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- DIVERSIONS
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## Jian Ghomeshi and the problem of narcissistic male rage

Jian Ghomeshi, in all his traumatized dysfunction and for all the pain he has inflicted, may have done us the favour of waking us up to a larger problem.

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Making this scandal all about Jian Ghomeshi, we risk ignoring the broader sources of male narcissistic rage towards females, writes Gabor Maté.

By: Gabor Maté Published on Tue Nov 04 2014

His public persona shattered, **Jian Ghomeshi's** overweening narcissism has become the subject of public scorn. His reported violence against women, whether inside or outside sexual interplay, has been rightly denounced. Yet making this scandal all about Ghomeshi, we risk ignoring **the broader sources of male narcissistic rage towards females. We are dealing here with far more than the pathological quirks of an apparently disturbed and charismatic individual.**

**We live in a society steeped in male narcissism, one in which aggression towards women is deeply entrenched in the collective male psyche.** Nor is male sexual predation confined to a few "sick" individuals: that we see it portrayed, relentlessly and voyeuristically, in movies, TV shows, and advertising is beyond obvious, except for those mired in denial.

Acknowledging such realities is not "a tremendous slur against men," as one denial-mired national columnist suggested recently; it is not to label men as "pigs." It is simply to recognize that **Ghomeshi's reported behaviours arise from a misogynistic culture that degrades and confuses people of all genders.** Few men enact extreme hostility, but few are those who do not harbour anti-feminine aggression somewhere in their psyche.

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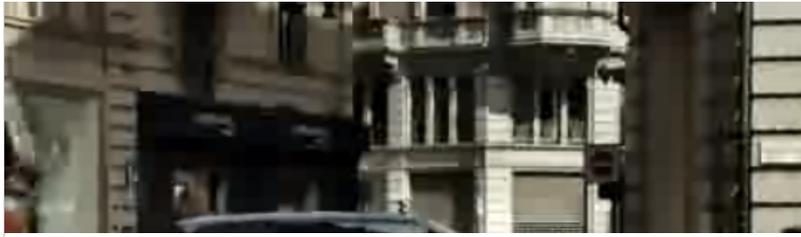
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As a man, a husband and the father of an articulate and proudly feminist daughter from whom I have learned much, I know that Ghomeshi's alleged actions — hitting women even as he hits on them — are symptoms of a larger problem. Inside what has been called a "rape culture," many men are familiar with fantasies of non-consensual sexual dominance and violence. Although not in physically violent ways, I, too, have acted out male rage, including toward the woman with whom I am about to celebrate our 45th wedding anniversary. Much as I regret it, it's the truth.

From what dynamics does this narcissistic male anger flow?

A narcissist sees and experiences the world primarily with respect to his own needs. It is all about him; other people merely supply or frustrate these needs, seeming to lack individuality, dignity or needs of their own.

There is a time in life, in infancy, when we are all narcissists. In this early developmental phase we implicitly believe the world revolves around us, and properly so: we have but to feel a need, and the world moves to meet it. The people who remain stuck in narcissism, whether everyday narcissism expressed as ordinary self-centredness or the extreme forms we label as pathological, are the ones who never fully developed past that early stage. We graduate from a developmental phase only if our needs at that stage were fully satisfied. And in our society, most children do not get their needs met.

The growth of a healthy self depends on emotionally rich, attuned interactions with parents who are emotionally present and available. Stressed, depressed or anxious parents, or those who were themselves traumatized, may be incapable of providing their children with such interactions. In our increasingly alienated, isolating, and hyper-stressed culture, many children grow up under conditions characterized by what the seminal psychologist and researcher Alan Sorensen has called "proximal separation": the parents are physically there but often emotionally absent. In this context healthy human development is impaired. Thus narcissism pervades our culture.

The rage against women is rooted in what the late feminist scholar Dorothy Dinnerstein identified as the "female monopoly of early child care," where an isolated woman is seen by the child as the sole source of nourishment, physical soothing, and emotional support. In a mobile and economically unstable society, it falls upon an individual female to become the entire world for the child. The male child, finding his needs frustrated, develops rage. As the brilliant Canadian psychologist Gordon Neufeld points out, "frustration is the engine of aggression."

Rage against the mother later becomes generalized into rage against women. In pathological cases, that hostility is acted out precisely in moments when intimacy is sought, such as sex, because it was in early moments of vulnerable intimacy that the narcissistic wound was sustained. The rage is an implicit memory of intense proximal separation. Many boys also witness and absorb the hostility of their overworked and emotionally alienated fathers and, unconsciously, blame their mothers for not having protected them.

The problem is worldwide and as old as civilization. We fool ourselves if we believe that our advanced society has come even near to resolving it. A new consciousness and a new conversation are needed. Jian Ghomeshi, in all his traumatized dysfunction and for all the pain he has inflicted, may have done us the favour of waking us up.

**Gabor Maté, M.D.**, is a Vancouver-based author and speaker.

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