Dear Esteemed Students and Mr. Leeman,

Vesterday in your 1st period class I interrupted your lesson and the train of your discussion in a way that was disruptive, for that I apologize. One shouldn't barge into others conversations and take over — or in this case — throw bombs. Apologizing to Mr. Leeman after class for the interruption he mentioned it was too bad I couldn't stick around and fully articulate why discussions of rape culture fall flat on my ears. So today I took some time to write down some of my — and other people's — thoughts on this subject to explain the reasons I find assertions of rape culture dubious. If you're interested in rape culture theory to the point of advancing it in our communities and institutions I would hope you take a bit of time to think about criticisms of these theories. So here are some of mine:

- 1. "Rape culture" is a theoretical construct that is ill defined. What exactly is "rape culture"? I don't see it in my life or the lives of any of the men and women I have known. I have never met a person who believes rape is anything other than a heinous crime. There is not a man or boy I know that if I would not trust to sit on a jury with full faith that that they would convict an accused male rapist if the evidence presented proved his guilt. The punishment for rape in our culture is long terms in prison followed by a lifetime of stigmatization as a sex offender our penultimate sanctions.
 - a. All the men in our community find rape to be a heinous crime, we must therefore deduce that those who commit it are not acting according to the culture's norms and expectations but violating the culture's norms. My understanding of rape crime data is that a very small predatory part of the population commits nearly all violations. Given this, the best approach to reducing sexual assault is to focus our efforts on enforcement of sexual assault laws and policies, encouraging victims to take advantage of institutional and legal remedies, and educating our young about our laws and conduct codes. Addressing sexual offenses as a culture war or a cultural engineering project have less appeal.... Because
 - b. I find the proposition that if we just engineer the perfect culture we will not be victimized by criminal aggression in society highly dubious. Being a historically minded, when I think of projects to consciousely reshape transform culture I think of the Jacobin's cultural vision, the Bolshevik's vision, the Khamer Rouge's cultural utiopia, The Cultural Revolution's vision of social perfection by doing away with old cultural norms, the Moral Majority's work in this country, and other social engineers with visions of perfect culture that would eliminate human aggression and victimization. In these cases, and dignity of others who don't share their cultural perspectives. That is to say, well-intentioned but scary.
 - c. Moreover, if we continue blaming rape on patriarchal male "culture" we are excusing the rapist from their behavior, excusing the individual violator from responsibility for their actions. This seems like letting the real rapist of the cultural hook in order to chase a shadow.

- 2. The very wording of "Rape Culture" seems to me a bit hysterical. Rape and sexual assault are declining (as are all categories of violent crime happily) fairly sharply (Rape and Sexual Assault Victimization Among College Age Females, 1999-2013). Doubtless the reason women are safer on campus is the higher ed. system has made progress in elevating and addressing the issue of sexual assault as a serious matter and assumed a role in protecting their students using educative means that foster consensual relations and disciplinary policies that hold people accountable for their actions. But theories of rape culture go beyond addressing sexual assault to using the term rape which is a maximally provocative to apply not to individuals but to the broader culture. There is a danger to broadly applying the language of heinous and deviant crime to a project of what is essentially advocacy in my view. These dangers include:
 - a. Using the term "rape" in relation to the culture rather than the actions of individual or groups of criminals creates a climate of fear in which pressure, intimidation, and innuendo lead communities to be awful to individuals. The example in literature and American history is the Salem Witch craze and Arthur Millers celebrated work "the Crucible" that dramatized that episode and the McCarthy era of the 40's and 50's that resembled it in some ways. High profile cases in which journalists and individuals acting on what they feel must be true rather than actual evidence have lead to high profile cases of baseless accusations that have achieved national attention, destroyed real lives. Sabrina Erdely's "A Rape on Campus" in the Nov. 19 2014 Rolling Stone being a notorious example here.
 - b. The word "rape-culture" frames the issue of sexual assault in such a way that that its central proposition that rape is a culturally tolerated/encouraged practice cannot be questioned because questioning the presence of "rape culture" is evidence of denying rapes prevalence which is itself sometimes held up as a definition of "rape-culture." This is a circular type of reasoning that makes for powerful advocacy, but does not invite broad and realistic public discussion of an important issue. I feel like we witnessed this in class on Monday when I expressed skepticism toward the proposition that we live in a rape culture, a student immediately equated that view as not caring about sexual assault and rape.
- 3. A third critique of the theory is I find it both misandristic and unlikely to help young people navigate their sexual lives. By putting rape on a continuum of patriarchal culture, rape culture theory proposes a culture war between all men and all women. This does not square with the way I have lived my life, nor does it seem like the basis of helping men and women create the lives we want together. I don't, and I none of the men I know and share my life with, feel like women are objects, no less objects of domination and exploitation. Far, far from it. Sexual relations and intimate partnerships are our most intimate, our most exposed, and our most important relationships. Presuming that half of us are predatory doesn't strike me as helping anyone navigate the sexual shoals of life that are inherently difficult and pregnant with the possibility for both fulfillment and hurt. Moreover, many generations of women (and quite a few liberal minded men) have fought against cultural theories that where meant to protect women who were perceived as weak before men's superior power and sexual aggression. Historical cultural norms that protected women from men's sexual aggressions have been viewed as confining and limiting the freedom of women to define their lives for themselves.

Vin 4 women are sexually assaulted in College There seems to me a danger in rape-culture of reintroducing essentialist views of gender that cast women as in ways both great and small as social invalids.

- 4. A last thought is in relation to discussion of sexual objectification in popular culture: pop music, video's, television, film, etc... I find these discussions to often be censorious in tone and content. In how many era's is pop music seen as being indecent because it shows young women having sex. As a history teacher, I can tell you that this has been a feature of elite criticisms of popular and especially African American culture going back every generation to the 1920's when mass media really took off as we know it.
 - a. Particular attention is given to to pornography as if the consumption of pornography feeds violence toward women. That seems possible, but there is not evidence for it. As mentioned earlier the rise of internet pornography has been accompanied by a concurrent decline in sexual assault and violence. If anything, the data would support a claim that perhaps pornography provides an outlet for male sexuality that moderates rape and sexual assault in the population.
 - b. Sex sells and mass media uses sex to sell. But markets are free. If one does not like the sexual attitudes of media one does not have to consume it. Moreover, firms and individuals are free to challenge distasteful cultural products with cultural products of their own that comport more comfortably with desired cultural attitudes and beliefs. We live in a free country and expressive rights are guaranteed by the Federal Constitution and even powerfully by the State of Oregon's Constitution. Distinguishing between sinful and exploitative pornography and other objectifications of women and a culture that promotes freedom of thought, speech, and expression is tricky to say the very least. Being liberal, I tend to error on the side of liberty and trust that in the marketplace of ideas the right and the just will be embraced over the mean and exploitative in the character of a free people. Do you want to give Donald Trump, Attn. Gen. Jeff Sessions, a Republican dominated Congress the power to legislate what you can and cant say, broadcast, watch, surf, etc.....?
 - c. Those who cultivate sexual allure with panache and skill can profit from it mightily. Who am I to say that Lady Ga-Ga can't be rich and famous because of the tremendous Eros she is able to radiate through her song, dance, and physique? That power belongs to her, not to "society" to police or shame. Plenty of women wish to do the same and do so every time they buy a fancy dress or go to the make-up counter at Nordstrom. If a person feels empowered by cultivating displays of physical allure, I don't think anyone has a place to criticize them for it. Where would Melania Trump be without a physical beauty that shines through to the glossy pages of the magazine women buy in line while checking out at the grocery store or waiting in the lobby here and there? The answer to that is millions, and that seems like a real power that women really have and derive

These are a few of my thoughts on the subject. As you can tell, I'm uncomfortable with theories of rape culture. I don't think there are in these thoughts anything even remotely chauvinistic or misogynistic, quite the opposite. If you disagree, I'd love to hear your thoughts.