FRIENDSHIP SHOULDN'T HURT: TOWARD A TRAUMA-LITERATE RHETORIC OF FRIENDSHIP THROUGH POST-2010 TELEVISION

by

David Powers Corwin
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Committee:

______________________________ Director

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______________________________ Department Chairperson

______________________________ Program Director

______________________________ Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

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Friendship Shouldn't Hurt: Toward a Trauma-Literate Rhetoric of Friendship through Post-2010 Television

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by

David Powers Corwin
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Director: Heidi Y. Lawrence, Associate Professor
Department of English

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DEDICATION

To all my friends I've lost along the way, thank you for the time, space, and vibrancy you gave. Most of you caused me some level of trauma and I'm not thankful for those memories. I am, though, thankful for the stories I have to tell for others who are having these same experiences, but who can't make sense of them under our current social constructs. To all my current friends, thank you for continuing to be part of the journey and for making my life full. Our connections have challenged me to center my work on making sense of these relationships.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract vi

Introduction 1

Chapter 1:The Synergies of Television and Friendships in Trauma Rhetoric: Rhetorically Situating Television's Traumatic Friendships 28

Chapter 2: Who Are We Supposed to Be Friends With?: Feminist Rhetorical Analysis, Identification, and Traumatic Friendships 59

Chapter 3: The Traumatic Reality of Friendships: Rhetorical Constructions of Trauma and Friendships 97

Chapter 4: The Fusing Together of Television Rhetoric and Public Debates on Trauma and Friendship Rhetoric 143

Conclusion 171

Works Cited 179

ABSTRACT

FRIENDSHIP SHOULDN'T HURT: TOWARD A TRAUMA-LITERATE RHETORIC OF FRIENDSHIP THROUGH POST-2010 TELEVISION

David Powers Corwin, Ph.D.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Heidi Y. Lawrence

While trauma rhetoric continues to be a focus of scholarly inquiry in a post #metoo world, friendships are not explored and included within this body of literature. This dissertation responds to this gap through a feminist rhetorical analysis of Post-2010 television, another area that lacks in rhetoric. Through an analysis of trauma and friendship rhetoric in *Private Practice*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and *The End of the F***ing World*, this study finds television perpetuates a rhetoric of trauma that decenters the survivor's experience and refocuses the narrative toward a narration of how the traumatic events in question affect the friend groups involved. Using Burke's rhetorical theory of identification and Wendy S. Hesford's framing of trauma rhetoric, the study unveils how spectators are conditioned to identify with the dominant friend character who in turn has control over the narrative. Then, the dominant character chastises the survivors or victims who have brought this trauma to the friend group. This study also finds that this same rhetoric is infiltrated in public dialogues such as the Kavanaugh-

Blasey Ford hearings, which makes this work have implications for public dialogues on trauma. Finally, the study argues for a more “trauma-literate” rhetoric of friendships and maintains that feminist rhetorical analysis of fictional and public dialogues of trauma can bring this type of literacy.

INTRODUCTION

In an era that is grappling with the effects of the -#metoo movement (Coorigan), the Trump administration (Griffin), the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing (Pollino), the Michael Kimmel case (Mangan), and Bill Cosby's conviction and subsequent release (Palmer-Mehta), trauma rhetoric continues to be a scholarly conversation that needs to be addressed as both scholars and activists work to dig up our culture's foundations in sexism that perpetuates traumatic experiences for people of varying marginalized identities. These national events within the last decade have set the stage for more dialogue around sexual violence, women's autonomy, abortion rights, etc.; however, while scholars and activists are more aware of some of these issues, arguably, there has been very little to *change* this rhetoric as we navigate a Post-Trump America and an overwhelmingly conservative Supreme Court. In her discussion of abortion rights during the 2012 election, Sarah. S. Watt argues that "the resulting delusions of cultural rape myths and controversial religious doctrine help people imagine their place in the social order even as they remain disconnected from it." (240). While she argues that women persist against this anti-abortion rhetoric, the mere fact that this conversation continues communicates a halted paradigm regarding violence and, implicitly, regarding trauma. Even though there are many fields that do engage with these national events about trauma, rhetoric needs to be engage more so with these debates because a rhetorical

analysis asks scholars and spectators to answer the questions “what do we say about trauma?; “How do we say what we say about trauma?” and “where do we say what we say about trauma (i.e. the rhetorical situation)?” Other fields such as political science, psychology, sociology, and other social science disciplines don’t necessary call for the specific questions, which is what rhetoric can do for scholarship on trauma more generally.

The “where do we say it?” question is an integral piece to this dissertation because trauma rhetoric is not inclusive of all types of intimate relationships and tends to focus only on familial and romantic attachments. While we publicly give lots of “lip service” to the basic human need for friendships, we don’t engage in scholarly debate what happens when they “hurt” or become messy and in turn are traumatic experiences. (Sow and Friedman). This lack of inclusion implicitly communicates that friendships cannot be traumatic experiences that people need to heal from, particularly as they function within the same heteropatriarchal capitalist expectations that other intimate bonds do and scholars recognize as legitimate (Hattery; Hattery and Smith).

Lastly, while scholarship in trauma rhetoric doesn’t focus on friendships, the field also lacks any analysis of fictional serialized television and typically focuses on how trauma is featured in news media. (Fernandez et. Al; Hesford; Lawrence et.al; Rothe; Yaeger). Furthermore, fictional television is focusing much more on friendships in a Post-*Friends* and post-network era of television because of our current streaming platforms abilities to cater to multiple non-mainstream audiences. As I argue in this dissertation, fictional television is a platform that needs rhetorical analyses of trauma

because it can provide a more intimate representation of friendships due to its length, but also because of its accessibility to many survivors' living rooms.

What We Know From Trauma Studies

While this dissertation is not a specific intervention into trauma studies, the scholarship in the social sciences brings together a theoretical framework that rhetoricians have and continue to draw from. According to trauma scholar Judith Herman:

> To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events. When the events are natural disasters or 'acts of God,' those who bear witness sympathize readily with the victim. But when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides. (7)

Rhetoric engages with trauma through some foundational texts in trauma studies; however, there are some others that rhetoric could draw from in order to have a more nuanced and current discussion of trauma. Many writing studies scholars use *Trauma and Recovery*, as their theoretical framework for their pedagogical studies; however, Herman's focus tends to be on cisgender women's experiences with sexual assault and veterans who are suffering from PTSD, which does leave out a plethora of other traumas that people experience. Another important work that is necessary in understanding how trauma has been studied in the social sciences is Ruth Leys' *Trauma: A Genealogy* that focuses on how trauma studies has evolved from Freudian conceptions to the present. According to Leys:

> the history of trauma itself is marked by an alternation between episodes of forgetting and remembering, as the experiences of one generation of psychiatrists have been neglected only to be revived at a later time. Just as it took World War II to 'remember' the lessons of World War 1, so it took the experience of Vietnam to 'remember' the lessons of World War II, including the psychiatric lessons of the Holocaust. (15)

Leys shows us how war and genocide have contributed to our understandings of trauma, but also of memory more generally, which situates how trauma is certainly an ongoing experience and how people have varying experiences even when faced with similar circumstances (i.e., a global war). That said, the history of trauma studies focused less on the individual and physical response to trauma until more recently.

Since Herman and Ley's publications, Bessel Van der Kolk's 2014 book *The Body Keeps The Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* has become not only a foundational text in trauma studies, but a common text that therapists use in their work with clients. In his work, Van Der Kolk uses neuroscience concepts as a way to legitimize the experiences of trauma survivors, which is not something that has been done in trauma recovery work to date. Furthermore, he focuses on how the body remembers trauma through its reaction to situations where survivors remember their pasts or feel threatened. Van Der Kolk argues that this shift in trauma studies "[helps] us understand why traumatized people so often keep repeating the same problems and have such trouble learning from experience. We now know that their behaviors are not the result of moral failing or signs of lack of willpower or bad character–they are caused by actual changes

in the brain" as a way to protect oneself from potential psychological harm" (3). Even though Van der Kolk is a trauma studies scholar rather than a rhetorician, his work should be seen as a shift in how trauma can be conceptualized and the role of rhetoric within this perspective. Furthermore, Van der Kolk calls for survivors to

> physically [reexperience] the past in the present and then reworking it in a safe and supportive 'container' can be powerful enough to create new, supplemental memories…..structures do not erase bad memories or even neutralize them….Instead, a structure offers fresh options–an alternative memory in which your basic human needs are met and your longings for love and protection are fulfilled. (302)

If the body remembers trauma this way, then the rhetorics of trauma that are out there don't coincide with this research, but perpetuate narratives that survivors' trauma responses are a sign of "moral failing" and focus on how they affect other people, a major cornerstone of this dissertation. Furthermore, while this restructuring of memory is critically important according to neuroscience concepts, our current narratives have to be rhetorically reframed in order to continue more trauma-informed work and to benefit survivors. Also, in taking a step back, this lack of common understanding of what trauma is or can open space for friendships to not only be overlooked but invalidated because while rhetoric discusses friendships, as will be addressed later in the chapter, rhetoric only discusses whether or not we need friendships not what rhetorics of trauma coexist and infiltrate these relationships. This fusing together of these issues creates scholarly

space for a trauma-literate rhetoric of friendships to be gathered through fictional television.

What is Trauma Rhetoric?

While scholarship is engaging much more with trauma, the scholarship is still fairly young. Much of the work in trauma rhetoric lies within writing studies rather than rhetoric and doesn't address how friendships can be relationships that rhetorically craft traumatic experiences. In writing studies, discussions about personal narrative and personal trauma have been subjects of debate since at least the 1990s with the special issue in *College Composition and Communication* that focused on "personal and innovative writing" (Anderson and MacCurdy 14). Since then, writing studies scholars have discussed the role of PTSD, psychology, and personal narratives in writing classrooms (Anderson et al. 2000; Payne 2000) Furthermore, the literature on trauma in the field is mostly focused on the first-year composition classroom, and almost exclusively on physical trauma (sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and eating disorders) or national trauma (particularly Hurricane Katrina, 9/11, and the War on Terror) (Borrowman 2005; Hurlbert 2012; Payne, 2000) leaving out much of the interpersonal and emotional trauma that many writers face. While these experiences are certainly ones that contemporary students are struggling with in writing classrooms, not much attention has been given to how trauma is rhetorically situated for spectators prior to coming to college writing classrooms or after. Scholars know that trauma is an experience that college students and people more generally experience, but scholars don't know what rhetorics people are learning about trauma as they relate to friendships and

televised representations of these relationships. Furthermore, another issue that rhetoricians need to wrestle with is that the field has ebbed and flowed in its focus on trauma with very little common understanding among scholars about what trauma means in the field. A study of friendships could do some of this work because some of the same concerns regarding common understanding of terms come up in friendship studies as well.

How Has Trauma Rhetoric Changed?

Arguably, scholars in rhetoric have been moving toward expanded understandings of the relationships between framing and public understanding of trauma for the last decade (Fernadez et. al; Hesford; Lawrence et. al). Wendy S. Hesford has been one of the key scholars in this work and will be the theoretical framework used for much of chapter three because of her focus on media narratives and the rhetorics of trauma that news stories continue to tell through world news. Much of her work focuses on refugee trauma, immigration, and the narratives that the media tells regarding these traumas. Her framing needs to be extended to fictional television–something that she doesn't do in her own work. For example, she focuses on the pedagogical implications of teaching the 1996 documentaries, *Rape Stories* and *Calling the Ghosts: A Story About Rape War and Women*, and argues that:

> The term trauma is more often used to refer to the state of mind that ensues from an injury, than to the blow itself. The fantasy can be read as an articulation of trauma-as- devastating and not-worked-through experience (the more common use of the term) - and as an experience lived belatedly at the level of its

> unspeakable truth (the more specialized notion of trauma in psychoanalytic theory). The fantasy thus beckons viewers into the territory of psychoanalysis to consider the "textual anxieties" surrounding the representation of trauma. (195)

From this perspective, scholars can see that there is an understanding that trauma is a series of reactions to harmful or negative experiences and indeed does not end after the event and/or perpetrator is out of the picture. This understanding continues to be important for fictional television and friendships because of the nature of these types of storytelling and relationships. Fictional serialized television expands years (even decades in some cases), which gives characters the opportunity to unpack their traumatic pasts, but also for spectators to be along for the ride. Friendships can cover a short time span, but they can also be lifelong, which provides space for more discussions about trauma and its effects after the traumatic event or series of events. This continued understanding of trauma is crucial for an analysis of trauma rhetoric, television, and friendships.

In moving this understanding of trauma toward fictional television, Hesford's focus on "textual anxieties" illustrates how texts can indeed situate trauma for spectators and that rhetorical analyses of media texts provide a framework for moving toward more trauma-literate rhetoric. Rikki Thompson also reinforces this understanding through her connection to the scholarship on trauma in writing studies:

> The rhetoric of recovery and discourses of healing are a direct reflection of how the American ideology about trauma and abuse has shifted over the last twenty-five years. Recent national and world events such as child abuse allegations in the Catholic Church, the events of September 11th, and the war in Iraq remind us that

> trauma is inevitable. As survivors of these traumatic events engage in healing possibly through the "writing cure" we are given an opportunity to examine and critique the rhetoric of recovery, thereby making visible notions that are being constructed and circulated as common sense notions. (672)

However, even though scholars see writing as a potential "cure" for trauma, scholars focus very infrequently on how watching and experiencing trauma moves survivors to a place where they can make these strides through writing, particularly in fictional television. Furthermore, while writing might be a "cure," the rhetoric of trauma that created the problem in the first place needs to be addressed. Also, it doesn't seem to be a coincidence that narrative (particularly television news narratives) are spaces where rhetoricians focus on in their analyses of trauma. Hesford and Shuman argue that "the precarious subject is often narrated by others, including… the perpetrators" (50). Furthermore, Thompson argues that "in consuming trauma stories, it is necessary not to look solely at the traumatic events of the story but at the message that the author is trying to convey in the act of writing." (672). Hesford, Shuman, and Thompson all acknowledge that narrative is important and more specifically who holds the power to tell the narrative and how they tell it to others. Also, while Hesford, Shuman, and Thompson all provide a more critical analysis of trauma in media narratives, they mostly address national and collective traumas and don't focus on individuals or friend groups, but their framing provides space for more rhetorical analyses like these to be done.

In moving toward how scholarship has addressed more individualized trauma, rhetoricians have mostly focused on how memory is constructed through trauma and how

conceptions of the self change (Brison;Crowley;Pructic and Lacey;Vivian). Brison argues "If one's self, or one's *true* self, is considered to be identical to one's will, then a survivor cannot be considered the same as her pre-trauma self, since what she is able to do post-trauma is so drastically altered" (27-28).One can see that trauma becomes a space where an alternate self is constructed, which in turn potentially causes the person to be a different version of themselves in their communities both throughout and following the healing process. This same idea of "alternate self" is also indicative of how humans have related to friends and what early rhetoricians argued was a maker's space for friendships. In his discussion of humans' need for friends, Aristotle argues that "we are better able to observe our friends than ourselves and their actions than our own. But more so because to truly befriend others is to stare life's uncertainties, limits and ambiguities in the face. To seek friendship is to seek wisdom" (qtd. on Vernon 164). Arguably through friendships, people look for alternate selves to serve as a mirror for our own moral codes. With this framework in mind, it makes sense to see how trauma and friendship rhetoric can come together to make sense of the experience of a trauma survivor. However, television, while making a connection between friendship and trauma, does so problematically because of its lack of focus on the survivor, which is a problem with representation that needs to be addressed rhetorically because of the messaging that is sent through language, communication, and characterization.

In moving the conversation toward media narratives, rhetoricians cited up to this point tend to focus on current events and more on news media rather than serialized fictional television. For example, in her book on non-fictional television, *Popular*

Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in Mass Media, Ann Rothe provides an analysis of the first-person accounts of trauma that are featured in *The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Phil Donahue Show,* and *The Jerry Springer Show*. She argues that "Although first-generation talk shows claimed to empower the oppressed, disenfranchised, and marginalized and to practice the identity politics notion of making the personal political, they actually promoted the idea that individuals can and need to change nothing but themselves" (52). This rhetoric of self-change as a response to traumatic pasts has continued into the last decade through news stories, but I also, I argue through fictional television narratives.

In order to bridge the gap between news media and fictional television, an understanding of how spectators come to a fictional text must be examined rhetorically. In contrast to talk shows, fictional television has to earn an audience in a way that reality/talk show television doesn't. In many cases the host of a talk show already has a fan base that follows them to their show while a new fictional series has to rely on communicating a rhetoric that will appeal to their target audiences. Spectators are asked to engage in the same rhetoric of trauma that Rothe says that talk show spectators are asked to take part in regarding self-change (Brison). If we can't return to our "pre-trauma" selves, then the rhetoric perpetuated by some of these talk shows reframes a rhetoric of trauma that is problematic for spectators. According to Sujata Moorti, "fictional programs are able to introduce into the public arena issues pertaining to the body, affect, and desire. The news, on the other hand, relying on official sources of information, can only re-produce dominant understanding of cultural categories; it is

unable to include voices from the margins that may provide a radical departure from hegemonic perspectives" (33). Moorti's focus on the bifurcation of types of television provides a foundation for understanding the importance of separating them because of their impact on the audience and the stories they are entrusted to tell. That said, while the stories and the evidence may be different, the ways that trauma is framed rhetorically follows the same problematic patterns on news media as well as in fictional television, which I argue more fully in chapter 3. Furthermore, what's implied through Moorti's point is that trauma rhetoricians have only focused on news reporting because of this officiality and hegemony that Moorti claims exists in the news.

This same officiality applies to friendships because of the lack of cultural focus and language around friendships today–another reason that these fields weave together seamlessly. Because of its alleged "objectiveness," the news communicates trauma narratives that are deemed factual, but in and of themselves are hegemonies that communicate particular messages to groups of willing spectators (whether they are fully conscious of this submission or not) (Lull). Then, this hegemony creates problematic rhetorics of trauma that decenter the survivor and normalizes this rhetoric. In turn, another hegemony that is put in place is that due to friendships' lack of "officiality," that they are not seen as experiences that can cause traumatic ones because they aren't valued in the first place. This rhetoric still exists in fictional television and the theory needs to move in a more trauma-literate direction in order to undo some of these problematic trauma and friendship rhetorics.

Another area of trauma rhetoric that is important for framing television's traumatic relationships is how academia "consumes" and frames the traumatized body because of its focus on how the media certainly does the same. In addition to Anne Rothe's work, Patricia Yaeger's work is foundational in discussing academic rhetorics of trauma and how we consume them through media. She argues that:

> ...we inhabit an academic world that is busy consuming trauma--eating, swallowing, perusing, consuming, exchanging, circulating, creating professional connections--through its stories about the dead. We are obsessed with stories that must be passed on, that must not be passed over. But aren't we also drawn to stories from within an elite culture driven by its own economies: by the pains and pleasures of needing to publish, by salaries and promotions that are themselves driven by acts of publication, by the pleasures of merely circulating? (29).

Yaeger pushes back on the academic study of trauma and recognizes that as we moved into the 2000s, trauma became a commodity for not only mainstream culture (which Rothe shows us), but also for academic research. She challenges rhetoricians to ask themselves why these stories need to be told and for whom, which is a question that continues to be wrestled with not only in rhetoric, but academia more largely. While the need for feminist rhetorical methodologies in chapter 2 will be discussed, Yaeger's concern is one that needs to be taken up methodologically in order for rhetorics of trauma to benefit survivors who are reading these narratives and the power imbalance between the researcher and the survivor–a key component of feminist methodologies.

Yaeger also argues that "Rhetoric is often complicit in evacuating dead men's and women's worlds; it can cancel the brutal facticity of the body's local date for the appropriative potentials of metaphor. At the same time, some form of troping, de-or re-anthropomorphizing--is inevitable whenever we speak of the dead. What does it mean to turn bodies into rhetoric?" (35). While only one of the shows I am working with focuses on a deceased character, Yaeger's focus on bodies becoming rhetoric is important because of Van der Kolk's recent conversations on how the body remembers trauma. Van Der Kolk's focus on restructuring memories in order to heal becomes a rhetoric of trauma in and of itself because of its focus on reframing an experience that has happened and telling a new narrative for new audiences. That said, what the media does with this is take the "restructured narrative" and communicates it in harmful and demoralizing ways for survivors rather than allowing survivors to provide their own restructuring.

In pulling together Van der Kolk, Hesford, Rothe, and Yaeger's work, it is clear that media, specifically fictional television, is a logical place to turn in order to understand current rhetorics of trauma. Television does perpetuate problematic rhetoric through its construction of friendships because it decenters the survivor's narrative and structures the narrative around how the traumatic experience(s) affect the friend group more largely. That said, television can't be where the conversation stops, which is why a multidisciplinary approach is taken in this dissertation. The fusing together of televised fiction, trauma rhetoric, friendships, and public debates are what will provide a vehicle for transforming current rhetorics of friendships as they relate to trauma in order to focus more on their potential for social change while also recognizing their complications.

Much of the conversation regarding trauma today focuses on the validity of the survivor's testimony and whether or not justice can be obtained for the survivor. Furthermore, the media rhetoric around trauma and violence continues to flood people's understanding of trauma and how society views survivors' experiences. As Michelle A. Holling further argues, "Recognizing discursive violence for what it is, and the role of media frames, reveals how profoundly audiences could be primed" (251). Discursive violence and media's framing are extremely important as we think about trauma rhetoric because of how violent discourses, as seen in some of the political cases mentioned previously, rhetorically construct narratives both fictionally and realistically. Valerie Palmer-Mehta argues that the survivors' narratives against Bill Cosby in *New York Magazine* "... serve as an alternative community history that documents not only their private experiences of disbelief and despair but also their public, collective movement to reclaim their stories. Despite the disconfirmation the women endured, their accounts illustrate the power of persistence in claiming space and giving voice" (175). This further illustrates the general impact of survivor voices, but in turn, scholars could answer why and how audiences continue to be conditioned to either overlook survivors' stories or buy into these problematic rhetorics of trauma.

What We Know About Friendships

While the scholarship in rhetoric certainly acknowledges the importance of this type of study, it doesn't fully attend to friendships due to its focus on other types of relationships (familial and romantic). Friendships have been studied somewhat in the social sciences since the 1960s, but picked up more momentum in the 1990s. In

Friendship: Developing a Sociological Perspective Graham Allen defines friendship as "a voluntary, informal, personal relationship" (17). Certainly, friendships do not have a legal contract and are often time-sensitive due to location, common space (workplace, education, etc.) and social context (parenthood, retirement, etc.) They also are socially seen as connected to individual personal needs rather than ones that are deemed universally necessary or gain a level of capital (human or economic), which I problematize throughout the dissertation. That said, through this vague definition of friendships, one can see that much like trauma, there is very little common understanding of the relationship, which makes lots of scholarly space for a discussion of these relationships as well as advocates for a more fluid understanding of them more generally. Allen's definition also mostly focuses on friendship duos rather than friend groups, which is a problem that some scholars have said about friendship studies more generally (Sow and Friedman *Big Friendships*). Even though this definition is vague, there are some hard and fast understandings of the relationship implied here and in scholarship. Friendships certainly need to be discussed as groups because many people have such relationships, but also, in the context of this dissertation, this is an additional layer that television adds in its storytelling. While friendships are discussed across the lifespan (college, professional careers, academia, retirement), they are mostly discussed in duo relationships rather than groups, which certainly leaves a gap in scholarship. (Shrodt et. al; Wantanbe and Falci). Since television gives more narrative space to discuss friend groups, this medium certainly provides scholarly space to make claims about how trauma is rhetorically created through friendships.

However, scholars have continued to problematize that simplistic understanding of this relationship because of the fluidity of the category more generally, but also, I argue because of its ability to also facilitate traumatic experiences, which are overlooked. (Sow and Friedman; Ryle; Schweitzer). While there is certainly some agency in the ambiguity of friendship and it's a way of queering binary understandings of relationships more generally (Nehamas, Vernon, Garver, Birdsong), friendships have to be more front and central to the conversations that focus on trauma because these relationships are often some of the first types of connections that we have and arguably overlap with our familial and romantic relationships. In Plato's *Lysis,* even Socrates acknowledges that our relationships with parents are often our first friendships (Garver). Friendships are some of our first intimate bonds and when boundaries are violated, they can often be from people we have or still call friends. For these reasons, these complicated, but necessary relationships have to be part of trauma dialogues. Furthermore, while trauma certainly happens in friendship duos, the traumatic experiences that happen within friend groups is an additional layer that brings nuance to discussion about friendships, but also about trauma more generally. This additional layer has implications for rhetoric because while rhetoric can certainly be communicated between two people, a stronger case for the impact of rhetoric can be had in larger friend groups. In this dissertation, I call for a trauma-literate rhetoric of friendship that addresses friendships as traumatic experiences and that in order for these relationships to be the healing spaces that we've communicated they are elsewhere (Kafer, Schweitzer, Nehamas), we need to have a trauma literacy that

decenters the impact the trauma has on the friend group and in turn focuses much more on the survivor's healing experience.

Toward a More Trauma-Literate Rhetoric

In moving toward what "counts" as trauma today, the national conversations tend to focus on physical and sexual trauma within intimate partner or familial relationships as if these relationships are already trauma-informed in some way. However, a trauma-informed rhetoric insinuates that there is some basis for an understanding of trauma that can "inform" our ways of knowing. A trauma-informed approach to any curriculum, pedagogy, analysis, or practice also insinuates that one can be fully "informed" at some point rather than engaging in an ongoing practice of literacy, which is what is needed in order to dismantle problematic rhetorics of trauma and friendships. A trauma literacy asks us to wrestle with what we know about trauma and to continue to build on this understanding as we navigate relationships. Also, since a trauma-informed practice has mostly dismissed friendships, a new framing is necessary in order to make sense of these relationships.

I argue that rhetoricians need to take a step back and address the lack of trauma literacy that exists more generally, particularly in friendships. Since friendships are relationships that are seen as not causing trauma, trauma literacy is not an expectation or a foundation for the development of these relationships. In order to really see friendships as the subversive relationships that scholars say they are (Nehamas; Sow and Friedman), we need to address the lack of trauma literacy within these relationships publicly and fictionally and call for a trauma-literate rhetoric that centers the experiences of survivors

and decenters the power that friend groups hold over survivors. A trauma-informed practice can be a series of checkboxes and a trauma literacy asks people to continue to engage with cultural assumptions and misinformation about the impact that traumatic friendships can have on survivors.

While there has been very little connection in scholarship between friendships and trauma, this dissertation brings together how survivors experience trauma within friend groups and how television perpetuates a rhetoric that makes the effects of trauma on the friend group as the epicenter of the narrative rather than the survivor's healing process, which is a form of discursive violence that has public implications. A trauma-literate rhetoric of friendship extends the conversations that have been had in trauma rhetoric by 1) expanding the conversations on media to fictional television; 2) unpacking how trauma narratives are told by whom and for whom within friend groups; 3) reframing narratives that bring healing to survivors through relationships that are supposed to be healing spaces in the first place—friendships.

As discussed previously, trauma rhetoric has almost exclusively focused on news media and leaves out how trauma rhetoric is infused throughout fictional television. By having such a narrow focus in the media on trauma rhetoric (i.e., news reporting), rhetoric does not take into consideration the vast array of traumas that are presented to spectators. According to Bronwyn Williams, "Television may not be their [students'] only common ground, but in terms of forms of discourse and communication, it is one of the most powerful and pervasive" and argues that all students come with some sort of television literacy because we all have some level of it from our youth (37). If this

literacy is already in place for most folks, then television is a space where trauma literacy can be learned. Furthermore, I argue that most people have some level of friendship and trauma literacy when they come to most spaces even if they are not fully aware of what that is for them or how to navigate some of these past experiences. This connection based on literacy and potential moves toward an increased and even just literacy is another way these three areas come together to make this argument about trauma and friendships.

In transitioning to why this topic is important in this specific decades' television narratives, trauma rhetoric within television has been an issue for much longer than the 2010s. This decade has been chosen to keep within the theme of a discussion of how current national movements make this analysis important in more public arenas. This project focuses on Shonda Rhimes's *Private Practice* (a medical soap opera), Brian Yorkey's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (a teen drama), and Charles S. Forsman's *The End of the F***ing* World (a teen dark comedy), which all fall under the larger umbrella of melodrama. The reason for choosing these series is because they all have trauma narratives as integral pieces of their larger narratives and have aired in the last decade. While they are all melodramas, they each occupy different subgenre spaces (teen drama, teen dark comedy, and soap operas) which makes a stronger argument for rhetoricians because of the similar messages that are being sent across subgenres. The plots of each series are radically different (which I explore more in Chapter 1) but they all perpetuate the same rhetoric of trauma that decenters the survivor and focuses on the health of the friend group, particularly its dominant figure (which I explore more in Chapters 2 and 3). Also, these series are either driven by a response to characters' traumas (*Thirteen*

Reasons Why and *The End of the F***ing World*) or at some point pivot toward this type of narrative *(Private Practice*). Lastly, these shows focus on friendship narratives as their core journeys. All three series create anti-nuclear family spaces and therefore put emphasis on developing close friendships that function as families of choice. While each of the series focus on relationships within specific contexts (high school and the workplace), the term "friend" is used to discuss certain relationships over others. Rather than these characters serving as a superficial, pursed network of people, they see their friends as people whom they care for and shape their lives. Also, some of the characters form friendships over the course of the series, but don't have these relationships in place earlier in the series, which presents a narrative journey that can be unpacked by scholars. In sum, regardless how the term "friend" is used, the friend groups chastise the survivor or victim and reframe the narrative to focus on how the trauma ultimately affects the health of the friend group.

After expanding the texts we use for studying trauma rhetoric, the theoretical framing for the project itself sets us up to have a more trauma-literate rhetoric. As argued in chapter 2, feminist rhetorical analysis brings together how survivors are represented in television and how scholars and activists can advocate for change because feminist methodologies are deeply rooted in benefitting the experiences of the research participants (Kirsch and Ritchie). Feminist rhetorical analysis, particularly through television, has the potential to benefit survivors because television is often considered "a member of the family" which makes most people, including survivors, have some level of television literacy as they heal from these experiences. (Silverstone 40; B. Williams).

Furthermore, in order to discuss the rhetorical framing of this messaging, Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory of identification is used to analyze how spectators do or don't identify with particular characters due to their experiences or the power they hold in the series--another reason to use feminist methodologies (Leavy and Harris). While Burke's framework for identification presents a powerful example of how spectators identify with texts and how friends identify with friend groups, he doesn't take into consideration how identity and positionality create or even force a rhetoric of identification. Feminist methodologies point to these implicit biases through their focus on reflexivity, objectivity, and positionality, and how the researcher's standpoint matters in working with participants. (Devault and Gross; Leavy and Harris; Hartsock). Furthermore, in textual rhetorical analysis, feminist methodologies are needed to challenge Burke's theory because of the relationship between the spectator and the text, the spectator, and the dominant friend, and the dominant friend and the survivors or victims, which will be argued for more fully in Chapter 2.

In addition, melodramatic television has focused on a variety of traumatic experiences over time such as abortion, sexual assault, domestic violence, and various forms of grief and pain (Elsaesser, Illouz), so survivors are likely to have and continue to engage with these narratives in television. Moreover, in his work about contemporary narratives and characterization, Jason Mittell argues that "characters are triggered by the text but come to life as we consume fiction and are best understood as constructs of real people not simply images and sounds on a screen" (118). With this in mind, scholars can't ignore the rhetoric of trauma that is created and "triggered" through identifications

with television series prior to the 2010s and today (O'Donnell) and its appeal to people who may be survivors of traumatic experiences. A trauma-literate rhetoric can be found through this methodology because of its focus on unveiling current inequities, but also advocating for change for survivors, so that these narratives pivot toward more healthier ones. Furthermore, feminist methodologies are needed for a trauma-literate rhetoric because due to the co-opting of narratives that have been seen in news reporting and I argue fictional television, a *feminist* framing of trauma in needed in order to communicate the importance of survivor's agency within a group who isn't giving them this power.

Finally, in forming a trauma-literate rhetoric, the narratives unpacked in this dissertation will serve as examples of how friendship narratives currently lack trauma literacy and how this rhetoric can move toward advocacy for change so that friendships can indeed be healing spaces for survivors. Due to the interdisciplinarity of this project, it may be hard to see on the surface why friendship rhetoric, trauma rhetoric, and television should be discussed in unison to further a conversation about trauma rhetoric today. First, I acknowledge that I have a personal investment in this project. As someone that values friendships just as much as many of my familial connections, I find, as a spectator, taken in when television focuses on friendships and, as Sow and Friedman say, the "stretch[ing]" that takes place in these relationships over time as we evolve and our attachment to each other grow" (*Big Friendships* 91). Furthermore, I have experienced these moments myself where my friend groups either didn't believe me when I had traumatic experiences or refocused my experiences in relation to how my trauma affected their daily lives. Also, people certainly experience trauma from their friendships through

issues regarding consent, boundaries, loss, "ghosting," and many types of conflict (Coslett; Furlan). While a trauma-literate rhetoric can't guarantee that these things won't happen, what it can do is provide a healthier rhetoric for understanding friendships that requires people to see them as the subversive relationships they are and can create radical change.

Chapter Outline

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the project, **Chapter 1** is dedicated to the overview of the project, where it fits within the literature, and why the project needs to be worked on now through the scholarship used in the dissertation, specifically rhetoric. This chapter makes a case for why television and rhetorics of friendships need to be integrated in order to make this argument about trauma rhetoric. Rather than provide traditional literature review and methods chapters, this chapter focuses specifically on what has been said about friendships and television, and what trauma rhetoricians need to know from these fields in order to make arguments about their intersections. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of why fictional television is a rhetorical situation that rhetoricians should interrogate more within scholarship and provides some context of the shows that are the focal points of this dissertation's analysis.

Chapter 2 lays out Burke's rhetorical theory of identification and how it is used to discuss friendships and television. This chapter provides the foundation for how this project is a rhetorical intervention and the rhetorical work that has been done on identification and friendships up to this point, despite television studies' problematizing of spectator identification. The chapter uses all three shows as examples of spectator

identification and how feminist rhetorical analysis is necessary in order to understand any rhetoric of trauma. Furthermore, this chapter interrogates the power dynamics of the friendships in these series, despite the literature that says that friendships are defined through a lack of a power imbalance, which also makes feminist rhetorical analysis necessary for this study. This analysis finds that spectators are conditioned to identify with the trauma that the main character, the most powerful one, experiences rather than the other characters who are experiencing traumas in the main character's friend groups. In order to accomplish this rhetorical mode, the spectator is supposed to ignore and even chastise the other survivors for how their traumas affect the entire friend group. In sum, spectators are supposed to identify with how the other characters' traumas affect the most powerful characters in the series more so than the survivors themselves, even if the main character is deeply flawed–a main characteristic of melodramatic television.

Chapter 3 focuses on the overarching argument of the dissertation which is that these three shows illustrate a rhetoric of trauma that takes the focus away from the survivor or victim and toward the effects that the trauma has on the friendships present and the ones that are created in spite of the trauma. Using Wendy S. Hesford's work and some other rhetoricians, this chapter provides a rhetorical analysis of specific plotlines, relationships, and moments where the three shows perpetuate the following narratives which creates a specific overarching rhetoric of trauma: 1) the continued narrative that survivors not only want to bring harm to their survivors, but that they *should* do so; 2) the rhetorical framing of trauma through the other characters, rendering the survivor invisible and making their story "untellable" or too "chaotic" for them to tell (Goldstein). In

response to this chaos, the friend that the spectator most identifies with becomes the voice of the survivor and in turn the epicenter of the narrative. Then then move the story toward their own trauma because it is more palatable and relatable for spectators; 3) how trauma narratives are rhetorically constructed as having larger social implications, which moves the focus away from the survivor and toward the friend group. The analysis concludes that this overarching rhetoric of trauma perpetuated through friendships is a problematic one in these specific television texts over the course of the 2010s.

Chapter 4 makes the case for the fusing together of post-2010 fictional television rhetoric and public rhetoric for understanding trauma in the public sphere in a post #metoo world with the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing as a specific example while also pulling from Sow and Friedman, Derrida, and St. Onge's rhetorical analyses of friendships. The Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing was much more politically charged than trauma-informed and public reception of the case did not focus on the friend group dynamics and Kavanaugh's rhetoric in his defense as it relates to friendships and his rhetorical construction of trauma. More specifically, Kavanaugh uses friendships as a political tool to decenter survivor narratives and melodramatically makes himself the victim through this defense that is based on friend testimonies. His politicization of friendships and trauma is constructed through the following ways: 1) how friendships are subversive relationships, which makes him radical for using these testimonies 2) the gendered nature of friendships and trauma and his alleged subversion, and 3)how friendships become a political tool for reframing trauma narratives. This chapter also advocates that due to the reasons laid out in this introduction now is the time for televised

friendships to be unpacked because of the public discourse on trauma over the last decade.

The **conclusion** provides calls to action that asks scholars to consider fictional television rhetoric as a space that creates a rhetoric of trauma that is problematic for survivors. This chapter argues that this project is a multidisciplinary one that has implications for many different fields even though it's first and foremost an intervention into rhetoric. Also, this chapter provides the limitations of the project in relation to the data set. In its discussion of steps forward, the chapter calls for this same type of analysis to be done in sitcom, film, video games, social media, and music while also using other primary texts to discuss antenarratives to the analysis presented in this dissertation. Furthermore, this chapter calls for pedagogical interventions and for empirical work to be done on this topic as well. The conclusion also call for steps forward in how to intervene in these trauma and friendship rhetorics that post-2010 television perpetuates, particular referring to how this type of feminist work benefits survivors.

CHAPTER 1:THE SYNERGIES OF TELEVISION AND FRIENDSHIPS IN TRAUMA RHETORIC: RHETORICALLY SITUATING TELEVISION'S TRAUMATIC FRIENDSHIPS

Existing scholarship in trauma studies, television studies, and friendship studies has established how trauma and friendships have been represented in television. However, these relatively siloed approaches can benefit from the addition of a *rhetorical* framing of trauma, which reveals how problematic rhetorics of trauma have been perpetuated in televised friendships. As discussed in the introduction, a trauma-literate rhetoric of friendship is needed because of the density of these types of relationships in most people's lives and because of these relationships potential to facilitate traumatic experiences. While one could argue that friendships don't cause trauma and may not be a friendship if they do, what this argument doesn't take into account is that friendships are rhetorically constructed in a heteropatriarchal, capitalist world that causes trauma while also being acknowledged as positive, but often superficial relationships. Fictional television is a platform that often features friendships and more recently focuses much more on trauma, but the lacing together of these rhetorics has not been addressed. Television's traumatic friendships convey a rhetoric of trauma that perpetuates toxic and anti-healing messages for survivors who look to these relationships as spaces for healing. In order to fuse this work together for rhetorical analysis, rhetoricians need to bring

together the relevant scholarship in these three areas in order to conceptually frame the interdisciplinarity of this concern and its implications for public audiences.

This chapter, therefore, articulates what scholarship rhetoricians what rhetoricians need from television studies in order to produce scholarship that focuses on rhetorics that are perpetuated through television. First, I give an overview of the three series that are the major focus of this dissertation and how their trauma narratives fit into the overall argument. Then, I provide an overview of what rhetoricians need from television studies and friendship studies in order to understand how they communicate a rhetoric of trauma. Finally, I provide what these fields do for rhetoric and for discussions about healthy relationships and survivors' testimonies more generally.

I choose the following three shows because, as discussed in the introduction, while they are all melodramas, they each occupy different subgenre spaces (teen drama, dark comedy, and medical soap operas). Also, these series are either driven by a response to characters’ trauma or at some point pivot toward this type of narrative rather than trauma narratives being discussed for a few episodes and left in the rearview of the show’s plotline. Lastly, these shows create anti-nuclear family spaces and therefore put emphasis on developing close friendships that function as families of choice. Through their pushback on the nuclear family, these shows facilitate a space that rhetorically situates friendships as “better,” but in turn, facilitate traumatic experiences. Furthermore, each of these shows was supposed to present more trauma-informed perspectives, and in turn present toxic friendship rhetoric.

***Private Practice*:**

Private Practice is an ABC medical soap opera that is a spin-off of the continually popular *Grey's Anatomy*. The show lasted from 2007-2013 and featured the narrative of Dr. Addison Montgomery (played by Kate Walsh) as she leaves Seattle Grace Hospital and moves to Los Angeles to work in a private practice. The series follows Addison as she transitions from her illustrious career as an Ob-Gyn and fetal surgeon to a private practitioner. She also continues to struggle with relationships and fertility which are main components of her narrative from *Grey's Anatomy.* While she comes to L.A. to work with her best friends Sam and Naomi Bennett (played by Taye Diggs and Audra McDonald), she soon becomes close friends with her colleagues, Pete Wilder (play by Tim Daly), Charlotte King (played by KaDee Strickland), Cooper Freedman (played by Paul Adelstein), Dell Parker (played by Chris Lowell) and Violet Turner (played by Amy Brenneman). Also, later in the series, Amelia Shepherd, her ex-sister-in-law, (played by Caterina Scorsone) joins the practice. Like any medical soap opera, there are a variety of jaw dropping and hyperbolic examples of medical crises and plot spins; however, this project will focus on Violet Turner's rape (as she terms it) by her patient, Katie Kent (played by Amanda Foreman), who drugs Violet and performs a c-section to take Violet's unborn child because she believes the child is hers. Katie is a patient with schizophrenia, which causes her to go into alternative modes of reality and often seem euphoric. Violet survives, but for the remainder of the series continues to face adversity from her friends, her husband Pete Wilder, and even the medical board for her healing process. At no point in the series does Violet's narrative not center the experience

of her rape and her recovery process. In addition to this primary trauma narrative, Charlotte King is also raped by a patient and Amelia Shepherd is a recovering drug addict who gives birth to a child without a brain. They face not only adversity from the rest of the friend group, but Addison, the character whom spectators are supposed to identify with, centers the narrative on how she deals with their traumatic experiences in relation to hers. She doesn't provide selfless support for her friends' healing processes and retraumatizes many of these people, an issue that will be interrogated in chapter 2.

***Thirteen Reasons Why*:**

Thirteen Reasons Why is a Netflix original series, created by Brian Yorkey, that is based on Jay Asher's novel by the same name. Lasting four seasons (2017-2020), the series focuses on the students of a fictional high school, Liberty High, after the suicide of one of their peers, Hannah Baker (played by Katherine Langford) . The first season follows thirteen cassette tapes that Hannah created before her suicide that laid out "the reasons why" she made her choice. The main character, Clay Jensen (played by Dylan Minnette), is the only person discussed on the tapes that Hannah says is not culpable for her death and the series follows Clay's mental health journey and recovery from this loss. Seasons two through four take place where the novel leaves off and focuses on a variety of coming out narratives, Bryce Walker's (played by Justin Prentice) murder, and more conversations about mental health and sexual violence in high schools. Clay Jensen becomes the focal point of the television series when in the novel he plays a much more limited and less outspoken role. Also, the novel takes place over the course of an evening rather than weeks like the first season does. Furthermore, Clay's chivalric need to defend

Hannah’s honor and others is exponentially heightened in all four seasons. He takes a lead in working with Tyler Downs (played by Devin Druid) as he deals with his almost mass school shooting attempt, Justin Foley (played by Brandon Flynn) as he recovers from addiction and family abandonment, and co-leads the quest to find and hide Bryce Walker’s murderer. Once Clay becomes the identifiable character, he is then seen by his peers as “The hero that holds everything together”- Ani (S3 E1 “If You’re Breathing, You’re a Liar”) and we follow his trauma and more importantly focus on how Hannah’s suicide traumatizes the people on her tapes and the friendships developed in spite of her death.

The End of the Fing World*:**

Created by Charles S Foreman, *The End of the F***ing World* is a British dark comedy that is based off his graphic novel of the same name. After airing in the United Kingdom, Netflix aired the series internationally in 2018 and aired for two seasons. The series focuses on two teenagers, James (played by Alex Lawther) and Alyssa (played by Jessica Barden), as they run away from home. James believes that he is a psychopath because he enjoys killing animals and now wants to kill a human. Viewers also find that as a child, James watches his mother complete suicide and he hasn’t had a close attachment to his father. Alyssa is estranged from her father and hates her mother’s new partner which makes her wish to be on her own. After killing Clive Koch (played by Jonathan Aris) following his attempted rape of Alyssa, James leaves spectators thinking that he won’t be back. However, James and Alyssa are later reunited and meet Bonnie (played by Naomi Ackie), who wants to kill both of them as revenge for Clive’s murder.

Clive was Bonnie's professor and love interest, but she's unaware of the trauma he caused Alyssa. This project mostly focuses on season two and Bonnie's character as it serves to craft a rhetoric of trauma. This specific series is also of interest because it presents a bit of a different construction of friendships because the narrative only mentions friendships a few times throughout the series; however, other relationships such as intimate partner and familial ones are seen as toxic and ones that need to not only be avoided but actively eliminated (as represented in the death of James's parents and Clive's death). Romantic relationships in general seem to be seen as toxic because one of the underlying messages by the end of the first season is that it is indeed the end of the f***ing world to fall in love, so in turn, there is little narrative space for friendship in particular because any intimacy is deemed to be toxic.

Each of these series feature trauma narratives that become driving forces of whether or not the friend groups will "make it" to the end of the series. In order to maintain the friend groups, the dominant characters have to collect some form of narrative capital (Goodson) as a way to win over the friend groups and the spectators. Furthermore, the latter two shows (*Thirteen Reasons Why* and *The End of the F***ing World*) are extended from the original narratives by television, which makes television an important medium in which to discuss trauma because of its reshaping of these original narratives. While these series certainly express radical understandings of trauma by just merely centering on these experiences, these televised friendships lack a trauma literacy that is necessary for friendships to thrive. In order to understand why televised

friendships need to be studied in unison with trauma, I provide an overview of the scholarship in television studies that rhetoricians need for this argument.

What Television Can do for Trauma Rhetoric

Television studies scholars have set the foundation for rhetoricians to draw from in their own work on television. Furthermore, because all three series are classified as melodrama, it is important to incorporate scholarship in melodrama studies in this argument. Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* can be argued as one of the most important texts that began cultural studies' focus on popular culture. While his discussion mostly focused on print culture, he provides a framework for scholars to think about the progression of culture and today's focus on platforms such as television, the internet, and even social media. He argues "since the world is assumed to be one of incessant change, in which the future automatically supersedes and is preferable to all in the past, the past becomes laughable and odd" (159). Storytelling is supposed to be ever evolving and through critique is supposed to improve; however, television still tells problematic and dated narratives of various social issues, but for the purposes of this dissertation, their narratives of trauma have not caught up with much of the current dialogues in trauma studies that Van Der Kolk suggests. These narratives that decenter survivors' voices, while dated, are still at the forefront of narratives that are supposed to focus on the nuances of trauma. Even when past stories are "laughable and odd," that reaction causes stories to be told the same way over and over again.

With the post-network era of television on the rise and arguably one of the major focal points of television analysis, Hoggart's analysis is even more important today. In

The Television Will be Revolutionized, Amanda Lotz argues that "Television might continue to provide a cultural forum for those who tune in to a particular show, but it has become increasingly unlikely that television functions as a space for the negotiation of contested beliefs among diverse groups simply because audiences are now more narrow or specialized" (33). These shifts due to online streaming do indeed provide space for more niche audiences to have the representation they want, but while this may be the case, the rhetoric of trauma and friendships argued for in this dissertation certainly exists in a variety of television spaces, both on Primetime and streaming platforms. While we do certainly look to the "the past [as] laughable and odd," these problematic rhetorics continue to sell, which television studies helps rhetoricians to see.

Another area of television studies that is needed for rhetorical analysis is early scholars' focus on discourse and its shaping of texts. John Fiske frames television as "a bearer/provoker of meanings and pleasures, and of culture as the generation and circulation of this variety of meanings and pleasures within society", which argues for the cultural relevance of television (1) Also, according to Fiske:

> Textual studies of television now have to stop treating it as a closed text, that is, as one where the dominant ideology exerts considerable, if not total, influence over its ideological structure and therefore over its reader. Analysis has to pay less attention to the textual strategies of preference or closure and more to the gaps and spaces that open television up to meanings not preferred by the textual structure, but that result from the social experience of the reader. (64)

This same framing is extended in Ron Lembo's *Thinking Through Television*, Ron where he argues that

> ….It is discourses and texts themselves that are understood to generate agency, to give form to practices, and to produce power effects. In the more 'post-structural' of cultural studies' accounts, then, it is *discourse* that is without a doubt *always-already there*, serving as a kind of non-essentialist starting-point for speaking about people, about what they think, how they think, as well as what they do in social life. (89)

In 2000, Lembo's work was a watershed moment in television studies because this is one of the first book-length RAD research studies that was conducted in the field, but still advocates for the importance of texts' shaping of discourse. In some ways, television studies is much like rhetoric in the sense that only in the last few decades has the field been seen as one that produces RAD (replicable, aggregable, and data supported) research (qtd in Driscoll and Powell). Furthermore, Bronwyn Williams points out that "...television is considered the ugly stepchild of other mass popular cultural forms." (30), which has been a continued theory about writing and rhetoric programs in English departments. That said, regardless of the disciplinary framework that television studies scholars appropriate from, they focus on how texts and language shape discourse—a major concern in rhetoric. In this dissertation, trauma rhetoric is produced and reproduced through television narratives and while much of the rhetoric we know comes from news reporting, this same framework needs to be applied to fictional televised constructions of

friendships and more public dialogues on friendships through an analysis of texts and the discourse that surrounds them.

While television may not have a wide variety of work that focuses on rhetorics of trauma, its work on identity and power provides rhetoricians with a conceptual framework for understanding trauma, which at its core stems from power imbalances related to identity. For example, regarding 1980s television, Herman Gray argues in *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* that,

> ...Reagan, television, and the discourse of Reaganism perfectly complemented one another. Television is the medium that surrounds our everyday lives without appearing to do so, intrusive without being obnoxious, a part of our common sense. Like Reagan's rhetoric, television can confront, represent, and circulate immorality without appearing hostile, judgemental, or, most important, racist. (34)

Gray's work provides a framework for analyzing the role of television in culture as early as the 80s and how television perpetuates current rhetoric implicitly, but makes a large impact on spectators and narratives. While Gray focuses on representations of race, other scholars have made similar arguments about how politics and social movements have influenced discussions of gender and sexuality (Doty 1993; Chambers 2009). Television is indeed a medium in which discourses about current issues are transcended into people's living rooms, particularly with rhetorics about marginalized identities.

On the other hand, television has been an agent of social change through varying social movements over the last few decades. For example, some 90s sitcoms and drama

such as *ER*, *Seinfeld*, *The Golden Girls*, *Sex in the City, Living Single, Ellen, Will and Grace,* and others dealt with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and LGBTQ related issues. More recently, shows such as *Blackish*, *Dear White People*, *Orange is the New Black*, *One Day at a Time*, *This is Us*, *Pose,* and *Insecure* have dealt with issues specific to Black Lives Matter, women of color, the intersections of race and sexuality, and a variety of other race and gender related issues. Certainly, these shows feature traumatic experiences for its spectators, but there is virtually no scholarship on how these experiences become a rhetoric that appeals to particular spectators or one that calls for identification. Furthermore, many of the shows listed above focus on varying rhetorically constructed friendships and traumas that the characters face, but scholarship does not address how these experiences are rhetorically constructed together, which is taken up in Chapter 3. This work articulates the ways in which rhetoricians might consider turning their attention toward television, given its social and cultural influence.

More recent scholarship in fictional television has not focused on rhetoric; however, William Chapel's work in the 1970s illustrates how fictional television does indeed perpetuate rhetoric through his analysis of Archie Bunker's character in *All in the Family*. He argues that "TV is communicating something—ideas, attitudes, values—content with implications and consequences for human action. As will be seen, television programs ask their audiences to accept specific attitudes, and in this sense they may be characterized as persuasive" (82). While his work is dated, the current scholarship in rhetoric could focus more on how these types of television series perpetuate "specific attitudes" and become "persuasive" for audiences, which is how Burke's theory informs

the next chapter's analysis. While television has certainly made some strides since the 1970s, there are many problematic rhetorics that have still perpetuated regarding trauma and friendships over the last decade, but rhetoric needs to name these rhetorics in television and how they are constructed or this work will stay in the 70s.

Another aspect of television studies that factors into this study is teen television studies because two of the three shows (*Thirteen Reasons Why* and *The End of the F***ing World*) considered within this project's analysis feature teen casts. Furthermore, teen television certainly conveys rhetorics of chivalry and crusade (Clay's quest to defend Hannah's honor and James's quest to find Alyssa) that morph into trauma rhetoric through the hijacking of the narrative by the friend groups present. In a U.S. context, there has been a wide variety of scholarship that focuses on readings of *Dawson's Creek, Buffy The Vampire Slayer, The O.C. Saved By the Bell, One Tree Hill, Smallville*, and others. In thinking about the appeal of teen T.V, Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson argue "Teen TV is precarious; precarious in its appeal (its audience may 'grow out of it' and another one may not assume its place) and in its conviction about its themes (about-turns on major narrative issues in the name of market forces are commonplace)" (4). However, they argue that its focus on issues such as sex, drugs, and sexuality mimic many teenagers' daily experiences makes them appeal to both teen and adult audiences who are looking for these types of representations for themselves and/or their children, which is one reason it's appropriate to bring these three shows together despite their maturity differences. That said, their focus on friendships and the "messiness" of these relationships is another space that teenagers are drawn to through the rhetoric of

identification that exists in these series. If friendships are as surface level as we culturally view them, then why do we have these continued melodramatic tellings of friendships?

However, while Davis and Dickinson argue that these issues are important to feature on the screen, what teen TV scholars have not addressed is how trauma becomes an issue that needs to be focused on in television possibly due to some of these experiences. Furthermore, they don't address that trauma is rhetorically constructed through friend groups based on power imbalances within these friend groups. While scholars such as Whitney Monaghan and Marieke Jenner focus on the importance of queer representation in teen TV, they don't really discuss the trauma that teenagers may face from coming out or other mental health challenges that teenagers face during high school and how their friendships may affect them. In more recent films such as *Love, Simon*, audiences certainly see some nod to how friendships can shape traumatic experiences for their friends in their coming out process, but there's been virtually no academic conversations about how these relationships create rhetorics of trauma for spectators. This dissertation provides this analysis as a way to further the conversation and to situate the rhetorical framings of these narratives as the real problem at hand.

Another concern that fuses television and rhetoric together is public nostalgia of specific series that focus on idealized forms of friendship and how they lack a trauma-literacy. One cannot ignore the current revitalization of nostalgia on *The Golden Girls* and *Friends* (Joseph). Rarely does anyone walk in Walmart or Target, surf Amazon, or peruse a store that sells niche popular culture merchandise and not find a multitude of different products that focus on these two watershed sitcoms. Furthermore, with the

recent airing of *Friends: The Reunion*, the 2020 *Saved By the Bell* reboot, and Betty White's death, the current conversation on televised friendships is much more relevant than it was even five years ago because of heightened nostalgia on shows with these narratives. These series have not aired on Prime time for nearly twenty years, but they are still very much part of Millennial and Generation Z's rearing experiences. Also, *Television and New Media's* 2018 special issue *Friends Reconsidered: Cultural Politics, Intergenerationality, and Afterlives* illustrates that this rhetoric is not just a public one, but one that academia also sees the need to address through texts and the discourses they create. That said, the nostalgia of both shows creates a rhetoric that friends regardless of age will have this live-in and close friendship experience until one or more of them chooses to marry, but don't address traumatic experiences that can happen within these relationships. Furthermore, scholars can't ignore that current rhetorics of trauma and friendship differ from the ones on the screen during the 90s and also have potential to be genre-specific. The shows mentioned above are sitcoms and the focus of this dissertation is on three melodramas. Even so, this revived nostalgic period is a unique time to make these arguments about friendships and trauma because in many ways they counter the public rhetoric of friendship I'd like to see forced into the 2020s.

Television's focus on discourse, representation, characterization, and identity make scholarship from this field necessary in addressing how trauma is rhetorically created because of the role that television plays in telling these narratives. Its focus on storytelling and how genre, time period, and narrative type illustrate different messages for different audiences is another framing that rhetoricians are concerned with when

discussing rhetorical situations and identification, but haven't created a strong bridge for. In order for rhetoricians to unveil how rhetorical messaging impacts culture, scholarship in television studies has to be fused together with scholarship in trauma rhetoric to provide not only a reading of problematic narratives, but also a pivot toward new narrative structures. In narrowing the focus of the field, as discussed previously, specific genres have more radical potential than others, which is why melodrama is the genre chosen for this dissertation.

Rhetoric and Identification in Melodrama

Another area of television studies that rhetoricians need to be engaging with discussions of trauma rhetoric and friendships is melodrama studies. Since these three series occupy this genre, the characteristics of melodrama and how spectators identify provide insight for this feminist rhetorical analysis. Melodrama is a space that makes sense to study trauma and friendships because of the heightened storylines that are integral to the genre and its focus on grotesque understandings of characters and their trials. Furthermore, since melodramas have longer time slots and more continuous narratives than sitcoms, one can see how a trauma narrative evolves and how a survivor heals (or doesn't) from a trauma. Melodrama continues to be a genre that is rooted in social change and realities for its spectators despite it being seen as "the isolated genre of antirealist excess supposed by film studies" (Gledhill and L. Williams 1). Furthermore, melodrama has been seen as "encompassing both so-called female-centered pathos and so-called masculine adventure and action--to a narrow genre encompassing only women and family" (L. Williams "World and Time: Serial Television Melodrama in

America"172). With these unbecoming, gendered understandings of the genre in mind, one can see how film studies scholars would have seen this genre as a "stepchild," much like television, to the film genre (B. Williams). However, post-1980, film scholars "began to turn attention away from investigations into the ideology of the 'family melodrama' and the 'woman's film' to find ways of understanding the distinctive narrational and aesthetic effects of melodrama across a diversity of genres, sub-genres, and film cycles" (Mercer and Shingler 78). This gendered understanding of the genre shows how trauma rhetorics can indeed occupy this genre, but also how this genre is subversive in and of itself because of its lack of conformity to the genres that came before and coexist with them. Since friendships are also subversive relationships, an issue that will be taken up in Chapter 4, it's certainly no coincidence that this rhetoric exists across similar texts in this space.

Also, while melodrama has strong roots in theater, literature, and film, television has become more of a space for the genre to move toward and evolve through soap opera and other prime time television serials. It has taken a variety of scholars (R. Allen, Levine, L. Williams, Modleski, Reinhard) to move scholarship toward a more nuanced understanding of melodrama and/or soap opera and its constructions on social realities and how spectators do or don't identify with its characters and plotlines. For example, Tania Modleski argues:

> In spite of the fact that soap operas contain more references to social problems than do most other forms of mass entertainment, critics tend to fault them heavily for their lack of social realism./If television is considered by some to be a vast

> wasteland, soap operas are thought to be the least nourishing spot in the desert. The surest way to damn a film, a television program, or even a situation in real life is to invoke an analogy to soap opera. (447)

While this anti-soap opera rhetoric certainly still exists, scholars continue to focus on the genre's attention to social issues, which makes melodrama be taken more seriously as a narrative form than it was even a decade ago. In "When is Melodrama 'Good/" Mega-Melodrama and Victimhood, " Linda Williams argues that "most television critics today agree that, with the advantage of more 'cumulative' stories and the ability to write and produce series more rapidly than movies, television has become more aesthetically interesting, complex, sophisticated, timely and relevant than most movies, or than previously episodic forms of television drama" (56). Not only is the production of television important for discussing representations of trauma, but also the move toward more conversations about "victimhood" in the 21st century (Elsaesser). Elsaesser argues that melodrama "is a placeholder for all the asymmetries and imbalances, for all the excesses seeking appeasement, for all the outrages yearning for redress and all the injustices thirsting for retribution, for all the feelings of guilt that act as forms of empowerment" (37). Williams and Elsaesser bring together the importance of melodrama as a genre to discuss trauma because of its continued focus on social inequities and its call to deem characters "the villain" and "the hero" even when television has shifted to more fluidity among these caricatures (Levine *Her Stories*). If melodrama becomes a space to unpack "injustices" and one that has more "cumulative stories," then trauma survivors can point to television narratives as a place that is integral (both positive and

negative) in their healing processes because they have the narrative space to do so. That said, the series that are discussed in this dissertation, while subversive in their focus on friend groups rather than maintenance of the nuclear family, their need to keep within the melodramatic genre creates a rhetoric of trauma that needs more drama from the trauma than the trauma itself creates. In order to accomplish this form, the trauma narrative and the survivor's healing process is less of a focus and the focus moves toward how the trauma narrative marrs the friend group. The genre conventions and their rhetorical modes have to be integrated into a rhetorical analysis of this issue because the narratives being discussed are occupying under these norms.

Also, when thinking about spectator identification, trauma narratives "demand from us, the viewers--demand and even command--our moral reverence and compassion [and] funct[ion] as a signal and support for viewer identification..." (Illouz 158). Not only do survivors have to have this "reverence" but also spectators who do not identify as trauma survivors. This specific type of reaction is commanded through the genre because of the pathos that it evokes when survivors share their stories. However, as mentioned previously, this scholarly discussion tends to focus on news media and reality television and doesn't provide the same sentiment for fictionalized melodrama. Furthermore, while melodrama wants to move away from traditional family dramas, it's also not addressing the connections between trauma and friendships. Illouz's work focuses on Oprah Winfrey's personal trauma narrative and how she communicates a more powerful pathos because she has already had economic and cultural capital with her talk show viewers. Also, Rothe argues that in shows like *The Oprah Winfrey Show* "victim status [is] the

ultimate moral capital and the consequent transformation of testimony into victim talk" (59). While critics argue that having a "victim status" has some level of cultural capital, this same type of capital gained in fictionalized television is not seen, particularly when focusing on friendships. Narrative capital is something to be gained, but it's not the trauma survivors that gain this form of capital, but their friend groups, particularly the ones that spectators are supposed to identify with. In some ways, this dissertation pushes against some of the scholarship and understanding of melodrama in order to continue to problematize the genre, its rhetoric, and its storytelling.

Furthermore, in using feminist rhetorical analysis as a methodology to coincide and extend Burke's theory of identification, one can't ignore how infused both melodrama and feminist criticism has been since the beginning of film studies, despite current critiques. The scholarship in melodrama is crucial not only to discuss the importance of television more generally, but also to defend why rhetoricians should move attention toward this rhetoric of trauma that seems to be coming out of these specific melodramas. Certainly, this dissertation doesn't seek to make an argument about all of television or all of melodrama or even takes a deep dive into some of this scholarship, but it does bring together these areas to discuss the importance of a study of trauma rhetoric in recent televised friendships and these complicated framings need to have a stronger place in public debates on trauma and also media representation.

U.S. Television in the 2010s

In addition to understanding melodrama, rhetoricians also need to understand the rhetorical situation of 2010 U.S. television and how trauma is represented. Even though

the scholarship cited up to this point could be seen as timeless, the social context of the decade is important because of the social issues addressed, the differences in technology, and the evolution (or not) of particular narratives. Also, the scholarship on the series that is the focal point of this dissertation needs to be synthesized in order to carve out scholarly space for new arguments. As implied through Amanda Lotz's work earlier in the chapter, television melodrama has provided a much more diverse storytelling through the post-network era streaming platforms. According to Aymar Jean Christian:

> Historically, legacy TV development executives have found diverse cultural representation too risky and the presumed audience too small for the multimillion price tag. Particularly risky have been series embracing intersectionality, with lead characters and producers who are multiply marginalized" and he argues that this work has been countered by the small independent streaming options that are available ("Beyond Branding" 458).

Furthermore, trauma narratives have been more central due to scholarly attention to shows such as *The Wire*, *Orange is the New Black*, prison dramas, real crime TV, and continued discussions of terrorism and post-9/11 media culture (Asultany; Buonanno; Ewen; Lavik; McNabe; Schwan; Zelizer; Scepanski; L. Williams *On the Wire*). Also, due to the #metoo movement, some scholars feel that producers have revised their camera angles and some of their narrative plotlines (Byrne and Taddeo), which is crucial when thinking about the shows I'm working with because of the problematic representation that has been noted regarding medical and teen dramas (Berridge; Jacobs). 2010 U.S. television rhetorically situates trauma much in the same way that rhetoric has. While

individual trauma is certainly addressed through some of the shows mentioned, much of the focus tends to be on global and national traumas, the prison system, and the nostalgia around real crime television. Since this similar gap exists in both fields, rhetoricians do need to attend to how trauma rhetoric impacts friend groups more individually while using some of this background information to understand the problem systemically in order to advocate for change.

Moving toward the shows specifically, there has been virtually no scholarship on *The End of the F***ing World* and very little on *Private Practice and Thirteen Reasons Why* in general, but none that addresses traumatic friendships or even rhetoric more generally. *Thirteen Reasons Why* has received mainstream attention for audience critiques on the "glorification" of suicide, particularly its realistic representation that has since been deleted from this Netflix series (Koehler; Kennedy). On the other hand, Emily Krebs argues that the series has been a positive narrative for teenagers to learn accurate information regarding suicide. She says:

> The show provides medically accurate information about suicide's risk factors based on current scientific knowledge, while simultaneously engaging with the uncertain, incomplete nature of that information. Such uncertainty is a central feature of the story's plotlines, and it draws audiences to engage in learning about suicide by offering them the opportunity to predict characters' potential suicide risk as the show progresses. (189-190)

While this specific series has a dearth of scholarship, one can see that there are some stark differences between mainstream critics and scholars' perspective on *Thirteen*

Reasons Why, and certainly this dissertation is more critical of the series than Krebs. Furthermore, despite its sole focus on a friend group that is formed throughout high school, there has been no work that focuses on how friendships can rhetorically construct trauma and this work provides that intervention.

However, Shonda Rhimes, creator of *Private Practice*, has been a focal point of television studies scholarship because of the ever popular *Grey's Anatomy, Scandal,* and *How to Get Away With Murder* and certainly fits into the rhetorical situation of the 2010s through its focus on the legal system, medicine, and disasters. Since the beginning of *Grey's Anatomy*, Shonda Rhimes has been the focal point of much of the critical race conversations within television studies due to her experiments with diversity and accusations of color-blind racism (Adams et. al; Bonilla-Sliva and Ashe; Joseph; Jones Jr. and Vaijala; Meyer and Griffin; Warner). However, in more recent years, Rhimes has been more attentive to issues of race regarding the George Floyd case and the following protests, COVID-19, and the various inequities that people of color face in the health care and criminal justice systems, which implicitly addresses trauma rhetoric more systemically rather than interpersonally. (Joseph).

Private Practice has been studied as a representation of abortion and trauma in relation to medical dramas more generally and their unrealistic representations (Furgurson and Swenson). However, while there are virtually only two scholarly articles that focus on the series, they both implicitly focus on trauma and friendships, which provides scholarly space for this dissertation's argument. In her analysis of abortion narratives in Shondaland, Jessica L. Furgerson argues that both Addison and Violet "have

known each other for years as colleagues and friends yet never shared their experiences speaks to a larger culture of silence surrounding abortion. This episode sends a strong message that all abortions are acceptable regardless of the presence of mitigating factors" (68). While the author focuses on abortion, she does implicitly acknowledge that trauma can bring friends together, which is often a simplistic understanding of friendships. Also, Sean Swenson argues that Katie's chastisement is problematic in the narrative because of Rhimes's focus on the medical practitioners, who have more power than the patients. He says:

> Given Shondaland's hyperattentiveness to physicians, had Katie's storyline been scripted for a doctor, it would likely have contained an emotional appeal for understanding and treating mental illness. Instead, it became an example of overcoming a terrible criminal act committed by a terrible person. Even when we know that Violet has forgiven Katie, we only feel for Violet because Shondaland's writers failed to script empathetic space for Katie as the patient. (241)

However, Chapters 2 and 3 argue against this specific reading because of the lack of support that Violet receives from the rest of the practice. While limited, it is important to note that the scholarship on this specific series does move the scholarship and this chapter toward a closer reading of friendships and their implications for trauma rhetoric because of its focus on the major trauma narratives of the series.

Television studies is an important framing for this dissertation not only because its focus is on a rhetorical analysis of television shows, but also because the field

provides scholarship on trauma, genre, and identity that focuses on characterization which is less of a focus in rhetoric. Furthermore, its focus on discourse and texts overlaps with rhetoric in an important way to convey that rhetoric is not only an interdisciplinary concern in and of itself but also one that exists across fields and fictional television needs more of this specific analysis from a rhetorical perspective as well. Next, an understanding of the scholarship on friendships needs to be analyzed for rhetoricians because the field does address rhetoric and certainly television is a space where these relationships continue to be central to its storytelling.

Friendship Studies and Rhetoric

In moving toward the role of friendships in trauma rhetoric, friendship studies is likely not an intelligible field for many rhetoricians. In turn, it is important to provide an overall statement of some of the scholarship and what it does, and then make connections to its relevance in rhetoric and television studies. Even though friendships have been studied by sociologists and psychologists since the 1960s, friendship studies is a fairly underdeveloped field and still does not have any formalized programs across the U.S. Some universities have a few courses that are dedicated to friendship related topics, but there are virtually no minors, majors, concentrations, or graduate programs that give focus to this area. This interdisciplinary field evolved in response to the third wave of feminism and conversations about social constructions of marriage and queer theory. At its roots, friendship studies starts by critiquing our cultural assumptions (in the U.S.) that marriage and family relationships are valued because of the social, cultural, and economic capital gained in these relationships (G. Allen). Friendship studies examines

relationships that have no sexual, romantic, or familial attachment and how, not only they are important, but necessary in a person's development and everyday interactions (even though some of this is changing with more openness about friends with benefits relationships).

In the 1990s, television representations began to enter this conversation through shows such as *Friends, The Golden Girls, Living Single, Girlfriends,* and the increase in high school and college television series that focus on friend groups such as *Saved by the Bell, Boys Meets World, Beverly Hills 90210,* and *Dawson's Creek*. While socially we don't value friendships as much as more committed relationships, more recently, television has put a greater focus on them because people flock to these series. Arguably, the reason for their popularity is that, according to research, most adults feel that they don't have strong friendships so they find them through fictional characters. There's also literature on the importance of friendships in college, professional careers, aging, and for faculty as they go up for tenure and promotion, which illustrates not only the desire for these relationships in a variety of contexts, but the *necessity* of them. (Shrodt et. al; Wantanbe and Falci).

In thinking about the subversiveness and politicization of friendships, these relationships are also given more nuance based on race, gender, and sexuality and how they become spaces that strive for social justice, but also ones that can cause trauma. Often college students of color struggle to find like-identified groups of people and there is research that they are much more successful when they have groups of like-identified friends (Fletcher et. al). LGBTQ+ folks often call their friends "families of choice"

because of rejection from family and particularly during the HIV/AIDS crisis, LGBTQ+ folks relied on their friends for palliative care (Muraco and Fredriksen-Goldsen) . Most queer focused TV shows (*Queer as Folk*, *Noah's Arc, The L Word, Pose*, *Orange is the New Black*, etc.) focus on a group of friends rather than biological family connections. There is also literature on how trans people struggle with maintaining close friendships because typically the gender binary and constructs of masculinity and femininity are reinforced in friend groups (Galupo et. al; Zitz et. al). However, this idea of "family of choice" has been appropriated in other spaces that aren't necessarily queer ones in representations of friendships more generally. This idea of family of choice and the necessity of like-identified friendships is important to note because of the point of friendships for most people—a space to be their authentic selves and experience love in a fluid relationship that they may not have otherwise. That said, when friendships breed trauma, they rhetorically become a new toxic space for survivors–an issue that none of this literature addresses.

While friendship studies has strong interdisciplinary connections, there is very little current work done in the rhetoric of friendships and virtually no scholarship on the relationship between friendships and trauma. Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato provided some framework for friendships and in turn laid a ground for how we rhetorically situated friendships. Also, Montaigne, Cicero, Kant, Emerson, and others have contributed to philosophical and rhetorical conversations about friendship, which will be discussed more in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 (Vernon). For example, Aristotle believed that humans find alternate selves as friends and desire to be one in the same with them

(Vernon 2-3). On the other hand, Plato extends the conversation by arguing that friendship is much more what one gains from the relationship rather than wishing to assimilate into another person's life. In *Lysis*, Socrates argues that "If I cannot talk about my friendship, it is not true friendship, but something arbitrary and unworthy of the name of friendship; but if I can talk about it, I am not a true friend, but an analyst and critic of friendship" (Garver 130). More specifically, friends don't spend time discussing their feelings for each other, but what the relationship has brought them (146). Plato's rhetoric of friendship is particularly important for how a rhetoric of trauma is created by the friendships created and/or changed due to a character's trauma because if a friend cannot discuss their friendship when there's trauma involved, then the friendship seems to have less meaning. If we have friends for friends' sake, then these deeper and more complicated understandings of friendships are hard to maintain because we need to be critical and analytical of these relationships in how they are growing and/or harming the people involved.

In fusing together friendships and rhetoric, it's also important to discuss how Montaigne's use of a person's writing as a way to connect with friends (his relationship with Etienne de La Boétie) because writing studies and rhetoric's focus on writing as healing. Also, Montaigne's focus on knowing friends after their death through their writing supports some of Plato's feelings about friendships because the intimacy exists only when the physical part of the friendship is over rather than during its lifespan. This is another important framework to use in the analysis of *Thirteen Reasons Why* because of the narrative's focus on Hannah's cassette tapes and both the characters and the

spectators get to know her best through her tapes rather than her real time existence. In order for rhetoricians to use friendships as a space to unpack trauma rhetoric, they must take into consideration the angst that exists in these theories because once a friendship needs work (Sow and Friedman), they often dissipate. These theories don't account for how friendships can indeed be traumatic and implicitly argue for a trauma rhetoric that focuses on how trauma affects a friend or friend group rather than the survivor, leaving no space to address trauma that coexists with friendships.

Where Do We Go Next: How Scholarship Weaves Together for Change

Even though these fields seem rather separate, television studies and friendship studies have crucial intersections in understanding how post-2010 fictional televised friendships perpetuate problematic rhetorics of trauma and can provide framing for a truly interdisciplinary project such as this one. One takeaway from this chapter is that these fields' overlapping concerns about discourse, texts, language, and power fuse together a scholarly framework for addressing how trauma rhetorics are formed within fictional televised friendships. According to Aymar J. Christian, "Indie web producers invoke diversity to address the incomplete representations they see in the mainstream media. They hope their work expands Hollywood's labor markets and helps better value their own communities" (*Open TV* 115). While arguably post-network television has dealt with some concerns about representations for some time, it does not mean that some of the more mainstream television programs don't perpetuate some problematic rhetorics of trauma despite the post-network era's ability to produce more diverse and socially just

content. However, despite the progress that Christian argues has been made in the post-network era, Elana Levine argues that:

> The recent changes in the television industry and in viewer experiences of the medium are clearly significant, but they do not eliminate the need for attention to the ways that television continues to play a part in struggles for power. The medium need not speak in a single voice to be a factor in the exercise of dominant interests, nor do its audiences need to engage in a single experience of television to make their negotiations with it central to current social, cultural, and political debate. ("Teaching" 182)

Levine and Christian present opposing sides to the argument that television is clearly a platform in which social justice and accurate (or lack thereof) representation is an issue. Arguably, representation issues do have implications for rhetoric because of television's use of specific narratives in order to communicate narratives of trauma. As Chapel would argue, scholars certainly can't ignore the continued patterns of trauma narratives that are seen in the media and how television appeals to spectators who are looking into other people's traumas voyeuristically. Rhetoricians can step in here to bring these conversations to light.

Another takeaway from this chapter is that friendships and their televised representations, are crucial in understanding rhetoric because of rhetoric's need for humans to view the way humans interact with each other and how humans' ways of being parallel with each other. Even though friendships have not been studied in relation to trauma rhetoric, it is important to make these connections now as scholars think about

what current rhetorics of trauma are told through television. Furthermore, many people who experience trauma are much more likely to disclose to close friends due to fear of disbelief and rejection from their families. Often in nuclear families, trauma is undiscussed and hinders the idea of the American Dream which centers on a "perfect" nuclear family. In turn, friendships have to be a central focal point for analyzing rhetorics of trauma because of the potential tension that trauma can cause families. However, just because a person labels someone else as their friend, this labeling certainly doesn't free the person from perpetuating some of the rhetorics of change and survival that Yaeger and Rothe argue is seen in media. If our bodies remember trauma and we tell the stories of bodies that have experienced trauma, then our telling of these stories becomes a rhetoric because we tell again and again how these bodies are supposed to behave, heal, and in some cases what we expect these bodies to contribute back to society. Friendships and their representation on television have the potential to police trauma response through this same rhetoric, which makes these three areas not only important ones to address this research gap, but *necessary* ones in order for the fields to be more subversive and benefit trauma survivors. Friendships are complicated relationships that are currently rhetorically situated as very one-dimensional and can both heal and cause trauma, which is a major takeaway that this analysis brings to scholars in these areas.

Finally, this fusing together of these scholarly areas not only begins a conversation that is lacking in academia, but also in discussions of healthy relationships more generally regarding consent, boundaries, and the trauma that friendships can cause. Many of the issues that *Private Practice*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and *The End of the*

*F***ing World* feature are rooted in a lack of awareness and a trauma literacy is needed in order to support friends who are experiencing trauma. Furthermore, they lack an awareness of consent and boundaries when attending to their needs and often move the narrative in a direction that undresses them to the rest of the audience in demoralizing ways. These narrative problems are indicative of our current cultural issues and lack of trauma literacy as it pertains to friendships, which makes the project important for representation, rhetoric, but also for survivors and friends of survivors who need resources on how to support their friends who are dealing with traumatic pasts. A trauma-literate rhetoric would involve a more public acceptance of trauma rhetoric and more rhetorical analyses like these in order to break down and reframe current rhetorics of trauma in the narratives we tell so that friend groups could indeed tell more trauma-informed narratives and provide more trauma-informed support. Due to our culture's lack of focus on friendships, their ability to be multi-dimensional and convoluted, and healthy boundaries within these relationships, we allow space for these narratives to potentially signal harmful messages for people who are experiencing trauma within their friend groups. There's also a lack of discussion nationally about friendships creating trauma because there seems to be no legal or political benefit from interrogating these relationships. The next chapter sets up the importance of Burke's theory of identification when discussing rhetorics of friendships and why a feminist rhetorical analysis ensures that this work benefits survivors and has implications for audiences outside of academia.

CHAPTER 2: WHO ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE FRIENDS WITH?: FEMINIST RHETORICAL ANALYSIS, IDENTIFICATION, AND TRAUMATIC FRIENDSHIPS

This chapter demonstrates that, first, fictional traumas are rhetorically structured and encourage spectators to identify, not with the survivor or victim, but rather, with the trauma that the main character and most powerful character experiences. Second, the spectator is further conditioned to ignore and even chastise trauma survivors for how their traumas affect an entire friend group and the plot's mobility more generally. Finally, spectators are supposed to identify with how the other characters' traumas affect the most powerful characters in the series rather than with the survivors themselves. This chapter uses Burke's rhetorical power of identification as a way to unveil this rhetoric, but also uses feminist rhetorical analysis in order to challenge identification rhetoric's lack of focus on power and positionality, particularly in how dominant members of friend groups are constructed in these narratives.

Burkean Identification and Rhetoric of Friendships

Burke's theory of identification articulates a role for the spectator in a rhetoric of trauma and friendship. Aristotle, Montaigne, Nehamas, and others further complicate Burke's notion of identification through rhetorics of friendship that overlap and are in opposition with one another. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke focuses much of his

analysis on literature, particularly, poetry. However, his rhetoric of identification is transferable to the television screen and the narratives produced through this medium. He argues that "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined. A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes, they are or is persuaded to believe so" (20) In this analogy, Burke argues that people don't have to have identical features or interests in order to be associated or feel a connection to another person. In the context of his work, Burke is looking at the written word, but his work can be (and has been often used) for a variety of spectator experiences, including television. This type of association (i.e. identification) with another person is not only powerful for a spectator who is looking for representation or connection with a series, but more importantly correlates with Aristotle's early understanding of friendship as an alternate self. In order to discuss the power of friendships, identification has to be central to a rhetorical framing of televised friendships. While some television scholars would argue whether it's the role of television to identify with its consumer, a rhetorical framing of television must take into consideration the potential power of a Burkean identification among spectators, characters, plotlines, and narrative structures because in order to eventually frame how trauma is constructed in friend groups, the relationship among the spectator and the dominant characters in friend groups needs to be interrogated through identification. Also, television scholar Jason Mittell argues that "characters are triggered by the text but come to life as we consume fiction and are best understood as constructs of real people not simply images and sounds on a screen" (118). If characters do indeed "trigger"

experiences for real people, then a theory of identification seamlessly works to craft how powerful the relationships are on the screen.

Aristotle, who Burke regularly cites in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, would argue that, "we are better able to observe our friends than ourselves and their actions than our own," which is a model that sees friendship as a quest for an alternate self (Vernon 164). From an Aristotelian perspective, people seek friendships to find like selves while A "[being] identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives" (Burke 21). While certainly people look for friends with whom they may have common interests with and similar values, they become identified with their friendships as they become stronger over time. Even if there are stark differences between the friends being discussed, they are now identified with each other, which in turn, gives them a level of connection that can cause a power imbalance and have a dominant character in place. This also becomes more prevalent in larger friend groups. Furthermore, this identification then has potential messaging for the audience that these relationships are what are seen as friendship norms.

Ancient and early modern rhetorical understanding of friendships and Burkean identification certainly come together to create synergy for analyzing how friendships can be a relationship that spectators identify with as part of their own experiences. Furthermore, this identification is intentional for the target audiences at stake. Historically, shows such as *The Golden Girls* evoke particular identifications with audiences based on personality types (i.e. Blanche as the promiscuous friend; Rose as the

naïve friend; Dorothy as the voice of reason; and Sophia as the matriarch and outspoken friend). In *Friends*, a similar identification can be seen with those characters (Rachel as the promiscuous, but naïve female friend; Monica as the matriarch and the control-freak; Chandler as the sarcastic friend; Joey as the promiscuous, but naïve male friend, Phoebe as naïve, but the most progressive friend, and Ross as the most successful, but often socially awkward friend). In both shows, spectators are asked to identify either themselves or people in their friend groups with one of the characters. One example of this identification is the many quizzes that continue to circulate that asking "which Golden girl are you" or "which Friend are you" shows that this is not only an experience during the 30 minutes the shows are on, but also in fandom spaces.

Another important discussion of friendships from more early modern understandings of rhetoric comes from Michel de Montaigne's writing on friendship as he deals with the loss of his friend Etienne de la Boetie. According to Barry Weller:

> In bequeathing Montaigne his books, la Boetie acknowledges them as both source and continuation of the friendship. Human affection and human pain seem but an episode and la Boetie himself something to be elided to assure the immemorial continuities of reasoned discourse. Books are the only true Stoics, offering silent, unimpassioned speech amid whatever circumstances permit their mere survival. Montaigne, however, instead of welcoming the companionship of books, true images of what his friend aspired to be but never was, wishes to awaken them from their impassivity, to force them into the realm of passion, change, and inconsistency. (511)

This specific rhetoric of friendship is mostly important for a reading of *Thirteen Reasons Why*, but it is also a foundational understanding of how one can come to know a friend, particularly after their death and through texts. Montaigne would argue that people do not find an actual alternate self, as Aristotle would say, through a friend because that would insinuate “a stable and coherent, even static, notion of selfhood” (Weller 506). Montaigne extends Aristotle’s discussions of friendships because he focuses on intellectually connecting with a friend through some of their most intimate thoughts--writing---which scholars regularly argue for within writing studies and is Burke’s focus. Montaigne’s focus on the written text as a way to learn and arguably identify with a friend illustrate the power of Burkean identification. If the written word is a way to connect with people after death in order to maintain this emotional intimacy, then identification is a rhetorical tool that is necessary in order to address not only how the relationship affects a person while their friend is alive, but also during the grieving process, both for the living and dead.

While a rhetoric of identification is powerful for this specific analysis, what both Burke and Aristotle fail to acknowledge is the power that can exist within this identification and these friendships more generally. These plot foci provide evidence to support that, while Burke and Aristotle are necessary in crafting a rhetorical intervention into these series, it is crucial to incorporate feminist rhetorical analysis in order to grapple with the power that the main characters hold in these series. While Burke in particular is an important rhetorical theorist, as mentioned, there are some patriarchal implications of his work that need to be reckoned with in a study of trauma (Foss and Griffin).

Furthermore, Burke and Aristotle's framing does not provide specific benefits for the subjects who are being studied--in this case trauma survivors. Lastly, while friendships are certainly integral to Aristotle's rhetorical framing, there isn't space in this model to discuss how friendships can be traumatic experiences and in turn have power imbalances. For this study, there are three specific characteristics of feminist rhetorical analysis: 1) it must move away from hierarchal power structures and binary understandings; 2) it must benefit trauma survivors rather than be "analysis for analysis sake;" 3) it needs to "listen" to the narratives of survivors through textual and rhetorical analysis.

Rhetorically Framing a Feminist Case for Trauma and Friendships

First, feminist rhetorical analysis provides a reading that moves away from "cozy hierarchies and binaries" and uses both theory and evidence to bring together an analysis the unpacks these power structures. According to Gesa Kirsch and Jaqueline J. Royster, excellent feminist research:

> involves an effort to render meaningfully, respectfully, honorably, the words and works of those whom we study...It entails an open stance, strategic contemplation, and creating a space where we can see and hold contradictions without rushing to immediate closure, to neat resolutions, or to cozy hierarchies and binaries. (664)

Kirsch and Royster's movement away from "cozy hierarchies and binaries" is critical when providing a Burkean or Aristotelian analysis because these mainstream rhetoricians don't provide space for how power and privilege affect the identification process and more specifically the creation of friendships. In these three series, even though the main characters may be sympathetic and more identifiable for the target audience, scholars still

have to be critical of the reasons they are the identifiable characters (i.e. class, race, gender, positionality, etc.). While Burke acknowledges that identification rhetoric prevents spectators from "criticiz[ing] it [the rhetoric] properly," he doesn't explicitly focus on how power and privilege factor into this identification, which is why this undoing of hierarchies and binaries is needed for any feminist rhetorical analysis, but particularly one that is addressing traumatic constructions of friendships–a fluid and nuanced understanding of these types of relationships (36).

Second, feminist rhetorical analysis has to benefit the populations being discussed, which in this case is trauma survivors. Kirsch and Ritchie argue that:

> ...we need to ask participants to collaborate with us, to help us design our research questions to ask for their feedback, to answer their questions, and to share our knowledge with them. The formulation of collaborative research still does not go far enough. A feminist politics of location would require the learning about self to be *reciprocal* as possible--with the researcher also gaining knowledge about her own life or at least reexamining her cultural and gender biases.(146-147)

Feminist rhetorical analysis requires this careful framing of analysis in order to eliminate bias and uncover injustice, which is a limitation of both Burke and Aristotle's approaches. Researchers have to unpack their own biases and in turn make sure that their biases don't infiltrate how research benefits survivors. For example, in their introduction to *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticisms of the Real*, Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol argue that in order to discuss trauma representation that scholars should ask "Whose crisis is this anyway? Is the crisis merely academic? Or does it reflect larger

social and national crises?" (4). Due to television being a "member of the home," it's not hard to connect why television analysis could be a way to teach more about trauma, consent, and boundaries within friendships because of the television literacy that most people have (Silverstone 40; B Williams). I do want to note that this chapter is not seeking to make an argument about the potential media effects of these specific series because that would require empirical data (surveys, interviews, ethnographic data, etc.), but instead an unveiling of this rhetoric of trauma has potential to add to the ongoing conversations about trauma and survivors that is being had nationally. Just like empirical work though, rhetorical analysis must have some sort of benefit for survivors and must be accessible to people who would benefit from these framings.

Third, feminist rhetorical analysis must have a structure in place where researchers "listen" to the narratives of survivors in the text rather than impose a specific reading on them. In thinking about the benefits of this method, it is important to understand the potential for power imbalances and that a feminist rhetorical analysis must take the position of the researcher into consideration as they "listen to the texts" (Ronay Johnson 63). Burke and Aristotle don't take into consideration the positionality of any person in their framing and implicitly communicate absolutes for their theories of friendship and identification, which at times puts people within friendships in a position to speak for others in these types of relationships. As Linda Alcoff notes, it's problematic in and of itself to "speak for others," but in regards to issues of representation, this framework has many intricacies and how one frames this speaking has to be carefully

framed (5). For example, in their work on trauma and refugees, Randall, Powell, and Shadle say:

> ...just as a refugee tells a certain story in order to access political identity and safety, often the purpose of collecting the oral histories of displaced persons is to sway a public or influence a policy decision. And just as the story a refugee tells to a government official must be one of sufficient trauma, there is a temptation in an oral history collection to foreground "the refugee identity," with the trauma both implied and made explicit, to achieve a certain response from an audience. Thus the role of the oral historian and archivist is not only to collect or document experiences, but to recognize how these experiences are framed--what story the archive itself is telling. (78)

In any kind of rhetorical analysis that focuses on texts (both living and nonliving), it can be tempting to read a particular agenda onto them. However, in this particular work that seeks to benefit trauma survivors, the reading should take away one reading, but not the only reading of this particular issue. Also, some trauma survivors may not see televised friendships as a relationship that they seek to unpack. While some could say that this is simply ethical research, a feminist framework takes into consideration the power implications of much of this analysis and we need now more than ever to have more *feminist* analyses of trauma as we live in a culture that still often rejects survivors' testimonies.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, much of the work on trauma is in writing studies, which focuses on “listening” to texts that live in classroom spaces rather than media narratives. In her discussion of student writing, Ronay Johnston says:

> ...I wanted to cultivate a collective experience of “listening to the texts.” I wanted to ingrain this listening practice as a prerequisite to confronting gendered injustices represented in the texts—just as grassroots activist groups listen to the communities they serve to assess the particular needs of the communities, and to allow those needs to drive activist initiatives and strategies. (63)

This act of “listening to texts” overlaps with Kirsch and Royster’s focus in their feminist rhetorical analysis and illustrates the need to have one’s position as a researcher in mind when conducting any kind of analysis. One must “listen” rather than provide a forced framing in order to uncover messages that are problematic for the subjects the study wishes to benefit. Furthermore, this “listening” brings together Kirsch and Ritchie and Randall, Powell, and Shadle’s work together to discuss the benefits of trauma narratives on the survivors who are research participants because it’s a framework to use when making conclusions about data. Lastly, Ronay Johnston focuses on how “listening to texts" can advocate for social change just as much as “grassroots activist groups,” which is often missing in more theoretical academic research. While Ronay Johnston, Kirsch, and Royster’s work are more focused on the experiences of women, this focus provides an analysis of power that, while often gendered, does need to take into consider positionality (or as some feminists would say standpoint) such as class, race, and hierarchy (Harris and Leavy; Hartsock). Furthermore, Sandra Harding argues that while

feminist methodologies have traditionally centered the experiences of women "Feminist inquiry represents not a substitution of one gender loyalty for the other- one subjectivism for another-but the transcendence of gender which thereby increases objectivity" (651). Harding asks feminist researchers to reframe their work to provide objectivity and that moving away from a "masculine bias" moves them in this direction (651).

In moving this framework toward an analysis of friendships, Alexander Nehamas argues that "Feminism pays particular attention to friendship because it can be deeply liberating for those who don't fit well into society's existing structures: friendships can be agents of social change" (55). This observation illustrates not only the potential for using feminist methods to unpack rhetorics of trauma through friendships, but the *necessity* of using these methodologies. In order to move the conversation on trauma toward friendships, feminist rhetorical methodologies uncover the power relationships that exist in these relationships (despite sociological definitions of friendships) and how the rhetoric television produces sends harmful messages about the healing process and the role that friends play as both allies and antagonists in these experiences. Furthermore, this type of analysis calls for change in representation through a careful "listening" to the rhetoric that television produces regarding trauma, friendships, and power and hopefully creates space for critics, writers, producers, and activists to create change both in representation, but also in public debates on trauma and violence more generally. I use this method to unpack the rhetoric of friendships in these shows below. First, I examine how the shows are structured to encourage identification with the main and most powerful character rather than the trauma survivor or victim. Then, I examine how the

spectator is supposed to be more concerned about the health of the friend group in spite of the trauma rather than the survivor's healing process. Lastly, I examine the rhetoric of how the friend group's trauma is much more important than the one of the survivor or victim.

Nothing is Actually Private Here: Trauma Rhetoric and Identification in Private Practice

In *Private Practice*, Addison becomes the most identifiable, powerful character from the first scene because of her credentials that surpass most of her colleagues and the narrative capital she brings from *Grey's Anatomy* to this spin-off. As discussed before, Addison Forbes Montgomery comes to Los Angeles with a fan base because of her role on *Grey's Anatomy*. However, even if viewers have not seen *Grey's Anatomy*, she becomes the character that spectators are supposed to identify with because she seems to be more composed than her new colleagues at Oceanside Wellness. When her former boss, Richard Webber, confronts her about her resignation, she tells him all of the positives of her colleagues; however, after each statement she makes, the camera moves to Naomi crying while eating cake in her bathroom floor; Sam having a heart to heart conversation with his cat; Violet continually calling her ex-boyfriend who has moved on to another relationship; Cooper being handcuffed to a bed while continually calling that day's lover by the wrong name; and Pete kissing Addison from the two-part backdoor pilot episode in *Grey's Anatomy*, "The Other Side of This Life." Immediately, spectators see that Addison is coming to a space where she has more professional clout than her colleagues despite her committing some of the same behavior in *Grey's Anatomy* (harassing Derek to give her another chance; her continued affair with Mark Sloan; her

one-night stand with Alex Karev). Furthermore, their personal flaws are juxtaposed with Webber's reminder that she is a world class neonatal surgeon (S1 E1). According to Meyer and Griffin:

> Shondaland's melodramas offer viewers the opportunity to consume multiple, manifold narratives saturated with potent insights into ethics and morality set in the powerful social institutions of medicine, law, and politics. Subsequently, it is imperative that an examination of audience interpretations and reactions to Shondaland shows view television culture as a 'historically specific set of institutionally embedded relations of government in which forms of thought and conduct of extended populations are targeted for transformation. (12)

Private Practice is no exception to this understanding of morality through powerful and noble professions such as medicine. Since Addison has the best medical reputation of the characters in the series, she has to be situated as the character that folks are not only supposed to see as the most redeemable character, despite her flaws, but also the one that they are interested in following throughout the series. She is also the character who spectators are supposed to learn from rather than her colleagues, even when she makes poor life choices.

Also, Addison becomes a sympathetic character for spectators because Naomi hires Addison without consulting the other doctors in the practice, which causes them to shun her at first. Addison then realizes she doesn't have a staff and may only see one patient per day, which seems like a demotion from the well-acclaimed operating room at Seattle Grace Hospital. She spends the entire first episode proving her skills and her

worth to her new colleagues by performing a c-section in the practice and defending her expertise at the end of the episode through an emotional conversation in which her colleagues motion to vote on whether or not she should get to stay. Because of her continued fan following and her sympathetic narrative, Addison becomes the person the spectator identifies since arguably middle- and upper-class middle-aged women (like Addison) are the target audience of most medical soap operas. According to Sean Swenson, "Shonda Rhimes typically puts a focus on the physicians and less so on the patients despite spectators being more likely to identify with "the sick and dying" than the elite in the medical field" (239). While Swenson provides an alternative argument for mine on trauma and identification in the series, it does illustrate how spectator identification is not only supposed to be with the physicians, but more importantly that a rhetoric of identification exists to begin with.

Oceanside Wellness also becomes a space to unpack friendships because of its rhetorical framing of care and workplace relationships. The doctors practice "small town medicine" and seek to care for the whole patient, a hallmark of their work in a big city like Los Angeles (S1 E1). Patients are often referred to and seen by multiple doctors in the practice based on their needs. Also, due to this model, the physicians foster an environment where they are a family of choice and occupy a fairly anti-nuclear family space. For example, Naomi and Sam, the founders of the practice, are undergoing a divorce; Cooper and Violet are best friends and struggle to maintain any type of romantic relationship (at least at first); Pete is a widower who hated his wife and has an estranged relationship with his mom and brother; Dell seems to have no relationship with his

parents and is raising a daughter he fathered as a teenager; and in *Private Practice*, we learn that Addison has an estranged relationship with her parents and struggles with her support of her brother, Archer, particularly in his toxic relationships--a plotline spectators are unaware of in *Grey's Anatomy*. Addison comes to Oceanside Wellness because Naomi is her best friend from medical school, but it takes time for Addison to develop friendships with the other physicians and arguably, she is still closer to some more than others by the end of the series.

With this information in mind, friendship is at the core of the rhetorical framing of the series not only because of the relationships that are formed prior and during the series, but also, the intentionality of friendships superseding other types of relationships. Nehamas argues that "...friendship can be a bulwark against inertia and conformity. In others, it can also impose them: that's one reason for its double face. When a friendship develops into a clan or coterie, it requires not just difference from those outside but also unquestioning conformity to those within" (204). In order for Addison to become part of the practice, she has to conform to the friendship guidelines of the group because she has to get used to the family vibe of the practice. She arguably did not receive this same treatment at Seattle Grace because of the narrative's focus on Derek, her ex-husband, maintaining his relationship with Meredith Grey, the main character. On the other hand, due to the power she brings with her new colleagues must conform to her as well. She even says at the end of the first episode "I saved your asses...welcome to the new Oceanside Wellness." Then, the episode finishes with her dancing naked behind her curtain at her new home and Sam laughing as he watches her from next door. Conformity

becomes central to this friendship group, but arguably, the group has to conform to Addison more so than she has to conform to the other physicians.

Also, Addison gains identification as the most powerful character because of the imperative style she uses. As the most powerful character, she gains power in the practice from her first day because the narrative of her hiring overtakes the practice, who weren't even thinking about her the prior day. Also, her imperative address is "for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests' and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience" (Burke 46). Her interests here are to be accepted, one that most people can identify with being in a new place, but as the narrative progresses, spectators find that her interest is to be in charge and dominate the narrative—a development that they are supposed to support.

Addison continues to be the character with which spectators identify because she takes care of others before meeting her own needs and sees friendship as holding a particular moral code that she implicitly feels the rest of practice does not have in their relationships with Naomi. While we later find that Addison has many different struggles with her relationship with Naomi (i.e. taking over the practice from her and dating her ex-husband, Sam), Addison is set up from the second episode of the series ("In Which Sam Received an Unexpected Visitor") as the only devoted friend that Naomi has. Cooper and Pete hire an "entertainer" for Sam and stampede Addison's home to watch his reaction, since she's his next-door neighbor. Addison is expecting Naomi for wine and conversation as they tend to do most evenings and for this reason asks them to leave. She

says “Naomi is my friend; you people I barely know.” She then refuses to speak to Pete at the practice and says that she’s “just looking out for Naomi.” Pete and Addison have sexual tension beginning with the backdoor pilot of the series where he kisses her. At the end of episode, in an attempt to show his continued interest, Pete says to Addison, “Addison, I think it’s great that you try to take care of Naomi, but who takes care of you.” Pete’s use of Addison’s moral code as a way to identify with her experience also makes her the identifiable character for the audience. Burke argues that “ you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55). We learn in the next episode that Pete struggles with his own self-care due to his wife’s death and his continued hate for her. Also, during the backdoor pilot, Pete continually says how “hot” Addison is and is chastised by his colleagues for his lack of commitment to women, which has resulted in their most recent Ob-Gyn leaving the practice. While one can’t ignore Pete’s sexual attraction to Addison, his use of this rhetoric communicates to the audience of women like Addison that she is the identifiable character of the series.

Moral code is also another issue that Addison brings to the surface through her maintenance of her friendships, particularly Naomi’s. Nehamas argues that philosophers and rhetoricians have argued whether or not the construction of friendships insinuate moral virtue and that arguably they can’t because many famous political friendships have centered on immorality (146). However, what he implicitly points out here is that most folks feel that friendships are good and should have a particular moral compass. When the rest of the practice provides an entertainer for Sam, they feel they are providing him

with feminine attention as a recently divorced man, while not thinking of Naomi's feelings. For them, this is an act of friendship but one that is deemed immoral by Addison, the identifiable character of the series. Even though she has a track record of cheating on her partners, she still holds and shifts the moral compass of the series because she's not only the identifiable character because of her loyalty to Naomi, but also, she has the most power of any of the characters in the series.

The spectator's identification with Addison provides a power imbalance from the first episode because the spectator is conditioned to see Addison as the most powerful, *redeemable* character. While this is certainly a basic component of melodrama, it is also a critical component of the problematic trauma rhetoric in the series that feminist rhetorical analysis addresses through its focus on unveiling the power inequities here. Addison becomes the most powerful and identifiable character in spite of Violet, Charlotte, and Amelia's traumas because she has the most professional and narrative clout, but also because she is seen as the most loyal friend–a rhetoric that is critically important for an analysis of the lack of trauma-literate rhetoric in the series.

Was Hannah Ever Really Here?: Trauma Rhetoric and Identification in Thirteen Reasons Why

In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Clay Jensen becomes the identifiable and powerful character because of his "everymanness" and his desire to single-handedly bring justice to Hannah after her suicide. This series is a bit unique in its plot structure because the climax of the series happens offstage--Hannah's suicide. While we later see flashbacks to her suicide (an issue that will be taken up in the next chapter), the climax of the plot

focuses on why she completed suicide rather than the traumatic action itself. The first episode "Tape 1, Side A" opens with Hannah's first words on her tapes and students walking past the memorial created in her honor on her locker door. However, the first character we meet is Clay Jensen, who sees his first mirage of Hannah since her death. After class begins, Clay is left by himself in front of Hannah's locker when Justin Foley walks behind him and says "What the hell are you doing?" Clay seems confused and asks Justin "Do you even know my name?" Justin then says, "You're not that innocent, Jensen. I don't give a shit what she says." Throughout the conversation, the school's guidance counselor, Kevin Porter, reminds the two students that the bell has rung and asks Justin and Clay to go to class. Then, the episode transitions to the home room where the teacher discusses resources for students who are struggling with suicidal thoughts and grief. While the audience later finds that Justin Foley is one of the first people that Hannah discusses as culpable for her suicide, Clay is not aware of his place in her cassette tapes at this point. He's only vaguely aware that they exist and he's one of the last people to be granted access to them because he's the only person mentioned on the tapes that Hannah says is not culpable.

As the first main character introduced, spectators are conditioned to identify with Clay's struggle to find answers because of this "every man" concern that many people face in the midst of tragedy. He's a social outcast, a bit unaware of his surroundings, lacks curiosity, and is regularly bullied by guys like Justin Foley. He also doesn't seem to have any close friends other than Tony Padilla, the person trusted with transporting Hannah's tapes. This narrative arc is identifiable for many high schoolers. On the other

hand, he seems to be very familiar with the problematic rhetoric of care that often surrounds suicide. Furthermore, he clearly has some connection to Hannah, while others seem only to be affected by the reputation they now have after her tapes are released or are using her death as a way to make others feel sympathy for them. In addition to the interaction between Clay and Justin, two students say prior, "She was so pretty" and take a selfie in front of her locker, which they post on social media to garner attention from their peers. Also, Courtney Crimsen, who is mentioned on the tapes, hugs Clay and says "you've been on my mind lately." His response is, "have I?" which insinuates how he doesn't expect concern from any of his classmates. Also, spectators are to believe that she has likely never spoken to him until this point. She responds, "Well, I just feel like we all need to be there for each other at a time like this you know? It's all just so sad. It just doesn't make sense, right?" His facial expressions communicate dismissal and he responds with "But, um a lot of things don't make sense," which communicates his feelings about the superficial care that people are claiming to have when in reality, they are fearful of their reputations. Since Courtney is on the tapes, she feels that she needs to show superficial care toward Clay. In all of these scenes, despite knowing very little about him, Clay seems to be the one that carries the best moral code of the other characters. He's not only seen as the most identifiable character, but the friend in which spectators should identify within this friend group.

Furthermore, he's also the character that sees the superficiality of his peers regarding Hannah's death. An identification with Clay is "favorable to the speaker or his cause is made to seem favorable to the audience, [which] enters the possibility of such

‘heightened consciousness’ as goes with deliberate cunning” (Burke 45). The spectator becomes invested in Clay’s journey to find clarification for Justin’s comment about his innocence because of the malice that Justin clearly has for Clay. Also, the aesthetics of the series provide a bit of a “heightened consciousness” because of the adrenaline rush and hypervigilance that Clay feels as he finds out Hannah’s story. He’s scared of being found out by his family and friends, but also needs to defend Hannah’s honor in order to function in the real world after her death. He rushes to Tony’s home to use his cassette tape and has a biking accident because he isn’t paying attention, an identifiable type of adrenaline rush for spectators. This complicated space is one where spectators can identify because of the nature of the series---a melodrama--but also, because as the person who is least likely to be successful, Clay becomes the person that spectators are rooting for. Furthermore, what is missing in this identification rhetoric is that while spectators can identify with his cause in its basic form, his execution decenters Hannah’s story and makes him the most powerful character and the keeper of her story–a patriarchal construction of trauma narrative.

As the episode progresses, the audience learns that Clay and Hannah worked together at the Crestwood movie theater and attended a few parties together. He denies that he knew her to his parents, but all the students at Liberty High and even Hannah’s mother, Olivia Baker, are aware that they had a connection, arguably the only positive one that Hannah felt she had. While spectators don’t know the full extent of Clay and Hannah’s relationship just yet, they are conditioned to see Clay as the only positive influence in her life, which is in line with the rhetoric of friendship that Nehamas

proposes about friendships as evoking some sort of moral code. The audience later finds that Justin Foley and Bryce Walker are close friends even though much of their relationship is centered on the abuse and objectification of women. The narrative preferences the friendship that Clay and Hannah have over Justin and Bryce arguably due to mainstream rhetorical understandings of friendship.

Since Clay is seen as an anomaly and is on this quest alone, spectators identify with him. Burke argues that "the fact that an activity is capable of reduction to intrinsic, autonomous principles does not argue that it is free from identification with other orders of motivation extrinsic to it" (27). Burke brings up a point that is central to this argument about motivation and the need for rhetorical analysis of motivation when a rhetoric of identification is being used. Clay certainly uses a rhetoric of "everymanness" and care that seems pure in its essence, but in actuality, he perpetuates a problematic, patriarchal rhetoric of trauma and healing. Burke acknowledges the privilege that comes along with this type of identification and references the expectation that college students are autonomous in their educational experiences; (28). however, what's missing here is how the narrative told here is not an autonomous one for Clay. The story is Hannah's and he's telling it for spectators in a way that decenters his voice and amplifies his "good nature" and efforts in bringing justice to her name after her death.

Furthermore, in rhetorically situating this friendship, one can't ignore that Clay is looking to the past to understand Hannah's story, which is similar to how Montaigne learned and maintained his connection with la Boétie. Hannah's cassette tapes arguably provide the same type of reaction for Clay that la Boetie's books did for Montaigne.

Montaigne learned about his friend through his work as well as more about himself through his friend. As high school students and characters who aren't supposed to have senses of selves, Clay and Hannah both can't fit into Aristotelian understandings of friendship because they don't have clear understandings of selves, which arguably is why the narrative begins where it does---after Hannah's suicide. The tapes become the space where Clay learns more about Hannah and as he learns more, she appears to him to provide more explanation when he needs it. For high school audiences, this type of friendship is much more in line with how they perceive themselves--misunderstood and lacking selfhood,--which makes Clay's character much more identifiable than the other characters in the series including Hannah.

However, Clay's connection to Hannah's tapes cannot completely be read through a fusing together of identification and Montaigne's theory of friendship. While Montaigne provides a theory for understanding friendships through the written and historical word, he does not discuss how access to these books gives him power over la Boetie's story and its telling, which Burke doesn't do either. This could be because Montaigne doesn't feel he has power or it could be because these two men arguably had a much more equal playing field because they were both white philosophers in the same generation. While Clay could arguably have a more feminist consciousness than his peers because of his lack of culpability, Justin Foley and Bryce Walker, he still gains power over Hannah's story by having access to its telling. He and Tony both become the keepers of Hannah's story, which can arguably be seen as a patriarchal keeping of her struggles as a woman. Over the course of the first season, the tapes uncover Hannah's

struggles with sexuality, body image, sexual assault, and peer acceptance, which arguably led to her suicide. Her struggles of course come from her experience as a teenage woman who is being reared in a patriarchal world. While she trusts Tony and Clay much more than the other men in the series, the fact that they gain power over her narrative cannot be ignored.

This identification rhetoric is arguably one that is not seen regularly in teen series up to this point. According to Susan Berridge, "Teen drama series, then, with their soap-like formal organisation and thematic concerns, hold many potentials for representing sexual violence...The emotional aftermath on the victim is frequently emphasised and, moreover, because these victims are typically central female characters, they establish strong levels of identification and sympathy" ("Teen Heroine TV" 482). While there's certain moments where spectators are sympathetic or even empathetic to Hannah's struggles, the series makes Clay the identifiable character because Hannah's suicide happens offstage rather than in real time during the series. Identification becomes central to an analysis of this series because it arguably shifts the plot structure of teen dramas up to this point where narrative traumas happen in real time. Spectators certainly learn about Hannah's emotional turmoil, but they only learn it through Clay and other male characters and by season four, she's nearly written out of the plot.

Furthermore, through this plot structure, Clay gains power by being the only person on the tapes that Hannah denies any culpability. For the second, third, and fourth seasons, the audience then follows Clay as he works to defend her honor through his condemnation of Bryce Walker--Hannah's rapist. Much like Montaigne, Clay "instead of

welcoming the companionship of books, true images of what his friend aspired to be but never was wishes to awaken them from their impassivity, to force them into the realm of passion, change, and inconsistency" (Weller 511). Clay wants to bring Hannah justice, despite the inability to bring her back from the dead, which while noble gives him the power to change the focus of the story. He also struggles with his own mental health struggles and guilt for her death, which becomes the main focus of the series rather than Hannah's story. Also, Jay Asher's novel by the same name ends after the narrative of the first season, which illustrates the culpability that television has for this narrative, which is explored in the next chapter. Spectators are conditioned to identify with Clay because of his "everymanness," but also because he's the most powerful character in the series. He has the ability to tell Hannah's story, but also to change the focus of the story to his own inner turmoil, but also for teen dramas more generally. While his control of the narrative is a bit more covert than some other teen dramas in the past, Clay is able to control the narrative in a way that makes him more identifiable. This plot device though is not new to the teen drama. For example, Doyle Greene argues that in *Saved By the Bell*, Zach Morris has the power to say "time out" and change the course of the narrative, which is critiqued as a patriarchal narrative. While Clay is certainly not given this type of visible power, he is given the same amount of power that Zach Morris was given more than twenty years ago to tell narratives that aren't his, particularly women's.

Through this feminist rhetorical analysis, we can see that the power that Clay has creates a rhetoric of trauma in this series and provide a framework for analyzing power within friendships. Hannah's cassette tapes give a narrative account that the characters

are forced to listen to in order to understand her reasons for suicide, but also how nearly everyone in Liberty High was culpable for what happened proving the systemic implications of any suicide more generally. As Kirsch, Royster, and Ronay Johnson would point out, these tapes give the characters and media critics the opportunity to "listen to the texts" in a more deliberate way than *Private Practice* or *The End of the F***ing World* do. However, in framing a feminist rhetorical analysis of *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the "listening" to the cassette tapes cannot be separated from who is listening and who has the power to drive plot mobility. While Clay certainly listens to the tapes and believes every word of Hannah's story, he then takes the story in his hands and makes assumptions about how Hannah would want her story to continue. Even though he "listens" to the tapes, he doesn't listen for an understanding of Hannah's wishes, but listens for how he can create a chivalric ending to his story while guised as hers. Thus, the rhetoric of trauma that is communicated is that the trauma victim cannot speak for herself and her story now becomes a piece of the powerful character's narrative. Then, it is his to tell and bring justice to rather than hers.

*Maybe Chivalry is the End of the F***ing World?: Trauma Rhetoric and Identification in* The End of the F***ing World

In *The End of the F***ing World*, James becomes the most identifiable and powerful character through his need to chivalrously rescue Alyssa from multiple traumas. This series is arguably the hardest of the three series to frame a rhetoric of identification and friendship because the narrative lacks a friend group like *Private Practice* or *Thirteen Reasons Why*. James and Alyssa become friends and Bonnie eventually becomes part of

this trio, but the narrative pushes a romantic relationship between James and Alyssa. In the final episode, they confess feelings for each other, but arguably they don't have a language for any relationship other than a romantic one because they've only seen romantic relationships and negative ones at that. For example, within seconds of meeting, they have an awkward make out session because they don't know how else to relate to some of the opposite gender. In his voiceover, James says "So I pretended to fall in love with her." He doesn't kiss her back and tells her to "shut up" when he asks her about his burnt hand. Also, when he introduces Alyssa to his father, his father mentions he isn't sure if James masturbates and that he might be gay. Alyssa responds, "Maybe I'm gay. Maybe he's asexual. We're dealing with a really broad spectrum these days." While Alyssa provides a more progressive understanding of sexuality, she doesn't provide any language to support the fact that they are in a relationship and could actually be friends. However, spectators are supposed to identify with James rather than Alyssa or Bonnie because James is the first introduced and the one that becomes the chivalric hero, much like Clay, for both women.

The series opens with James introducing himself: "I'm James. I'm 17. And I'm pretty sure I'm a psychopath. I was eight when I realized I didn't have a sense of humor." Then after his father tells a "dad joke," James says " I'd always wanted to punch my father in the face." Since the series is a dark humor melodrama, spectators are looking for this type of cynical humor and a fairly niche teen and young adult audience who identifies with this type of humor. Then, James tells spectators that he purposely burnt his hand in his dad's deep fryer and that he regularly kills animals." In the background,

Bernadette Carol's song "Laughing on the Outside" plays in between scene changes. The lines "laughing on the outside; crying on the inside" continue to repeat. Many teen audiences that would watch a dark humor identify with this experience regarding mental health–an issue that is certainly addressed through a much more melodramatic framing in *Thirteen Reasons Why*– because of the inner turmoil that this population faces during puberty and adolescence. It's a feeling that is more accepted in public rhetoric and in our classrooms, which is relevant for the target audience of this series. Angela Carter argues that, "for us, there is no choice; our experiences of trauma shape how we move through the world... Teaching with trauma is our daily life. We do it everyday, because we have to if we want to survive in the academy." Much like in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, we can't ignore that our students have many of these mental health struggles; the writers of *The End of the F***ing World* choose a different subgenre, dark humor, to communicate some of these same points about teen mental health. James is a social outcast and much like Clay Jensen is identifiable for many teenagers at some point in their high school experience even though arguably most teenagers do not self-identify as psychopaths. In his discussion of identification and politicians, Burke says that "whatever the falsity in overplaying a role, there may be honesty in the assuming of that role itself; and the overplaying may be but a translation into a different medium of communication, a way of amplifying a statement so that it carries better to a large or distant audience" (36). This type of rhetoric is what is seen in this series. While James may be a grotesque of many of his peers, his experience is relatable for the series' target audience and this overstatement

regarding teen mental health is still effectively communicated through dark humor and reaches teenage and adult audiences.

Since James opens the narrative and Alyssa joins second, spectators are conditioned to believe that this is James' story, despite its focus on “saving” Alyssa. While they quickly learn that Alyssa also has mental health struggles and comes from a broken family, she doesn’t gain the same level of identification as James because by the end of season one, his story is who spectators are following due to his alleged death. While being characterized as more deviant than her peers, Alyssa does have friends with whom she sits with at lunch and seems to have a bit more confidence in her standpoint than James does, particularly since Alyssa becomes the mastermind of their escape. Additionally, Alyssa does not introduce herself to spectators until the first episode of the second season. She says: “I’m Alyssa. I’m 19. and I thought I already had the shittiest day of my life” and then the camera transitions to James being shot at the end of season one. Then, the camera shifts to her wedding dress shopping trip. While spectators get to know Alyssa, the story is told from James’s subconscious perspective throughout season one. Alyssa doesn’t provide the same introduction for herself that James does in season one until the following season when he’s off stage. Then, the narrative rotates among Alyssa, Bonnie, and James with the goal being that James saves Alyssa from her “almost wedding.”

At the beginning of season two, we meet Bonnie, who is recently released from prison for manslaughter. The audience learns that she was in love with Clive Koch, the man that James kills because he attempts to rape Alyssa. Bonnie finds Alyssa’s picture in

the newspaper and seeks to gain revenge for Clive's death. Bonnie, the first major character of color in the series, could be an identifiable character for spectators because she comes from a family who had high expectations of her that she fails to live up to, but she quickly becomes the psychopath of the series because her desire to kill seems to be less noble than James or Alyssa's. It then becomes James's responsibility to save Bonnie from herself, which makes him the identifiable and chivalric character yet again. Furthermore, one can't ignore his male privilege as the only man in the trio and how he is written as the character that must save the day. Despite the subversive plot line of the show regarding mental health and the disavowal of the nuclear family, this power still provides a patriarchal plot line for the series.

Another difference between *The End of the F***ing World* and the other two series in this analysis is that James, Alyssa, and Bonnie do not use the term "friend" to define each other's relationship with each other except for one of the last scenes of the series. James is questioned by an officer about Bonnie's crimes and when he's asked to leave, the officer asks him if he can find him through his girlfriend's (Alyssa's) residence. James says, "She's not my girlfriend," and in a voiceover says "*But she was my friend*." One could argue that this series does not belong in this dissertation for that reason. However, the lack of labeling in the series for any type of relationship makes this series important in discussing friendships. As mentioned previously, Nehamas argues that friendships and their fluidity make them overtly feminist relationships and ones that advocate for "social change" (55). While he's referring to feminist activists historically, this type of unshackling from structures is really important when analyzing rhetorics of

friendship. As said previously, there's no language for friendship in this series because there are no relationships that aren't sexual or familial; furthermore, many of these relationships are broken and lack consent, which makes friendship rhetoric a way to frame how these three people do not fit into the structures that are set in place. Each of them go as far as to leave their lives and run away from these familial and social structures that they don't fit into (which is the opposite that happens in *Private Practice* and *Thirteen Reasons Why*). This type of undoing and James's power despite this undoing calls for a feminist rhetorical analysis, but also a rhetorical framing of friendships.

Another rhetoric of friendship that's present in this series is the lack of moral code that is presented through these characters. All of these characters have committed various felon crimes, but according to Nehamas:

> ... friendship can also be 'a school of vice' in another, more urgent way. A friendship may sometimes not simply permit or encourage but actually *require* attitudes or actions that can't be morally justified. The ethical problem has not one but two dimensions. When morality and preferential relationships are juxtaposed, they can conflict not only in how they evaluate the purpose of an activity but also in how they evaluate the means to achieve it. (61)

Many of the actions in this particular series cannot be morally justified and while the other two series seem to preference particular moral codes of friendships than others, this one doesn't create a moral code of friendship, but one that requires sacrifices on

everyone's part, which is arguably what many mainstream conversations about friendships would say is important for friendships to be successful because, "...what is essential to friends is their motive for behaving as they do--that they do what they do *out of* friendship, out of their love for each other" (105). While their actions may not be moral, their motives for these actions create a rhetorical framing of friendships that needs a feminist framing because of its inability to fit into the "cozy hierarchies and binaries" that society sets for relationships (Kirsch and Royster 664). Feminist rhetorical analysis is necessary for framing these friendships because of the continued narrative arc of needing to save characters, in this case women, from their trauma narratives and rather than providing support the identifiable character co-opts the narrative and brings themselves to the forefront rather than the survivor.

Moving Toward A Rhetoric of Trauma, Identification, and Friendship

The power of identification manifests itself in these trauma narratives because of the close association that the dominant characters have with the survivors or victims, which aligns with Burke, but what this power doesn't acknowledge is just what power does to the survivor or victim's agency when the identification is with the dominant figure rather than the survivor or victim. All three series either exclusively focus on trauma narratives or pivot toward one at some point in series. The character(s) with which spectators are conditioned to identify create a rhetoric of trauma that preferences some traumas as more palatable and relatable for audiences than others, particularly for the more powerful characters. Judith Herman argues that in order for trauma survivors to heal and speak their narrative they must have "... a social context that affirms and protects

the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered" (9). Victims and survivors need to have supportive networks in order to nurture their healing process, which sometimes results in their narratives being told in some way. For example, Violet Turner writes multiple books about her experiences and Hannah Baker documents hers on cassette tapes. However, if individual relationships, particularly friendships, are sources of support, problematic rhetorics of trauma cannot continue to be perpetuated through televised representations. Also, friendships tend to be a space of acceptance for folks who may not feel that they fit in with their families or as Nehamas points out society more generally. As Alison Kafer argues, trauma is still a "taboo subject" in most familial settings, which means that friendships should be relationships where trauma can be destigmatized, which is not the rhetoric that these series are perpetuating (13). They are actually creating a rhetoric of trauma that glorifies their own roles in the healing process of their friends, which is a way of usurping power over the narrative and moving the focus toward their own struggles.

While these three series occupy different subgenres of melodrama and deal with vastly different issues, they come together to form a rhetoric of identification that forms how friend groups process and respond to trauma within their friend groups. Each of the most identifiable characters occupy different privileged spaces, but they each seek to have themselves be the central focus of the narrative through and "every man or woman" narrative and seeks to "fix" the trauma narrative in some way that not only benefits the

friend group, but keeps them in power, which leaves the survivor and victims as the least priorities in the series.

In *Private Practice*, Addison's trauma as a woman who can't bear children and struggles with monogamy despite wanting a committed monogamous relationship is much more identifiable than Violet Turner's rape by her patient Katie, which causes her to struggle with attachment to her new son, Lucas. Addison continues to maintain power through this identification and even goes as far as to testify against Violet when she sues Pete for joint custody. While Addison's struggle with PTSD and attachment issues doesn't present the same level of trauma that Violet's does, she is seen as the noble and sympathetic character for caring for Lucas in Violet's absence and as the one who has led the practice without Violet. Addison's ability to gain identification from spectators gives her the power to create and perpetuate this rhetoric of trauma while still claiming to be friends with Violet and her colleagues.

In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Clay Jensen's trauma as someone with regular flashbacks to his time with Hannah and his continued need to defend her honor makes him the identifiable character that has the power to change the narrative through the focus on his character development. Furthermore, as long as Bryce Walker walks free, Clay endures trauma in order to make sure Hannah's story is brought justice. Clay also serves as a brother figure for Justin Foley through his homelessness and his drug addiction, which makes him a much more identifiable and noble character than Hannah Baker, whose story is supposed to drive the narrative. Since Justin Foley was his bully in the first season, Clay is seen as the "good guy" by the end when he and his family adopt

Justin due to his lack of parental figures. During flashbacks, Hannah also depicted as promiscuous and someone whose reputation was questionable among her peers, which further pathologizes her character and in some cases provides more empathy for the people who were featured on the tapes than Hannah herself. Lastly, in the final episode, Clay leads the initiative to bury the cassette tapes after his class's high school graduation. This ritual arguably rids the people on the tapes, with the exception of Bryce Walker, of culpability because as they move into adulthood the tapes are no longer physically in their space. The series ends with a moral lesson of burying the past, which makes Clay the character that has the power to perpetuate this rhetoric of trauma which erases Hannah's story, particularly as the person depicted as having the most positive friendship with Hannah.

In *The End of the F***ing World*, James has his own traumas from his past; however, he quickly becomes the character that must swoop in to save both Alyssa and Bonnie from themselves and also from other men. Alyssa's assault and Bonnie's emotional abuse from Koch are not unpacked in great detail because their traumatic pasts are much less important than ensuring that James saves the day and that there's a love story between Alyssa and him. This focus creates rhetoric of trauma that preferences the story of the main character and the most powerful character rather than the other main characters who are experiencing ongoing trauma.

One of the major takeaways from this analysis is that a rhetoric of identification has potential to cause trauma if a feminist framework is not in place. Even though Burke's rhetorical theory of identification acknowledges some privilege through the

autonomy that identification can bring, he doesn't acknowledge the narrative capital that is given to characters with whom spectators identify with. In trauma narratives, spectators should be invested in the survivor or victim with whom is currently experiencing trauma or is the person who is dealing with their healing process. Addison, Clay, and James certainly have traumatic pasts through loss, but their trauma narratives are not the central focus of the plot—Violet, Charlotte, Hannah, Alyssa, and Bonnie's are. While Burke and my analysis is focusing on written texts, the next two chapters will demonstrate how this same rhetoric is infiltrated in public dialogues of trauma, which makes it harmful and in need of change.

Second, another takeaway from this analysis is the need for more *feminist* rhetorical analysis in trauma narratives. Feminist rhetorical analysis provides a space to unpack the "messiness" of plots, but more importantly narrative structures. If the telling of trauma narratives are framed in a way that doesn't benefit the survivor, then the narrative is not one of liberation, but one that reinforces the heteropatriarchal, capitalist framework that trauma narratives are embedded within. The traumas that Violet, Charlotte, Bonnie, Alyssa, and Hannah endure all involve some sort of assault where their consent was violated. With the exception of Katie, they all involved men taking advantage of them in some way, which demonstrates how these trauma narrative structures in and of themselves are framed in a heteropatriarchal society. The narration of trauma narratives and the narration of them in friend groups is supposed to be subversive because of the "taboo" of these narratives as Kafer discusses. That said, if they are told in a way that reinforces trauma for survivors and spectators who may be survivors then the

narration is an act of futility. Feminist rhetorical analysis forces the narration of these experiences to center the experiences of survivors through "listening," undoing power structures and binaries, and creating outcomes that benefit rather than hurt survivors. Also, feminist rhetorical analysis calls out narratives that don't do these things in order to bring light to the continued heteropatriarchal framing of these narratives. Feminist rhetorical analysis can push trauma rhetoricians toward change because its use for both calling out and reframing problematic narratives is necessary in order for survivors to feel their narratives are valued.

Lastly, a final takeaway from this analysis is that while friendship narratives subvert heteropatriarchal capitalist understandings of relationships, feminist rhetorical analysis is needed to ensure that friendships don't reinforce problematic structures through their processing of trauma. In all of these series, friendships create anti-nuclear family spaces through their resistance to familial input and in most cases the lack of healthy examples of families. However, when trauma narratives enter the friend groups, the friend groups move into some sort of crisis mode and often respond in a way that centers their reactions to the traumatic experience rather than the survivor's healing. More specifically, the dominant and most identifiable friend in the group, takes control of the trauma narrative and decenters the survivor's voice, which reinforces the heteropatriarchal capitalist narrative that friendships seek to dismantle in the first place. Early feminists focused on friendships because of this exact subversion, but what they didn't provide was an analytical framework for unpacking when friendships run off the rails and do the opposite of their original intentions. What feminist rhetorical analysis

does is bring that analytical framework to friendship narratives because of its focus on unveiling issues related to power and privilege and its subversion of these issues in research methods more generally. Feminist rhetorical analysis is not just a method that works for analyzing trauma and friendship narratives, but one that is *necessary* in order for survivors to feel heard and to see healthy rhetorics of trauma and friendships both academically and publicly.

The next chapter will provide an analysis of the trauma narratives in these three series through the friendship structures in place. More specifically, the chapter will discuss how a rhetoric of trauma is created through the friendships that drive the narratives and spectator identification with the most powerful characters in the narratives, who can arguably change the narrative at any point. The chapter will also focus a bit more on how this type of analysis calls for change more generally.

CHAPTER 3: THE TRAUMATIC REALITY OF FRIENDSHIPS: RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF TRAUMA AND FRIENDSHIPS

This chapter highlights the rhetorical theories of trauma that inform a rhetorical understanding of television and friendships. The characters in *Private Practice, Thirteen Reasons Why, The End of the F***ing World* react adversely to their friends' traumas because these traumas change their relationships, which creates a problematic rhetoric of trauma that decenters the focus on the survivors and in turn blames them for shifting relationship dynamics in the friend group. Then, the friend group becomes the epicenter of the narrative rather than the survivor or victim. For this specific argument, I will mostly draw from Wendy S. Hesford's work and other rhetoricians on trauma rhetoric while also focusing on their limitations and how their understanding of trauma and friendships can be applied to fictional serialized television through feminist rhetorical analysis. This chapter articulates the stakes of this analysis of these specific shows and how despite the differences in the series, these melodramas are shows that communicate the same rhetoric of trauma that decenters the survivors experience and focuses the trauma narrative on the effects it has friend group, a rhetoric that is seen in public debates as well.

As mentioned in the last chapter, trauma studies is an interdisciplinary field that has roots in psychology, but also can be attributed to Holocaust studies, literature

(Caruth), media studies (Bruzzi; Chouliaraki; Rothe; Yaeger), and the social sciences (Herman; Leys) as part of its inception. In rhetoric, trauma is an underdeveloped area, but one that continues to gain attention within composition, memory rhetoric, and rhetorics of media. This chapter begins with notions of trauma rhetoric established through media narratives, as developed by Wendy S. Hesford and other scholars in rhetoric. While television studies does have some work on trauma narratives that will be engaged with throughout the chapter (Jacobs and Moorti), rhetorical theory will be the main framing because of the contribution to that particular field.

A Rhetoric of Trauma for Television and Friendships: Hesford's Rhetoric of Trauma in Media

Much of Hesford's work on trauma rhetoric focuses on issues outside of the United States and news accounts of trauma narratives. Over the course of her work (*Spectacular Rhetorics,* "The Malala Effect*," Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the 'Real.*) Hesford uses rhetorical analysis to illustrate how survivor narratives are told by others, a framing that is important to televised fictional narratives, which often decenters the survivor's voice. In her rhetoric of trauma, there are three specific messages that are conveyed to audiences that are seen in news media.

First, Hesford communicates that one component of trauma rhetoric is that survivors are often portrayed as wanting to attack their perpetrators, which is an unrealistic and problematic understanding of the healing process. In her reading of the documentaries, *Rape Stories* and *Calling the Ghosts: A Story About Rape War and Women*, she observes that some of the survivors featured in this documentary say that

fantasies of attacking their perpetrators are forms of healing and can be read as forms of empowerment. While Hesford acknowledges that women can feel this way, she argues that these narratives perpetuate a problematic rhetoric of violence that ignores the gendered language used in the narratives. She argues that these narratives still objectify survivors because "critics have not paid as much attention to...how women's representations of rape, trauma, and resistance (visual and literary) can also become sites for the reinscription or contestation of cultural and national fears and fantasies of those in positions of power" (209). These "fantasies" may take place for some survivors, but this is not a complete story of how a survivor experiences trauma and their healing process and implicitly makes the survivor out to be an unstable, violent person as a victim of violence themselves.

Second, Hesford and other rhetoricians conclude that trauma narratives are often devoid of survivor voices, which silences them, their experiences, and makes their stories often "untellable" and "chaotic." which then leaves their stories in the hands of the more powerful. (Goldstein 184). Hesford and Shuman argue in "Precarious Narratives: Media Accounts of Islamic State Sexual Violence," and Hesford and Kozol in the introduction to their edited collection *Haunted Violations Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the 'Real,"* that news coverage of events such as *The New York Times* 2015 coverage of the Islamic state's rape of Yezidi women and the documentary *Calling the Ghosts* provide static accounts of trauma that is not scaffolded by any kind of trauma-informed rhetoric. First, the accounts are told in the third person, not directly by survivors, thus denying them the opportunity to tell their own stories. Second, they say that these third person

accounts don't take into consideration the precarity of these women and how media exposure could affect their culture and/or their healing processes and could even retraumatize these women. Furthermore, there doesn't seem to be much attention to trauma-informed rhetoric in this coverage due to the lack of knowledge of precarity and working with survivors. Their identities were uncovered despite knowing the risks that they faced from their home cultures and they didn't have the opportunity to narrate or frame their own stories for public audiences. In her discussion of trauma narratives, Diane E. Goldstein pushes Hesford, Shuman, and Kozol's work further and argues that certain types of trauma narrative are rendered "untellable" and "chaotic" because of social constrictions:

> I use the term untellability here to refer to limited comfort or ability of the narrator because of perceived restrictions of context—such as narrator interpretations of discursive safety or risk—as well as issues of content arising from faulty memory, confusion, fragmentation, and an inability to articulate. The chaotic narratives discussed here might be, on the surface, most easily understood as unwriteable, rather than untellable; in other words, the chaos is most apparent as the text moves from oral to written form. In written texts—as we commit narrative to the page—linearity, fragmentation, silences, and disorder become all the more apparent. But many chaotic texts do not depend on writing to reveal their chaotic nature; rather, they are experienced and received as chaotic at the time of performance. (184)

In turn, one can see how a rhetoric of trauma is formed to make a narrative too "chaotic" that it becomes "untellable" and therefore needs to be told by someone other than the survivor in order to be taken seriously in mainstream media. This is an issue that happens in the written word, but is also apparent visually.

Third, Hesford concludes that trauma narratives are used as a function of a larger story about a social problem and have broader social implications, rather than their own experiences that are worthy of retelling. Hesford argues in *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms* that "human rights crises and activism often coalesce around the spectacle of suffering but the visual field of human rights does not form a monolithic rhetoric. The spectacle is open to cooptation and containment, but it can serve as an occasion to challenge, exploit, or at the very least rupture the objectifying gaze" (19). In this particular text, she focuses on Western-centric tellings of transnational and human rights narratives and the need to rhetorically situate human rights concerns because of social conventions. Hesford argues this type of storytelling takes place in the news coverage of Malala Yousafzai's shooting and her activism for women and young girls that followed. According to Hesford:

> "The 'Malala Effect' is rooted in the logic of exceptionality. The "Malala Effect" points to a rhetorical process whereby configurations of exceptionality are bound by composite images of repressed Muslim women and girls and normative story-lines that turn on simple oppositions, such as freedom and constrain" ("The Malala Effect" 142).

While these texts are different in some of the issues and contexts that are addressed, they both illustrate how media accounts of trauma often don't provide support for survivors and even give more power to the people that are already in power.

These components of trauma rhetoric are an important way to frame a feminist rhetorical analysis of trauma. As these narratives are repeated through documentaries, news media, interviews, etc., the same rhetorics repeat: trauma narratives are often told by someone other than the survivor in problematic ways; these narratives silence survivors and often take on extraneous meanings or goals not expressed by survivors themselves, such as becoming a part of a larger dialogue that takes the focus off of the individual experience or engaging in thoughts of revenge or violence on the attacker.

The Need to Attack the Perpetrator: The Misrepresentation of the Survivor's Emotions

Hesford's focus on the continued trauma narrative that survivors not only want to bring harm to their perpetrators, but that they *should*, is a nuance that comes up in these series through a variety of characters' trauma narratives. In *Private Practice*, the rest of the practice perpetuates this narrative through their negative reaction when Violet testifies on behalf of Katie after Katie rapes her. Violet struggles whether or not to testify on Katie's behalf as her therapist (S3 E5 "Strange Bedfellows"). Even though Katie Kent injects Violet with a drug that paralyzes her from the neck down, which seems intentional at first, Violet recognizes during the encounter that Katie is having a euphoric episode. In her schizophrenic euphoria, Katie believes that the baby she miscarried is the baby that Violet is pregnant with (Lucas) and she has come to take the baby back. When Violet finally realizes that Katie isn't going to rationalize with her, she shows her how to

perform a c-section so that Lucas stands a chance of survival. Katie leaves Violet bleeding out and takes Lucas with her. However, when the trial happens, Violet says that she feels that Katie was euphoric. As a therapist, Violet feels it's her duty to her patient to be honest despite the personal connection she now has to Katie's act. However, others in the practice feel that Violet should indeed chastise Katie to ensure she is punished appropriately for her mistakes. In this case, while Violet certainly hates Katie, her story is framed by her friends to tell a story that she's not willing to tell about her rage, which illustrates how trauma can be rhetorically situated through the power that friends have over the narrative. This plot structure is indicative of how friendships can indeed be traumatic experiences, particularly for people who are needing and expecting their friendships to be supportive relationships.

In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, this rhetoric of survivors needing to bring harm to their perpetrators is articulated through the focus on Bryce Walker's murder in seasons three and four. However, due to the narrative structure, it is Hannah's friends, particularly Clay Jensen, who feel that Bryce should pay for what he has done--an interpretation on their part of what Hannah would want if she were alive. In season three, the audience is introduced to Ani, a character who while new to the series has had an offstage role in the prior seasons. Ani becomes the main narrator of the season and a co-orchestrator with Clay as he develops a plan to find out who killed Bryce Walker and potentially to cover up the crime. Ani and Clay begin dating and Clay soon finds out that Ani had been having sex with Bryce prior to her relationship with Clay. Ani is the only person in this friend group who really believed that Bryce could change from his aggressive behaviors.

She serves as a storyteller of how the high school not only views Bryce, but also Clay. She regularly tells Clay that he's the "hero,", but is later critical of him for feeling pressure to assume that role. When Clay confronts Ani about her relationship with Bryce, she says, "Clay, this has nothing to do with you" and he responds, "Of course it has to do with me!" Ani's answer illustrates that she might be one of the few characters that is aware of how Clay actually functions in the narrative and the toxicity that he has as its keeper. She says, "Why, because I only exist as a function of you?" He then leaves and this comment isn't addressed much further (S 3 E 12 "And then the Hurricane Hit").

Ani's reaction illustrates her ability to see how Clay makes Bryce Walker's, Hannah Baker's, Justin Foley's, and Tyler Down's traumas about him; however, she still orchestrates that same narrative to make sure that Clay isn't convicted of Bryce's murder. The police continue to feel that Clay is the only suspect and even call him "a person of interest" which rhetorically situates him even further as the main focus of the series (S3 E9 "Always Waiting for the Next Bad News"). While Clay didn't kill Bryce, it becomes Ani and the rest of his friends' responsibilities to make sure that he comes out as the "hero" and with his help they work to cover up the true story. They accuse Montgomery (Monte) De La Cruz, who dies in jail, of Bryce's death rather than Alex, who did indeed kill Bryce, and are successful in keeping this narrative undercover (S3 E13 "Let the Dead Bury the Dead"). Alex's, a white man, name is cleared and the blame is put on Monte, a Latinx man, which is very much in line with the white patriarchal narrative of the series--one Clay seeks to uphold. Even though Alex later confesses to Winston, he and Monte's former lover, Winston says that Alex has been through enough and he won't turn him

into the police. Alex attempts suicide earlier in the series and has long-term physical ailments, which get lots of narrative time, but Monte's continued abuse by his father and the homophobia he received from his community is seen as less traumatic by this narrative's standards. It's also important to note that Alex's father is a deputy sheriff and while he is suspicious that his son committed his crime, he doesn't specifically question him about the crime.

The narrative leaves the audience with a conundrum about whether or not Bryce Walker deserved to live and be given a second chance while also focusing on the need for this friend group to heal from the trauma of their high school experiences. During prom (S4 E9), Clay says in a voiceover, "*As the night got later, we just kept dancing and dancing like there was nothing else. Like it was the end of the world*" which is arguably the first positive moment this group has had together since Hannah died. After graduation (S3 E10), they mourn the death of Hannah and Justin (who dies from AIDS), bury the tapes, and hope to move forward into their college and professional lives. During the burial, Jessica sees a mirage of Bryce as she often has in the last few seasons. When Bryce says, "this is my day too...I still feel like I won." She responds with how she views graduation as a moment of loss, but also of love: "In what kind of world, do I love all these people? The world you made. We had to love each other at the end of it all. You did that."

While still not giving him much verbal credit in the following lines, Jessica does provide a conclusion that is central to the overall argument of this chapter. The spectator certainly expects Jessica, a survivor of Bryce Walker's violence against women, to hate

him, but she in turn doesn't actively set out to hurt him. The narrative moves toward and ends with how this group of friends handles the loss of others and their traumas rather than seeking healing for people like Hannah, Justin, and others. Even though Jessica is the one that communicates this rhetoric rather than Clay, Clay is the first person she lists to Bryce that she now loves because of the trauma that Bryce causes them, which still centers Clay's dominance. The narrative ends with the friend group promising to seek each other out when they need help and Tony and Clay leaving for college together, divorcing itself from the premise of the whole series---Hannah's story. This narrative structure communicates this same rhetoric of rage through Clay's need to avenge Bryce Walker and Alex's murder of him. The series ends with feelings of possibility for a group of people who killed and covered up the death of one of their classmates. While it's a complicated narrative that is told about sexual violence and justice for survivors, it is one that encourages and even expects violence from survivors, which reifies this age-old problematic rhetoric of trauma that Hesford and others discuss. Furthermore, Clay Jensen and others communicate the power that friendships do indeed have over trauma narratives when given access to them and how they can be traumatic experiences for people who need them to be supportive spaces.

In *The End of the F***ing World*, the rhetoric of needing to bring justice to a survivor through their harm of their perpetrator is articulated through Bonnie's need to kill both James and Alyssa for murdering Clive–her main contribution to the series' plot. What the audience soon finds is that Clive was cheating on Bonnie and engaged in predatory behavior by forcing her to jump through hoops, including sexual ones, to sit in

on his philosophy classes at the college where she works. In season two episode seven, at gunpoint, Bonnie forces Alyssa to tell her the whole story. Alyssa says, "Your boyfriend tried to rape me. So James stabbed him. What else is there to say?" Bonnie accuses them of lying and Alyssa tells her that there were other women in Clive's life. Bonnie responds with "That was never proved….No. No! He loved me. And you took him from me. You killed him." Then, James jumps in and says "I-I killed him. Let her go" And Alyssa responds with "Fuck off James. Stop trying to save me." Alyssa's response illustrates, similar to Ani's, that she's aware that James feels the patriarchal need to be the savior. Then, Bonnie says, "...People are supposed to get punished" and Alyssa says, "You think we weren't? I'm always in that house. I'm always in that room. I can't get out. Maybe I did some things that I shouldn't have done, but I didn't deserve that….We're not gonna say sorry." Yet again, Alyssa provides this argument that Bonnie can't really argue against. Bonnie responds by attempting suicide, which James and Alyssa stop her from. However, Bonnie is taken to jail for crimes over the season and is written out of the plot, which shows that her trauma is actually never going to be dealt with in this particular narrative and is just an add-on for James and Alyssa to process as their own trauma. Now, James and Alyssa have this shared traumatic experience that they can process together while Bonnie is out of their orbit. It's also no surprise that Bonnie is the only woman of color in the main cast and is treated in a similar vein to Monte in *Thirteen Reasons Why*. While she certainly commits crimes, Bonnie is not given narrative space to process her traumas, despite her allegedly being one of the main foci of this particular season. The only way she is allowed to process is to bring harm to others who she perceives as the

perpetrators of her trauma, which continues this cyclical rhetoric of trauma that focuses on revenge and violence.

This rhetoric of violence and revenge within trauma narratives illustrates how fictional television's need to dramatize the story even after the traumatic event(s) have happened. In turn, this rhetoric pathologizes the survivor or victim rather than the assailant or the cultural discourses that shape and allow these traumatic events to happen in the first place. By focusing on revenge rather than healing, survivors are then caught in this rhetoric and avoid telling their stories because of how fictional ones manifest this rhetoric, which in turn silences the people that these shows are supposed to or should target. This dramatization is also a product of melodrama, which while I argue in Chapter 1 can be a subversive genre, it does provide a traumatic space for this problematic rhetoric of trauma to fester and cause more harm than good. Furthermore, when this rhetoric exists within friendships, friendships now become a rhetorical situation where violence is a norm rather than healing, which is not how survivors have historically seen these types of relationships. Rather than being spaces for healing, friendships now retraumatize the survivor and in the case of the series discussed traumatize other members of the friend group.

Telling the Narrative Without the Survivor: The "Untellability" and "Chaos" of Trauma

Each series rhetorically frames trauma narratives through narrative structures that decouple the survivor from his or her own story. First, the trauma narrative is relayed via characters *other* than the survivor. This not only renders survivors invisible, but also makes their story "untellable" or too "chaotic" for them to tell. Then, in response to this

chaos of the original trauma, the narrative recenters around the friend that the spectator most identifies with becomes the voice of the survivor and in turn the epicenter of the narrative. Also, due to this "chaos" the most identifiable and powerful friend moves the story toward their own trauma because it is more palatable and relatable for spectators and implies that since the story is too "chaotic," that the survivor cannot tell it for themselves.

In *Private Practice*, this rhetoric is seen in the practice's reaction to Charlotte King's rape. Charlotte calls Addison to perform her exam after Pete finds her. (S4 E7 "Did You Hear What Happened to Charlotte King?"). During the exam, Addison says, "Charlotte, it means a lot that you called me. I know that we haven't always...I'm here for you whatever you need, okay?." Charlotte is known for being abrasive and having few friends. Also, as chief of staff at St. Ambrose Hospital, she's often in the position to make medical decisions that the practice doesn't agree with. Even though Addison could certainly be sincere here, it does continue the narrative that Addison's feelings seem to become central whenever any of her friends are experiencing a trauma, particularly one that she has not experienced herself. Charlotte asks Addison not to collect a rape kit and while Addison agrees, she collects one anyway in case Charlotte wants to press charges later. She also claims that she has a "legal obligation." Finally, everyone finds out, including Cooper (her boyfriend), that Charlotte is raped despite Charlotte's desire to keep it a secret.

Furthermore, in a much more overt way than with Violet, Addison forces a friendship onto Charlotte because she assumes that Charlotte now feels a connection to

her. In reality, Charlotte is just aware that Addison is one of the best ob-gyns in the country and is at her disposal. When Charlotte returns to work, Addison asks Charlotte to go to coffee with her. Charlotte responds, "We're not friends" and Addison proceeds to give Charlotte unsolicited medical advice that she arguably already knows due to her own medical credentials (S4 E8 "What Happens Next"). Then Addison says, "All right, we're not friends. But we could be. I could be your friend. I'm the only one that knows what happened., and I could, I don't know, be there for you or whatever." Then, Charlotte justs asks her to keep her rape a secret. In this moment, Addison juxtaposes her desire to be Charlotte's friend with her power over the narrative. Addison recognizes that she has control over the narrative because she's the only person that knows Charlotte was raped. Also, Addison wants to win Charlotte over in the process, which shows much more of a disregard for Charlotte's experience and more of a need for Addison to maintain self-importance. Furthermore, one can't ignore that Addison feels guilty for labeling Charlotte's rape kit as a "Jane Doe" which is a way she could lose her medical license. Yet again, this trauma becomes more about Addison's potential to lose control of the narrative than one that focuses on Charlotte's healing. Addison also moves the narrative toward her desire and likely her own trauma response to not attaining to be friends with Charlotte as Charlotte is certainly a character that most folks see as prickly and stoic.

Addison continues to demonstrate this need to shift Charlotte's perspective by telling Violet about Charlotte's rape in an attempt to make Charlotte comfortable with Addison's legal obligation to process her rape kit. Sheldon also tells the police when he is called on to interview Lee McHenry, Charlotte's rapist. Sheldon feels he needs to provide

the police with this evidence to bring justice to Charlotte and to ensure that this same trauma does not happen to other women. Violet tries to coerce Charlotte to speak with her and then shows up at her office and tells her own rape story to assure she that she "get[s] it" (S4 E8). This scene is then juxtaposed with Addison and Sam calling in Charlotte's rape kit to be processed. Yet again, Addison's need to be seen as a victim becomes the central narrative despite Charlotte's own need to remain silent about her experience. While we can't ignore that Addison has these legal obligations, the problem is that the narrative is rhetorically situated in such a way that Addison continues to need to be the main focus despite the other trauma narratives in the series. Furthermore, she not only needs to be the main focus as the main character, but also because her everyday traumas need to be seen as just valid as the ones that her colleagues experienced that arguably have a greater negative impact on their lives moving forward. Addison also needs to be seen as a supportive friend and Charlotte does not give her that pleasure, which upsets the narrative arc of friendship in this series. While all of these characters want to help Charlotte, they don't allow her to process her trauma herself, but in turn, actually do everything she asks them not to do. Addison, Sheldon (played by Brian Benben), and Violet (who is also a victim of this same rhetoric) articulate this rhetoric that when the narrative becomes "chaotic," they must chivalrously calm the storm by taking the focus away from the survivor. Even though Addison's training as an ob-gyn and Sheldon and Violet's training as psychiatrists would discourage this type of response to a patient, their need to maintain power over the narrative and "decenter" the chaos is clearly more important and critical to the maintenance of this narrative.

Violet also continues this chastisement when, against Charlotte's wishes, she tells Cooper that Charlotte was raped and insists that she should go to the police. Violet feels this way because her rapist raped someone else prior to her[1] and Violet feels she saved others from having to go through the same experience (S4 E9 "Can't Find My Way Back Home"). After Violet tells her story, she says to Charlotte, "No matter how hard it is, I can tell you from experience that it is the right thing to do." While Violet is not insinuating that Charlotte's failure to report her rape is hurting the friend group, she is insinuating that Charlotte's healing is about others who might be raped by this person rather than that fact that Charlotte was raped in the first place. Furthermore, this rhetoric is very much the antithesis of what Violet would tell her own patients, which shows that this rhetoric exists in this friend space rather than medical space--arguably two separate spheres of the same office. Sheldon, the newest psychiatrist in the practice, also tells Charlotte that her rapist has a girlfriend and a son that "he could hurt." In both cases, the blame is placed on Charlotte, which makes her feel she has to come forward in order for the narrative at the practice to stay in place. Furthermore, Violet breaks doctor-patient confidentiality and tells Cooper that Charlotte was raped because she feels this secret "is damaging Charlotte more than she's already been damaged," an assessment she makes based off very few conversations with Charlotte. Now, Charlotte has turmoil in her romantic relationship, which is an added layer of trauma and complexity in her narrative. While Cooper is certainly supportive, she wasn't ready for him to know and potentially act out violently, which he tends to do in moments of heightened passion (i.e. when his

[1] Violet was raped prior to Katie's attack.

child patients are facing abuse). In turn, Charlotte does identify Lee McHenry as her rapist, despite saying he wasn't when she attended her first lineup. She later forgives him when he comes to the hospital for care (S4 E13 "Blind Love""). Charlotte then moves into the rest of season four with little acknowledgement that she's ever been raped, arguably because she gave into the pressure of her friends and "healed" in the way that *they* needed her to.

Charlotte's narrative becomes so "chaotic" for the rest of the practice that they must narrate for her and frame the story as one of duty rather than healing, which becomes a problematic construction of a trauma narrative. Charlotte is then made to feel that she is letting others down, which also communicates the other components of rhetoric discussed in this chapter. By identifying her assailant, she brings charges against someone that she's unsure she wants to in order to conform to the narrative her friends craft for her. She is also made to feel that she is doing other women an injustice by not reporting, which makes her narrative much more about the broader society than her own healing process. Furthermore, her friends and colleagues recenter the narrative onto their own experiences, thus decentering her voice and amplifying the voices of her friend group.

Amelia Shepherd's trauma becomes another narrative where this same rhetoric of "untellability" and "chaos" surfaces, but in this case is called out and almost named. When Amelia joins Oceanside Wellness, she is definitely seen by many of her colleagues as a child by people like Addison, Sam, Naomi, and Mark Sloan when he crosses over from *Grey's Anatomy* (S3 E11 "Another Second Chance") –which is a perception she

regularly resents. It is due to this hubris that she often won't seek help from her colleagues.

After Amelia assists her friend Michelle in completing suicide due to her Huntington's disease diagnosis, Amelia begins drinking and taking Oxycontin again. Once her colleagues realize that Amelia is writing prescriptions for herself and her new boyfriend, Ryan, they host a facilitated intervention in an attempt to stop her behavior (S5 E8" Who We Are"). While all of her colleagues give feedback about her behavior, much of the focus is on Addison because of her history with Amelia. Addison threatens to throw Amelia out of her home, call her family, and report her to the medical board if she doesn't join a rehab center. During this episode, there are consistent flashbacks to Amelia's childhood where she and Derek watched their father die during an armed robbery because the perpetrators wanted her father's watch. Amelia now has that watch and gives it to Ryan. Addison notices that Ryan is wearing the watch and is appalled at Amelia's decision. Amelia refuses to tell her colleagues the significance of the watch and Addison begins to tell the story. Amelia interrupts and says, "You do not tell that story! That is not your story! He was not your Dad! He was my Dad! You shut your mouth! Shut up, you stupid, ignorant monster bitch! You do not tell that story. You do not ever tell that story. You ever tell that story to anyone...and I will kill you with my bare hands." While it should be taken into consideration that Amelia is coming off of a high, she is one of the first people to push back on Addison when she takes control of her trauma narrative. One could argue that Amelia's history with Addison makes her more

comfortable in doing so, but also it could have just taken the repetition of this continued narrative cycle for someone to finally speak out.

Earlier in the episode as a response to the tension in the room, the facilitator suggests in order to calm Amelia down that her colleagues should give her access to Oxycontin because she won't listen to them if she's coming off a high. They agree not to, but when Addison can't take Amelia's insults anymore, she wants to give her a pill. When Sheldon tries to stop her, Addison says:

> That--that thing in there. That used to be a person, okay? And she was sweet and she was funny. And I took her to get her ears pierced, And I-I-I did her hair for prom, And I told her all about birth control. When she didn't know who to ask, And we were sisters, you know? We were closer than sisters. Now she's ...that used to be Amelia Shepherd. That used to be someone I love, and I want her back.

Sheldon then agrees to help Addison get into the drug cabinet. Yet again, Addison takes control of the narrative by going against the majority and using her narrative capital as both the main character and the person with the most history with Amelia. While Addison is certainly concerned about Amelia's well-being, she yet again wants to move the narrative back to what it used to be rather than what Amelia wants or needs. She also uses mostly "I" statements, which communicates this rhetoric of identification and trauma that is seen throughout the series. Yet again, when the trauma becomes overwhelming for Addison, she wants to control and tell the narrative herself. Furthermore, her focus on her and Amelia being "closer than sisters" insinuates a more

intimate connection that is often had through friendships rather than family. According to Nehamas:

> Our friendships permeate our personality, they structure our perception of the world, and in many circumstances enable us to act in a particular way without a second thought: they are part of the background that allows us to perceive directly what we must do something for a friend that we wouldn't do for someone else. Friendship is in that respect more like courage, generosity, or modesty than it is like justice. (149)

Addison feels that she has to bring justice to Amelia in a way that she doesn't for her relatives. She has a very estranged relationship with her parents and after her brother, Archer, cheats on Naomi, her relationship with him also becomes estranged. Some of her most formative memories are clearly with Amelia, but when Amelia's trauma makes the friendship narrative too "chaotic," Addison responds with hypervigilance in order to control the narrative and attempt to move it back in a direction in which she is more comfortable. This use of familial language and intimacy is also antithetical to the narrative itself, but in turn, recognizes the world in which the narrative takes place, which certainly preferences familial connections and traumas over friend ones. This decentering of familial relationships becomes almost a past thought in this moment because once Addison loses control and Amelia brings this "chaotic" narrative to the practice, Addison uses any form of rhetoric she can to keep her power in place and in turn orchestrates another traumatic experience for a member of this friend group.

In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah's cassette tapes are certainly a stark example of the power of narrative being deemed "untellable" and more importantly here told and *interpreted* by others. As mentioned previously, Clay is the only person mentioned on Hannah's tapes that she doesn't find culpable for her death. Clay then feels it is up to him to make sure that justice is brought to Hannah's story. He takes this task too far and becomes representative of the inherent patriarchal narrative that exists in this show. The tapes are facilitated by Tony and Clay becomes the focal point of concern not only for the spectators, but also the other characters. He also becomes the character that spectators and the show's characters are supposed to see as the most marred by Hannah's death because of their almost romantic relationship. Clay even cuts his face while riding his bicycle and has this cut for most of the first season– a rhetorical way to show his pain for the audience (S1 E1 Tape 1 Side A). This same type of cut happens again after a fight with some of Montgomery de la Cruz's teammates in the first episode of season 4 (S4 E1 "Winter Break."). Also, from the beginning of the series, Clay's parents and Mr. Porter, the school guidance counselor, are very concerned with how he is handling the situation despite Clay's insistence that he barely knew Hannah. The audience soon finds out that's not true, but that narrative space is set up in such a way that Clay's potential PTSD becomes the focus rather than Hannah's continued pain and sexism that she endures at Liberty High. Clay does his best to make contact with everyone that is on the tapes such as Mr. Porter, the school guidance counselor; Justin Foley, Hannah's first crush; Tyler Down, the photographer who leaks out pictures of her, Courtney, one of Hannah's love interests, and others in order to bring justice to Hannah.

One of the most salient moments where Clay's trauma becomes the focus rather than Hannah's is after he listens to "his" tape with Tony. There are flashbacks to a party where Clay and Hannah start to have sex and she asks him to leave. Then, she hides in the bedroom closet and witnesses Bryce Walker rape Jessica (S1 E8 Tape 6 Side A). When Clay hears this part of the tape, he yells at Tony: "...She needed me, and I walked away….I was scared. I thought it was something I had done or something I didn't understand, because I'm this fucking loser that doesn't know anything about girls or about life or anything….It all started with me." Tony reassures Clay that he did what Hannah wanted, and tries to get Clay to step back from the rock ledge. Tony then says, "You think you could have changed anything? What does that make you, God?" While Clay does genuinely feel regret for his choice, the build-up to this moment decenters Hannah's story and instead focuses on Tony making sure that Clay knows that he wasn't responsible for Hannah's death. What Clay seems to miss here is that throughout these tapes, this is the only time that Hannah's wishes were respected during her narrative. She asked Clay to leave because she became nervous about their sexual encounter and he did just that. She wasn't given that agency throughout the rest of her story; however, Clay still steps in and tries to take control of a narrative that wasn't his to begin with because it becomes too "chaotic" for him to handle.

While Clay's trauma certainly shouldn't be ignored, it is important to point out the problematic narrative structure that is put in place in order to process his issues. According to Rachel N. Spears:

> ...when teaching trauma narratives, we need not interrogate the accuracy--an impossible task as noted in autobiographical studies. Rather, we should accept each text as presented, with all its complexities and performances, while discussing links between trauma and healing. By doing so, we will be acknowledging that the trauma narrative is one version of the traumatic experience, a version filled with authorial choices and connected to processes and purposes that cannot be ignored, a version different from, yet similar to, all prior versions. (63)

While Spear's point is a pedagogically valid one and one that should be used for any rhetorical analysis that focuses on trauma, it is important to note what types of trauma are seen as the most important and who gets to have a traumatic experience that is empathized with. Now that Hannah is dead, the focus moves toward how her friends handle her death and their own traumas that are potentially still present in spite of her death. Clay now has control of the narrative and its telling because he's the only person whom Hannah doesn't hold culpable, but now in order to process his own trauma, he becomes hyper-focused on being the chivalric figure and moves the narrative away from Hannah because he has the power to do so.

During the trial season (season 2), the Bakers bring a lawsuit against Liberty High for Hannah's death, which while crafted as bringing justice to Hannah, becomes another platform for Clay. They seek to hold the school accountable while also putting Bryce Walker on trial for both Hannah and Jessica's rape. Each of the episodes focuses on specific characters' testimonies, which mirrors Hannah's tapes in the previous season. By

the end of the season, Liberty High is held blameless, Justin Foley turns himself in for being an accessory to Jessica's rape, and while Bryce is convicted of rape, he is only given a brief probation and is encouraged to transfer high schools by his family. The narrative seeks to bring awareness to the lack of repercussions for male perpetrators, particularly athletes and people who come from wealthy backgrounds, which is a very realistic critique of sexual assault in society more generally, but particularly educational institutions. That said, Clay continues to be the center of attention due to his hypervigilance of needing to be the one that brings justice to Hannah. In both the trial and the quest to find Bryce Walker's murderer, Clay asserts a co-detective role in opposition to law enforcement because he mistrusts their handling of the case. Again, this narrative seeks to bring awareness to some of the issues that are seen in law enforcement regarding sexual violence. However, Clay has control of the narrative to the point that he can center his own experience as the main one rather than Hannah's.

When Clay gives his testimony, the prosecutor is critical of Clay's leaving Hannah after their attempted sexual encounter. He tries to defend himself and say "we were all recovering," which is juxtaposed with his father telling him how parents just want to protect their children. (S2 E7 "The Third Polaroid"). This juxtaposition illustrates that, despite Clay's own internal turmoil with Hannah's death, the goal of the narrative is to find someone else culpable rather than Clay Jensen. Even though Hannah communicates his lack of culpability in the tapes, he still needs validation from others and arguably doesn't get much closure until the final episode when he and his group of friends bury the tapes in the same place where he first heard "his" tape. Zach even says,

“let’s pile on the closure dirt” as he shovels dirt over the tapes. (S4 E10 “Graduation”). When Hannah’s story is too “chaotic” or has been resolved by the people who have control over it, the narrative literally buries the story and moves toward a possibility narrative for the other characters, which perpetuates this rhetoric of trauma that renders the victim invisible. The narrative ends with the resolution of a quest, which is an age-old understanding of televised youth and adolescent experience, rather than addressing the trauma that Hannah faces from her friends.

In *The End of the F***ing World*, this trauma rhetoric is perpetuated briefly through James’s need to center his experience and desire to save Alyssa. While this narrative is progressive in its focus on mental health, it still tells a patriarchal savior narrative that perpetuates trauma among these friends. For example, in season two, episode five, James says to Alyssa “It wasn’t just you...that had a bad time...I nearly died. I nearly died!” She responds, “It’s not a competition. Oh, apparently it is.” Then, she says, “I know. I was there.” Alyssa is the first character in this analysis to acknowledge this rhetoric that some traumas are seen as more palatable than others for spectators and for narratives more generally. Her focus on the fact that traumatic experiences are not a “competition” really communicates an antithesis for the patriarchal rhetoric of trauma and friendship that exists in these series. She also takes control of the telling of her own story (albeit briefly) when James focuses on how the “chaotic” narrative affected him. She interrupts his telling of her narrative, which is similar to how Amelia handles Addison’s telling of her story, and illustrates the potential for this rhetoric to pivot in a healthier direction for future representation. The rhetoric doesn’t change and by the end

of the story, James is still the savior and he and Alyssa share a similar ending to a quest with some hope for a more romantic relationship in the future.

The rhetoric of "untellability" and "chaos" that is seen in these series presents not only a problematic storytelling structure for trauma narratives, but also a space for toxic friendships to be created. Even though Amelia, Alyssa, and Tony (on behalf of Hannah), push back on Addison, James, and Clay's usurping of survivor narratives, they aren't successful because the rhetoric of friendships that constructs trauma narratives focuses on friendships for "the greater good" rather than ones that support individual survivor experiences. When their trauma narratives are "out of control" for the dominant friend in the group, they have to take over the narrative in order to maintain their power, but also keep the friendship narrative intact. These power moves make friendships another traumatic relationship for survivors, which is a concern that rhetoricians and television scholars need to address more frequently in criticism on these issues.

What About Us? The Broader Implications of Trauma in Televised Friendships

Finally, and arguably one of the most important components of this analysis, is Hesford's focus on how trauma narratives are rhetorically constructed as having larger social implications, which decenters the survivor's voice. This rhetoric lies within the communication among friend groups in this series and is orchestrated by the dominant friend, whom the spectator is supposed to identify with. The maintenance of the friend group is the first priority and if the trauma narrative has any capacity for pivoting away from disrupting the narrative structure, then, the friend group chastises the survivor for this upheaval.

In *Private Practice* (arguably the series that demonstrates this rhetorical component the most), this rhetoric of the larger social implications of the survivor's experiences takes place when the narrative pivots toward Addison's inner turmoil as she works to save Violet and Lucas's lives. When Pete and Naomi find Violet unconscious in her home, Addison is immediately called as the expert healer for Violet (SE E1 "A Death in the Family"). She works to save Violet's uterus under the direction of Cooper, her best friend, rather than Pete and Sheldon, the potential fathers of Lucas[2]. Addison's choice to listen to Cooper is indicative of the culture of friendship within the series and how one person's trauma is seen to affect the entire group. Furthermore, Cooper is seen as having more insight into Violet's wishes than the two men with whom she's had sexual relationships with. For example, Sam, Pete, Sheldon, Dell, and Cooper are waiting in the lobby while Addison and Naomi operate on Violet rather than any of Violet's blood family. In the meantime, Katie, still in a euphoric state, brings Lucas to the hospital specifically to be seen by Cooper because she believes that Lucas is hers. Pete and Cooper coerce her to give the baby to them and Charlotte soon finds that Lucas's spleen may be bruised. Since Addison is also a neonatal surgeon she says, "I can save them both" and leaves Naomi with Violet while she attends to Lucas. After Violet and Lucas come out of surgery, Naomi chastises Addison for trying to save both of them and leaving Naomi to finish a procedure that she hadn't done since medical school. Addison says, "It's Violet. It's Violet's baby. These are my people. They are my responsibility….I

[2] Violet has sexual relationships with both Pete and Sheldon at the same time and at this point doesn't know Lucas's paternity. After a test is initiated, we find that Pete is Lucas's biological father.

have to take care of them. I have to do everything. Do you know what that's like? Do you know that weight that is pressing down on me? If she had died. If that baby had died...So you don't get to lecture me. You don't get to fault me for not wanting to lose another friend." This "losing another friend" allusion is in response to Naomi's resignation (albeit very brief) and the tension between Addison and her regarding Naomi's misuse of the practice's finances.

While Addison completes what seems to be the impossible in both operating rooms, the narrative then turns to her own feelings of helplessness and responsibility rather than Violet's recovery. Naomi holds Addison and repeats "You're not alone." While no one can fault Addison for feeling a deep sense of responsibility and certainly being exhausted from these surgeries, Violet wakes up with little focus on her physical recovery and the episode ends with Naomi clutching Addison's hands as she breathes a sigh of relief. Addison illustrates that her main concern is her own reputation and culpability if Violet or Lucas dies. She certainly cares about Violet, but the viewer is supposed to identify with Addison's trauma rather than Violet's, who is going to have ramifications from this attack for the rest of her life. According to Hesford, "to find human rights testimonies and images of suffering simultaneously empowering and voyeuristic is not to remain undecided about their role but rather to recognize their complex rhetorical dynamics" (*Spectacular Rhetorics* 115). This specific moment as indicated is quite complex in its rhetorical framing because while Addison is committed to save Violet, her reaction has to be questioned. If Violet dies, this could change the dynamic of the friend group because as one of its newest members, Addison, would be

responsible for the shift in their group having a "unique audience to talk to," which Plato argues is a foundational reason for having friends because of the intimate details of our lives we share with them (Garver 146).

In contrast to how the previous episode ends, the next episode (SE E2 "The Way We Were") opens with Violet experiencing some level of agoraphobia and fear of being alone. However, in this episode, Addison works with a family whose daughter has a tumor that is causing her to act out violently. At the end of the episode, Addison says to Sam:

> Nobody beat me, nobody tried to steal my baby, nobody stabbed me, but I am wounded, Sam. Noah?[3] Oh my heart is broken. And I shouldn't even complain about it because...nothing happened. I mean nothing *happened* to me. Not like what happened to the Larsons or Violet. You know, sometimes, I'm jealous of them? Because everybody can see their injuries, so they have a right to be messed up.

In this moment, Addison blatantly uses her trauma as a way to direct the narrative back to her when most of the episode has focuses on Violet's recovery and the Larsons' struggle. She takes control of the narrative and provides a rhetoric of identification for audience members to identify with her as the series' "every woman" and how her trauma should be seen just as significant as Violet's and the Larson's. However, in turn, she actually appeals to an audience who is more likely to have her experience than the ones of the

[3] A subplot during this time is that Addison has feelings for one of the surgeons whose wife is one of her patients. They never have sex, but have a variety of sensual encounters.

others. Addison's connection between her own experience and theirs actually objectifies Violet's story because she becomes jealous of the attention that has been focused on Violet, while saying in the last episode that she had to save her friend. She minimalizes Violet's trauma by rhetorically constructing a narrative of her own experience that this particular group of spectators might find to be more relatable. She also makes the trauma narratives of both of these people center on her own reaction to the lack of attention she received for her own traumatic experiences. Furthermore, Addison focuses on how Violet's trauma affects how her own trauma is perceived which perpetuates this problematic rhetoric that seeks to chastise the survivor for how their trauma affects their friendships.

Addison continues this need to develop her own traumatic narrative in response to Violet's through her connection to Luke and Pete in Violet's absence. As the season progresses, Violet asks Pete to take over care for Lucas as she recovers from her rape. She struggles to attach to Lucas because of the trauma she connects him with and she also takes time to travel and seek therapy. In the meantime, Addison and Pete develop a friends with benefits relationship where Addison states frequently that the best part of the relationship is that she gets to raise Lucas with Pete and "so that's sort of this amazing icing on the cake except for the fact that Pete's still in love with Lucas's mother, which is…" (SE E19 "Eyes Wide Open"). While they say they are "together," they are regularly sulking about their love for Violet and Sam because at this point, Addison has developed feelings for Sam and he's dating another woman. Addison is even actively spying on Sam

from her living room while Pete is lying on her couch complaining about Violet's extended stay in Costa Rica (S3 E16 "Fear of Flying").

I use the term "friends with benefits" to describe this brief relationship because while Addison does say "I'm with Pete" to Amelia in SE E19 "Eyes Wide Open," it poses as more of a friendship and co-parenting relationship that only has sexual interactions a few times. Any watcher of any *Shondaland* series knows that regularly sexual interactions are part of the series and in contrast, this relationship has some of the fewest sex scenes of any of the other relationships. Furthermore, the "benefits" are not just sexual. Addison also sees serving as a surrogate mom for Lucas as a benefit that Pete can provide her with. In S3 E17 "Triangles," she says to Pete, "I'm tired of making the wrong choices. I've done that too much. I want to make the right choice…Maybe I could be in love with you too." Pete and Addison seem to have an understanding that while they still love Violet and Sam (people they feel they can't have), and that this relationship is a placeholder for them in order to raise Lucas and to have support from the other in doing so. According to Owen and Fincham, "Some young adults may see FWB relationships as an attractive way to explore a future committed or exclusive romantic relationship" (983). While Addison and Pete are not young adults, they do seem to see this opportunity as one where they can try out a nuclear family relationship without the relationship commitment--an issue they have both said they struggle with throughout the series. I think that this relationship pushes the boundaries of what a FWB relationship is traditionally seen as in order to meet their own needs, but as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, friendships are fluid relationships and are deeply rhetorical.

Furthermore, Addison is working out her own traumatic past with lack of fertility and failed relationships through Violet's absence. Addison uses someone else's trauma as a way to unpack her own and stands in for Violet for her own personal benefit.

While Addison and Pete's relationship may seem to be less relevant for this particular study, it needs to be reckoned with because of its influence on Violet and Pete's future relationship and their custody battle where once again Addison becomes the identifiable friend (as discussed in the last chapter) that is central to the narrative. Also, the relationship continues to illustrate how the series troubles the nuclear family dynamic more generally. When Violet returns and sues Pete for joint custody after he refuses to do so voluntarily (S3 E21 "War"), the practice takes sides on whom they will testify in support of. Addison is scared that she is going to lose access to Lucas and supports Pete in his desire to hold exclusive custody of him even though her body language communicates conflicted feelings about Violet having no access to her son. Naomi, Amelia, and Charlotte testify in support of Violet while Addison, Cooper, and Sheldon tell narratives that actually discredit Violet's capabilities as a mother, but the viewer is conditioned to feel that they don't tell these stories on purpose and are victims of the lawyers' argumentation. Cooper, her best friend, testifies that he feels that Violet is not ready to raise Lucas. Sheldon alludes to Violet's sexual relationship with him and Pete at the same time and her PTSD from her rape as impairing her ability to mother Lucas right now. Violet is not granted custody, but only supervised visits and the narrative centers around what Addison would or wouldn't lose if Violet has access to her son. Then, Pete

and Violet reconcile, marry, and Addison has to live with the fact that she can't have a maternal role in Lucas's life anymore.

This particular episode is arguably one of the major sources of support for how this friend group chastises Violet for her healing process, which involved not rearing Lucas for a very short period of time. Addison, the same person that saved Violet's life, is now testifying against her parenting. Furthermore, as discussed previously, Jessica L. Furgerson argues that Addison and Violet actually bond due to their shared experiences with abortion: "That these women have known each other for years as colleagues and friends yet never shared their experiences speaks to a larger culture of silence surrounding abortion. This episode sends a strong message that all abortions are acceptable regardless of the presence of mitigating factors" (68). That said, Violet's lawyer calls into question Addison's morals (her abortion and regular cheating in her relationships) as grounds for Addison not being a good influence on Lucas or a credible source more generally. Addison responds:

> You're right. I'm a cheater and husband stealer, and on top of all that I'm barren. I...I never wanted any of this to happen. I never wanted to hurt Violet. Yes, she's a mess. I'm a mess, too. I'm..I'm here for Lucas. He's a baby so he can't speak for himself. But I'm pretty sure if he could he'd say that he wanted to feel loved and safe and have cereal for dinner. I just want Lucas to be happy. So if that means you tearing me apart and making me look like the most horrible person on Earth, then please go ahead and do it, because Lucas is worth it...to me.

This moment of apology rhetorically situates Addison as the person who is being attacked and Violet as the attacker, particularly when Violet is denied joint custody, which rhetorically communicates that Addison wins. Despite Addison saying a few lines earlier that she sees Violet as an unfit mother, she then claims to be Violet's friend and an advocate for Lucas, which appeals to the viewer as Addison being less polarizing than some of her colleagues and friends. She becomes the voice of reason rather than coming across as having deep loyalties to one or the other, despite her relationship with Pete. However, yet again, Addison takes control of the narrative and becomes the center of attention rather than Violet and constructs Violet's trauma as having a broader effect socially. Furthermore, the constant flashbacks to Violet's therapy sessions juxtaposed with Addison's rearing of Lucas illustrates that the intention is to position Addison and Violet against each other in order for Addison to be seen as the victim and Violet as the attacker. Violet loses control of her own narrative because due to our judicial system the opinions of others, her friends for that matter, are seen as more credible than hers. According to Susan J. Brison, "a trauma survivor suffers a loss of control not only over herself but also over her environment--a loss that, in turn, can lead to a constriction of the boundaries of her will" (27). Violet does indeed lose control of her environment because people with whom she felt safe (Addison, Pete, Cooper, Charlotte, Naomi, and Sheldon) now are using her trauma as a way to discredit her.

Then, due to how the narrative shifts, Violet is forced to forgive her friends nearly immediately because she marries Pete and leaves Addison without a partner or a child. Now, one can see how the rhetoric of friendship in *Lysis* can play out once the narrative

has changed. Addison benefitted from Violet's traumatic past because she could fill a void for both Lucas and herself, which is a bit of an inversion of how Plato and Socrates view friendships because Violet's lack of presence is what makes Addison value their connection; however, the same logic exists that Addison needs what Violet can provide her with and now that she doesn't have this, their friendship is arguably in jeopardy. The narrative though continues to preference Addison's trauma because when she tries fertility treatments again, Violet assumes the duty as her close friend. Violet injects Addison treatments for her and serves as her emotional support even though Addison has not always supported her (S5 E8 "Who We Are"). Nehamas's analysis of Aristotle's views of friendship says, "Friends don't dispute about who has done what for whom, and their relationship makes claims on them in its own right: one should still care for one's friends even if they have undergone serious changes--provided that they have not become 'incurably' vicious" (25). Even though this aligns with the altruism that is often associated with friendships, this framing does not take into considered harmful trauma rhetoric and even encourages situations like Violet's. Yet again, Addison's trauma of being barren is seen as needing more support than the others and Violet's is seen as an attack on the friend group's culture.

Another area where this rhetoric of chastisement for upsetting the friendship narrative exists is when the practice faces a lawsuit after Violet publishes her memoir. Despite seemingly being happy after her marriage to Pete, Violet continues to work through her healing from her rape. At no point does the narrative reckon with the narrative in the prior episodes in which the practice was divided over Lucas's

guardianship and yet again Violet is expected to just move on as if her colleagues are still part of her support system. She writes a memoir of her experience which gains national attention. However, there are certainly critics and Katie's family sues for disclosure of her medical records despite a pseudonym being used. Furthermore, the medical board conducts an investigation of the practice and suspends Violet's medical license for writing about one of her patients. During these struggles, Violet continues to be seen as the antagonist and her friends, particularly Addison and Sheldon, control and chastise her narrative. When Violet's memoir is first published, she receives a negative review from a psychiatrist, Marla Thomkins (S4 E17 "A Step Too Far"). Then, Sheldon meets this same person at dinner and begins dating her. Sheldon is often depicted as the only loyal person in the practice that women can discuss their personal problems with, which makes Violet see him as someone who is always on her team. Sheldon certainly internally struggles with his attraction to Marla, but decides to date her anyway. He doesn't tell Violet and allows her to find out while during lunch together, Marla runs over and kisses Sheldon (S4 E18 "The Hardest Part). In the same episode, Sheldon also questions Violet's ability to work with patients who have had similar experiences to Violet's after her book's publication and says, "You had something to say and you said it. It's healthy for you. It's gonna help a lot of people. But there's a price to be paid for that, and that's where we are right now. And I'm sorry that's just the reality." Sheldon and Marla break up by the end of the episode, but Sheldon's response to Violet cannot be ignored as a potential thesis for how she is viewed by her friends not only post-trauma, but in this case, post-healing. Violet sees this book as the pinnacle of her healing process and in turn she is chastised

for it socially, but more intimately in her group of friends. While Sheldon ultimately chooses his loyalty to Violet over Marla, it can't be ignored that he places the blame of the book's reception on Violet rather than taking into consideration how trauma and speaking out about it is viewed as resisting social conventions. Furthermore, even when Violet gets the opportunity to tell her own story, it is co-opted by her friends and their colleagues in its reception and delivery.

While Violet faced resistance and chastisement from her friends earlier, it seems that now that her story is put into written words, she is facing much more backlash that is harmful to her relationships and her profession more generally. Violet's narrative becomes "chaotic" for her friends when they feel it affects them. Sheldon feels that Violet's narrative becomes problematic for him as he navigates his physical desires. When thinking about trauma narratives, Violet's is "untellable" because it threatens to decenter the focus of the narrative on Addison and the health of the practice, which causes Violet's friends to react. Also, in thinking about the rhetoric of friendship in these moments, Montaigne's focus on la Boetie's books as a way to gain knowledge about his friend is still relevant here because now that Violet has put her experience into words her friends can now claim more ownership and arguably affect from her story than they could when it was mostly in oral form. Furthermore, this analysis ties in with Hesford's focus on the telling of narrative because once Violet is given space to tell her narrative, it is immediately taken control again by her friend group. Even scholars that engage with this plot piece seem to decenter Violet's experience. For example, as discussed in chapter 1, Swenson says that:

> Seasons 3 and 4 address Violet's trauma from [Katie's] assault by positioning Katie as a violent challenge that must be legally dealt with in order for Violet to recover from her ordeal..., it became an example of overcoming a terrible criminal act committed by a terrible person. Even when we know that Violet has forgiven Katie, we only feel for Violet because Shondaland's writers failed to script empathetic space for Katie as the patient. (241)

While Pete feels that Violet shouldn't forgive Katie, within the practice there still becomes a decentering of Violet's narrative due to the medical board's perception of the Hippocratic oath and how this lawsuit could affect the practice. Violet doesn't get the opportunity to have a supportive healing process because of the narrative's hyper-focus on how her trauma affects others, particularly Addison. The practice decides to restructure and Addison fronts her personal trust funds to buy out everyone's shares. Then, the practice agrees to exclusively report to her as a way to dismantle its structure and move away from the scrutiny of the medical board. This narrative structure communicates that any attack on the practice is a direct attack on Addison. However, beginning in S4 E22 "To Change the Things I Can," each episode begins with Addison's sessions with her new therapist. Yet again, Addison takes control of the narrative through attention to her own trauma and draws away from Violet's and the medical board's investigation. By taking over the narrative this exclusively, one can see how this narrative does not allow space for traumas to be healed other than Addison's.

In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the actors and producers certainly seek to bring justice and awareness to issues of sexual violence, but the narrative is rhetorically constructed in

such a way that Hannah's suicide is seen as negatively affecting her friends rather than society more generally. After the trial, Clay is asked to give a eulogy at Hannah's service. He says:

> ...I loved her. I loved her so much. And I ask her every day why she did what she did. But I get no answers. She took those with her when she went. Leaving me, all of us, angry, empty, confused. And I know that hurt won't ever go away. But there will come a day when I don't feel it every minute. And the anger won't be so hot, and the other feelings will fade, and I'll be left with only love… (S2 E13 "Bye.")

Clay is one of the few characters that regularly sees mirages of Hannah and he is looking at her in the back row the entire time he delivers his speech. Then, she leaves when he says he "lets her go." This eulogy is indicative that even when Clay and others fail to bring Hannah the legal justice, she deserves that he still communicates a rhetoric of trauma that focuses on how Hannah's suicide impacts her friends, especially him, rather than memorializing Hannah at the one moment that is rhetorically constructed to be about her---her funeral. Clay is given multiple platforms to tell Hannah's story, but instead controls its telling in order to feature his own trauma and in this case chastise Hannah for her suicide.

In the final episode of *The End of the F***ing World*, the narrative ends with James and Alyssa reuniting at Clive's home where they then go to spread James's dad's ashes. Alyssa tells James she loves him, but says she "needs a lot of time" and that she needs "psychological help." In just a few short minutes, James identifies Alyssa as a

"friend," but then moves toward a more romantic understanding of the relationship. After James acknowledges that they are friends, the audience is left with whether or not their love is platonic or romantic, but it still can be read as ending with an attempt at a heterosexual love story that acknowledges that trauma does come with any relationship. While the social implications may be seen as more covert in this situation, this is one of the first times that Alyssa argues she needs any type of therapeutic help, which arguably is in response to James's desire to have a relationship with her. Rather than giving Alyssa the space to process her trauma herself, a heterosexual narrative is initiated by James in order to fulfill his needs, which brings the focus back to him and the heteronormative order. While this series arguably presents a stronger trauma-literate narrative than *Private Practice* or *Thirteen Reasons Why*, it still cannot divorce itself from a heteropatriarchal narrative structure and ending--a traumatic narrative for many people including survivors.

This rhetoric of trauma that focuses on broader society, in this case the friend group involved, polices survivors' stories and rhetorically situates them in the same power structure that traumatized them in the first place. Hannah, Violet, Charlotte, and Alyssa have also been raped and had other experiences that have caused trauma in their lives. In all of these instances, their agency was taken away from them and someone (or many people) gained power over them. When they look to their friends to heal, or in Hannah's case look to them for accountability, they use the same power structure to co-opt the narrative and blame the survivor for how their trauma affects everyone in the friend group. These friendship narratives lack a trauma-literate rhetoric because in order

to maintain the melodramatic genre conventions of the series and to push the narrative forward and away from the trauma narrative, they have to spin the narrative so that it affects the most characters it can rather than focus on one of the supporting characters for too long.

Pushing Friendship Narratives into a Trauma-Literate 2020 Rhetoric

These series are all vastly different, featuring different types of people at different stages of life, recovering from different traumatic incidents. Yet the audience learns the same thing about trauma from them over and over: survivors are supposed to want to hurt their perpetrators; they ultimately cannot be trusted with their own stories; and their traumas exist for the consumption of their friend groups. Hesford, Goldstein, and other rhetoricians see this pattern across a variety of real-life narratives, which makes this pattern a predictable rhetoric of trauma that is not only seen in our news coverage, but in our current fictional narratives that are supposed to be better representations of trauma than what has come before them.

The limited scholarship on *Private Practice* still sees the series as one that features trauma in a nuanced way that highlights social issues (abortion, sexual assault, etc.) that need to be addressed from survivors' perspectives. While *Thirteen Reasons Why* has been criticized for its glorification of suicide and its triggering violent scenes, the premise of the book and the series was to focus on mental health in teen communities and rebut resistance to discussions of suicide (Kennedy; Koehler; Krebs; *Thirteen Reasons Why Beyond the Reasons* S1 E1). *The End of the F***ing World* is supposed to be a trauma narrative that uses dark humor to center some of these same important issues

(Stephenson). However, these series don't actually remedy any of the problematic rhetorics of trauma out there. Instead, they reinforce common rhetorical patterns through friendships, a nuance that while disguised as support, brings more trauma to the survivors and victims in these series.

While these series certainly do not speak for all television in the 2010s, it can't be ignored that these problematic rhetorics of trauma are perpetuated across various sub genres within melodrama. As much as these shows repeat well-worn rhetorics of what trauma is and how it works as established in real-world media, they also demonstrate two important new ways trauma rhetorics work: 1) that trauma narratives are merely reified in fictional media, even in media that purports to subvert dominant narratives about trauma, and 2) that friendship groups, though seemingly a healing space for trauma survivors, are actually capable of their own forms of trauma and retraumatization through how friends respond to a survivor. The latter largely happens because maintenance of the unity of the friend group is what takes precedence in the narrative, adding a fourth way in which trauma rhetoric works: to seek resolution in order to maintain the status quo of relationships. Violet, Charlotte, and Bonnie never get to heal from their traumas in their own ways because the narrative does not allow for individualistic processing; the friend group has to be maintained in the same form in order for the narrative to function. More specifically, the friend group must maintain a dominant figure, Addison, Clay, and James, in order to legitimize the narrative and continue a power structure. Even when Amelia, Tony, and Alyssa push back on the misrepresentation of their stories, they are still forced to conform to some form of a heteropatriarchal (James/Alysssa and

Clay/Hannah as lovers) or nuclear family narrative (Amelia and Addison as "sisters"), which maintains a power structure that does not benefit the survivor and the friendships involved. Even though the focus of these series are on friendships, the traumatic experiences still require some sort of power structure, which is appropriated from familial and romantic relationships. Finally, Hannah Baker's story is buried in order for the friend group to continue, despite its formation as a result of her suicide. When the adrenaline of the various detective stories is over, the Liberty High senior class now moves on while still leaving so many broken pieces behind. Can anyone really say that justice is brought to Hannah by the end of the narrative? Clay finds "closure" and arguably the rest of the group does, but they never address the real "why" of what happened to Hannah and their own culpability in her demise. While this storyline certainly embraces the "messiness" of trauma narratives, it leaves on a positive note that literally buries the past and doesn't provide a real remembrance for Hannah, despite this scene seemingly memorializing her story.

Culturally, friendships are not acknowledged as spaces that can breed trauma rhetoric because friendships are under-discussed in both academic and public scholarship and dialogues. These melodramatic fictional television narratives create and successfully maintain these problematic rhetorics of trauma because friendships, while being healing spaces, also function in the same power structures that heteropatriarchal capitalist ones do. Since friendships are not seen as productive because they can't produce children or continue a nuclear family's wealth, they are forced into these same capitalist understandings of relationships and in turn fall victim to causing trauma. Even though

melodramatic representations are supposed to heighten the issues being discussed for their audiences, they still provide dominant narratives that don't align with the social justice connections in the genre that scholars feel are important, as discussed in chapter 1. Instead, the genre becomes one that takes subversive narratives and reinforces heteropatriarchal capitalist power structures that many of them are arguing against. These continually reinforced trauma rhetorics actually reflect heteropatriarchal capitalist values because these understandings of friendships infiltrate into the narratives and cause trauma for all involved. Even though friendships are supposed to be subversive and antenarratives to heteropatriarchal capitalist ones, trauma rhetorics within them still hold these same heteropatriarchal capitalist understandings of relationships.

Rhetorical analyses of these narratives becomes necessary to enact change because the "messiness" of friendships needs to be more central to the national conversations about trauma. Rhetoric itself is "messy" because it relies on context and fluidity in order to exist. Friendships also require this same framing because of varying levels of friendships that people have and how these relationships ebb and flow over time. Rhetoric can create social change, but it can also create harmful messaging. In order to do the former, the latter must be addressed through analysis and calls to action based on the "messiness" that rhetoric and its rhetoricians (both academic and public) have created in order to get us here. Rhetorical analysis is needed in order for us to know how friendships have been and what they could be. In these series, the power that lies in the people who have control of the narrative, which happens to be the friends of the characters who are experiencing trauma--a nuance that trauma rhetoricians are not

exploring. Another difference from some of the work that Hesford and other rhetoricians provide is that these series are forms of melodrama that provide an overdramatized narrative that is fictional, but is arguably handling a variety of real social issues (Levine *Her Stories*). These series' discussion of trauma rhetoric focuses on voyeuristic tendencies that some of these news media accounts of rape also have.

Furthermore, the trauma that these characters experience are seen by their friends as affecting their friends negatively, which becomes the focus of the narrative rather than supporting the survivors' healing processes and, in turn, overlaps with the focus on the larger social implications of an individual trauma. Arguably, since the focus of the survivors' narratives have changed, their friends now lose their unique "audience" and connection to the person, which results in their focus on self rather than their friend. According to Eugene Garver in his analysis of Plato's *Lysis*:

> We learn how reciprocal friendship blocks the quick passage of desire to its ultimate end and therefore see how being persuaded is something people do together, to each other and on one another's behalf. When I come to know someone as a friend, I not only have a unique object to talk about; I have a unique audience to talk to. This is how I develop my *ethos* as someone being persuaded...Most friends do not spend their time talking about friendship and love; they speak about things they will do or have done together. (146)

While the trauma rhetoricians cited in this chapter are mostly writing in the twenty-first century, it is important to note that these discussions of friendships date back to Plato, but haven't been connected to address that trauma can be rhetorically formed through

friendships. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, feminist rhetorical analysis brings these rhetorics together due to the fluid experiences of trauma and friendships and the need to unpack the power that these experiences and relationships have.

Lastly, a takeaway from this analysis is that survivors of traumatic friendships need to be heard and they deserve to have public dialogues that encourage friendships to be more trauma literate, but the place to start is with media narratives, particularly fictional television ones due to the nostalgia our televised friendships and the continued focus on friend groups in television in the post-network era. The next chapter will discuss how this type of trauma and friendship rhetoric exists in public discussions of violence in a post #metoo world and how the rhetorics of trauma and friendship discussed in this chapter exist in public cases as well.

CHAPTER 4: THE FUSING TOGETHER OF TELEVISION RHETORIC AND PUBLIC DEBATES ON TRAUMA AND FRIENDSHIP RHETORIC

In rhetoric, friendships are often overlooked as relationships and sites of trauma. Friendships are indeed complicated relationships particularly in the context of trauma rhetoric. While friendships are often a refuge for people who experience trauma from their families, romantic relationships, or the workplace, friendships also have the potential to cause trauma in and of themselves, police trauma response, and have the same lasting impacts as these other relationships. Also, even though friendships are often safe havens, due to a lacking trauma literacy culturally, these trauma narratives are not always handled with trauma-literate rhetoric even though friendships are rhetorically situated as having a more equal footing than familial or romantic partnerships. Friendships are subversive relationships, but it's also subversive to discuss the trauma that is caused within them because our current rhetoric of friendships only views friendships as surface level, cordial relationships that don't require work, criticism, or in some cases healing from. According to Sow and Friedman, "at a cultural level, there is a lot of lip service about friendship being wonderful and important, but not a lot of social support for protecting what's precious about it. Even deep, lasting friendships like ours need protection–and, sometimes, repair." (*Big Friendships* xviii). Friendships should be healing spaces, but also, the fact that scholars don't interrogate their potential for trauma or how they often handle trauma illustrates the lack of acknowledgement that we have of

these relationships as well as the critical framework in which to have these conversations.

This chapter lays out how complicated these relationships are, the importance of studying this complication, and how television rhetorics of trauma and friendship are also ones that are infused in more public dialogues–the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing as the major example. After President Trump announced his intention to appoint Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford brought her accusations against Kavanaugh to the public, where she claimed he sexually assaulted her at a party in high school. After the Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony from both parties, the Senate still voted Kavanaugh in as the next associate justice for the Supreme Court. In response, conversative media's telling of the story created a witch hunt to prove Blasey Ford wrong and Kavanaugh innocent, while more liberal media platforms used this opportunity to focus on Trump as an unfit candidate for the presidency.

What is missing from the critiques of this case is that Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh were part of a friend group and that this type of evidence is often not a major platform for alleged perpetrators to build their cases. Blasey Ford's close friend, Lelan Ingam Keyser, did not write a letter of support for her and said she had no memory of this incident–a piece of evidence that Kavanaugh uses regularly in his testimony. Instead, Keyser wrote a letter that inadvertently supported Kavanaugh and in turn can arguably be a traumatic experience for any survivor. Through his use of friendship evidence as his only evidence of his credibility, Kavanaugh uses a rhetoric of trauma that decenters the survivor and in turn makes the melodramatic reveal (that is seen in television narratives) that he is indeed

the victim rather than Blasey Ford, which politicizes both trauma and friendships and illustrates how this rhetoric is seen across trauma narratives. In turn, friendships are a rhetorical tool that is used as a way for people to deal with who is the "survivor" and who is the "perpetrator", which is an age-old trauma rhetoric that dates back to Judith Herman's theory of trauma (as discussed in the introduction). Also, this rhetoric of trauma in and of itself does not provide space for friendships to be traumatic for people, which invalidates narratives like Blasey Ford's and is seen through her questioning and much of Kavanaugh's responses throughout the hearing. Furthermore, this chapter brings together Derrida, Sow and Friedman, and St. Onge's theories of friendship rhetoric as political to address how friendships can rhetorically situate traumatic experiences. First though, the context of the case and what we already know needs to be situated.

Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's Accusations and What Brought us to the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford Hearing

In July 2018, after Justice Anthony Kennedy announced his retirement, President Donald Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh to take his place, which was a controversial nomination as was Trump's presidency (Tautwein). Upon the announcement of Kavanaugh's nomination, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford wrote an anonymous letter to *The Washington Post* that accused Kavanaugh of physically and sexually assaulting her in high school in the 1980s. Since 2012, Blasey Ford had been sharing her story with her husband and a therapist; she claimed that she had seen Kavanaugh once since the alleged assault and "he was extremely uncomfortable seeing her." (Blasey Ford, CNN). However, without her consent, her identity was revealed by the press, and Kavanaugh

and the Senate Judiciary Committee wanted her testimony during his confirmation hearing. On July 27, 2018, she testified before the committee. She discussed how she was assaulted by him and one of their mutual friends and ran from the home where they were attending a party. Blasey Ford was in high school and Kavanaugh was in college, but they shared mutual friends. In her letter to *The Washington Post*, she said, " Kavanaugh was on top of me while laughing…They both laughed as Kavanaugh tried to disrobe me in their highly inebriated state. With Kavanaugh's hand over my mouth I feared he may inadvertently kill me." She discussed how this night has continued to cause her trauma and she couldn't let him be confirmed without the nation knowing her story. Kavanaugh, who was accused of two other cases of sexual assault, denies even knowing Blasey Ford. The Senate Judiciary Committee questioned Kavanaugh about Deborah Ramirez and Julie Swetnick's allegations, which he also denied. Despite her testimony, the Senate still confirmed Kavanaugh as the next Supreme Court Justice in order "to support the president's nominee" (Tautwein).

This case has gone down as one of the major media narratives of the #metoo era including Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, and Jeffrey Epstein. This story is also important politically because this nomination along with others (Betsey Devos and Amy Coney Barrett) was controversial and broke records for how close the Senate's votes were–51-49 (Tautwein). While this story is certainly important in national conversations about sexual assault, here I will discuss the *rhetoric* of trauma that is communicated, and more specifically how friendship is a rhetorical tool to tell trauma narratives. As discussed earlier, Kavanaugh and Blasey Ford were part of a friend group. While they weren't

friends themselves, they certainly were part of the same friend web, which as Sow and Friedman argue can have just as great an effect on a close friendship as the close friends themselves. "…As [friendwebs] [become] larger and more interconnected, everything from innocent miscommunication to whispered rumors can potentially rupture it…" (*Big Friendships* 112). While Sow and Friedman are discussing everyday miscommunication, their understanding of friendwebs as spaces that can cause discord is important in an argument about trauma because this type of discord can certainly be on a spectrum of behaviors that cause trauma. Kavanaugh turns to this specific friend group and other ones that spun from it to gain his evidence to make himself the victim rather than Blasey Ford.

Furthermore, Kavanaugh cites how much his friends have supported him through these allegations and how Blasey Ford's closest friend at the time, Leland Ingham Keyser, allegedly doesn't remember the event even happening. This case illustrates exactly how friendships are supposed to be safe healing spaces from trauma, but can also be used as ways to reframe whom the victim is. The rhetoric of trauma and friendships that is analyzed in the fictional television used in this dissertation is definitely infiltrated into public conversations of trauma and these rhetorics need to be fused together to understand its stakes and its impact more generally.

Theories of Friendship and Politics

Before moving into an analysis of how friendships are a rhetorical tool to communicate who is the trauma survivor, theories and rhetorics of friendships as political need to be situated as framings for the analysis. As discussed earlier, rhetorics of trauma have become much more mainstream as more and more narratives regarding violence

reach national and international attention. In addition to recent television rhetoric, due to the politicization of the #metoo movement, survivors' testimonies and healing from trauma have now become major parts of platforms for political candidacy and have become their own rhetorical modes in more public spaces. Furthermore, the rhetorical messages of friendship that exist in public spaces now are also seen in fictional televised representations of friendships, which have been the focus up to this point in this dissertation. The fusing together of public dialogue on friendships and trauma and more recent fictional televised messages has the potential to create a space where all of these types of work (content analysis, rhetorical analysis, and activist work) come together to create a more trauma-literate rhetoric of friendship and to keep friendships center to political conversations more generally. According to Jeffrey St. Onge, "friendship is an antidote to a culture of enmity or, at least, a corrective that can create a culture more amenable to basic democratic practice," which makes a trauma-literate rhetoric of friendship crucial to moving forward in this type of scholarship (45). On the other hand, friendships right now are so rooted in heteropatriarchal capitalist frameworks that this liberatory potential is being overlooked because friendships are not seen as relationships that are complicated in and of themselves.

According to Aminatou Sow, friendships are "political," and that to be friends in and of itself is a subversive act (Fall for the Book). Sexist and capitalist frameworks of relationships center the nuclear family and people's relationships with their blood family and romantic partners over friendship relationships. If friendships are political, then discussions of them are needed in more public spaces. However, this issue becomes a

rhetorical one because how friendships are discussed in the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing illustrates a rhetoric of trauma that makes the alleged perpetrator the victim because his friends say he's an "everyman and good guy." Since Kavanaugh opens his defense with the importance of friendships and their necessity in his proving to be innocent, we can't ignore the rhetorical function of friendships in trauma narratives because of his driving defense of them in this case.

Furthermore, trauma and violence are also political, and our most recent administrations have proven that the #metoo movement is more than one of activism and change, but now has been added to political agendas. In most of the #metoo era discussions of violence, there has been no discussion of friendships because trauma has mostly focused on some type of sexual violence between people in romantic or familial relationships (or these relationships are at least assumed to be this nature) rather than the emotional or sexual trauma that friendships can cause; however, I argue that the Kavanaugh- Blasey Ford hearing was deeply rooted in rhetorics of trauma and friendship, but wasn't framed within a trauma-literate framework because of the need to prove Kavanaugh innocent and furthermore the victim rather than Blasey Ford. In order to continue the #metoo conversation into the 2020s, rhetorics of trauma in friendships and the politicization of those relationships need a stronger presence in public dialogue as friendships can also be a space that advocates for greater social change.

Even though Sow and Friedman discuss friendships as political today for more mainstream audiences, this conversation dates back to Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero. For

example, Athenian culture connected citizenship and friendship much more than we do today, which Mark Vernon argues makes context so important for these relationships:

> ...context allows us to imagine that one of the reasons why an image of friendships resonated so strongly with the Athenian sense of identity was that the experience of being a citizen was far more closely interwoven with the experience of having friends than it is today, when public and private aspects of life tend to occupy different spheres of existence (97).

However, one can't ignore that some of our early rhetorical understandings of friendships were rooted in the coexistence of our public and private identities. For example, Michael A. Kaplan argues that

> Friendship offers a model of private life that appears able to get along without politics, relying on moral law and the conventions of personal loyalty and trust. On the other hand, cultural anxiety over the impossibility of getting beyond or away from the political drives the imaginative production of private space….The private sphere can never be secured through 'real' political contest; the walls are always coming down, and in any case the walls are themselves the objects of political struggle. (27)

Even though today, the more mainstream rhetoric of friendship is that friendships are more private and should be less prevalent in public spaces (like the workplace), these relationships also have lots of gray areas in both public and private spaces. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida draws heavily from Carl Schmitt's argument that the binary of "friend" and "enemy" has to exist in order for the public to understand the

difference between these relationships. If the only alternative from the enemy is friend, then friendship's potential for trauma is indeed ignored because that recognition in and of itself would cause someone to be an enemy. Derrida points out that friendships, while subversive and progressive, are founded on a binary understanding of opposition, which doesn't allow space for a more nuanced conversation of how friendships can indeed be both healing and traumatic experiences.

In fusing these rhetorics of friendship together, Kavanaugh uses friendships to create a rhetoric of trauma that decenters the survivor and in turn melodramatically makes the perpetrator the victim in his case and frames friendships as political to address sexual assault. He constructs this rhetoric through the following ways: 1) how friendships are subversive relationships, which makes him radical for using these testimonies 2) the gendered nature of friendships and trauma and his alleged subversion, and 3)how friendships become a political tool for reframing trauma narratives.

Friendships As Subversive Relationships

Friendships call for a much more fluid understanding of relationships, identity, and support, which is needed when considering the variety of trauma experiences that people have both through friendships and the support they may need from their friendships. As discussed in earlier chapters, Violet, Hannah, Alyssa, and Bonnie all have some sort of connection to sexual assault and emotional abuse, but they each experience them differently and elicit varying reactions from their friends with regards to type and level of support. Though they are all in the end traumatized by their friend groups as well, these narratives tell us that one subversive quality of friendship is that people often turn

to their friends during their healing process because of the lack of familial support they may be receiving. None of these characters have strong relationships with their nuclear families, so they turn to chosen families for support, but even then, don't always gain the support they need. According to Nehamas, "... friendship can also be 'a school of vice' in another, more urgent way. A friendship may sometimes not simply permit or encourage but actually *require* attitudes or actions that can't be morally justified" (61). In each of these cases, morality is questioned because each survivor or victim needs (or in Hannah's case needed) a level of support that is outside of the confines of what was socially acceptable because friendships are such undervalued relationships. Alex kills Bryce, and the rest of the group hides the narrative because they feel that's what's best to bring justice to Hannah's story. Addison dissolves the medical practice and opens another in a new name in order to save everyone's jobs, but also to clear Violet's name and ensure that Addison's own name is kept in line with the caliber of a "Forbes Montgomery". James engages in a variety of illegal acts in order to maintain his and Alyssa's independence. These relationships all require some sort of diffusion of moral code in order to hold the friend group together, which makes these relationships subversive whether or not the spectator agrees with the choices being made. Even though these acts are seen as acts that are necessary in order to keep the group together, they are also necessary in order for the dominant character to maintain their status and lack a trauma-literate rhetoric of friendship.

However, this rhetoric of subversion does not fully take into account how trauma does indeed exist in these relationships. In Brett Kavanaugh's opening response to the

Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing, he says, "...cherish your friends, look out for your friends, lift up your friends, love your friends. I've felt that love more over the last two weeks than I ever have in my life. I thank all my friends. I love all my friends." Kavanaugh's witness statements are from friends who were there the night Blasey Ford was allegedly sexually assaulted and from women he went attended college with. He recognizes the need for friends and that we need to "cherish" these relationships, which in turn makes him the victim rather than Blasey Ford who at this point has been a main subject of news coverage for weeks. In turn, he actually argues for a rhetoric of victimization that chastises Blasey Ford because if his friends say that he is a "good guy" then he has to be, particularly since her closest friend at the time writes in support of him rather than Blasey Ford. His melodramatic defense and call for close friendships is very much in line with the rhetoric that is seen in melodramatic television earlier in this dissertation. The melodramatic reveal reframes the plot progression and makes him the victim rather than Blasey Ford, whom the narrative tells us is the victim prior to the hearing.

Kavanaugh extends a rhetoric of identification for alleged perpetrators who have come before him because he uses his personal story to compel the Senate Judiciary Committee to acquit him. Jonathan Goldberg argues that "Identification involves a process of coming to identify by experiencing ourselves located outside us; this process of feeling-with, of identifying-as, thus involves being ourselves by not being ourselves"(34-35). In this context, Kavanaugh uses friendships as a way for his audience (The Senate and U.S. voters) to experience him differently and for him to also see how he

is perceived by these friends. These witness statements have to be analyzed under a lens of friendship rhetoric because friendships become a rhetorical tool to provide Kavanaugh with the right pathos to make his case. He uses this subversive rhetoric to his benefit in order to communicate his position and to decenter and invalidate Blasey Ford's narrative.

Kavanaugh also argues for friendships as subversive relationships because of his many friends who are women. He says, "I have always had a lot of close female friends. I'm not talking about girlfriends; I'm talking about friends who are women. That started in high school. Maybe it was because I'm an only child and had no sisters." He implies here through this rhetoric of friendship and gender equity that since he had so many friends who happen to be women that the subversive nature of this relationship overcomes his ability to perpetuate any kind of trauma within friendships. Furthermore, he is the victim for anyone thinking he could in the first place. He's an "everyman" but also, a "different" man because he is able to have ethical and non-sexual friendships with women, which he argues is rare for heterosexual men. In turn, this rhetorical framing deems him innocent and arguably more identifiable for men in his position. He also uses his family dynamics (the fact he is an only child), while mostly positive, as a way to address why he has these types of abnormal relationships. Even though he argues for more focus on the relevance of friendships in people's lives, he clearly ignores the trauma that these relationships can cause, which makes his rhetoric more of possibility than one of healing. Furthermore, his discussion of gender dynamics in friendships moves toward the next political point about friendships–the power of the gender binary in these relationships.

Friendships, Gender, and Power

Another aspect to consider when arguing for the relevance of friendships in more mainstream conversations about trauma, particularly with Kavanaugh and Blasey Ford, is the gendered nature of these relationships, which moves us back to the early feminist framework that "the personal is political." Kavanaugh's need to focus on the gender dynamics of his friendships is indicative of how he uses friendships as a way to deflect the focus on Blasey Ford as the survivor and reframe the focus on him as victim. Gender becomes a necessary factor in friendships more generally, but more specifically in this case because of his need to prove his decency through testimonies from his women friends. Furthermore, since feminist rhetorical analysis and power in narrative are the frameworks for this study, an analysis of gendered dynamics is necessary in a discussion of how gender is inevitably a factor in traumatic experiences in friendships. For example, research on men's friendships continually shows that men struggle to maintain emotional intimacies with other men despite their desire to have these close relationships, which leads to higher rates of depression (Heasley, Leib, Miggliaccio, Nardi). Women are much more likely to have stronger friendships with other women, but are deemed as more emotionally unstable because of these attachments and men are more likely to disclose their emotions to their friends who are women despite taboos about cross-gender friendships for heterosexual people (Swain; Tani et. al). Trans people struggle to maintain friendships with cisgender people and even people in their own communities because of the continued instillment of the gender binary in any type of connection (Galupo et. al; Zitz et.al). Some of the rhetoric that comes out of this research is certainly

imbedded in Kavanaugh's testimony and how he has allegedly overcome some of these social barriers through this friendships with women.

However in spite of Kavanaugh's testimony, according to Ivy Schweitzer, women have historically not been valued in more public and philosophical conversations about friendships. In the Greco-Roman era, men's friendships gained more public attention because of their implications for civic engagement and ultimately power. According to Nehamas, by the early modern era, Montaigne's more private approach to friendship "made friendship theoretically available to women as well, despite the fact that his personal view of the matter continued to fit the ancient mold" (47). In her discussion of the historical feelings of friendship being "highly ethical," Schweitzer argues that in order to maintain equity and push the relationships forward "... we have to reorient our thinking away from who we are to what we do — that is, we have to reimagine friendship as a dynamic, improvisational, sometimes improbable process that operates outside the terms of self/other and sameness/difference and requires that we practice a form of self-exile or self-pluralization" (364). In this case, friendships are not only political relationships but ones that can push our understanding of gender, and more importantly binaries and either-or concepts more generally. If friendships are supposed to be about mutual connection and support, the gendered nature of the relationships has to be dismantled in order for these relationships to be fully supportive of trauma survivors and to fully comprehend the complicated nature of friendships. As they currently are constructed, friendships are not doing this radical work they could be. Kavanaugh uses this gendered binary to make his case that he did not commit these crimes, but also that

he is an ally to women because he has the capability of being friends with women without a sexual relationship. Kavanaugh implies that he’s aware of this rhetorical understanding of friendships across genders and uses these relationships to deflect how friendships in and of themselves can be traumatic experiences for people like Blasey Ford rather than only a space for healing like he argues happens for himself.

Furthermore, Kavanaugh’s use of the gender binary does not take into consideration how friendships can also push our understandings of trauma to be more fluid and work toward a rhetoric of trauma that doesn’t rely on this “sameness/difference,” an often gendered binary, that is seen in some of the media used for this dissertation. Jody Greene argues that “friendship studies” is a cross between an examination of historical friendships and a queer theoretical framework for viewing relationships more generally, which illustrates the importance of how gender and sexual binaries are challenged by these relationships (320). For example, Addison’s need to have attention placed on her due to her inability to conceive in spite of Violet’s rape is an example of how friendships as they are constructed now need to bring together some form of sameness rather than a more progressive support that breaks down this type of competitive binary relationship. Furthermore, Addison’s trauma as a woman is challenged and in her eyes invalidated because of Violet’s trauma, which is all inherently gendered. If friendships are a queering of relationships and binaries more generally, then current conceptions of friendship (which date back to Aristotle) are problematic and potentially harmful for survivors and spectators more generally. Kavanaugh doesn’t use friendship rhetoric in this way, which creates a harmful rhetoric of trauma that makes him

the victim for his audience, but one that is seen across narratives, both real-life and fictional.

This sameness and need to find an alternate self through a friend is rooted in heterosexist frameworks of relationships and reinforces self-serving relationships rather than ones that bring people together for mutually serving ones. Tani et. al find that "because females' friendships are characterized by greater intimacy and affection, narratives about friends by those women in our sample who perceived higher levels of social support are characterized by relatively less use of I and greater use of We, thus expressing their sense of affiliation" (298). Gender stereotypes and the power that is given within these frameworks is a barrier for friendships. Clay and James both feel the need to be chivalric characters for Hannah and Alyssa, which makes them focus much more on the "I" than the "we". Post-2010 fictional television is indicative of the poorly constructed realities that are being rhetorically produced, which illustrates the need for this analysis as a way to push the scholarly conversation forward because of the radical potential that friendships have for social change. Kavanaugh uses this same problematic rhetoric because he creates an ally narrative in a space where he is being questioned for committing non-ally behaviors.

While this chapter mostly focuses on Kavanaugh's defense, in order to unpack the gendered components of this rhetoric of friendship and trauma, Blasey Ford's questioning is necessary in order to see the effects of Kavanaugh's rhetoric. Senator Feinstein asks: "You were very clear about the attack. Being pushed into the room, you say you don't know quite by whom, but that it was Brett Kavanaugh that covered your mouth to prevent

you from screaming, and then you escaped. How are you so sure that it was he?" While this question may not seem to have anything to do with friendship or gender binaries for that matter, it is an important framing for how we understand trauma within friendships publicly. Kavanaugh was asked multiple times about his drinking habits, his perceived reluctance to an FBI investigation, and the validity of Blasey Ford's testimony. However, he was never questioned about whether or not Blasey Ford could have had a doppelganger or if he could have just forgotten the details of the event. Any of Blasey Ford's hesitancy was framed as presumably false testimony and since she says that more than one person is in the room, this line of questioning assumes that she couldn't know it was Kavanaugh who assaults her. This binary that is formed about her remembrance does not take into consideration how the brain responds to trauma, particularly when survivors are testifying for the first time publicly. It also doesn't take into consideration that we know that she had said Kavanaugh's name multiple times in therapy sessions before he was appointed to the Supreme Court.

All of these rhetorical moves perpetuate a rhetoric of trauma that doesn't acknowledge the power imbalance between Kavanaugh and Blasey Ford as well due to positionality in 2018, but also due to gender differences and how their questions and the Senate's concerns are framed. Furthermore, Senator Feinstein's questions further perpetuate the narrative that trauma can't exist in a friend group because of cultural understandings of friendships as fun, surface-level relationships. She perpetuates the same friendship narrative that Kavanaugh does that trauma can't happen if multiple friends are in a space together (i.e., both male perpetrators and Blasey Ford) and that

Blasey Ford might not be able to remember his interaction properly because we don't believe these acts can happen in the first place in these situations. Since Blasey Ford doesn't provide the same defense of friendships that Kavanaugh does, the implied narrative that the friendship could have been traumatic for her is therefore erased and the victim status is transferred to Kavanaugh.

Friendships as Political Tools to Tell Trauma Narratives

As discussed earlier in this chapter, trauma has indeed become more political, particularly during the last few elections because of the focus on proving a story valid or not rather than unpacking trauma narratives more generally. According to Moorti, "whether fictional or nonfictional programming, television narratives have consistently focused on stories of individual achievement or individual victimization, ignoring the logic and structural demands of feminism" (68), which is seen in friendship trauma as well. For example, the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing drove many political discussions for both major U.S. parties upon Trump's decision to appoint Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court despite this controversy. Maddison A. Pollinoa argues that:

> The sexual assault allegations against Kavanaugh brought forth conflicting ideas of victimhood. Different media outlets frame both Ford and Kavanaugh—alleged victim and perpetrator—as victims. CNN and MSNBC frame Ford as the victim of a sexual trauma, while Fox News frames Kavanaugh as a victim of a vengeful political party. President Trump makes this divide clear in a press conference regarding the allegations: "They [Democrats] have been trying to destroy Judge Kavanaugh since the very first second he was announced … a man's life is in

> tatters. A man's life is shattered. They destroy people … These are really evil people" (Fox News, 2018a). These contestations represent the clash between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies—the us and them— relative to sexual violence by creating a dichotomy between good and evil. (77)

The Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing illustrates the continued binary in the conversation of sexual violence between people who are accused and people who are survivors or victims. As a man, Kavanaugh's "career" and "reputation are at stake, which insinuates that Blasey Ford's isn't by coming forward. Furthermore, Blasey Ford is seen as a puppet of the Democratic party because of many of their stances on sexual assault and its prevention rather than a credible source on her own experience. The Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearing also reinforces a narrative that trauma only exists in heterosexual sexual encounters because of Kavanaugh's use of friendships as a tool to decenter survivor narratives. Even in television movies, Byrne and Taddeo argue that "...rape is as much about the male actor's desirability, male identity and rivalry for ownership of women's bodies, as about the actual female victims of the crime," which illustrates yet again how media reflects current social understandings of trauma and survivors' stories. (392).

Kavanaugh takes the politicization of trauma a step further by using friendships as a political tool to reframe trauma narratives and in turn makes friendships political as well. The politicization of friendships is definitely seen in this case, but also in U.S. politics more generally in the last five or more years. As stated earlier, "friendship, considered both literally as a bond between people who are emotionally close to one another and metaphorically as a means for theorizing comradery and citizenship, is an

important component of democratic thinking. It allows for an understanding of how people with innumerable differences can not only get along, but thrive" (St. Onge 47-48). During the Trump administration, St. Onge argues that "friendliness" and its potential for "friendship" was lost due to the lack of cooperation and basic human civility that filtered throughout U.S. politics (45-46). Kavanaugh uses friendships as a political tool here, but uses them in a way to further polarize political parties because of the lore around the case regarding the Trump administration and the #metoo movement.

In this case, neither political party was committed to seeing justice brought to Blasey Ford for her trauma; they were more focused on what the outcome of the hearing could say about the Trump administration and the future of Kavanaugh's career. This case was not seen through a trauma-literate framework because the impact that friends can have on traumatic experiences was not addressed at all in the hearing, despite the importance of supportive friends being such a major part of Kavanaugh's defense. Friendships are only seen as a space of support and Blasey Ford's narrative of trauma is silenced because of Kavanaugh's appeal to this audience. In turn, this illustrates the potential for trauma that is being overlooked in friendship rhetoric. However, if both political parties had handled the situation more effectively, friendliness and civility could have brought us out of the "...current culture of antagonism and into a more fulfilling democracy of the future where cooperation, rather than polarization, is the norm" (St. Onge 56). If the goal had been to bring healing and justice to Blasey Ford through a dismantling of the trauma rhetoric presented rather than focus on the political implications of the trial, then trauma narratives would possess the potential to be

reframed and liberating for survivors rather than another situation where they are overpowered. Rather than focusing the traumatic effects of this experience on Blasey Ford, the immediate focus of the case was whether or not Kavanaugh was suitable to assume the role as Supreme Court Judge or whether or not Blasey Ford was presenting false testimony. Furthermore, the case then became an issue of whether or not Democrats were using this case to prove Trump's unworthiness of his seat in the Oval Office. Even though these analyses matter as Americans look to government officials for leadership on these issues, the focus became more of a witch hunt to prove Blasey Ford wrong and Kavanaugh innocent than to handle how friendships rhetorically construct trauma. In focusing on identity in these types of cases, Moorti argues that that intersectionality is an important framework for looking at how television narratives tell stories of rape:

> Television narratives do not present the white male in a monolithic manner or within a stable position; they present a diversity of understandings of (white) masculinity. But rape is presented consistently from the 'normal' position of the white male subject. From this vantage point, gender or race becomes the only explanatory framework for the crime. Rape occurs because of bad masculinity (often black masculinity) or because a woman sends 'wrong messages,' or it is an instance of a woman 'crying rape.' In other instances, this white male angle of vision explains rape by tapping into myths of racialized (male and female) sexuality. (214)

In the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearings, Blasey Ford had to be deemed as the uncredible source because of the power that Kavanaugh had as a white man. Since he was "the

norm," he could not have been responsible for this assault and in turn Blasey Ford had to be misleading voters so that the Trump administration would be discredited. During the hearing, Kavanaugh even attempts to refocus her narrative by repeatedly says, "I'm not questioning that Dr. Ford may have been sexually assaulted by some person in some place at some time. But I have never done this." He reframes the narrative to seem trauma literate by weaving together a belief narrative and his strong opposition to the allegations in order to maintain his power, but also seem empathetic. In turn, Kavanaugh appeals to spectators who now see him as more "likeable" than other alleged perpetrators such as Weinstein and Epstein and moves the narrative away from Blasey Ford's traumatic experience in this friend group toward his own victim status.

Furthermore, Kavanaugh's defending statements use a rhetoric of friendship that allows for this messaging about trauma to be deemed acceptable. Even though he uses friendships as a platform to defend his case and make himself the victim, he still reinforces how friendships are deemed socially as spaces that trauma can't happen. In the hearings, he says as one of his platforms of defense: "I drank beer with my friends. Almost everybody did. Sometimes I had too many beers. Sometimes others did." (qtd in Brown). Just as discussed in the fictional representations of friendships used in this dissertation, Kavanaugh paints himself to be an "everyman" in order to gain control of the narrative and secure his ethos for the audience. He also brings in the age-old narrative that alcohol causes sexual assault and implicitly communicates that when partying with friends that one doesn't have to think about consent and boundaries because friendships aren't relationships where this type of violence can happen. This is another issue that

comes up as scholars think about the role of friendships in trauma narratives. Even though it is so important to discuss consent and boundaries in dating relationships, friendships are often overlooked and deemed as spaces where trauma can't happen because socially these relationships are not seen as complicated in the first place.

Furthermore, in his comments, Kavanaugh downplays the effects that trauma has within friend groups by casually using the term to discuss his lack of culpability–a very white masculinist rhetoric that is often used in these cases. His use of "sometimes" and his use of absolutes to discuss how friends interact with each other do not take into consideration the multifaceted nature of these relationships. While Kavanaugh may certainly see this particular friend group as more casual, he doesn't see friend groups as a space where this kind of trauma could even happen in the first place, which might be just as much at the root of the problem in a culture of gender-based violence. Vernon argues that often when friendships become sexual, there are complications that risk the ending of the friendship, as well as how we view love and feelings of love more generally. He says that we live " in a culture in which sexual consumation is seen as the highest expression of love that two people can hope for…" (45), which means that love or intimacy between friendship devoid of sex is seen as less desirable. The Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford case is indicative of this conundrum, but also how our culture that devalues friendships and encourages gender-based violence comes together to present an even more traumatic experience for people who are survivors and victims of violence within their friend groups. These cultural frameworks are rooted in misogyny, sexism, toxic masculinity,

and capitalism, which makes them lack consent and boundaries when these structures are not upheld.

Kavanaugh's casual allusion to alcohol use in his college friend group also reinforces the lack of accountability that exists in friendships today and how this rhetoric of accountability needs to be reframed in order to deepen the cultural importance of friendships. Despite the flowery language he uses to discuss his friends' loyalty to him, Kavanaugh implies that a college or high school friend group is not a relationship that should be given much consideration because culturally these types of relationships are often seen as situational even though college orientations often say that students will find lifelong friends during their next four years. That said, accountability for traumatic experiences is not seen as necessary because these relationships are not only surface level, but ever positive, which would divorce itself from accountability. If Kavanaugh's defense is that drinking and boundaries matter less in friend groups, then one can see the connections between public debates on friendships and fictional television. At the end of all three series, there is no accountability for how the dominant and most identifiable friend treats their friends who are experiencing trauma.

At the end of *Private Practice*, Addison is still in charge of her practice and the audience leaves the practice doors and hops on the elevator with a jovial feeling that it will continue, which is arguably what the audience wants to see. Even as recently as a few months ago, Addison flies in from L.A. and is featured on *Grey's Anatomy* for two episodes (S18 Episodes 3 and 4 "Hotter than Hell" and "With a Little Help From My Friends") to test a new study and the audience is conditioned to feel empathy for her

because she felt she had a drinking problem during COVID quarantine rather than Amelia Shepherd's--a now main character in *Grey's*-- most recent breakup and continued inner turmoil with addiction. Addison also feels she must give Amelia her seal of approval to stay single rather than marry Atticus Lincoln, her baby's father.

Clay Jensen is the Liberty High hero and is seen as a cultivator of this new friend group that the characters feel they will take with them post-graduation. Alyssa gives James hope that with some therapy she may be ready for a romantic relationship with him even though they've established they are friends. If awareness of trauma and violence are going to be political issues, the politicization of friendships and their ability to hurt and heal survivors needs to be more central to the conversation and perpetrators need to be held accountable, which doesn't happen in these series or in the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford case.

All in all, Blasey Ford's testimony illustrates how trauma affects all types of relationships including family, marriage, and other interpersonal ones over time, which illustrates that sexual assault does not just affect one's security with other potential sexual partners, but also other types of emotional intimacy, including friendships (Stewart). Since friendships are relationships that exist over time and are often ones that people experience before romantic ones, it is not a hard connection to make that they indeed may be hurt by one's sexual trauma. Also, if we could move toward a culture that valued friendships and platonic connections, we would arguably have more empathy and the ability to have more radical changes around these issues. St. Onge argues that "empathy provides a path toward a more collaborative future and is a key component of radical

friendliness. Thus, while dominant discourses of the present support a destructive and degrading politics of enemyship, political rhetoric can still be mined for logics of civic friendship that support rhetorical community" (54). If friendliness is a radical act, then this framework is indeed what is needed in order to move toward a more trauma-literate rhetoric across trauma narratives.

Friendships are Indeed Traumatic. Now What?

One takeaway from this analysis is that if trauma is political, friendships are as well and need to be interrogated within politics to understand how trauma narratives function rhetorically. Friendships are indeed rooted in capitalism and therefore friendships are currently seen as a form of human capital, which in turn causes traumatic experiences. Kavanaugh gains capital in his political career by collecting friendship narratives to build his case. According to Lisa M. Coorigan, "consent, especially sexual consent, implies that people are peers. And in a capitalist culture, peers are recognized through their ownership of property. Since women, people of color, children, and LGBTQ people are often thought of as property because they are propertyless, I am reticent to talk about sexual violence through the lens of consent rather than property…" (264). Kavanaugh gains narrative capital by spending so much time at the beginning of his hearing discussing the importance of support from friendships and how his friends have helped him make his case against Blasey Ford, but ultimately upholds his credibility as a white heterosexual mean who abides by "traditional values."

Another takeaway from this analysis is that friendships are a rhetorical tool that reshapes trauma narratives in order to frame a victim narrative that decenters the survivor

narrative and makes the alleged perpetrator the victim. This type of rhetoric is certainly seen in the fictional television used in this dissertation and Kavanaugh uses some of the same tactics in his defense of his case. He discusses the importance of these relationships and even how they provide him solace, which creates a rhetoric of trauma that lacks any kind of trauma literacy and one that silences the survivor. Friendships have the ability to be relationships that can dismantle these power structures because of their ability to divorce from capitalism and their rhetorical fluidity, but one certainly see how this isn't how they are represented in television or are understood more generally because of how much they are indeed solidified within capitalism and diluted as complicated, but *necessary* relationships. For example, Kant argues that "friendship is presented as a pact in which individuals put their selfish motives to one side because they know that their interests will be foremost in the mind of their friend, and vice versa. This...is the ideal in friendship; a self-love that is 'superseded by a generous reciprocity of love" (Vernon 80). While Kant recognizes that friendships have moved far past from this selflessness, it is a common understanding that friendships should be less selfish and much less rooted and power and capital than romantic and familial relationships. Kavanaugh uses this same rhetoric, but what is missing here is the analysis that he uses these friendships as capital to defend his case and confirm his Supreme Court appointment.

Lastly, as argued throughout the dissertation this rhetoric is presented across various types of trauma narratives, particularly media ones. Addison Montgomery views her friends as property because she buys their shares of the practice so that they can stay together and devoid the medical board's investigation, which means that she uses their

presence as a way to maintain her dominance, reputation, and self-importance. While Clay Jensen has no monetary gain from uncovering and fighting for Hannah's story, he gains narrative capital and keeps his place as the male hero of the narrative because he has now created a friend group in spite of Hannah's death. James also gains some form of narrative capital, but in turn, may have begun a heterosexual counterplot if Alyssa agrees to date him, which we'll never know, but the audience is conditioned to hope for. Regardless, he now owns the narrative and controls how trauma is told through this relationship. Kavanaugh's rhetorical framing of trauma through friendships is one that has to be addressed in order to have more inclusive conversations about consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships and currently we are in a precarious state if we don't have these conversations now. However, these rhetorics are infiltrated across friendship and trauma narratives which makes the problem systemic and rooted in the "isms" discussed throughout the chapter. The next chapter concludes the dissertation and provides steps forward and gaps in this dissertation could be addressed in future studies.

CONCLUSION

Limitations and Future Inquiry

In conclusion, this dissertation benefits many fields due to its multidisciplinary approach. While the specific intervention is in rhetoric, television studies, friendships studies, feminist theory, queer theory, and trauma studies all benefit from this specific analysis and how it calls for a more radical understanding of the place of friendships in media and public dialogues on trauma. This dissertation has focused on specific ways that post-2010 television has perpetuated problematic rhetorics of trauma through constructions of friendships and how these rhetorics are also ones that we see more publicly as well. However, this dissertation as many television and rhetoric related ones do has a limited data set and certainly can't provide a holistic analysis of all televised friendship narratives in this decade. This dissertation can only say that this rhetoric exists in the primary texts that it engages with based on the rhetorical framing of the work overall. Future research on this topic could focus on how other melodramas perpetuate this same rhetoric and which ones may counter this unhealthy rhetoric or introduce healthier rhetorics of trauma within friend groups. For example, shows such as *A Million Little Things, Nashville, Orange is the New Black, Sweet Magnolias, The Resident, New Amsterdam, Pose, Once Upon a Time*, the *Chicago* series, and others are melodramas that

focus primarily on adult friend groups, all of which have trauma narratives at some point in the series or in the case of some could as the seasons continue.

Also, with the more fluid understanding of trauma that this dissertation calls for, trauma narratives are likely part of most melodramas currently on television. *Love, Victor* and *Riverdale* are teen melodramas that focus on friend groups and the traumas that exist during this part of our development, which in light of *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *The End of the F***ing World*, could be significant juxtapositions to this analysis. Lastly, while mentioned, Shonda Rhimes's *Grey's Anatomy* and more recently, *Station 19*, take place in the same professional world as *Private Practice*, their friendships and their handling of trauma have not been interrogated in scholarship and could support or be antenarratives to this dissertation.

Another area of inquiry that should be researched is a focus on sitcom friendships and how they handle trauma. For example, shows such as *Parks and Recreation*, *Community, It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *Broad City*, *United States of Al, 2 Broke Girls*, *Grace and Frankie*, and others focus on friend groups or friend duos and while humorous, also deal with a variety of traumas. *Glee* and *Saved By the Bell* (the reboot) focus on friend groups in high schools and how they do or don't last into adulthood, which certainly has its own experiences with trauma. And lastly, while *Friends* and *The Golden Girls* are 80s and 90s sitcoms, their nostalgia and continued popularity also make their dealings with trauma within friend groups relevant for post-2010 television watchers and could open the door for a more historiographical study of trauma, friendships, and television rhetoric.

Further work could also explore if there are other types of popular culture that exist, such as film, music, video games, and social media that perpetuate this same rhetoric of trauma, or if these genres present a healthier rhetoric of trauma within friendships. Friendships are important as public concerns on social media platforms, which certainly deal with issues related to trauma, particularly as we think about how video games and social media have been part of the #metoo movement. Also, social media platforms encourage and even depend on some sort of friendship connection in order for them to remain relevant. While scholars such as Michael A. Kaplan have focused on fictional friendship narratives in film, he doesn't focus on trauma and seems to be one of the few book length studies that focus on friendship narrative in film from a rhetorical perspective. Films across genres such as *Steel Magnolias*, *Good Will Hunting, Dallas Buyers Club, Juno, Friends with Benefits*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower, Girls Trip, Spirited Away, Mean Girls, Bridesmaids,* The *Harry Potter* and *Toy Story* series, and many others feature friendship narratives and have won and been nominated for a variety of awards including Emmys and Oscars. Song artists such as Judy Garland and John Mercer, The Beatles, Kenny Rogers, Better than Ezra (which features a trauma narrative) Tim McGraw, Ben Rector, The White Stripes, The Rembrandts, BTS, Randy Newman, Beyonce, Jay-Z, Chris Jensen, and others have included lyrics or focused specifically on the importance of friendships in their songs. Lastly, video games such as *Final Fantasy X*, *Kingdom Hearts*, *Halo, Portal*, *Mass Effect, Sonic,* and even the *Super Mario* games depend on friendship narratives in order to accomplish their quests. All of these genres rhetorically situate how various demographics understand public dialogues

on friendships, but currently, scholars don't foster conversations that ask audiences to see these as crucial to our social realities and narratives that we couldn't do without.

Calls to Action and the Importance of this Work

As discussed in Chapter 4, this dissertation has implications for more public spaces because of the rhetorics of trauma and friendships that overlap between fictional television and public rhetoric. In order to move forward with healthier conversations about friendships, scholars need to have space to have a more critical dialogue on friendships. Much of the work in friendship studies up to this point has focused on the importance of friendships and our culture's lack of focus on them in relationship dialogues more generally. However, while friendships can support others in healing from trauma, they can also perpetuate traumatic experiences because of our culture's lack of validity given to these relationships, as well as their rooting in heteropatriarchal capitalist frameworks. A more critical friendship studies allows for scholarly conversations centered on how friendships can cause harm and how we can remedy this hurt through a look at how friendships are in their basic sense - a healthy, positive, equal relationship - which I argue has been lost as a society. A more trauma-literate rhetoric of friendship calls for both of these perspectives because scholars have to first acknowledge that friendships can cause trauma in order to discuss how to avoid trauma within these relationships that are supposed to heal.

Furthermore, the subversive nature of friendships themselves make them crucial in changing how trauma narratives are rhetorically framed more generally. Television needs to present more healthy friendship narratives, particularly as they relate to trauma

in order to stifle these current ones and to redirect our energies into a more progressive, supportive narrative of trauma that centers the impact of friendships more positively rather than the ones seen in the last decade. Also, due to the vast array of friendships that have streamed from television, the platform is responsible for making sure that the fluidity of these relationships is represented as well. That said, this recognition of the complication of this type of relationship and how culturally it's been rhetorically framed needs to be more present in scholarship and public debate than it currently is, particularly because of its intersections with other discussions of power, such as gender.

While this study is one in rhetorical analysis, this trauma-literate of friendship has pedagogical implications as well. Trauma literacy needs to be central to writing classrooms, but also ones that focus on popular culture, communication, and critical thinking more generally. Friendships can teach critical thinking skills because it is subversive in and of itself to have friends due to our heteropatriarchal capitalist system that preferences romantic and familial attachments. Also, in asking students to first begin with narrative arguments as they move toward researched ones asking for friendship narratives evokes a more nuanced and deeper level of critical thinking that what we are asking some of our introductory students to do. Currently, I theme my Public Speaking and Critical Thinking Skills course through friendships, rhetoric, and communication, which challenges students to see the unpacking of these relationships as rhetorical act and one that can nurture critical thinking skills. In this course, we use Aristotle and Plato's discussions of friendships to frame how rhetoric does form these relationships and they are relationships that are indeed rhetorical. Also, just as Bronwyn Williams argues that

television is a literacy that students come to classrooms with, friendships are also a literacy that students have when they enter college classrooms as well because of these relationships being some of our first intimate bonds. By using friendships to teach rhetoric, students learn not only the importance of friendships in making public arguments, but also they begin from a place where they can identify—friendships--which is often not the case in introductory public speaking courses.

Friendships also are spaces to teach social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion topics because of these relationships as spaces where people from marginalized backgrounds turn to for acceptance. While St. Onge's theory of friendliness may limit some understandings of how friendships function in polarizing political rhetoric, it does provide a vehicle to teach the next generation of changemakers who have the potential to dismantle the structures that make friendships so hard in the first place. Lastly, friendships can create a pedagogy of the self because people from marginalized backgrounds often explore their identities through their friendships, particularly with like-identified people and social movements such as the women's movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the LGBTQ+ movement have been dependent on friends banding together to create change and making the "personal [be] political. (Cornego; Olson and Gillman).

Even though this dissertation argues for the importance of textual rhetorical analysis as a way to advocate for change, empirical research on traumatic experiences within friendships are needed in scholarship not only because of the dearth of scholarship, but also because of the wide array of traumatic experiences that people can

have in friendships. Empirical work that focuses on "ghosting," friend death, sexual assault, physical violence, emotional abuse, and other forms of traumatic experiences need to be more present in public dialogues. Furthermore, institutional ethnographies need to be conducted on how friendships can be traumatic experiences within education, the workplace, and other settings.

Finally, in more public dialogues on healthy relationships, friendships need to be more central. Right now, friendships seem to be more limited to the private sphere and while scholars recognize the importance of friendships in child and adolescent development and in education, they don't discuss the potential that more conversations about friendships can have for media literacy, policy, and other forms of advocacy. Friendships have been critical to political and public dialogues since the Greco-Roman era, but rather than being seen as a strength, we now see friendships as a weakness in public spaces or we invalidate the importance of these relationships altogether. This type of research benefits survivors because they certainly experience traumatic experiences from their friends, particularly since most people have many friendships before they have romantic ones. Violet Turner survives her trauma from her friendships, but viewers don't get the opportunity to see the future outcomes of this turmoil. In order for Alyssa to survive her trauma in her journey with James, she has to leave the audience with the narrative potential that the relationship has a chance to be romantic. Finally, Hannah Baker doesn't survive her friendships and we learn about her traumatic experience second hand from the friendships who were the thirteen reasons why she completed suicide. Blasey Ford's story was given a few weeks of national attention and is now ignored and

left in the past. Kavanaugh focused much of his defense on the importance of friendships–a piece of the hearing that wasn't interrogated at the time, but needs to be reopened in order to fully comprehend the ramifications of this hearing and the decisions that were made and messages sent as a result. Furthermore, this research benefits survivors because any trauma narratives need to have survivors in mind as the audience and arguably need to have space for survivors to work through their own traumas as they heal. Friendships need to be more central to public dialogues and rhetorical situating trauma if we hope to end silence and create change in the 2020s. Friendships shouldn't hurt, but when they do, we need to talk about it and give survivors the *rhetorical* space they need to heal.

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BIOGRAPHY

David Powers Corwin holds a bachelor's degree in English and Humanities from Milligan University in Johnson City, Tennessee. They also have two master's degrees, one in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Women and Gender Studies and one in English Literature, both from George Mason University. In this doctoral program, they focused on trauma and social justice in writing and rhetoric, television studies, feminist qualitative methods, and friendship rhetoric. David will continue teaching courses on LGBTQ Studies, feminist and queer theory, friendship studies, rhetoric, writing, and representations in popular culture through their joint appointment with the School of Integrative Studies and Women and Gender Studies at Mason. David will begin pursuing a graduate certificate in qualitative methods at Mason this fall and will conduct research on friendships and trauma, gender, sexuality, and Appalachian identities, and gender, sexuality, and television representation.