reflected a concern with how to make sense of the scandal. Some writers agonized over how to tell children the story about a “talented, successful and harmless-seeming man who used his charm to attract women, and then, according to their accounts, surprise them with acts of violence” (Kay, November 4 2014); others publicly flogged themselves for being silently complicit in their knowledge of Ghomeshi’s likely abuse of women: “In Jian’s case, you didn’t know, of course. But you knew” (Wilson, November 4 2014). Many articles involved critical feminist appraisals of the public discourse found in media and social media around the Ghomeshi scandal. For instance, Catherine Porter presented sexual assault as a systemic crime, offering five “rape myths” reflected in the Ghomeshi scandal, and

thanking the women who came forward with their allegations for challenging the myths (Porter, November 1 2014). Similarly, many articles discussed the scope of sexual assault as a social problem (Shafi, November 2 2014), or emphasized the role of men in resolving it (Webster, November 8 2014), or spoke to the prevalence of the topic of sexual assault as a social problem in the mind of the public (Chapin, November 18 2014).

Charges laid

On Tuesday November 25 2014, the cacophony having barely subsided, Ghomeshi's Facebook account was deleted without warning, and his Twitter feed scrubbed. The fifty-five million-dollar lawsuit against the *CBC* was dropped, and Ghomeshi agreed to pay the broadcaster \$18,000 in legal costs (Donovan, Alamenciak & Ormsby, November 26 2014).

The next day, Toronto police announced Ghomeshi was being charged with multiple counts of sexual assault and one count of overcome resistance – choking related to three complainants, of which one was DeCoutere. He faced a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison for each sexual assault charge, and life imprisonment for the choking charge. Ghomeshi surrendered to police and posted \$100,000 bail. The conditions of his release included that:

“he must live with his mother, cannot have any contact with the complainants and must stay at least 500 metres away from them. He has also been banned from possessing any firearms and has already surrendered his passport. He has been ordered to stay in Ontario.” (Visser, Alcoba & Warnica, November 26 2014)

At his bail hearing, a crush of reporters met Ghomeshi and his legal team headed by Marie Henein, who refused to comment on the case in the media beyond saying Ghomeshi would plead not guilty: taking up Ghomeshi's earlier Facebook comment about meeting the women's allegations directly, Henein said “We will defend and respond to these allegations fully and directly in a court of law” (Gallant, Benzie, Donovan & Ballingall, November 26 2014).

On December 2 2014, the woman who had alleged she had been sexually harassed while working at *Q* (and one of the original four accounts Brown brought to the *Toronto Star* in May 2014) identified herself as Kathryn Borel in an article she wrote for *The Guardian* (Borel,

December 2 2014). The article delivered a scathing indictment of her experience of bringing her sexual harassment allegations to *CBC* management, to no avail.

The 2014 year closed out with a few retrospective pieces related to the Ghomeshi scandal, such as the one by the editorial board at the *Toronto Star*, which indicated that the scandal around Ghomeshi appeared to have changed the public discourse around violence against women and sexual assault more particularly in Canada. It encouraged survivors of sexual assault to come forward with their stories, as “no longer would the court of public opinion side with a powerful man against alleged victims.” The article closes with the following:

Whether the victims were young or old, whether the crimes perpetrated against them were recent or decades past, the stories pointed to one thing: they mattered. As for perpetrators — no matter how privileged — they didn’t. And if the signposts in the events of 2014 are any signal, there will be no turning back. (“The good news on women’s,” December 29 2014)

A quiet year: 2015

On January 5 2015 the *CBC* announced Todd Spencer and Chris Boyd, the two executives who had first learned of the allegations against Ghomeshi, were placed on indefinite leaves of absence (Haupt, January 5 2015). Three days later, three more charges of sexual assault against Ghomeshi from three new complainants, including Borel, were announced by police (“Jian Ghomeshi case: Ex-CBC,” January 8 2015).

In mid-April, the *CBC* announced it had fired Spencer and Boyd just before releasing the heavily redacted final report of the external investigation into the *CBC*’s policies and practices in the wake of the Ghomeshi scandal. The report concluded that a number of factors conspired to create an environment in which Ghomeshi’s abusive workplace behaviour was permitted to thrive, including that managers at *Q* condoned it by their lack of response to staff complaints (Haupt, April 16 2015).

On May 12 2015, a closed-door preliminary hearing came to an end, and two sexual assault charges were dropped because, as the Crown prosecutor put it, there was “no reasonable prospect of conviction on the two dropped charges” (Hasham, May 12 2015). Of the remaining

charges, four sexual assault charges and the charge of overcome resistance – choking were to be tried in February 2016, and a fifth remaining sexual assault charge was to be tried separately in June 2016 (Hasham, May 12 2015).

The only clue as to what Ghomeshi was doing during this time was offered in an article by Leah McLaren (McLaren, June 17 2015). In the article, McLaren presents herself as a former friend of Ghomeshi's, and leaves no doubt as to whether she thought Ghomeshi had hurt women:

What's startling about the allegations against Jian is not that a seemingly law-abiding person is accused of doing terrible things. That happens all the time. It's the way Jian wove the most cherished and sacred liberal values of Canadian society into an ingenious disguise that he used to hide in plain sight. He was a wolf in organic, fair-trade lamb's clothing. One woman I spoke to for this story who is now accusing Jian of sexual assault believes his persona was a deliberate cover for his predatory behaviour. (McLaren, June 17 2015)

McLaren described her experience of “being torn between the charismatic person we knew and the predatory über-villain portrayed in the media,” but said the “volume of accusations crushed any lingering doubt.” McLaren said Ghomeshi had been busy building a team of about 10 to 20 loyal persons who visited with and supported him, including Sarah Bobas whom she identifies as a former girlfriend of Ghomeshi's and “a key member of his inner circle” (McLaren, June 17 2015). McLaren also says:

Some of the women now accusing Jian of sexual assault allege that after the story broke, Bobas contacted them in a friendly manner—as a fellow ex-girlfriend of Jian's—to ask whether they were planning to go to the media or the police. They suspected Bobas was pumping them for information, under the guise of considering her own options, in order to feed it back to Jian. (McLaren, June 17 2015)

Reportedly, Bobas denies this allegation.

McLaren added that an anonymous member of Ghomeshi's support team said: “Jian's life post-bail has been quiet, a period of self-reflection and introspection” in which “he spends his

days at his place in the Beach, reading, watching movies and working out” (McLaren, June 17 2015). He also said Ghomeshi “is in fighting form, ready for an epic battle against what he perceives to be a pernicious conspiracy of deranged ex-girlfriends enabled by a corrupt and envious media” (McLaren, June 17 2015).

The remainder of the year passed relatively quietly in the media. Very few articles related to the scandal were published, and included perfunctory updates on the trial (for example, *Canadian Press*, October 1 2015) and retrospective pieces on the anniversary of the scandal breaking (for example Leventhal, November 5 2015).

A new year: 2016

By the end of January 2016, anticipation grew for Ghomeshi’s first court date to answer to the first set of charges, namely four of the five counts of sexual assault and one count of overcome resistance -- choking.

The first trial began on February 1 2016 and ended on February 11 2016, with presiding Judge William Horkins reserving judgement until March 24 2016 (Gollom, March 23 2016). Every day of the proceedings was covered closely by Canadian media, and the court proceedings were even live-tweeted by multiple media outlets including *CBC* and the *Canadian Press*. The case featured the testimony of three alleged victims, the first of which was Linda Redgrave and the second Lucy DeCoutere.

Each alleged victim experienced a cross-examination that devastated their credibility: after swearing she had had no contact with Ghomeshi since her second alleged assault at his hands, the Redgrave said she forgot she had “baited” Ghomeshi with an emailed picture of herself in a bikini in the hopes of getting him “to explain to her why he had punched her in the head”; DeCoutere asserted many times she had had no romantic interest in Ghomeshi, which was challenged by flirty and sexually suggestive emails presented as evidence by the defense, as well as a blue hand-written love letter dating from just after the alleged assault against her; and the third witness failed to disclose to police that she had had a sexual encounter with Ghomeshi “days after the alleged assault,” and had also had extensive communication with DeCoutere in the months leading up to the trial, and thus it could not be ruled out that they had colluded.

These inconsistencies, among others highlighted by the defense team, led Justice Horkins to conclude:

The success of this prosecution depended entirely on the Court being able to accept each complainant as a sincere, honest and accurate witness. Each complainant was revealed at trial to be lacking in these important attributes. The evidence of each complainant suffered not just from inconsistencies and questionable behaviour, but was tainted by outright deception.

The harsh reality is that once a witness has been shown to be deceptive and manipulative in giving their evidence, that witness can no longer expect the Court to consider them to be a trusted source of the truth. I am forced to conclude that it is impossible for the Court to have sufficient faith in the reliability or sincerity of these complainants. Put simply, the volume of serious deficiencies in the evidence leaves the Court with a reasonable doubt.

(...)

I have no hesitation in concluding that the quality of the evidence in this case is incapable of displacing the presumption of innocence. The evidence fails to prove the allegations beyond a reasonable doubt. (R.v. Ghomeshi, March 24 2016)

In short, since in Horkins's judgement the witnesses were not reliable and the sincerity of their motives was in doubt, Ghomeshi was found not guilty of all charges.

The second trial that never was

Ghomeshi's second sexual assault trial never came to pass. In a move that surprised many observers, the Crown prosecution and Ghomeshi's defense negotiated a deal whereby Ghomeshi would publicly apologize to Borel – the complainant in the last sexual assault charge – and sign a twelve-month peace bond if the Crown dropped its last charge of sexual assault. The terms of the peace bond included that Ghomeshi could not have any contact with Borel, and could not possess any weapons: agreement to these terms meant that Ghomeshi would not be accepting criminal responsibility or risk having a sexual assault conviction on his criminal record, and

Borel would not have to testify on the stand (Haupt, May 11 2016). The Crown's decision to accept this form of resolution was partly informed by Ghomeshi having sought and received ongoing therapy from an unnamed psychotherapist, according to whom their therapeutic sessions began on November 12 2014, and were ongoing at the time of the signing of the peace bond (Donovan & Hasham, May 13 2016).

On Wednesday May 11 2016, (that is, about two years since Ghomeshi originally spoke to his *CBC* bosses about possible allegations of sexual assault against him) Ghomeshi broke his long-held silence to offer Borel a public apology in court, saying he was deeply regretful and embarrassed to not have "...always lead by example" in the workplace and that he had "failed to understand and truly appreciate the impact of my conduct on Ms. Borel's work environment." He acknowledged "that I crossed boundaries inappropriately" and "did not appreciate the damage that I caused, and I recognize that no workplace friendship or creative environment excuses this sort of behaviour, especially when there is a power imbalance as there was with Ms. Borel." Importantly, Ghomeshi said he had "...reflected deeply and have been working hard to address the attitudes that led me, at the time, to think that this was acceptable" but this apology only referenced the incident with Borel that led to the sexual assault charge ("Read Jian Ghomeshi's full apology," May 11 2016c).

Outside the courthouse, Borel responded to Ghomeshi's apology with a public statement of her own. Explaining the corroborating evidence for her allegations, she said: "when I spoke to the police at the end of 2014 and detailed my experiences with Mr. Ghomeshi, they confirmed to me what he did to me was, in fact, sexual assault. And that's what Jian Ghomeshi just apologized for, the crime of sexual assault." She explained her experiences:

Every day over the course of a three-year period, Mr. Ghomeshi made it clear to me that he could do what he wanted to me and my body. He made it clear that he could humiliate me repeatedly and walk away with impunity.

Throughout the time that I worked with him, he framed his actions with near-daily verbal assaults and emotional manipulations these inferences felt like threats or declarations like

I deserved to have happening to me what was happening to me. It became very difficult for me to trust what I was feeling.

Up until recently, I didn't even internalize that what he was doing to my body was sexual assault. Because when I went to the CBC for help, what I received in return was a directive that, yes, he could do this and, yes, it was my job to let him. The relentless message to me from my celebrity boss and the national institution we worked for were that his whims were more important than my humanity or my dignity. (“Jian Ghomeshi sex assault,” May 11 2016b)

Borel further explained why she agreed to the peace bond: “...when it was presented to me that the defence would be offering us an apology, I was prepared to forego the trial. It seemed like the clearest path to the truth. A trial would have maintained his lie, the lie that he was not guilty and it would have further subjected me to the very same pattern of abuse that I am currently trying to stop.” She pointed out that Ghomeshi had never answered any of the other alleged victims’ claims “head on as he vowed to do in his Facebook post of 2014. He hasn't taken the stand on any charge. All he has said about his other accusers is that they're all lying and that he's not guilty. And remember, that's what he said about me” (“Jian Ghomeshi sex assault,” May 11 2016b). Following her statement, *CBC* publicly apologized to her for its role in permitting Ghomeshi’s sexually assaultive behaviour in the workplace (“Jian Ghomeshi sex assault,” May 11 2016b)

Final Words

So ended Ghomeshi’s criminal legal troubles. He kept a fairly low profile after his public apology, until April 2017 when he announced his new podcast with an unceremonious tweet:

“Hi. For those interested, here is something I’ve been working on...
<http://TheIdeationProject.com>” (Ghomeshi, April 10 2017).

While the full cultural impact of the Ghomeshi scandal is difficult to gauge, and what lies ahead for Ghomeshi personally and professionally has yet to be seen, he has retained some

fiercely loyal fans who say the criminal trials vindicated Ghomeshi, as well as equally fierce critics who continue to call him a sexual predator and say he got away with his crimes.

The strength and rapidity with which attitudes about Ghomeshi and the scandal changed – that is, what people believed about the alleged sexual assaults and Ghomeshi’s person – is striking. The tumultuous currents in the public discourse surrounding the Ghomeshi scandal can in part be explained as a response to Ghomeshi’s own Facebook post. In the next chapter, I will be examining that post in more detail.

Chapter 2: Examining Ghomeshi's Facebook Post

On October 26 2014, Jian Ghomeshi took to social media to announce he was fired by the *CBC*. More specifically, his 1,586-word public Facebook status update explained that he figured in a burgeoning sex scandal and that the *CBC* dismissed him because it feared the scandal would harm its reputation (for the full text of the post, see Appendix 2). The structure, rhetorical positioning, and style of the post evidence the care with which it was composed. With his revelations, Ghomeshi opened a public discourse, and from the position of being the first to offer his account, he was also free to cast his story in whatever manner he chose. Importantly, as the first communicative act in a series of sequential communicative actions between Ghomeshi and members of the public, this Facebook post also informed much of the public responses that followed: understanding what was said and how it was said in this post is necessary to better understand the public response.

For this purpose, I will treat the text as though Ghomeshi authored it himself. It is impossible to verify whether this is actually the case or whether he hired someone else to author it, as Ghomeshi had the public relations firm Navigator in his employ at the time (Kingston, December 10 2014). In any case, given that the essay was posted to Ghomeshi's social media profile, it is probably fair to assume he at the very least approved posting the message. Given his reported propensity for taking credit for authoring audio essays actually composed by his producers while on *Q* (as discussed in Chapter 1 and as seen in line 17 of his post where he calls them "...my audio essays..."), and that the text is written in the first person, it is probably fair to assume the authorship of the text was intended to be attributed to him.

In this chapter, I will offer an analysis of what was said and to what effect in this Facebook post: this interpretation is the product of a discourse analysis.

On Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis can be defined as a "[d]etailed exploration of political, personal, media or academic 'talk' and 'writing' about a subject, designed to reveal how knowledges are organized, carried and reproduced in particular ways and through particular institutional practices" (Muncie, 2011, p75). In other words, they are examinations of how language is used to generate an account of reality, with attention paid to what effect it achieves and by what

means. It can be contrasted with “examples which have been invented by the linguist or which have been found in textbooks” for the purposes of analysis (Mills, 2004, p122).

The principles for generating a discourse analysis can vary depending on the sorts of data being examined and for what purpose it is being effected, but typically it involves considering any amount of talk or text as a social practice meaningful for the speaker and their audience. It also involves identifying the “processes of action, construction and variability” and “recognizing the rhetorical or argumentative organization of talk and texts” by which they become meaningful (Muncie, 2011, p75). The goal is to locate particular items as part of ongoing speech or text as a whole, rather than their meaning or interpretation in isolation from one another (Mills, 2004, p123). This method belongs to the family of narrative analysis among qualitative methods insofar as it involves examining how people use language to elaborate versions of reality.

A properly executed discourse analysis allows a researcher to produce an interpretation of the examined ‘talk’ or ‘writing’ which is available to be challenged. It

allows us to discuss, compare and challenge multiple readings and the processes through which they were arrived at. The methodology of discourse analysis then emphasizes the importance of being reflexive and open to competing knowledge claims. The avoidance of formulaic analyses and commitment to be open to the new insights that a particular text/talk might provide remain vital. (Muncie, 2011, p76)

Care must be given, then, to ground any discourse analysis in the observable details of a length of ‘talk’ or ‘text.’

In this chapter, then, I will elaborate my interpretation of what Ghomeshi accomplished with his Facebook post and how he managed to do so, referring back to the text frequently to justify my account.

Ghomeshi’s Facebook Post

A few preliminary words on structure, familiarity, and emotions in the post

Early in the essay, every sentence or two are broken up into paragraphs, visually emphasizing any statements Ghomeshi makes without preamble and heightening their impact. Statements such as “Today, I was fired from the CBC” (line 9) and “As friends and family of

mine, you are owed the truth” (line 35) form their own paragraphs and stand apart from the rest of the text: the reader’s gaze readily falls on these segments of text such that even a casual reader can easily seize and stitch together their meaning. They are short, dramatic in what they reveal, and command attention. In contrast, the details of the sex scandal Ghomeshi says he disclosed to the *CBC* are buried in long carefully worded paragraphs in the middle of the text, and do not lend themselves to the same easy reading.

The text is also rendered in Ghomeshi’s familiar style: fans of *Q* could expect to hear Ghomeshi deliver a daily essay on the radio show, and as mentioned above they often incorrectly attributed authorship to him. Broken up in short paragraphs in simple language, and with the frequent use of run-on sentences, reading the post takes on a cadence reminiscent of a radio script much like Ghomeshi would have used while delivering essays on *Q*: uncannily, readers attending to the text closely would read it as Ghomeshi would sound.

The text further leverages readers’ feelings of familiarity by Ghomeshi’s personal approach: the essay is addressed to “Dear everyone” (line 1) and he opens with “...I want you to be the first to know some news” (line 3): this manages to address a wide audience – literally everyone – yet employs a personal address. Ghomeshi also deploys the cultural capital on which his career is based with both popular and obscure literary references, while also letting readers in on a personal joke: “We joked about our relations being like a mild form of *Fifty Shades of Grey* or a story from Lynn Coady’s Giller-Prize winning book last year” (line 51-53). The content of the essay is rendered immediate by the use of the present verb tense in direct addresses to readers: “As friends and family of mine, you are owed the truth” (line 35). The sum of these discursive choices invokes a kind of personal intimacy, like that of a familiar friend making a confession or telling a secret.

Ghomeshi also makes a few appeals to readers’ emotions. He twice mentions his pain from the recent death of his father, once at the beginning and once at the end of the essay (line 5 and line 130); he also closes the essay saying—rather offensively given the murder of a soldier during the attack on Parliament Hill a mere four days before – that he has “...always tried to be a good soldier and do a good job for my country” (lines 135-136). The first appeal calls on readers to sympathize with Ghomeshi’s personal loss; the second calls on the strong feelings of grief stirred by the recent national tragedy.

All these discursive strategies call up and reinforce readers' personal relationship with Ghomeshi. As Dr Lise Gotell has suggested in an interview, Ghomeshi's relationship to his listeners is an intimate connection characterized by positive feelings fostered over years of consistent contact with his work: "We have a relationship with Jian Ghomeshi. We listen to him every day. He's in our homes and he's like a member of the family" (Porter, November 1 2014).

In the post, Ghomeshi also elicits emotion by contrasting his past positive emotions and laudable personal carriage with his current negative emotions and unfair treatment from the *CBC*. From lines 15 to 21, he writes of his efforts to "maintain a dignity and a commitment to openness and truth" his "love for this country" and his championing of the *CBC*. In the next, dramatic, one-line paragraph on line 23, he says "All this has now changed" and in the next paragraph, he evokes harsh and even forceful language in saying he has been "stripped from my show, barred from the building and separated from my colleagues" (line 26). The one sentence paragraph acts as a fulcrum that emphasises the stark contrast between the past and present. The appeal to emotions does not merely characterize Ghomeshi's behaviour and that of the *CBC* as good and bad, respectively: it also casts him as victimized by the *CBC*.

This same effort to present himself as a blighted but laudable hero can also be seen when Ghomeshi carefully avoids using negatively charged language to describe his own choices and behaviour. For example, rather than saying "I am suing the *CBC*" Ghomeshi writes "I have commenced legal proceedings against the *CBC*" (line 37); rather than saying "I enjoy BDSM" he says "I have always been interested in a variety of activities in the bedroom" (line 42). Both verbose formulations cushion the revelations, making their potentially less palatable meaning more digestible.

Ghomeshi reminds readers that he "co-created" the show *Q* (line 11) and that it is his "pride and joy" (line 12), and is "something beautiful" (line 13). The choice of words is endearing: they could just as easily be spoken by a parent of their beloved child. Interestingly, Ghomeshi then acknowledges the role of *Q*'s "fantastic team" that is "super-talented" in helping to create the show, but refers to it as "My fantastic team": the use of the possessive pronoun subtly reminds readers that however talented the *Q* team members may be, they worked under Ghomeshi's leadership. This has the effect of emphasising Ghomeshi's identification with the show and its success and reducing the *Q* team's contribution to that of a helping role. This

subtly back-handed praise is repeated at the end of the text in the closing paragraph (lines 133-135). The act of publicly complimenting “his team” veils from readers any antipathy between the *Q* team members and Ghomeshi – in either direction. It also makes any objections or challenges the *Q* team might raise more difficult to level against him without having to also account for a whole different narrative about what was happening behind the scenes at *Q*.

Trustworthiness

While the tone of the text elicits an emotional response and positive feelings of familiarity towards Ghomeshi, its substance contains a sustained effort at depicting him in the best possible light. Most notably, a lot of space in the text is devoted to establishing Ghomeshi as trustworthy. Early on, he says

15. I have always operated on the principle of doing my best to maintain a dignity and a
16. commitment to openness and truth, both on and off the air. I have conducted major
17. interviews, supported Canadian talent, and spoken out loudly in my audio essays about
18. ideas, issues, and my love for this country. All of that is available for anyone to hear or
19. watch. I have known, of course, that not everyone always agrees with my opinions or my
20. style, but I've never been anything but honest.

In this paragraph, Ghomeshi’s trustworthiness is hung on the body of work for which he is known: what he does off the air is not actually available to be reviewed by his fans; what he does in the public eye that can be reviewed does not necessarily shed light on what he does in private; but by equating who he is off the air with his on-air persona, Ghomeshi invites readers to overlook the fact they do not actually know him personally and consider him as they would his persona. This is reinforced by the familiar tone Ghomeshi employs throughout the post.

After establishing that his work is representative of his person, Ghomeshi sets up the scandal he is revealing with a style that builds anticipation:

25. (...) I
26. was given the choice to walk away quietly and to publicly suggest that this was my
27. decision. But I am not going to do that. Because that would be untrue. Because I’ve been
28. fired. And because I’ve done nothing wrong.

Not only to readers learn here that Ghomeshi has been unfairly treated, but there appears to be something nefarious going on: the choice he says he was given demonstrates dishonesty on the *CBC*'s part, which is starker in contrast to the honesty Ghomeshi affects when he claims to be bringing their dishonesty to light.

Ghomeshi further weights his claims to being trustworthy by repeating that he is sharing what happened because the readers “are owed the truth” (line 35), “what’s important to me is that you know what happened and why” (lines 37-38), that the post is intended to bring the scandal into the light (lines 92-93), and that “I am telling you this story in the hopes that the truth will, finally, conquer all” (100-101). By repeatedly emphasizing that he is making a public account for the benefit of the reader, Ghomeshi frames them into the story: this calls on them to be witnesses and arbiters of the truth. Moreover, should they agree his account is truthful, it would mean Ghomeshi must be a teller of the truth. In other words, by being framed into Ghomeshi’s Facebook post, readers are asked to validate – and therefore become complicit in – Ghomeshi’s account by their agreement (or for want of that, by their silence).

Also, in Ghomeshi’s recounting of how he came to be fired, he is not the only person to attest to his trustworthiness: he also has other persons speak to the truth of the allegations against him, indirectly. In three instances, he says:

71. Increasingly,

72. female friends and ex-girlfriends of mine told me about these attempts to smear me.

79. Everyone

80. contacted would ask the same question, if I had engaged in non-consensual behavior why

81. was the place to address this the media?

84. “One assumes they recognized these attempts

85. to recast my sexual behaviour were fabrications.

In the first excerpt, Ghomeshi makes inferentially available that if the women in his life who know him well enough to be his friends try to protect him from those who would harm him, he must be of good character and trustworthy with women more generally, and therefore any

allegations against him cannot be true. In the second excerpt, Ghomeshi points readers to the question “Everyone” is asking, which is a way of asking the reader to answer the question for themselves since they cannot ask the anonymous women for an answer: in turn, readers answer the rhetorical question using whatever resources they have at their disposal, including the sparse information presented by Ghomeshi himself – and that information does not lend itself to a generous understanding of the women’s motives. Asking the rhetorical question “Everyone” is asking plants a seed of doubt about the intentions of the women making allegations against him without Ghomeshi being personally responsible for asking – or answering—the question. The third excerpt refers to the *Toronto Star*’s choice to not publish the allegations in the summer of 2014, well before the scandal broke. Without naming them specifically, their reputation is leveraged to suggest that if a reputable paper set aside the story of the allegations, that is tantamount to them saying there is no story to report and so there must be no truth to the allegations against him: although an open letter from the editor of the *Toronto Star* would eventually say otherwise (as seen in Chapter 1), at the time of Ghomeshi’s post a reader could be forgiven for coming to the same conclusion.

Anticipating and steering the discourse

It is only after Ghomeshi establishes that he was fired unjustly and that he is trustworthy that he begins to unfold the allegations against him. Ghomeshi demonstrates he is aware his sexual proclivities are non-normative and anticipates they may invite condemnation: he prefaces his account by asking for readers’ forgiveness, saying “Forgive me if what follows may be shocking to some” (line 40), but his apologies end there. Ghomeshi inoculates himself against potential censure by taking the words out of his prospective critics’ mouths, making it unnecessary for them to be repeated by saying: “Let me be the first to say that my tastes in the bedroom may not be palatable to some folks” (lines 121-122). Moreover, any moral superiority a reader may feel, given his situation and admitted sexual proclivities, is flattened when they are reminded they are equally guilty of having parts of themselves they would not make public, saying: “We all have our secret life” (line 123).

Ghomeshi minimizes the impact of sharing his “shocking” sexual behaviour. The number of details offered to characterize this behaviour are limited, contained in the paragraph

between lines 46 and 55: these details are tucked neatly into the second longest paragraph in the text, and the longest in the text up to that point. A casual reader could understandably scan the content of that paragraph rather than give it a close critical read. In this paragraph, Ghomeshi refers to engaging in “adventurous forms of sex that included role-play, dominance, and submission” (48-49); “rough sex” (49); “using safe words” (50); and refers to “a mild form of *Fifty Shades of Grey* or a story from Lynn Coady’s Giller-Prize winning book” (52-53). In all these instances of uses of vague terms employing a repertoire of terms referring to kinky sex practices, readers are given enough detail to characterize his sexual behaviour, but are left to imagine what it may involve more specifically. The cultural references offered are clues to fill in the blanks Ghomeshi does not fill himself.

Ghomeshi defends his elusiveness in discussing his sexual proclivities by invoking his rights to free sexual expression and privacy: using the present tense, he proclaims: “it is truly not anyone’s business what two consenting adults do” (line 54) and “Sexual preferences are a human right” (line 55). Elsewhere in the text, he uses many euphemisms to refer to his sexual activities: he refers to his “private sex life” (line 31), his “private life” (line 55, line 123, line 125), “acts in the bedroom” (line 94), his “private affairs” (line 105), “what I do in my private life” (line 119, line 131), and his “tastes in the bedroom” (line 121). Indeed, by using euphemisms and repeating that his sexual expression is “private” and occurs “in the bedroom,” Ghomeshi defends himself against being asked to disclose more, disallowing readers from asking questions about his personal affairs. It is a stunning achievement, given that Ghomeshi is freely choosing to disclose his personal sexual affairs in the first place: he has a right to privacy, he says, but will selectively waive it to let readers in on vital information, yet will brook no questions for those same readers to clarify what they are understanding. Moreover, he accomplishes this while invoking a culturally-appropriate and beloved piece of Canadiana, namely former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s memorable 1967 quote: “There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation” (“Trudeau: “There’s no place,” n.d.). In this reference in the essay, the state is likened to the *CBC* as an employer, and the nation to Ghomeshi himself: it is yet another subtle way of increasing feelings of familiarity with an audience likely largely made up of Canadians.

Constructing “a jilted ex-girlfriend and a freelance writer”

Ghameshi presents his circumstances as being the result of “a campaign of false allegations pursued by a jilted ex girlfriend and a freelance writer” (lines 31-33). The term “campaign” is connected to the ideas of politics, persistence, deliberation and strategic planning: it suggests that Ghameshi is a person in a position of power, and makes inferentially available that those engaged in “campaigns” against him must be uncommonly motivated to put in the work required to harm him. The choice of terms in which to cast these circumstances also makes it easier to establish that he is being victimized.

The only attribute explicitly made of the ‘jilted ex-girlfriend’, to whom I will hereafter refer as ‘the woman’, is that she is “in her late 20s” (line 46). Another way of saying this would be to say the woman is nearing thirty years old: saying instead that she is in her late twenties emphasizes her youth. Ghameshi reports he and this woman not only discussed their sexual tastes, but she “encouraged our role-play and often was the initiator” (line 51): this implies the woman was consenting – and eager – in their sexual encounters, and establishes Ghameshi as a competent and responsible – and desirable – kinky sex practitioner.

Ghameshi then says:

57. Despite a strong connection between us it became clear to me that our on-and-off dating
58. was unlikely to grow into a larger relationship and I ended things in the beginning of this
59. year. She was upset by this and sent me messages indicating her disappointment that I
60. would not commit to more, and her anger that I was seeing others.

This paragraph is loaded with implications, and much of the implicature is done by what the phrase “it became clear to me” obscures: readers can only guess at what convinced Ghameshi to end their relationship. (Perhaps their on-and-off dating was due to either party having wavering intentions towards each other; perhaps Ghameshi experienced a change of heart; perhaps either of them is promiscuous; perhaps again their intentions for each other were not as honest as Ghameshi suggests earlier in the text?) The text provides readers with clues – but no explicit answer – to fill in the blank left by the ambiguous phrase. This accomplishes a few things. For one, Ghameshi is positioned as a desirable sex partner, given the woman’s strong negative

feelings when rejected and the unspecified number of “others” he was dating. He is also positioned as a moral, well-intentioned man searching for a “larger relationship” than one just based on a “strong connection”: more still, it establishes that he is not a man ruled by his sexual desires, that he can be reasonable enough to know when a relationship has come to its end, and that he is willing to do the right thing by being the one to end the relationship. In contrast, the woman is cast as one not as reasonable as Ghomeshi in dispassionately recognizing the natural end of a relationship, and wanting to force its continuation. Moreover, Ghomeshi says she experiences many feelings simultaneously, including upset, disappointment, and anger. The woman’s abundance of emotions is amplified in contrast to Ghomeshi’s lack of them. This is seen again when Ghomeshi says “there began a campaign of harassment, vengeance and demonization against me that would lead to months of anxiety” (lines 62-63): he does not say he was anxious or felt anxiety. By this formulation, the anxiety was neither felt nor had by anyone in particular, and certainly not Ghomeshi. Without ever saying so in as many words, Ghomeshi manages to convey that the anonymous perpetrator of a campaign against him is focused and deliberate, driven by emotion, and intends to harm his reputation.

Interestingly, Ghomeshi never directly accuses the woman of being the person trying to destroy his reputation. The phrase “there began a campaign” is both impersonal and passive: just as there is no one in particular to feel Ghomeshi’s anxiety, there is no one in particular to begin the campaign. The woman is further depersonalized when Ghomeshi says: “It came to light that a woman had begun anonymously reaching out to people that I had dated” (lines 65-66), “someone had rifled through my phone” (line 69), “This person had begun methodically contacting” (lines 70-71), “Someone also began colluding” (line 74). This indirect way of referring to Ghomeshi’s antagonist’s behaviour depersonalizes her, while also softening the accusatory tone the text might have if Ghomeshi instead used the more direct and active form “She began a campaign” or “She rifled through my phone.” The depersonalization is further accomplished when he says she was “anonymously reaching out to people that I had dated” (65-66) suggesting she herself was deliberately trying to erase her role over the course of her “campaign.” Moreover, it implies that her behaviour was dishonest, shameful, or cowardly such that she would not want to have her identity attached to it. This shadowy figure ‘rifled through Ghomeshi’s phone’ ‘methodically contacted’ women who seemed to be Ghomeshi’s exes, ‘tried to build a story against him to

defame him' and 'painted herself as a victim': in other words, Ghomeshi is making available that this woman is willing to invade his personal life, transgress his privacy, and resort to manipulative tactics to better harm him. He even names the harm he suspects her of trying to achieve: "it would do the reputational damage to me it was intended to do" (line 90-91).

Ghomeshi even erases some of the "jilted-ex's" agency. In lines 91 to 92, Ghomeshi says: "the ex has even tried to contact me to say that she now wishes to refute any of these categorically untrue allegations." As the phrase "tried to contact me" suggests she has not been able to do so, one wonders at how Ghomeshi knows she would want to refute her allegations, or know that she is the "someone" who began the campaign, rifled through his phone, and painted herself as a victim. More importantly, these lines suggest that the woman has set something in motion she regrets but cannot stop. (Her identity has not been definitively revealed as of this writing, and as far as the public is concerned she has never tried to publicly refute the allegations.)

In sum, Ghomeshi makes inferentially available (Edwards, 2004, 268) the trope of the vengeful, manipulative, irrational, and overly emotional woman, placed in contrast to his rational, forthcoming, honest self. Her irrational villainy towards Ghomeshi is maximized while her identity and agency are minimized. Importantly, Ghomeshi anticipates and answers questions readers may have about the woman's motives: he speaks for her in the way he characterizes her and her behaviour, and undermines the account he gives on her behalf by claiming that she regrets what she has set in motion, making it unnecessary for an uncritical or inattentive reader to ask further questions.

There is something perhaps more sinister that happens as a result of this narrative. Ghomeshi does more than anticipate and attend to possible responses from curious readers with this post: it also intercepts any future allegations that may be made against him. Just as the backhanded compliments Ghomeshi makes of "his team" at *Q* makes it difficult for them to challenge his account of what happened at *Q*, this way of characterizing the anonymous woman anticipates and invalidates the accounts of other women who might level similar future allegations against Ghomeshi. The pre-emptive undermining of their credibility also undermines their possible accounts before they can even be spoken.

Part of the reason the jilted-ex cannot stop the campaign she set in motion is that it is being spurred even in her absence by a “freelance writer” (line 33) – a term that suggests they are nameless and unimportant with no reputation to lose, no public record to respect, and are motivated to gain a reputation and public record by breaking a juicy story: in this way, Ghomeshi sets up the “freelance writer” as a person who cannot be trusted. Part of this is also accomplished by the choice of words around the “freelance writer.” Ghomeshi says they are someone with whom the jilted-ex ‘colluded’ and “set out to try to find corroborators to build a case to defame me” (74-75): corroborators ought not need to collude to tell the truth, and any reporter interested in reporting the truth would not need to “set out” – as though on a mission – to “build a case” which ought not need constructing.

Ghomeshi then says:

- 77. The writer boldly started contacting my friends, acquaintances and even work
- 78. colleagues – all of whom came to me to tell me this was happening and all of whom
- 79. recognized it as a trumped up way to attack me and undermine my reputation.

And soon adds:

- 83. The writer tried to peddle the story and, at one point, a major Canadian media
- 84. publication did due diligence but never printed a story. One assumes they recognized
- 85. these attempts to recast my sexual behaviour were fabrications.

In the first excerpt, Ghomeshi recounts that his “friends, acquaintances and even work colleagues” warn him that the freelance writer is not only bold, but are on a mission to attack and undermine Ghomeshi’s reputation: here, the “friends, acquaintances and even work colleagues” demonstrate how obvious the freelance writer’s nefarious intentions are, as well as remind readers that Ghomeshi has supporters who believe in his trustworthiness, a stark contrast against the freelance writer’s untrustworthiness. The same rhetorical move is seen again in the second excerpt where Ghomeshi uses the “major Canadian media publication” to demonstrate that the story the writer is “peddling” – behaviour that belongs to a persistent salesperson who cannot be trusted – must not have merit. Without calling the freelance writer a liar, Ghomeshi invalidates their work, without that actual work ever having been made public.

Amazingly, Ghomeshi manages to simultaneously confess and conceal the nature of his sexual proclivities; reveal and invalidate allegations against him; depict and undermine the woman behind the allegations as deceptive and therefore untrustworthy, even though she has never spoken publicly; and depict and undermine the writer who might have but had not yet brought the allegations to light as self-serving and therefore untrustworthy.

The allegations, as told by Ghomeshi

Even with all this effort expended in this precarious discursive positioning, Ghomeshi manages one more thing: the term sexual assault is never mentioned directly in this Facebook post. This is a notable absence: if an allegation is always an allegation-of-something, and the deliberateness with which avoiding explicitly stating it is betrayed by its consistent absence, this suggests there may be persuasive power in the choice of what to call the allegations – or not call them, as the case may be.

In the place of “sexual assault allegations” or “sexual assault,” Ghomeshi refers to “false allegations” (line 32), “abusive relations” (line 66) which are quickly reframed as a lie about “something nefarious” (line 68), “a story against me” (line 71), “attempts to smear me” (line 72), “a case to defame me” (line 75), “a trumped up way to attack me and undermine my reputation” (line 79), “fabrications” (line 85), “this stuff” (line 89), and “salacious gossip” (line 95). None of these references carry the legal or moral weight nor the negative connotation of sexual assault. Instead, most of the references suggest the sexual assault allegations against Ghomeshi are not only incorrect, but the product of a falsehood from persons interested in harming Ghomeshi.

In contrast to the zero references to sexual assault, Ghomeshi refers to sexual consent on multiple occasions. He first uses the term when categorically stating what he does in the bedroom:

42. I only

43. participate in sexual practices that are mutually agreed upon, consensual, and exciting for

44. both partners.

He uses it again to characterize his relationship with the jilted ex-girlfriend as “what two consenting adults do” (line 54) and “what had been an ongoing consensual relationship” (line 67). The repetition reinforces Ghomeshi’s claim that the allegations of non-consensual sexual interactions are false. Similarly, the term is also used to challenge the story he anticipates will be told about him when he says “the implication may be made that this happens non-consensually. And that will be a lie” (lines 94-95).

Interestingly, towards the end of the post, Ghomeshi says

106. CBC has been part of the team of friends and lawyers
 107. assembled to deal with this for months. On Thursday I voluntarily showed
 108. evidence that I everything I have done has been consensual.

These lines accomplish a few things: for one, it clearly implicates the *CBC* in defending Ghomeshi against sexual assault allegations “for months.” If it is true that the *CBC* fired Ghomeshi for behaviour “unbecoming of a prominent host on the *CBC*” as Ghomeshi reports (line 116), then they have already made themselves complicit in that bad behaviour by “dealing” with the allegations rather than addressing them. It also would lend credibility to Ghomeshi’s claim that he has done nothing wrong, since it could be inferred that a well-established and publicly-funded and therefore publicly-accountable organization like the *CBC* could be expected to not defend somebody legitimately accused of sexual assault.

That Ghomeshi says that he has evidence of his sexual activities being consensual is extraordinary. As seen in Chapter 1, Bradshaw & McArthur and later Donovan would report that Ghomeshi showed this evidence to lawyers and *CBC* executives in the form of text messages, emails, photos, and videos related to Ghomeshi’s sexual encounters just before he was fired (Bradshaw & McArthur, October 31 2014; Donovan, November 12 2014). However, the Canadian Criminal Code explicitly defines what constitutes sexual consent, and importantly sets out five conditions under which sexual consent cannot be obtained in a case of sexual assault. Sexual consent is not obtained if:

- (a) the agreement is expressed by the words or conduct of a person other than the complainant;

- (b) the complainant is incapable of consenting to the activity;
- (c) the accused induces the complainant to engage in the activity by abusing a position of trust, power or authority;
- (d) the complainant expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to engage in the activity; or
- (e) the complainant, having consented to engage in sexual activity, expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to continue to engage in the activity. (*Criminal Code*, 1985)

While it is unclear of what the evidence actually consisted, it is doubtful that it could have accounted for all five of these conditions for every single moment of every single encounter with every single partner or alleged victim. Moreover, by sharing any explicit photos, videos, or written material from his partners or alleged victims with the lawyers and *CBC* executives, Ghomeshi may have been engaging in non-consensual sharing of sexual materials: while it is unclear whether this constitutes a whole other kind of criminal offense, it may well be evidence of non-consensual behaviour from Ghomeshi, the opposite of what he intended.

In spite of this, Ghomeshi uses the word “consensual” or “consent” when enlisting the *CBC* as a corroborator of his claim that his sexual practices have always been consensual. He reports that:

- 112. CBC execs confirmed that the information provided showed that there was
- 113. consent. In fact, they later said to me and my team that there is no question in
- 114. their minds that there has always been consent.

Again, in light of the Criminal Code definition of consent and the “evidence” presented, it is difficult to be convinced of there having been sexual consent between Ghomeshi and his sexual partners on the basis of the *CBC* executives’ agreement. However, a casual reader of the post unfamiliar with the Criminal Code could be forgiven for thinking the *CBC*’s reported

unquestioning agreement corroborates Ghomeshi's claim, making it unnecessary for readers to ask further questions.

After dispensing with a discussion of the allegations, Ghomeshi says that the real offense against him has actually come from the *CBC*:

103. I have been open with the CBC about this since these categorically untrue
 104. allegations ramped up. I have never believed it was anyone's business what I do in
 105. my private affairs but I wanted my bosses to be aware that this attempt to smear
 106. me was out there. CBC has been part of the team of friends and lawyers
 107. assembled to deal with this for months. On Thursday I voluntarily showed
 108. evidence that everything I have done has been consensual. I did this in good faith
 109. and because I know, as I have always known, that I have nothing to hide. This
 110. when the CBC decided to fire me.

Here, Ghomeshi makes clear that the real violence in the story he is sharing in the Facebook post – and the truth that needs to be told to and validated by the public – comes from the *CBC* betraying his attempt at keeping faith with them. As he puts it just a few lines later:

127. “...with no formal allegations, no formal complaints, no complaints, not one, to
 128. the HR department at the CBC (they told us they'd done a thorough check and
 129. were satisfied), and no charges, I have lost my job based on a campaign of
 130. vengeance.

The heart of the post

The section in the post most revealing of Ghomeshi's real concerns is found in the twentieth of twenty-five paragraphs: readers are walked through a catastrophic scenario in which Ghomeshi says he expects he will become hated, or a laughingstock, and that that will do his reputation irreparable damage.

89. And this leads us to today and this moment. I've lived with the threat that this stuff would
 90. be thrown out there to defame me. And I would sue. But it would do the reputational
 91. damage to me it was intended to do (the ex has even tried to contact me to say that she

92. now wishes to refute any of these categorically untrue allegations). But with me bringing
 93. it to light, in the coming days you will prospectively hear about how I engage in all kinds
 94. of unsavoury aggressive acts in the bedroom. And the implication may be made that this
 95. happens non-consensually. And that will be a lie. But it will be salacious gossip in a
 96. world driven by a hunger for "scandal". And there will be those who choose to believe it
 97. and to hate me or to laugh at me. And there will be an attempt to pile on. And there will
 98. be the claim that there are a few women involved (those who colluded with my ex) in an
 99. attempt to show a "pattern of behaviour". And it will be based in lies but damage will be
 100. done. But I am telling you this story in the hopes that the truth will, finally,
 101. conquer all.

Ghameshi does a number of interesting things in this paragraph. For one, this paragraph is set apart from the rest of the post in that it is the only one in which Ghameshi uses the future tense consistently: what he says here is what he anticipates will come, as caused by all the things he has revealed so far. Moreover, the entire scenario he depicts is hypothetical – readers are warned they may “prospectively” hear the things Ghameshi lists, even though he is sure enough of the likelihood it will happen to warrant making explosive public revelations through his post.

It is striking that this paragraph consists of a series of run-on sentences. Though the paragraph as a whole is a complete thought, each sentence is not: the subject changes from a threat, to suing, to reputational damage, to what allegations will be heard, to salacious gossip, and lies, and more. The paragraph ought to read as disjointed, and yet Ghameshi’s meaning is clear. Part of the effect is due to the structure: just as the paragraphs in the post are broken up so that a reader adopts the familiar cadence of Ghameshi delivering a radio essay, so this paragraph reads as a radio essay may sound.

Another contributor to this effect comes from the striking use of the conjunctions “And” and “But.” Of the thirteen sentences in the paragraph, all but one begins with either conjunction: without them, the paragraph reads as a string of largely disjointed hypothetical statements. The conjunctions perform an interesting function. In this paragraph, Ghameshi provides a hypothetical account of how sexual assault cases usually unfold while simultaneously providing commentary on it: he expects the allegations against him will unfold the way they typically do,

and these involve a particular sequence of events. “And” could stand in for “then of course,” indicating where he is describing how the story of the allegations will unfold; “But” could stand in for “however”, indicating where he is inserting commentary on the sequence of events.

By listing some of these events and linking them with “And,” Ghomeshi is calling down readers’ cultural competences around celebrity sex scandals and lays out how that script “usually” happens in a continuous string: for instance, first he would be defamed, “then of course” he would sue. That string is punctuated by Ghomeshi “interrupting” the script to interject his objections: he would sue “however” the reputational damage would already be done. The paragraph is prophetic: Ghomeshi both gives an account of what will be the fallout of his revelations, taking the words out of his potential critics’ mouths and thus minimizing their impact, and responds to the hypothetical fallout by interrupting the account with his objections, as flagged by the use of “But” four times. This allows Ghomeshi to pre-emptively set parameters on how the fallout from his post is interpreted. Ghomeshi’s commentary on the things to come is most effective coming from the trustworthy source Ghomeshi has expended a lot of effort to establish himself as being earlier in the post.

Putting it all together, with a few questions

In short, in this post Ghomeshi is telling readers: that Ghomeshi the person is the same as Ghomeshi the on-air persona; that he has been blighted by persons on a mission to do him harm; that he is truthful and trustworthy; that he is concerned with and fastidious in obtaining his sexual partners’ consent, and moreover he can prove it; that he has plenty of friends and supporters – among whom can be counted respectable institutions like reputable news sources -- who believe him and do not believe his antagonists; that even the jilted-ex girlfriend would take her part in the story back if she could; and that the *CBC* more specifically agrees he has not done anything wrong in his sexual relations. Importantly, the flood of information in this post obscures the sexual assault allegations (which are called anything but such) against him, dismissing them as not an issue of concern.

Rather, in this post, Ghomeshi is cast as a victim. This is accomplished when Ghomeshi frequently indicates how he is unfairly victimized by circumstances and processes beyond his control in what he chooses to divulge to readers and his choice of words. He evokes a

sympathetic response in telling readers he is in pain and has been experiencing the hardest time of his life in part due to the loss of his father and his concern for his mother (lines 5-6), that he has been “stripped from my show, barred from the building and separated from my colleagues” (line 26) even though he has “done nothing wrong” (line 29); that he has been the subject of a “campaign of harassment, vengeance and demonization” (lines 62-63) by an overly emotional jilted ex-girlfriend and a freelance writer who cannot be trusted, as discussed above. Over the course of this campaign he experienced violations such as when “someone had rifled through my phone” (line 69) and later contacted “my friends, acquaintances and even work colleagues” (lines 77-78) to “attack me and undermine my reputation” (line 79). The post is structured so as to preempt and defuse the latter. The story Ghomeshi presents is an extraordinary one, namely that a set of false sexual assault allegations were unjustly levelled against him, and he was fired even though he is innocent because of the materials he showed the *CBC* executives “in good faith.” Yet there are a few notable absences in his account which raise a few questions.

For one, Ghomeshi says the “CBC has been part of the team... assembled to deal with this for months” (lines 106-107), yet he says he only showed them evidence of his innocence that Thursday. What spurred his sudden need to become explicit with the executives? Given how much Ghomeshi stresses his right to privacy in matters of sexual expression in this post, one would assume he would avoid sharing that level of detail at all costs: whatever caused him to reveal himself publicly must have been compelling or concerning to him.

Also, although Ghomeshi expends a lot of effort in undermining sexual assault allegations against him, he also suggests that in the next few days readers could still expect to hear allegations including “the claim that there are a few women involved (those who colluded with my ex) in an attempt to show a ‘pattern of behaviour’” (lines 98-99). Ghomeshi said a lot about the jilted ex-girlfriend and her motivations of anger and revenge; he said nothing about the motives of those who “colluded” with her, or why so many women might be interested in seeking revenge against him. Why would they still be interested in publicly claiming Ghomeshi had assaulted them, given that the freelance writer could not get the story published and the jilted ex-girlfriend had relented? Would pre-emptively describing their potential future allegations as a “‘pattern of behaviour’” (line 99) -- between quotation marks, even though they had not yet been

spoken-- undermine their claims, should their allegations actually demonstrate a pattern of assaultive behaviour?

Final Words

In this post, Ghomeshi anticipates a negative public reaction, including that he will be demonized. The entire Facebook post can therefore be seen as an effort at “scooping” any upcoming news stories, the better to manage possible fallout by being the first to tell the story.

Examined closely, the text of the post raises more questions than it answers about the sexual assault allegations (which are never called that), and Ghomeshi relies heavily on his personal reputation and strongly emphasized trustworthiness to gloss over those questions. By claiming the privilege of casting the story in his own language first, anyone wanting to challenge his account would have to also challenge his public persona as well as address the content of the post, whether they were a journalist, an alleged victim of sexual assault, or a fan speaking in support of Ghomeshi.

It appears Ghomeshi did not anticipate that more alleged victims would respond to his post by coming forward with their own allegations, not in spite of efforts to pre-empt them but because of and in response to them: as seen in Chapter 1, such was the case for Linda Redgrave as well as for Lucy DeCoutere. Their accounts along with those of the other alleged victims, if true, would invalidate Ghomeshi’s account: faced with these detailed allegations, readers and interested followers of the scandal were then left to make sense of the mutually invalidating accounts they were considering – that is, of deciding which account they believed was true.

The question of what it means to believe either the alleged victims or Ghomeshi in this scandal is the subject of Chapter 4. But before considering that question, it is worth first examining how the public responded to Ghomeshi’s post more generally, such that some persons felt the need to discuss their beliefs at all. This is the task undertaken in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Reconstructing the Narrative in the Facebook Responses

In this chapter, I will discuss the public responses to Jian Ghomeshi's October 26 2014 Facebook post as shared on the same social media platform. The large number of comments Ghomeshi's post garnered have been subjected to a thematic analysis, then grouped by theme and arranged semi-chronologically: the object of this chapter is to faithfully recount the public response to Ghomeshi's essay in the earliest days of the scandal. In reconstructing the narrative of the responses, I will also discuss some of the key elements of the themes found in these comments.

About the Data

When I first thought I should examine Facebook responses to Ghomeshi's post, I had not yet set out to answer a precise research question nor chosen to use a particular research method. My intention was to collect as much of the available social media feed as possible, then decide to what best use it could be put.

To secure access to Ghomeshi's Facebook post and the comments that followed, I downloaded his status update to my personal computer, loading as many responses as possible without exceeding my browser's capacity. Since there was an enormous number of responses available, and Facebook comments are displayed most recent first, I did this by expanding top comments (that is, comments made directly in response to Ghomeshi's post, as opposed to comments making up conversational threads between commenters) in reverse chronological order: ultimately, I was able to collect a total of 6850 comments, with the earliest time-stamped at October 27 2014 at 10:54PM, and the latest at October 31 2014 around 5:00PM. The latter is also the time and date when I collected the data. Once Ghomeshi's status update and as many comments as possible were saved to my personal computer's hard drive, I treated the file as a document by converting the 36-megabyte webpage into 42-megabyte searchable 602-page Portable Document Format (.pdf) document.

According to details captured on the page, at the point at which the data was collected Ghomeshi's status update had amassed 34,810 comments, 38,815 shares and 106,175 likes. Presumably then, this data collection approach failed to capture the remaining 27,960 comments (that is, about 4 out of 5 comments); these may have occurred between October 26 2014 at

3:11PM when Ghomeshi's status update was originally posted and the earliest data that could be collected (October 27 2014 at 10:54PM), or they may have been comments made in threads that only started after a response to Ghomeshi's post, or—as some comments appear to suggest – some comments may have been deleted by users, or by whoever was responsible for managing the page. Since the entire original status update and comments were deleted towards the end of November 2014 just before Ghomeshi surrendered to police, and his entire profile has been removed from Facebook, this data—and the opportunity to review it— is likely permanently lost.

The data collection method in this chapter did not yield a “complete” data set, in the sense of having captured every single comment and every single response to commenters that could in principle (if not in fact) have been collected. It was not intended to be so: the opportunistic collection strategy and sheer volume of available data limited what was possible to collect. What data was collected also cannot be said to be ‘representative’ of the ‘complete’ data set, since the latter no longer exists and what qualities characterize it cannot be established, (and therefore what constitutes a representative subset of the data also cannot be established). However, such concerns for the representativeness of the data is misplaced here: this is a question typical of quantitative methodology, as a true probability sampling for the purposes of statistically generalizing findings would not be possible using the data collection approach I used (Maxwell, 2013, p.99). However, my interest for this chapter is not in producing a thematic analysis with attributes symmetrical in number and spread to those of the total set of Facebook posts: the Facebook posts are not themselves a representative sample of the population at large, and so what value the quantitative exercise would yield is limited at best. Rather, my interest in this chapter is in exploring what constitutes the qualities of the data—that is, exploring what people were saying and what they meant by it— and of grounding a retelling of commenters' responses over an eventful period of time (as seen in Chapter 1) using their own word choices. A “representative” subset of the data is not required for this task; rather, an analysis sensitive to the expressions and to the context in which the comments were made is required.

In short, the comments available for analysis for this chapter form an opportunistic data set, a snapshot of a quickly-developing and dynamic discourse which spans the earliest days of the public response to Ghomeshi's post: the comments needed to be analyzed as having emerged within that context if their meaning is to be understood. It proved to be fortuitous to have

captured this particular snapshot, which features a sudden change in the content of the comments (I will return to this later in the chapter).

It is also important to note the available data is rich in complexity, a boon and a challenge for any research effort. The complexity is partly due to the variety in the participant profiles, as best can be ascertained: persons with all sorts of self-avowed relationships to the scandal and with all sorts of affiliations and interests took part in the discussion. It was not uncommon for users to engage each other by tagging one another or otherwise responding explicitly to another commenter, even in top comments, as will be seen later in this chapter. These Facebook users might also be persons who may or may not have been fans of Ghomeshi's, persons who only became curious about Ghomeshi and his post after following the proliferation of news articles on the scandal, persons with a relationship to the *CBC* (whether positive or negative), persons with opinions and feelings about sexual assault as a social problem, and so on. Some of the participants in the online discussion were very frequent posters, including those who segmented a lengthy essay into multiple posts published in quick succession, or frequently recurring posters who seemed to have taken an especially strong personal interest in the social media conversation and spent hours engaging other users. The emerging narrative of the posts as a whole may also have been shaped in part by a user with administrative rights who may or may not have been deleting comments, as well as Facebook administrators who were occasionally called upon to reign in overly zealous, trolling, abusive, or nonsensical posters, or again by posters who may have been hired to shift the tone of the discussion in one way or another—all possibilities suggested by commenters themselves at various points in the feed.

That so many voices with so many varying stakes and interests in the online conversation are represented in these posts ought to mean it should be difficult if not impossible to see meaningful patterns in the data. Yet because these top comments serve the same communicative function, insofar as they are responses to Ghomeshi's post made available to a public audience, they can be analyzed as discursively situated attempts to take up, make sense of, and respond to Ghomeshi's account. However, given the (short) nature of Facebook comments, and the next-to-anonymity of the participants, any fair analysis of the comments would have to minimize assumptions about participants' intentions and meanings by remaining very faithful to the words they used.

About the Method

After documenting my researcher's position (see Appendix 1 for details), I scanned the data to get a sense for its scope and for any immediately observable patterns. As mentioned above, in spite of the complexity of the data one of the important patterns emerging from the large number and variety of attitudes, thoughts, and feelings expressed is that the available comments are structured as 'kinds' of responses to Ghomeshi's original Facebook post. A second pattern is that a few key phrases recurred frequently in the responses. Accordingly, for the purposes of this chapter it was most fitting to use a thematic analysis to capture not just what these broad patterns were, but in terms of what key phrases they emerged.

A thematic analysis involves a careful examination of talk or text in order to identify important or recurring features. While there are different ways of executing thematic analyses depending on the research focus and data being studied (Terry et al., 2017), for this chapter I specifically used an inductive approach to developing an understanding of the themes reflected in the Facebook responses, identifying them by the words commenters themselves used and the meanings they expressed.

For this kind of qualitative coding,

The assumption is that coding 'gets better' (i.e. develops depth and moves beyond the obvious surface level) through immersion in, or repeated engagement with, the data (...) Themes are developed from coding and working with the data and codes, rather than pre-existing the coding process. They are the outcome of the analytic process, rather than a starting point. They are not imagined or anticipated early on, and do not drive analytic direction. Coding and theme development are assumed to be subjective and interpretative processes. (Terry et al., 2017, p19)

Following Gibbs (2007a) and Gibbs (2007b), this meant proceeding through each comment one at a time and developing an open (that is, unstructured) categorizing scheme for the content of the comments using the words posters were using themselves. I continued to categorize comments until the in-vivo codes reached a point of informational redundancy, that is encountering more data no longer contributed to further elaborating or specifying the code.

Informational redundancy happens “when researchers sense they have seen or heard something so repeatedly that they can anticipate it. Collecting more data is deemed to have no further interpretive value” (Sandelowski, 2012, p876).

I used NVivo to track the instance with which a theme appeared, the time and date of the comment, as well as the assumed gender of the commenter based on their screen handle (gender-ambiguous names such as Terry, initials such as J.P. or pseudonyms were categorized as ‘unknown gender’). I began with the earliest comment available and worked through each subsequent comment for the first hundred pages of the document: there were a total of 1,037 comments in this first part of the analysis, of which the last comment was posted at October 28 at 11:19AM (that is a rate of about 1.4 comments per minute!). By that point, I had identified 21 themes that were well saturated—that is, no new codes were emerging, and the themes were well-defined.

Because the narrative in this scandal appeared to change over time, I anticipated there would be themes that would only emerge later in the document. In order to faithfully capture these responses too, I selected five more sets of consecutive pages from the remaining five hundred pages of data. These selections were not taken at random: I purposely tailored the selections to cover all four remaining days in the data, to favour evening hours (as, I reasoned, commenters were less likely to access Ghomeshi’s post – given its sexual subject matter-- during regular business hours), and hours after the daily news cycle but before the very late hours of the night and early morning during which fewer users engaged in the comment section. More importantly, I selected sections of the feed to capture online reactions to the major events of the scandal, and as sketched in Chapter 1 these are namely: before any of Ghomeshi’s alleged victims came forward; when the first anonymous woman’s interview with the *CBC* was aired, when the *Toronto Star* republished its article containing allegations of sexual assault; and when Lucy DeCoutere’s interview aired on the morning of October 30 2014 and was reproduced in multiple media through the day. To be more specific, in this part of the analysis I examined:

- 318 comments from October 28 at 7:34PM until October 29 at 12:37AM (representing a time before the alleged victims came forward);

- 548 comments from October 29 at 5:08PM until October 29 at 8:42PM (covering the reaction to the anonymous woman’s interview as well as the *Toronto Star* republishing the allegations it had collected);
- 539 comments from October 30 at 5:27AM until October 30 at 12:02PM (this was before, during, and after DeCoutere’s interview air time);
- 279 comments from October 30 at 4:23PM until October 30 around 7:00PM (the time by which most of the allegations had become publicly available);
- 246 comments from October 31 around 9:00AM until October 31 around 4:00PM (representing some of the last available comments from the feed).

This purposeful selection of an additional 1,930 comments was subjected to the same process as the earlier 1,037: I proceeded through each comment individually and continued to elaborate the code. From this process, nine more in-vivo categories emerged and were saturated.

In total, 2,967 comments were analyzed. Once the open coding was complete, following Gibbs (2007a) and Gibbs (2007b) I examined the relationships between the codes according to how they were used in the comments, and identified the core categories and their relationships to other categories. As a result of this process, I could “re-story” the emergent thematic narrative of the individual comments to better understand what people were saying about the scandal in their own words (Cresswell, 2013, p. 74).

The Emergent Narrative: the Early Days

In this chapter (and again in Chapter 4), I will provide samples of comments to illustrate the analysis as I elaborate it. These comments are reproduced exactly as they are found in the Facebook feed in order to fully represent commenters’ contributions: these comments do not always follow grammatical, orthographic, or punctuation conventions.

It’s nobody’s business what you do in your bedroom!

Wow I loved your show. You are a great radio person. What you do in private is your business and no one, not your employer, nor associates should care. Too many people are saying the wrong thing. They had no right to fire you...I know the pain of losing a parent. My condolences. Wherever you go I will still be a fan. Stay strong. (Hiscoe Kris,

October 27 11:18PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 8)

I'm sad, I loved your show, it was one of the only reasons for tuning in. There is something about your voice I find so soothing, I sense a kind heart and gentle spirit through the air waves. Whatever you do in the bed is your business, and hasn't changed my opinion in the slightest way! Thank you for stepping outside the box that has so kindly been provided for us and Thanks for being honest and putting yourself out there. Big love!! (Jen Girard, October 27 11:24PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 9)

Good luck on your fight to keep a persons private life private. It should make no difference what people do away from work if it doesn't affect your job(which has been one of the most educational and entertaining I have had the pleasure to listen to) and consensual. I will follow you no mater where your life follows. Fight the good fight Jian. (Sean Vernon-Scott, October 28 2:49AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 30)

Damn. Just...Damn. I love (loved?) Q! Your work on the show was(is) so refreshing and insightful. Sorry for the pain you're experiencing. Keep fighting against the cowardly actions of the CBC. What you do in private, with consenting adults, is none of anyone's business. Very sorry, again! You are talented and brilliant! Keep up hope! (Stephen Yturalde, October 28 5:53AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 47)

Early in the available record, commenters appear to be agreeing with Ghomeshi's version of events, and address him directly to offer their emotional and moral support. As seen in the sample above, some of the examples of support involve compliments ("I loved your show. You are a great radio person" ; "There is something about your voice I find so soothing, I sense a kind heart and gentle spirit through the air waves" ; "one of the most educational and entertaining I have had the pleasure to listen to" ; "Your work on the show was(is) so refreshing and insightful" ; "You are talented and brilliant!") and expressions of sympathy and encouragement ("I know the pain of losing a parent. My condolences" ; " Sorry for the pain you're experiencing" ; "Keep up hope!"). These commenters exhort Ghomeshi to be brave and wish him luck ("Stay strong" ; "Good luck on your fight to keep a persons private life private"; "Fight

the good fight Jian” ; “Keep fighting against the cowardly actions of the CBC”). They recognize he is embattled—using words that connote battles and fights and struggles to be overcome -- and want him to know that they want him to win against his antagonist. Moreover, these commenters are not just expressing sympathy, goodwill, and warm feelings to Ghomeshi: they are also expressing loyalty (“Wherever you go I will still be a fan” ; “Whatever you do in the bed is your business, and hasn’t changed my opinion in the slightest way”; “I will follow you no matter where your life follows”).

The other thing expressed in these comments (“What you do in private is your business and no one, not your employer, nor associates should care” ; “Whatever you do in the bed is your business” ; “your fight to keep a person’s private life private. It should make no difference what people do away from work if it doesn’t affect your job” ; “What you do in private, with consenting adults, is none of anyone’s business”) are variations on the iconic Canadianism “There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation,” a phrase originally spoken by former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1967 (“Trudeau: “There’s no place,” n.d.). The same phrase is taken up by Ghomeshi in his post (in lines 124-125). In repeating Ghomeshi’s culturally-appropriate words, these commenters are also expressing agreement with Ghomeshi’s position.

Of course, these kinds of responses were encouraged in the original post, not only by the familiarity of the famous phrase but also the approach by which it was delivered. Ghomeshi called readers his friends and family, and commenters answered in kind: their responses are strikingly familiar: commenters refer to Ghomeshi by first name, and offer their personal feelings of love (“Big love!”) and sympathy as though speaking to a beloved friend with whose personal qualities they are familiar. They offer him their condolences over the recent death of his father (which Ghomeshi brings up twice in his post). They also take him at his word that his sexual encounters are consensual. Their expressions of love, sympathy, loyalty and trust for Ghomeshi suggest they feel personally involved in his predicament, a fitting response to Ghomeshi asking readers of his post – his “friends and family” – to witness and validate his story (as seen in Chapter 2).

These commenters do not need to explicitly say they believe Ghomeshi. By their responses, they sympathize with Ghomeshi and extend their protection to him by placing themselves alongside him, amplifying his story in repeating it. They do not question or otherwise

challenge the story he is telling them.

Innocent until proven guilty!

Depressing is the number of people who have already decided in their minds that you or your accusers are guilty, based on nothing but anecdotal evidence. Makes me really hope I never end up accused of anything, as humanity proves once again how little faith it deserves. (David Grant, October 27 11:13PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 7)

I think your personal life is yours!!! What ever happened to INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY? Sorry to hear of this Jian! (Loral Kinloch-Murdock, October 28 12:35AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 20)

I listen to Q podcasts here in Japan and I always loved the show. This whole incident is a total disaster and I can't believe the CBC thinks listeners care what happens in a private bedroom. It is absolute stupidity to even consider such claims of abuse considering zero police complaints or investigations were made. Smear campaigns are bad enough, but losing your job due to unproven allegations is just wrong. (Janice Ishizaka, October 28 2:55AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 31)

Private life should be respected and private. If he broke the law then charge him and price it in court otherwise it's slander. (Kevin Ramirez, October 28 4:52AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 41)

An other frequently recurring comment among supporters early in the Facebook feed was that what happened to Ghomeshi was unjust (“people who have already decided in their minds that you or your accusers are guilty, based on nothing but anecdotal evidence” ; “What ever happened to INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY” ; “losing your job due to unproven allegations is just wrong” ; “If he broke the law then charge him... otherwise it's slander”). Here, commenters are referring to the touchstone of Canadian jurisprudence that an accused person must be considered innocent until proven otherwise.

In these responses, which in many but not all cases also involved more personally supportive comments (such as “I always loved the show”), commenters are saying three important things. The first is that there are very serious consequences to believing false allegations: jobs can be lost, persons can be slandered and their reputations besmirched, and people can turn against the accused. Responders here are either cautioning against making hasty judgements about Ghomeshi’s situation or the persons involved, or reacting against what appears to be hasty judgement by the *CBC* against Ghomeshi: either way, they are trying to guard against the general acceptance of a falsehood as a fact. The second is that the arbiter of truth in matters of establishing whether a sexual assault occurred ought not to be the public at large, but a court of law: fair consideration of allegations requires police involvement, support by facts and evidence, and a court hearing. In these posts, commenters express faith in the justice system’s ability to respond adequately to sexual assault allegations, and with that faith comes the normative expectation that the justice system is the place to which sexual assault victims ought to turn. The justice system is held to be a real-making entity: allegations become true or false based on a court’s rendering, which absolves the commenter of the responsibility of taking a position with respect to the allegations (or even with respect to the problematic role of the justice system in addressing cases of sexual assault). The third thing the *Innocent until proven guilty!* comments are saying is that the accuser’s burden of proof has not sufficiently been satisfied, a judgement that there appears to be insufficient or questionable proof to substantiate the allegations made against Ghomeshi (“It is absolute stupidity to even consider such claims of abuse considering zero police complaints or investigations were made”), and he therefore ought not have been fired.

This third element in the responses is interesting in that it shifts the other two meanings in these messages when they appear together: while the first two meanings would caution readers against rash judgement, or have the matter of judgement placed in another entity’s hands altogether, the third meaning (where present) demonstrates that commenters are nonetheless making their own assessment of the information with which Ghomeshi is presenting them – that is, without cautiously waiting to consider the *CBC*’s or the alleged victims’ side of the story as they appear to be saying is necessary. In other words, *Innocent until proven guilty!* messages are not always an unbiased call to consider temperate, sober responses to Ghomeshi’s account in the proper forum: rather, they can be loaded with implications which become accusatory, namely

that others are rushing to an unfair judgement when siding with Ghomeshi's accusers, given the judgement that his accusers must be dishonest since they are not pursuing their allegations through the justice system.

The emotion conveyed in these kinds of responses can be characterized less as sympathy for a beloved friend (as in the *It's nobody's business what you do in your bedroom!* responses) and more as anger or outrage: the object of concern for these commenters is the injustice of Ghomeshi's predicament, not the perceived personal harm done to him. Where these comments involve taking up the details of Ghomeshi's story and repeating them to draw conclusions about the truth or falseness of the allegations, the responders effectively place themselves alongside Ghomeshi in agreement and support.

Questioning the women

If these women claim "repeated" sexual abuse then they're full of shit. Nobody goes back to an "abuser" that they're casually dating over and over again. (Jessica Inamorata, October 28 6:08AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 51)

If it were a sexual assault there would be a charge, but there is no one in sight. (Elena Permiakov, October 28 7:42AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 67)

This is such a strange story. If I, as a woman, were assaulted I would think the police would be my first point of contact to spill not a reporter at some tabloid newspaper. Any other newspaper in the world will have more credibility than the Toronto Star. So sorry for your pain Jian. Head up. This too shall pass (Rita Wall, October 28 8:16AM, from Richard, 2018, pp. 73-74)

Jian - As a 71 year old great grandmother , I couldn't care less what you do in your bedroom as long as it doesn't involve children. What is wrong with your ex-girlfriend that she would go public with this/ If she didn't enjoy it, why did she date you? (Doruta Chapel, October 28 8:10AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 73)

Early in the post, supporters of Ghomeshi frequently called into question the alleged victims' motives in coming forward. These commenters demonstrate that they have understood the nature of the *CBC*'s concerns with Ghomeshi's behaviour, and have already determined the women's motives are not honest. They make this clear directly ("they're full of shit") or indirectly with rhetorical questions ("If it were a sexual assault" "if she didn't enjoy it, why did she date you?"). They also make evaluative statements, in which the commenters' expectations for their own hypothetical behaviour become standards for other people's behaviour, as when Wall says "If I, as a woman, were assaulted I would think the police would be my first point of contact to spill." This comment also again demonstrates how some responders took up comments Ghomeshi makes himself in the post. There are similarities between Rita Wall's comment and lines 80-81 from Ghomeshi's post where he says "if I had engaged in non-consensual behavior why was the place to address this the media?": both comments question why the alleged victims did not register their concerns in what is identified as the appropriate venue, namely the justice system. Other evaluative statements are entirely unanticipated by Ghomeshi's post – including Inamorata's "Nobody goes back to an "abuser" that they're casually dating over and over again," -- but still leverage commenters' expectations for victims of sexual violence's behaviour.

The above responses involve questioning the women's behaviour and motives, but these questions only thinly veil an accusation, namely that their behaviour reveals the type of person the anonymous women to be. That accusation is made clearer in responses which involved questioning the women's personal character, and even their essential nature, more directly:

Shakespeare was right. Hell hath no fury, like a woman scorned. (Tim Wiebe, October 28 12:21AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 19)

the sluts banded together to rake in some dough (Stein Wahl, October 28 12:17AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 18)

Bitches be crazy, man (Jer Jitsu, October 28 3:08AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 32)

Why these three women did not go to the police after they finished their orgasms??? Why

is it that after many months they just realized that they were beaten? We live in a free society where we can go to police and make a report if someone harm us. Believe me it has nothing to do with Jian's personal life. Three angry women wants publicity and probably compensation for the pleasure they received. (Ahmad Farhad Asmat, October 28 10:51AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 99)

Oh puh-lease ! If there has been a crime then go through proper channels... Using the media to defame is nothing more than vigilantism and quite frankly insulting to the many brave women who have had the courage to face their attackers in a court of law. (Emmeline Gray, October 28 1:54AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 27)

Here, commenters are explicit and direct in condemning the women, characterizing them as vengeful or angry, manipulative, and calling them by derogatory gendered names (“bitches” and “sluts”). They say their behaviour and motives are to be expected, given the sort of person they are deemed to be. The alleged victims’ womanhood serves as proof of their mercurial nature, which in turn is an indictment of the honesty of their intentions: such essentializing statements leave very little discursive footing on which to defend the alleged victims, or for them to defend themselves. These types of comments say women in general cannot be assumed to be good-willed, since they can be motivated to pursue fame and fortune through the ruin of men. All these comments reflect allusions made by Ghomeshi in his post about his “jilted ex-girlfriend’s” motivations for coming forward (as discussed in Chapter 2); evidently, those allusions resonated with some commenters. These commenters emphasize women’s power to destroy men with false allegations, which stands in contrast to (and thereby undermines) their claim of having been made powerless in becoming a victim of sexual assault.

To be completely accurate here, we would have to specify that Ghomeshi was the one to first publicly claim that there were women claiming they were victims of sexual assault at his hands, a point that bears repeating (however awkwardly) given how quickly the alleged survivors of sexual assault were made to be responsible for the demise of Ghomeshi’s career in public broadcasting: the timeline of events leading up to Ghomeshi’s firing does not support that, as seen in Chapter 1. Also, as in the case of some of the *Innocent until proven guilty!* posts, most of these commenters say the motivations of the “jilted ex-girlfriend” and the persons colluding with

her (to whom Ghomeshi refers in his post) are questionable because their allegations are becoming public through the media instead of through the official channels of the justice system; yet it is Ghomeshi himself who shared the allegations through social media, not the women. Similar to some of the other themes examined so far, the suggestion repeated here is that any claim of sexual violence needs to be validated by a police investigation in order to be considered true, which is striking because the converse is evidently not true: as the accused, Ghomeshi benefitted from the legal presumption of innocence and needed only to post his version of the story – without police investigation – to find supporters.

Not everyone agrees...

Although most commenters early in the feed were supportive of Ghomeshi and his post, this was not so in all cases. Some commenters took issue with the nature of Ghomeshi's confessed sexual proclivities:

First things first dear Jian... seek psychological help sweetie. To feel pleasure with the suffering of a human being is not normal... consenting or not. And while you hired a company for your Facebook statement, to allow them to use the death of your father as a sympathy tool is so disturbing... Let me give you my two cents: God, that is all love, took the poor old man just in time to avoid him the huge suffering you brought to your life. Be thankful... and a bit more moral. (Virginia Ramunda-Marty, October 28 12:17AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 18)

This guy likes being violent to women – he finds it titillating – and wants us to feel sorry for him?!?!?! Violence against women is wrong, unless it turns the guy on. Then it's supposed to be okay?? (Anne Glenn, October 28 at 9:20PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 181)

This man, by opening his bedroom doors voluntarily, has admitted to enjoying the demeaning and subjugation of women. If women, half his age, volunteer to be punched, slapped and strangled, I cannot imagine that they are doing so with full awareness, blinded by his celebrity (CBC based). We all know about women staying in abusive relationships, In any case, I cannot support this person being a representation of CBC in any way, shape or form. Yes, he is talented, but so was Ted Bundy. (Karen Goodwin,

October 28 at 4:21AM, from Richard, 2018, p.37)

These commenters say that BDSM and rough sex as described by Ghomeshi constitute acts of violence, and the use of violence under any circumstances – and especially against women – is morally wrong. As such, Ghomeshi’s bedroom activities become a matter of everybody’s concern and Ghomeshi has indicted himself in their eyes by his sexual proclivities and actions alone, never mind the allegations against him.

Other non-supporters of Ghomeshi took it upon themselves to respond to commenters who questioned the women’s motives for making allegations:

Why on earth would any woman, even a jilted ex, want to take on the public skewering that comes with making false accusations of a celebrity? Sure, don't automatically assume he's guilty of assault - at the same time, don't assume that these women are lying. They really don't have anything to gain by doing so. False assault accusations happen, but they're rare. (Robin Miller Flamm, October 27 11:35PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 12)

If any of you are wondering why the FOUR women havent come forward till now scroll through and carefully read the comments on this post. It amazes and disgusts me how Jian is allowed to be innocent till proven guilty yet these women are automatically liars. It is precisely this stigma that causes victims of abuse to blame themselves and not come forward. Shame on all of you for perpetuating this (Graeme Phillips, October 28 9:29PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 182)

These comments challenge others’ normative expectations for sexual assault victims’ behaviour by re-interpreting the information Ghomeshi shared in light of the experience of sexual assault victims more generally (‘False assault accusations happen, but they’re rare’ ; “...this stigma that causes victims of abuse to blame themselves and not come forward.”). This could be a powerful rhetorical move, but to be most effective it requires that readers are familiar with the experiences of sexual assault survivors more generally.

Others still point out that as a celebrity and a successful person, Ghomeshi is a powerful man with the resources to and an interest in carefully telling his story. They say that Ghomeshi’s post is very one-sided, and carefully crafted to allude to the alleged victims’ motivations. They

respond to questions about the women's motivations by questioning Ghomeshi's motivation in sharing his post, and remind participants in the online discussion that he might have others helping him construct his message (possibly including an administrator of his page selectively deleting posts, as previously mentioned):

Also the whole "your personal life is yours" argument is bogus in this case, because the allegations have been diluted with talk of his personal life, all within the framework of a carefully constructed and effectively manipulative PR campaign. It sure seems to have worked on many of you. (Phillip C Western IV, October 28 12:48AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 22)

posts whereby people have had direct, incriminating knowledge of Ghomeshi's behaviour towards women are being deleted...if you say you know first hand a woman...bam off you go. (JT Cassidy, October 28 2:21AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 29)

Consent consent consent you need consent non consensual sex is violence . It makes me sad and angry that the women involved are afraid to talk feel ashamed are gonna be judge and you get to write your poor me letter. Power and control and again you are showing that power and control is important to you by how you are handling this. (Claude Brown, October 28 7:20AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 63)

A Turning Point

There is a noticeable shift in the content of the responses from largely supporting to largely not supporting Ghomeshi and/or his post. In the interest of visualizing this shift, I drew a frequency distribution of the proportion of explicitly supportive and non-supportive comments relative to the total number of comments analyzed in each section. As seen in Figure 1.1, the percentage of supportive comments plummeted at the same time as non-supportive comments spiked, then stayed more or less consistent through the remainder of the feed.

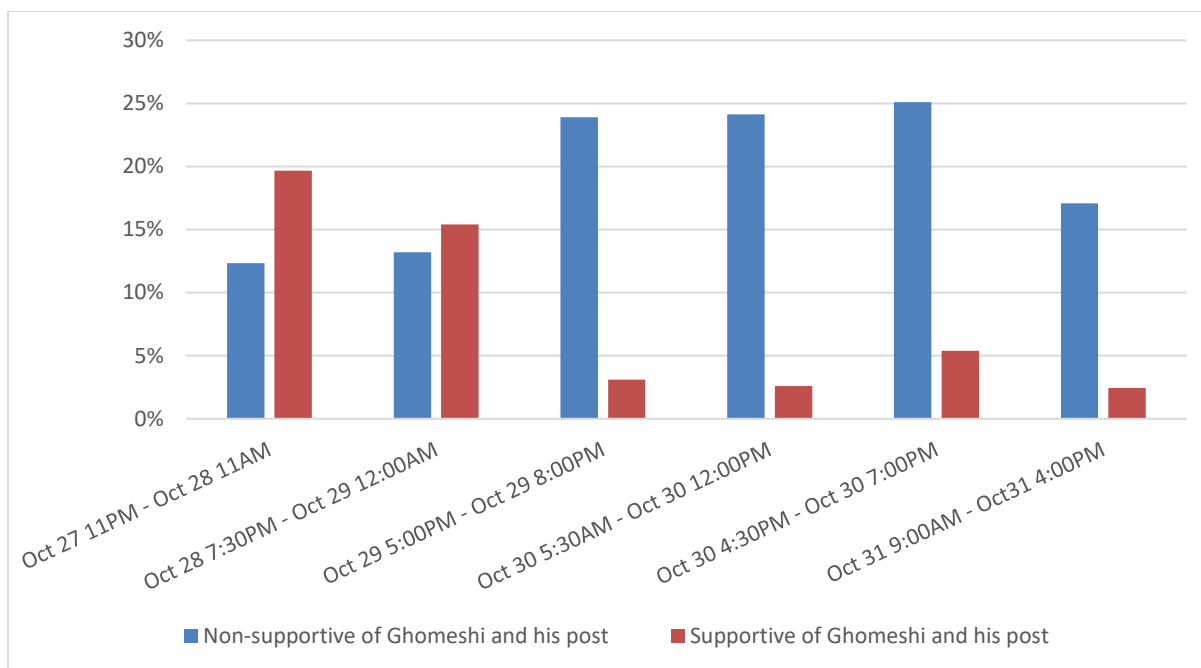


Figure 1. Supportive and non-supportive comments for Ghomeshi and his post over time. This bar charts represents the proportion of comments that were supportive of Ghomeshi and his post compared to the proportion of comments that were not supportive of Ghomeshi and his post.

It is important to note here that the remaining comments, by virtue of not explicitly supporting or not supporting Ghomeshi, did not necessarily fall into a category of expressing a neutral position with respect to the unfolding scandal. The largest category of analyzed comments actually involved commenters addressing other commenters. Examples of this are found in the following pairs:

@barbara low Seriously, you need to grow the fuck up. BDSM wouldnt just mean he was aggressive or liked it it means she was to you prude (Tyson Lee , October 28 6:07AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 51)

Tyson Lee you need to learn what quotation marks are used for. (Barbara Low October 28 6:13AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 52)

So, Heather, you were there when these attacks supposedly happened? You were there when Jian and these women went on dates? You were there when Jian and these women were having sex? First of all, gross but whatever floats your boat. Secondly, read up on feminism and gender equality then we can talk about abuse (Scott Rolands October 28 at 7:33PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 170)

Scott, go back to your pof profile. I'm sure there are dozens of reject messages there for you to get outraged about. I won't respond to you again. (Heather Ruth October 28 7:40PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 171)

Such comments were frequent, petty and patronizing when not defensive and petulant, and riddled with non-sequiturs, ad hominem, general verbal abuse, and profanity. They could have been funny had these discussions not dominated the online conversation, or had been executed more stylishly. More to the point for the purposes of analysis, a commenter could not be assumed to be taking a position of support or non-support of Ghomeshi in these comments, since such an assumption would have violated the faithful reading I endeavoured to execute for this chapter: without seeing what else these commenters contributed to the online discussion, the position they are taking with respect to the allegations cannot be determined.

There were other categories of comments that did not involve explicit communication of support or non-support for Ghomeshi. These included those in which a link to a news article was posted without further comment; comments which lent themselves to ambiguity for want of tone cues, such as

Nothing wrong, he says. (Khan Trayles, October 30 around 6:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 515)

and comments that were either nonsensical, or did not address the content of the scandal at all, such as the following:

Does anyone remember Jian bad mouthing the Prime Minister before this happened. I thought for sure he was talking about the PM's reaction to the Parliament shooting just days before he got fired from the CBC.

Not saying that it's related but I can't seem to find any trace of his remarks and was sure he made some.. Odd??? (Julien Caesar October 28 4:14AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 37)

In short, the categories of comments which did not clearly evidence support or non-support for Ghomeshi are not represented in Figure 1.1. because the comments do not fit either of those categories.

The alleged victims speak back

The shift discussed above coincides with the *Toronto Star* republishing its article containing sexual assault allegations against Ghomeshi on October 29 2014. As discussed in Chapter 1, at this point four more women's allegations (including those of Lucy DeCoutere) were added to the first four. On that same evening, *CBC Radio* aired an interview with an anonymous woman. Both this woman and DeCoutere the very next morning would say they had come forward partly in reaction to Ghomeshi's post, spurred by his claim that their alleged experiences of sexual assault at his hands were lies (which Ghomeshi says in his post when he warned readers that "in the coming days you will prospectively hear about how I engage in all kinds of unsavoury aggressive acts in the bedroom. And the implication may be made that this happens non-consensually. And that will be a lie" (lines 93-35)).

The shift in the feed also coincides with commenters posting and re-posting the *Toronto Star* article (for which a photo of DeCoutere was the thumbnail) as a way to share information with other people in the discussion, and also posted and re-posted a recording of the anonymous woman's radio interview. That DeCoutere attached her name to her allegations lent them credibility in the eyes of many commenters.

you are so screwed dude, you hit lucy from trailer park boys and she's more than happy to speak publically....i hope you rot you douchebag (Lana Mari, October 29 7:25PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 297)

Is EIGHT enough? Eight women have come forward now with nearly identical stories. Do you all honestly believe this is still a "jilted ex conspiracy"? One brave woman

(remember the one who was PUNCHED AND CHOKED WITHOUT CONSENT??) has come forward with her name. It's Lucy DeCouture. An actress yes, but also A CAPTAIN IN THE ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE!! http://www.thestar.com/.../jian_ghomeshi_8_women_accuse... (Jacqueline Gilmour, October 29 at 7:41PM, from Richard, 2018, pp. 303-304)

Ryan Edward Katic 99.9% of women do not make this stuff up. Read the Toronto Star article.. for christe sake, a Captian in the Canadian Airforce is coming out with details and others . The writing is on the wall. Accept it. (Barton Cutten, October 29 8:18PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 314)

A compelling pattern

After the turning point, commenters started pointing out that the eight women's stories are independent, and yet fit into a pattern: that of violence against non-consenting women.

You wanted women to speak up in public? Well actress Lucy DeCoutere did. ANother victim of his violence. #8 to speak up so far. (Steph Anne, October 29 6:53PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 289)

This article leaves little doubt of his repetative stereotyped assault on multiple women who have never met one another. I think it is "Well Good Bye There Jian Ghomeshi" Might just as well get FB to close down your page. The tide has definitely turned, swept under your self created tsunami of inhumanity.

http://www.thestar.com/.../jian_ghomeshi_8_women_accuse... Jian Ghomeshi: 8 women accuse former CBC host of violence, sexual abuse or... THESTAR.COM (Christine Johns, October 29 7:15PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 294)

From the beginning of this, I said "the court of public opinion" should not be judge and jury. Wanted to give Jian the benefit of the doubt, wanted to believe that everyone is innocent until proven guilty. I'm sorry, but when EIGHT women come forward, including one who was willing to put her name out there in the media, it's all too much of a stretch

to believe this was not a pattern of abusive behaviour for over a decade. 50 Shades of Grey, I don't think so. (Tracy Proutt, October 29 8:00PM, from Richard, 2018, pp. 308-309)

Commenters reasoned that if the allegations reveal a pattern of sexual violence against women – and not of consensual BDSM sex as Ghomeshi had said—then Ghomeshi’s post was not only incorrect but must have been deliberately designed to obscure the truth. Commenters noted with increasing frequency, and often with strong emotions such as alarm and dismay, how consistently the essay painted Ghomeshi as a victim, and how successfully it manipulated unsuspecting readers into believing him. As these commenters say, that Ghomeshi apparently needed to manipulate his audience with a cleverly crafted post is an indictment of the honesty in the rest of his claims, or at the very least ought to invite more careful consideration:

A suspiciously manipulative document that should be read very carefully. (Peter Johnston, October 29 at 6:21PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 282)

Jian's statement was nothing short of emotional manipulation; it was designed to sway and frame any story before it became a story, and to discredit anyone who came forward. The "crazy ex" narrative always elicits sympathy, apparently. And if fans are so easily manipulated by him, you can imagine that some of these women might have been too. He used his status at his workplace as well. Why don't women complain to the authorities? Probably because they felt isolated and because they felt no one would believe them (looking at all the initial comments here, is it any wonder why?) It is my experience that many bullies play the victim card, so you feel sorry for them and not their victims. To be honest, I am surprised he didn't try the "self defence" line so many abusers use. (Jocelyn Nadine, October 29 at 6:35PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 283)

He has made it very clear with his team of lawyers, his 55 million law suit and his spin team "Navigator" that any woman pressing charges will be annihilated in court. (Sue Donaldson, October 30 at 7:02AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 456)

“Jian hurts women”

What is perhaps most striking at this point in the feed is that for many of these

commenters there is no question that the alleged victims have in fact been harmed by Ghomeshi. The compelling pattern in the allegations combined with the apparent dishonesty of his post appears to convince these posters that Ghomeshi has sexually assaulted the women who have come forward, and has likely harmed even more:

Good bye Jian - you woman beater - CBC was right to fire you. If you get one penny from them, I hope all women in this country go after you..... (Ana Smith, October 29 7:03PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 291)

You beat women, Jian. If you have any shred of dignity you should drop the PR act, apologize to your victims, apologize to the BDSM community for smearing them, accept the public backlash and consequences, seek help for your problem, and become a better person. What you do in the bedroom is not private -sexuality is a social and political choice, and when you chose to hurt people, do things without their consent, especially as a public figure, you will face social and political consequences. (Gabrielle Mariano, October 29 8:02PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 310)

Eight women have come forward and one of them, a popular actress, has revealed herself. She's extremely believable. Eight is a large number. Ghomeshi may have hired a clever PR firm to script this as BDSM but it's becoming apparent that he latched onto that community as a way of legitimizing his abuse. People in the BDSM community think he's full of it. I now think he's full of it. I simply don't believe his claims and I doubt we've heard the last from the many women this creep has abused. (Mackenna Wilson, October 29 8:02PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 310)

To have produced such a pattern of harm against women, some commenters opined, Ghomeshi must be in need of psychological help, or might be a predator, or some measure of both – in any case, the allegations are said to reveal that he is a dangerous man. Commenters recognize him as a public threat hiding in plain sight, and alternately encourage him to seek professional help or condemn him, and sometimes manage to do both. The conversation here is not about establishing his innocence or his guilt – these are legal constructs, and besides in these

comments there is no question that he might be innocent– but about identifying and calling out a threatening deviant behaviour that harms others:

I'm glad he was found out before he escalated further and perhaps killed someone. I hope charges are pressed so that he experiences real consequences. I hope he can acknowledge that he's an ill man and get some help. (Sue Donaldson, October 30 at 6:37AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 449)

Eight women.....what is wrong with you??? Trying to say it was consensual. You are a predator. YOU'RE SICK. The majority of women don't report sexual assault for different reasons.....that doesn't bother me.....what bothers me is you. I don't believe your story. Nice spin you tried to put on it but your lies are coming out. CBC did the right thing. (Louise Baker, October 30 at 7:22AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 459)

Interestingly, the four newer allegations in the *Toronto Star* article were not radically different from the original four, and did not provide any new information about Ghomeshi's alleged assaultive behaviour. Similarly, the anonymous woman and DeCoutere's accounts were already in the reprinted article before they were made available in audio format. Although it took eight allegations for any of them to become widely believable and accepted as true, each new story only augmented the number of cases at issue, not their substance: arguably, if the first through fourth allegations were not especially believable for many commenters, then the fifth through eighth ought not have been either. Yet the volume of allegations was compelling. Also, Ghomeshi's post was never edited or modified once it was posted: that it was carefully constructed and manipulative was always available to be seen. Yet it was not described as obviously so for many commenters until this turn in the feed.

“Ghomeshi is a...”

Some of the more visceral non-support responses featured name-calling, vitriolic condemnation, and anger heaped on Ghomeshi. Often addressed to him personally and including graphic or obscene imagery, and even in some cases threats, these comments leveled accusations against Ghomeshi's very nature: he was called narcissistic, arrogant, careless with people, vain, perverted, a closeted homosexual, and so on:

After reading this, I have to say, you're a real shit-head Jian. I'm embarrassed I ever liked your show or listened to you. I hope you go to jail where Bubba can treat you the same way you treated this young woman. You'll be the SUB wife for life in prison, tough guy. (Alexei Maxim Russell, October 29 5:53PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 278)

Freak (Janice Wyatt, October 29 at 6:49PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 288)

You lying coward! F off with your lawsuit! That's 50 million we would have to pay! If you are so wronged go work for a private station! Continue your career! This post was such damage control by a guilty man, as all the proof is now coming out. Go away you ego maniac psycho! (Mike Ritchie, October 29 at 7:04PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 291)

Dude, if your gay. Bend over for me, I'll be more than happy to choke you and fuck you in the ass Jian (Kenny Anderson, October 29 at 7:55PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 307)

Kill Yourself, Jian. (George Fatsolopolos, October 29 at 6:59PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 290)

As a former fan of his, I can now confidently say that he is a sick, abusive sociopath and a despicable, revolting waste of life...a master manipulator with delusions of grandeur. This disgusting douchebag should be in jail. (Erin McPherson, October 29 at 7:58PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 308)

Jian, you are a liar, a piece of shit and deserve no sympathy or consideration. Fuck you. (Ian Jones, October 30 at 8:50AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 471)

One recurring feature in some of these more abusive comments are references to Big Ears Teddy – reportedly Ghomeshi's anxiety-therapy stuffed animal, as mentioned in Chapter 1. In their reprinted article, the *Toronto Star* published that

Two of the women who allege they were physically assaulted also say that before the alleged assaults in his home he introduced them to Big Ears Teddy, a stuffed bear, and he

turned the bear around just before he slapped or choked them, saying that “Big Ears Teddy shouldn’t see this.” (Donovan and Brown, October 29 2014)

That detail was alternately deemed disturbing or strange enough to be worthy of mockery. Some commenters hypothesized the toy served a dark abusive purpose, and appeared to signal the depths of Ghomeshi’s alleged depravity:

What's with the teddy bear thing Jian? That's some straight out of silence of the lambs buffalo bill shit right there. Effen creeper . (Susan Sealy, October 30 at 6:40AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 449)

Poor Big Ears Teddy must need therapy too (Felicia Cohen, October 30 at 10:03AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 475)

I hope you end up in prison with your fucking teddy bear. (Christine Brisson, October 29 at 7:23PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 297)

3 in 1000 women are successful in sexual assault charges. great odds for these women.. fucking teddy bear he turned around so the bear would not watch had a camera ... he fucking taped his sick appetites to watch later.... fucking asshole (Kelley Landrie Maki, October 30 around 6:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 517)

“I retract/withdraw my earlier support for Ghomeshi”

Among all these, in perhaps the most striking comments in the feed commenters returned to the online conversation chiefly to express regret and guilt for having supported Ghomeshi earlier on: this was often signaled by the use of the phrases “I retract my earlier support” or “I withdraw my earlier support.” The words “retraction” and “withdrawal” here carry connotations of formally recorded public avowals, such as those made in a court of justice, that require formal amendment: it is a stunning phrasing for commenters using an informal social media platform like Facebook:

Retracting my support- You need help. (Kenzie Connolly, October 30 at 6:24AM, from

Richard, 2018, p. 446)

I retract my support. What you're doing will be held against you in court. You should be ashamed. (Cheryl McNaughten, October 30 at 7:39AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 461)

I retract my earlier comment of support. (Debbie Imboden, October 30 at 11:24AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 482)

I withdraw my support (Wanda Denny, October 30 at 11:49AM, from Richard, 2018, p.484)

OK taking back my earlier comment in your support. Have fun being out of a job, creep. (Mary Wimmer, October 30 at 11:59AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 485)

I withdraw my previous comment & hope all these women that have been victimized have an opportunity to be heard. (Sandra Haslett, October 30 at 5:24pm, from Richard, 2018, p. 512)

Some commenters who felt the need to account for their change of heart pointed to having had the sudden realization that though they had felt that they had a relationship with Ghomeshi, they in fact did not know him at all, and the illusion of having personal knowledge of his character was a product of his celebrity. These posts carry a chastened tone coupled with sadness or anger:

mine was one of the first comments on here so I can't find it to remove it. I ardently defended him initially after first reading this post. I shocked even myself because I never disregard the accusations of violence by men toward women. I am an ardent feminist and greatly concerned about violence toward women and how pervasive it is in our culture and how common it can be in relationships. Yet there I was defending him based solely on what he said. Every situation is different. Of course now that women are coming forward, my tune is a different one altogether. I could get into perception and media manipulation, but I think the point I would like to make is how abusive men can be very

charming and extremely persuasive and have a squeaky clean image. And of course, abusers are often drawn to fame and wealth and positions of power. He was scheduled to make an appearance in my little northern city next week and only a small community of people up here listen to CBC and I cannot help but think it could've been me. Makes me sick. I am withdrawing my support from this page. We have lost what has become a strong Canadian cultural icon that I was proud of. I am sad. (Melodie Ward, October 30 around 7:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 524)

As it has become clearer now that this is and always has been an issue of assault, not sexual proclivities, I want to apologize to the victims as my earlier comments no doubt, hurt them further. This has been a murky ride and I now see that despite my zero tolerance of JG, I fell for part of his story and ended up taking you down with him. I am very sorry. (Mary Macdonald, October 29 at 5:37PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 275)

To all, i liked his status within minutes of it being released, and when it become apparent i had been also been lied to, manipulated, and that i connected with the victims, i fucking unliked his status in a heartbeat, and please, do the same. We dont know Jian, but we know he is involved in a story that goes like this "once upon a time, a man pulled a woman's hair and punched her repeatedly because he likes it rough. And she, well, she didn't like it at all.... Contribute to the happy ending, unlike his status, become smart and whole again and go back to not liking men hitting and sexually assaulting women... (Mélanie Hughes, October 29 at 6:02PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 279)

On Sunday I wrote here in support of Jian. I regret that now. It was a knee jerk reaction. I wrote without thinking, hearing only his side of the story. It was a reflection of my sadness at losing my favourite broadcaster on CBC. But I do not know him, and now, hearing more of the story, I believe the CBC did the right thing. I wish only the best for the women he has hurt. (Jasmine Field, October 29 at 7:13PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 294)

This meaning-dense theme will be revisited in Chapter 4.

Not everyone agrees here either...

In spite of the overwhelming turn against Ghomeshi, he retained supporters after the *Toronto Star* article was reprinted. Although far less in number than before the article was re-published, the comments supportive of Ghomeshi and his post at this point sounded a lot like early ones:

I feel sorry for You Jian Ghomeshi. The CBC has been on a smear campaign against you, wasting 15 20 minutes every news broadcast. What You or anyone else does in their bedroom with another person (that does not complain until they are offered to go on TV) is not a employers business, unless it directly effects the job. As you notice the smear campaign seems to be working against you by a lot of Conservative minded people that seem to want to tell you how you should act in your bedroom. It is none of their business! (Craig Cavanagh, October 30 around 7:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 523)

Jian. I also believe you r innocent until proven guilty. I do question your taste in women, however. (Carolyn Turner, October 30 around 8:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 529)

Let this guy live!!! These women consented and if they had such a problem they would have contacted the police after the first time!! Not after he broke up with them. Give me a fuckin break!!! (Tania Cecchino, October 31 around 3:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 595)

I hope that you have the evidence, I hope your ex friend will stand up for you, probably best she come forward sooner than later, the damage is already done to your reputation, too bad, I loved your voice on air, I hVe never been a fan of the CBC but loved your show. (Jan Langton, October 31 around 4:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 587)

Indeed, in these comments can again be found the *It's nobody's business what you do in your bedroom!* theme (“What You or anyone else does in their bedroom with another person ... is not a employers business...” ; “It is none of their business!”) including instances that are more familiar in tone (“the damage is already done to your reputation, too bad, I loved your voice on

air, I hVe never been a fan of the CBC but loved your show”), as well as the *Innocent until proven guilty!* theme (“I hope that you have the evidence”; “Jian. I also believe you r innocent until proven guilty”) and the *Questioning the women* theme (“if they had such a problem they would have contacted the police after the first time!!”). It appears, then, that whatever convinced a number of commenters to believe the allegations and even return to the feed to retract their statements and express regret was not compelling enough to have convinced everybody.

Final Words

To sum up, the Facebook posts analyzed in this chapter contain many themes, and where it is made explicit in the comments they can be said to reflect two broad positions: that of support for Ghomeshi or parts of his post, and that of non-support for Ghomeshi or parts of his post. Though both broad positions were evidenced before and after the *Toronto Star* article was republished, the majority of these position-taking comments went from supporting to not supporting Ghomeshi. In comments from Ghomeshi’s supporters, personal affection for the radio star, belief in privacy in the sexual domain and/or in the presumption of innocence, and a lack of belief in the women making allegations of sexual assault are themes which can be found. For comments from Ghomeshi’s non-supporters, evidence of a compelling pattern in the sexual assault allegations combined with apparent dishonesty in his Facebook post, his unmasking as a man “in need of help,” and vitriolic name calling and condemnation are all observable themes. A striking theme of publicly retracting support for Ghomeshi was also noted among those who declared themselves as no longer supporting Ghomeshi or his post.

Having now surveyed the public response in the first few days of the Ghomeshi scandal as found in the Facebook posts, in the next chapter I will focus my attention on the matter of belief and believability in that public discussion. What did it mean for Facebook commenters to talk about believing Ghomeshi, or his post, or his alleged victims, or their allegations? How did these commenters talk about believing and belief? And how does it matter?

Chapter 4: Belief in the Responses to Ghomeshi’s Facebook Post

Having examined Ghomeshi’s Facebook post and the themes appearing in response to it, I will now turn my attention to the subject of belief in the commenters’ responses. As discussed in Chapter 3, Ghomeshi’s supporters offered reasons for their support including belief in privacy in the sexual domain and/or in the presumption of innocence, or a lack of belief in the women making allegations of sexual assault; non-supporters said they did not believe Ghomeshi due to evidence of a compelling pattern of sexual assault and to Ghomeshi’s own apparent dishonesty; and many commenters returned to the social media conversation to publicly retract support for Ghomeshi once they stopped believing him and/or his account. The question of what people mean when they talk about belief such that commenters were lending or rescinding support to persons or their accounts, and the question of what it means to change beliefs, assert themselves given how central the concern is for commenters themselves.

In this chapter, I will try to answer these questions using a discursive psychological analysis. I will also introduce Charles Taylor’s (1985) “strong evaluations” to augment the analysis beyond the limits of the method being used.

About the Approach

Baerveldt and Voestermans (2005) say that in cognitivist approaches in psychology, beliefs are typically regarded as “propositional attitudes,” and persons exposed to them are understood to either accept or reject them (Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005, p. 453). They suggest this sets up a distorted understanding of beliefs: to reduce a belief to a propositional attitude erases the process by which it is formulated, robbing psychology of an understanding of its affective and real-world content or origins. More still, reducing the action of believing to a cognitive process of acceptance or rejection pulls the phenomenon of believing out of the social domain and locates it in minds, casting it as an individual subjective experience. As the authors remind us: “‘ideas’ do not just represent pieces of knowledge stored in the mind, but compel us to certain kinds of action,” – and understanding how ideas are compelling of our actions matters when we are trying to understand persons (Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005, p. 453).

Discursive psychological approaches offer a critical alternative to cognitivist approaches by treating “mind, experience, emotion, intention and so on in terms of how they are constructed

and oriented to in interaction” (Wiggins & Potter, 2017, p. 99). Discursive psychology “starts with a view of people as social and relational” (Wiggins & Potter, 2017, p. 93), and examines how people’s use of language in everyday situations is “constructed to perform interactional or interpersonal functions. It studies what people do in language” (Wooffitt, 2011, p. 115). What people ‘do in language’ is “construct versions of the world that have implications for their own dispositions and thoughts” and “these versions of the world are treated as a product of the talk itself”(Wiggins & Potter, 2017, p. 97): in other words, for discursive psychologists, we constitute our social world through our use of language, and how and in what ways we constitute the world is a matter of research interest.

Discursive psychology is a specific kind of discourse analysis, distinct in that it has three intended applications:

“(i) respecification and critique of psychological topics and explanations; (ii) investigations of how everyday psychological categories are used in discourse; (iii) studies of how psychological business (motives and intentions, prejudices, reliability of memory and perception, etc.) is handled and managed in talk and text, without having to be overtly labeled as such.” (Edwards, 2004, p. 259)

It is also distinct from discourse analysis in that it draws specifically from conversation analysis and its ethnomethodological grounding. These result in a key feature of discursive psychological analysis: in contrast to cognitivist psychology, whereby language is understood to be “a window on, or expression of, the workings of cognitive procedures” occurring in minds (Wooffitt, 2011, p. 115), the action-orientation understanding of language in discursive psychology means that, analytically, we cannot rely on people's accounts to reveal the inner properties of the mind as the organisation of discursive acts might be informed by the social actions for which they have been designed” (Wooffitt, 2011, p. 116). Accordingly, since meaning is an interactional accomplishment, it cannot be explained by reference to mental states, but requires a detailed examination of the elements that make up our discourses:

[I]t is made up of linguistic building blocks: words, categories, idioms, repertoires and so on. (...) [It is] situated within a specific sequential, turn-by-turn environment; words are understood according to what precedes and follows them. (...) Discourse is also situated within a particular institutional setting, such as a telephone helpline, school classroom or

family mealtime. Finally, discourse is also situated rhetorically, within a particular argumentative framework. One way of describing something will always be countering – either explicitly or indirectly – alternative ways of describing the same thing. (Wiggins & Potter, 2017, p. 97)

Analytically, this focus means avoiding making attributions to a speaker's (or for this chapter, a commenter's) mental states or their intentionality, since what they intend by what they say cannot be demonstrated through their use of words: what their words accomplish, on the other hand, can.

An advantage to using a discursive psychological approach to understanding the phenomenon of belief, as will be seen in this chapter, is that a careful examination of how we talk about belief can make explicit in what ways it is an ongoing accomplishment in the dialogical exchanges between persons. Moreover, discursive approaches demonstrate how “people actively position themselves in constant response to and anticipation of competing ‘versions’ of reality” (Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005, p. 455), suggesting multiple understandings of reality can exist simultaneously and making the examination of how and in what ways persons ‘compete’ for their ‘beliefs’ possible.

Out of regard for the strictures of the method, I will avoid intentional language as much as possible in elaborating my discursive psychological analysis. This will not always be possible, though: as will be seen later in this chapter, the strictures of the method are also boundaries which disallow certain analytical ventures. For clarity – and as a disclaimer of sorts – on the occasion I deliberately employ intentional language and deviate from discursive psychological canon, I will not be claiming to have a window on any commenter's true intentions or their mental state. Rather, I will be attempting to capture something of how experiences are constituted in language in terms of their existential importance. As we will see with Taylor (1985), discourses are not strictly rhetorical, and the languaged act of claiming something also constitutes something. But it is too soon to elaborate this point – for now, the analytic focus for this chapter will be on language as action, and an examination of what actions are being accomplished and how.

About the Data

For this chapter, I returned to the set of 2,967 comments which were the subject of the thematic analysis in Chapter 3. To remain faithful to the commenters' meanings and minimize ambiguity in the data, and to further narrow the materials of interest, I chose to focus on explicit expressions of belief. I isolated the comments in which the following key words were used: the nouns "belief" or "disbelief," the adjectives "believable" and "unbelievable," and the verbs "believe," "disbelieve," "believed," and "disbelieved." This yielded 192 results. I scanned this subset of comments and eliminated those which did not include original content from the commenter (eliminating for instance comments which only provided a link to an article which contained a key word). I organized the data by sorting the remaining 179 comments into in vivo categories. Fifteen categories emerged, of which four were the most elaborate and became the core of this analysis.

I then focused my gaze to what commenters were saying when they used the key terms in their responses, conducting a discursive psychological analysis using Wiggins (2017) to govern its execution and Hepburn and Wiggins (2007) for inspiration. This meant conducting multiple readings within and across each category of responses to recursively identify patterns by which commenters were positioning themselves as well as what they were accomplishing with their expressions. I then applied my reading of Taylor's strong evaluations to round out the analysis. The following chapter summarizes and discusses this work.

In the comments selected to demonstrate the analysis, I highlighted the keywords in boldface for ease of reading. As in Chapter 3, the comments are rendered exactly as they are found in the Facebook feed, and may contain grammatical, orthographic, or punctuation errors. Unlike in Chapter 3, I will also refer to specific commenters: in the interest of not mis-gendering them (a challenging task, given the nature of social media), I have chosen to refer to commenters using the pronouns used on their Facebook profile. On the occasion a commenter's profile could not be found or no specific gendered pronoun was made publicly available, I have chosen to refer to the commenter as "they" or "them" – an at-times grammatically awkward choice which potentially mis-genders commenters in spite of my best intentions, but it is a choice that does not unfoundedly assume a binary or cis-identity for commenters.

On Believing the Person

I **believe** the women. (Trish Harper, October 28 at 8:58PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 179)

Comments such as Harper's are deceptively simple. In the context of a Facebook feed characterized by strong language, volatile expressions of emotions, and sometimes lengthy diatribes of questionable coherence or relevance, Harper's expression of belief in the women is stark in its unambiguous simplicity. Her use of the first person claims the belief as her own, and the present tense lends it immediacy. Interestingly, it is not the women's allegations which she says she believes but the women themselves: this makes available that how believable the women's allegations are may in some way be tied to their personal believability. Also, it is striking that Harper contributed to the online conversation at all, given that this comment is not a response to Ghomeshi's post directly. It is also not a response to a specific other commenter in the feed: addressing this statement to someone in particular would call on them to respond somehow, while this comment instead requires no response at all. What is accomplished here is rather like a declaration: an unambiguous position stated publicly, with no attempt to minimize or soften the statement such that Harper could potentially disavow the statement later on, and with no specific intended audience. Given the at times hostile tone between commenters in the Facebook feed, this is a strange thing to do: why did Harper choose to make a public declaration on this Facebook post?

I **believe** you. Hard time in your life especially after the death of your dad . I hope you can forgive the girlfriend too. Move forward. (Carolee Fox, October 28 at 8:26PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 176)

Fox's comment is similar to Harper's in that they are both declaring their belief in a person – in this case Ghomeshi—rather than in that person's account. In this case, Fox adds expressions of sympathy for Ghomeshi's loss, and offers advice ("Move forward"). The personal relationship Ghomeshi fostered with fans over the course of his career (and called up in his Facebook post, as seen in Chapter 2) appears to be reciprocated by Fox here: she addresses him personally using the second person in a casual and direct response. The comment further echoes the content of the Facebook post in referring to the death of Ghomeshi's father and his betrayal by the jilted ex-girlfriend, indicating Fox is not questioning or challenging Ghomeshi's

post: in conjunction with the expression of sympathy, the statement of belief also becomes a statement of support.

Caroline Chartrand Im sorry I **believe** jian ghomeshi over his ex. Women are like that. And be honest ladies. No woman will ever admit up to it because we are supposed to be innocent. But she crossed a line. Thats typical for a woman to do and I'm saying this because I know a few girls who have done this before. I dont get along with girls as much as I do guys. Its just the way I was raised. Jian is a good guy for as long as I have known of him. Way too many people like him. Yes I know men can be just as difficult as women but this sounds like the typical ex girlfriend wanting to get revenge because shes too emotionally attached and was mad when she got dumped. Sorry to be honest but at least I can be honest. I know other women will lie and say they are not like that which is bull spit. I **believe** Jian Ghomeshi 110% he did nothing wrong so deal with it. (Marla Laurell, October 30 at 7:30AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 460)

I'll always **believe** the woman...it's rarely unsubstantiated yet people still don't get that...and they dismiss it and blame the woman who has already been raped, demeaned and changed for life...I've been watching this shit go on for 56 years...and I'm telling you...most every woman I know has a story or stories...either their own or someone they know.....I'll always **believe** women...in this case...the very young women...who I'm sure were smitten and trusting....and then after the fact are put through the ringer and made out to be lying and unstable...shame on you all (Charlotte Dickson, October 28 at 7:13AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 61)

In strongly stating her comment, Laurell makes available that sexual assault allegations are polarizing for those not immediately involved in them. She says “I believe jian ghomeshi over his ex”: here, Ghomeshi and his ex are understood to have mutually invalidating accounts, and either one or the other party is assumed to be lying. This sort of response to allegations of sexual assault is challenging for respondents: choosing which account to believe is also to choose a ‘side’ in a dispute. By saying she “believe[s] jian ghomeshi over his ex,” Laurell takes an unambiguous stance – with Ghomeshi, and therefore not with “his ex.”

This stance appears to be in part informed by her understanding of women more generally. Laurell's comment includes features similar to the Facebook responses which questioned the alleged victims' personal characters (as examined in Chapter 3). She repeatedly speaks to women and dishonesty, categorically saying "Women are like that" and "That's typical for a woman to do" in reference to what she identifies as "the typical ex girlfriend wanting to get revenge because she's too emotionally attached and was mad when she got dumped." Here, Laurell is calling up a "typical" account of women being held to a different standard of behaviour because of an unjust expectation of innocence ("No woman will ever admit up to it because we are supposed to be innocent"), as untruthful about having emotions like vengeance and anger motivate them ("revenge because" she was "mad when she got dumped"), and making inappropriate or irrational attachments ("she's too emotionally attached"). That women lie is further emphasized by Laurell in addressing women readers directly ("be honest ladies") and saying she knows "other women will lie and say they are not like that which is bull spit": here, she is making available that women are so inclined to lie that even women readers might lie about having the tendency or willingness to lie. (This is rather paradoxical: Laurell also says "at least I can be honest. I know other women will lie," making available that she is a woman herself, then demonstrates her honesty by being honest about how women lie.)

Laurell also calls up her relationship to Ghomeshi, not unlike Fox, to support her position: when she says "Jian is a good guy for as long as I have known of him. Way too many people like him," she is leveraging her relationship to Ghomeshi as an authoritative position from which to determine which account is true, and moreover also calls up the judgement of 'way too many people' which seem to be in agreement with her. Holding as categorically true that "Women are like that," would have to entail that the allegations against Ghomeshi cannot be true; repeating it emphasises it, especially in contrast to expressions of trusting Ghomeshi.

Interestingly, Laurell twice apologises for the emphasis in her comment ("I'm sorry" and "sorry"), but surrounded by her particular choice of words, these apologies appear sarcastic, and the comment takes on a tone which is sardonic ("at least I can be honest"), combative ("he did nothing wrong so deal with it"), and defensive ("It's just the way I was raised"). This is not entirely surprising, given the overall tone of the online conversation was characterized by extreme positions and personal attacks (as seen in Chapter 3), and posting a comment at all could be assumed would be met with a discursive attack. As with Harper, we can again ask here: why

would Laurell choose to participate in the online conversation at all?

Importantly, Laurell does not just repeat variations on essentializing statements about women (“Women are like that”): she also says “I don’t get along with girls as much as I do guys. It’s just the way I was raised” and follows this up with “I’m saying this because I know a few girls who have done this before”. Here, Laurell defends her account of women’s behaviour by leveraging her personal experiences with and knowledge of other women. She is not just making sense of the allegations against Ghomeshi in light of her experiences or previous knowledge: she is also casting the account of the allegations as being in alignment with her pre-existing account of women’s behaviour, each bolstering the other.

To compare, Dickson’s telling of how sexual assault allegations proceed is charged, pointing out real-life consequences of sexual assault allegations for survivors: using strongly-worded language she calls to attention their experiences of being “raped, demeaned and changed for life” only to be blamed for their experiences or have their allegations dismissed, then they are “put through the ringer and made out to be lying and unstable.” Dickson characterizes this process as “shit,” and explains she knows this process to be long-standing (“for 56 years”) and wide-spread (“most every woman I know has a story or stories...either their own or someone they know”). On the strength of her experience and observations (“I’ve been watching this shit... and I’m telling you”), she twice says she will “always believe women,” and that their allegations are “rarely unsubstantiated.” More still, she directly addresses other commenters on the feed in signing off with “shame on you all,” identifying the persons to whom she is responding as those who ‘don’t get it’ and are ‘putting the women through the ringer.’ By these strategies, Dickson leverages her personal experience to sweepingly identify how these allegations proceed and who participates in them. This identification is interesting, in that she also makes specific attributions to the alleged victims as being “very young women” that were “smitten and trusting”: these attributions are not characterizations found in the *Toronto Star* article or Ghomeshi’s post, yet she positions herself as ‘sure’ this is the case.

This is strikingly similar to Laurell’s post: Dickson is making sense of the allegations against Ghomeshi through her personal experience and knowledge, but in this case of how sexual assault allegations typically unfold without reference to the particularities of the allegations. Just as it appears Laurell dismisses the allegations because they are made by women (who, Laurell says, lie), it appears Dickson treats the allegations as true because they are made by women

(who, she says, are not lying when they allege they have been sexually assaulted). In both cases, the generalizations about women in these comments and the narratives surrounding sexual assault allegations require that facts be leveraged selectively, and any blanks in the account be filled with plausible details drawn from personal experiences. Laurell relies on her experiences with women and men, and her experience of women lying about sexual assault allegations; Dickson makes sense of the Ghomeshi sexual assault allegations in light of a longer-standing narrative with which she is familiar, which allows her to fill in unknown information about the alleged victims. Importantly, the same rhetorical move is made by these two commenters to make completely contrary arguments (ie “This is how I know women are, so the allegations must be false” versus “This is how I know sexual assault victims are, so the allegations must be true”): again, the position they take in their comments have nothing to do with the particularities or the validity of the accounts themselves, but with what they believe to be true about the persons rendering the accounts. This indicates there may be a concern here with aligning an expression of agreement and support with what is already held to be true, though this may not be factually true (for a fuller discussion of women and what is known of false sexual assault allegations in Canada, see Appendix 3).

Also, note how Laurell’s comment in support of Ghomeshi comes after the shift in public opinion on October 29th (discussed in Chapter 3), and Dickson’s comment in support of the women precedes it: both comments go against the dominant trend at the time they were made. Both not only provide a categorical declaration of taking a position but include a detailed account for why they are taking that particular position. This is more than taking making a public declaration, like Harper did: it is also making available to others an unpopular but justified personal judgement for others to consider.

Dear Jian, we're a hundred pourcent behind you! We **believe** in what you say and you're the best in what you do, we love the person you are and we love your show so much...CBC made a big mistake, they have to bring you back! In the meantime a lot of courage to you, it's a really difficult time, but remember that the sun will shine again...Good luck dear Jian and we're looking forward to hear you on the air, hear your voice and what you have to say, real soon...with whatever radio or tv station brings you back...HANG ON , HANG ON...We're with you! Take care ;0) (Nathalie Jobin, October

28 at 7:19AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 63)

please share- <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/gesture-of-love/> To the women who have been directly affected by Jian Ghomeshi, And to those survivors of abuse and assault who fear being **disbelieved**,

You should know first that there are so many of us who **believe** you. We understand why you fear coming forward, and want to offer a counterbalance of public support and understanding. Jian Ghomeshi's tactic of using his massive personal platform as a public figure to preemptively silence and discredit his victims is shameful.

We condemn the PR attempt to make you out to be a "jilted ex" and we see through the deplorable strategy of re-routing a conversation that should be about consent and assault to one about BDSM. No one should be abused anywhere - not on a date, not in a workplace. No one should be intimidated out of coming forward with their own stories. Gesture of Love and Support I just visited www.ipetitions.com and signed an important petition. I really care about this cause and hope you'll... IPETITIONS.COM (Karen Martin, October 29 at 6:44PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 286)

In her comment Jobin reaches out to Ghomeshi and offers him emotional encouragement in what can be read as a sympathetic response to Ghomeshi presenting himself as a victim in his post (as seen in Chapter 2). Her comment begins with "Dear Jian," a personal address mirroring Ghomeshi's "Dear Everyone," she wishes him luck and courage in his "difficult time," and exhorts him to "HANG ON"—emphasized by being repeated twice in all capital letters, and ends on an emoticon (";0") which may have been intended to represent a wink and a kiss. She speaks on behalf of "Everyone" by saying "We believe" with the plural first person used repeatedly: in speaking for others along with herself, Jobin expresses not only her own belief as well as loyalty, admiration, and love for him ("you're the best in what you do, we love the person you are and we love your show so much... We're with you!"), but extends these feelings to include a larger group of admirers, thereby magnifying the statement of support.

Importantly, this supportive comment has very little to do with the substance or truth of the allegations, or with Ghomeshi's post about them: rather, readers find here a sweeping and

non-specific validation of Ghomeshi's person through Jobin's expressions of love and appreciation ("you're the best in what you do, we love the person you are and we love your show so much") and two references to "dear Jian." She does not say "I think you are telling the truth," or "I believe your story," but "we're a hundred percent behind you!" and "We're with you!", with emphasis from the frequent use of exclamation points. There is no discursive ground here from which his alleged victims or their supporters could respond: Jobin's comment does not even acknowledge them or their allegations. In the context of the Facebook feed, Jobin appears as Ghomeshi's cheerleader, emphatically stating her categorical support amplified by "Everyone," and extending the reach of Ghomeshi's account to include her own social media audience.

This comment is like those of Laurell and Dickson in that they also make available that sexual assault allegations are polarizing, and responders appear to be expending a lot of effort in accounting for picking one side or the other. Not unlike Laurell, Jobin's response to Ghomeshi's post appears to be informed by a feeling of personal relationship to Ghomeshi. Not unlike Dickson, in saying the "CBC made a big mistake, they have to bring you back" and "we're looking forward to hear you on the air, hear your voice and what you have to say, real soon...with whatever radio or tv station brings you back," Jobin is highlighting some of the real-life consequences that come from not believing someone, but in this case the alleged sexual assaulter: that, perhaps mistakenly, jobs can be lost, loyal fans can be hurt from the loss of their favourite host, and so on. In other words, comments like Jobin's relate the ways in which sexual assault allegations are not just consequential for the alleged sexual assaulter and victim: whole networks of people are adversely impacted.

In her comment, Martin explicitly and directly addresses survivors of sexual violence with emotional encouragement, addressing what she identifies as their fear of being disbelieved. Like Jobin, Martin speaks on behalf of the "so many of us" to express "support and understanding," but in this case it is for victims who "fear coming forward." This too can be read as a response to Ghomeshi's post, except in this comment Ghomeshi's post would be held as untrue. Speaking on behalf of "so many of us" generalizes the expression of agreement and support to a larger group of persons who would "offer a counterbalance of public support and understanding." In referring to Ghomeshi's post using words like "tactic," "PR attempt," and "deplorable strategy," Martin is emphasizing the constructed quality of Ghomeshi's post, and

reframes the narrative of the responses to what it “should be about,” namely “consent and assault.” In addressing the fear of being disbelieved—a comforting, sympathetic response to the alleged victims not unlike Jobin’s for Ghomeshi—in an explicit manner, Martin does some of the rhetorical work of clearing discursive space on behalf of the women, providing a sympathetic account for their reluctance in speaking publicly. This also makes it difficult for commenters like Jobin to respond with more expressions of love or support for Ghomeshi. And, if Jobin pointed to the real-life consequences of not believing Ghomeshi, Martin points to real-life consequences of not believing the alleged victims, chiefly that other victims may be silenced. Interestingly, Martin then makes available a link to a petition where commenters can explicitly state their support and literally be counted as one of “so many of us,” challenging commenters to explicitly identify themselves as one of her “so many of us.”

These features in both Jobin and Martin’s comments position them with respect to the allegations in alignment with either Ghomeshi or the alleged victims. Both commenters point to a community of like-minded persons (which are amplified to be “Everyone” and “so many of us,” and into which other readers are invited to join—say by signing a petition) who are standing alongside them in a show of protection and encouragement. In other words, to express belief as Jobin and Martin do may be to metaphorically form or grow a community that surrounds a person and to invite others to join their example. This community may provide accounts for the person (or persons) they support, protecting them from non-supporters. As was also seen earlier with Fox, Laurell, and Dickson, taking this position is not necessarily about accepting the content or validity of Ghomeshi’s or the women’s accounts, but about validating their person: it follows from validating the person that their account is also valid.

On Believing the Account

No, I don't think this will pass. I **believe** Jian has done himself in. There is not much chance that THREE women would get together and all agree to lie in order to ruin Jian's career. Nooooooo, I don't think so. (Jane Hurl, October 28 at 11:48PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 194)

In Hurl’s comment, the phrase “I believe” acts as a modifier, qualifying the statement “Jian has done himself in” as a matter of personal belief instead of as a matter of fact. This is a

communicative strategy that softens the assertion, in that it protects Hurl from having to stand by it should it be proven incorrect. This effect is amplified as Hurl does not say what she thinks is true of the allegations, nor does she say more generally how she is making sense of the women's allegations: instead, she says what she does not think to be the case – twice – and she then states in a negative form that it is also unlikely that the women are colluding (“There is not much chance”). By this communicative strategy, Hurl manages to say something without saying it explicitly: she makes inferentially available (Edwards, 2004, p. 268) that Ghomeshi's account is not true, and that Ghomeshi is the one to have hurt his career (he has “done himself in”) by being untruthful, without saying as much. This careful saying-without-saying allows Hurl to avoid having to fully or clearly account for explicitly calling Ghomeshi untruthful while also avoiding having to account for explicitly supporting the women's allegations. This indirect way of communicating and qualifying statements with the “I believe” modifier points to the precarious positioning involved in communicating a belief, perhaps in part due to the overall tone of the comments making up the Facebook feed (which, as seen in Chapter 3, could be hostile towards the commenters), and an expectation of being attacked in response.

Jian you're a wonderful broadcaster, but this is not just another story. You have now brought us into your private life expecting your public persona to exonerate you. Your reputation was beyond reproach. I want to stand up for you as one of Canada's great intellects and journalists . However, the allegations of the four women have thrown me back on my heels. And the article in the Globe and Mail by Brenda Gossman <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/.../article21315629/has> really made me challenge my initial thought of simply coming to your defense as a citizen of Canada, who **believes** in our right to privacy. The Supreme Court can determine that informed consent may be irrelevant. And so I wish the best for all concerned. This is going to be a bumpy ride. (Andie Thewestie, October 28 at 12:41AM, from Richard, 2018, pp. 20-21)

In their comments, Thewestie does something similar to Harper by unambiguously stating their belief “in our right to privacy,” however in this case this is not quite a declaration. Thewestie says of Ghomeshi that they “want to stand up for you as one of Canada's great intellects and journalists” and identify themselves “as a citizen of Canada, who believes in our right to privacy” and who therefore has a responsibility to come to his “defense.” The word

choice here equates ‘coming to someone’s defense’ with ‘standing up for someone’: this sounds a lot like some of the previously seen metaphors related to ‘taking sides’ in sexual assault allegations in that they involve positioning Thewestie ‘with’ Ghomeshi in a defensive or protective position ‘against’ others.

Even though they say they are not sure what to think of the allegations by the end of the comment, by their expression of belief Thewestie identifies something about themselves, and more yet that identification becomes an explanation for their choices. They do not say “I believe in our right to privacy,” a formulation which would qualify the kind of believing action they are performing. Instead, they say “as a citizen of Canada, who believes in our right to privacy,” which makes the belief an attribute belonging to the identity of a “citizen of Canada” and with which Thewestie aligns themselves “as” one. Their “initial thought of simply coming to [Ghomeshi’s] defense” follows from how they identify. To lay this out in a more linear fashion, Thewestie’s comment says that part of identifying as a Canadian citizen is holding a belief in the right to privacy, and upholding that belief reflexively compels them to take a position defending Ghomeshi.

Thewestie is clear in saying that this was just their “initial thought” in response to Ghomeshi’s Facebook post, and says the women’s allegations and a legal expert’s news article now “challenge” that response: the position they would have taken as a matter of course is no longer defensible. In light of how this comment ends, the earlier statement of belief becomes less of a declaration of what Thewestie believes, and more an explanation for their earlier position; given the comment offers a public account for their position, and therefore anticipates responses from other commenters, the explanation of belief can more fittingly be seen as a justification for their earlier support of Ghomeshi. And, in ‘ceding ground’ by changing their position, Thewestie is careful not to repeat the mistake of taking another strong position: after listing the reasons for their change of mind, they do not resolve it by clearly saying “Now I believe the women” or “I still believe Ghomeshi, and here are the reasons why.” Instead, they express a general well-wish that does not privilege Ghomeshi or his alleged victims, saying “And so I wish the best for all concerned.” This new position that does not ‘side’ with either party is cautious in that it would be easier to defend against criticism from other commenters, and because it is not tied to a particular outcome in the case: should the allegations prove either true

or false by whatever measure, Thewestie would remain correct in having said “This is going to be a bumpy ride,” again without privileging Ghomeshi or the alleged victims.

So when I first read about the allegations, I so did not want to **believe** it. I even commented on the Q page saying "way to go CBC, you made a mistake"... And now that I've been reading more about this situation, I agree, it's ridiculous to say that 3 women are out to smear him with false allegations. No one in their right mind would come forward with such serious reports of abuse, let alone 3 women with similar accounts. So disappointed. (Heather Marczynski, October 28 at 7:51PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 173)

Like Jobin, Marczynski indicates her belief was initially informed by her personal relationship to Ghomeshi and his work. She says it took “reading more about this situation” to go from “so [not wanting] to believe it” to deciding “it’s ridiculous” to suggest the allegations against Ghomeshi are false. It is unclear what Marczynski initially read, or what she had been reading later on such that she changed her mind about the allegations, but it is clear that like Thewestie, her initial response was to come to Ghomeshi’s defense, only to change her mind upon considering more information. Interestingly, Marczynski does not say “Ghomeshi’s account is ridiculous,” saying instead “it’s ridiculous to say”. This impersonal form erases Ghomeshi’s role in issuing an account Marczynski says is “ridiculous,” preventing this judgement from outright condemning Ghomeshi; it also turns her statement into a categorical pronouncement against any other commenters who may be re-stating, agreeing with, or supporting the “ridiculous” account.

Perhaps even more interesting here though is Marczynski’s use of the phrase “so did not want to believe.” The colloquial use of the adverbial form of “so” augments her statement: not only did she “not want to believe” the allegations, but she very much did not want to believe them. And, as offered by Dr Cor Baerveldt (personal communication, March 22 2018), the phrase “did not want to believe” serves an interesting rhetorical function. It is never used to say “I so did not want to believe this, so I do not believe it”; rather, as Marczynski uses it, it acts as a disclaimer indicating the commenter had not been disposed to believe something, but in light of new information, must. What this makes inferentially available is that whatever provoked a change in belief has to be especially convincing, such that they were compelled to change beliefs: it weights whatever convincing information to which the commenter is referring.

Marczynski names that convincing information: “serious reports of abuse” from “3 women with similar accounts.” Now, as seen in Chapter 2, Ghomeshi himself was the one to make publicly known that there were women making allegations of sexual assault against him, without sharing the specific details of those allegations: the discursive devices used in his post made it unnecessary to provide those details. It appears pre-emptively revealing but minimizing the allegations managed to encourage readers like Marczynski to at first not consider them as “serious reports of abuse” and to overlook that “No one in their right mind would come forward with such serious reports of abuse.” It took encountering the accounts outside of the contextualizing narrative of Ghomeshi’s post to recognize them as “serious reports of abuse.” Marczynski indicates this would be a painful recognition: having had “so” not wanted to believe the allegations were true, but deciding there may be something true about them after all, she says she was left feeling “So disappointed”—again, not just “disappointed,” but very much so. It is unclear with whom she is expressing disappointment, with Ghomeshi for allegedly doing something she “so did not want to believe” or with herself for not having recognized the allegations of sexual assault as such.

How can people read this sob story and not use their little brains to think about the bigger picture? Like why so eager to get your story out so fast? Probably to shape the narrative and how people will view you when, possibly, more horrible stories start to come out. It's always about the 'jilted ex' isn't it? What about the other four women who also state that they were abused through their encounters with him? Let's not support someone just because he is charismatic enough to make us **believe** he is completely the innocent victim. (Banafshé E, October 28 at 5:46AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 46)

Why the hell is anybody supporting this asshole? There were three women, not just one. Do you guys honestly **believe** they are all colluding to bring this irrelevant radio talk show host down? Also, it doesn't matter if the allegations are true or false, he is making CBC look bad, and due to that they reserve the right to fire him. CBC employees can be fired at any time with no reason according to their collective bargaining agreement... they are public figures. His frivolous lawsuit gives me a glimpse into the mind of this sociopath/narcissist. It has zero legal standing, and he and his publicist both know it.

(Svet Pargov, October 28 at 10:18AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 94)

Banafshé E's comment reads as a scoff at Ghomeshi's post and a dig at fellow commenters: this is the result of her exhortation to readers to exercise their critical faculties while simultaneously undermining Ghomeshi's post and insulting those who hold it as true. She does not refer to Ghomeshi by name, referring instead to "someone" who is charismatic, and to how he might be thinking of himself through the use of the second person "you." This rhetorical move erases Ghomeshi's personal presence—and the persuasive power of his celebrity—from the allegations under consideration, replacing him with an unspecified "he." She addresses her reader as a familiar but generalized other, referring to "people [who] read this sob story" and "how people will view" Ghomeshi, framing readers and their possible responses into her comment. In the last sentence, Banafshé E goes further by also implicating herself in the comment, including herself by using the first person plural form in saying "Let's not support" and "make us believe." This shifts the narrative of the Facebook responses away from concerns about protecting Ghomeshi the beloved celebrity from being victimized (as seen in previous comments) to concerns of the content of the allegations he has divulged and how people are responding to them.

By shifting the focus of the online conversation, Banafshé E challenges the grounds on which some commenters were willing to validate Ghomeshi's account (as previously seen). The choice of words in saying "How can people read this sob story and not use their little brains to think" challenges the very intelligence of those not using their critical faculties to consider that Ghomeshi's account might be persuasively styled: the derisive tone casts the perceived gullibility as contemptible, and thrusts commenters' initial responses (such as the one Thewestie identifies having had) into visibility to be scrutinized. This creates the discursive space required to pose questions Ghomeshi's post had pre-emptively anticipated and favourably addressed: indeed, in six sentences, Banafshé E manages to ask four questions of Ghomeshi's account, and most of these are rhetorical. In questioning Ghomeshi's post, then rhetorically offering a counter-narrative to it in the form of "probable" or "possible" answers, she also makes available that shifting the focus in examining the allegations can be easy to do.

Banafshé E encourages readers to do the same as she has, then offers that an insufficient reason to support Ghomeshi might be that he is charismatic ("Let's not support someone just

because he is charismatic enough to make us believe he is completely the innocent victim.”). This suggestion – placed alongside her example of asking pointed questions of the content of the allegations – questions the sufficiency of feelings of familiarity with Ghomeshi for grounding belief in him. The phrase “make us believe” in particular emphasizes how Ghomeshi’s supporters might be at risk of being deliberately manipulated through his exercise of charisma. (Similar readings of Ghomeshi’s post were echoed in other comments, such as Martin’s reference to Ghomeshi’s “PR attempt,” an allusion to his post as a carefully constructed document intended to persuade.) More still, Banafshé E makes available that perhaps more insidiously Ghomeshi’s supporters are allowing themselves to be manipulated, given how easy it could be to ask questions of his post if one is willing. Without directly addressing any particular commenter or responding to any particular comment, Banafshé E manages to make a case against Ghomeshi’s account by drawing not only from his post, but from the content of responses in throughout the Facebook feed.

In Pargov’s comment, he goes further in rendering Ghomeshi’s person irrelevant to the matter at hand. Not only does he not mention Ghomeshi by name, Pargov belittles him, calling him an “asshole,” an “irrelevant radio talk show host,” and a “sociopath/narcissist,” which contests Ghomeshi’s account of being unfairly victimized because of his celebrity. In reminding readers that Ghomeshi is a public figure with responsibilities to his employer and a publicist who can carefully curate his account, Pargov devastates Ghomeshi’s claims to being victimized. More than a challenge to Ghomeshi’s post, this also challenges posts like Fox’s and Jobin’s which expressed love for Ghomeshi and his work as part of statements of support and belief. Through its strong wording and occasional foul language, the comment communicates a tone of indignance, both at Ghomeshi and his ‘knowing actions’ (“zero legal standing, and he and his publicist both know it”) and at other commenters and their actions supportive of Ghomeshi (“Why the hell is anybody supporting this asshole?”).

When he asks readers if they “honestly believe” Ghomeshi’s account, the rhetorical qualifier “honestly” in the context of a non-specifically addressed question echoes Banafshé E’s suggestion that dishonesty might be required to believe Ghomeshi’s post – an explanation Pargov levels before demonstrating some of what Ghomeshi has not communicated through his post, flagging what does and “does not matter” as he goes. The comment is provocative: if Banafshé E suggests it requires deliberate effort to avoid asking questions about the post, the

indignance in Pargov's comment condemns the reflexively supportive responses to Ghomeshi's carefully constructed post as careless if not shameful, making available that commenters may be allowing themselves to be willfully blind to some of the available information outside his post.

Deepening the Analysis

Up to this point in this chapter, a discursive psychological reading of the comments featuring the belief key words has yielded a sketch of how and when commenters used these words. To summarize, here are some of the observations I have made so far:

- It is different to express belief in someone and express belief in an account. Who is issuing an account, and perhaps more importantly what relationships readers have to the issuer, appears to be leveraged to account for what people are willing to accept as true;
- What personal experiences and understandings of the world pre-exist hearing an account can be the terms in which people account for it;
- Saying one believes an account sometimes requires justification, and accounting for this publicly also makes available a judgement for others to consider. Part of this judgement also involves revealing what one personally holds as true or valuable, or how one understands oneself;
- In the case of sexual assault allegations, which appear to be polarizing, to claim to believe someone or an account is to align oneself with one side or another exclusively, and care must be taken in making the choice so as to end up on the "right" side.

That said, a number of questions have also been raised. Why would anyone risk participating in the Facebook conversation to share their beliefs at all, which would result in exposing themselves to personal attacks given its at times hostile tone? Why does it matter to commenters whether others are agreeing with them – 'siding' with them – and whether others believe the same thing as they do? Commenters expend a lot of effort in justifying what they believe or explaining how they initially believed the wrong thing: what exactly matters about declaring our beliefs for the world to see, and being right in those beliefs? And why do some commenters appear to take issue with others for not being right in their beliefs?

It is here that I confess I have been profoundly dissatisfied by discursive psychological approaches like the one I used in this chapter. For all their strength in demonstrating how we are constantly creating and re-creating our social reality in our interactions with others, and how we position ourselves rhetorically as certain kinds of persons with certain kinds of commitments, discursive psychology falls short in allowing us to speak about what makes our social reality matter to us—precisely the sort of questions I set out to answer in this chapter. Baerveldt and Voestermans (2005) state the problem most succinctly: if discursive approaches examine “how our accounts produce ‘versions’ of the world” we treat as real, it does not shed light on “how, given the almost unlimited range of discursive versions, we can still believe in a shared world, so that we can act in it” (Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005, p. 452). More still,

for a world to be somehow forceful and compelling, that is, for it to be a world that both enables and demands our purposeful action, we must, at some level, believe (...) that it is real and compelling for others as much as it is for ourselves. (Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005, p. 455)

In other words, discursive psychology’s focus on the rhetorical use of language as social action is insufficient to illuminate commitments in the world – why certain things matter to us as they do.

Baerveldt and Voestermans argue for looking “beneath the obvious sociality of interpersonal discourse and argumentation” as discursive psychological approaches would, and instead starting with “our embodied engagements in a world we already share with others even before we come to reflect on it” (Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005, pp. 455-456). Baerveldt and Voestermans, and earlier Baerveldt and Verheggen (1999), insist that our shared world is normative. That I have a perception of the world implies there may be other perceptions possible, and that we are separate individuals but together in the world is the condition which requires that we ‘consensually coordinate’ what we do: this generates an inherently normative world of practices and meanings we enact (Baerveldt and Verheggen, 1999). It is against this normative background that our use of language even makes sense: paraphrasing an example from Taylor, Baerveldt and Voestermans say:

When I say ‘I’m sorry’, these words are not the proper words just by virtue of them effectively communicating my feelings or restoring the contact between us. My words may or may not be effective in that respect, but they are the right words because this was the right thing to do, regardless of whether they have the desired effect. (Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005, p. 464)

Taking these criticisms of discursive psychology and arguments for a different kind of psychology seriously means having to reconsider the limits of the method adopted for this chapter. More still, I want to dare a more theoretical consideration of the matter of belief in order to broaden those limits, in the hope of better answering this chapter’s questions. Accordingly, in the next section I will introduce the matter of Taylor’s strong evaluations, and discuss how it may prove useful in deepening our understanding of belief.

Taylor and strong evaluations

For Taylor, we are fundamentally language users. He argues that we are born into a world that pre-exists us and is “saturated with social and cultural beliefs and practices constitutive of our forms of life with others” (Sugarman, 2005, p. 804). This world is at first an inchoate blur, and we learn to use language from those around us to “draw boundaries, to pick some things out in contrast to others” (Taylor, 1985, p. 258). In this way, our world becomes differentiated in terms of the words we use, and that differentiation makes the world comprehensible.

Taylor’s account of language is in keeping with the expressivist tradition. In contrast with designative accounts of language, according to which words (and therefore language systems) are used to refer to objects existing independently in the world, expressivist accounts hold that language is fundamentally a part of how we experience reality: that is to say, we understand the world – and ourselves-- in terms bound up in language (Taylor, 1985, p. 37). When we learn by what name to call our experiences (of the world and of ourselves) they become more clearly knowable to us, we can become explicitly aware of them, and we can interpret them through the cultural resources available to us in language. Following this tradition,

any designative use of language is understood to emerge from a background of expressive language.

This constitutive argument goes deep for Taylor, for whom even our feelings are shaped by language (Taylor, 1985, p. 72): the background of terms in which we define the world and what words we use to bound our experiences also provides us with the language by which to define what we desire and value, and how we understand our feelings. To articulate what something is, or what it means, or what it matters, then, is to do more than list its qualities: it is to call up a whole meaningful world of definitions, concepts, norms, standards, intentions, and values that are reflected in language and already a part of the world into which we were initially cast. For instance, Taylor says our feeling of “remorse presupposes that we can apply the terms ‘right’ and ‘wrong’; shame requires that we have terms like ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ in our lexicon” (Taylor, 1985, p. 64): the feelings we cast in language terms are bound to socially- and culturally- defined practices we are able to recognize, and without which the terms we call our feelings do not make sense.

The effort of determining which words to use to make sense of our experiences makes “it an object of explicit awareness” (Taylor, 1985, p. 269). Importantly, for Taylor we may not be fully aware of what we are trying to articulate until we have expressed it (Taylor, 1985, p. 268). For Taylor, to express something is to do more than transmit information from one person to another: it is to realize it (in the sense of making something real in the world), and to reveal it so it may be visible to others without inference (Taylor, 1985, p. 264). In communicating something, I constitute a public space, making what I am expressing “no longer just a matter for me, or for you, or for both of us severally, but is now something for us, that is for us together” (Taylor, 1985, p. 259). The effort of sharing these words through languaged expression makes it available to others so they may be aware of them too (Taylor, 1985, p. 269).

It is possible to have “more or less adequate, more or less truthful, more self-clairvoyant or self-deluding interpretations of our experiences” (Taylor, 1985, p. 38). Since multiple interpretations of our feelings and experiences are possible – that is, since we can articulate our experiences in multiple ways -- coming to refine them and gain clarity involves becoming more precise and skillful in our use of language. To do so can transform how we define our feelings and our reactions (Taylor, 1985, p. 70).

And so, for Taylor we experience ourselves and the world in terms of language, and however articulate that use of language may be it allows us to understand ourselves and the world as meaningful against a culturally-defined normative background of standards of worth and acceptability. Through language, we can assess our immediate responses of desires, emotions, and actions to the world as “right or wrong, good or bad, better or worse, more or less worthy, and so forth” (Sugarman, 2005, p. 796). Taylor calls the process and result of us judging our immediate impulses and responses to the world ‘strong evaluations.’

Engaging in strong evaluations involves “evaluating not just objects in the light of our desires, but also the desires themselves” (Taylor, 1985, p. 66). These evaluations are not propositional: engaging in strong evaluations involves qualitatively contrasting possible—and usually incommensurable— alternatives (Taylor, 1985, p. 67). A weak evaluation can be made without consequence to myself, but not a strong one. For example, a weak evaluation might involve me deliberating between buying a blue or red shirt, where considerations of fit and style might be weighed against each other. In this case, the qualities of one possible choice can be measured against the qualities of another (ie, “Is blue or red more ‘my colour?’ Do I prefer the style of the one shirt to the other?”). In contrast, a strong evaluation might involve deliberating whether my concern for my personal appearance conveyed through having new clothing is more important to me than my concern for limiting my participation in consumerism. In this case, my deliberation between two choices – to honour my concern about my personal appearance or to honour my concern with being complicit in consumerism – does not involve contrasting qualities along the same dimensions. Making a decision between two alternatives in a strong evaluation is not a matter of my personal preference: it involves articulating who I understand myself to be, with what values I identify and want to align myself, and to what I commit myself to realizing about myself. In expressing the strong evaluation I have made, I am choosing to ‘show up’ in the world as a certain kind of person.

For Taylor, engaging in strong evaluations is how we develop our authentic personal identity. By our effort to define and realize what we care to become, we are “self-interpreting, and in our attempts to understand, we participate in the shaping of our own being and becoming” (Sugarman, 2005, p. 796). Critically, because we can also fail to adequately articulate our experiences, or fail to be coherent across all the evaluations we make, we can make a ‘wrong’

strong evaluation, or fail to make one at all. That we risk being right or wrong in our efforts means we are responsible for our evaluations, and therefore for what we choose to realize about ourselves.

On the occasion we fail to make the right strong evaluation, Taylor says we are suddenly dropped into existential turmoil. Thrown out of a defined and articulated understanding of myself and the world, I am left to contend with

my deepest unstructured sense of what is important, which is as yet inchoate and which I am trying to bring to definition. I am trying to see reality afresh and form more adequate categories to describe it. To do this I am trying to open myself, use all of my deepest, unstructured sense of things in order to come to a new clarity. (Taylor, 1985, pp. 41-42)

To re-effect my strong evaluations is profoundly jarring. As Taylor explains, if my strong evaluation became the yardstick by which I assessed myself and my engagements in the world, to revisit them is to be

questioning the inchoate sense that led me to use the yardstick. And at the same time it engages my whole self in a way that judging by a yardstick does not. (...) There is not only the difficulty of (...) concentration, and the pain of uncertainty, but also all the distortions and repressions which make us want to turn away from this examination: and which make us resist change even when we do re-examine ourselves. (Taylor, 1985, pp. 41-42)

To be thrown into the self-reflective place where words fail to express what matters in what I experience is to undertake the hard work of re-defining how I understand myself, how I understand the world to be, and how I engage with it; all profound morally engaging questions, the answers to which are necessarily transformative.

To sum up, for Taylor engaging in strong evaluations “involves defining what it is we really are about, what is really important to us” (Taylor, 1985, p. 68); it involves choosing “those feelings and desires with which we want to identify against a normative background of culturally-defined practices” (Sugarman, 2005, p. 797). Who we are, then, is the result of a process of self-fashioning, and that we choose with what we identify and how we express it means we are responsible for the sorts of persons we become. By developing and committing to

strong evaluations, they constitute who I am. To be confronted with competing strong evaluations, or to find myself wrong in how I have articulated them, is an existential crisis in which what is at stake is my sense of how I know anything, including who I think I am.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will return to a quasi-discursive psychological analysis of the belief-related comments, relaxing the proper application of discursive psychology to allow for a simultaneous interpretation of the comments through Taylor's theory. My intention is to more fully answer the question I set out to answer in this project, namely what did it mean for the Facebook commenters to say they believed something?

Revisiting the Public Retractions of Support for Ghomeshi

In this section, the three comments illustrating the analysis contain this chapter's key words (namely the nouns "belief" or "disbelief," the adjectives "believable" and "unbelievable," and the verbs "believe," "disbelieve," "believed," and "disbelieved"). They also reflect the "I retract/withdraw my earlier support for Ghomeshi" theme seen in Chapter 3 and to which I promised to return: these involved commenters returning to the Facebook feed to account for their mistaken initial support and belief in Ghomeshi and his account.

When he first published this post, I had sent him a FB message saying that I supported him because I **believed** him. But when I found out about the women (like when they came out with the truth), I had to change my mind. I regret sending him support. I regret saying I was on his side. I thought it couldn't be true. As a victim of sexual assault myself, I cannot support this man. I have to be on those women's side. And my perspective on Jian has completely changed. (Asteria Sparrow, October 30 around 6:00PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 519)

"I **believe** that we are innocent until proven guilty" is how I prefaced the post above, before sharing it. Within a couple of hours, as other sides to the story began to emerge, I wanted to erase any evidence of my willfully blind support for Ghomeshi. But I think there is something of value to be learned here: Even as an educated, media-saavy feminist who has both witnessed and experienced violence, I succumbed easily to a PR

document that played into comforting ideas about human rights and sexual freedom, and pre-emptively exonerated a gracious, skilled and diplomatic voice that has been present in my day-to-day life for a number of years. And while I can in no way speak to his innocence or guilt about these matters, I can offer an apology to his presumed victims for taking the side of an accused perpetrator, albeit briefly, just because his innocence was handed to me in such a pretty package. (Arr Brown, October 28 at 8:14AM, from Richard, 2018, p. 71)

I am retracting my previous support of you in light of the 8 women coming forward with allegations. You have not only hurt those women, but all of us who **believed** and trusted you. I don't know if I'll ever be able to trust my instincts again You are the last person I would have guessed would use violence against women and disrespect them by acting as you did without consent. It all comes down to consent. May God have mercy on your soul. (Jess Schurtman, October 29 at 8:32PM, from Richard, 2018, p. 317)

Following the discursive psychological analysis from earlier in the chapter, we can already point out similarities between these three comments and the earlier ones. These three commenters are all making declarations of their support or non-support (“I cannot support this man” ; “ I succumbed easily to a PR document” ; “I am retracting my previous support of you”), as Harper and Fox did. They are also communicating something of how they understand themselves (“As a victim of sexual assault” “as an educated, media-savvy feminist”) like Thewestie did, and how they understand the world (“You are the last person I would have guessed would use violence against women”) as Laurell and Dickson did.

They leverage their personal experiences and knowledge to make sense of what they believe (“As a victim of sexual assault myself (...) I have to be on those women's side”) like Jobin and Martin. Like Marczynski, they express hurt at no longer believing in Ghomeshi or his account (“I regret sending him support” ; “I wanted to erase any evidence of my willfully blind support for Ghomeshi” ; “You have not only hurt those women, but all of us who believed and trusted you”); and like Banafshé E and Pargov, they also speak to the importance of considering Ghomeshi’s post critically (“I can offer an apology to his presumed victims for taking the side of

an accuses perpetrator (...) just because his innocence was handed to me in such a pretty package”).

There are other similarities still. For one, these comments also reflect the adversarial nature of sexual assault allegations. In particular, Sparrow equates believing Ghomeshi to having been on his “side,” but says she now has to be on the women’s “side” – a formulation not unlike Marczynski’s which weights the new information compelling her to take a different side, and a metaphor frequently evoked in previous comments. The exact use of the phrase “take sides” evokes an image of clearly identifiable agents at odds, and of a person choosing to put themselves alongside one in solidarity against another. The reference “to take sides” used when faced with a sexual assault allegation captures how bystanders align themselves with the alleged offended or offender exclusively: commenters can either stand with the person making the allegations and hold their account to be true, or stand with the person who is the subject of the allegations and hold their account as true, but not both.

All three commenters say it was the women coming forward to detail their allegations that changed their minds about Ghomeshi – not unlike Thewestie and Marczynski. What it is about the women or the allegations that is convincing is not entirely clear from Sparrow, who refers to the women “coming forward with the truth,” but not to how she determined what was true; Brown says the accounts made clear that the post was manipulative, or a persuasively-wrapped “pretty package” such that even if the women’s allegations were not true (a possibility allowed for when they qualify their apology to the women with “I can in no way speak to his innocence or guilt about these matters”), they at least can no longer be “willfully blind” in their support for Ghomeshi; and Schurtman implies by their word choice that the allegations from the women shed “light” on what Ghomeshi was trying to accomplish with his account, and this is damnable (possibly literally, given their “May God have mercy on your soul” conclusion).

Together, these posts suggest that these commenters did not suddenly start believing the women and their allegations because they were especially persuasive, or numerous; rather, they suggest that these commenters stopped holding as true that Ghomeshi was truthful, and that this changed how they re-encountered his account. Ghomeshi had cast the narrative around his firing in terms of having been victimized by the *CBC* for his sexual preferences, and through his post called on his Facebook audience to affirm his and everyone else’s right to sexual freedom. After

reading his alleged victims' accounts, the narrative of his firing was recast into one concerning his alleged failure to establish sexual consent when engaging in sexually violent encounters – the very sexual preferences Ghomeshi had himself confessed to enjoying and for which he was appealing for support. Making available once more that sexual assault allegations are seen as adversarial, recognizing Ghomeshi's narrative as misleading for minimizing the sexual assault allegations it contained would imply that the post must need to be misleading in order to be accepted as true, which in turn lends credence to the women's version of the narrative. In other words, these comments indicate that recognizing the attempts at persuasion contained in the post implied Ghomeshi had something to hide, and the women's accounts remained as the only accounts to inform what that something might be.

Importantly, there are a few striking elements to these comments by which they stand apart from the rest. Given the huge span of the Facebook conversation, and how easy it would be to lose a single comment in the vast number of comments, not to mention the lack of accountability that accompanies online commenting more generally, that Sparrow, Brown, and Schurtman felt the need to reinsert themselves in the conversation to account for their earlier comment suggests they carried a sense of responsibility for their declaration of belief, which would remain unsatisfied until they amended the public record to reflect their change of belief. Perhaps more striking still is the affective charge in the comments: readers can readily recognize that these comments are also expressions of anger (“You have not only hurt those women, but all of us who believed and trusted you”), regret (“I regret sending him support”), shame (“I wanted to erase any evidence of my willfully blind support”), and remorse (“I can offer an apology to his presumed victims”). These commenters are not just declaring having had a change of heart, or having made a realization: there is something more at stake for them in these expressions.

Sparrow says she “thought it couldn't be true” that Ghomeshi had sexually assaulted anyone, but “had to change [her] mind” when she learned of the women's allegations. The way Sparrow communicates her position is unusually tidy: she uses a series of short, simple, declarative statements that allow for no ambiguity (“I had to change my mind. I regret sending him support. I regret saying I was on his side. I thought it couldn't be true. I cannot support this man. I have to be on those women's side”). Instead of using the more informal contraction “can't” she says she “cannot support Ghomeshi,” lending the declaration a measure of solemnity. The only clue she provides as to the necessity for her change of mind is in her disclosure of

being a victim of sexual assault herself, which is why she “cannot support” Ghomeshi. The inference that can be made here is that her painful personal experiences compels a sort of solidarity with the women, such that they “have to be on those women's side” because of them. To have initially agreed with Ghomeshi’s account – and to have looked past the women’s allegations -- in spite of her painful experiences is regretted by Sparrow (which she emphasizes by saying twice: “I regret sending him support. I regret saying I was on his side”). Seen through the lens of Taylor’s strong evaluations, this could be interpreted as Sparrow having fallen out of alignment with her values when she publicly supported Ghomeshi (and thereby made her position real), and that she needed to express (and thereby also make real) a change in position. The feelings of regret may reflect the difficult painful process of challenging Sparrow’s strong evaluations.

Brown’s comment is evidently thoughtfully constructed – in some ways as thoughtfully as Ghomeshi’s Facebook post – with obvious attention paid to word choice and grammar, with no use of informal contractions and complex sentence structures. They suggest their experiences of having “both witnessed and experienced violence,” coupled with how they identify, should have lent them insight into the Ghomeshi scandal and made them less likely to “succumb easily” to Ghomeshi’s persuasively-written account: Brown accounts for yet ‘succumbing’ to having been ‘willfully blind.’ The distinction signalled here is that to be fooled by manipulation is to be deceived, but to be willfully blind to being manipulated is to be complicit with the manipulation. Without strongly stating a new position ‘siding’ with Ghomeshi or the women, by apologizing for their ‘willful blindness’ Brown takes responsibility for their previous position and expresses remorse.

A reading of Taylor here might add that in atoning for their previous mistake with a carefully formulated comment, Brown may be attempting to re-cast themselves in the world in a manner that better fits the way they see themselves: specifically, as an “educated, media-saavy feminist.” To return to the Facebook conversation to make a new – corrected – public declaration can be seen as an attempt at redemption, to validate their self-understanding by making right the actions that are not in alignment with how they see themselves.

Schurtman explicitly says they were hurt by Ghomeshi (as were “all of us who believed...you”), a person they trusted. They express anger with Ghomeshi for misleading them

with his post, and in stating their belief in Ghomeshi was predicated on a prejudgement that could be manipulated rather than on any propositional facts. Schurtman enacts their anger by ‘retracting’ their support and categorically stating what Ghomeshi wanted to avoid having responders say (“You ... hurt those women,” and you “use violence against women and disrespect them by acting as you did without consent”): the categorical statements emphatically amplify the women’s accounts and contest Ghomeshi’s.

Importantly, this is not only an expression of betrayal by Ghomeshi: Schurtman is also saying that in believing Ghomeshi, they betrayed something in themselves. They say “I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to trust my instincts again,” suggesting their experience of responding to the Ghomeshi scandal was automatic and unreflective. That they are capable of instinctual responses of which they are not fully aware or able to steer, in spite of having relied upon them, has been revealed to Schurtman. More still, what was exposed was something of the kind of person they are, which they would disavow but cannot because it came to them ‘instinctively,’ unreflectively. Schurtman’s statement is a confession of how easy it is to be wrong in matters of belief, and how frightening it can be to realize one is not in alignment with one’s own instincts: it implies we are not fully known to ourselves, and there may be parts of ourselves we may dislike, or more still that we may want to disown. Accounting for the mistake of having declared believing the wrong thing initially and amending the record publicly, in this case, would serve the powerful purpose of allowing Schurtman to confront an error they did not realize they could make, express disagreement with and a disavowal of it, and amplified by their expression of anger this reaffirms themselves as someone who would not make such mistakes.

Drawing from Taylor, we can theorize that when these commenters first chose to participate in the Facebook feed by expressing their beliefs, they chose to declare themselves in the world as having particular identities and as having particular commitments: Sparrow identified as a supporter of Ghomeshi, Brown as someone who believed one is “innocent until proven guilty,” and Schurtman trusted Ghomeshi was not someone who “would use violence against women.” In doing so, they revealed —and realized, in the sense of “making real” — something of themselves, their values, and the causes with which they are aligned. When the narrative explaining why Ghomeshi was fired became one of sexual assault allegations, these commenters were confronted with having to resolve (at least) two strong evaluations. It is not that Sparrow suddenly stopped believing she should extend support to a beloved radio host in his

time of need the way one does with a friend, or that Brown stopped believing it is important to assume innocence until there is proof of guilt, or Schurtman stopped believing that there are kinds of people who do not engage in violence against women: rather, because the narrative was cast in a different language and therefore carried different meanings, they had to re-evaluate how they had understood Ghomeshi's post such that they failed to stand with victims of sexual assault struggling to have their allegations heard. These three comments are saying that not only is it painful to realize they believed the wrong thing, but a public act of 'owning up' to it is required, since making that mistake is to reveal themselves to be shown to be out of integrity with themselves, or to be contemptible in their incapacity to right away recognize they are being manipulated

The commenters make clear that resolving the competing evaluations is difficult, even painful, and that they feel responsible for their mistaken beliefs. All three commenters expend a lot of effort to account for their mistaken belief. In light of Taylor's contribution to this reading, these comments 'returning' to the Facebook feed can be read as avowals of wrongdoing, and the care they evidence as atonement for want of being able to undo the wrongdoing.

Final Words

This chapter has demonstrated that, in the context of the Ghomeshi scandal, saying one believes something or someone is a risky practice. Saying one believes something in a case of sexual assault accomplishes a public declaration of allegiance with a "side," a position which is easier to take with persons with whom one already has a relationship, or with accounts that already fit one's worldview. To take a 'side' is also to make a contribution to it, by amplifying it through repetition or by persuading others to join the same 'side.' Declaring a belief is an opportunity to uphold personal values, but requires revealing these personal values, worldviews, and self-understandings as part of the declaration. Part of what makes beliefs and believing risky is that they can be wrong, or they can be manipulated, and whether they are right or wrong they are consequential for the persons involved. Importantly, to publicly declare one's beliefs is to become involved in the matter. That the declarations of belief are committing and involving is felt profoundly, with the shocking realization of having been wrong having the painful consequence of confronting the believer with a part of themselves they had not acknowledged, and which they must publicly disavow as being part of themselves for it to be made real.

Final Thoughts on the Project and Discussion

Over the course of this study, I examined what it means to believe survivors or alleged perpetrators of sexual assault in the context of the Ghomeshi scandal. This involved telescoping into the data of interest from the widest contextual scope of a retelling of the Ghomeshi scandal, to a discussion of the Ghomeshi Facebook post which triggered the scandal, to considering the narrative of the responses to that post, and finally to the narrowest scope of the subset of responses that directly concerned matters of belief and believing.

Through the first chapter, it became clear that the scandal was triggered – in many ways unintentionally– by Ghomeshi himself in the attempt to set the course of the narrative of his firing from the *CBC*. In the second chapter, it was shown that the Facebook post Ghomeshi shared on his timeline carefully cast him as a victim, and in the third chapter the ways in which the public responded to Ghomeshi’s post on Facebook was outlined, demonstrating there was a significant shift from a majority of responders supporting him and his post to not supporting him and his post. Finally, the fourth chapter explored how commenters spoke to belief and believing – the purpose of this project – and it was shown that expressing belief involved in part rhetorical positioning, and in part the practice of strong evaluations: commenting about belief involved declaring for Ghomeshi or his alleged victims, which committed commenters to expressions of how they understood themselves, and when these understandings changed they expended a lot of effort to amend their past statements. Drawing from Taylor, the interpretation I offered is that to commit to a belief engages one’s very sense of self, putting it at risk, but it is by that risk that we come to know who we are and what matters to us – even if what we learn is that that we have made a mistake and are compelled to redress it.

It appears that what happened in this case is not that public opinion suddenly turned against Ghomeshi because the public suddenly had a change of heart about how to understand sexual assault allegations and started to believe the women, or that their allegations were suddenly bolstered by especially compelling evidence. Rather, it appears that the public stopped believing in Ghomeshi. The machinery making up Ghomeshi’s public persona was made painfully obvious by the deleted posts, carefully crafted essay, his choice to come forward first, overly-familiar tone, focus on celebrity, and available resources. Moreover, unflattering personal anecdotes about Ghomeshi in the comments and newspapers, as well as articles relating

his difficult nature at work, and the fact that he did not exclusively write the essays or research the interviews for which he is best known, made Ghomeshi a stranger to his supporters. Each time the number of allegations increased, it appeared to identify a pattern of behaviour commenters seemed to think was indicative of pathology. The allegations' plausibility was bolstered by the independence of these accounts (in that the women involved in the allegations were not related to each other), as well as because of Ghomeshi's own public revelation of his enjoyment of BDSM: even without applying a sex-negative moral evaluation to the practice, the nature of the activity meant it was possible he hurt people without intending so.

Importantly, Ghomeshi never did respond to the allegations directly, as he had promised to do after DeCoutere's interview aired in 2014. His Facebook post provided a standard to which people could respond, and the way it was cast allowed for certain kinds of responses: people could talk about his success and work ethic, or his sexual proclivities, or the unfortunate death of his father, etc. But it also allowed them to come up with responses not anticipated in the post, and in the absence of his continued engagement responders were left to fill in the blanks in the available information on their own.

What is striking though, at the close of this project, is to note that the matter of what or who should be believed in the Ghomeshi scandal—however important it was for commenters – eclipsed other important matters which ought to have been part of the public discussion.

It appears from the Facebook comments that there is something like a cultural narrative around sexual assault allegations which calls on us to pick one side or another. It also appears the reaction of expecting that women often level false sexual allegations – and accordingly 'siding' with alleged sexual assaulters – is not typically correct (see Appendix 3 for details). I would also argue that the opposite reaction of categorically demonizing alleged sexual assaulters (as seen in some of the more vitriolic comments attacking Ghomeshi in the Facebook feed) – and therefore 'siding' with alleged sexual assault survivors – is not typically correct either. Such essentializing responses permit us to pretend abusive or assaultive behaviour is the result of one person's 'bad nature' that needs to be factually established in order to justify treating them as such, whether they be an alleged sexual assaulter or leveling false sexual assault allegations. Essentializing prevents us from acknowledging or confronting systemic (cultural, legal, political) conditions that permit sexually assaultive behaviour to develop and go unchecked. It also means

we do not have to acknowledge our role in maintaining the systemic conditions allowing for such behaviour to occur. On this point, it is striking to note in particular the *CBC*'s role in the Ghomeshi allegations. It was largely not discussed—or the discussion was sidestepped -- that the *CBC* managed to evade accountability for allowing Ghomeshi to engage in sexually assaultive behaviour towards Borel, unchecked for many years, until her criminal allegations forced them to review their practices and forced Ghomeshi to apologize for this behaviour in court. The *CBC* eventually apologized to Borel, but it is unclear whether this episode resulted in any lasting changes to *CBC* workplace culture.

This project began with AASAS's exhortation for the public to "show, do, and say" belief to improve outcomes for sexual assault survivors (AASAS, 2018, para. 9). In light of the cultural narrative surrounding sexual assaults, this may sound like they are urging persons to default to always believing allegations of sexual assault. But this is a challenging prospect. Sexual assault offenders are often known to their victims, and not just from being celebrity radio hosts: "A friend, acquaintance or neighbour was the offender for 52% of sexual assault incidents" that were self-reported in 2014 (Statistics Canada, 2017, p. 13). Often, then, asking someone to believe that someone they know has been sexually assaulted is also to ask them to believe that someone else they know is responsible for a sexual assault. More still, there is no comfort to be had should the allegation prove false either (as this would mean an acquaintance has lied about being sexually assaulted by another acquaintance). That that remains a factual possibility (if a strongly unlikely probability—see Appendix 3), and given how profoundly committing believing appears to be means the AASAS's exhortation to always react to allegations by believing survivors is an impossible proposition to accept.

But this is only one way of understanding the AASAS's campaign to encourage 'believing.' When they say "The role of friends and family is not to play judge and jury," (AASAS, 2018, para. 9), they are indicating that believing allegations of sexual assault is not a matter of establishing the 'facts' of what happened as a prerequisite for believing – and as seen in this project, beliefs do not appear to be compelled by an array of propositional facts anyways. Drawing from Taylor, it may be that survivors asking to be believed creates an important opportunity for them to articulate their experience, and the act of casting their experience in words makes it possible to make sense of it. Rather than being asked to validate a version of

events, to be asked to believe an account of sexual assault may be about validating that person's experience through an expression of care and attention. This may mean hearing someone out while they practice getting their mouth around the words that fit their experience; acknowledging their feelings as an important – and potentially informative—part of their experience; and letting them know they are not alone in their process of working it all out. Critically, it also does not necessarily follow from believing sexual assault survivors that we ought to automatically condemn alleged sexual assaulters: rather, it may be a more fitting response to create the discursive space needed for them to express their own experiences too; and in accounting for themselves they can also be held responsible for their account.

Importantly, and relatedly, casting sexual assault allegations as a set of sides from which one must choose also deprives us of the opportunity to actually talk about the complexities of what constitute sex acts and sexual assaults. It was frequently and emphatically repeated throughout responses to the Ghomeshi scandal that sexual consent was necessary for all sex acts, because without it these become sexual assaults. Notably absent from the news articles and from Ghomeshi's post and from the Facebook comments, though, are discussions of how persons can be not only aware of but confident in their sexual partners' consent, or alternately how persons can learn to recognize when their partners are non-consenting, or of how to be confident in expressing one's sexual consent. To not have a clear social articulation of this, given that there may be parts of ourselves with which we are not familiar (as Taylor suggests) means losing an opportunity to identify some of the less evident features of assaultive behaviour, and perhaps even of locating them in our own behaviour. Surely, this is a vital conversation to have, and perhaps it is more possible in the current days of #MeToo (for a timeline of events that make up this social movement, see Johnson & Hawbaker, March 19 2018).

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Appendix 1: My Researcher's Position Statement

When this sprawling project started innocently enough over three years ago, I had begun collecting data before having acquired the tools or skills – or even the fully-fleshed intention – to handle what I was trying to accomplish. The work has unfolded as I have lived with it, and I have taken multiple runs at the data in my analyses since I started. This thesis project reflects a fraction of that work, and only one question among many I have entertained (and continue to develop!). Along the way, I have made notes about my researcher's position in an effort to better recognize and make explicit my own complicities, my own compromises, and my own judgements. In this appendix, I am sharing a formalized version of my notes related to my researcher's position in the interest of transparency.

As an avid news reader, I had followed the scandal since before it broke. I had both a personal and an instrumental reason for this: I was a fan of Ghomeshi's since before his work on *Q* and cared about his fate; and as I was a first-year graduate student at the time, I had a hunch I could turn my personal interest into a significant research project. As I collected the various publicly available materials about Ghomeshi and the scandal as it unfolded, I noted that being a fan of Ghomeshi's meant that I had come to trust him in part due to his relationship to the institution of the *CBC*, and used his association to a project to identify new programs and media products I would enjoy. I had appreciated and envied his interviewing abilities and evident charm, and I can to this day name some of my favourite interviews which he has conducted. I did not realize the extent to which the work in preparing these interviews had been done by producers whose names I never learned: I was among those who incorrectly believed the words Ghomeshi spoke on his show were his alone.

I had read Ghomeshi's Facebook update when it first came out, but I had not read or participated in the discussion in the comments, thinking of them as senseless rabble. I have often been told not to bother reading online comments, the suggestion being that no intelligent conversation of consequence happens in such forums. While my work on this project has not entirely disabused me of that opinion – nor has it encouraged any sort of faith in civility in online forums– today I would disagree that the phenomenon of online commenting is inconsequential, and I would challenge the related idea that nothing can be learned from examining those comments rigorously.

While I also noted that I had initially felt sorry to hear of Ghomeshi's dismissal and that I had felt it was a reflection of the *CBC*'s regressive policies, it was not until I heard Lucy DeCoutere's interview to the *CBC* that I realized I had not even considered the anonymous women's allegations of sexual assault for what they were, and then felt badly for not having thought more critically. In training to become a crisis line operator for the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton in early 2015, I became formally acquainted with the discourse surrounding sexual assault, and it was in light of this training that I encountered the remainder of the Ghomeshi scandal. It is also in light of this that I confess this thesis has served as a sort of atonement for my early lack of critical thinking on the matter, and my own complicities in harboring a cultural misunderstanding of sexual violence. To be completely honest, I would have to say that I too "retract my earlier support for Ghomeshi": that I was most struck by these kinds of comments is indicative of how strongly I identified with them, even though I could not even explain it to myself early on.

I have elsewhere noted that I believe Ghomeshi has indeed hurt some of his sexual partners non-consensually: I cannot explain why he would collect materials (texts, emails, photos, videos, etc) that would corroborate that his sexual activities were all consensual – including DeCoutere's blue letter, which was handwritten and over a decade old when the original was produced at the trial – unless on some level he was aware his sexual activities could lead to sexual assault allegations. I also do not believe Ghomeshi had the ability to recognize the impact he had on the persons in his life from his coworkers to his adoring fans; that inability was scaffolded by the abundance of systemic issues within and without the *CBC* that amplified and supported this ignorance. This is not to excuse nor condone his alleged behaviour: in matters of sexual assault, an alleged assaulter's intentions or personal impressions are hardly the thing of primary concern. But this inability to recognize the effect of one's actions is haunting: I sense it is not just something I identify in this case, but in the sexual domain more generally. What this sense is, what it comes from, and what it means are all questions that will require more work in the future. In the meantime, my beliefs cannot be bracketed away from the work I am presenting here.

I often think ruefully of the number of lives adversely impacted by this scandal: those featured in it – including Ghomeshi— and those reacting to it. But I am heartened, as always, by

the resiliency of those who experience the life-altering harm of sexual violence. And I believe we transform ourselves by confronting it head on as a social problem in which we all share, and must refuse to complacently accept it as normal.

I hope all those impacted by the scandal have found support and resolution, and encourage those still searching to keep faith they will find what they need.

Appendix 2: The Text of Ghomeshi's Facebook Post

1. Dear everyone,
- 2.
3. I am writing today because I want you to be the first to know some news.
- 4.
5. This has been the hardest time of my life. I am reeling from the loss of my father. I am in
6. deep personal pain and worried about my mom. And now my world has been rocked by
7. so much more.
- 8.
9. Today, I was fired from the CBC.
- 10.
11. For almost 8 years I have been the host of a show I co-created on CBC called Q. It has
12. been my pride and joy. My fantastic team on Q are super-talented and have helped build
13. something beautiful.
- 14.
15. I have always operated on the principle of doing my best to maintain a dignity and a
16. commitment to openness and truth, both on and off the air. I have conducted major
17. interviews, supported Canadian talent, and spoken out loudly in my audio essays about
18. ideas, issues, and my love for this country. All of that is available for anyone to hear or
19. watch. I have known, of course, that not everyone always agrees with my opinions or my
20. style, but I've never been anything but honest. I have doggedly defended the CBC and
21. embraced public broadcasting. This is a brand I've been honoured to help grow.
- 22.
23. All this has now changed.
- 24.
25. Today I was fired from the company where I've been working for almost 14 years –
26. stripped from my show, barred from the building and separated from my colleagues. I
27. was given the choice to walk away quietly and to publicly suggest that this was my
28. decision. But I am not going to do that. Because that would be untrue. Because I've been
29. fired. And because I've done nothing wrong.

30.

31. I've been fired from the CBC because of the risk of my private sex life being made public
32. as a result of a campaign of false allegations pursued by a jilted ex girlfriend and a
33. freelance writer.

34.

35. As friends and family of mine, you are owed the truth.

36.

37. I have commenced legal proceedings against the CBC, what's important to me is that you
38. know what happened and why.

39.

40. Forgive me if what follows may be shocking to some.

41.

42. I have always been interested in a variety of activities in the bedroom but I only
43. participate in sexual practices that are mutually agreed upon, consensual, and exciting for
44. both partners.

45.

46. About two years ago I started seeing a woman in her late 20s. Our relationship was
47. affectionate, casual and passionate. We saw each other on and off over the period of a
48. year and began engaging in adventurous forms of sex that included role-play, dominance
49. and submission. We discussed our interests at length before engaging in rough sex (forms
50. of BDSM). We talked about using safe words and regularly checked in with each other
51. about our comfort levels. She encouraged our role-play and often was the initiator. We
52. joked about our relations being like a mild form of Fifty Shades of Grey or a story from
53. Lynn Coady's Giller-Prize winning book last year. I don't wish to get into any more
54. detail because it is truly not anyone's business what two consenting adults do. I have
55. never discussed my private life before. Sexual preferences are a human right.

56.

57. Despite a strong connection between us it became clear to me that our on-and-off dating
58. was unlikely to grow into a larger relationship and I ended things in the beginning of this
59. year. She was upset by this and sent me messages indicating her disappointment that I
60. would not commit to more, and her anger that I was seeing others.

61.

62. After this, in the early spring there began a campaign of harassment, vengeance and
63. demonization against me that would lead to months of anxiety.

64.

65. It came to light that a woman had begun anonymously reaching out to people that I had
66. dated (via Facebook) to tell them she had been a victim of abusive relations with me. In
67. other words, someone was reframing what had been an ongoing consensual relationship
68. as something nefarious. I learned – through one of my friends who got in contact with
69. this person – that someone had rifled through my phone on one occasion and taken down
70. the names of any woman I had seemed to have been dating in recent years. This person
71. had begun methodically contacting them to try to build a story against me. Increasingly,
72. female friends and ex-girlfriends of mine told me about these attempts to smear me.

73.

74. Someone also began colluding with a freelance writer who was known not to be a fan of
75. mine and, together, they set out to try to find corroborators to build a case to defame me.
76. She found some sympathetic ears by painting herself as a victim and turned this into a
77. campaign. The writer boldly started contacting my friends, acquaintances and even work
78. colleagues – all of whom came to me to tell me this was happening and all of whom
79. recognized it as a trumped up way to attack me and undermine my reputation. Everyone
80. contacted would ask the same question, if I had engaged in non-consensual behavior why
81. was the place to address this the media?

82.

83. The writer tried to peddle the story and, at one point, a major Canadian media publication
84. did due diligence but never printed a story. One assumes they recognized these attempts
85. to recast my sexual behaviour were fabrications. Still, the spectre of mud being flung
86. onto the Internet where online outrage can demonize someone before facts can refute
87. false allegations has been what I've had to live with.

88.

89. And this leads us to today and this moment. I've lived with the threat that this stuff would
90. be thrown out there to defame me. And I would sue. But it would do the reputational
91. damage to me it was intended to do (the ex has even tried to contact me to say that she

92. now wishes to refute any of these categorically untrue allegations). But with me bringing
93. it to light, in the coming days you will prospectively hear about how I engage in all kinds
94. of unsavoury aggressive acts in the bedroom. And the implication may be made that this
95. happens non-consensually. And that will be a lie. But it will be salacious gossip in a
96. world driven by a hunger for "scandal". And there will be those who choose to believe it
97. and to hate me or to laugh at me. And there will be an attempt to pile on. And there will
98. be the claim that there are a few women involved (those who colluded with my ex) in an
99. attempt to show a "pattern of behaviour". And it will be based in lies but damage will be
100. done. But I am telling you this story in the hopes that the truth will, finally,
101. conquer all.

102.

103. I have been open with the CBC about this since these categorically untrue
104. allegations ramped up. I have never believed it was anyone's business what I do in
105. my private affairs but I wanted my bosses to be aware that this attempt to smear
106. me was out there. CBC has been part of the team of friends and lawyers
107. assembled to deal with this for months. On Thursday I voluntarily showed
108. evidence that everything I have done has been consensual. I did this in good faith
109. and because I know, as I have always known, that I have nothing to hide. This
110. when the CBC decided to fire me.

111.

112. CBC execs confirmed that the information provided showed that there was
113. consent. In fact, they later said to me and my team that there is no question in
114. their minds that there has always been consent. They said they're not concerned
115. about the legal side. But then they said that this type of sexual behavior was
116. unbecoming of a prominent host on the CBC. They said that I was being
117. dismissed for "the risk of the perception that may come from a story that could
118. come out." To recap, I am being fired in my prime from the show I love and built
119. and threw myself into for years because of what I do in my private life.

120.

121. Let me be the first to say that my tastes in the bedroom may not be palatable to
122. some folks. They may be strange, enticing, weird, normal, or outright offensive to

123. others. We all have our secret life. But that is my private life. That is my personal
124. life. And no one, and certainly no employer, should have dominion over what
125. people do consensually in their private life.

126.

127. And so, with no formal allegations, no formal complaints, no complaints, not one,
128. to the HR department at the CBC (they told us they'd done a thorough check and
129. were satisfied), and no charges, I have lost my job based on a campaign of
130. vengeance. Two weeks after the death of my beautiful father I have been fired
131. from the CBC because of what I do in my private life.

132.

133. I have loved the CBC. The Q team are the best group of people in the land. My
134. colleagues and producers and on-air talent at the CBC are unparalleled in being
135. some of the best in the business. I have always tried to be a good soldier and do a
136. good job for my country. I am still in shock. But I am telling this story to you so
137. the truth is heard. And to bring an end to the nightmare.

Appendix 3:

On the Prevalence of Women’s False Sexual Assault Reports in Canada

To provide a background against which to consider the Ghomeshi scandal and the matter of women ‘typically’ leveling false sexual assault allegations, it is important to know Statistics Canada does not currently publish findings related to the instance with which false sexual assault allegations are reported to police in Canada—perhaps the best metric to capture the size of this phenomenon.

In the past, Statistics Canada collected data related to “unfounded incidents,” which is the classification used “if police investigation determined that the reported offence did not occur” or an investigation into the reported offence was not attempted (Statistics Canada, 2017). As will be discussed shortly, the latter may not accurately reflect whether a false report has in fact occurred (Doolittle, February 3 2017). A 2006 review of the data collected up to that point revealed inconsistent reporting of unfounded incidents, and this yielded poor enough data quality that the information is no longer published. A renewed effort to uniformize the data reporting process across policing agencies means we can expect the first set of results concerning unfounded incidents in July 2018, and this figure will hopefully prove reliable (Statistics Canada, 2017).

For now, an estimate may be tentatively offered: according to the National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women, a US agency which reviewed national studies of false sexual assault allegations, 2-8% of sexual assault reports (that is, allegations formally made to a police agency) are deemed false (NCPVAW, 2009). The range between 2% and 8% reflects the methodological challenge in establishing whether a sexual assault report is deemed false because it is untrue (as in the alleged incident did not occur), or because conditions affecting how a true allegation was perceived by the reporting agency resulted in it being dismissed. These conditions can include for example: investigator bias against a victim; the presence of exaggerations or omissions in the victim’s account (which can be indicative of a lie, but can also be a response to sexual assault trauma); cultural or familial pressures causing a victim to retract a true report of sexual assault, among other reasons (NCPVAW, 2009).

A recent Statistics Canada survey found there were approximately 636,000 self-reported incidents of sexual assault in Canada in 2014, of which approximately 555,000 were against persons identifying as women. Of these, “71% of sexual assault incidents were unwanted sexual touching, 20% were sexual attacks and 9% were sexual activity where the victim was unable to consent due to drugs, intoxication, manipulation or non-physical force”; 87% of these sexual assaults were reportedly committed against persons identifying as women (Statistics Canada, 2017, p. 5). In the same year, police recorded 20,735 reports of sexual assault, in which 88% of complainants identified as women (Statistics Canada, 2017). If the NCPVAW’s finding holds true in Canada, and the rate of false reports is assumed to be the same for persons identifying as women as for persons identifying as men, this would mean that approximately 365 to 1,460 of the 18,246 sexual assaults against women reported to police in Canada in 2014 might be deemed false (and whether or not these would in fact be false cannot be established), in contrast to the 636,000 self-reported incidents of sexual assault.

The cultural stereotype of women ‘typically’ making false sexual assault allegations in anger or for vengeance seen in many comments examined in this project does not appear to be borne out by the data, then: rather, it appears to be the case that it is most ‘typical’ for women to not report sexual assaults at all.