

HALSEY'S *A STORY LIKE MINE*: EXPLORING THE RHETORICAL  
CONSTRAINTS FOR MUTED GROUP MEMBERS AND REFRAMING  
RATIONALITY EXPECTATIONS FOR NARRATIVES  
ABOUT MUTED EXPERIENCES

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis and every painstaking effort I have taken to get where I am has been for the people whom I have loved the most throughout my life. My siblings, Beth, Price, Jane, Jayden, Lily, and little Bill are as much a part of me as my daughter, Rehya and birth-son, Liam are. These eight people have given me all the motivation I have to constantly reach a little further and dig a little deeper. All my academic achievements have been to show them that it is possible to make your dreams come true. I would also like to dedicate this work to my spouse. When he figures out what his dream is, I hope he can remember the hard work this took and know that he can do hard things too. Finally, I dedicate the work I did on this project to the women of the world, with the hope that their stories will be shared.

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**I. INTRODUCING HALSEY, WOMEN’S RHETORIC, AND  
MUTED GROUP THEORY**

At the 2018 New York Women’s March, Halsey said,

We are not free until all of us are free.

So, love your neighbor, please treat her kindly.

Ask her, her story.

And then shut up and listen:

Black, Asian, poor, wealthy, trans, cis, Muslim, Christian.

Listen, listen.

And then YELL at the top of your lungs.

Be a voice for all those who have prisoner tongues.

For the people who had to grow up way too young,

There is work to be done.

There are songs to be sung.

Lord knows there’s a war to be won. (4:30-5:00)

This moving conclusion to Halsey’s powerful, but nontraditionally formatted speech, represents concepts found in feminist theorizing. Halsey brought together feminism, consciousness raising, intersectionality, oppression, and silencing/muting in simple, accessible terms. Women continue to face these problems every day. By examining contemporary examples, scholars can glean insight into the everyday forms of marginalization women face. Women make up the largest, most universally oppressed

group of people in the world. Women's issues are considered niche, or particular, when in reality they are experienced by half of the global population. The election of Donald Trump, a man who has the reputation of a misogynist, to the office of the United States of America sparked a protest which took place the day after his inauguration (Rafferty, 2017). During the protest, the 2017 Women's March, women on every continent—even Antarctica—rallied for women's issues. This massive global event has repeated three times since and continues to be a world-wide phenomenon. One characteristic of local Women's March events in large American cities is the presence of celebrity speakers. In the past decade, celebrities using their entertainment platforms for political or social-justice messages has increased drastically. The messages from fans' favorite entertainers are extremely persuasive. In 2018, Halsey joined other celebrity activists across the US in speaking out for women's issues. Videos on Facebook and Twitter of Halsey's speech quickly went viral with reposts, retweets, comments and "likes." The quick popularity of Halsey's nontraditional speech online, the pervasiveness of celebrity activism, and the magnitude of women's oppression make a study addressing these issues relevant and important.

Halsey used a nontraditional speech style in that she employed a rhyming scheme to make her speech a poem. Women have used not only nontraditional speech styles, but also nontraditional speech channels to convey their ideas. In this thesis, I will explain how women's rhetoric, Muted Group Theory, the feminine style framework, consciousness raising, and narrative work together to explain women's linguistic constraints and how those constraints have been navigated. Through my discussion of narrative, I will explain how personal narratives about traumatic experiences like sexual



abuse cannot be held to common standards of narrative rationality. By doing so, I offer the following contributions to the study of rhetoric and women's rights advocacy. First, my situational analysis highlights why scholars should consider Muted Group Theory when unpacking a rhetorical situation, attuning to the linguistic constraints faced by marginalized advocates. Second, my textual analysis showcases the importance of reconsidering standards associated with narrative rationality. As I will demonstrate, although people often criticize narratives of sexual violence based on being too fragmented, these fragmented narratives enable powerful forms of identification based on how the fragmentation enables stories to ring true for those with experiences with sexual violence.

To lay the scholarly foundation for the rest of this thesis, this chapter will discuss why women used nontraditional speech channels and styles to convey their ideas. I will discuss the division between women's rhetoric and men's rhetoric. I will introduce the issue that is commonly called the "silencing" of women. Finally, I will present the guiding argument for and provide an overview of the next four chapters.

### **Introducing Women's Rhetoric**

To understand and appreciate Halsey's rhetoric at the 2018 New York Women's March, we must first understand the historical barriers that women have faced in producing rhetorical appeals. Historic gender roles and the norms for communicating within those roles led the earliest women orators in the US to make nontraditional stylistic choices. Campbell wrote,

Early woman's rights activists were constrained to be particularly creative because they faced barriers unknown to men. They were a group virtually unique

in rhetorical history because a central element in woman's oppression was the denial of her right to speak. (Campbell, 1989, p. 9)

Campbell went on to describe the specific roles that women were expected to fill that relegated women to the home. She wrote, "Woman's nature was pure, pious, domestic, and submissive. She was to remain entirely in the private sphere of the home, eschewing any appearance of individuality, leadership or aggressiveness. Her purity depended on her domesticity" (Campbell, 1989, p. 10). Women who forsook the expectation of domesticity became tainted (Campbell, 1989). Additionally, speaking itself was considered a masculine activity for which women, by their presumed nature, were unsuited. Houston and Kramarae (1991) wrote, "speechmaking is not the only kind of communication that has impact on human events" (p. 395). Women have expressed themselves through a large variety of channels besides speechmaking. Houston and Kramarae specifically mention graffiti, oral histories, diaries and journals, and sewing, weaving and embroidering as ways women have expressed themselves outside of the dominant mode of oratory. Additionally, in Ritchie's and Ronald's (2001) *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)* many selections of women's rhetoric are letters addressed to a particular person and excerpts from larger written works. Women's rhetoric has not always, or even mostly been oratorical.

Because women rhetors have had to present their ideas through nontraditional channels, their ideas have historically been pushed aside by society and scholars alike. In Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, he was very specific about the three *topoi* or genres that counted as rhetoric (2001). All three, deliberative, ceremonial, and epideictic, were forms of oratory in which women almost never engaged during Aristotle's time (2001). Women continued

to be barred from public oratory for millennia, so the three *topoi* as described by Aristotle continued to be only applicable to men. Women, though, have not withheld their opinions and ideas, they simply had to resort to mostly non-public or non-oratorical means of expression. Vonnegut (1992) argued that the non-oratory, therefore nontraditional, rhetorical forms that women had at their disposal led to the absence of texts composed by women from higher-education courses in public discourse. Vonnegut (1992) used the concept of “muted groups” as described by Kramarae (1981) to explain that women, and others who have been sequestered away from mainstream public oratory, have less access to language. Vonnegut cited this excerpt from Kramarae to explain muted groups,

The language of a particular culture does not serve all its speakers equally....

Women (and members of other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men are to say what they wish, when and where they wish, because the words and the norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men. So women cannot as easily or as directly articulate their experiences as men can.

Women’s perceptions differ from those of men because women’s subordination means they experience life differently. However, the words and norms for speaking are not generated from or fitted to women’s experiences. Women are thus “muted.” (Kramarae, 1981, p. 1 in Vonnegut, 1992, p. 27)

Vonnegut used the idea of muted groups to explain why women would have had to express themselves outside of the system through non-oratorical means (1992). Overall, Vonnegut (1992) argued that “studying varied forms in which early American women expressed their views illustrates the diversity of our rhetorical tradition and contributes to the development of a more comprehensive theory that encompasses the different media

through which cultural values emerge” (p. 27). In addition to nontraditional speech channels (media), Campbell (1989) argued early women orators in the United States used nontraditional speaking strategies that she called the “feminine style” in order to overcome the social expectations that corresponded to their gender identity. I will discuss the feminine speaking style in greater depth in Chapters 2 and 3.

Campbell’s feminine style is not the only set of strategies women have used to thwart their constraints. Houston and Kramarae (1991) compiled a list of ways that women are actively muted, accompanied by seven ways women can overcome their mutedness. A large portion of their article is used to list the ways that women are actively silenced by men, so they wrote, “The sad thing is that the list we are making now will likely be erased, and women 30 years from now will have to put together their own, thinking that no one had done it before” (Houston & Kramarae, 1991, p. 394). It is nearly thirty years later, and the list of ways that men silence women that these two female scholars compiled is in the mind of at least one budding female scholar. The more relevant list to this thesis, though, is the list of strategies, some nontraditional, that women use to reject the silencing actions of men. The seven ways that Houston and Kramarae proposed women have and could overcome their mutedness included, first listing the techniques used to mute women. The second strategy on the list is an observation that women have used silence in order to quietly “protest against their dehumanizing treatment by supervisors” (Houston & Kramarae, 1991, p. 394). Third, women use “trivial” discourse to impact human events; in other words, women use alternate, or nontraditional modes of discourse that are not viewed as impactful by dominant ideologies but that can be very meaningful. Houston and Kramarae specify

graffiti, oral histories, diaries and journals, and sewing, weaving, and embroidering as modes of female expression that can be reclaimed, elevated, and celebrated (1991). The fourth item on the list is truth-telling. Houston and Kramarae wrote, “Women who write or talk publicly about their lives are courageous since these accounts often counter men’s records of women’s lives; the accounts and their tellers are considered troublesome or subversive” (1991, p. 394). Fifth, women can take control of language through creative code-switching, listing problems for which there is no name, renaming old concepts or changing definitions, and coining new words (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). The sixth way that women can overcome being muted is through organizing support groups, and the seventh way is for women to start women’s publishing presses. The seven strategies listed by Houston and Kramarae that women can use to break out of silence are a starting point for women to become empowered communicators. Through my analysis of Halsey’s speech, I will illustrate how Halsey used a nontraditional mode of discourse through poetry to make her argument. Throughout my thesis, I refer to “truth telling” through the more direct term “consciousness raising.” By sharing their experiences, women can connect and identify with each other, and counter dominant narratives or “scripts” for behavior that are based on dominant models.

Women’s relegation to the home created an additional barrier to women’s ability to speak in public. This barrier came in the form of the idea that there are separate spheres of communication for members of the opposite sex: men in the public sphere and women in the private. These separate spheres have been observed and discussed across disciplines, in various literatures, and by many lay observers. Campbell (1989) discussed the spheres as the “cult of domesticity” for the women, and the public sphere for the men.

The public sphere/private sphere dichotomy is a popular nomenclature for scholars and laypeople who wish to discuss the separate communicative circles for the sexes. Abbott (2020) discussed the nineteenth-century literature written by women that advocated for women to remain within their own proper, narrow, homely, familial, little, private, domestic sphere.

A more descriptive, albeit more complex alternative to the public/private nomenclature for this idea is Mary Daly's idea of foreground/background as discussed by Griffin (1993). The largest problem with the public/private spheres is the inability of the dichotomy to effectively address the intersection between the two. Griffin wrote that by using the background/foreground framework, "rhetorical scholars can begin to develop and make use of new methods and strategies for assessing rhetoric that does not fit comfortably into either realm" (1993, p. 160). In this framework, the foreground is centered on the male experience and actively oppresses women, while the background is where women are able to redefine, reconstruct, and rename their own realities (Griffin, 1993).

The foreground/background framework is applicable to consciousness raising in that women can help each other by bringing unconscious or suppressed experiences to the conscious level. Griffin wrote, "The foreground is informed by and perpetuated through the oppression and separation of women's selves from experience, is male centered and male controlled, and is the overriding condition in which women exist and to which women must respond" (1993, p. 162). In the male-centric foreground, women's experiences are separated from them by the norms, or standards set by men. Of the background, Griffin wrote "Women are unsubdued in this world; they move contrary to

the false standards imposed upon them by foreground rhetors and replace these standards with background reason and truths” (1993, p. 162). In the background, women are free from the standards of men and can apply their own logic to their experiences to understand them more fully and communicate about them freely. According to Griffin, the goal of the background for women is "transforming our ‘Selves’ and engaging in the process of ‘continual conversion of the previously unknown in the familiar’” (1993, p. 166 with citation from Daly, 1978, p. 7-8). By communicating in the background to bring to consciousness level those experiences that had been suppressed, women can engage in consciousness raising outside of the foreground’s oppression. Consciousness raising does not just bring an issue to the attention of society, but it also allows muted experiences to become conscious thoughts and narratives for those who have experienced them. In the following chapters, I will explain how Halsey’s speech is an example of the personal level of consciousness raising for women who have experienced acquaintance and intimate partner sexual abuse.

### **Introducing Muted Group Theory**

Because of women’s relegation away from the public, their discourse did not have as much of an impact, if any impact at all, on the creation of the language used in the foreground of society. Women’s ideas and experiences were not expressed in the dominant sphere, so many of women’s experiences have not received names or are constricted by the names men have given them. Women were socially sequestered which created a linguistic barrier. Muted Group Theory (MGT), addresses the issue of inadequate language for members of marginalized groups who have not participated in the creation of dominant modes of discourse. The inadequate existence of language or the

sequestering of one group's unique issues creates a social situation where that entire group and topics that relate specifically to them are lessened or brushed aside in the discourse of the dominant group. In Chapter 3, I discuss the rhetorical constraints (Bitzer, 1968) that come from this kind of lessening.

Many feminist scholars have discussed the lessening of women's issues through the metaphor of voice or silencing. The concept of silencing women's voices has been discussed by a multitude of scholars using various verbs to describe the act of "silencing." Houston and Kramarae (1991) describe the phenomenon as a muffling, a silencing, an absence, and a suppression. Blumell and Huemmer discussed how the public and news media silence "women's issues such as sexual violence" (508). Lumsden and Morgan (2017) discussed how internet trolling, "including rape threats, death threats, and body shaming" acts as a method of silencing by dissuading women from further interaction in online public spaces. Nurik (2019) discussed what she called "gender-based censorship" in similar instances of Facebook trolling, or what she referred to as hate speech. Nurik argued that women are implicitly silenced by hate speech and are explicitly silenced by Facebook's ban on pictures of female nipples. Winderman (2019) described the ways that women's anger is silenced through expectations for the literal volume at which they express their anger publicly. She described this as a muting or diminishment of intensity of the woman's anger. Jaworski (1992) wrote that silencing is a means for oppression. Jaworski also wrote that the language of the oppressor "leaves a lot of concepts and/or problems simply unnamed, and the experiences of men and women are different to the point that they need different forms of linguistic expression" (1992, p.



31). Jaworski paraphrased this idea from Kramarae's (1981) discussion of MGT, showing the utility of using MGT in explaining the linguistic constraints faced by women rhetors.

Muted Group Theory has a sparse history with rhetoric criticism. It is briefly mentioned in Foss et al.'s (2006) *Feminist Rhetorical Theories*. MGT was used by Vonnegut (1992) to justify her argument that women's rhetoric should be added to public discourse courses. Bleoaja and Jones (2018) used MGT as their theoretical lens in analyzing Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, which is considered the first text written in English by a woman. Bleoaja and Jones used MGT to analyze how Norwich expressed herself within the male-dominated social structure in 1373. Norwich is known almost completely through her text in which she described visions of Christ that she had. Bleoaja and Jones wrote of Norwich's text,

She dramatically altered the orthodox view of the divine and of femininity through her innovative narrative, which both reflected and dismantled the conventions of her time. In doing so, the experience of women was reclaimed and elevated, so that they were no longer curbed by their position as members of an "inferior" group but able to use their state as a marginalized group to access an exclusive form of communicative authority. (2018, p. 83)

They argued that Norwich's text and other accounts of women claiming to have visions of Christ gave women divine power (Bleoaja & Jones, 2018). Women at the time had no access to ecclesiastic authority, and Bleoaja and Jones argue that women "procured power through the authority of their direct connection with the divine" (2018, pp. 82-83). Because of the visionary experiences the women claimed to have, "they could assert a public voice by presenting their arguments as part of a larger narrative, grounded and

authenticated in the unquestionable source of the divine” (2018, p. 83). Like Norwich, Halsey used an innovative narrative style to reflect her experiences while also rejecting the hegemonic patriarchy that has formed the speaking conventions of her time. Halsey’s speech is a particularly productive choice for using MGT as a theoretical lens in rhetorical rhetoric studies because Halsey is a woman and, like Norwich, engaged with the ideas that make up MGT to point out women’s oppression and provide a model of what can be done to thwart women’s mutedness.

Muted group theory can function as a theoretical lens in rhetorical criticism because it can help explain certain ways rhetoric works (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 2006). MGT can highlight how some orators have fewer symbolic choices to describe experiences that may be unique to their identity group. For example, MGT would claim that women are denied the ability to describe, name, and define their own experiences (S. Ardener, 1993). Women are denied the opportunity to participate in the rhetorical construction of their own realities (Kramarae, 1981). For instance, in 2017, Vice President of the United States, Mike Pence posted a photograph of a group of lawmakers on popular social networking site, Twitter (Wolf, 2017). The photo depicted the all-male House Freedom Caucus meeting about healthcare reform (Wolf, 2017). One of the agenda items for that day was a discussion about removing maternity healthcare from the national healthcare plan requirements (Wolf, 2017). During a nationally important discussion about a singularly women’s health issue, in which descriptions and definitions of “maternity care” undoubtedly took place (Wolf, 2017), there were no women present. The lack of women’s presence at that meeting to describe and define their own

experiences is an example of the rhetoric through which women's experiences become linguistically subjugated.

Using ideas presented in this chapter, my thesis argues that Halsey used nontraditional speech forms and elements of the feminine style of speech to overcome her social and linguistic marginalization. This thesis begins to establish celebrity activism as a rhetorical genre worthy of further study. I analyze Halsey's speech to the 2018 New York Women's March using narrative criticism and concepts from Muted Group Theory in order to argue that she effectively answered her situation, in which she was marginalized as a woman, and increased awareness about a potentially unconscious women's issue.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Muted Group Theory (MGT) contends that the unique experiences of marginalized, or muted group members are not incorporated into language as adequately as the experiences of dominant group members (Kramarae, 1981). A thoroughly incorporated experience is described, named, and defined by the experiencers themselves. When an experience is described by someone(s) who does not have the experience, when it is named by someone(s) who does not have the experience, when it is defined by someone(s) who does not have the experience, or when an experience fails to receive any kind of description, name, or definition at all, the experience is inadequately incorporated. Usually this means that someone else has observed the experience, described it and named it, which gives the name a second-person perspective. A second-person perspective is useful because it can help bring the experience to the attention of the experiencer, which can allow the experiencer to become aware of the experience in order to describe and define it. But second-person naming can also present a barrier if that name is maintained and is wrapped up in the second person's biases, or if it does not accurately describe the experience. Names for described experiences can be adequate so long as the marginalized group had enough empowerment to approve the description and name of the experience as well as completely define the experience. Halsey's call for more widely spread story sharing is an example of a call to describe experiences that have been under described by women all over the world. Halsey also exemplifies how to describe her own experiences and categorize them as sexual assault. In this chapter, I will provide some clear and prominent examples of where new language has been used to describe muted experiences. Then I will give a brief history of MGT. I will discuss the

feminine style framework in greater depth, as well as narrative and identification as elements of feminine style speaking. Finally, I will briefly discuss the methodical approach I use in my thesis.

### **Examples of New Language Creation**

The linguistic incorporation of the term “sexual harassment” is a prominent example of inadequate language existence and the creation of new symbols to overcome that inadequacy. In 1974, Lin Farley held a “consciousness raising” session with her female students from a course about women and work (Siegel, 2003, p. 8; Swenson, 2017, para. 2). Farley was a feminist, a journalist, and a Cornell University course instructor. This discussion session was originally about workplace experiences, but a pattern of narratives about discrimination arose as participants described their experiences (Swenson, 2017). According to Swenson, Farley said

Every single one of these kids had already had an experience of having either been forced to quit a job or been fired because they had rejected the sexual overtures of a boss. When I left the class, I thought that we needed to have a name for what this phenomenon was. We all needed to be talking about the same thing. (2017, para. 3)

Through the students’ shared stories, Farley was able to identify the need for new language. These women were still able to discuss their experiences, but in a round-about way that required them to tell entire stories in order to get to what they meant. The creation of the term “sexual harassment” allowed women to discuss their experience through shared symbols. This particular case of overcoming linguistic inadequacy also had implications for workplace discrimination law. Farley said, “It was something that

we all talked about but because we didn't have a name, we didn't know we were all talking about the same thing" (Swenson, 2017, para. 5). Through a multitude of legal cases that used "sexual harassment" as a description of the workplace sex discrimination experienced by women, the wide-spread nature of the problem was spotlighted (Siegel, 2003). The experiences of these many women, all described through one term, led to sexual harassment being included in anti-sex discrimination laws (Siegel, 2003). Even though Farley's identification of a less incorporated experience led to the creation of a new term, not all responses to inadequate experience incorporation must be the creation of brand-new symbols. The repurposing of existing symbols can also help incorporate inadequately incorporated experiences into language.

Halsey's personal experiences, which she shared through narratives in her speech, are about acquaintance rape and intimate partner sexual violence. According to Jaffe et al. (2017), Littleton et al. (2007), and Botta and Pingree (1997), acquaintance rape and intimate partner sexual violence go unacknowledged as rape because they do not fit the survivor's socialized conception of what a rape is. According to Littleton et al. (2007), these unacknowledged rapes are largely due to a mismatch between the overall societal "script" or idealized narrative of rape and the experience of the survivor. Usually, this means there was not enough force, not enough injury, or too much familiarity with the perpetrator to completely place blame on the person and cast them as a rapist by describing the experience as rape (Littleton et al., 2007). Because the societal script or dominant narrative of what happens during rape does not match all survivors' lived experiences, many are unable to identify their experience with sexual abuse as rape. The

normalization of a narrative that is not descriptive of all sexual abuse experiences is an example of inadequate linguistic experience incorporation.

In all the experiences Halsey shared, even her friend's the perpetrators were familiar, there were pre-existing interpersonal relationships between the abusers and their victims. In Chapter 4, I will show how Halsey's speech provided a point of consciousness raising. Halsey's speech is a form of consciousness raising because by sharing her experiences in the context of rape, Halsey can help people who have had similar experiences identify with Halsey's narratives and consciously think about their own experience as a sexual assault. The speech also helps these kinds of experiences be incorporated into the social narrative or "script" of what a rape is.

Identification using shared symbols is more difficult for muted groups because an entire linguistically unincorporated experience must be explained before others can identify with that experience. Kramarae (1981) related a story about a woman's repeated experience which was originally relayed at a seminar about the limitations of language for women. One married woman maintained a full-time job, and so did her husband. The woman expressed a grievance that she was the sole maker of dinner, a responsibility she wished her husband would share. Upon approaching him with the issue, he would say, "I would be glad to make dinner. But you do it so much better than I" (Kramarae, 1981, p. 7). Kramarae wrote that the woman said she

"was pleased to receive this compliment but as she found herself in the kitchen each time she realized that he was using a verbal strategy for which she had no word and thus had more difficulty identifying and bringing it to his awareness.

She told the people at the seminar, 'I had to tell you the whole story to explain to

you how he was using flattery to keep me in my female place” (Kramarae, 1981, p. 7)

If the woman had had a word that described the verbal strategy that her husband was using, she could have used the word to bring the behavior to his attention and perhaps resolve the issue. If there was a word for this verbal strategy, she could have avoided having to tell the entire story, and instead she could have said, “My husband does \_\_\_\_\_ when we talk about him making dinner.” Other women who had experienced the same thing could have immediately identified with that experience, and the entire exchange could have been shortened. Brevity has been shown to be preferable and more persuasive (Phillipson, 1981; Ragsdale, 1968). Persuasion is more difficult to achieve when the symbols available are limited. MGT presents that symbol availability is particularly limited for members of groups with less access to or less sway in public discourse.

### **Muted Group Theory’s History**

Because of the central role communication plays in society and daily life, scholars in a wide array of academic fields have made observations and theorized about the phenomenon. Communication Studies scholars, in our focus on the message and act of communication, offer a significant and unique contribution in this regard. Yet, an interdisciplinary approach helps ensure a fuller understanding of communication as the astute observations about communication in other fields deepen the work of Communication Studies scholars. Social or cultural anthropology are examples of such fields. Anthropologists often have a large focus on ‘observation’ in their fieldwork, but there is also a second level or what E. Ardener calls the “meta” level of fieldwork (1975a, p. 1). In the metalevel, anthropologists discuss their observations with those they have



observed. When the observed behavior is communication, anthropologists, much like communication scholars, discuss the communication with their participants. MGT was born from anthropologists observing the metalanguage of their post-observation discussions about communication. E. Ardener pointed out that women were less likely to have anything to say during post-observation discussions outside of the sense of “merely uttering or giving tongue” (1975a, p. 2). Mere utterance is not a thoughtful engagement with discussion. The problem of largely not being able to discuss women’s behaviors with the women themselves put the study of women (in the 1970s and earlier) “on a level little higher than the study of the ducks and fowls...a mere bird watching indeed” (E. Ardener, 1975a, pp. 1-2). When bird watching, a person can describe the duck’s behaviors; define the duck’s social and biological patterns; but without being able to talk to the duck, the observer will never know how the duck is experiencing the world.

Ducks do not participate in society; they are truly silent in terms of human symbol-use. Women in E. Ardener’s ethnographies indefinitely had more access to their own societies’ language than ducks would. But the women were still unable to use language to talk about their experiences with researchers. In the introduction to her book, *Perceiving Women*, S. Ardener, E. Ardener’s research and life partner, wrote a definition of MGT that gave it clear relevance to rhetoric. She wrote, “Because the arena of public discourse tends to be characteristically male-dominated and the appropriate language registers often seem to have been ‘encoded’ by males, women may be at a disadvantage when wishing to express matters of peculiar concern to them” (1975, pp. viii-ix). Because public discourse is and has been dominated by men, women have not been able to incorporate their experiences into language as often as men have. This puts women at a

disadvantage when trying to recognize and rectify the injustices they experienced because of sex discrimination.

The Ardeners, with their creation of MGT, recognized that women's experiences were subjugated by existing language. Kramarae introduced MGT to Communication Studies (Griffin, 2020). In 2005, Kramarae presented about her own history with the theory, explaining a little of the process that brought her to use the theory in her book (1981). In her presentation from 2005, Kramarae explained that MGT came to be in her book as one of several theories she used to explore "language and sex" (p. 55). She had searched for one theory to rule them all on the subject of language and sex but realized the questions she was asking were best answered by several theories. Kramarae pointed out, "The assumptions, scope, and uses of each [theory] varied" (2005, p. 55). Muted group theory deals specifically with inadequacies of existing language and how women navigate those inadequacies.

Kramarae defined MGT in several ways, the most relevant to this thesis is in her discussion of the proponents and assumptions of the theory. She wrote,

The proponents of the muted group theory hold that a language reflects a world view. They argue that over the years a dominant group may generate a communication system that supports its conception of the world and then call it *the* language of the society, while at the same time subjecting others to experiences that are not reflected in that language. (Kramarae, 1981, p. 3)

MGT's utility to rhetorical scholarship rests in its focus on how communication establishes a particular and marginalizing conception of the world. In other words, MGT

describes the linguistic and narrative constraints that marginalized rhetors face. These constraints contribute to the rhetorical situation for muted group members.

Wall and Gannon-Leary (1999) gave a thorough discussion of MGT that refutes one of the foundational issues critics have with the theory, which stems from the theory's name (pp. 25-26). As communication scholars, we are highly concerned with the implications of others' symbol use, and the name of the theories we use are not above the same reproach. In S. Ardener's introduction to her 1975 book in which E. Ardener's two essays appear, she described the tumultuous process through which the theory was named. Rather than "muted" E. Ardener's first instinct was to describe the phenomenon as an "inarticulate" use of language (S. Ardener, 1975, p. xii). Ardener's peers interpreted "inarticulate" to be more indicative of some biological ineptitude. In the sense Ardener meant it, "inarticulate" was meant lacking articulation, not any kind of physical inability or tongue-tiedness (S. Ardener, 1975). The suggestion of "muted group" came from a Charlotte Hardman, at the time, a young social anthropologist (S. Ardener, 1975). The name stuck but has still been a point of contention for theorists.

Much of the contention over the name of MGT has come from the instant interpretation of the word "muted" as completely silent. E. Ardener clarified that the "muted" in MGT refers to a decreased perceptibility, as in muted colors or discussions held in muted tones (1975b). Women are not completely silent, Wall and Gannon-Leary explained, "Women's voices trying to express women's experiences are rarely heard because they must be expressed in a language system not designed for their interests and concerns" (1999, p. 24). It is not that women are not saying anything, only that what they

say is un- or undervalued and dismissed easily, even by other women who use the same dominant language system.

Kramarae (2005) put a great deal of thought into the name of MGT. She proposed several new names for the theory, with hasty explanations for why the proposed name is no better than MGT. She wrote, “Muffling Action Theory: Muffling as in deadening sounds or making obscure. But it sounds too car-repair-ish. Maybe Muffled Group Theory” (p. 61). In 1991, well after Kramarae’s (1981) book in which she discussed MGT was published, Houston & Kramarae described the silencing of women as muffling in the abstract of their article. Kramarae (2005) also proposed

The Hushing Theory: Hushing as in quieting. But it sounds too library-based.

Voiced-Over Theory: Voiced-over as in covered up. But it sounds as if the theory is voiced-over.

Smothered Voices Theory: As in concealed, suppressed, extinguished. And smothered includes an “other”. But it sounds a bit like mushroom sauce over potatoes.

Stifled Group Theory: As in interrupted, cut off, limited by the exercise of power or control. Calls up some Archie Bunker images, but it seems to work. (p. 61).

For the sake of continuity with existing literature, I maintain the label Muted Group Theory to describe the phenomenon of unequal access to language due to the inadequate incorporation of marginalized experiences into language. Kramarae’s published list of alternate suggestions is a testament to the discomfort that comes with naming this theory, though. The various verbs used by scholars to describe the state of being muted or the act

of silencing, as discussed in Chapter 1, also testifies of a similar discomfort. It is a problem for which no suitable name yet exists. The difficulty in naming the theory is evidence of the theoretical point that society lacks names for particular and muted experiences and phenomena.

Agreed upon descriptions, names, and definitions of words are negotiated on all levels of communicative interaction, including public discourse (S. Ardener, 1993). MGT would argue that most of the negotiations, most of the describing, naming, and defining is done by the dominant group that controls public discourse. This power imbalance leaves all marginalized groups without an adequate set of symbols to describe their experiences (Ardener, 1975b). Those marginalized groups become the muted groups described by MGT.

Because Halsey's speech focuses on women, and a primarily women's issue, my thesis focuses on women's mutedness. Women are not the only example of a muted group, but it is a largely accessible one. Kramarae (1981) wrote, "The public areas of life--and public discourse--in most societies appear to be controlled by males" (p. 2). Men then, have the privileged worldview that is discussed more thoroughly in the public sphere. Muted group theorists are quick to remind that women are not the only muted group, though women represent approximately half of the world's population and are the largest marginalized, or muted group around the world (E. Ardener, 1975b p. 25; Kramarae, 1981, p. 3; S. Ardener, 2005, p. 51). According to E. Ardener (1975b), "The woman case is only a relatively prominent example of muting: one that has clear political, biological, and social symbols" (p. 25). Because of the prominence of women as a muted group and the vast research done in Communication Studies and related

disciplines that pertains to MGT and women, it is the woman's case that I will use to display this theory's utility to rhetoric.

### **Feminine Style, Narrative, and Identification**

As the cornerstone author for MGT in the communication discipline, Kramarae proposed several hypotheses that could be explored through muted group theory. None of these are strictly rhetorical but can be adapted to fit a rhetorical perspective. The most relevant of these suggestions reads, "Females are likely to find ways to express themselves outside the dominant public modes of expression used by males in both their verbal conventions and their nonverbal behavior" (Kramarae, 1981, p. 4). This idea has been partially discussed in rhetoric studies because of the feminine style framework, developed by Campbell (1989). Campbell wrote, "Analysis of persuasion by women indicates that many strategically adopted what might be called a feminine style to cope with the conflicting demands of the podium. That style emerged out of their experiences as women" (1989, p. 12). Campbell developed the feminine style framework after observing the rhetoric of the early women's rights movement and identifying ways that women navigated the social constraints that disallowed them from speaking in public (1989). The women of the early women's rights movement found new ways to express themselves, ways that were distinctly different from the dominant style men used. The new ways to express themselves would have been due to not only the social constraints of the time, but also the resulting linguistic constraints described by MGT.

The specific social constraints for women, as described by Campbell (1989) were mostly preclusions from engaging in public communication of any kind. These preclusions are the same that are described by MGT; however, MGT contends that the

exclusion of groups from dominant discourse creates an unequal incorporation of experiences into the dominant language. Campbell's feminine style framework, while certainly used as a response to social constraints, was and is also a way that linguistic constraints were and are navigated by female rhetors. The specific case of Halsey's speech illustrates the enduring need for women to develop the desire to express themselves and their experiences. MGT can be productively used with feminine style since these theories can explain why women may need to develop innovative ways of expression, and how it is they proceed with that development.

Halsey's speech used personal narratives and elements meant to draw audience identification. Campbell suggested specific qualities of the feminine speaking style. Feminine style rhetoric tends to 1) invite audience participation, 2) address the audience as a group of peers, 3) use a personal tone, 4) use personal experiences and stories, 5) have an inductive reasoning pattern, and 6) create identification with the audience (Campbell, 1989, p. 13). Halsey relied heavily on personal stories and identification for persuasive value; so, the feminine speaking style constitutes a productive tool to help showcase the strategies Halsey used in her speech. For most of the speech, Halsey relayed the experiences she has had with sexual abuse. When someone verbalizes an experience to share it with another person or with other people, they are engaged in narrative production. Foss wrote,

Narratives organize the stimuli of our experience so that we can make sense of the people, places, events, and actions of our lives. They allow us to interpret reality because they help us decide what a particular experience is about and how the various elements of our experience are connected (2009, p. 307).

Halsey's narratives are her own first- or second-hand experiences with sexual abuse. They are verbalizations of how she organized her own experiences in order to make sense of them herself. The specific narrative elements she chose to share were selections she made to help the audience understand and make sense of her experiences for themselves as well. As I will show in Chapter 4, Halsey's narratives about acquaintance and intimate partner sexual abuse can help women with similar experiences come to terms with and share their own experiences.

Narratives create their own fantasy world that the narrator and audience become personally involved with (Foss, 2009). The involvement with stories that people experience creates "an internal, even emotional connection individuals feel which binds them to other people as well as to places, things, activities, ideas, memories, and words" (Tannen, 1989, p. 12 in Foss, 2009, p. 308). Foss wrote, "Such a felt connection is more likely to result from narratives than from most other kinds of discourse" (2009, p. 308). Narratives increase emotional appeal for audiences and high emotional appeal increases the probability of successful persuasion (Carroll & Gibson, 2011). In the case of Halsey's speech, her narratives attempted to elicit an emotional fervor from her audience that would motivate them to respond favorably to her cry for increased story sharing.

Emotional appeals in narrative rhetoric can be deepened further through the rhetor's attempt to help the audience identify themselves within the narrative (Hoeken & Fikkers, 2014). According to Hoeken and Fikkers (2014), narrative identification is "the ability to feel what the character feels (emotional empathy), adopting the character's point of view (cognitive empathy), internalizing the character's



goals, and potentially having the sensation of becoming the character” (p. 86). Halsey used specific language to help her audience identify themselves within her narratives so they would adopt her goal, which she presented as a solution or call-to-action. She also used particularly emotional strategies to develop empathy within her audience to amplify their desire to align their goals with hers.

According to Fisher (1984), the logic of narrative does not rely on true rationality, but rather on how well the audience can identify with the narrative. He wrote, “The operative principle of narrative rationality is identification” (Fisher, 1984, p. 9). Elements like narrative fidelity and probability affect how much an audience can identify themselves within a narrative. Fisher wrote,

Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives. (1984, p. 8, italics present in original)

Narrative fidelity, then, is how true a narrative sounds; and narrative probability is how coherent a narrative is and how likely the events were to have occurred. Whether or not a narrative is likely to have occurred is based on “the consistency of characters and actions” (Fisher, 1984, p. 16). Narrative fragmentation, or the degradation of plot within narrative, is the opposite of coherence (Jasinski, 2001).

Sexual assault, a topic that is not completely defined by its experiencers, becomes further relegated from dominant discourse because often, sexual assault survivors cannot create a coherent narrative. Halligan et al. (2003), wrote that trauma can block coherent

memories from forming. The narratives used to make sense of experiences when there are incoherent memories of that experience are unlikely to be anything but incoherent. Incoherent narratives can be especially problematic to legal arguments for sexual assault survivors. Jasinski (2001) wrote, “Each attorney must construct a unified plot that is coherent and accounts for all of the relevant details in the case” (p. 391). The incoherent narratives that sexual assault survivors use to make sense of their experience can hinder their search for justice because of the lack of narrative probability. However, to other survivors of sexual assault, the fragmented narrative becomes more probable because of the lack of coherence. Someone who has had the experience of sexual assault would hear a non-coherent recounting of a traumatic sexual assault and identify their own fragmented memories with the narrator’s broken plot. In Chapter 4, I will explain how Halsey relies on narrative fragments to tell the collective narrative of her life’s experience with sexual abuse. I will show how Halsey’s narrative fragments legitimize her stories of sexual abuse to those who understand why her narratives are fragmented. However, to those who do not understand, the lack of coherence lessens the narrative fidelity and further mutes the topic of sexual assault.

Halsey’s heavy reliance on feminine style, particularly narrative and identification, make narrative criticism the most useful method for analyzing her speech. Because of the consciousness raising goal of the speech, I focus on elements that invoke high identification with the audience. Halsey spent a lot of time during her speech describing the settings and characters present for each event, so I will particularly focus on those narrative elements which Halsey used for their identification-garnering value. Additionally, elements of the speech that seem to particularly answer Halsey’s constraints

as a woman or assets as a celebrity will be highlighted and examined for effectiveness. In chapter 3, I analyze the context that Halsey faced while crafting her speech using Bitzer's conceptualization of the rhetorical situation. Chapter 4 includes an assessment of how aptly Halsey answered that rhetorical situation. Because Halsey used pathos appeals through narrative identification to overcome her status and her topic's status as muted, I use narrative criticism to guide my analysis of those parts of Halsey's speech.

### III. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

*Men have an ancient and honorable rhetorical history. Their speeches and writings, from antiquity to the present, are studied and analyzed by historians and rhetoricians. Public persuasion has been a conscious part of the Western male's heritage from ancient Greece to the present. This is not an insignificant matter. For centuries, the ability to persuade others has been part of the Western man's standard of excellence in many areas, even of citizenship itself. Moreover, speaking and writing eloquently has long been the goal of the humanistic tradition of education.*

*Women have no parallel rhetorical history. Indeed, for much of their history women have been prohibited from speaking, a prohibition reinforced by such powerful cultural authorities as Homer, Aristotle, and Scripture. ... As a result, when women began to speak outside the home on moral issues and on matters of public policy, they faced obstacles unknown to men.*

-Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her, Volume 1*, 1989, p. 1

This chapter's opening excerpt eloquently explains the rhetorical subjugation women have faced for millennia. Rhetorical practices and theories have long excluded women orators. Ten years prior to Campbell's book, E. Ardener theorized that the public linguistic subjugation women faced had implications for the very language that women use (1975). In the introduction of a book in which E. Ardener's essays concerning MGT appear, S. Ardener introduced and summarized his work,

Because the arena of public discourse tends to be characteristically male-dominated and the appropriate language registers often seem to have been 'encoded' by males, women may be at a disadvantage when wishing to express matters of peculiar concern to them. Unless their views are presented in a form acceptable to men, and to women brought up in the male idiom, they will not be given a proper hearing. If this is so, it is possible to speculate further and wonder whether, because of the absence of a suitable code and because of a necessary indirectness rather than spontaneity of expression, women, more often than may

be the case with men, might sometimes lack the facility to raise to conscious level their unconscious thoughts. (1975, pp. viii-ix).

In order to properly understand this quote, communication scholars must be aware that the Ardeners were anthropologists. The verb “encode,” to anthropology and linguistics, as opposed to communication scholars, is the literal creation of code (language), rather than the use of code to express thoughts. In this context, Ardener meant that language has been created by those who dominate public discourse. Those who are marginalized in public discourse, or altogether absent, have less access to the language creation process in which experiences become symbolically incorporated and communicable. This is not to say that women are less articulate or speak less than men in any given society. The Ardeners only suggested that women are unable to express themselves on women’s issues because of the male-perspective that has incorporated experiences into symbols as language. In our contemporary society, the issue becomes less about what women talk about in public and more about who is listening. The audience for a speaker’s message effects the reach of change that the message can make. Women, or people speaking on women’s issues are often automatically dismissed by some potential listeners because they do not perceive the message as relevant or the speaker as credible. The automatic dismissal of women’s issues or women speakers disallows the potential listeners from hearing the message and creating change based on that message. In this chapter, I discuss how women have recently navigated their linguistic and social marginalization. This chapter also analyzes the situation in which Halsey’s speech was composed and delivered in order to identify how Halsey’s audience, her own identity, Donald Trump’s election,

the Women's March, the #MeToo movement, and the Time's Up movement affected the situation for her speech.

### **Constraints**

Bitzer (1968) argued that a rhetor's situation contains the combination of the exigence, audience, and constraints that a rhetor faces when constructing and delivering their message. Rhetorical exigence "is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 6). The audience is composed of people who hear the rhetor's message and have the power to modify the exigence (Bitzer, 1968). According to Bitzer, constraints are the existing limitations on the rhetor and the audience that affect their collective ability to modify the exigence. Constraints can be negative, in that they hinder the rhetor or the audience's ability to modify the exigence; or, constraints can be positive in that they assist the rhetor or the audience's ability to modify the exigence. Being a member of a muted group, or having less linguistic ability to express personal experience, is a negative constraint that women face when constructing a speech. MGT is useful to rhetorical situation criticism in that it can help guide critics' search for understanding of the constraints a rhetor has because of their status as a member of a muted group. Throughout this chapter, I will show how MGT can contribute to the development of a framework for the analysis of how those constraints are maneuvered rhetorically. A thorough understanding of the situation in which a piece of rhetoric has been constructed can guide the analysis of a text in order to determine whether or not the rhetor skillfully responded to the situation.

Women's minimized access to language creation constrains their rhetorical options and available means of persuasion. Both Ardener (1975) and Campbell (1989) iterate that women have been historically subjugated within or prohibited from public discourse. Because of their subjugation, women have not participated in language creation; their concerns, perspectives, experiences have no suitable code through which to be expressed. This leaves women communicators at a disadvantage—they are less able to express their thoughts, because more of their thoughts have not been previously described by language than the thoughts of men. This disadvantage constrains women's use of language in most, if not all endeavors that require the use of symbols to express thought. The disadvantage women face because of their discursive relegation is a constraint in their production of rhetoric.

Campbell (1989) recognized some constraints early women rhetors had because they were women. She wrote, "Early feminist rhetors rose to inventive heights as they sought to overcome the special obstacles they confronted because they were women, and because they were attempting to alter traditional conceptions of gender roles" (1989, p. 9). Campbell focused on the social constraints women had, mostly the idea that a "true woman" could not speak in the public sphere (1989, p. 10). According to MGT, the social constraints Campbell described led to linguistic constraints in that women's experiences were not fully incorporated into the dominant language. Though Campbell did not mention the linguistic constraints that women faced because of the exclusion from dominant discourse, the feminine style framework undoubtedly answers some rhetors' needs to "express themselves outside the dominant public modes of expression" (Kramarae, 1981, p. 4). Campbell suggested that consciousness raising has many of the

qualities of the feminine style, such as a personal tone, a heavy use of stories drawn from personal experience, an inductive structure, invitations for audience participation, an address of the audience as a body of peers, and an effort to create identification with the audience (Campbell, 1989, p. 13). Halsey used many of these strategies in her consciousness raising speech, especially in her use of personal stories and attempts to garner identification with the audience.

Because Halsey is a celebrity, she had an advantage that positively affects her ability to engage in activism. Celebrities already have fans, people willing to listen to their message and attribute the celebrity credibility just because of their fame. Additionally, because of Halsey's celebrity, she would be able to sway her fans on socio-political issues such as sexual abuse and women's rights. In addition to the positive constraints Halsey had because of her wide-reaching fan base and easy access to an opinion-leader position, she may face negative constraints because of her fame as well. Halsey's womanhood, as well as her celebrity-status affects the constraints and advantages she had to navigate while composing and delivering her speech.

### ***Halsey's Background***

Halsey's appearance at the New York Women's March in 2018 was largely due to her celebrity status. Born Ashley Nicolette Frangipane, Halsey was 23 at the time she performed her speech for the 200,000 attendees at the 2018 New York Women's March (Olabanji, 2018). Frangipane began going by Halsey as a stage name in 2014. Reliably sourced biographical information about Halsey's early life is difficult to find online. Most of the public information about Halsey's life has come from an interview she did with *Rolling Stone* and this performance for the Women's March. *Rolling Stone* writer, Alex



Morris conducted an interview with Halsey in 2016. During that interview, Halsey said, “It’s like, 19 years of my life feel like they don’t even fucking matter” (Morris, 2018, para. 5). The absence of a reputable biography from before she was famous partially confirms her feeling that the public is more interested with her as Halsey than as Ashley. It was as Halsey that she performed her speech in January of 2018, as a singer/songwriter whose music and celebrity-status lends her most of her credibility and positive situational constraints.

Halsey gained a celebrity platform very quickly. Halsey began gaining popularity by posting original poetry and artwork on social media platform, Tumblr (Morris, 2016). However, it was not until she posted her original song “Ghost” that she started to gain attention from recording labels (Morris, 2016). According to Halsey’s Twitter account, her initial post of “Ghost” was on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014. Her first professionally released album debuted on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015 (AppleMusic, 2015). Her rise from self-released songs and Tumblr posts to full-fledged, gold-certified album production took only a year and a half (McIntyre, 2016). In June of 2017, Halsey’s third professional album, *Hopeless Fountain Kingdom*, reached the number one spot on the *Billboard* 200 chart in June of 2017 (Caulfield, 2017) and by May of 2018, it was certified platinum (Enos, 2018).

Celebrities have a larger immediate audience to whom they can express their ideas quickly. The immediate platform people have in society can be measured by how many followers they have on social media. The more people who follow someone's profile, the more people a message can reach. On the day Halsey delivered and posted her speech, she had 8.4 million followers on Twitter and 6.3 followers on Instagram

(Trackalytics, n.d.). The everyday person lacks access to an instant, large platform in our society. A person must gain notoriety before their message can even reach the public for their consideration. When Ashley became Halsey, she gained notoriety and a platform, however, Halsey's credibility is at least partially inhibited because of her reputation—a reputation she could not have earned without her celebrity status. In particular, feminists have criticized Halsey because of her appearance in *Playboy* Magazine in December 2015 and on the publication's cover for the September/October 2017 issue (Playboy, n.d.). This rebuke of her choice threatens to undermine her credibility as an advocate. In a now-deleted Instagram comment, Halsey faced criticism for her choice to appear in *Playboy* (Kaufman, 2017). The comment insinuated that a woman could not be feminist and expose their breasts publicly (Kaufman, 2017). Halsey, rather than agreeing that her exposed breasts also outed her as less-than-feminist, she took ownership of her many roles. She said,

Yeah, it's crazy. I can show my tits in *Playboy*, perform at the Nobel Peace, speak at the Planned Parenthood gala with Hillary Clinton, shake my ass on 300 stages, do 150 shots of tequila, get a #1 album, and march in the streets of DC in just ONE year!!! Newsflash. A woman can be multidimensional (Playboy, n.d., para. 3).

Halsey's activities exemplify the freedom of choice that she advocates all women should have. Not all women have that freedom of choice though. Halsey enjoys a measure of privilege in her fame. Halsey's fame provided her with the opportunity to influence public discourse about sexual violence at the 2018 New York Women's march, but that fame also brings with it heightened scrutiny of her personal choices and her credibility as

a spokesperson. Not all women would face the same type of rhetorical situation, despite the common muted experiences they would share. Halsey's positive and negative constraints in advocating for social justice issues, specifically constraints that come from her celebrity, indicate a celebrity activism as a new rhetorical genre that may be worth exploration.

Halsey's choice to appear for Playboy and continue her pro-feminist advocacy is a privilege that all women would not share. Nude or partially nude photos are used to condemn women's community activism—if not their careers. In 2017, Lauren Miranda, a teacher, took a topless photo and electronically sent it to her then-boyfriend who taught in the same school district (Nashrulla, 2019). Somehow, but not by Miranda, the photo was distributed to students in 2019 (Nashrulla, 2019). Miranda was fired because “she was no longer a ‘role model’ for the students she was teaching because her breasts were seen” (Nashrulla, 2019, para. 9). For Halsey, exposing her breasts in a publicly purchasable magazine may have damaged her reputation, but ultimately it increased her celebrity.

Halsey herself experienced a nude photo leak similar to Miranda's. When she was in high school, before she was a celebrity, “Someone broke into her locker during gym class and spread around school a topless photo she'd meant for her boyfriend” (Morris, 2016). Halsey commented on the incident and said, “Suddenly, I was not the weird girl, I was the slut” (Morris, 2016). Although Halsey did not lose a job because of the photo that was leaked while she was in high school, she experienced negative repercussions to which non-celebrities could relate. Halsey's nineteen years of experience as a non-celebrity lend her additional credibility because she had experiences that every-day women have. The story fragments Halsey shared during her speech reflect these

experiences that increase her credibility and provide a positive constraint, or an advantage for the rhetorical situation in which she spoke. She was not a celebrity speaking from only economically privileged and celebrity experiences; she was a woman sharing horrifyingly relatable experiences with her audience.

Halsey was criticized because of her appearance in Playboy Magazine. Her advocacy accompanying the photographs in the magazine was pro-Planned Parenthood (Playboy, n.d.). Her appearance on the cover of Playboy may have influenced the line of her speech that reads, “Who don’t have a voice on the magazine covers” (Halsey, 2018, 4:25-4:28). With that line she was recognizing her platform-based privilege and she took ownership of the controversial advocacy she had done in Playboy. Halsey’s reputation going into the 2018 New York Women’s march was a mixed bag that provided both constraints and advantages to her ability to persuade.

### **Audience**

Celebrity activism helps raise awareness about important social issues. Celebrities already have followings on social media. Halsey’s social media presence allowed her speech to spread beyond its immediate context and to influence many others. Halsey’s audience was not limited to the 2018 New York’s Women’s March attendees. In fact, the people present at the 2018 New York Women’s march were disinterested in Halsey’s speech. Halsey said, “When I did it, there were 2,000 people in front of me, and no one was listening or paying attention — if you watch it, there was barely even a cheer at the end. I felt defeated” (Darus, 2019). However, because of easy audiovisual recording and readily available access to social networking internet websites, videos of Halsey’s performance quickly spread online. Halsey’s own verified accounts on Facebook and

Twitter have posted videos of the speech. Halsey said that right after she delivered her speech, she was on a plane to Los Angeles (Darus, 2019). When she landed and turned on her phone the video had ten million views and comments “about thousands of women’s experiences” (Darus, 2019). In a fall 2019 interview, Halsey said “And that video is still getting a response” (Darus, 2019).

Halsey’s physical audience included the women activists and their allies present at the march, but social media video sharing extended the audience to potentially everyone with an internet connection. Having begun her popularity on social media, Halsey was undoubtedly aware of technologically mediated audiences who would watch and read her speech (Morris, 2016). Halsey’s speech resonated the most with the audience mediated by social networking sites. Her celebrity status led to increased visibility for her message due to her large social media following.

### **The Women’s March and Donald Trump**

The first Women’s March, held on January 21, 2017, was social disquiet specifically in response to President Trump’s election (Rafferty, 2017). The day after Donald Trump’s presidential inauguration, people, particularly women, gathered in more than 670 locations, in more than 30 countries, in all fifty of the United States, and on all seven continents—even Antarctica (Rafferty, 2017; History.com Editors, 2018).

According to Gantt-Shafer, Wallis, and Miles (2019),

It was expected that close to 2 million people in the United states and abroad would take part in the various women’s marches across the world. By the end of the day, an estimated 5 million people globally had participated in 673 separate marches” (p. 221).

The Women's March on Washington in 2017 had approximately 500,000 attendees, the 2017 Women's March in New York had around 400,000 (Rafferty, 2017). The march was held to support various causes around women's rights according to the History.com Editors, these causes included

Women's and reproductive rights, criminal justice, defense of the environment and the rights of immigrants, Muslims, gay and transgender people and the disabled—all of whom were seen as particularly vulnerable under the new administration. (2018, para. 9)

The myriad of issues encompassed by Women's March activists invited a large global turnout at the 2017 Women's march.

The organizers of the Women's March never intended the Women's March to be a single-day demonstration (History.com Editors, 2018). Rather, the organizers wanted the demonstration to begin a social movement aimed at advocating for women's rights (Women's March, n.d.; History.com Editors, 2018). Three marches have been held since the original Women's March in 2017. It has become an annual event held on the Saturday nearest to the original Women's March's anniversary. Halsey said during her speech that she had attended the first Women's March in DC, implying that her speech at the 2018 New York Women's March was not the beginning of her interest in the movement.

During Donald Trump's presidential campaign, many individuals "perceived his statements as communicating misogyny" (Weber et al., 2018, p. 2290). Trump's misogynistic views were exhibited as he "publicly called women debasing names, including dogs, fat pigs, and disgusting animals" (Weber et al., 2018, p. 2290). Seeming to support the claim that Trump has shown a history of misogyny, a recording from 2005

was leaked during the 2016 campaign. On this tape, Donald Trump is heard “talking to the television personality Billy Bush of ‘Access Hollywood’ on the set of ‘Days of Our Lives,’ where Mr. Trump was making a cameo appearance” (Bullock, 2016, para. 1). On this recording, “Trump repeatedly made vulgar comments about women” including the now-infamous line, “Grab ‘em by the pussy” (Bullock, 2016, para. 1; para. 23). Trump’s controversial statements led to unrest, such as the Women’s March. His election, the election of a perceived misogynist to the office of the President of the United States, caused social disquiet, including the Women’s March.

Halsey’s speech during the 2018 New York Women’s March was part of the continued protests surrounding Trump’s presidency. Halsey specifically aired a grievance she had with President Trump concerning his lack of response to the Olympic sex abuse scandal concerning Larry Nassar (Halsey, 2018). At the time of Halsey’s speech, Nassar, who was an Olympic physician, had pled guilty to sexually abusing female Olympic athletes under the guise of medical examination (Rosenblatt, 2017). Four days after her speech, Nassar was sentenced to 40-175 years in prison (Eggert & Householder, 2018). The enormity of this sex scandal with little or no mention from the President continued his image as one of a man with little regard for women’s concerns. Because of Trump’s election, women marched en masse on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 and have marched thrice since.

## **#MeToo**

The Women’s March had ties to the #MeToo movement, which enabled speakers to use the Women’s March as a forum to discuss sexual violence. In an article about the 2018 Women’s March, *The New York Times* (no specified author) wrote,

A deluge of revelations about powerful men abusing women, leading to the #MeToo moment, has pushed activists to demand deeper social and political change. Progressive women are eager to build on the movement and translate their enthusiasm into electoral victories in this year's midterm elections. (2018, para. 2)

This prominent news source tied the fervor during the 2018 Women's March to the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo movement, as *The New York Times* suggests, was in response to abuse against women.

*The Chicago Tribune* reported that the phrase "Me Too" was coined "as a way to help women who had survived sexual violence" (*Chicago Tribune* staff, 2019, para. 1). Tarana Burke is credited as the founder of the #MeToo movement because of the nonprofit organization, Me too, which she launched in 1997 "to help victims of sexual harassment and assault" (Stevens, 2017, para. 3). The social media movement began when actress Alyssa Milano, prompted by sexual abuse allegations against high-level Hollywood men, posted a tweet on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017 that read, "If all the women and men who have been sexually harassed, assaulted or abused wrote 'me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem. #metoo" (2017). The next night, over 53,000 people had replied to Milano's tweet (Chen, 2017). According to Chen, the day after Milano's tweet was shared, "Thousands of women had shared their stories of rape, sexual assault and harassment on social media, including actresses like America Ferrera, Anna Paquin, Lady Gaga, Rosario Dawson and Debra Messing" (2017, para. 4). The trend of sharing experiences with sexual abuse with or without the #MeToo hashtag continued for months.



The #MeToo movement influenced the rhetorical situation in which Halsey composed her speech, and in which her audience heard and responded to it. The #MeToo movement encouraged people, especially women, to express their stories of sexual assault. Fittingly, Halsey also encouraged women to express their stories of sexual assault. Halsey's speech, a compilation of her experiences with sexual assault, echoed the stories shared on social media as part of the #MeToo movement when she said, "And every friend that I know has a story like mine" (2018, 3:46-3:49). Halsey could have delivered her speech on any variety of Women's Rights issues. But because of the huge move towards sharing experiences of sexual abuse, Halsey added her stories to those of the masses. Her speech was a call for women to share their experiences, to normalize talking about sexual abuse so that the act of sexual abuse could be denormalized and condemned. Halsey's speech echoed the calls from the #MeToo movement to share stories of sexual abuse.

### **Time's Up**

Halsey's use of her fame to advocate for women's issues led to her being asked to participate in the New York Women's March as a speaker. The Women's March commonly asked celebrities to speak. The 2018 Los Angeles Women's March saw Hollywood celebrities Scarlett Johansson, Laverne Cox, and Olivia Munn (Hall, 2018). The 2017 Women's March on Washington had America Ferrera, Ashley Judd, Michael Moore, and Scarlett Johansson speak (Hall, 2018). Halsey's speech was one of several celebrity speeches during the 2018 Women's March.

Another movement, Time's Up, influenced the situation in which Halsey's speech was composed and delivered. On January 1, 2018, a group of Hollywood women

launched Time's Up (Langone, 2018; Time's Up, n.d. (History)). Time's Up took the flood of stories shared on social media and made specific action-based goals that have now been simplified to three points. These points include safety, or "insisting everyone is safe at work," equity, or "leveling the playing field for women," and power, or "disrupting the status quo" (Times Up, n.d. (About)). Langone reported that "The organization's aim is to create concrete change, leading to safety and equity in the workplace" (2018, para. 20). This goal was in direct response to the "widespread abuse and misbehavior at the hands of powerful men" (Time's Up, n.d. (History), para. 1). Time's Up addresses all issues of workplace inequality, however sexual misconduct against women is at the forefront of these issues (Time's Up, n.d. (History)). Time's Up is an example of celebrity activism that is aimed at women's issues and has specific goals to end sexual abuse against women in the workplace. On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, at the Golden Globe Awards, "Actresses wore black gowns on the red carpet to raise awareness for Time's Up" (Grady, 2019, para. 1). The launch of the Time's Up movement, and the high celebrity participation in raising awareness for this sexual abuse-related movement, provided a backdrop for Halsey's speech which shared her own experiences with sexual abuse. Although Halsey was not directly involved with Time's Up, her speech was a harrowing example of how to use a celebrity platform for advocacy just like the Time's Up movement.

#### IV. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Halsey composed and delivered her speech in a difficult situation. Her speech about sexual abuse was situated in a context that was affected by the #MeToo movement, the Time's Up movement, Donald Trump's presidency, and the resulting Women's March movement. She was constrained negatively because of her gender and her speech topic, but positively because she is a celebrity. She had a relatively large face-to-face audience who did not engage with her, and an even larger social media audience who made the speech go viral with their comments, shares, and "likes." Because of these intersecting aspects of the rhetorical situation in which Halsey composed and delivered her speech, she had a lot to accomplish. The objectives in Halsey's presentation of her narratives specifically included 1) to help her audience identify themselves within her narrative so they would go and act after the speech, 2) to provide an example of how to share sexual abuse stories, 3) to provide an example of how to share sexual abuse stories on behalf other sexual abuse survivors, 4) to continue the normalization of sharing sexual abuse stories, and 5) to bring acquaintance and intimate partner sexual violence further into the foreground. The first, second, fourth, and fifth of these objectives were well-met within the situational constraints that Halsey faced. The objective that is listed third was met immaturely, not fully, or crudely. That is to say that Halsey's example of how to share a sexual abuse story on behalf of another sexual abuse survivor was less successful than if the story had focused more on the survivor, rather than Halsey's secondary experience of the events in the survivor's story.

Throughout this chapter, I will argue that Halsey's speech was an adequate response to her situation because she used unconventional speech forms to garner

identification and prove the validity of her narrative, despite the mutedness of both her gender identity and speech. In this chapter, I perform a narrative criticism of Halsey's speech in order to assess how well her narrative met its objective and how well her rhetoric fit its situation, as described by chapter 3.

## **Narratives**

Halsey's speech is a narrative about sexual abuse presented through five individual narrative fragments. The five narrative fragments presented in Halsey's speech are simultaneously part of one collective whole, and fragments of distinct narratives, with distinct settings, sets of characters, and events. Three elements tie these narratives together as part of one overall narrative; they are Halsey's presence as a character in each one, the theme of sexual abuse against women, and some influence of events in chronologically earlier fragments on the events in later fragments. In the following subsections, I use narrative criticism to analyze the fragments presented as one narrative by Halsey. In this section, my goal is to assess how well Halsey's narrative met its objectives.

### ***2009***

The first narrative Halsey presented in her speech was an emotional, albeit unsatisfactory illustration of how to speak out for victims of sexual abuse who are not oneself. Halsey's example of how to speak out for someone else who has been a victim of sexual assault is not entirely adequate because Halsey focuses on her own experience that resulted from the experience of the sexual assault victim. The story is about a sexual assault that her friend, who she called Sam, survived in 2009 when Halsey was fourteen years old. The narrative was told from Halsey's point of view, as she sat with Sam while

waiting for the results that would tell Sam whether or not she was pregnant as a result of her rape. In this story, Halsey gave vivid descriptions of the setting—a Planned Parenthood. Halsey said,

Not really sure where I am but I'm holding the hand of my best friend, Sam in the waiting room of a Planned Parenthood. The air is sterile and clean, and the walls are that not grey, but green; and the lights are so bright they could burn a hole through the seam of my jeans. (2018, 0:34-0:50)

Halsey's description of bright lights, the green paint, and the sterility of the air all aide in establishing the medical nature of the setting (Halsey, 2018). By highlighting the specific and somewhat eerie elements of the setting, Halsey emphasized the anxiety and fear associated with the medical facility; feeling fear at a doctor's office is common. By describing the medical nature of the facility, Halsey evoked a base level of emotional identification with the audience with the fear the two girls felt sitting in the medical setting of Planned Parenthood.

The 2009 narrative is also an effort to defend Planned Parenthood. Halsey had previously advocated for maintaining funds for Planned Parenthood in the pages of *Playboy* and at the Planned Parenthood gala (*Playboy*, n.d.). This narrative is not only the means by which Halsey speaks for her friend, but it is instrumental as an effort to influence public opinion about policy decisions. This adds to the importance of this text in current debates, since funding for Planned Parenthood has since been blocked by the current US presidential administration (Belluck, 2019).

Four lines of Halsey's first narrative that do not describe Sam's experience, but Halsey's, come with a plethora of potential for identification and emotional response.

Halsey said, “My mom is asking me if I remembered my keys, ’cause she’s closing the door and she needs to lock it. But I can’t tell my mom where I’ve gone. I can’t tell anyone at all” (2018, 0:51-1:07). Those few sentences of the first narrative describe of the dependency of teenagers on their parents. They also increase Halsey’s invitation for her audience to achieve early identification with her speech because of the emotions that were involved with her example. Halsey felt that she could not even share the experience with her mother. The stigma against sharing experiences of sexual assault is so strong that Halsey could not even tell her mother what had happened to someone else.

Halsey’s focus on the importance of the mother-child relationship in her life at that point also emphasized her youth, her lack of independence, and by association, Sam’s youth and lack of independence. The lack of independence and the focus on youth make the rape that Sam experienced more horrific. The mother-child relationship invoked the horror of pedophilic sexual assault. This horrific depiction is compounded by Halsey’s description of Sam’s sexual assault. She said,

My best friend, Sam, was raped by a man that we knew ‘cause he worked in the after-school program. And he held her down with her textbooks beside her, and he covered her mouth, and then he came inside her. (Halsey, 2018, 1:07-1:23)

The description of the after-school program and school textbooks compounds the elements that depict the youth during which Sam’s rape took place. Halsey places emphasis on issues of youth and sexual assault throughout her speech in order to make her speech more emotional, and therefore increase the invitation for her audience to identify with the speech. The increased identification because of the extremely emotional

topic and elements meant to evoke even stronger emotional reactions would motivate her audience to action by the end of her speech.

The first narrative is separate thematically from the others in that it is relevant to someone else's sexual abuse, not Halsey's own. Halsey was attempting to provide an example of how to express someone else's experience with sexual assault. However, because Halsey focused on herself in this narrative, it is not a good representative of how to advocate for others. The narrative about Sam only had two, out of fourteen sentences about Sam's actual assault. The other twelve sentences of the story were about Halsey's experiences and perceptions of her friend's assault. Halsey did not speak out for her friend; she did not tell her friend's story; instead, she talked about her own experience that stemmed from Sam's assault. If Halsey was using this narrative as an example for her audience to follow so they could speak out for other women, this narrative could have been more productive if it had been from Sam's point of view, or at least with a focus on Sam's experience rather than Halsey's.

By starting with Sam's story, Halsey crafted a powerful narrative that invited deeper emotional connection. Halsey presented the narratives about her own sexual abuse experiences in chronological order. Sam's story, though, took place in 2009, and Halsey's first sexual abuse experience occurred in 2002. Halsey may have presented her experience related to Sam's sexual assault first because it is a more powerful narrative than the chronologically earliest one. Presenting a more powerful narrative at the beginning acted as an attention-grabbing story in a speech that does not have a standard introduction. Sam's story is more powerful because Halsey presents the sexual assault clearly as a rape—something she does not address directly when she is the sexual abuse

survivor in the other narratives. Residual trauma from Halsey's own experiences led the narratives that feature herself as the sexual abuse survivor to be more fragmented and less clear than the narrative about Sam. According to Halligan et al. (2003), narrative fragmentation is very likely for recounted versions of traumatic experiences because of the way the intense emotions affect memory. It is certainly still traumatic to be secondarily aware of someone else's sexual assault, but the memory is much clearer. Halsey also had a difficult time describing her experiences as outright rape, unlike the way she presented Sam's sexual assault. Because Halsey was able to say, "my best friend, Sam was raped," Sam's story is more clearly about sexual assault and leaves little room for misinterpretation (2018, 1:07-1:11). Halsey's chronologically earliest story, which took place in 2002, was much more ambiguous and would have left the audience questioning what the speech was about if it had been presented first. Halsey said,

And the stairwell beside apartment twelve-forty-five will haunt me in my sleep  
for as long as I am alive. And I'm too young to know why it aches in my thighs.  
But I must lie. I must lie." (2018, 1:49-2:01)

It is only evident that Halsey was talking about sexual abuse in the 2002 story because of the first story's clear introduction to the topic of rape.

## ***2002***

The 2002 story is the most fragmented and therefore it is the least coherent and has the least amount of narrative probability. Yet, the lack of coherence does not detract from the overall rationality of the speech; instead, it aides in establishing both the amount of trauma associated with the event and how long ago the memory took place. As time passes, the narratives in memories become fragmented, a point that any person in



Halsey's audience could identify with. Additionally, according to Miragoli et al. (2017), the younger a child is, the less they are likely to remember about a traumatic experience like sexual abuse. Halsey's use of fragmented narratives reframes what a typical sexual abuse narrative can and should sound like. Even though Halsey's speech lacked coherence, Halsey's narrative was overall rational because the smaller narrative fragments increase the fidelity of her speech.

Christine Blasey Ford's testimony during Brett Kavanaugh's congressional hearings was incessantly needled by questions that invoked the idea of narrative probability. Because Ford could not remember how she got home, and other small details of the evening, her narrative was deemed false by conservative lawmakers and commentators (Reston, 2018). However, given the time that separated the rape and the trial, as well as the evidence that trauma effects coherent memory formation, Ford's narrative was rational and valid, despite the lack of coherence.

Halsey's or Ford's audience members who had experienced sexual abuse would have been able to emotionally identify with the fragmented narratives because the memories of their experiences would have been similarly fragmented. Additionally, those audience members with childhood trauma similar to Halsey's would have found the fragmented narrative more believable than if Halsey had fully described every detail of the encounter, which took place when she was seven or eight years old.

Halsey emphasized her youth and created points with which the audience could emotionally identify with through the satellite elements, or details that were not essential to the plot of her narratives. In her 2002 story, Halsey emphasized how young she had been at the time. She mentioned Sue's son's toy cars and the boy's conditional offer to

teach her how to play guitar. That she remembered these two trivial childhood-based things showed her youthful innocence at seven-years-old. That youthful innocence would have been another point for which the audience would have had a strong emotional reaction. The emotional reaction of the audience would have ranged from shock to disgust that a little girl went through this; and from grief to sadness as they identified with Halsey and remembered their own youth. The strong emotions evoked by this narrative would have further motivated Halsey's audience to action.

By telling her story about Sue's son, Halsey helped normalize telling sexual abuse stories, she shared an example of how to share a sexual abuse story, and she helped bring acquaintance rape further into the foreground. In this narrative, "mom's friend Sue" has a son who Halsey implicated as a sexual aggressor (2018, 1:39-1:40). The boy would have been Halsey's acquaintance, and even friend. The specific satellites of information that Halsey decided to share were particularly important because they highlighted the elements that Halsey used to make sense of the experience, which would have been similar to her audience members' sense-making of similar experiences. The similarity would have created identification and would have made her audience members with similar experiences feel validation for their feelings about their own sexual abuse narratives, or even help them realize that what had happened to them *was* sexual abuse.

One way that members of muted groups will be able to overcome their mutedness will be to realize that their experiences are common and give those experiences a name. Acquaintance rape already has a name, but many people still struggle to identify their sexual abuse experience at the hands of an acquaintance as rape because of social stigmas. According to Littleton et al. (2007), acquaintance rape is less likely to be

acknowledge as rape by the victim because it does not fit the “script” or societal idea of what rape is. Even Halsey has trouble in her narrative coming out and saying that she had been raped. Botta and Pingree, in an article in which they studied acquaintance rape, wrote, “Sharing common stories is an important way in which these young women name or redefine their experiences as rape” (1997, p. 197). By sharing her experiences with acquaintance rape, Halsey was “flipping the script” on sexual assault. Halsey also invited the people in her audience with similar experiences to make sense of them through the new societal script. After sharing her 2002 story, Halsey moves forward in time to an experience that occurred in 2012.

## **2012**

The narrative fragment from 2012 that Halsey relayed is a normalization of story sharing; it also rescripts rape to include intimate partner sexual violence. This narrative invited audience members to reaffirm intimate partner sexual violence as sexual abuse. Intimate partner sexual violence is less acknowledged than acquaintance rape because feelings of love, commitment, and/or attachment prevent the survivor from conceptualizing their experience as rape (Botta & Pingree, 1997). Halsey’s 2012 narrative is about intimate partner sexual violence. She said,

He’s taken to forcing me down on my knees. And I’m confused ‘cause he’s hurting me while he says, “please.” And he’s only a man and these things he just needs. He’s my boyfriend! So why am I filled with unease? (Halsey, 2018, 2:26-2:37)

While this is another roundabout way of addressing her own experience with sexual abuse (rather than just saying “I was raped”), it is still powerful. For people in her

audience who have experienced similar sexual abuse, Halsey's roundabout description would be even more able to garner identification. Jaffe et al. (2017) found that the inability or unwillingness to acknowledge intimate partner sexual violence as rape is common for women. The women, and others in Halsey's audience who had not put a name to their sexual abuse experience would find Halsey's description of her experience relatable and may have been able to name their own experience with intimate partner sexual violence. Through this consciousness raising effort, Halsey invited her audience to reconceptualize their own experiences that had been muted because they did not fit the societally normalized script of rape.

Halsey's 2012 narrative also speaks to Halsey's skill in crafting narratives that an audience can identify with. This narrative discussed sexual violence that she experienced at the hands of a significant other. In the story, instead of saying her age precisely like she did in the 2009 story, she said "I just learned how to drive" (Halsey, 2018, 2:06-2:07). In the United States, people learn how to drive in their mid-to-late teens; and that time in a person's life is usually seen as new and exciting. The intentional description of age by a societal rite-of-passage—that has emotional ties—allowed the audience to more deeply identify with her character in this story.

Halsey's comparative description of age-related character elements of her past self and her ex-boyfriend allow her to emphasize how financial inequality makes way for increased intimate partner sexual violence. The portrayal of herself as a minor or barely 18, contrasted with the description she gives of her boyfriend. Halsey depicted her boyfriend of the past, "He's older than me, and he drinks whiskey neat, and he's paying for everything. This adult thing--it's not cheap" (Halsey, 2018,). Her descriptions of

herself and the past boyfriend invoked the image that she was a teenager, seventeen- or eighteen-years-old, and he was at least twenty-one because he drank openly. Halsey's description of the age and responsibility difference between her past self and her ex-boyfriend illustrated the heightened pressure she felt to acquiesce to his demands for sex. She said, "He wants to have sex, and I just want to sleep. But he says I can't say no to him. This much I owe to him. He buys my dinners, so I have to blow him." (Halsey, 2018). Halsey's narrative raised the question financial inequality between intimate partners and how financial inequality encourages coerced sex acts. According to McOrmond-Plummer (2008), intimate partner sexual violence is a problem that is often depicted on television and makes up a substantial number of sexual abuse cases. Halsey's enables emotional identification with her story about her experience with intimate partner sexual violence, even the parts of her audience who had never experienced it themselves because of the frequent depictions on television.

Halsey not only shaped the narrative to be more identifiable to the audience, but she also expressed her personal emotions and experiences without any indication of embarrassment or shame. In the 2012 narrative, she said, "I'm confused because he's hurting me while he says 'please'" (Halsey, 2018, 2:27-2:31). For a sexual violence survivor, feeling confusion is common (Massachusetts Amherst Police Department, n.d.). Halsey's word choice not only allowed the audience to more deeply identify with her narrative, but it also served as a reassurance of confusion's normalcy for other sexual abuse survivors. By sharing her experiences with sexual assault, Halsey encouraged women to share their experiences, illustrated how to share these experiences, and

reminded the individual women that they are not the only ones who have had experiences with intimate partner sexual violence.

## **2017**

Halsey's 2017 narrative is another example of how to share a personal story about sexual assault; it was an attempt to increase the normalization of sexual abuse story sharing; it used rhetorical strategies to deepen the identification the audience would have had with Halsey as the character; and, the 2017 story is yet another depiction of acquaintance sexual abuse that can help survivors understand their experiences through a new narrative understanding of what sexual assault is. The narrative, beginning, "It's two-thousand-seventeen and I live like a queen," transcends less relatable elements in order to help her audience identify with Halsey and lead into her final argument (Halsey, 2018, 2:38-2:42). Halsey's 2017 narrative takes place after she became famous, so her self-proclaimed naivete about being "protected" because she lives "on a screen" cannot be directly identified with by her audience of non-celebrities (Halsey, 2018, 2:49-2:50). However, this narrative does showcase that even a famous person is not immune to sexual abuse; and that no matter who a sexual abuse survivor is, their story should be shared to increase awareness of sexual abuse. The few sentences that detail the sexual abuse are very relatable, despite the context of her fame. Halsey said, "Until a man that I trust gets his hands in my pants. But I don't want none of that, I just wanted to dance. And I wake up the next morning like I'm in a trance" (Halsey, 2018, 2:56-3:05). The man that she trusts is an acquaintance or more who sexually abused her. This scene could happen to anyone, regardless of celebrity-status. The relatability of this narrative largely

comes from her emphasis that sexual abuse is widespread and can happen to anyone, even a celebrity.

Additionally, the feeling of being “in a trance” after significant trauma could be shock, the after-effects of date-rape drugs, or psychological defense mechanisms—all of which would hinder memory formation of the event. Hindered memory formation leads to increased narrative fragmentation (Halligan et al., 2003), which decreases narrative coherence. Narrative fidelity, however, is increased when traumatic memories are shared in fragmentation precisely because of memory formation’s tendency to be fragmented when the experience was particularly traumatic. Therefore, critiquing narratives about sexual abuse and other traumatic experiences, fidelity is the most important indicator of rationality.

## **2018**

As Halsey concluded her fragmented narratives, she transitioned and emphasized the present realities of sexual violence and the need for action. Halsey said, “It’s twenty-eight and I’ve realized that no one is safe as long as she is alive” (2018, 3:41-3:46). This realization was the last event in Halsey’s narrative. She used this event as a steppingstone for her final arguments that emphasize the widespread and omnipresent nature of sexual abuse against women. This part of her speech aimed to build upon the already heightened emotional sensitivities of the audience in order to capitalize on the emotional identification the audience members would have with her cause. In this part of her speech, she abandoned her narrative in favor of pure pathos appeal. She said, “It’s about closed doors and secrets and legs and stilettos, from the Hollywood hills to the projects in ghettos” (Halsey, 2018, 4:12-4:19). With this, she argued that sexual abuse

can and does happen to everyone, from the poorest women “in ghettos” to Hollywood stars “on a screen” (Halsey, 2018). Halsey made sure not to neglect the topic of girls—children—who are also victims of sexual abuse, “When babies are ripped from the arms of teen mothers and child brides cry globally under the covers,” she recited (Halsey, 2018, 4:19-4:26). Including descriptions of children and babies evoked the innate emotional response that most people have, to protect the young of the species. This was a stepping-stone in the emotional build up in Halsey’s speech.

When Halsey said, “nobody is safe as long as she is alive,” she placed vocal emphasis on “she” and meant any woman, or girl (Halsey, 2018, 3:43-3:46). Her inclusion of everyone, not just women with similar social statuses as herself, allowed her audience to identify themselves within her narratives and be more persuaded to share and ask others to share suppressed stories. Her poetic descriptions and staccato pronunciations during this part of her speech invited an emotional reaction within her audience that increased feelings of anger, sadness, and fear for her audience. This increase in emotional appeal was a strategic lead-up to Halsey’s final pleas, so that her audience would have an emotional motive to follow her call to action.

Halsey’s call to action in her speech comes as a solution to the problem of mutedness on topics of sexual abuse. This problem is prefaced in her speech by the acts of silencing and the pressure she felt to keep her experiences with sexual abuse as secrets. In her narratives, Halsey allowed the audience to identify with the fear she felt in the waiting room of Planned Parenthood, her inability to understand after her encounter with Sue’s son, the confusion when her boyfriend forced her to perform sexual acts, and the outrage she felt when she experienced sexual abuse again, after becoming famous. By



delivering her experiences with story suppression, Halsey indicated the suppression as problematic while validating the feelings of others who may have been silenced after experiencing sexual abuse.

### **Answering her Context**

Halsey's use of a highly nontraditional speaking style helped her break from her mutedness and share her stories about acquaintance and intimate partner sexual violence. Halsey presented this speech as a poem. Because of the narrative evidence, the clear call to action, and inherent persuasion, this speech is rhetorical despite its poetic style. The poetic style does serve as a nontraditional speech format that Halsey indicated made her more comfortable. She said, "This is my second march. I was in DC last year, and I came back to do a speech this time. But I don't really know how to do a speech unless it rhymes" (Halsey, 2018, 0:08-0:20). The rhyming nature of the speech, lyrical like the songs she writes and performs regularly, increased her ability to speak in front of a crowd. Additionally, the near-lyrical nature of her speech helped her transition from the entertaining purpose she was used to into a persuasive, social-justice fueled form of activism.

Although Halsey did not craft a new term for her experiences, her sexual abuse narratives provide a point of identification and a model for others to continue discussing their experiences. Halsey's focus on every woman highlights the intersectional nature of the Women's March and the trajectory of feminism in general (IWDA, 2018). Halsey reminded her audience that all women, whether they are "Black, Asian, poor, wealthy, trans, cis, Muslim, [or] Christian" deserve the freedom that story expression can provide

(Halsey, 2018, 4:39-4:43). With this, she also reminded her audience that sexual abuse was a classless experience—people with any level of privilege can experience it.

Halsey's speech echoed the #MeToo movement and the Time's Up movement. Both of these social media hashtag movements influenced the rhetorical atmosphere in which her speech was delivered; and both were started by celebrities. When Halsey said, "and every friend that I know has a story like mine. And the world tells me that we should take it as a compliment," she emphasized the universality of sexual abuse, echoing the #MeToo movement (Halsey, 2018, 3:46-3:52). She went on, "But then heroes like Ashley and Simone and Gabby, Mikaela and Gaga, Rosario, Allie. Remind me this is the beginning; it is not the finale. And that's why we're here, and that's why we rally" (Halsey, 2018, 3:53-4:06). Halsey's list of celebrities who have come forward with stories about their own sexual abuse at the hands of high-profile entertainment industry leaders faintly echoes the sentiments of the Time's Up movement's stance against sexual abuse in the entertainment industry specifically and the workplace more generally.

Halsey's focus on the classless, widespread nature of sexual abuse show the need for collective action in the form of a Woman's March and national anti-sex abuse measures. Through her own 2017 narrative about acquaintance sexual abuse, Halsey illustrated the uselessness of individualized measures against sex abuse. Individual measures one could take include becoming well-known through celebrity, covering x amount of skin with clothing, acting somber and reserved, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and others. Because she achieved celebrity, because she lived on a screen, Halsey believed she would no longer experience sexual abuse (2018). She recounted her experience with acquaintance rape, and showcased that even she, a celebrity, was not safe

from sexual abuse. Individualized measures are ineffective against sexual predators. Halsey's advocacy is one for collective action, even action at the national political level.

The rhetorical atmosphere in which Halsey's speech was inserted was also affected by President Donald Trump's election. The Women's March was launched in 2017 the day after Trump's inauguration in protest of his presidency because of the demeaning and misogynistic language he had used against women. Halsey briefly addressed Trump's lack of commentary on a particular sexual scandal. She said, "It's Olympians and a medical resident, and not one fucking word from the man who is president" (Halsey, 2018, 4:06-4:12). This line came in response to Larry Nassar, an Olympic physician, who had pled guilty to sexually abusing female athletes at the time of Halsey's speech (Rosenblatt, 2017). Trump's lack of response at that point is a testament to the priorities he had for his discursive actions. An Olympic sex abuse scandal, though a nationally publicized tragedy, did not call forth an immediate response from the President of the United States. Halsey's call-out for this situation was a nudge toward making sexual abuse a much more important issue in national politics. Importantly, Halsey's statement called-out inaction; her message highlighted a need to hold politicians who do not act accountable for their inaction.

Halsey's final call to action channeled the emotional appeals that she developed into motivation for advocating for others. In her final argument, Halsey sought to remedy the issue of story suppression by saying, "Child brides cry globally under the covers, who don't have a voice on the magazine covers" (Halsey, 2018, 4:22-4:29). Magazines, television screens, concerts, celebrity award shows, press conferences, even police reports and the internet; all of these are platforms for speech and expression that are not

available to every woman. Halsey recognized this fact and advocated for her audience to solve the problem and to “Be a voice for all those who have prisoner tongues” (Halsey, 2018, 4:47-4:51). According to Halsey, not only should her audience share their own stories, but they should become advocates for the women who do not have the opportunity to advocate for themselves.

## V. IN CONCLUSION,

In this thesis, I focused on how Muted Group Theory has described women's linguistic constraints. These constraints negatively impact women rhetors' abilities to modify and get their audience to modify the exigence for any given speech. I proposed the feminine style framework as a starting point for how muted constraints have been and can be overcome. Through the use of such elements of feminine speaking style as consciousness raising, personal narrative use, and narrative elements meant to garner audience identification, Halsey used the feminine speaking style to start to overcome her mutedness. By delivering her speech with a rhyming scheme, Halsey also used a way of expressing herself that was "outside the dominant public modes of expression" (Kramarae, 1981, p. 4). Halsey used nontraditional speaking styles to overcome her linguistic constraints in order to deliver her speech at the 2018 New York Women's March.

Halsey's use of consciousness raising was a particularly noteworthy example of her use of the feminine style framework because it exemplified two forms of consciousness raising. First, Halsey's speech helped to increase public awareness for sexual abuse. But more importantly, Halsey's speech is an invitation for her audience members who have had experiences similar to her own to think about their experiences in the context of real sexual abuse. Consciousness raising does not just bring an issue to the attention of society, but it also allows muted experiences to become conscious thoughts and narratives for those who have experienced them (Griffin, 1993). Halsey's speech invited her audience to think about acquaintance and intimate partner sexual violence as

real sexual abuse, when the societal “script” mostly normalizes stranger rape and highly aggressive sexual abuse in which the victim is seriously injured.

Halsey’s use of personal narratives, which she delivered in fragmented segments with a hyper-focus on satellite elements characterize the sense-making process for sexual abuse survivors. Because Halsey’s speech was fragmented, it lacked the typical elements required to meet the narrative probability benchmark in order to be a rational narrative proof. However, because the memory and sense-making process would be similar for other sexual abuse survivors, Halsey’s narratives served as an example for how true sexual abuse narratives sound—which increased the narrative fidelity of her speech. Future work on the narrative rationality of fragmented, but highly fidelitous narratives about sexual assault would be worthwhile in overcoming social expectations of coherence. It would also be prudent to investigate narratives delivered by other muted group members that may not fit the typical criteria for narrative rationality. For example, narratives about immigration, racial profiling by police officers, intimate partner abuse, child abuse, and many others may not be rational according to Fisher’s (1984) conceptualization of narrative rationality.

Halsey’s rhetorical ability, in addition to being constrained by her mutedness, was both positively and negatively constrained by her status as a celebrity. Celebrities have much different personal situations than most people, and their platforms have much different implications. Future research into celebrity activism and its differences from non-celebrity activism would further illuminate how celebrities navigate their constraints in order to speak out on social justice issues.

Halsey's speech, specifically the advocacy therein, revealed a set of tensions in representative activism that would be prudent to study further. By representative activism, I mean activism such as Halsey's that seeks to define an experience that many muted group members share and represent the collective experience through the narrative of their own, individual experience. The tension in representative activism is primarily that tension between the elements of the activist's individual narrative which are particular to their experience, and the massive collection of elements that make up the muted group's collective experience. A promising direction for future research into muted group theory's role in public discourse would be to examine the tension that arises when a single person's narrative attempts to represent a collective experience.

The tension in representative activism between the activist's experience and the collective experience also highlights a marginalizing factor when it comes to consciousness raising. Only certain people's narratives end up representing the collective experience; only certain narratives contribute to consciousness raising about a muted experience. Those individual narratives that represent the collective do not encompass every single element that every individual within the collective has experienced. Halsey's narratives about her experiences with intimate partner and acquaintance sexual violence did not contain every element that every person who has experienced intimate partner or acquaintance sexual violence has experienced. In that way, Halsey's representation of that experience for the collective is incomplete, and her version of intimate partner and acquaintance sexual violence is privileged to be part of the consciousness raising on the subject while others' stories will never be shared. Those narratives that do contribute to the consciousness raising on any given muted experience serve as the definitional

foundation for the name of that experience. Those experiences that do not contribute to the consciousness raising about a muted experience, and which are not fully represented by the narratives that have contributed, are in themselves muted; they are not fully represented by the standing definition of that experience. Halsey herself advocated for increased story sharing. An increase in story sharing would help with ensuring that more diverse elements of individual experiences are incorporated into the definition. Increased story sharing may be the only possible solution for the marginalizing effects of representative activism. Further study into this issue is needed in order to fully understand the marginalization that comes from names of experiences and their incomplete definitions.

Halsey's 2018 speech to the New York Women's March was emotional, passionate, and persuasive. The narrative she used about her life's experiences with sexual abuse showcased an example for and led into her plea about wider spread story sharing. Halsey's call to action was a call to further raise consciousness about sexual abuse and advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Like Halsey's speech, Muted Group Theory exists to not only raise awareness about a particular aspect of societal subjugation of marginalized groups, but also to provide a point from which those groups can begin to empower themselves and end their own oppression. Scholars must continue analyzing and sharing stories of those on the margins, recognizing and highlighting the difficulties these advocates face in overcoming their linguistic constraints. If we prioritize equality and the exposure of marginalizing actions and effects in our research, we can provide allyship to those fighting to end their marginalization.



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