

## **My Story of Harassment**

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In Aug 2017 I was informed of a false allegation that at a private event in skeptic event 2016 in Australia, during a session of 'selfie' photographs, I had touched a woman's breast. The unsubstantiated allegation was made by a third party, and was not reported at the time to the organization, but was alleged in letters to two Universities with which I am associated, and to BuzzFeed. The report was discredited by investigations at both Universities. BuzzFeed decided however it was good fodder for a story about alleged sexual harassment by a 'prominent atheist scientist', feeding an effort to support the claim that the skeptical community is dominated by misogynistic harassers, and supplementing it with the claim that somehow my Universities were protecting me from claims of harassment.

Following that, for 6 months BuzzFeed made a concerted, but unsuccessful effort to try and justify their presumption, and continued to harass me, my family, friends, and colleagues, and former students and postdocs, dredging up discredited internet allegations and confronting us with them along with new false claims, including that above, and twice sending me emails threatening to publish them, until I provided evidence that they were false-- evidence they could have obtained themselves had they tried. We have been forced to send them a cease and desist letter to get them to stop harassing me and others.

Nevertheless, having decided their conclusions in advance, they have continued to generate misleading allegations to defame me, and by extension, the atheist community. I have worked with many journalists and have never witnessed such a lack of integrity in the methods used to try and generate false claims, often making false claims to sources in order to try and elicit responses or produce some negative reaction. In spite of the counter-evidence provided by many people BuzzFeed continued to express to me their intent to produce a false and misleading story to justify their a priori conclusions—the opposite of good journalism or good science. They have demonstrated time and again over this six-month period of harassment to have little or no interest in truth.

I believe in speaking freely, and in encouraging others to speak freely back to me in return, whatever the situation. That is the essence of rational human interaction. Whether it involves a book signing line, agreeing to a selfie, working with to students or colleagues, or leading professional meetings, I work hard to make people feel comfortable and respected, as those who have met me can attest. I try to support and mentor people and to encourage them to flourish. I have built an environment of open, transparent and frank discussion, wherever I have worked. And while frank and free discussion opens possibilities for misunderstanding or disagreement, these can be and have been transparently addressed.

Any efforts by BuzzFeed to distort this to claim that my activities amount to harassment are false—nonsense compounded by garbage—not surprisingly for a what is essentially a gossip rag and certainly not a credible news source. Any claims they may make in this regard are not supported by the actual evidence provided to them by myself or others.