Opinion   **Open Access**

An Analysis of Joe Rogan's COVID-19 Apology

Gavri Steiger*

Department of Finance and Philosophy, Washington University, United States

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an undeniable impact on the global community, affecting nearly all areas of life relating to people's mental, physical, and financial well-being. Prior to the pandemic, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that approximately 1 in 10 adults in the United States reported depressive or anxiety disorder symptoms from January to June 2019. Since then, these numbers have grown exponentially to 4 in 10 adults experiencing similar symptoms. Moreover, one effective method of determining a country's economic activity is comparing the expected employment ratio of people over sixteen with the actual ratio. In 2020 the United States Census Bureau released that historical trends anticipated that the ratio would be 61.3%; however, the actual ratio was 51.5%. The differentiation between these two numbers indicates that far fewer people were employed than expected due to the pandemic. Most importantly, in the United States alone, the Johns Hopkins University and Medicine Coronavirus Research Center estimates that as of February 21st, 2022, there have been 78,479,134 confirmed cases and 935,335 confirmed deaths due to COVID-19. Therefore, when Joe Rogan utilized his podcast platform, which receives 190 million monthly viewers, to downplay and spread false information related to COVID-19, the public was justifiably and understandably outraged. The offense Rogan has committed could be an entire paper in its own right; however, this paper aims to focus on how he responds to his offense in the form of an apology. To accomplish this objective, this paper will have three sections:

1. Establishing an effective apology through Arron Lazare's book On Apology.

2. Outlining the specific details of Joe Rogan's offense.

3. Analyzing whether his apology to said offense fits the framework established by Lazare.

An Effective Apology

This section will establish the practical components that make an apology effective. Establishing a clear framework of the contents of an effective apology is essential to analyse Joe Rogan's apology objectively. The components of an effective apology differ slightly depending on the specific occurrences of the transgression, and no two transgressions are precisely the same. However, the components established in this section are the most universal and applicable that relate to the vast majority of apologies. The first and most important part of an apology is acknowledging the offense. Within the acknowledgment component of the apology, there are four parts:

1. Correctly identifying the party or parties to whom the apology is owed

2. Acknowledging the offending behaviours in adequate detail

3. Recognizing the impact these behaviours had on the victims

4. Confirming that the grievance was a violation of the social or moral contract between the parties.

Secondly, there is a communication of remorse and forbearance. Thirdly, there is an explanation of the given offense. Fourthly, there is some aspect of reparations. As mentioned above, all apologies are different, and thus not all apologies have to fulfil all four components. However, when analyzing the effectiveness of Joe Rogan's apology, for the sake of this paper, all four components will be deemed essential due to the magnitude and scope of the offense.

The Offense

This section will thoroughly review the offense committed by Joe Rogan that will ultimately yield the apology analyzed in the next section. It is important to note that his offense was not a singular action but rather a pattern of continual dangerous rhetoric regarding COVID-19. With the average The Joe Rogan Experience podcast episode ranging from 2-3 hours, it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into every detail of his offense. However, the most notable portions of his offense will be mentioned throughout this section.

As expressed in the introductory paragraph, Joe Rogan's offense stemmed from controversial and dangerous remarks surrounding COVID-19. Joe Rogan made his first notable problematic remark in April of 2021, wherein Rogan stated that "if you're a healthy person, and you're exercising all the time, and you're young, and you're eating well, like, I don't think you need to worry about this." The claim made in this quote is that young and healthy people do not need to worry about getting the COVID-19 vaccine. This statement was rejected by Dr. Anthony Fauci, White House communication director Kate Bedingfield, and several major media outlets. The primary objection to Rogan's claim was the numerous cases where COVID-19 had a severe impact on young and healthy individuals and that getting vaccinated is not just for yourself but also others.

Another remark made by Rogan occurred in August of 2021, in which he adamantly opposed vaccine passports stating that they bring society "one step closer to dictatorship." This claim is highly problematic because it could influence his 190 million monthly viewers to be sceptical of a government whose primary intention is to keep its citizens safe. While not directly telling people not to get vaccinated, this statement creates a culture wherein scepticism is prioritized over facts and rationality. Moreover, when this scepticism is aimed at a government pushing people to get vaccinated, it causes his massive viewership to be sceptical of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

Just one month later, in September of 2021, Rogan released a video endorsing a regimen of a supposed effective treatment for COVID-19, including "monoclonal antibodies, prednisone, azithromycin, NAD drip, a vitamin drip, as well as ivermectin." This regime is highly problematic

*Corresponding author: Gavri Steiger, Department of Medicine, Department of Finance and Philosophy, Washington University, United States, E-mail: g.n.steiger@ wustl.edu

because the drug ivermectin is not endorsed by the FDA or medical professions as an effective cure for COVID-19. This statement is increasingly dangerous because multiple people have been hospitalized for self-medicating with the over the counter version of ivermectin. Moreover, upon Rogan's claim of ivermectin being an effective treatment for COVID-19, there was a surge in outpatient prescriptions of the mentioned drug, a trend the FDA called "disturbing."

The remarks mentioned above made by Rogan were severe and garnered immense media coverage. However, in January 2022, the situation dramatically escalated when Rogan hosted Robert W. Malone, a highly controversial guest notable for being suspended from Twitter "for spreading misinformation about COVID-19". For example, while on 'The Joe Rogan Experience,' Malone compared pandemic policies to the Holocaust. As a result of this guest 270 medical professionals wrote a letter to Spotify on the topic of the "false and societally harmful assertions" where they insisted that Spotify should "establish a clear and public policy to moderate misinformation on its platform." Moreover, they were concerned that Joe Rogan was "broadcasting misinformation, particularly regarding the COVID-19 pandemic." This letter proves that much of the COVID-19 content on Rogan's podcast is based on misinformation and that he is not a reputable source.

Perhaps the most notable occurrence of retaliation against Rogan's problematic COVID-19 remarks was on January 24th, 2022, when Neil Young threatened to remove all his music from Spotify if they did not remove Joe Rogan's podcast. In specific young wrote that "Spotify has a responsibility to mitigate the spread of misinformation on its platform." Just two days later, Young's music was removed from Spotify's platform. This removal was followed by a statement from Spotify, which said they want "all the world's music and audio content to be available to spotify users," but they have a "great responsibility in balancing both safeties for listeners and freedom for creators." Moreover, other artists removed their content from Spotify, including Joni Mitchell, who wanted to support "Neil Young and the global scientific and medical communities on this issue." This occurrence played a massive role in publicizing the misinformation spread of Rogan's podcast and resulted in him making a public apology.

The Apology

This section will analyse Joe Rogan's apologies for the offenses mentioned in the last paragraph, utilizing the criteria set out by Lazare in the first section. The totality of Joe Rogan's offense was composed of many separate instances, and thus Rogan has made two separate apologies on the related subject. Therefore this section will analyse two apologies made by Rogan rather than one.

The first apology made by Rogan was made on one of his podcast episodes, where his production team trimmed the 5 minute segment where he talked about his offense and entitled it 'Joe Rogan Clarifies His Vaccine Comments.' As seen by the title, this 5 minute segment was not a proper apology and was a mere explanation of his offense. However, this clip has some primary elements of an apology, mainly explaining the given offense, and while not out rightly using the apologetic phraseology, there was an apologetic tone to his explanation. Therefore, this clip will be utilized as the first apology analyzed throughout this section.

First, Rogan clarifies his stance by stating, "There's some legitimate science behind this... I'm not an anti-vax person. In fact, I said I believe they're safe and I encourage many people to take them, my parents were vaccinated. I just said I don't think if you're a young, healthy person that you need it." This statement adds some clarification to his initial claim; however, it is still highly problematic. He starts strong by stating

that "there's some legitimate science behind" the vaccines, although the use of 'some' qualifies the statement and suggests that the vaccines are not entirely based on science. Next, he makes another appeal to his detractors stating that he is "not an anti-vax person" and that he believes that vaccines are "safe and he encourages many people to take them" including his parents. Nevertheless, once again, he qualifies his statement adding, "I just said I don't think if you're a young, healthy person that you need it." This additional qualification to the statement nullifies the productive portion and signifies that he does not feel "remorse and forbearance."

After he clarifies his offense, he transitions into his lack of reputability as a source stating, "I'm not a doctor I'm a *expletive* moron... I'm not a respected source of information." He then adds that when he says "something stupid I'm not thinking about what I'm going to say before I say it, I'm just saying it," and that "If you say you disagree with me, I probably disagree with me too. I disagree with me all the time." It is vitally important that he clarified that he is not a "respected source of information;" however, this does not nullify the fact that he has 190 million devoted monthly listeners and has a social responsibility not to spread dangerous misinformation.

If Rogan would have said I am not a reputable source on COVID-19, I apologize for spreading misinformation, and since I lack the necessary credentials, I will leave the COVID-19 talk to the medical professionals; that would have been a sufficient apology. Instead, he fulfils just one out of four of the parts in the acknowledgment component, provides a shaky explanation of the offense, and completely neglects expressing remorse and forbearance, as well as lacking any form of reparation. For these reasons, Rogan's first apology was not an effective one and merely corroborated the backlash given by Dr. Anthony Fauci, White House communication director Kate Bedingfield, and several major media outlets.

Rogan's second apology on the topic was more outright and occurred directly after the 270 medical professionals wrote a letter to Spotify and Neil Young, and Joni Mitchell removed their music from Spotify's platform. Unlike the last one, this apology was far more personal and was its own piece of content posted on his Instagram rather than a 5 minute snippet of a multiple hour long podcast. However, much like his other apology, he entitled it 'My thoughts on the latest controversy with Spotify.' This apology has an in genuine and strategic feeling by tagging Spotify on the apology video directly after the medical professionals, and notable artists reached out to Spotify. Moreover, by not using any apologetic terms in the video's title, the apology starts on a negative footing before the apology even begins.

Rogan starts his second apology by deflecting responsibility for his actions stating that he "thinks there's a lot of people that have a distorted Perception of what I do, maybe based on sound bites or based on headlines of articles that are disparaging." Next, when acknowledging the offense, he uses another qualifier as he did in his last apology stating, "The podcast has been accused of spreading dangerous misinformation." This approach deflects the blame off of him and accomplishes the opposite of what is at the core of Lazare's four components of an effective apology, taking responsibility. If done effectively, Rogan would have owned his offense and not used the word 'accused,' which effectively nullifies any remorse he might express later on.

He rushes through the acknowledgment portion in the usual Rogan fashion and spends ample time on the explanation. He begins by expressing the credibility and reputability of Dr. Robert Malone, who "owns nine patterns on the creation of mRNA vaccine technology, and is

Citation: Steiger G (2022) An Analysis of Joe Rogan's COVID-19 Apology. J Comm Med Health Educ 12:764.

Page 3 of 3

at least partially responsible of the technology that led to the creation of the mRNA vaccine." This is a compelling insight because no media outlet acknowledges that this guest is a knowledgeable person on the subject of vaccines despite holding extreme views. However, Rogan takes away from his argument by adding that Malone only faces criticism because he has "an opinion that's different from the mainstream narrative." The addition of this line detracts from his previous compelling statement because Rogan fails to acknowledge that his extreme opinions can have dangerous health ramifications and are not criticized solely because they are non-mainstream.

Next, Rogan attacks the term misinformation as a whole, stating, "The problem I have with the term misinformation especially today is that many of the things that we thought of as misinformation just a short while ago are now accepted as fact." Upon reading this, I was highly sceptical of his claim, but he backed it up with examples. The first example was, "if eight months ago you said if you get vaccinated you can still catch COVID and you can still spread COVID you'd be removed from social media they would ban you from certain platforms now that's accepted as fact." The second example was that if you said, "I don't think cloth masks work you would be banned from social media now that's openly and repeatedly stated on CNN." I found this example compelling because the information is constantly changing; however, going against the mainstream scientific opinion can lead to catastrophic results. Therefore, even if the mainstream narrative is not entirely accurate at times, it ultimately corrects itself as seen through Rogan's examples, and thus it is essential to trust the mainstream scientific opinion regardless of potential inconsistencies in knowledge.

Rogan then transitions to the reparation portion of his apology, where he suggests bringing experts with more mainstream opinions directly having episodes with the controversial ones. This method seems plausible in theory but is flawed due to the false equivalency theory. This theory goes as follows: "when you set up two opposing sides of an argument, and make it look like they hold equal weight, when really, they don't." Therefore, this idea is flawed because it suggests that the controversial and mainstream opinions are of equal validity when they are not in actuality. Moreover, Rogan and Spotify agreed to put a disclaimer before potential controversial podcast episodes such as Dr. Robert Malone. However, this is also a flawed concept because he should not be having guests on his show that require a disclaimer that the content might include misinformation.

Conclusion

Lastly, when he expresses any sense of remorse for the first time, it is not to the general public or the health professionals, but rather it is to Spotify who signs his pay checks. Rogan states, "I want to thank Spotify for being so supportive during this time, and I'm sorry that this is happening to them and that they're taking so much heat from it." This statement confirms my initial feeling before watching the video that it was made to protect himself rather than amend his offense.

Overall his apology was not an effective one that lacked a proper acknowledgment of the offense, mentioned reparations that were flawed in nature, gave some reasonable points in his explanation that unreasonable ones ultimately overshadowed, altogether never mentioned a sense of forbearance, and worst of all only demonstrated remorse for Spotify.