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Senior Project

**Media and The Banality of Evil:
An Analysis of Rape Culture In America Through the Lens of Hannah Arendt**

by

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Introduction

In recent American history, rape and sexual assault and the culture that leads to them has shifted from academic understandings to societal/cultural ones. We are currently in the sweeping “Me Too,” and “Time’s Up,” movements in Hollywood, where those who were once powerful and taking advantage of others are now being called out and held responsible for their actions. This has led to the general public broadening the definition of what sexual assault and rape are, and the myriad of ways they happen. A common concern has been just how many people¹ have been accused of rape, with many wondering how what they thought was a rare but evil crime happens to be so prevalent in our culture. In the past three years, I’ve studied rape culture and its effects extensively, and analyzed it through the lens of multiple philosophers and thinkers. About a year ago, I began to study the Jewish political scientist and philosopher, Hannah Arendt, who reported on Adolf Eichmann’s trial after the Holocaust and proceeded to work on theories of civil disobedience, responsibility (both collective and personal), and evil. I realized that her work does not only apply to the emergency state of Nazi Germany, or the political issues when she wrote, but prevalent topics today. In particular, I found Arendt’s writing illuminated some of the important subtleties in understanding both rape culture and rape on an individual level².

Because of this, I chose to analyze rape culture in America through the lens of Hannah Arendt, which led me in many different directions. I would like to note that I am aware Arendt never defined herself as a feminist and never intentionally put forth any feminist work, and that my reading of her is one that she may have resisted. I know that I am reappropriating Arendt’s

¹ I would like to note that I often use the terms ‘men’ and ‘women’ in this paper, not to erase the complex identities of womanhood and trans womanhood, but to make myself more clear and leave room for others to expand on my

² The kind of rape I discuss in this paper is colloquially considered ‘date’ rape or sexual assault, or rape that is more complicated than the violent assault that happens when a stranger grabs someone on the street. I am discussing the kind of rape that is often considered to exist in the ‘gray area,’ in this paper, and I believe this kind of rape is just as violent and catastrophic as any, but may spring from different causes.

words for my own use, and that she has been used in feminist lenses before, and that there is criticism opposing this³. As Seyla Benhabib writes in “Feminist Theory and Hannah Arendt’s Concept of Public Space”:

A critical exchange between Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy and contemporary feminist theory can be illuminating for both sides. Since the second wave of the women’s movement has made the motto ‘the personal is political’ one of its few and continuing rallying points, there is a challenging conceptual and political problem which feminists must face when reading Arendt.⁴

This “challenge” is Arendt’s theory on the private and public spheres, and the strict line she draws between the two (drawing on Greek thought in *The Human Condition*). She is strictly against “bodily functions” and “material concerns” being matters in the public, political sphere; she creates a divide between the Greek public sphere and the private sphere, which she defines as domesticity and the home. In maintaining this distinction, Arendt essentially keeps women confined to the private realm. Arendt, therefore, might not take something like rape culture as a concern of the public sphere. However, today, the “Me Too,” movement, among other political movements by women, has made it one. In addition, our forms of communication (especially political discussion) through the Internet has pretty much allowed the “triumph of the social,” to blur the boundaries between private and public. Because I emphasize the importance of media, and take the personal/private concerns of women as political ones in my appropriation of Arendt,

³ 1. *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig 2. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/095269519300600205>

⁴ Benhabib, Seyla, History of the Human Sciences “Feminist Theory and Hannah Arendt’s Concept of Public Space,” Sage Publications, 1993 (<https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/campuspress.yale.edu/dist/3/949/files/2016/05/Feminist-Theory-and-Hannah-Arendts-Concept-of-Public-Space-2dpmmo2.pdf>)

I must acknowledge that her private/public distinction in *The Human Condition* is something I'm sidestepping, if not directly countering.⁵

This paper is a distilled analysis of this culture through parts of Hannah Arendt's work, finally moving into my own theory of avenues for a creative change in rape culture. To begin, I explain how Arendt's work (particularly *Eichmann in Jerusalem*) and the controversy around it share difficulties with analyzing rape culture, which I define in depth. I apply her theory on the banality of evil to rape culture and the kinds of rape that stem from it. I use her theories on what it means to think as an individual, and how that relates to personal morality when confronted with an emergency, like that of rape. I then proceed to explain how her definitions of 'willing' and 'judging' have to do with moral action, and how judgement is essential to shifting culture. This leads me to discuss Arendt's conception of collective responsibility. I work through the intricacies of the argument, outlining how personal guilt and judgement of individual crimes is different from the collective responsibility of a society. Through all of this, I explain how, for Arendt, examples are the way to force groups of people to make better judgements.

I argue that as a collective, we must create better examples for people to look to as a moral compass when they think. I use a piece by Virginia Woolf titled "Thoughts of Peace in An Air Raid," to analyze what makes masculinity so toxic and how much this has to do with the examples men are given and what they are taught. Because men are taught to value violence, I argue that the only way we can form a feminist collective resistance is through nonviolence and the values of 'natality' and 'creativity' (both things that Arendt discusses). I argue that in order to uproot toxic masculinity, we must use radically new (aka natality) examples of women and

⁵ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition 2nd ed.*, "The Public and Private Realm" published by The University of Chicago Press, 1958

men in art (aka creativity) to shift rape culture, and create what Arendt calls an ‘enlarged mentality,’ which has to do with thinking about other people and putting ourselves in their (imagined) shoes.

Finally, I identify the art form that is most talked about today in American society: television. I argue that television is now considered a valid art form, and reaches a large variety of people, and therefore we should dissect the kinds of examples we see on television. On television, we are shown modes of masculinity and masculine ways of being that are conducive to rape happening (rape culture) and modes of femininity that are conducive to women being blamed for it (also rape culture). I discuss the show *Jersey Shore*, which I and many of my peers grew up watching, and how its examples of toxic men go unaddressed. I move to analyze the Hulu original *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and dissect how it succeeds and fails as a current feminist TV show. Finally, I discuss *Switched at Birth*, a show that unexpectedly addressed the complications of date/campus rape and the emotional ramifications that come from it. Through all of this, I argue that television (and other art forms) need to enlarge their conception of what ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ roles are and how, with more complex examples of femininity and rape, our society can have a chance at moving to an enlarged mentality surrounding rape culture.

Rape Culture and Hannah Arendt’s Work: Shared Difficulties

In 1960, Adolf Eichmann (a prominent administrator in the Nazi regime) was captured and went to trial for his war crimes. Arendt, already recognized as the author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, reported on Eichmann’s trial for the New Yorker. The collected writings were published in a book titled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt used her personal and historical knowledge of the Holocaust and World War Two, as well as her eyewitness account of Eichmann’s trial, to create a theory on the banality of evil. She argued that

while Eichmann was fully responsible for his crimes, he was a man who was willing to accept whatever the dominant narrative of society was. When he was a hero in Nazi Germany, he accepted this, and when he was a war criminal after, he was also just as complacent in accepting this role. She labeled him as someone who does not think, and used him as a base for the concept of evil as being something banal instead of ingenious or particularly wicked. This theory was often misread and was therefore highly divisive, but the complicated balance she lays out between the responsibility of people in a collective society and the guilt of individuals perfectly illustrates the issues that come up in rape culture.

Both Arendt's work (especially *Eichmann in Jerusalem*) and academic understandings of rape culture are often misunderstood in their subtleties; one must understand that by identifying the problem as collective, one is not excusing the individual crime. Arendt wrote on the banality of evil, arguing that one does not have to be particularly ingenious or insane to commit evil deeds. Evil can be done by any human who doesn't think about what they are doing or doesn't have a conversation with themselves when confronted with a moral emergency. Arendt was not forgiving the sins of the Nazis, even those like Eichmann, by saying they had an inability to think. She simply was acknowledging that non thinking becomes genocidal in certain states of emergency (think: Nazi Germany), whereas at other times, it would not mean much. She does not believe that the culture of Nazi Germany would convince anyone to do what Eichmann did, as some people resisted; that is why Eichmann is guilty. But she argues that there is something about the Nazis and Eichmann that caused them not to resist, that being the fact that they refused to think. Arendt does not use the term 'thinking,' in the colloquial sense (which I will expand on later), but misinterpretations of this led many critics to argue that she was apologetic for Eichmann. However, Arendt was actually attempting to rethink evil by denying its glamour to

the Nazis. Rivka Galchen, in her New York Times article “Fifty Years Later, Why Does ‘Eichmann in Jerusalem’ Remain Contentious?” argues that:

Arendt does not argue that the Holocaust and its unspeakable horrors are banal. She does not endorse or believe Eichmann’s presentation of himself as a man beset by the tricky virtue of obedience. And she does not say that the evil she saw in Eichmann is the only kind of evil.⁶

This applies to my understanding of rape culture through the lens of Arendt, and makes what I mean specifically clear. It is not that rape culture or rape itself is a banal kind of evil; it is violent and catastrophic. It is not that all rapists are banally evil, mediocre, non thinking; there are various kinds of evil and violent rape, but this is not exactly the kind I’m trying to work through. It is also not that I truly believe men are *tricked* by the culture they are in or unaware of body language and consent. It is simply that the culture surrounding rape makes this unspeakable horror seem banal, as everything surrounding it normalizes it, and those who are non thinking will never resist the kind of evil they can get away with. In the documentary on Hannah Arendt titled *Vita Activa: The Spirit of Hannah Arendt*, Judith Butler eloquently explains: “under those conditions of non- thinking the evil became banal- a hideous reality that became banal. She [Arendt] is not saying the evil is banal. She is saying it’s a new form of hideousness that is able to pass itself off as the normal, which is why we need to be all the more alert.”

Galchen calls this the “bottomless amoral mediocrity latent in millions”⁷. Those who live under rape culture become amoral, not attempting thinking or reflection on the culture at large

⁶ Galchen, Rivka and Kirsch, Adam. “Fifty Years Later, Why Does ‘Eichmann In Jerusalem’ Remain Contentious?”, *NY Times*, Nov 26 2013 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/books/review/fifty-years-later-why-does-eichmann-in-jerusalem-remain-contentious.html>)

⁷ Galchen, Rivka and Kirsch, Adam. “Fifty Years Later, Why Does ‘Eichmann In Jerusalem’ Remain Contentious?”, *NY Times*, Nov 26 2013 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/books/review/fifty-years-later-why-does-eichmann-in-jerusalem-remain-contentious.html>)

and how it relates to oneself. It becomes a serious problem when they are confronted with an urgent situation like rape.

Since the concept of rape culture is such a highly tense and polarized environment, it's sometimes hard to talk about the culture without allowing others to think you forgive the perpetrator. There has to be a way to talk about rape culture and how it influences everyone underneath it while still holding those who commit rape personally responsible for their actions. Arendt was trying to highlight the complex problem of how to understand that normal people do evil things under circumstances that are themselves racist and evil, but not to use this as an excuse for these people. Those who commit these crimes must be responsible for their actions, but we cannot just stop at that. We must target the kind of society and political regime that makes things like rape seem banal or normal.

To begin, we must first have an understanding of what rape culture is: a widespread series of social behaviors that normalize or reduce the gravity of rape and sexual assault. Rape, the way it is understood in the most basic sense, is considered a serious crime; people generally don't think that violent rape by a stranger is okay. However, American society has created a space where, even if certain forms of rape are illegal, they are dismissed by the social world. Behaviors surrounding sex that have been deemed "fine" for a long time are now coming under the microscope. In the past decade or so, the term "rape culture" shifted from academic understandings to social ones. Unsafe university and work environments add to rape culture; as does catcalling, slut shaming, and doubt surrounding cases of sexual assault. Universities protect male supremacy, as do most other religious, political, and social institutions. The perfect example of rape culture at work in America was the Aziz Ansari assault. A man America loved and adored was accused of being coercive sexually; he pressured and pestered a woman he was

trying to sleep with, again and again⁸. Every time she mentioned she was uncomfortable he would back off, and then come back full force. Ansari himself was a celebrated feminist; the only reason the woman came out with her story was because he was supporting the Time's Up movement in Hollywood, and she felt he was praised by the world when he truly had different intentions. Ansari's behavior is on the spectrum of sexual assault. Rape culture in America teaches men to think these kinds of coercive practices are okay, that persistence is key in sexual and romantic relationships. And the public response to this article only furthered it: 'It wasn't that bad', 'why didn't she leave?', etc. etc. This kind of environment not only leads to sexual assault like this (where, often, the perpetrator doesn't believe what they are doing is assault because it's been normalized), but damages any survivor who was brave enough to speak out, making it harder for others to do so. People who argue that "if all these tiny instances are rape and sexual assault, then everyone I know has been assaulted," are getting exactly the point. I want to explore, through the lens of Arendt, how we can tackle a culture like this by using her theories of personal responsibility and morality, collective responsibility, thinking, and judgement. To do this, we must begin by dissecting a term of Arendt's I brought up earlier: thinking.

Thinking

Arendt explains what thinking means and why it is important: for humans, there is a claim to think, to withdraw from the world and represent to ourselves what we have seen and experienced. We may not respond to this claim all the time, as we would be entirely isolated (and exhausted), but we must, at times, think. In this time apart from the world, we can reflect and tell a story to ourselves about our day, understanding for ourselves how the events line up and what

⁸ Way, Katie, "I Went On a Date With Aziz Ansari. It Turned Into The Worst Night of my Life", source anonymous, (<https://babe.net/2018/01/13/aziz-ansari-28355>)

they meant in relation to each other, for us, and for others. When one thinks, they are having a conversation with themselves: me and myself are in dialogue. And when we are faced with moral dilemmas, we can reflect on them: can I live with myself if I do this action? We can refuse to be a part of a culture, turn away from our choice, and decide not to participate. But, and this is most common, according to Arendt, most people aren't thinking at all. The reason evil is banal to her is because the person most often committing evil is not in dialogue with themselves, even in the slightest bit; there is no one home, no ingenious mastermind, but rather a blank slate. In "Thinking and Moral Considerations," Arendt writes: "the trouble is precisely that no wicked heart, a relatively rare phenomenon, is necessary to cause great evil"; the only thing necessary for evil is thoughtlessness⁹. Eichmann, for example, didn't seem to know any such claim to think. He accepted easily the new rules- that what was once his duty (in the Nazi regime) was now a crime.¹⁰ His 'story' of life was created by no personal reflection, but simply the words and narrative of those outside of him. When one thinks, they create their own story about the events in their life, rather than accepting the dominating narrative of what their actions mean. This is why thinking often produces new ideas, new ways to make things come together. By doing this, thinking conditions us against evildoing; things have unique meaning for us and us alone. Thinking is key to being an ethical being. It is not an action, piece of writing, or a sustained dialogue. It is everyone's personal conversation with themselves, deciding what is right and wrong. Someone who is actually in conversation with themselves understands that by doing a disservice to another person, they are putting their peace with themselves in jeopardy. Thinking

⁹ Arendt, Hannah, "Thinking and Moral Considerations", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (164)

¹⁰ Arendt, Hannah, "Thinking and Moral Considerations", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (160)

is about asking oneself if the way one operates in the world puts them at odds or at peace with themselves, regardless of what the rest of the world deems right. When one thinks, they develop a sense of personal responsibility, and act accordingly. Arendt argues that most people operate day to day without thinking, but this doesn't become a problem until one is confronted with a serious moral dilemma (for example: was something rape?). While thinking, for Arendt, is the first step in moral considerations, it cannot be the only one.

This is because thinking itself can only yield negative results. Arendt explains why thinking, on its own, is not a moral thing. Thinking is negative because it simply means we must avoid what we cannot bear to have done. In thinking, we sit with ourselves in isolation. So we must simply avoid what will cause us to no longer want to live with ourselves. But Arendt reminds us that what we cannot bear to have done changes depending on who we are, where we are, and when we live; we exist in a plurality, and different people have different thresholds of what they find morally reprehensible. So we need a different way to see morality; not in the Socratic 'what I can bear to do and therefore what I should avoid'. Arendt turns to Jesus, who has considered "the performance and consequences of the deed at large"¹¹. Arendt wants to think about "the harm done to the community, the danger to all"¹². While thinking is important for individuals not to do wrong, we must have some kind of morality that takes into account how we actively affect people on a larger scale.

This 'large scale,' mentality is essential because the consequences of non- thinking are catastrophic when one is confronted with an emergency moral situation. Arendt theorizes

¹¹ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (125)

¹² Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (126)

throughout her writing on how non thinking becomes a problem, becomes genocidal, when a society of non- thinkers are in a state of emergency. While genocide does not occur, and there is no centralized location or ‘state,’ of emergency, we can apply this thinking to rape culture. This is not to conflate the state of emergency of Nazi Germany, where genocide occurred, with rape, but to apply the same theory to both acts of evil. Rape culture shows how clear non- thinking is in American society. While this “latent amoral mediocrity,”¹³ means very little in day to day life, it can be far more dangerous when one is in an emergency situation. An emergency situation, as applied here, would be the act of rape itself. When many don’t think (in the sense Arendt means it) in their day to day life, very little occurs; but place someone in an emergency situation, where they may commit a violence against another, and their nonthinking becomes evil. Non- thinking may function in a society until it causes mass amounts of people to act amorally in emergency situations, simply because they have the inability to think with themselves about others. By putting themselves in another’s shoes, by imagining how another would feel, one has the ability to extend themselves past themselves. If we do not exercise our ability to think, the moment we are confronted with evil we will be unable to judge it and do right by others. The “banality of evil” comes shining through when an emergency occurs¹⁴.

In her work, Arendt often places thinking as essential to making decisions at the site of emergency, which I have outlined earlier. But she explains that thinking isn’t a borderline concept, one that occurs when our “back is against the wall,” in an emergency situation. She often places it there, because otherwise, it would be an entirely amoral thing, simply about storytelling. But when we are at the borders of an emergency situation, thinking becomes moral.

¹³ Galchen, Rivka and Kirsch, Adam. “Fifty Years Later, Why Does ‘Eichmann In Jerusalem’ Remain Contentious?”, *NY Times*, Nov 26 2013 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/books/review/fifty-years-later-why-does-eichmann-in-jerusalem-remain-contentious.html>)

¹⁴ Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 1963, Penguin Classics, 2006.

So what is considered moral action? Thinking entering the phenomenal world as judgment. This is where we turn to judging and willing, which are tied up together, as ‘what to do,’ rather than thinking, which is simply ‘what not to do’¹⁵.

Willing and Judging

Arendt argues that power is something that is inherent in willing, that is, power *is* willing. Willing comes from itself, willed by itself. She writes, “powerfulness is inherent in willing no matter what the object or the goal may be”¹⁶. No matter what one is willing, whether it be a humble deed or a mighty act, there is some power in the overflowing strength of being able to simply just will something to occur; there is equal power in doing something kind and good as there is in doing something violent or ruling over others. This is because either way, we are willing something to happen, some action to occur, and some radically new human activity to spring up. Arendt writes, “this overflow of strength is then identified by Nietzsche with the creative impulse; it is the root of all productivity”¹⁷. The will prompts us to act. There is some power inherent in this burst into action, into creation. Take into account this ‘creative impulse’ she associates with an overflow of strength. Traditionally, power and strength are associated with masculinity (and therefore, often violence). Here, however, the overflow of strength (even though it has no aim and its motives and consequences can be anything) has been identified with a creative force, a need to produce and create something. Quite literally, femininity has been traditionally associated with reproduction, with the sheer spontaneous power of bringing

¹⁵ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (122-3)

¹⁶ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (134)

¹⁷ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (135)

something new into the world.¹⁸ So Arendt has turned this willing/power, this overflow of strength, on its head, without one bit of notice from her. She has handed power and strength to women, contained in it is the creative impulse, the desire to do good. The lavish will, she writes, “prompts men in wanting and loving to do good”¹⁹. This doing good can only occur through action, through the spread of new ideas, through modes of natality.

I am not trying to simply point out that there needs to be new and creative modes of being that are powerful; I am also saying that the examples we are given need to be creative, and that everything we must do to shift the problem of rape culture has to part with masculine modes of fighting. We cannot use violence, force, arguing, or any tactics that are considered traditionally masculine (see footnote 17). In terms of deconstructing the ways masculinity becomes violent and promotes rape culture, I will not come to the conclusion that we should use violence and force as a way to dismantle this system, because they are exactly the tools by which this system is built. I want to use modes of creativity, examples grounded in empathy, in putting ourselves in another’s place, and in nurturing others, all things traditionally looked down upon as feminine. And most importantly, I want to stress Arendt’s point of natality. All throughout her theorizing, Arendt held on to the hope that there will always be new ideas, that in reproducing things we find something new, and that each person born in the world has the potential to do something radically different. At the heart of this, which she refuses to touch on, is the feminine theme of fertility and natality. Women do not only have to be the mode in which life comes into the world, they can also be the life force that brings in new ideas, that encourages men to have the same

¹⁸ This is not to argue that femininity and being a woman has to do with fertility and reproduction, but simply to point out that Arendt’s use of natality and terms like this allow strength to be contained within traditional feminine models, whereas they usually have to do with traditional masculine models (aka violence/conquering/colonization).

¹⁹ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (135)

feminine traits, to be creative, to be empathetic. But, to figure out how exactly to do this, we must turn to another aspect of willing.

While willing is important in terms of the power inherent in it, how it brings us together, and how it inspires creativity, it has historically become about its judging faculty, the ability to tell good from bad, or right from wrong, according to Arendt. When we are confronted by particular situations, we attempt to judge said situation based on some general rule or law. This reference back to a general rule or written law allows us to claim validity for our judgments on these situations²⁰. Sometimes, though, we are confronted with what I will call here ‘suspended judgments’. Arendt says, “the matter gets a bit worse when it comes to those judgments where no fixed rules and standards are applicable, as in questions of taste, and where, therefore, the ‘general,’ must be seen as contained in the particular”²¹. Both Arendt and Derrida discuss these kinds of situations. Derrida explains, open endedly:

For a decision to be just and responsible, it must, in its proper moment, if there is one, be both regulated and without regulation, it must preserve the law and also destroy or suspend it enough to reinvent it in each case, rejustify it, reinvent it at least in the reaffirmation and the new and free confirmation of its principle. Each case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely.²²

So while we must have general rules or laws for things, they always have an element of unpredictability (especially in cases of rape culture), where we must find radically new and unique ways to address particular situations using general laws or rules. How can we bring a

²⁰ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (138)

²¹ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (138)

²² Derrida, Jacques, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’”, *Acts of Religion*, Edited by Gil Anidjar, Routledge, 2002. (251)

fresh, new, idea to a general law each time that we must judge a situation? Arendt tries to give us an answer.

Arendt provides more of a solution to this question of judgment without general laws being easily applied to particular situations. Using Kant's "Critique of Judgment," (which is largely based on taste or aesthetic judgments), Arendt argues that judgment springs from common sense. According to her, common sense does not necessarily mean an understanding common to all, but rather it is what fits us into our particular community, agreements that allow us to communicate with other members²³. So how does this operate in the mind so that we may make a judgment? Arendt here discusses imagination and representation, using the example of bridges. When I withdraw from the world, I can represent the things that exist in it in my mind's eye- Arendt gives the example of the George Washington Bridge. As human beings, we can represent it to ourselves even when we aren't there. She takes this one step further, writing, "while I can conjure up before the eye of my mind the faraway bridge, I actually have two imaginations or representations in my mind: first, this particular bridge which I have seen often and, second, a schematic image of bridge as such, by which I can recognize and identify any particular bridge, including this one, as being a bridge"²⁴. Now this derivation of what a bridge is using a particular bridge works similarly when we are thinking about moral judgments. Arendt writes, "the schemata that appear in knowledge become examples in judgment"²⁵. To have knowledge about a bridge is to be able to use a particular example of a bridge to understand what

²³ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (139)

²⁴ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (139)

²⁵ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (140)

it is in general, and when it moves out of the mind, it becomes various particular bridges. This is what she means by examples. In order to judge particular situations when we don't have a general rule to already apply, we must think up an exemplary situation, similar to the one at hand, and find a way to deal with the situation using this example.

This is where common sense comes into the mind. The sense that is common to everyone in my community allows me to "have present in itself all those who actually are absent".²⁶ So all the members of my community can be imagined by me (by this I mean I can imagine myself in their shoes, take them into account). Using this imaginative capacity, I can see if my judgment "will carry a general, though perhaps not universal, validity"²⁷. So we must have examples in our world that are accessible to our communities, however big they may be, that allow everyone to imagine these particular situations and try to apply judgments to situations that will take others in our lives into account. Arendt explains this: "while I take into account others when judging, this does not mean I conform in my judgment to theirs [...] but my judgment is no longer subjective either; in the sense that I arrive at my conclusions by taking not only myself into account"²⁸. This would be intersubjective judgment. I am no longer judging situations based on my own lens or position, but on the imagined positions of others. Arendt again applies Kant and explains that this is what he means by "enlarged mentality". The hope, according to Arendt, is that we will all become citizens not only of our communities but of the world, so that our thinking that takes others into account begins to take *all* others into account, take radically different positions into

²⁶ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (140)

²⁷ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (140)

²⁸ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (140-141)

account, and to care about those that are not even in our communities. Arendt argues, using Kant, that “enlargement of the mind,” or “enlarged mentality” is accomplished by “comparing our judgment with the possible (imagined) rather than actual judgment of others and by putting ourselves in the place of other men”²⁹. And in this way, our imagination must take us to places we didn’t expect, to radically new ways of thinking based on the testimony of others personal experiences. The only means we have to even begin to imagine others’ point of view is through examples of what they may be experiencing, their personal testimonies shared through art (in my particular interpretation of Arendt and Kant).

This way of validating and understanding intersubjective judgment is essential to my proposed work on rape culture. If we have exemplary situations available to a wide audience, they may be able to represent or imagine these situations in their mind and apply better judgments. Further on in this essay, I will expand, but for now I will give a quick sketch. Say a large majority of Americans watch a TV show where a woman has been raped, and the situation is not black and white, but we must witness her pain and her struggle to cope with what has happened. Alternately, let us say there is a TV show that depicts the complications of being a woman or man in the world, allows the individuals within it to be fully who they are, complex characters that are complicit in various situations. Whoever sees these television shows, whoever consumes media (which is predominantly a younger generation who are growing up) will have an intimate understanding of this woman who has been raped on television. Or, they will see the various ways we can damage other people, if the shows are open to their testimony. Women can see themselves as more complex than a superhero against the patriarchy or submissive to it, but instead someone who makes their own decisions, and they can see how those decisions might

²⁹ Arendt, Hannah, “Appendix: Judging, Excerpts from Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy”, *Life of the Mind*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (257)

hurt other women, how they might be participating in the same toxic systems that oppressed them. In these representations, we see the stories of others who are struggling and this can help us think, in the sense of creating our own narratives about what we do and what it means. And then, let us say an actual situation arises, like Aziz Ansari assaulting someone, or Kavanaugh assaulting someone in high school, or any of the real life situations we've seen in the past year. Just having this one example in media would allow people, when it comes time to make judgments about these real situations and place blame, to put themselves in the woman's shoes, to have a schema for understanding her, to empathize with her. We have a representative or imaginative understanding of what she may be going through (regardless of the reality of her feeling, we can put ourselves in her position and imagine how she *may* be feeling- or how we would be feeling *if we were her*). And this personal testimony we have, this understanding of those outside of us, may just help us make more open judgments. Arendt writes that Kant says that this is where “egoism is overcome,” - “egoism cannot be overcome by moral preaching, which, on the contrary, always sends me back to myself; but, in Kant's words, ‘Egoism can be opposed only by plurality, which is a frame of mind in which the self, instead of being enwrapped in itself as if it were the whole world, regards itself as a citizen of the world’”³⁰. This being a member of the world, joining the plurality, and seeing things as others may see them can only be brought about by examples, and that is why they are absolutely essential to shifting rape culture. A final note by Arendt: “there is indeed something to which common sense, when it rises to the level of judging, can and does hold us to, and this is the example”³¹. Common sense, when

³⁰ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (143)

³¹ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (143)

we judge, holds us to thinking about the examples we have, to using them as a way to connect over something common with the others around us. To apply this logic, I plan to think about just this: what is the exemplary television show? What are our exemplary modes of being feminine, or being masculine, or understanding rape and how rape culture contributes? What will the scope of sexual education look like using examples such as these?

We must have examples so we may be able to judge people's character, to choose whom we would like to spend time with. After all, the company of that person who reminds us of the most fantastical villain, or whose deeds compare to terrible ones in fictional or real history, is not the kind of person we often desire spending time with. The benefit of living in a plurality is that there are always new and different people whom we may admire or surround ourselves with. As for what examples can be, practically, Arendt says: "we judge and tell right from wrong by having present in our mind some incident and some person, absent in time or space, that have become examples. There are many such examples. They can lie far back in the past or they can be among the living. They need not be historically real"³². Arendt ends here, saying that examples are the mode she provides by which to "think and move in these difficult and urgent matters"³³. If we do not think in examples, we may become indifferent or not truly care who we keep company with or what their thoughts are. When we are in a culture that encourages us not to judge, not to notice when our friends justify something, not to care about things outside of ourselves, we have come to the greatest moral danger, which is indifference. Arendt writes:

Out of the unwillingness or inability to choose one's examples and one's company, and out of the unwillingness or inability to relate to others through judgment,

³² Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (145)

³³ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (145)

arise [...] the real stumbling blocks which human powers can't remove because they were not caused by human and humanly understandable motives. Therein lies the horror and, at the same time, the banality of evil³⁴.

So this is where it comes to: in the simple act of choosing not to imagine another's position, to think in examples, or to have been never taught to do either of those things (which is what I believe she means by inability) we have moved away from what is human. To be human is to be among others, to care for them, to think about them. To remove oneself from that is to remove oneself from what is human, and cultures like rape culture encourages us to do just that; to become indifferent to judging, to whose company we keep, to see the most evil things as normal. And without the ability to think against the current, we so easily slip into being non-human, being isolated, and being banally, but totally, evil.

So why should we, those who don't rape, who do resist and think about others, attempt to shift this culture? To explain this, we must understand Arendt's theory of collective responsibility.

Collective Responsibility and Personal Guilt

Arendt writes in "Collective Responsibility," that one must not feel guilty for others actions, but rather place blame when someone specific has done something. Arendt explains that there is political (collective responsibility) on one side, and moral and/or legal (personal) guilt on the other.³⁵ Arendt says there is an issue with personal guilt for actions one has not done; an example would be someone feeling guilty for other men raping or assaulting women. Arendt writes: "where we are all guilty, nobody is. Guilt, unlike responsibility, always singles out; it is

³⁴ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (146)

³⁵ Arendt, Hannah, "Collective Responsibility", *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 151)

strictly personal”³⁶. If everyone feels guilty for something, the blame is not placed on the person that should feel guilty. People may feel responsible for forming a culture that would allow that type of behavior, or by being surrounded by those who do, but they should not feel guilty *for the crime itself*. Arendt uses the example of the youth in Germany, who often had a sentiment of guilt, where they felt responsible for the pain their fathers caused. Arendt critiques this, arguing that guilt is easy to feel when you haven’t done a thing wrong. Because the German youth knew their fathers had done these things, they should have been indignant, fighting with them. But this is inconvenient, for jobs and relationships. So instead of confronting the issue, they simply said they felt guilty³⁷. When, on the other hand, the people who really should feel guilty feel nothing at all.

This relates to those operating under rape culture; feeling guilty for what “other men,” do is just saying empty words. Instead, one should be directly combatting their own thoughts and toxicity, calling out their friends, saying something. Turning to a woman and announcing that you are sorry men are horrible is an empty sentiment, and not particularly helpful either. We need to place blame on those who deserve blame; powerful people and institutions that perpetuate rape culture. Without placing blame, everyone feels guilty, instead of holding themselves and others responsible. Guilt and responsibility are the two words that Arendt wants to clearly distinguish. Solidarity is necessary to form empathy for others, to make the conditions for sharing emotions viable, but when we say we are guilty, we are making our “solidarity with the wrongdoers”³⁸. Rape culture is permeated by small actions; we can all take responsibility for

³⁶ Arendt, Hannah, “Collective Responsibility”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 147)

³⁷ Arendt, Hannah, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (29)

³⁸ Arendt, Hannah, “Collective Responsibility”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 148)

our personal place in furthering that culture, but we cannot feel guilty. As a culture, this is the shift that needs to be made; we are collectively responsible for what is happening, and individual perpetrators are guilty.

Collective responsibility means that everyone who is a member of a group or society must take responsibility for how that society operates and what happens as a result within it. It necessarily assumes that there is a collective in the first place, like a nation; it is not formed when a group forms. Instead, two conditions must be present for it: I have to be responsible, not for something I've "done," which would cause guilt, but for being a part of a group that I am a member of which I cannot stop being a part of or leave. As an example, one may think of American society. Arendt says, "there is such a thing as responsibility for the things one has not done; one can be held liable for them"³⁹. One must have responsibility without guilt. I am responsible for all my culture has done, as I am an active member, who reaps the benefits and rewards, but I am not guilty for what they've done. The only escape from this responsibility would be to leave: "we can escape this political and strictly collective responsibility only by leaving the community, and since no man can live without belonging to some community, this would simply mean to exchange one community for another and hence one kind of responsibility for another"⁴⁰. Anytime someone is a part of a community, they take on responsibility for the culture at large and the way it functions. As an American, everyone must take responsibility for the rape culture functioning within it. When one is immersed in a nation they can't leave, they are responsible for what that nation does and represents; they cannot choose to not participate. This is another reason why our morality cannot stop at thinking- we must once again move

³⁹ Arendt, Hannah, "Collective Responsibility", *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 147).

⁴⁰ Arendt, Hannah, "Collective Responsibility", *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 150)

outward into the world and do something. Our participation in rape culture, which is inherently happening because we live in America, is something we are collectively responsible for. Raping a person is a morally wrong thing to do, but what about being responsible for a society that allows, and I would argue, even encourages things like that to occur, and no one to be punished for it? An individual must be good for the world he lives in; while we often consider the bare minimum “good,” in rape culture (aka simply not raping), we must actually think about how far we have come. As a society, we have a much broader understanding of what, even in the smallest ways, is or is not okay; to be good for the society one lives in has more implications today, as our society better understands rape culture. To be good for the world one lives in is to genuinely educate oneself in order to gain a full understanding of other people and how to do right by others; that is what it means to live in a society and be good for that society. That would be to try and educate oneself on how even the smallest things one can do can contribute to a destructive culture, and then try and change- this is a much more complicated way of stating that I believe people must think and form an enlarged mentality, as discussed earlier.

Although a notion of collective responsibility is essential to combating rape culture, we must also learn how to place judgement on situations and people. Arendt writes:

The moral issue arose [...] not with fear inspired hypocrisy, but with this very early eagerness not to miss the train of History, with this, as it were, honest overnight change of opinion that befell a great majority of public figures in all walks of life and all ramifications of culture, accompanied, as it was, by an incredible ease with which lifelong friendships were broken and discarded. In brief, what disturbed us was the behavior not of our enemies but of our friends, who had done nothing to bring this situation about. They were not responsible for the Nazis, they were only impressed by the Nazi success and unable to pit their own judgement against the verdict of History, as they read it. Without taking into account the almost universal breakdown, not of personal responsibility, but of personal *judgement* in the early stages of the Nazi regime, it is impossible to understand what actually happened⁴¹.

⁴¹ Arendt, Hannah, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 24)

What Arendt is saying here is essential to understanding rape culture in America now. It is not necessarily about being scared of not being “manly” or “cool,” anymore, a fear based feeling of “if I don’t do it, someone else will,” where one goes against their moral values because of cultural standards. American society has made the beginnings of a huge shift- the “yes means yes,” campaign, an understanding of frat and college culture as the breeding ground for toxic masculinity. Instead, there is an actual convinced population that thinks this is the way things are and should be; friends who are okay with microaggressions, with small aspects of the culture at large that affect others deeply. It is not so much that the people and friends one knows do rape, or even sexually assault in the myriad of ways they can, but that they simply see nothing wrong with the culture at hand (again, evil being made banal). They are not responsible for the President or the crime in the public sphere, the Hollywood moguls and powerful men who use their influence to subject others; but they are okay with it, with how “things are”. Rape culture is not a direct comparison with the beginnings of the Nazi regime, but the understanding that Arendt outlines on the lack of personal judgment applies to both situations in a variety of ways. Both cultures created an understanding of what is “okay,” and everyone in it ceases to resist, ceases to make moral judgements. Arendt often points out that there was very little resistance from anyone, really, even on a small scale, during the Nazi regime. These attitudes are not only social, but they affect the political atmosphere of our nation. Arendt calls this, “the intrusion of criminality into the public realm”⁴². This feels essential in America now, where our president is an accused rapist, for one. The intrusion of a lack of morals into the public realm fosters the idea that we can’t make judgements from within ourselves about situations, but rather that the reigning narrative about rape must remain.

⁴² Arendt, Hannah, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 24).

This lack of judgement also applies to judging individual criminals. In “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” Arendt explains how we must judge individuals for their actions. Our unwillingness to judge those who have committed crimes, according to Arendt, is this:

First, how can I tell right from wrong, if the majority or my whole environment has prejudged the issue? Who am I to judge? And second, to what extent, if at all, can we judge past events or occurrences at which we were not present?⁴³.

This immediately applies to understandings of rape in rape culture that I outlined before. Many misunderstand what one means by collective responsibility; I in no way am arguing that because a group has a certain morality, we cannot be expected to break from it. But in many ways, American society has prejudged what we should think when we hear about rape or sexual assault: what was she wearing? Did she explicitly say no? How drunk was she? Etc, etc. This culture of disbelief not only contributes to these crimes, but also to how much we think we can judge them. This is what connects to Arendt’s second point: oftentimes, we claim we cannot judge a situation because we were not there, because it is not black and white. In this text, Arendt is not arguing we are superior, impartial, and objective judges who can distinguish right from wrong. But she is saying that we can judge, we can place blame on what we feel is right or wrong, and it does not make us uncivilized in our understanding (we can make the kind of judgments I outlined previously, see: Judging and Willing section). She argues we need to hold those who do bad things and set bad examples accountable, instead of blaming it on historical deeds, events, and ideas that may have influenced it. This is essential to understanding personal vs collective responsibility in rape culture. Those who rape are personally responsible for raping, as they actively made the decision to do so and cannot be excused, even if the society they grew

⁴³ Arendt, Hannah, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 22)

up in warped their version of consent. Yes, anyone can rape, but not anyone did, much like Arendt explains when she's talking about the Nazi's excuses at the Nuremberg trials. Anyone who consumes the same media and understandings of sex in America can rape, but in each case, that specific person did; we cannot shy away from that. Arendt writes, "[men] whose deeds are of course still human deeds but who appear before a tribunal because they have broken some law whose maintenance we regard as essential for the integrity of our common humanity"⁴⁴. People who rape are doing it under a certain system and set of ideas, but that does not excuse them; they have broken a common law of humanity that directly damages others. We should not feel guilt for operating under America's rape culture, just responsibility to change. We must place blame onto those who are actually guilty, we must judge them. By judging, we hold certain members of our society personally responsible.

We can be collectively responsible for understandings about rape and examples of morality, even if we are not collectively guilty for rape occurring. Arendt says, "while [...] the question of personal responsibility under dictatorship cannot permit the shifting of responsibility from man to system, the system cannot be left out of account altogether"⁴⁵. Collective responsibility is essential, because it holds us accountable for how our nation and the systems within it operate. If each of us held ourselves responsible, we could pave the way for better *examples*. Arendt argues that personal morality is derived from examples one sees as they grow. We can understand general moral issues when confronted with specific cases and particular examples, Arendt explains⁴⁶. If people exist in a plurality, they should be able not only to

⁴⁴ Arendt, Hannah, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship", *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 22)

⁴⁵ Arendt, Hannah, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship", *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 32)

⁴⁶ Arendt, Hannah, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 138)

understand what feels right and wrong when they are in conversation with themselves (thinking), but also what their community would consider right and wrong. They would be able to make a judgement, not only depending on what they feel, but what those beyond them feel. This applies particularly to rape culture because it would not be individuals wondering what they think is okay to do, but what others feel comfortable with. Arendt says, “examples, which are indeed the ‘go cart’ of all judging activities, are also and especially the guideposts to moral thought”⁴⁷. We don’t have to judge deeds instead of the doer of them, but before deciding to do something, we should be able to pull up an example in our mind of what is right or wrong in a situation. Our examples must be better, so that people think of them; but the only way to create better examples is to actually punish those who do something wrong, or rather, show that what they are doing *is* wrong by placing blame. It seems we are getting there (the Times Up movement in Hollywood, the Me Too movement, etc), but we still don’t have great examples. We must have a new way to theorize and act collectively so we may offer new examples to coming generations.

Personal thinking and collective action can add to or help combat rape culture. Arendt says, “what is true is that the nonparticipants were not resisters and that they did not believe that their attitude had any political consequences”⁴⁸. This was in the case of those who chose not to participate in the Nazi regime, but applies under rape culture today. We cannot only think personally about moral situations; we have a collective responsibility to resist and act against certain examples and modes of living. Arendt notes:

No moral, individual and personal, standards of conduct will ever be able to excuse us from collective responsibility. This vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our

⁴⁷ Arendt, Hannah, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 145).

⁴⁸ Arendt, Hannah, “Collective Responsibility”, *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 156)

fellow men, and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community⁴⁹.

No standards of conduct, no matter how good or bad we are individually, can excuse us from the way we and other people create a culture, says Arendt here. We must take responsibility for the way things are, even if we aren't the individuals who refused to think. Our political faculty is the capacity for action. In order to combat rape culture, we must not only think on a personal level (which implies nonaction, according to Arendt), but also act against it, by speaking, fighting, writing theory. There are many active ways to exist and to help this culture politically, beyond simply thinking with oneself and therefore being personally moral. Action is the execution and understanding of collective responsibility.

A Cultural Shift: Virginia Woolf and Masculinity

So, now we understand how this culture comes about and why we are responsible for it. The next question is, how do we shift it? This leads me to another text by the author Virginia Woolf in *The Death of the Moth*, titled "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid".

In "Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid", Woolf writes about misogynist and capitalist mentalities and how they are a kind of "subconscious Hitlerism," that gave rise not only to Nazi Germany and its soldiers, but the men fighting them as well⁵⁰. She argues that someone like Hitler arises from a kind of power hungry, masculine mentality. Throughout history, men have been glorified for violently conquering other countries and genders. Woolf writes, "Who is Hitler ? What is he ? Aggressiveness, tyranny, the insane love of power made manifest, they reply.

⁴⁹ Arendt, Hannah, "Collective Responsibility", *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Random House, 2003. (pg 157-58)

⁵⁰ Woolf, Virginia. "Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid," *The Death of the Moth*, Hogarth Press, 1942. (155)

Destroy that, and you will be free”⁵¹. Those who commit heinous crimes are always responsible for their actions- I cannot stress this enough. We always have the choice to turn away from what we are taught if we just choose to think, expanding our mentality to include how another is affected by us. As Arendt says, “if I can have reflective thinking, he can too- he can judge. I just don’t know how to create this desire in him.”⁵² But how can we when our culture doesn’t just historically foster violence, but also discourages any turn away from it? Woolf is saying here that just by locking up perpetrators, just pointing the finger, is not quite enough. There is a culture of aggression and tyranny that fosters situations of rape and those who don’t think within them. There doesn’t only have to be individual punishment; the kind of culture that makes violence seem normal has to shift. We can only make cultural shifts as a collective. Just to reiterate before moving on: we have a base understanding of how thinking and nonthinking functions as applied to rape as an emergency site. We have understood how this kind of emergency arises from a certain kind of culture. To understand this in Arendt’s terms, this would be distinguishing between personal morality and thought at the site of emergency versus the culture that fosters both that emergency and the individual acting immorally within it.

Woolf writes about the patriarchal values that led to the state of Nazi Germany and how one might subvert those values. She argues that one prospect for this kind of activism is academic and creative writing and theorizing, saying “unless we can think peace into existence we- not this one body in this one bed but millions of bodies yet to be born- will lie in the same darkness and hear the same death rattle overhead”⁵³. There has to be a way, not just to think personally about morality, but to enact it in order to give people examples by which to think morally. Woolf even says, “there is another way of fighting for freedom without arms; we can

⁵¹ Woolf, Virginia. “Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid,” *The Death of the Moth*, Hogarth Press, 1942. (155)

⁵² This is in an interview with Arendt

⁵³ Woolf, Virginia. “Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid,” *The Death of the Moth*, Hogarth Press, 1942. (154)

fight with the mind”⁵⁴. This way of ‘fighting’ both subverts masculine values of conquering and fighting by encouraging people to use the mind (or maybe some kind of emotional capacity, a traditionally feminine trait), but also says something important about non violent and theoretical action. Only by subverting how a group goes about things, and thinking about masculinity and rape culture in a new way, can we derive a new morality. Woolf wants us to fight against the group, as Arendt argued in *Eichmann In Jerusalem*, saying that when we group- think, we often go with the herd. However, as long as I am in accordance with my morality, even if it strays from what most of the world thinks, I will be fighting for what is right. Woolf says, similarly, “mental fight means thinking against the current, not with it”⁵⁵. The group mentality of rape culture is a system of behavior that sets an example of what is okay in a sexual situation, and often leads to situations of rape that seem to exist in a gray area for the public but are deeply violating in private. Date rape, campus rape, rape by someone you know is evil and violent and the most terrifying thing that can happen to a person, and yet, it seems kind of mild. It appears normal, like something that ‘just happens’. This, in itself, is the most horrifying thing I can think of. Rape, the emergency, arises from societal conditions, although the perpetrator is just as guilty. The essential question is how to change the culture that creates the kind of person that would not think in an emergency like this. While academic writing as action may be a starting point, or one means to do so, it remains unclear exactly how radical the inversion of this culture will have to be.

Woolf outlines how complicated the problem of rape culture and how to begin to solve it is. We can’t just destroy rape by declaring it illegal, or making all kinds of sexual assault against the law. Rape culture needs to be shifted by a collective through the use of the ‘enlarged

⁵⁴ Woolf, Virginia. “Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid,” *The Death of the Moth*, Hogarth Press, 1942. (154)

⁵⁵ Woolf, Virginia. “Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid,” *The Death of the Moth*, Hogarth Press, 1942. (155)

mentality,' as discussed before. A young man Woolf writes about says his life's devotion is to come home from war, with undying honour and glory, by shooting total strangers. How do you dig these kind of values out of men? Woolf says:

Do the current thinkers honestly believe that by writing 'Disarmament' on a sheet of paper at a conference table they will have done all that is needful? [...] The young airmen up in the sky is driven not only by the voices of loudspeakers; he is driven by the voices in himself- ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition [...] We must help the young Englishmen to root out from themselves the love of medals and decorations. We must create more honourable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism. We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun⁵⁶.

So, following Woolf and Arendt's thinking, the question becomes: how exactly do we root out subconscious Hitlerism, how do we interrupt the kind of culture that fosters this? While Woolf is discussing the pride that comes with violence in war for all men, this can be applied to the violence of rape culture and rape as well. She makes clear how complex the issue of fixing this kind of culture and the emergencies that occur within it is.

In order to force others to think, to make a judgement, to enact morality at the site of the emergency, we must have better examples in our larger culture. We must present something that makes masculinity honorable, that is not a violent, subconscious Hitlerism (the need to control and dominate). We must have an idea of the traditional examples of masculinity in order to find a way to radically enlarge the mentality of what it means to be a 'man'. Individuals are responsible for their actions at the site of emergency, as they must exercise individual morality, but our collective responsibility is to force others to enlarge their mentality when engaging with themselves. That can only occur when the collective group has enlarged their mentality, or at least a significant portion. Arendt gives us two ways of doing this: societal examples that create empathy with victims rather than perpetrators, and interruption in the form of civil disobedience.

⁵⁶ Woolf, Virginia. "Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid," *The Death of the Moth*, Hogarth Press, 1942. (156)

This is both the “thinking,” inactive aspect, and the academic writing, marching, active aspect. Both must function together. The active work of the collective should create and encourage the thinking aspect in the individual. This comes clearly from Arendt’s work, but I still have qualms about this simple of an outline. I know we must enlarge the collective mentality through empathy, examples, and civil disobedience, but I’m not sure exactly what kind of masculinity that active writing should be advocating. We can interrupt and subvert the traditional culture, as we have more recently in America, but what kind of radical notion of masculinity would turn rape culture on its head? When Woolf writes about helping the young Englishman root out his violent tendencies that have been fostered, she doesn’t see it as a simple task. She equates it to taking away what is traditionally considered the heart of femininity- motherhood. These traditional feminine and masculine values aren’t ‘right’, but they have been fostered so long they almost seem like instinct. To root out something like a mothering or conquering “instinct,” Woolf writes, *everyone* would have to come together and offer the group that must change something else. Woolf says we must “give them other openings for their creative power”⁵⁷. Different openings require different examples of masculinity. And because we are turning away from violent, masculine urges, these openings and examples must be nonviolent but widespread. The only thing I can think of that fulfills both of those qualities is art.

Nonviolent Collective Resistance: Art To Shift a Culture

What we call ‘art’ has expanded in meaning greatly. In society today, we are in an era where television on streaming sites is seen as a serious art form. Television is the site where sociopolitical issues are tackled at every turn, especially during the Me Too movement sweeping Hollywood. TV right now is changing every day, and the content that we consume is almost constant, virtually commercialness, and we are given 8-10 hours of binge watching material at a

⁵⁷ Woolf, Virginia. “Thoughts On Peace In An Air Raid,” *The Death of the Moth*, Hogarth Press, 1942. (156)

time. While Arendt and Woolf existed in an era where the novel was the best way to present examples, we now live in a world where TV can. So, in light of this, we must examine the examples we are given and the stories about women and men that we are told, and discern whether they measure up to the crisis of rape culture and the ways men and women are perceived under it, or if they need radical deconstruction and vastly new examples.

Jersey Shore and Masculinity: Men in Media

The reality television show, Jersey Shore, ran from the years 2009 to 2012. It consisted of putting four men and three women to live in a house together for the summer. They were not allowed any outside news or television, and were provided with jobs, food, and alcohol. The results of the first season are amusing, with a group of twenty somethings doing outlandish things on camera. However, there were more sinister aspects to the show we've continually overlooked as a society. There are many instances where the men on the show take women who are too drunk to consent home from the club. These are filmed on the show. In addition, there are certain ways women and men on the show talk about each other that are perfect examples of rape culture. The central couple on the show, Ronnie and Sammi, are a textbook abusive relationship. They are defined as "toxic" by many of the other characters, but I couldn't find anywhere in the show, or any online articles, that lists this behavior as abusive. Ronnie's constant threat of physical violence is a perfect example of the ways masculinity becomes dangerous. The many times he sleeps with other women, only to sleep with Sammi immediately after, borders on being rape, considering if she had known he had just slept with another woman, she would not have had sex with him.

The examples of masculinity on the show are violently traditional, and more than once a girl goes home with one of the main men, too drunk to stand, and her friends come to save her.

The girls in the house will go so far as to try to fight off the friends, who are considered ‘ugly girls,’ from protecting their friend from the men in the house. It’s a disturbing look at the minds of men in America, especially young, drunk people. It also explains why our generation was one of the last to have a less comprehensive view of consent in the media.

While some have acknowledged that Jersey Shore reverses gender roles in interesting ways, as the men in the house cook and clean and the women rarely do so, this doesn’t necessarily apply to my project⁵⁸. The ways the men enact their masculinity is a direct expression of rape culture. They go to the club to sleep with as many women as possible, define women as “grenades,” when they are too ugly or fat to take home, and often bring home women who are far too drunk to consent. The women around them are complicit in this, as these men are their friends, and they refuse to acknowledge this bad behavior, even going so far as to fight girls who don’t want to sleep with their friends.

My point is not, necessarily, that we should censor this; I don’t want to sanction television. Rather, I think the glorification of these modes of masculinity, especially in how popular Jersey Shore became, are the problem. The ways men interact with women and their approaches to sex are clear instances of rape culture on screen. The kind of rape culture this show exemplifies is never addressed by the characters and is rarely discussed in real life. I’m not sure what would have happened to the girls the men on *Jersey Shore* tried to have sex with, had their friends not stepped in to help them. When no one points out that something like this is damaging to everyone in the situation, every single person watching is either having these values instilled or confirmed.

⁵⁸ See: <http://blog.commart.wisc.edu/2011/02/26/compulsory-masculinity-on-the-jersey-shore/>

This show is a bit different than the other two I plan to discuss, because it is reality television. There is an aspect of the shock factor, as it's notoriously known that reality TV has its highest ratings when people are being horrible to each other on screen. I'm not saying that this show needs to become 'relatable' necessarily, but women and men on the show are distilled down to the most obvious stereotypes; the male predator/female prey binary that has been exhausted in every tale through time. Constantly, ways to 'be a man,' or 'be a woman,' are reaffirmed, and dangerously so.

We are taught differently, somehow, in the shows that are on today.

The Handmaid's Tale: A Feminist Win or Failure?

The Handmaid's Tale, based on the 1985 novel with the same name, by Margaret Atwood, premiered on Hulu in 2017. The first season follows the premise of the novel: births have declined rapidly across America, causing mass hysteria, and a totalitarian, hyper-Evangelical Protestant government named Gilead takes rule of the United States. Women are explicitly oppressed⁵⁹, and are confined to very few roles: they may be the infertile "Wives" (the husbands are never the issue) of officials ("Commanders"). There are "Marthas" who work for these officials and their wives, as cooks and housekeepers. There are "econowives," women who already have "legitimate" husbands and are fertile or have babies. All of these women are "good," by Gilead's standards: i.e, straight, cis, married without any infidelity, not Catholic, etc. Those who are "bad," and fertile are "Handmaid's" for the Wives and Commanders, ritual rape

⁵⁹ While the Handmaid's Tale novel deals with racial segregation, the televised Gilead appears to be post racial, sparking an enormous amount of controversy, between those who believe the casting wouldn't be diverse if race was an issue in Gilead, versus those who point out the ways Handmaid's are treated is similar to female slaves, and that this is nothing new, to those who argue Gilead could never truly be post racial, as it is set in America at the present moment. All are fascinating, valid arguments I won't have a chance to discuss in this paper. See: <https://www.vulture.com/2017/06/the-handmaids-tale-greatest-failing-is-how-it-handles-race.html>
<https://theundefeated.com/features/hulu-handmaids-tale/>

occurring whenever they are fertile, so that the Commander and Wife may have a child. The Wife holds the Handmaid down while the Commander rapes her, once a month. Or, women can be prostitutes at a place named Jezebels. Finally, all of those people who are infertile and have committed crimes are sanctioned to the “Colonies,” a toxic wasteland kind of concentration camp.

The show explores the life of the handmaid June, now named “Offred,” or “Of Fred” in the Republic of Gilead, under Commander Fred Waterford and his wife, Serena Joy. The show interrogates what it means to be a woman in this kind of oppressive, fascist regime, whether that be the most privileged woman- Serena Joy, who helped write the laws for the Republic in the first place- or the least, and the ways women can be complex, and complicit, and fully human within the worst conditions imaginable. It tackles how women begin to treat each other and others under overbearing misogyny, and how they hold one another accountable. In my discussion of Jersey Shore, I pointed out that I didn’t want representations of complicit womanhood and rape culture to cease, but rather that I’d like it to be acknowledged and addressed, which the first season of this show does, asking: who is our resentment towards? Who are we angry with? Who is responsible, and who is guilty for what has happened? The first season does this, instead of telling traditional stories about women and relying on tried and true archetypes, i.e.: mother, femme fatale, etc. It also avoids a classic trap: casting a ‘hero’ lead with traditional masculine characteristics as a woman, rather than developing a fully drawn out female character. Offred, the central character, is angry, closed off, sarcastic, and mean; she isn’t some classic male hero with the label “woman,” on top. Serena Joy is truly warped, believing that men are superior and women are given mothers and caretakers, with no other value. Although, she does seem to exclude herself from this, an interesting kind of ‘exception to the rule’ mentality.

Emily, one of June's Handmaid friends, is so tortured throughout her time in Gilead that she, in cold blood, murders one of the 'wives' when they both are in the Colonies. Moira, a friend of June's from before the overthrow, becomes complicit, having sex with men in Jezebel's, totally defeated. And even though all these women do all these things to one another, their stories are still being shown on television. They are there. We are listening to them, no matter how wrong or flawed or strange they are; they are being heard.

In an op-ed piece titled "Stormy Daniels, Feminist Hero," author Jill Filipovic argues that in Stormy Daniels and Donald Trump's affair, and the subsequent lawsuit she filed against him, Daniels has become a true feminist hero. This is in some of the same ways that the women on the first season of the *Handmaid's Tale* are feminist heroes. In Daniel's case, Rudy Giuliani, one of Trump's lawyers, capitalized on the fact that Daniels is an adult star, saying "that although he respects 'all human beings,' Ms. Daniels is apparently one exception: 'I don't respect a porn star the way I respect a career woman, or a woman of substance, or a woman who has great respect for herself as a woman, and as a person'." ⁶⁰ Filipovic writes that this perpetuates the "profoundly misogynist virgin/whore dichotomy imposed on women, where we can be only perfectly good or entirely bad."⁶¹ From *The Handmaid's Tale*, we can see that women are much more than that, and that the value of their words, and listening to them, have very little to do with what archetype they fit into- we can still believe what they say. As a society, this is what we always do with men: we believe their objective validity despite any personal flaws. Filipovic says that Daniels:

Marks an unanticipated feminist turning point. Ms. Daniels is an adult film star and, like the president, an unapologetic self-promoter. Hers is not a female archetype that has historically garnered much respect, trust or sympathy. Yet here she is, an imperfect,

⁶⁰ Filipovic, Jill. "Stormy Daniels, Feminist Hero," *The New York Times*, 24th August 2018, Opinion

⁶¹ Filipovic, Jill. "Stormy Daniels, Feminist Hero," *The New York Times*, 24th August 2018, Opinion

entirely self-possessed woman telling her story with clarity and without shame. And here we are, actually listening to her.⁶²

This, I would argue, is what it means to be powerfully feminine. It is to be human, to be fully a woman, in whatever way that one may express it. It is to be flawed and confused and everything that men are allowed to be. Archetypes of female superheroes, those who fight against the odds in a perfectly moral, asexual kind of way, aren't real, and only allowing those kinds of women- or women who fit into male roles, which is sort of like this superhero idea- to be heard isn't really allowing them to be heard at all.

This is the trap *The Handmaid's Tale* falls into in its second season. It devolves into a show about one woman rising up against the patriarchy despite what we've seen are painful and dire consequences. We watch as women have their body parts removed: fingers, hands, eyes, tongue, and even the clitoris. We've seen women have their hands burned in front of large crowds, people stoned, people hung, pregnant women locked in solitary confinement. And then we have June, who has already escaped and been caught once, who takes her baby, the most sacred prize in Gilead, and gets her out. And then June goes back, for her other child, to a world of constant surveillance and unbeatable odds. This is the main problem with the second season of the show- a character once dealing with being both the mother and the warrior, and navigating how to treat the other women around her, even when they abuse her, now becomes a superhero type figure, someone who knows the odds are totally against her, but remains in place to "save the day". While the show is fine to present this story, June is going against all the very real consequences that she's seen in order to play the hero archetype. The story that moved the show forward before this was much more interesting in some ways- it showed women in all sorts of

⁶² Filipovic, Jill. "Stormy Daniels, Feminist Hero," *The New York Times*, 24th August 2018, Opinion

non traditional archetypes- or rather, traditional archetypes that have layers and layers of complexity upon them because of the women within them.

In an article titled “The Trouble With Uplift,” Adolf Reed discusses mainstream media and the effort to consolidate complex identity and struggle into a sort of fable against oppression. He writes:

Whatever Coogler’s auteurish intentions to render *Black Panther* a fable of American black empowerment, its release triggered an all-too-familiar torrent of hype that alchemizes the collective struggle for racial justice into still one more praise song hymning a hyperindividualist hero Challenging Stultifyingly Generic White Oppression and Overcoming It Against All Odds.⁶³

While white supremacy is a separate and complex issue⁶⁴ from the fictional republic of Gilead and the women versus the patriarchy fight in general), I think this line perfectly exemplifies the point I am trying to make, which is that, in making Offred a one dimensional superhero who beats out the very real consequences we’ve seen, we consolidate her into the ‘one woman who can save everyone from a impossibly oppressive, misogynistic regime,’ and we do an injustice to the kind of female character she could be, as well as the kind of show *The Handmaid’s Tale* was setting out to be. Filipovic, in her op-ed, wrote:

Ms. Daniels also undercuts liberal impulses to turn her into an oversimplified feminist hero. She is a vastly imperfect person by any standard, at times brave and at times venal, obviously admirable and obviously self-interested. These complications, of course, exist in most human beings. But most human beings could not survive the scrutiny she is under, nor so deftly dodge efforts at simplistic caricature. What’s incredible is to see Ms. Daniels embody so many human extremes — so much boldness, so many flaws, and so many taboos broken — and to see her story nonetheless believed and acted upon. [...]The potential triumph of a deeply imperfect woman over a powerful

⁶³ Reed, Adolf “The Trouble with Uplift” *The Baffler*, no. 41 (<https://thebaffler.com/salvos/the-trouble-with-uplift-reed>)

⁶⁴ One that does intersect, but is separate; the two aren’t comparable because they have vastly different histories and problems; can’t distill women’s oppression to equal oppression of black people over centuries, although we can identify their intersections.

man won't exactly break a glass ceiling. But it could put a little crack in a stereotype just as tough to shatter.⁶⁵

I want to see the stories of the women in the *Handmaid's Tale*. I want to see the vastly imperfect and venal Serena Joy, the obviously admirable and obviously self-interested Emily, the brave and bold June, and the Moira who dodges efforts at simplistic caricature. These imperfect women triumphing makes them human, and therefore the best kind of example; one someone may actually be able to put themselves in and imagine. I think that seeing them tear down the Republic of Gilead would make for a fascinating show. But I want to see them do it in their extremes, to have women on television that are terrible and abhorrent, vain and lost, and still worth watching, listening to, and rooting for. I want people to be convinced to support women and believe women, even when they aren't perfect heroes- because who is?

Switched at Birth and Portrayals of Rape on Television

Finally, this brings me to an unexpected storyline on the television show *Switched at Birth*. For the first four seasons, the show deals with the fallout after two teenage girls named Bay and Daphne realize they were switched at birth⁶⁶. Their families come to live together and we watch as they spend their high school and college years learning to coexist. By the fourth season, the girls have reached college. Bay goes to a party at her ex boyfriend, Tank's, house, while dating another man named Emmett. Bay wakes up naked in bed next to Tank with no recollection of the night before. She goes to her birth mother and pretends to ask for advice for a friend. She asks if one has cheated on their significant other if they can't remember sleeping with the other person. Her mom calmly responds that that isn't sex- her friend has been raped. Bay

⁶⁵ Filipovic, Jill. "Stormy Daniels, Feminist Hero," *The New York Times*, 24th August 2018, Opinion

⁶⁶ Show has been praised for representation of the deaf community and American Sign Language used predominantly.

comes to the realization that what happened to her was rape; she could not remember consenting. As Caroline Linton puts it in her article titled “ABC Family’s Switched at Birth Tackles Campus Rape”:

The “I don’t want anyone to get in trouble because of me” is a theme in *Switched at Birth*, where Bay is at first unwilling to report the incident, although an investigation goes forward without her consent. At first, she refuses to speak to the school but relents as it spirals—and her name is printed online. Having both characters’ names publicized and “dragged through the mud” was important, Weiss [executive producer] said.⁶⁷

The blurry nature of Bay’s realization, the fact Tank was her boyfriend at one point and that they remained friends, and the fact Bay hadn’t originally wanted to press charges all made for a messy, complicated rape storyline. But the show handled it with integrity; Bay had been known to be selfish, compulsive, and angry, but she was still heard and believed.

And what message is the show trying to put forth? Someone who was a ‘fan favorite’ like Tank, someone who is by all means a ‘nice guy,’ can still do something evil. He may not think it is evil. The culture that surrounds sexual assault, the examples men and women are given, all point to the idea that men should value domination and take what they want, thinking solely of themselves. The show wants to point us towards what kind of conversations need to happen for things like this to stop happening. Again, as Linton writes:

The emphasis on “yes means yes” is what sets *Switched at Birth* apart from other television shows that have dealt with rape in the past. “It’s you need to get a yes—that’s just a dramatic change for men to understand,” Weiss said.

⁶⁷ Linton, Caroline “ABC Family’s ‘Switched at Birth’ Tackles Campus Rape,” *The Daily Beast*, 10th February 2015 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/abc-familys-switched-at-birth-tackles-campus-rape?ref=scroll>)

Although Bay has trouble admitting she was raped, by the end of the second episode she tells school investigators that she feels Tank took advantage of her.⁶⁸

The exact lines are: "I want to make sure I understand. Are you saying that you regret having sex with Tank, or that it was not consensual?"

"I'm saying something happened and ... I wasn't okay with it."⁶⁹

Bay is confused, and understandably so. The world has taught her that her feelings surrounding sex should be minimized for men to be more comfortable, especially men she knows and loves. To admit that one of them made her upset, and to hold him accountable for it, is a radical thing to do in a society that normalizes sexual assault so rigorously. But that is what Bay, and *Switched at Birth*, does. It validates the story of a woman who isn't even sure of her own validity. A lot of viewers' reactions might have been that this wasn't rape, because we, as a society, like to bracket rape into something that only violent monsters can do. But this isn't true. This is the importance of the banality of evil, of an entire culture indoctrinating its people into thinking something like this is okay and even normal or a 'drunken mistake'.

Concluding Statements

When reading Arendt, I felt her layered studies on the banality of evil and responsibility to others applied perfectly to understanding rape culture. I hope I have successfully outlined how her theories of evil, thinking, willing, judging, personal morality, and collective responsibility all apply to rape culture. The opening I found in shifting this culture was through Woolf's writing, which proved to me what I felt was intuitive: that a culture can be shifted through its prominent

⁶⁸ Linton, Caroline "ABC Family's 'Switched at Birth' Tackles Campus Rape," *The Daily Beast*, 10th Febuary 2015 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/abc-family-switched-at-birth-tackles-campus-rape?ref=scroll>)

⁶⁹ Buffum, Joanna, "How An ABC Family Show Tackled Campus Rape In a Real and Honest Way" *Refinery 29* (<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2015/02/82114/switched-at-birth-consent-rape>)

art forms and the kind of examples of masculinity, femininity, and rape culture that are depicted. I picked three television shows that I knew in depth, and I'm sure there's a lot of work and analysis to be done with other art forms and other TV, and how they apply.

While my project comes from the point of view of a white woman, and capitalizes on my personal experiences and therefore cannot be a comprehensive project on womanhood and rape culture), I would like to note here that all issues I point out about rape culture in American society not only apply to other groups of women, but do even more so. White supremacy, capitalist society, and the oppression of various marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, are obviously deeply connected, and all make rape culture and the patriarchy that much worse. The ways rape culture negatively affects women of color and trans women is far more complicated and layered than I can cover in one paper, but capitalism, homophobia, and white supremacy intersect with toxic masculinity and makes these issues all the more terrible and complex. I also hope it is a beginning point for others to discuss their experiences with rape culture, how it changes and complicates when it intersects with their identities, and to discuss the media they consume and how it creates negative or positive representations of men and women.

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