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"Redemption Follows Allocution": Dan Harmon and the #MeToo Apology

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This article analyzes comedian and TV writer Dan Harmon's famously well-received #MeToo-era apology for sexual misconduct on the set of his sitcom Community, noting how Harmon revises the traditionally individualistic genre of the apology into a statement of advocacy for the collective moral imperative of the #MeToo movement. After discussing #MeToo as a rhetorical situation that justifiably trivializes pleas for individual forgiveness, the article analyzes Harmon's monologue in relation to scholarship on genre of apologia, contrasting Harmon's with the comparatively individualistic and unsuccessful apology of Louis C.K and arguing that traditional apologies prove ill-suited to the #MeToo era. I contend, finally, that male speakers seeking redemption for sexual misconduct should heed Harmon's example of sustained critical self-reflection, pronounced advocacy for victims, and sustained cultivation of an ethos that merits redemption.

Keywords: #MeToo, apology, apologia, allocution, Dan Harmon, rhetorical situation, differentiation, transcendence, characterological coherence

The #MeToo movement hit peak momentum in late 2017, a year that saw sexual assault allegations mount against figures like Harvey Weinstein, Louis C.K., Matt Lauer, Garrison Keillor, Charlie Rose, Kevin Spacey, and a long list of other male celebrities—all of which, let us recall, succeeded the inauguration of a president who had nonchalantly boasted about grabbing women's genitals before garnering 306 electoral votes.[1] The comedian and writer Dan Harmon fittingly dubbed 2017 "the Year of the Asshole." Taking to Twitter on New Year's Eve of that year, the creator and former showrunner of NBC's sitcom *Community* and co-creator of the Adult Swim animated series *Rick and Morty* offered this bit of self-deprecating, understated humor: "This was truly the Year of the Asshole. Myself included. We don't have to make 2018 the Year of the Mensch but I hope it can be the Year of the Not as Much of an Asshole. #RealisticGoals."[2]

The tweet could have easily disappeared into the upheaval of #MeToo discourse, inundated by more incendiary and important voices of accusation and amplification. It remains memorable, though, if only because it provoked a response from Harmon's own victim of unwelcome sexual

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[1] See Anna North, Constance Grady, Laura McGann, Aja Romano, "263 Celebrities, Politicians, CEOs, and Others Who Have Been Accused of Sexual Misconduct since April 2017," *Vox,* January 9, 2019, https://www.vox.com/a/sexual-harassment-assault-allegations-list; Dan Corey, "Since Weinstein, Here's a Growing List of Men Accused of Sexual Assault," *NBC News,* January 10, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/sexual-misconduct/weinstein-here-s-growing-list-men-accused-sexual-misconduct-n816546.

[2] Dan Harmon, Twitter post, December 31, 2017, 7:02 PM. Harmon has since deleted his Twitter account, so the original post is no longer accessible online.

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attention, writer Megan Ganz. On January 2, she tweeted back: "Care to be more specific? Redemption follows allocution."[3]

A contributor to *The Onion*, *Modern Family*, and *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, Ganz had earned her first TV gig at the *Community* writers' table under Harmon in 2010. Her response to Harmon yielded a short public exchange on Twitter between the two. The indignant but reserved Ganz and contrite Harmon each strongly hinted at a history of exploitation and abuse on the set of *Community*.[4] More importantly, the exchange also spurred Harmon to issue, on his weekly podcast *Harmontown*, what has become one of the most famous and famously well-received apologies of the #MeToo era.[5] For whatever it's worth—and I will argue it is worth something—Ganz herself would later call the seven-minute monologue a "masterclass in How to Apologize."[6]

The unlikely success of Harmon's apology, amid a still-growing scrapheap of bad apologies and non-apologies from #MeToo's accused, merits attention from critics and scholars of rhetoric. Indeed, a rhetorical perspective demonstrates how the very conditions of apologetical "success" have shifted in the era of #MeToo, where redemption and image restoration—the traditional, individualistic outcomes of apologetic success—come to depend on identification with and advocacy for the movement itself, as well an analytical stance toward one's own wrongdoing that has more to do with critical reflection than overt repentance. To better explain such a relationship between the individual apologist and his rhetorical context, I examine Harmon's monologue in three interrelated perspectives: (1) the #MeToo movement as a rhetorical situation, (2) the apology as a rhetorical genre, and (3) Harmon's own reformed role as a critic of toxic masculinity and consequent *ethos* as it pertains to this critical role.

First, however, one should note the unusual phrasing that initiated Harmon's apology. Ganz uses an unexpected word, "allocution," to describe the path to her interlocutor's potential redemption. This word derives from the Latin *allocūtiō*, a term denoting rhetorical exhortation, usually to an army before battle; in modern use, "allocution" signifies the courtroom statement of a defendant or, more generally, a speech of intense moral significance.[7] Whether or not these etymological undertones informed Ganz's own lexical choices when she tweeted at her former boss, the word was prescient: As this paper argues, the redemptive quality of Harmon's subsequent monologue derived not from adherence to the typical genre markers of the apology (remorse, repentance, pleading for forgiveness, and so on), but precisely from its service as a classical allocution—a metaphorical call to arms—for the moral imperative of the #MeToo movement and against the

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[3] Megan Ganz, Twitter post, January 2, 2018, 4:11 AM, https://twitter.com/meganganz/status/948134632037462017.

[4] The entire exchange, plus Ganz's retrospective commentary, appears in Jonah Engel Bromwich, "Megan Ganz on Dan Harmon's Apology: 'I Felt Vindicated,'" *New York Times*, January 13, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/13/arts/dan-harmon-megan-ganz.html.

[5] Dan Harmon, Jeff Bryan Davis, and Spencer Crittenden, "Don't Let Him Wipe or Flush," January 10, 2018, in *Harmontown*, produced by Starburns Audio, podcast, MP3 audio, 2:09:22, accessed May 17, 2019, https://www.harmontown.com/2018/01/episode-dont-let-him-wipe-or-flush/. Harmon's preamble to his apology begins at the 19:25 mark; the apology itself begins at 21:30. The edited and slightly abridged text of Harmon's apology appears in Marissa Martinelli, "Dan Harmon Acknowledges That He Sexually Harassed *Community* Writer Megan Ganz in a Seven-Minute Podcast Monologue," *Slate*, January 11, 2018, https://slate.com/arts/2018/01/dan-harmon-apologizes-to-community-writer-megan-ganz-on-harmontown.html.

[6] Megan Ganz, Twitter post, January 11, 2018, 2:41 AM, https://twitter.com/meganganz/status/951373403625177088.

[7] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "allocution, *n.*," September 2012, accessed May 17, 2019, http://www.oed.com; Kimberly A. Thomas, "Beyond Mitigation: Towards a Theory of Allocution," *Fordham Law Review* 75 (2007): 2641-2683.

dangerously routine complicity of men in a culture of female sexual subjugation. In short, Harmon's apology "worked" because it also worked as an *apologia*—in the classical sense, as a measured defense—not of himself but of the #MeToo movement. This essay continually returns to the relationship between apology and allocution. Through this comparison, I hope to illuminate how the male rhetor can demonstrate both the progressive evolution of his own character and the legitimate, unselfish support of feminist movements like #MeToo.

#MeToo as Rhetorical Situation

#MeToo represents a watershed moment, or situation, culturally and rhetorically. Lloyd Bitzer famously describes the rhetorical situation as an interconnection of exigence, audience, and constraints.[8] Exigence, for Bitzer, denotes "an imperfection marked by urgency."[9] While #MeToo is irreducible to any single mobilizing event (a la, say, the Watergate Scandal or the 9/11 attacks) the many incidences of sexual assault, accusation, and consequent media attention circumscribed by the hashtag fit the bill of an "imperfection" (here, a gross understatement) tied to the mounting "urgency" of revelation that women have been suffering, and continue to suffer, repeated sexual assaults from their male colleagues, coworkers, and supervisors. The slogan "me too," which was coined by black civil rights activist Tanara Burke in 2006,[10] resurfaced in 2017 to suggest a vast, composite rhetorical situation marked by growing solidarity among many individual speakers. Most of the key actors within this situation have been women, perhaps most famously actress Rose McGowan, who was one of the first to publicly accuse Weinstein of rape in October 2017.[11] The collective agency of the "silence breakers," as *Time* referred to #MeToo's many righteous accusers in its 2017 "Person of the Year" feature,[12] bespeaks a snowball effect of solidarity, confidence, and cultural momentum, in which one speaker breaks silence, thereby encouraging others to follow suit and eventually provoking an exponential groundswell. I should stress that reformed apologists like Harmon offer only a peripheral contribution to this collective agency; it was the Burkes and McGowans (and Ganzes), not the Harmons, who most centrally set the #MeToo exigence in motion.

Like the speakers, the relevant audiences within the #MeToo situation are many. The hashtag #MeToo, of course, indicates women speaking to other women—i.e., "You have experienced sexual harassment; me too." This, again, constitutes a recursive process of rhetorical agents hailing audiences who might themselves then become similar agents in breaking the unwritten code of silence. Other #MeToo advocates, though, have addressed men in particular, arguing, as one editorialist puts it, that "[c]hange will not happen if men aren't willing to share their part of [the]

[8] Lloyd Biter, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 6.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Abby Ohlheiser, "The Woman Behind 'Me Too' Knew the Power of the Phrase when She Created It—10 Years Ago," *Washington Post*, October 29, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2017/10/19/the-woman-behind-me-too-knew-the-power-of-the-phrase-when-she-created-it-10-years-ago/.
[11] Sam Levin and Olivia Solon, "Rose McGowan Alleges Rape by Harvey Weinstein—and Amazon Ignored Claim," *The Guardian*, October 13, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/oct/12/rose-mcgowan-amazon-studios-harvey-weinstein-ignore-rape.
[12] Stephanie Zacharek, Eliana Dockerterman, and Haley Sweetland Edwards, "The Silence Breakers," *Time*, December 18, 2017, http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/.

risks."[13] Writ large, then, the movement has comprised numerous rhetorical exchanges among diverse groups of people seeking further transparency and justice on the topic of sexual harassment.[14] This means validating victims' voices; enlisting the support of male allies, who can, at the very least, help lighten the burden on women's shoulders; and deterring potential abusers.

This inventory of rhetorical purpose also ties into the matter of constraints, Bitzer's final criterion of the rhetorical situation and one particularly interesting in relation to #MeToo in general and Harmon's apology in particular. In many ways, #MeToo has busied itself in *lifting* constraints—in toppling unwritten rules about what can be spoken, when, about whom, and by whom. In practice, Bitzer tells us, rhetorical constraints amount to "persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence."[15] Through its development, #MeToo shattered the convention of silence about sexual assault, offering in its place the need to validate and amplify the stories of victims. Ironically enough, the imperative to break the code of silence itself became a "constraint"—though a productive one—of the rhetorical situation. Within this context, conventional apologies from men for their sexual wrongdoing have risked sounding hollow, trivial, or downright insulting, inasmuch as they constitute *individualistic* damage control for abusers rather than contribution to the *composite* momentum at the movement's heart. Within the #MeToo situation, in other words, it feels appropriate to respond, "Who cares?" That is: "Who cares if you're sorry for committing sexual assault? This movement isn't about you and you and your need for forgiveness. This is about vindicating the victims and stopping future abuse." Some #MeToo apologists, like Louis C.K. (whose apology I contrast with Harmon's below), made more or less this exact blunder of misreading the rhetorical situation. Harmon, however, avoided this mistake by revising the genre of the apology to suit the rhetorical situation.

The Apology Genre in the #MeToo Era

In an influential 1973 article, B.L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel contend that "apologetical discourses constitute a distinct *form* of public address, a family of speeches with sufficient elements in common so as to warrant legitimately generic status."[16] The authors suggest, further, that this formal durability of the apologia transcends specific time and place in the Western rhetorical tradition due to the enduring prevalence of four generic strategies: denial, the standard strategy of "disavowal"; bolstering, the strategy of identifying oneself with something the audience favors; differentiation, the division of contexts so as to place the speaker "into a new perspective"; and transcendence, which "joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which

[13] Ellen McGirt, "From #MeToo to #YouToo: Why We Need Male Allies to Help Stop Sexual Harassment," *Fortune*, November 21, 2017, http://fortune.com/2017/11/21/from-metoo-to-youtoo-why-male-allies-stop-sexual-harassment/.

[14] I should note that such people are not exclusively cisgender women. The woman-man binary that sustains much #MeToo discourse and risks marginalizing gender-nonbinary people and perpetuating, for them, the same culture of abuse and silence women have long suffered. This important issue lies beyond the scope of the present essay, but it bears note that #MeToo has arguably entailed conservative as well as progressive rhetorical constraints: see Meredith Talusan, "How #MeToo Stands to Marginalize Trans and Gender-Nonconforming People," *Them*, October 27, 2017, https://www.them.us/story/how-metoo-stands-to-marginalize.

[15] Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation," 8.

[16] B.L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "The Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 273.

the audience does not presently view that attribute."[17] While other critics have significantly expanded and challenged ideas about the apologetical genres,[18] I want to harness Ware and Linkugel's final two categories, differentiation and transcendence, as explanatory terms that shed light on Harmon's apology—though Harmon's words and the constraints of the #MeToo era, in turn, slightly revise each of these strategies by shifting emphasis away from Harmon as an individual and toward the collective moral imperative of the #MeToo movement.[19]

This idea remains somewhat counterintuitive. Apologetics, common sense tells us, deals in defense and most obviously self-defense. And had Harmon attempted a more traditional defense of himself—using well-worn strategies like denial and expressions of mortification—his utterance would register as an example of what William L. Benoit terms "image repair discourse," which disgraced entertainment figures have commonly employed in their own defense as an attempt to safe public face.[20] This sort of speech and writing is common enough in the #MeToo era. Consider, for example, radio personality Garrison Keillor's letter to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* after his firing from Minnesota Public Radio.[21] Keillor begins with a bolstering appeal, identifying himself with previous radio personalities: "Getting fired is a real distinction in broadcasting and I've waited fifty years for the honor. All of my heroes got fired. I only wish it could've been for something more heroic." This final remark attempts to humorously segue into Keillor's strategy of denial, through which he disavows any intentional wrongdoing during an incident where he touched a woman's bare back with his hand. Throughout the short letter, Keillor imbues his self-defense with a rueful tone he probably intends to be funny, though it whiffs of passive-aggressive bitterness: "If I had a dollar for every woman who asked to take a selfie with me and who slipped an arm around me and let it drift down below the beltline, I'd have at least a hundred dollars. So this is poetic irony of a high order. But I'm just fine. I had a good long run and am grateful for it and for everything else." Keillor's huffy resentment notwithstanding, his most egregious rhetorical shortcoming might be his tone-deaf ignorance of the aforementioned rhetorical situation. Even if Keillor was wrongfully accused, his individualistic defense sounds callous and detached in the context of the #MeToo upheaval, a situation his letter entirely neglects to mention.

Contrast this with the *Harmontown* apology.[22] On his otherwise comedic podcast—which typically involves free-flowing conversation, music, table-top role-playing games, and other improvisational comedy—Harmon sets aside seven minutes to speak about his misconduct against Ganz, though he never refers to her by name. His unscripted monologue, which he delivers in an understated but occasionally emotional timbre, recounts the professional relationship between Ganz and

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[17] Ibid., 275-282.

[18] See, for example, Sharon D. Downey, "The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (1993): 42-64; Joy Koesten and Robert C. Rowland, "The Rhetoric of Atonement," *Communication Studies* 55, no. 1 (2004): 68-87; Lisa Storm Villadsen, "Speaking on Behalf of Others: Rhetorical Agency and Epideictic Functions in Official Apologies," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2008): 25-45; Adam Ellwanger, "Apology as *Metanoic* Performance: Punitive Rhetoric and Public Speech," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2012): 307-329; William L. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research*, 2nd ed. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015).

[19] For another innovative application of differentiation and transcendence in relation to social justice discourse, see Steve Martin and George F. McHendry, Jr., "Kaepernick's Stand: Patriotism, Protest, and Professional Sports," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 6, no. 3/4 (2016): 88-98, http://contemporaryrhetoric.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Martin_McHendry13_4.pdf.

[20] Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, 75-86.

[21] "Read Garrison Keillor's Full Email to the Star Tribune," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 29, 2017, http://www.startribune.com/read-garrison-keillor-s-full-email-to-the-star-tribune/460827763/.

[22] Harmon, Davis, and Crittenden, "Don't Let Him," 21:30-28:30.

himself, repeatedly stressing how "easy" and "unremarkable" it was for him, a man, to "crush on" and force unwanted sexual attention on a female employee. Harmon uses direct subject-verb phrasing to claim culpability ("I ruined my show. I betrayed the audience. I destroyed everything, and I damaged her internal compass") and avoids groveling or begging forgiveness.[23] He describes his own actions without excusing them, analyzes the gendered social situation that allowed him to make these actions, and stresses that others should think critically about the ubiquity of such situations and their uneven power dynamics.

Harmon's apology offers the symmetrical opposite of Keillor's: If Keillor denies wrongdoing and ignores #MeToo's broader exigence, Harmon readily concedes wrongdoing, which he then transforms into allocutionary evidence for #MeToo's moral imperative. In contrast to Keillor's bolstering and denial, Harmon's apology involves both differentiation and transcendence: he divides contexts of past and present, not to exonerate himself, but to cast his own example of sexual harassment as something insidiously ordinary that other men should reflect on; and, in so doing, he transcends the boundary between the rhetorical genres of apology and allocution. Each rhetorical maneuver merits attention.

Differentiation: Past and Present Selves

Differentiation, as Ware and Linkugel describe, involves dividing "an old context into two or more new constructions of reality," which ideally compel the audience to reexamine the meaning of the apologist's actions.[24] They offer the example of Ted Kennedy's "Chappaquiddick" speech, during which the disgraced politician differentiates his "normal self" from the version "who barely escaped drowning" during the accident in question, and whose panicked actions ostensibly make no sense to the defendant in the courtroom, a different version of the same man.[25] Harmon's use of differentiation is similar, at least insofar as he represents two versions of himself separated by time. One notes this strategy from the very beginning of his apology:

> I was attracted to an employee. I really want to be really careful about that language because a huge part of the problem is a culture of feeling things that you think are unique and significant because they are happening to you and saying things like "I had feelings for" and "I fell for" and all these things. The most clinical way I can put it in [fessing] up to my crimes is that I was attracted to a writer that I had power over because I was a showrunner, and I knew enough to know that these feelings were bad news. That was easy enough to know. I knew that they ran the risk of undercutting people's faith in my judgement, her faith in her talent, the other writers' respect for me, the entire production, the audience. I knew that I wasn't doing anybody any favors by feeling these things, and so I did the cowardly, easiest, laziest thing you could do with feelings like that, and I didn't deal with them. And in not dealing with them, I made everybody else deal with them. Especially her.[26]

So, unlike the two Kennedys, one of whom makes no sense to the other, Harmon immediately reckons with a past self who makes entirely too much sense to his present self. Harmon's careful attention to language (e.g., highlighting his professional boss-employee relationship with Ganz and avoiding the romanticized "I fell for") and recognition of his own motives (e.g., "I did the

[23] Direct quotes are taken from the transcript of Harmon's apology in Martinelli, "Dan Harmon."
[24] Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense," 278.
[25] Ibid., 279.
[26] Quoted in Martinelli, "Dan Harmon."

cowardly, easiest, laziest thing") offer up two versions of one contiguous person, a past self capable of irresponsible and predatory behavior toward women and a present self who at least possesses the self-awareness and critical acumen to identify, name, and analyze the choices he made in the past. Unlike Chappaquiddick's Kennedy, the "new" Harmon—the speaker of the apology—performs self-evaluation more than self-defense. Here, the apologist himself becomes a sort of critic and advocate. Harmon makes his own example instructive; he uses his otherwise unsavory position to point out what was seemingly ordinary, but no less repugnant, about his behavior.

Later in the monologue, in fact, Harmon pauses to address listeners directly and stress this point: "I want you to be the one to examine this every step of the way and decide for yourself where I'm making mistakes. I don't want to explain to you what I've learned. I want you to look at this and I want it to sound relatively unremarkable to you, because that's the danger."[27] This sort of self-effacing turn to apologist-as-critic most centrally describes Harmon's revision of apologetic differentiation within the context of #MeToo. He transforms the traditionally individualistic genre of the apology into a call of collective evaluation and action, and while Harmon is effusively self-critical, he never explicitly asks for Ganz's forgiveness. (Again, he never mentions Ganz by name.) Instead, he differentiates between his past and present selves by illustrating, through his apology, the turn to critical reflection and advocacy. Collective transformation, not individual forgiveness, is the goal. And notably, the audience Harmon invokes includes not only Ganz and other victims of sexual misconduct, but also men who, conceivably, stand to reassess their own behavior and thinking after hearing the address.

Another contrasting example will better illustrate how Harmon's apology differs from those of other #MeToo-era offenders. In November 2017, several months before Harmon's apology was released on *Harmontown*, the comedian Louis C.K. released a statement admitting to masturbating in front of female comedians, some of whom had spoken with the *New York Times* about their experiences.[28] Unlike Keillor, Louis C.K. does explicitly apologize, stating, "The power I had over these women is that they admired me. And I wielded that power irresponsibly. I have been remorseful of my actions."[29] And like Harmon, Louis C.K. differentiates between past and present selves—here, the transgressive and repentant versions. It is the emphasis on individual repentance, though, and the commensurate strategy of emotional regret Benoit calls "mortification,"[30] that enfeebles Louis C.K.'s statement in the context of #MeToo. Feminist critics Leah Fessler, Annalisa Merelli, and Sari Zeidler argue that Louis C.K.'s statement "devolves into an attempt to paint himself as suffering and worthy of sympathy" through statements like, "The hardest regret to live with is what you've done to hurt someone else. And I can hardly wrap my head around the scope of hurt I brought on them."[31] Harmon, by contrast, never courts self-pity. And where Louis C.K. makes only passing reference to his "power" over the women whose trust he violated, Harmon makes this professional dynamic the thesis of his monologue. In short, Louis C.K.'s apology is about *himself* while Harmon's is about something bigger: that is, the dangerously commonplace

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[27] Ibid.

[28] "Louis C.K. Responds to Accusations: 'These Stories Are True,'" *New York Times*, November 10, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/arts/television/louis-ck-statement.html; Melena Ryzik, Cara Buckley, and Jodi Kantor, "Louis C.K. Is Accused by 5 Women of Sexual Misconduct," *New York Times*, November 7, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/09/arts/television/louis-ck-sexual-misconduct.html.

[29] Quoted in "Louie C.K. Responds."

[30] Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, 26-29.

[31] Leah Fessler, Annalisa Merelli, and Sari Zeidler, "We Edited Louis C.K.'s 'Apology' to Make It a Real Apology," *Quartz*, November 10, 2017, https://qz.com/1126593/we-edited-louis-cks-statement-on-sexual-misconduct-to-make-it-a-real-apology/; "Louis C.K. Responds."

social circumstances that allow for sexual exploitation. In offering transformed versions of themselves, Louis C.K. repents on behalf of himself, while Harmon turns apologist—defender, advocate—on behalf of the #MeToo movement and its collective rhetorical energy. This is the pivotal difference between each speaker's use of differentiation, and the reason that Harmon's suits the rhetorical constraints of the #MeToo era.

Transcendence: Speaker and Genre

Differentiation and transcendence are traditionally viewed as "obverse" strategies,[32] opposite sides of one coin. Harmon's uses of the two are irrevocably linked. It is by differentiating himself into both culprit and reformed critic that Harmon is also able to transcend the traditional genre boundary between the apology and the allocution, revising the genre to better suit the rhetorical situation of #MeToo. As Ware and Linkugel explain, transcendence accounts for "any strategy which cognitively joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does presently view that attribute."[33] Appeals to transcendence attempt to change the terms of an apologetical discourse, usually by placing the speaker's prior actions into a new light. Ware and Linkugel offer the example of the American socialist Eugene V. Debs, who—though he was charged and convicted of violating the Espionage Act during World War I—attempted to transcend the issue of his own legal guilt by placing his criticism of the war effort in a new context: that of war profiteering under industrial capitalism.[34]

This is a powerful example, but unlike Debs and other traditional purveyors of apologetical transcendence, Harmon is not trying to exonerate himself by newly contextualizing his actions. Rather, Harmon's strategy is perhaps better explained by Kenneth Burke's description of transcendence: "From a certain point of view, A and B are 'opposites.' We mean by 'transcendence' the adoption of another point of view by which they cease to be opposites."[35] Burke places "opposites" in scare quotes to suggest that many ostensibly opposite categories are not ontologically so, but are divided by cultural convention and category distinction, which may be dissoluble or altogether arbitrary. Transcendent rites—religious and educational ceremonies, for instance—may symbolically bridge such categories.[36] Harmon's own use of temporal differentiation mirrors such coming-of-age rites by dramatizing a link between the past and present selves, who together form an evolutionary, contiguous version of the changing person, one who grows into an evaluative critic of his own behavior precisely because he knowns his own faults. Harmon, that is, transcends the boundary between past and present selves in the act of apology. This, again, contrasts with Ware and Linkugel's image of Ted Kennedy, who cannot reconcile his past and present selves after Chappaquiddick.[37] Kennedys A and B remain "opposite"; Harmons A and B merge into a coherent, though evolutionary, image, and consequently dramatize how #MeToo's transgressors can change into critics of themselves through sustained reflection.

Such transcendence of temporally separated selves mirrors generic transcendence between the apology and allocution: Where many apologies, like Louis C.K.'s, wish to erase or banish the past

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[32] Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense," 280.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3rd ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 336.
[36] Ibid., 337.
[37] Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense," 279.

self and his actions, Harmon merges the two selves, thereby transforming remorse into allocutionary advocacy. This strategy appears powerfully in the end of his monologue, which is worth quoting at length:

> So I just wanna say, in addition to obviously being sorry, but that's really not the important thing, I wanna say I did it by not thinking about it, and I got away with it by not thinking about it. And if she hadn't mentioned something on Twitter, I would've continued to not *have* to think about it, although I did walk around with my stomach in knots about it, but I wouldn't have had to talk about it.
>
> The last and most important thing I can say is just: Think about it. No matter who you are at work, no matter where you're working, no matter what field you're in, no matter what position you have over or under or side by side with somebody, just think about it. You gotta, because if you don't think about it, you're gonna get away with not thinking about it, and you can cause a lot of damage that is technically legal and hurts everybody. And I think that we're living in a good time right now, because we're not gonna get away with it anymore. And if we can make it a normal part of our culture that we think about it and possibly talk about it, then maybe we can get to a better place where that stuff doesn't happen.[38]

These conclusive statements do, at least in part, read as a traditional apology—including a brief expression of individualistic mortification ("I did walk around with my stomach in knots"). But Harmon's half-ironic effacement of his own remorse ("in addition to obviously being sorry") gives way to a strong rallying cry on behalf of #MeToo's moral exigence, the message of which is not exactly "punish the guilty!" but rather "consider how easy it is to transgress when you hold the power." Harmon's refrain of "think about it" could even serve as the flagship *topos* or hashtag of #MeToo's male allies—a pithy reminder to interrogate one's own sexual power and privilege in the era when, thankfully, men "aren't gonna get away with" sexual misconduct as often as they used to. This is not the typical message of an apology.

I am not arguing, to be clear, that Harmon's apology "isn't really" an apology. Harmon has translated personal experience and motives into an intelligibly remorseful and satisfying form that audiences recognize as apology; it is an apology because he has mobilized at least some of the "recurrent patterns of language use," to borrow Carolyn R. Miller's phrasing, that characterize the genre of apology.[39] To argue otherwise would lead to a dead end of formalist essentialism. I am, though, pointing to the permeable boundaries between genres and the evolutionary character of genre itself.[40] While genres offer the rhetorical forms and patterns speakers can use to address, modify, and resolve rhetorical situations, those same situations can exert a reciprocal force on the conventions genres themselves. Again, the traditional apology, even done well (whatever that might mean), seems ill-suited within the righteous collective energy of the #MeToo movement, so Harmon merges the genres of the apology and allocution to better suit #MeToo's rhetorical constraints. Whether Harmon premeditated or just stumbled over this generic structure is beside the point. The point is that it does rhetorical work befitting the #MeToo era in a way the traditional apology does not.

This work, finally, might be characterized through differences in forensic and epideictic motives. The Greek *apologia* refers to the sort of legal defense that, along with accusation (or *katēgoria*), supplies the motive of forensic oratory, which, as Aristotle describes in the *Rhetoric*, decides

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[38] Quoted in Martinelli, "Dan Harmon."

[39] Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70 (1984): 163.

[40] See Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre Innovation: Evolution, Emergence, or Something Else?" *Journal of Media Innovations* 3, no. 2 (2016): 4-19, http://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/TJMI/article/view/2432.

the guilt or innocence of actors in the past.[41] Despite the self-evident similarity of classical *apologia* to latter-day apologies and image repair discourse, Lisa Storm Villadsen argues persuasively that apologies can also function as epideictic, the genre of ceremonial rhetoric Aristotle aligns with public affirmation of norms and morality.[42] This is the case because, in Villadsen's words,

> Official apologies provide a touchstone for a given community concerning the values and norms that characterize it. . . . Via a public recognition of a breach of particular norms, the official apology constitutes a renewed statement of commitment to those norms as it distances itself from their antidote. By explicating, possibly reformulating, a normative groundwork, the official apology marks a symbolic transfer from one understanding of the collective self to the another—strengthened through the acknowledgement of fault and vitalized through renewed ethical commitment.[43]

In other words, official apologies transcend the realms of the individual and community by bolstering epideictic norms against individual transgression. This sounds like Harmon. Though Villadsen's "official apologies" concern political officeholders more often than disgraced entertainers, Harmon, too, is able to escape the forensic domain of individual guilt and innocence and transform his apology into an allocution, a genre that, here, takes on epideictic qualities as it firms up the values of justice and equity for women.[44] It is significant, too, that Villadsen offers the possibility of "reformulating" cultural norms through apology, because Harmon does just this; his monologue validates the rapidly changing constellation of norms taking shape within the early days of #MeToo. In short, by affirming #MeToo's collective moral imperative within his apology, Harmon transcends (1) the differentiated past and present versions of himself, (2) the genres of the apology and allocution, and (3) the domains of forensic and epideictic rhetoric. These three acts of transcendence remain interlinked and cumulatively elevate Harmon's apology above more individualist attempts like Louis C.K.'s.

Ethos and Characterological Coherence

Having analyzed Harmon's apology in detail, I offer this caveat: Isolated apologies will rarely repair a speaker's image or forward public good without a preceding rhetorical foundation rooted in public ethos. Accordingly, one should zoom out and consider how his monologue intersects with Harmon's ethos, or persuasive moral character, as evidenced by prior rhetorical acts. Despite Aristotle's stipulation that the rhetor cultivates his ethos only in the course of speaking,[45] a latter-day account of rhetoric and intertextuality must account for the effects of fame and reputation across numerous interlinked rhetorical performances. Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca intuit as much through their vocabulary of the rhetorical person and her acts: "In argumentation, the person, considered as the support for a series of qualities, the author of a series of acts and judgments, and the object of a series of appraisals, is a durable being, around whom is grouped

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[41] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, ed. and trans. George A. Kennedy, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I.3, I.10-15.
[42] Villadsen, "Speaking of Behalf," 31-34; Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, I.3, I.9; Gerard A. Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic: The Formation of Public Morality," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29, 1 (1999): 5-23.
[43] Villadsen, "Speaking on Behalf," 33.
[44] Ironically, the courtroom allocution might be considered yet another forensic genre, insofar as it affords the defendant an individualistic plea regarding judgement of her/his past actions. Here, I refer to the broader, classical sense of the allocation described above.
[45] George A. Kennedy, introduction to Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 22.

a whole series of phenomena to which he gives cohesion and significance."[46] This sense of the "durable being" closely resembles Walter R. Fisher's coinage of "characterological coherence," or the imperative that figures "in life and in literature . . . behave characteristically. Without this kind of predictability, there is no trust, no community, no rational human order."[47] Public figures, for Fisher, are beholden to the same logics of consistency that audiences expect of fictional characters, because such figures *are* playing characters in the drama of public life. Characterological coherence, therefore, is a conservative force; it preempts the rapid, believable public transformation of a public figure—Louis C.K., for example—over the course of a single utterance. Such figures must *earn* their transformations, as it were, though the credible evolution of ethos.

Harmon's example is especially interesting. On one hand, Harmon—who Sarah Silverman famously fired from a writing gig on her show and NBC even more famously fired from *Community*, Harmon's own show—is notoriously obsessive, self-destructive, curmudgeonly, and difficult to work with.[48] Harmon's reputation as something of an egotistical perfectionist feeds into the familiar image of the "male genius" who feels entitled to the sexual attention of women; the negative dimensions of his ethos, one might say, gel all too coherently. On the other hand, Harmon exhibits an admirable track record of hiring women to his creative projects, including *Community* and *Rick and Morty*, plus an increasingly strong track record of publicly defending women writers against backlash from male fans.[49] After *Rick and Morty* hired four women writers in mid-2017—bringing the writing staff to gender parity—Harmon bluntly condemned the "testosterone-based subculture patting themselves on the back for trolling" the show's women writers, and clarified that his writing staff matters more than pacifying this part of the show's fanbase.[50] Here, it's worth noting that Harmon's terms of advocacy again reflect a critical consciousness about codes of toxic masculinity.

Equally important, Harmon also spoke about his misconduct against Ganz before their Twitter exchange. On an October 2017 episode of *Harmontown* that aired about three months before the apology, Harmon and his cohosts spend much of the episode discussing McGowan's allegations against Weinstein and other early rumblings of the #MeToo movement.[51] Unprompted, and again without naming Ganz, Harmon confesses to having harassed a female employee at *Community* with unwanted attention, stressing, as he would later, how easy and unremarkable it was to unthinkingly abuse his position of power. During this episode, Harmon underscores that #MeToo signals a watershed moment when men will need to critically think back on their interactions with

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[46] Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 295.

[47] Walter R. Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 47.

[48] See Sean O'Neal, "The Tortured Mind of Dan Harmon," *GQ*, May 30, 2018, https://www.gq.com/story/dan-harmon-rick-and-morty-profile; *Harmontown*, directed by Neil Berkeley, (Warren, NJ: Passion River, 2014), DVD.

[49] Patrick Shanley, "Meet the Women Behind 'Rick and Morty's' Third Season," *Hollywood Reporter*, August 11, 2017, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/meet-women-behind-rick-mortys-third-season-1028204; James Hibberd, "*Rick and Morty* Co-Creator Slams Trolls Attacking their Female Writers," *Entertainment Weekly*, September 21, 2017, https://ew.com/tv/2017/09/21/rick-morty-dan-harmon-female-writers/.

[50] Quoted in Hibberd, "*Rick and Morty*."

[51] Dan Hamron, Rob Schrab, and Spencer Crittenden, "Porcelain Birds," October 18, 2017, in *Harmontown*, produced by Starburns Audio, MP3 audio, 2:02:04, accessed May 17, 2019, https://www.harmontown.com/2017/10/episode-porcelain-birds/. The general discussion of #MeToo spans much of the episode, but the comments about Harmon's own misconduct occur from 24:20-26:45.

female friends, coworkers, and romantic partners, with an eye toward the exploitative and predatory behavior that had, until now, gone without comment. These are ideas he develops further upon Ganz's prompting that "redemption follows allocution."

In their remarks on the "durable being" of the rhetorical person, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also stress that "the person as a free subject possesses the spontaneity, the power to transform himself, the possibility of submitting to or resisting persuasion," such that rhetorical person, though durable, never completely ossifies.[52] Harmon demonstrates characterological consistency of numerous traits—for example, his TV shows and his public utterances consistently suggest a self-deprecating curmudgeon with a dark sense of humor—but he also displays gradual and logical progression on the issue of gender awareness. In fiction, we would call this a believable character arc. The point is not that Harmon, post-apology, now stands as an enlightened white knight or anything so absolute, but that his public performances demonstrate a logical, coherent evolution toward his apology to Ganz and affirmation of #MeToo. As an "act," this monologue feels commensurate with Harmon's rhetorical personhood, or in keeping with the character evidenced by previous rhetorical acts.

Louis C.K. again offers an illustrative point of contrast. While some audiences might infer his apology to sound genuinely remorseful, Louis C.K.'s critics have justly noted his long history of obfuscating and deflecting sexual misconduct rumors.[53] As late as September 2017—two months before his admission and apology—Louis C.K. had dismissed women's allegations, stating, "I'm not going to answer to that stuff, because they're rumors. If you actually participate in a rumor, you make it bigger and you make it real."[54] Even if his were a "good" #MeToo-era apology—that is, an effective one that, in isolation, communicated sincere remorse and allocutionary advocacy for victims—Louis C.K.'s apology would read as a glib about-face in context: a single, disjunct rhetorical act counterbalanced by too many contrary acts. (Louis C.K.'s subsequent return to comedy in 2018, including a set mocking millennials for gender-neutral pronoun preferences, hasn't helped.[55]) To repurpose a phrase from Quintilian, the male #MeToo apologist must constitute "the good man speaking well"[56]—that is, both a wise, cautious speaker, attentive to generic and situational constraints, and a consummate architect of rhetorical character whose ethos coheres with the rhetorical purposes of the #MeToo movement. Again, this is not to say that such a speaker must be the *perfect* man speaking well; *good*, here, signifies coherent evolution toward embodying the values of the movement, a criterion that disqualifies the likes of Weinstein, Lauer, Spacey, and so very many others. Only such characterological coherence can support a successful apology.

Conclusion

As this argument concludes, a few final qualifiers are in order. In celebrating Harmon's apology or his rhetorical character, one risks distracting from the frontline work of the #MeToo movement; one risks ironically replacing the movement's chief rhetorical agents—the vast majority of whom

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[52] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *New Rhetoric*, 295.

[53] Fessler, Merelli, and Zeidler, "Louis C.K.'s 'Apology.'"

[54] Quoted in Nate Jones, "A Timeline of the Louis C.K. Masturbation Allegations," *Vulture*, November 9, 2017, https://www.vulture.com/2017/11/louis-c-k-masturbation-allegations-a-timeline.html.

[55] Mary Elizabeth Williams, "Louis C.K. Is Back, and It's Bad: Leaked Stand-Up Set Shows He's Lost More than His Reputation," *Salon*, December 31, 2018, https://www.salon.com/2018/12/31/louis-c-k-is-back-and-its-bad-leaked-stand-up-set-shows-hes-lost-more-than-his-reputation/.

[56] Marcus Fabius Quintilian, *Institutio Oratio*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), XII.1.1.

are women who have suffered varying degrees of traumatic attention from men—with a white, straight, male hero who has, no less, confessedly contributed to toxic masculinity. #MeToo, no doubt, deserves much more scholarly attention, most of which should highlight the contributions of women and other marginalized groups who have shouldered the movement's weight. My own position as rhetorical critic bears comment, too: it would be stupidly ironic, but somehow not terribly surprising, for a straight, white, male rhetorician to venerate another straight, white man as the hero of a women's movement.

I hope this article reads as no such fool's discourse. My intention has not been to cast Harmon as a hero, but to analyze how his example illuminates what might be the one way men are uniquely positioned to rhetorically aid the #MeToo movement: through sustained, critical self-reflection that locates firsthand accounts of one's own transgressions (ranging from egregious sexual misconduct to more mundane examples of privileged thoughtlessness) within the new currents of the movement. Due to circuits of rhetorical identification between male rhetors and male audiences, such utterances might pull especial weight in persuading other men to also reconsider their own actions.[57]

To close, then, it's worth highlighting what other male speakers might learn from Harmon's apology. Consider the items below a loose playbook for male speakers reckoning with past misconduct and trying to prod history in the right direction:

- Speakers should clearly articulate misconduct—using direct subjects and verbs ("I harassed …"; "I wrongly assumed …")—and analyze the individual and cultural conditions that enabled this misconduct, all without excusing one's behavior or begging forgiveness. Illustrative self-evaluation matters more than individualistic atonement. This is the rhetorical work of *differentiation*—articulating and analyzing one's past misconduct in the present and bridging the two selves.
- Speakers should marshal personal testimony and analysis as evidence for the moral imperative of the #MeToo movement or other similar movements on behalf of marginalized or victimized groups. This is the *transcendent* move between apology and allocution, which should target other men as a primary audience with the express epideictic goal of reshaping public morality.
- In the era of online trolling and doxing, speakers should avoid bringing undue attention to individual victims. One should apologize to victims by name only when situationally appropriate. Again, the collective moral imperative of the movement matters more than individual repentance and forgiveness.
- High-profile public figures especially should consider ethos and characterological coherence; they should not expect one apology to "fix" past misconduct, but rather work consistently and visibly toward the values of the movement through numerous, cumulative rhetorical performances.

Ganz, again, dubbed Harmon's monologue "a masterclass on How to Apologize." Her reasons, I suspect, had much to do with Harmon's adherence to the strategies above, which are well-tailored to #MeToo and its ongoing rhetorical situation.

The future shape of #MeToo and its accompanying rhetorical situation remains to be seen, but it is a good thing that men feel discomfort with their past actions. The alternative, as Harmon articulates, is unthinking complicity in exploitation and trauma. And many men, doubtless, are beyond redemption and forgiveness. This, too, is a good thing: so be it. Harmon, though, remains

[57] On such forms of identification, see Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 55-65.

illustrative largely because his transgressions were common and unexceptional. As cultural codes shift, many men will become similarly cognizant of their own misconduct—major and minor both—and seek paths to redemption. The best path, as #MeToo and its aftermath persists, is often to retreat, wait, listen, and learn. But on those occasions when men should speak, a rhetorical consideration of context, audience, and genre can help them speak wisely and effectively.