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The Rise and Fall of Gilmore Girls' Feminist Legacy

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THE RISE AND FALL OF *GILMORE GIRLS*' FEMINIST LEGACY

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Abstract

This thesis explores the feminist legacy that the television series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007, 2016) built during its original airtime and how its later revival diminished that legacy. *Gilmore Girls*' main characters are three generations of women within the Gilmore family, providing a unique opportunity to analyze their feminist identities and characterizations relative to different iterations of feminism. This paper examines how the youngest Gilmore, Rory, is influenced by her mother's and grandmother's embodiments of feminism. Their expressions of femininity and sexuality, their approaches to motherhood, and their behaviors in their romantic relationships throughout the series correlate with the predominate feminism of their generations, allowing young Rory to become a modernized melting pot of historical feminism.

Gilmore Girls' revival aired in 2016, almost ten years after its final televised season, aging the characters along with it. However, its feminism remains stuck in its original form, unable to grow or change beyond late 2000s' feminism. Critiques of the revival range from its lack of intersectionality to body-shaming to avoidance of sexual education/health topics. This lack of growth undermines *Gilmore Girls*' original feminist legacy.

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Introduction

“She says her feminism just kind of took over.” –Rory Gilmore, Pilot

This epigraph is one of the only direct uses of the word “feminism” in the entirety of *Gilmore Girls*. The ability to create the iconic feminist legacy that *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007, 2016) did with rarely saying the word itself is unlike any other dramedy television series. This show’s predominately female cast provided a unique opportunity for the exploration of multiple generations of feminism and their intertwining beliefs and behaviors. Beyond solely representing strong women, *Gilmore Girls* focused on the tensions that are tied to a woman’s independence while trying to balance career, family, and romance (Gamber). Its witty, fast-paced humor and relatable family drama kept viewers addicted to the series for seven years, making the show a centerpiece of feminist pop culture and inspiring the next generation of feminists.

Gilmore Girls follows three generations of women in the Gilmore family; Emily Gilmore (Kelly Bishop) is the mother of Lorelai (Lauren Graham), who is the mother of Rory (Alexis Bledel). The premise of the show is that Lorelai became pregnant with Rory at the age of 16. Soon after Rory’s birth, Lorelai decided she could no longer live under Emily’s oppressive rule and moved with infant Rory to the eccentric small town of Stars Hollow to begin a new life. The first episode aired on October 5, 2000 on The WB network, picking up as Rory is about to turn 16. The series followed the ups and downs of the Gilmore women’s lives for seven seasons and left behind an iconic form of feminism that has continued to impact pop culture and women of all ages.

In 2016, *Gilmore Girls* was revived for a limited series consisting of four episodes titled “*Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*.” This revival took place in contemporary time, fast-forwarding through the characters’ last (almost) ten years. There was much buzz surrounding its release and

much more controversy once its ending was revealed. This revival was detrimental to the original series' feminist legacy due to its inability to progress and adapt. While the original *Gilmore Girls* still contains strong feminist values, it does fall short of modern feminism in particular aspects and its revival creates a bigger divide between the two. *Gilmore Girls* remains a picturesque series of 2000s feminism, but is unable to go beyond that era and can no longer be considered truly feminist today.

Defining Feminism

Every woman is unique and thus the feminist movement is also unique, with varied definitions, goals, and embodiments depending on the woman describing it. Feminism is a kaleidoscope whose shape, structure, and pattern change with every woman who takes claim of it (Frye). It is a movement that strives to end female oppression by rejecting differentiation between people on the basis of gender (Greig-Billington). No theory is wholeheartedly objective and feminism is no different as it reflects the different values, assumptions, and ideas of the women who follow it (Bunch). To strictly define feminism would take away the heart of the entire movement, eliminating the equality and inclusion feminists have worked towards for a century. At the forefront of feminism is the fight to end women's oppression, but underneath its activism lies the struggle for women to be seen outside of their gender and instead seen for their achievements and struggles (Bunch). That is where *Gilmore Girls'* feminism thrives. The show does not touch directly on feminist activism but instead focuses on three strong women of different generations struggling and overcoming challenges while developing and honing their feminist identities.

While feminism cannot be contained in one set of values or ideas, there are loosely defined waves of feminism that are accredited for certain accomplishments and stereotypical beliefs of feminists from particular generations. Just because a woman is born within a particular generation

does not mean that she is necessarily aligned with the feminist ideas of that generation. The first wave of feminism is largely defined by the suffrage movement, becoming feminism's first real step towards equality (Rowe-Finkbeiner). Although the first wave generation is a major part of historical feminism, *Gilmore Girls* rarely touches up on this wave due to the time period in which it is set. The second wave of feminism is recognized for gaining the right for women to enter the professional workforce (Rowe-Finkbeiner). This wave didn't remain unified for long due to its exclusion of women of differing backgrounds, leading to a split in ideologies (Women's Right Movement). The third wave is a culmination of past efforts paired with giving women the right to choose their lifestyle (Rowe-Finkbeiner).

The second wave of feminism arose in the mid-1960s, which aligns with Emily Gilmore's trek into feminism (Gamber). The correlation of characters and their supposed feminist generations assume that the characters' began seriously interacting with feminism around the age of 20, rather than their year of birth. The second wave of feminism focused on tackling laws that systematically reinforced gender inequality. By taking a political standpoint on feminist issues, second wavers believed that changing the laws would eventually trickle down and change society's view of women (Rowe-Finkbeiner). The rise of the second wave began when *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan was published in 1963. Friedan argued that American women were trapped in a belief that fulfillment could only come from being a housewife mother. Her book sparked women's interest in pursuing careers and lives outside of simply being homemakers. Friedan's argument against the mother/homemaker lifestyle is the forefront reason that Emily is, at times, read as not being feminist. Emily willingly chooses to remain at home and run the social life of the family, despite her Ivy League education and ambition, which automatically would discredit her as a feminist in Friedan's eyes. However, taking a step outside of the second wave perspective and

observing Emily's life from a modern perspective reveals instances of Emily's feminism that extends past her role in the house and beyond Friedan's and many other second wavers' embodiment of feminism. Traditional second wavers believe that a woman who chooses to become a housewife and is of Emily's stature and education is inherently not feminist. However, Emily takes the same traditional second wave beliefs and applies them to her life as a housewife, positioning her as an unconventional second wave feminist.

The multiple feminisms that drove the second wave to an end inspired the rise of the third wave in the 1990s, which correlates with Lorelai's generation (Gamber). A stereotypical upbringing for third wave feminists that rings true for Lorelai is full of feelings of confinement to a particular lifestyle backed by manipulative behaviors. This plays out strongly and slightly overdramatically with Emily's parenting of Lorelai and eventually Rory. Emily, along with many other mothers, believed she knew what was best for her child based on her own lifestyle and tried to manipulate Lorelai into following in her footsteps when Lorelai was young. While perhaps not the best parenting style, it is quite common, particularly with mothers of the same generation as Emily. Second wave feminists that were also mothers and fell into the same manipulative traps as Emily tended to attempt to manipulate their daughters into following the same feminist ideologies, which helped inspire the third wave. Feelings of entrapment in a particular definition of feminism led women to desire personal choice and freedom (Gamber). The third wave took the conflicts of the second wave, such as lack of diversity, and adapted it into the movement to embrace individuality (Gamber). This wave focused on being an individual and a feminist fighting for women's rights and empowerment (Rowe-Finkbeiner). This generation turned to pop culture as a method to spread feminist ideas, believing that once society changes the laws will change with them (Gamber). *Gilmore Girls* embraces its pop culture identity by dropping numerous references,

deemed “Gilmorisms”, in each episode, a majority of which refer to women in pop culture. These “Gilmorisms” are a strong component of the show’s third wave identity, correlating with the period in which it was created.

Ultimately, the third wave crystallized around the idea of being the opposite of the second. They embraced femininity, sexuality, motherhood – all the things that the second wave stereotypically avoided (Rowe-Finkbeiner). Lorelai demonstrates this behavior frequently throughout the series by refusing to participate in anything her mother was associated with. Ultimately, this opposition to the second wave created a rift between the two generations causing the separation of the waves within the movement, inviting conflict rather than cooperation (Gamber).

Presently, feminism is in its “post-third” wave which correlates with Rory Gilmore’s generation. Because Rory Gilmore represents modern day feminism which is still being developed, limited amounts of academic discourse regarding the stereotypical beliefs and attitudes of this wave as well as its defining accomplishments exist. However, there are two ideas that are crucial to this feminist wave thus far. The first being the argument against the “wave model,” and the second is intersectionality. The reason for correlating this generation of feminism with the wave terminology is solely for the purpose of cohesively naming the generation and understanding its relationship to past generations of feminism. However, many modern feminists do not subscribe to continuing the wave model due to the conflict it inspires and the perception of limitations it places on the possibilities of contemporary feminism. While the third wave is focused on individuality within the movement, it still had a set boundary with the second wave (Gamber). Strict opposition exists between some feminists from previous waves forcing women within the movement to pick a side (and subscribing to and reinforcing binary thinking, which current

feminism rejects). Post-third wave feminism, however, rejects the idea of “pick one or the other” and pushes for women to flirt with multiple aspects of historical feminism and adapt different elements into their lives as they see fit. *Gilmore Girls* emphasizes this idea heavily through Rory as she grows up on the show. Viewers watch her follow both Lorelai’s and Emily’s examples and decide for herself what she believes is right for her. Blurring the line between generations creates a more unified movement that can continue to accomplish great things for women. Additionally, intersectionality is a crucial part of modern-day feminism. *Gilmore Girls* falls way short of this standard throughout its entirety. In the early 2000s when aired, intersectionality was not as crucial to the movement as it is presently which is why *Gilmore Girls* could still build a credible feminist identity during its airing without overt engagement with this topic. However, with the continued lack of diversity in the revival, *Gilmore Girls*’ feminist legacy has taken a huge hit. Intersectionality is defined as the intersection of race, class, age, and gender (and more) (Bartkowski). By recognizing and accepting these differences among women, feminism is gaining more perspectives on issues and more creative ways to tackle them (Bartkowski). It is frequently argued that *Gilmore Girls* represents white feminism, not feminism as a whole, rendering its feminist legacy limited in modern times.

The Legacy

Gilmore Girls’ portrayal of strong, confident women inspired an entire generation of feminists in the 2000s. The Gilmore girls’ wit and charm, paired with their abundant success throughout the series set a feminist standard of a modern woman who is empowered, independent, and more. This series demonstrates the embodiment of feminist attitudes and beliefs while beginning to diminish the generational divide that was so strong within the movement at the time. While Rory grows up throughout the series, viewers watch her discover her identity and her

personal form of feminism by interacting with the women in her life, giving an insight into the birth of the post-third wave of feminism. Emily and Lorelai have the most profound impact on Rory's feminist upbringing over the years. Their embodiments of femininity, sexuality, motherhood, and their behavior in relationships are the forefront focus of *Gilmore Girls*' feminism, providing a unique perspective where assumed opposite feminist standpoints come together to shape the next generation. While *Gilmore Girls* does have its flaws and disconnects with feminism in certain aspects, it remains an overall accurate representation of 2000s feminism, capturing its focus, values, and the beginnings of a new generation.

Rory's Approach to Feminism

As Rory is growing up and discovering herself throughout the show, her generation of feminism is doing the same. The post-third wavers were in the midst of growing up, discovering feminism, and figuring out their identities; Rory Gilmore is no different. To discover one's identity and explore examples of feminism leads to looking at the women/feminists in one's life for guidance. Rory follows this model throughout all seven seasons, using mainly Lorelai and Emily as resources. Having two strong, consistent role models that are rooted in constant opposition pushes Rory between both sides frequently, allowing her to adopt the traits and attitudes that she resonates with most. This push-and-pull between Lorelai's and Emily's examples allows Rory to eliminate the barrier between the two women within her own identity, which is a theme throughout post-third wave feminism thus far.

Rory's exploration of feminism is centered on her interactions with different feminist models and their effects on her life. This concept is introduced to viewers almost immediately in the first season episode "The Lorelais' First Day at Chilton" (1.02) which follows Rory through

her first day at Chilton— a private, Ivy-League feeder school paid for by Emily and her husband Richard. In Rory's first meeting with Chilton's headmaster, he asks about her career aspirations and she quickly answers that she intends to, "Be Christiane Amanpour." He points out that her goal merely resembles a desire to be a replica of someone else. Rory further explains, "I don't wish to be her, exactly. I just want to do what she does...See the world up close...Be a part of something big." This response asserts Rory's approach to growing up; she mimics the lifestyles/feminisms of different women, not in an attempt to copy them, but to use as a guide for her own life. Rory sounds hopeful when she expresses, "I just want to be sure that I see...something." Her anticipative glance and faint smile draw attention to her desire to grow up and become her own person. Rory continues to follow this mimicking behavior paired with her desire to grow beyond who she currently is throughout the entirety of the show.

Rory's main female role models are her mother, Lorelai, and her grandmother, Emily, and she uses their feminisms as the basis of her self-discovery into her own feminist model. However, Rory does encounter many other women on the show that impact her in similar, but perhaps less frequent ways. Miss Patty (Liz Torres), who is the town dance teacher, is an example of a woman with a rampant sexuality. Sookie (Melissa McCarthy), Lorelai's best friend and eventual business partner, is an example of a woman with both a booming career and stable family life. Gypsy (rose Abdo), the town mechanic is an example of someone who defies the stereotypes of her traditionally-masculine profession. All of these women – and more – have surrounded Rory since she was a young girl and have impacted her journey into feminism, in subtle but very definite ways.

Rory's two best friends, Stars Hollow's Lane (Keiko Agena) and Chilton's (and later Yale roommate) Paris (Liza Weil), are often looked to by Rory for contemporary feminist inspiration.

Lane represents the contemporary version of Lorelai as a teenager. She's edgy, living outside of her mother's control, and rebels pretty much as frequently as possible similarly to Lorelai's teenage years. One of Rory's biggest struggles is separating her identity from Lorelai's and Lane provides Rory an example of how Lorelai and herself are different, using the contrast between Lane's (Lorelai's) rebelliousness and Rory's tameness to do so. By establishing a clear difference between herself and Lane, Rory is able to translate that into her identity crisis with Lorelai and give her a clearer view of her true self. Paris refocuses Rory throughout the show away from romance and towards her schoolwork through her sharpness and intensity. Rory often gets distracted by the young men in her life and drifts slowly away from her schoolwork. Paris, on the other hand, especially while still at Chilton, is the epitome of a focused student. She and Rory want the same things: to be valedictorian, to go to Harvard, and to beat the other. Paris' dedication and focus on academics pull Rory out of her love-struck daze and snaps her back into competitive intensity with Paris multiple times throughout the show. Paris' friendship with Rory reminds her that she isn't defined by the men in her life and that to achieve her goals she needs to continue being self-sufficient. By using other women's examples, Rory is able to get an outside perspective that enables her to critically think about Emily's and Lorelai's feminism in relation to her own.

One of the most prominent episodes where Rory directly imitates another woman's lifestyle, other than Emily's or Lorelai's, is in the episode "That Damn Donna Reed" (1.14). The episode begins with Rory and Lorelai mocking *The Donna Reed Show* mercilessly with Rory's boyfriend Dean (Jared Padalecki). Lorelai and Rory banter about their favorite episodes, "...my favorite is when their son, Jeff, comes home from school, and nothing happens" followed by, "My favorite is when Mary gets a part-time job, and nothing happens." Their continuation of the "and nothing happens" joke represents their notion that Donna Reed's life was flat and lacking

substance. This rejection of the classic housewife falls right in line with the opinion of Betty Friedan and the second wave of feminism. Friedan describes in her book the supposed emptiness and desperation that housewives felt whilst being trapped in their homes attempting to fulfill the “Feminine Mystique”. Lorelai and Rory mock Reed’s seemingly perfect appearance with “hair that, if you hit with a hammer, would crack” who is “never without a smile or high heel”. Their mockery of Reed’s embrace of stereotypical femininity directly correlates with the second wave’s rejection of it. Lorelai’s attitude towards Donna Reed’s femininity is surprising, considering her own frequent expressions of it. However, when considering how Lorelai’s beliefs are rooted in opposition to Emily’s it is not a shock that she rejects the housewife lifestyle (including its traditional embodiment of femininity), as it is similar to Emily’s.

Rory, on the other hand, is much more open to seeing varied views on topics or sides of women than Lorelai, shown when she and Dean argue about Donna Reed’s representation of women later in the episode. Dean expresses his belief that “... the general idea of a wife cooking dinner for her husband and family – that’s nice.” Rory further tries to argue her opposing opinion by explaining, “It’s not just that. It’s the having to have the dinner on the table as soon as the husband gets home and having to look perfect to do housework, and the whole concept that her one point in life is to serve somebody else.” Dean indignantly responds, “Maybe you just feel that way because your mother feels that way.” This comment, though it angered her, opened Rory’s eyes to the idea that there may be multiple perspectives on Donna Reed, rather than the single perspective that Lorelai has exposed her to. This revelation is what begins to separate Rory from the traditional second wave perspective. Many of the more vocal second wavers were notorious for the attitude of “my view is the best view” and watching Rory break free from her belief and try

to understand another point of view is like watching her break free from the restricting frame of the second wave.

Later that evening Rory decides to literally try on Donna Reed's role and femininity, dressing like a 1950s housewife to cook dinner for Dean. After dinner, they discuss their argument and how this little "dress up night" changed their opinions for the better. First, Dean tells Rory that he doesn't expect her to do this for him and is happy with her being focused on career. Rory admits, "Although I'll probably never get the feeling back in my left little toe, I'd do it again." And of course, Rory decided to research Donna Reed and tells Dean, "she did do the whole milk-and-cookies, wholesome, big-skirt thing, but aside from that, she was an uncredited producer and director on her television show. Which made her one of the first woman television executives which is actually pretty impressive." Because of Rory's attempt to copy Donna Reed for an evening, she found a new respect for her and the millions of women her show represented that she lacked before. Although Rory does not ultimately adopt the "Donna Reed way of life", she did start to understand the work that goes behind being a classic housewife while also realizing that a woman is much more than just her household role or career, as exemplified with the actress Donna Reed. Stepping away from Lorelai's limited perspective allowed Rory to explore the idea that just because a woman believes or behaves differently than herself doesn't make her wrong or lead a less fulfilling life. Overall, Rory's experiences with other women/feminists on *Gilmore Girls* allows her to break free of the limits both Emily's and Lorelai's feminisms have and experience different sides of feminism that continually shape her opinions.

Femininity

Both Emily and Lorelai revel in their femininity, however, their reasoning for embracing it is contradictory. *Gilmore Girls* uses Emily's displays of femininity as pointed remarks on the outdated attitudes behind it, pushing Rory and its viewers towards Lorelai's feminism-driven femininity.

Historically, men were typically defined by their minds while women were more so defined materially (Bartkowski). Women's link to the material world through their bodies enabled objectification, where society viewed women as objects to be possessed rather than actual people (Bartkowski). Second wave feminists largely rejected femininity as a way to rid society of its objectifying mindset. By not maintaining their stereotypical beauty through their clothing and makeup, second wavers hoped to disassemble the arbitrary gender stereotypes based on femininity (Gamber). Emily Gilmore, as usual, did the opposite of the feminists of her generation. She wholeheartedly embraced her femininity, which coincided with her stereotypical role as a housewife. She gets her hair and nails done frequently and is always dressed in a classy, feminine outfit. Her embrace of femininity would typically align with the third wave's mindset, however, she falls into the femininity trap that leads to objectification.

Emily's treatment of Rory on certain occasions shows her tendency to treat women as objects to be acquired. In the episode "Presenting Lorelai Gilmore" (2.06), Emily convinces Rory to come out to society at a debutante ball. Lorelai describes this ball as a way of saying, "Hi, I'm Rory. I'm of good breeding and marriageable age, and I will now parade around in front of young men...so they can all take a good long look at me." Lorelai's snarky attitude gives sly digs to the underlying meaning of debutante balls, which stereotypical feminists would describe as a mating

ritual that objectifies young girls. One of the debutants tells Rory, “The two minutes you are standing on those stairs tonight will determine your social status for the rest of your life.” Looking at this statement from a modern standpoint emphasizes the ridiculousness of such an event and the traditional view of women and their femininity that Emily follows. Another girl tells Rory, “Four out of five debutants marry their escorts,” followed by “You’re totally getting married” when she sees her escort, Dean. Rory is visibly uncomfortable with the notion that because she dressed up and walked around a ballroom with a man supposedly means she is going to marry him. Rory, especially in early seasons, is portrayed as the smart girl who doesn’t really care about her looks and has only just begun dating. Her uncomfortable debut highlights her transition away from Emily’s femininity and towards Lorelai’s.

Another instance of Emily dressing Rory up and parading her around men is in “The Party’s Over” (5.08) when she and her husband/Rory’s grandfather Richard (Edward Herrmann) throw a party with the sole purpose of introducing Rory to suitable men. When Rory arrives at the party Emily immediately whisks her upstairs to get glammed up with a hairdresser and makeup artist, all while Emily is layering her in a diamond necklace, earrings, and a tiara. This amplifies Emily’s thoughts towards femininity: it is used solely as a way to attract (and keep) a man which then determines one’s social status—the exact view that second wave feminists were trying hard to distance themselves from. Emily may be regarded as a feminist at times, however, her attitude towards femininity makes an appealing contradictory argument.

As the third wave of feminism evolved, women began to reclaim stereotypical femininity through things like shopping, nail polish, and clothing. This began to push the idea that embracing femininity meant embracing ownership of their bodies and being able to define themselves separately from their appearance (Gamber). Lorelai is an exemplary example of what third wave

femininity looked like. She dressed up, got her nails done, and seemed to really care about her appearance, just as Emily did. However, the difference between her femininity and Emily's is whom they were doing it for. Emily dressed well and kept her appearance put together because she believed it would attract (and later keep) a man and her societal status. Lorelai, on the other hand, put effort into her appearance for herself. She often discussed how great she looked in her clothing and how looking good made her feel good. She talks about her wardrobe choices in terms of her opinion rather than from the eyes of a man. By dressing to impress herself, Lorelai is claiming ownership over her body and allowing herself to feel good without the approval of a man. Rory takes this view on femininity to heart, as her experiences with Emily's approach put her in uncomfortable situations where she feels more like an object than a young girl. Once Rory heads to college and isn't forced to wear the god-awful Chilton uniform daily, viewers watch her follow her mother's footsteps, dressing to please herself rather than in hopes of attracting a man. *Gilmore Girls* pushes Rory and its followers towards third wave ideas about femininity, aligning itself with modern feminism and further progressing its legacy.

Expressions of Sexuality

Emily and Lorelai have stark differences in their view on women's sexuality which results in a push-and-pull effect on Rory's perception of it. Emily invests heavily in the concept of virginity, which is the opposite of her generation of feminism's beliefs. Lorelai, on the flip side, almost exactly matches the stereotypical beliefs of the third wave, embracing her sexuality and other women's in all forms. Rory ultimately follows Lorelai's modern take on sexuality due to Lorelai's positive example rather than Emily's manipulative one.

The second wave of feminism was focused on ridding society of the sexual double standard while giving women sexual freedom equivalent to that of men and fighting for women's right to control their own bodies (Bartkowski). Emily follows a much more old-fashioned, traditional belief regarding sexuality where a woman's virtue is of utmost importance. This is not surprising due to her daughter's out-of-wedlock pregnancy at the age of 16, disrupting their household while all but demolishing their relationship and social standing. While Emily's beliefs about premarital sex have always (presumably) stood stagnantly, Lorelai's disruption of the status quo in her life definitely did not make her more susceptible to new or different views regarding women's sexualities.

An instance of Rory directly interacting with Emily's view of sexuality is while she is living in her grandparents' pool house and dating Logan Huntzberger (Matt Czuchry). In the episode "Twenty-One is the Loneliest Number" (6.07), Emily and Richard, Rory's grandfather, begin to worry about Rory's virtue after they stumble upon her and Logan making out in his car. Emily warns Richard, "She might be getting ready to have relations with that boy." They immediately fret over the idea of Rory losing her virginity, something that has already occurred unbeknown to them. Emily believes that it is her duty to intervene so she arranges a dinner for Rory and their pastor. At dinner, the pastor begins to tell Rory, "Your virtue, for example, is a gift, a precious gift... It is a gift you can only give to one man." He quickly monopolizes the conversation to emphasize the notion that virginity is a virtue and once it is gone one can never go back. After Rory can no longer take the uncomfortable lecture she interjects, "The ultimate gift ship has sailed," essentially announcing her lack of virginity to the entire table. Emily's not so subtle attempt to guide Rory into her beliefs failed so she switches to manipulative tactics to force Rory into them by attempting to end her sex life. Emily does this by forcing Rory to move into the

guest bedroom right next to her and Richard's using a lie about the pool house needing to be fumigated. This backfires with Rory who eventually decides to move out and away from Emily's strict rules. Ultimately, the concept of virginity is taken down within the series, promoting a more modern take on sexuality exemplified through Lorelai. Believing in virginity is not inherently anti-feminist as it typically relates more so to religious beliefs and are personal choices. However, Emily's attempt to push and shame Rory into following her own beliefs it not promoting a feminist message.

Lorelai, in stark contrast and perhaps defiance to Emily, openly embraces her sexuality and encourages Rory to do the same without feelings of embarrassment or shame. The third wave of feminism continued the second's attitudes toward sexual liberation while also reclaiming stereotypical femininity (Rowe-Finkbeiner). Lorelai Gilmore is essentially a replica of the stereotypical third wave view of women's sexuality. Re-embracing the femininity that early feminists rejected brought about the fight to reclaim one's body, typically through sexuality (Gamber). Lorelai has always been open to exploring her sexuality since a young age, hence the reason Rory exists, and sets a sex-positive example for Rory instilling her with confidence and knowledge to safely explore her own sexuality with no shame.

In season 5, Rory attempts to expand her sexual horizons by agreeing to a casual arrangement with her future boyfriend, Logan Huntzberger. While traditionally casual relationships are frowned upon by society, Rory decides to play out her feelings and decide what is best for herself, using Lorelai's positive example as a motive to do so. After a month or so of trying out casual dating, Rory decides that it isn't making her happy or fulfilling her and directly tells Logan, "I'm a girlfriend girl." ("But I'm a Gilmore," 5.19). While she personally rejected casual sex, she never says anything negative regarding it or bashes the women that do find it

fulfilling. This exemplifies Lorelai's impact on Rory regarding sexuality, instilling Rory with positivity and uninhibited acceptance. By including this brief exploration of sexuality in the show, *Gilmore Girls* brings normalcy to both casual relationships and exploring one's sexuality.

Ultimately, Rory is much more impacted by Lorelai's feminist take on sexuality where she is encouraged to explore and always accepted, rather than Emily's traditional view which is portrayed as limited and centered on guilt and shame. Having different ideas about sexuality is encouraged by feminism as it is a personal choice; however, judging or shaming a woman for having differing views is not. Emily's beliefs about virginity aren't what makes her not a feminist regarding sexuality, it is her willingness to manipulate and shame other women into following those same beliefs. Lorelai, while she might not always agree with Rory's romantic choices, always tries to be supportive and encouraging as Rory discovers her sexual identity.

Motherhood

Rory is heavily influenced by the disparities in Emily's and Lorelai's embodiments of motherhood. Emily's version of motherhood is based on her hopes of Lorelai (and later Rory) following in her footsteps towards a similar lifestyle. When those hopes are diminished, Emily tends to strike out and attempt to manipulate the girls to put them back "on course". Emily wholeheartedly believes she knows what is best for the girls, and is, therefore, more capable of designing a life for them than Lorelai and Rory themselves, failing to recognize her manipulative tendencies or their free will. Lorelai's version of motherhood is rooted in opposition to her mother's. She felt trapped by Emily growing up and thus focuses on giving Rory the freedom to form her own life. Rory is pulled between both styles often, due to the constant rift between Lorelai and Emily, and ultimately thrives under Lorelai's mothering more so than Emily's.

Stereotypical second wave feminists did not acknowledge motherhood as a worthy endeavor (Gamber). Betty Friedan, in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, wrote about women feeling unfulfilled as mothers and housewives and that feminism needed to go beyond equality in the home and reach for equality in professional careers (Friedan). This spurred an “anti-housewife/motherhood” movement where many women began leaving the house to pursue careers or not have children at all. Once again, Emily did not follow the feminists of her generation. She became a mother and chose to remain at home, and because of this, many feminists at the time would probably argue that Emily is inherently not a feminist. Of course, there were second wave feminists that were also mothers, most of which choosing to pursue a career rather than staying at home with their children. Emily’s correlation with the stereotypical parental behaviors of second wave mothers indicates that she does have some commonality with them. These behaviors don’t render these women as feminist, due to its somewhat negative impact on their children and lack of acceptance towards deviation, but it does spark a common ground with Emily that later develops the third wave of feminism.

Third wave feminists grew up as the children of the generation that honed the second wave and therefore many of their mothers were considered to be second wave feminists. A large percentage of third wavers have stated that they felt trapped by their mothers’ feminism and felt forced to follow in their strictly bound footsteps (Gamber). This often occurred through their mother’s manipulation or meddling in their lives in an attempt to parallel them with their own, something that Emily is well known for. While perhaps traditional second-wave feminists manipulated their children toward second wave ideals and Emily more so attempted to parallel Lorelai’s life choices with her own, the behavior is the same and ultimately has the same effect. Emily mainly meddles in Lorelai’s life, believing that she can find a better suitor for Lorelai,

usually of similar class and education of her own husband, Richard. This behavior is the main cause of tension between the two throughout the entirety of the show. Emily's manipulation continues onto Rory, with perhaps less dire consequences in terms of maintaining a steady relationship due to Rory's willingness to experience Emily's lifestyle.

Rory had previously followed in Emily's footsteps in terms of education by attending elite private schools Chilton and Yale, however not in terms of her relationships with men prior to Logan Huntzberger. Up until the fifth season, Rory had only dated Dean and Jess (Milo Ventimiglia), both of which were not well received by her grandparents. In the episode, "The Party's Over," Emily and Richard team up to throw an elaborate party with the sole purpose of introducing Rory to, in their eyes, more suitable men than her current boyfriend, Dean. When Lorelai hears about this party, she becomes suspicious and immediately calls Emily and Richard to expose their scheme claiming, "It was a mating ritual." Lorelai reminds the pair that Rory has reignited her relationship with Dean to which Emily replies, "Oh so what!" followed by Richard's explanation that, "She isn't going to be with that boy forever." These responses indicate their lack of respect for Rory's choices in men and their determination to resolve it. Emily continues, "When she is ready to move on she will have met some nice young men who will represent the new phase in her life." While Emily and Richard are not directly attempting to break Rory and Dean up, they are definitely trying to push her in that direction while lining up "better" men to take his place. Emily continues to rationalize their behavior by saying to Lorelai, "We want more for her. Period. Obviously, it's too late for you, but it is not for Rory and we are going to make sure she gets the life she deserves." Emily's ignorance of Rory's free will and her insistence on having substantial say in her relationships is behavior that correlates with the manipulation exhibited by many second wave mothers. Emily believes that Rory should marry someone of elite education and class, which

Dean is not, as she did and continually tries to force Rory to mold to her lifestyle. It is important to note that while Richard was involved with this party, he merely was playing along with the plan that Emily orchestrated. This “Male Yale” party ultimately produces the result that Emily had hoped for, ending Rory’s relationship with Dean while simultaneously beginning her flirtation with Logan, who happened to be a party guest.

When Emily demonstrates similar manipulative behavior with Lorelai, it completely backfires and typically results in a huge feud. This could be attributed to their generational differences, which is backed heavily by the opposition of the second and third waves of feminism. Rory and Emily, on the other hand, rarely have explosive arguments regarding Emily’s manipulation due to perhaps both their generation gap as well as Rory’s curiosity about and willingness to experience Emily’s lifestyle. Rory is well aware of Emily’s manipulation, usually, because Lorelai is infuriated by it, and exercises her free will to follow along with Emily’s hopes, rather than being actually forced into certain actions like Emily intends. While Emily might not traditionally align with feminists of her generation, they do share certain beliefs and behaviors that shape younger generations similarly. These maternal behaviors do not demonstrate feminism, but it provides a common ground between Emily and traditional second wave mothers upon which other commonalities can be analyzed through a feminist lens.

The third wave of feminism overall learned a great deal from the mistakes of the past (Gamber). Individually, third wavers commonly looked to their mothers’ mistakes and attempted to overcome their shortcomings in their own lives. Growing up Lorelai felt very limited and that her wishes were disregarded due to Emily’s manipulative mothering, ultimately establishing her desire to create a life for Rory with endless opportunity. Lorelai tells Emily in a heated argument over their parenting styles, “I had nothing in that house. No life, no air. You strangled me. I do not

strangle Rory,” (“Rory’s Dance,” 1.09). This comment shows the disdain Lorelai has for her childhood with Emily and is a strong indication of where Lorelai gets her mothering style, which is essentially whatever the opposite of Emily’s is.

When Rory shows interest in a relationship with her grandparents at the beginning of the series, Lorelai struggles due to her negative feelings about their lifestyle and her personal desire for Rory to feel the same. For most of Rory’s childhood, Lorelai kept herself and her daughter very distant from Emily and Richard. At the start of the show, the only way for Rory to attend her dream high school, Chilton, is for Lorelai to accept money from her parents, a decision which she struggles with heavily. She eventually accepts the help, and the obligatory Friday night dinners that come along with it, because she doesn’t want to let her wishes keep Rory from attending her dream school. By putting Rory’s desires above her own, Lorelai is demonstrating what she has learned from Emily’s failures as her mother. Rory continually pushes for a relationship with her grandparents, earns an Ivy League education, and enjoys the privilege and opportunities her family name brings her.

In the episode, “Presenting Lorelai Gilmore,” Rory comes home and tells Lorelai that Emily has convinced her to participate in a debutante ball. Lorelai is taken aback by Rory’s willingness and slight eagerness to attend and tells her, “It’s all the things I ran away from. I just assumed you’d be running with me.” Rory quickly assures Lorelai that she doesn’t expect her to be involved in her coming out process to which Lorelai responds, “No no. If you want to do it, I’ll help,” and immediately starts making a list of the things Rory will need. Even though Lorelai absolutely despises debutante balls and what they stand for, she is willing to put that aside and step up to support Rory. Although Lorelai personally wishes for Rory to reject Emily and Richard’s

life completely as she did, Lorelai never stops trying to support and encourage Rory to follow her desires, something Emily never tried to do for her.

One of the most prominent instances of Lorelai supporting Rory regardless of her personal opinion is Rory's relationship with Logan Huntzberger. Logan is from a prominent, wealthy family and has a tendency to throw his money and privilege around to get what he wants. Logan is exactly the type of man Emily believes Rory (and Lorelai) should be with, immediately predisposing Lorelai to despise him. Rory is very aware of her mother's distaste for privileged men like Logan in "So... Good Talk" (5.16) when she tells Lorelai they are seeing each other. Rory reasons, "He's extremely well read and I know Logan's rich and I know you don't really-". Lorelai quickly cuts her off, "No no Rory. I don't care if he is rich. If you like him...and he is treating you well..." While Lorelai is clearly uncomfortable having this conversation with Rory, her "if you like him, I like him" attitude is a lesson learned from how Emily has handled her own relationships. Lorelai's ability to separate her personal opinion from Rory and (mostly) support her choices is a turning point in their relationship that she and Emily never had and demonstrates her strong third wave connection. The third wave of feminism is focused on accepting differences between women and their right to individuality. Lorelai's acceptance of Rory, regardless of the life she leads, instills Rory with confidence and pushes her to try different models of feminism, other than her own, allowing Rory to form her own identity.

Rory's experiences with both manipulation-based and freedom-based mothering styles expose her to the two stereotypical mothers from both established waves of feminism. Emily's manipulation is interpreted negatively by Rory, partly due to seeing its effects on Lorelai and as well as her willingness to try what Emily wishes rendering her manipulation utterly pointless to begin with. While Rory doesn't reject Emily's lifestyle and is willing to embrace certain aspects

of it, being exposed to Lorelai's unconditional acceptance gives Rory feelings of trust and support that she uses to grow into a modern feminist, which is lacking in her relationship with Emily.

Relationships

Rory takes after Lorelai in many ways, both in her personality and lifestyle choices, more so than she tends to mirror Emily, mainly due to generational differences. However, Rory tends to stray away from Lorelai's insistence on independence, especially in the context of relationships, and lean towards Emily's dependent, yet firm behavior throughout the show. Emily breaks down stereotypes and is an example of an empowered woman, whilst depending on her husband, Richard, whereas Lorelai tends to avoid commitment to a man to maintain her empowering independence. Rory mirrors both women's approaches to relationships throughout the series and ultimately finds more stability and likeness with Emily's.

To some, Emily is clearly not a feminist solely based upon her household role and some of her more traditional beliefs. However, exploring how Emily operates within her role as a wife and homemaker reveals her subtle, yet evident claim to feminism. Emily is very much a stereotypical housewife who describes her role in her own words as "to run a home, organize the social life of a family, and bolster her husband while he earns a living," ("I Am Kayak, Hear Me Roar," 7.15). From an outside perspective, that role seems frivolous and unfulfilling to some, but further examination of her behavior within that role sheds light on her ambition and commitment. Second wave feminists, like Betty Friedan, denounced roles similar to Emily's arguing it creates women who lack identities and are remaining complacent in the fight for equality (Friedan). Friedan encouraged women to reject their stereotypical roles and enter the workforce to fight for equality, which was the natural progress of feminism (Friedan). Many women would believe that Emily's

choice to remain complacent in her role as a housewife was backtracking feminism, as throwing away an Ivy League education to run a home could appear like a rejection of feminism. However, the way in which Emily handles herself in that role argues differently.

Emily takes her stereotypical role and turns it into an (unofficial) career. She is the president of numerous organizations and charities, most notably the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) where she is determined to maintain her authority and organize high-quality events. Emily continually breaks down the stereotypes surrounding housewives being unfulfilled or complacent in their lives. She rises to the top of every organization she joins and commands respect from all of her peers, men, and women alike. While a lot of her “job” is running a household and throwing parties, she takes her commitment to tasks to the fullest extent making sure she properly navigates social protocol while putting on near-perfect events. She may not have specifically fought for women’s equality in an actual career field, but her behavior in her duties as a housewife promotes just that, setting the example to Rory that one can prosper in any role, given commitment and ambition, regardless of the opinions or critiques from others. Emily’s breaking of barriers within a role that was historically rejected by feminists emphasizes a modern take on the movement where someone’s role, ethnicity, race, or other backgrounds cannot keep them out of the feminist movement.

Rory directly follows Emily’s footsteps into the DAR during her time away from Yale. She becomes a miniature copy of Emily, navigating social etiquette and commanding respect while putting a modern twist on the organization. Although her time devoted to the DAR was short-lived, Rory became a well-established and beloved member quickly, similar to Emily. It’s no surprise that Rory’s ambition led her to leave the DAR and return back to school with the hopes of a career in journalism, but she did take the lessons learned from her time at the DAR and paired it with the

grace with which Emily demonstrated to her and applied it to something she is passionate about. She becomes editor-in-chief of the *Yale Daily News* soon after returning to school, despite her unorthodox absence, and adamantly begins reshaping the culture of the newspaper after the dictatorship of the previous editor while gaining respect and admiration from the staff. Using Emily's hard work and dedication as an example, Rory is able to bounce back from her mistake of quitting school and jump right back to where she was, if not further, prior to her departure. Emily reinvigorated Rory's quest to dominate in her passion and was able to inspire Rory in a way that Lorelai was unable. Growing up, Rory always had Lorelai's example in business to follow and was the foundation that drove her perseverance and dedication to become a journalist. However, when Rory "falls off the wagon" and drops out of school it is ultimately Emily's barrier-breaking example that brings back her drive to succeed and helps her find her way back to Yale and journalism. While Rory is unlikely to ever become solely a socialite housewife, Emily has set a positive example not only for the role itself but also inspires Rory in her own career.

Emily's life is centered on her husband, Richard, and his success, following a traditional patriarchal model. However, Emily continues her barrier-breaking behavior in her marriage through her expectations of mutual respect. In the premiere of the fifth season, Emily and Richard argue over his secret lunches with his ex-fiancé. Emily argues, "The woman you married was your partner, you listened to her, you consulted with her, you respected her. So, Richard, you are right, I am definitely not the woman you married" ("Say Goodbye to Daisy Miller," 5.01). This defiant stance against her husband is not what one would typically expect from a traditional housewife, who is expected to be compliant and seen but not heard. This expectation not only speaks to the strides feminism has taken in household dynamics, but also reiterates Emily's feminism. She may not traditionally behave like a feminist of her generation, but she definitely attempts to stand for

the same basic concepts, like equality in relationships and households, and by her refusal to accept the notion that her role defines what she is and is not. Emily willingly takes on the role of the dutiful wife but she refuses to be treated as anything other than an equal partner.

Rory begins to expect this same mutuality in her relationships and exhibits Emily's willingness to stand up for herself when those expectations are not met. In "Presenting Lorelai Gilmore," Rory is participating in a debutante ball and convinces, if not forces, her current boyfriend Dean to be her escort. While discussing the mandatory escort attire, Dean responds with indignation, "Tails?! Gloves?!" Rory uses their relationship as a point of contention paired with a reminder of their compromise by responding, "Remember that you love me and remember that I will be watching *BattleBots* with you for a month." By saying this Rory is reminding Dean that part of being in a relationship with her is doing things she enjoys sometimes, furthering that point by mentioning their compromise to emphasize her willingness to do the same for him. Her insistence of Dean to do something that is important to her, despite his obvious lack of interest, highlights the example Emily has set for her in relationships.

When Richard does not respect Emily's feelings in the fifth season, she decides to (temporarily) separate from him. Similarly, when Jess, one of Rory's boyfriends, cannot comply with her expectations of respect and treat her as an equal, she ends their relationship altogether. Lorelai, of course, set this example for Rory in her relationships as well, however, due to Lorelai's rocky relationship history and her tendency to flee commitment, this example does not stick as well as Emily's. Emily's demand for respect and continual barrier-breaking within her traditional role as a housewife demonstrates to Rory that one can still be an individual while being dependent on another person. Emily's displays of feminism in certain aspects go beyond the scope of the traditional second wave, putting forth the idea that someone's generation, role, and more doesn't

define a person nor discredit their inclusion in a movement. This statement, made through Emily, is subtle, yet strongly adheres to modern feminism standards pushing forward *Gilmore Girls*' growing feminist legacy.

Lorelai is easily the most outwardly feminist character in *Gilmore Girls* and is introduced as such in the pilot episode when Rory explains the origin of her full first name (Lorelai). She says her mom was, "thinking about how men name boys after themselves all the time so why couldn't women? She says her feminism just kind of took over" ("Pilot," 1.01). Using the word "feminism" to describe Lorelai's actions within the first episode draws attention to the significance Lorelai's feminism holds throughout the show. Traditionally, women and children take the name of their husband/father for the protection and sense of belonging it brings (Skipper). By giving her daughter her own name, Lorelai instills those same feelings of protection and belonging onto Rory while eliminating the need for a man in order to feel them. Her creation of a world for her and Rory that isn't dependent on the existence of a man in their lives introduces her fierce independence backed by her feminism. Rory continually reaffirms Lorelai's belief that they do just fine without a man in their house and will continue to do so. Lorelai instills Rory with the same confident independence she had when she was young that enabled her to make scary, risky life decisions to follow her desires which ultimately carves a pathway for Rory to do the same.

Lorelai's life is rooted in strict independence from her parents and a man, so much so that she destroys relationships at the drop of a hat just when she is about to take a step toward commitment on multiple occasions. The first instance of this in *Gilmore Girls* is with her fiancé Max Medina (Scott Cohen). A few days before their wedding, Lorelai quickly jumps into the car with Rory and goes to tour Harvard thereby calling off her engagement ("Road Trip to Harvard," 2.04). The show never quite explains how or when Max learns there will not be a wedding, quickly

diminishing the importance of their relationship while highlighting Lorelai's flightiness towards commitment. Redirecting away from male storylines and keeping the focus solely on the women in the show is one of the strongest tools *Gilmore Girls* uses to maintain its feminist emphasis. Lorelai is constantly pulled between her opposition towards Emily, which steers her away from the idea of marriage and her own desire for a steady relationship. Lorelai's opposition towards her mother and everything she stands for is a key trait of many third wave feminists. Due to the parenting styles of their mothers, which was essentially an attempt to create younger feminist versions of themselves, the younger generation pulled away from the second wave of feminism and its beliefs and tackled feminist issues in opposite ways.

In season five Lorelai is finally in a relationship with Luke (Scott Patterson) which had been long awaited by viewers. It appears to be going smoothly until deeper examination of Lorelai's behavior reveals her purposeful communication gaps emphasizing her "half-in" attitude, which ultimately leads to a (temporary) split from Luke. Lorelai neglects to tell Luke when she sees Christopher (David Sutcliffe), Rory's father, to help with his other daughter and again to mourn the loss of his father with copious amounts of alcohol. Rory recognizes Lorelai's communication flaws in her relationship with Luke and attempts to meddle in Lorelai's love life, taking after Emily's manipulative tendencies, and tells Christopher, "I want you to stay away from her. Mom's in a relationship now and she's doing really great. You'll mess it up." ("Norman Mailer, 'I'm Pregnant!'" 5.06). Rory's acknowledgment of Lorelai's relationship flaws and attempting to combat them demonstrates her negative view of Lorelai's behavior in relationships and her own hopes to not follow that example. Rory emphasizes time and time again that Lorelai's independence set a great example for her and is the reason she is as successful as she is, however, she doesn't want that independence to subtly sabotage her relationships like Lorelai's has.

Lorelai's flighty behavior in relationships adversely impacts Rory's commitment to her own relationships, especially while in high school. With Rory's first boyfriend Dean, she is too afraid to express love for him, temporarily ending their relationship in "Star-Crossed Lovers and Other Strangers" (1.16). On her and Dean's three-month anniversary, Rory expresses how happy she is with their relationship and Dean concurs, adding that he loves her. Rory stumbles through her response saying that she needs to think about her feelings more, followed by, "Think about it from my point of view, my mom and our life." This phrase demonstrates the subpar relationship example Lorelai has set thus far, where loving a man leads to hurt and betrayal. Rory continues in an upset tone, "My mom said that she loved my dad and..." She associates her mother's poor relationship with her father as an indication that if she expresses love, her relationship is also doomed, playing into Lorelai's fear of commitment. This ends up becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy because Dean ends their relationship. When Lorelai finds out why Rory and Dean broke up in "P.S. I Lo..." (1.20) she admits to Rory that she is still learning about love and therefore is not setting the best example for Rory. She says, "I'm talking about my own lack of commitment skills. I mean look I love that you have my eyes, my coffee addiction, my taste in movies, but when it comes to love and relationships I don't necessarily want you to be like me." Lorelai's acknowledgment that maybe she is not the best role model in terms of relationships for Rory encourages her to explore other women's behavior in relationships to mimic. While Lorelai probably did not mean for Rory to use Emily as a resource, Rory finds a lot of commonality with her in terms of relationships, such as her positive portrayal of dependency, and mimics many of her traits.

Lorelai's independence is a driving force of her feminism, but it also harms her relationships as well as pushes her parents far away from her. Rory recognizes both the pros and

cons of her independence and through trial and error learns how to adopt the empowering independence while leaving behind the fear of commitment and failing relationships. Emily provides a much more traditional, yet strong, empowering example for Rory in her relationship with Richard, based on commitment and mutual respect. Emily's continual stereotype-breaking attitude in career and relationship establishes to Rory that one can be dependent on a man and still thrive personally. As the show follows Rory as she interacts with opposing women, and opposing expressions of feminism, *Gilmore Girls* sets up the rise of the post-third wave of feminism where merging different forms of feminism within one's self is acceptable and can lead to more fulfillment, inclusion, and empowerment.

Rory's Future

As the end of the series approaches, Rory is on the job hunt as she nears her graduation from college while still seriously involved with Logan Huntzberger. At Rory's graduation party, Logan proposes to her unexpectedly in "Unto the Breach" (7.21). He tells Rory that he got a job on the opposite coast and believes that a change in location should come with a change in their relationship status as well. Logan explains that he has already found a house for them as well as secured a job for her at the local newspaper. Stunned Rory decides to take a few days to think her response over. She is faced with two distinct decisions, both correlating to the lives Lorelai and Emily have led.

Accepting this proposal would be to follow in Emily's footsteps. Rory's life and career would be tied to Logan's, as he is the one who got the new job and arranged their entire new life. She would still have a career in journalism, but her job would ultimately be based around Logan's, similar to how Emily's "career" in the DAR is based on Richard's success. Emily never expressed

any regret for tying her life to Richard's and continually proved to Rory over the years that she is able to exist outside of her husband and follow her ambitions to create a meaningful life. Rejecting the proposal would be embracing Lorelai's independent lifestyle and the risk and freedom tied to it. Rory would be throwing away the past couple of years spent with Logan as well as the stable position at a well-known newspaper. On the flip side, Rory would be gaining independence to create her own life on her terms with no restrictions. Lorelai has shown Rory that choosing to be selfish and putting her needs first at times can lead to great things. Lorelai chose the harder path when she rejected Christopher's proposal at 16, putting her wants and Rory's needs above her parents', and moved to a new town away from everything she knew and created a life where she and Rory thrived.

The difference between accepting and rejecting the proposal backed by the embodiment of Lorelai's and Emily's feminist ideals can be easily summarized in the episode "I Am Kayak, Hear Me Roar" (7.15). In this episode, Lorelai helps Emily as she struggles to uphold Richard's household duties while he is recovering from a heart attack so Lorelai comes over to help. Emily begins to tell Lorelai, "Your father and I have been paddling a canoe together for years. Only now, he has dropped the paddle...Not only that but now the canoe is going in circles...it's hard work and I'm getting tired." Emily has willingly attached her life to Richard's and acknowledges that without him her life has little meaning. She openly admits that her life is limited because her success is based on his, but she never expresses regret or resentment; she chose to be a wife and is continually satisfied with that decision. While Richard's absence is unsettling, she is able to conquer stereotypes and barriers her traditional role places on her and upholds his duties if necessary. She would simply just prefer him to be there to do it himself because that's how their life works. Emily's role doesn't limit her capabilities, it merely ties her life to Richard's.

Traditional second wave feminists may not have necessarily accepted Emily's embodiment of feminism but from a modern lens that lacks strict, definite boundaries she is a feminist. While not perhaps a strong activist for the movement she does present herself as a strong, empowered woman that works for what she wants and demands equality when doing it. If Rory accepts Logan's proposal she would be choosing the "canoe way of life" because her life decisions and career path would be based on Logan's. Rory would have Emily's barrier-breaking example backing her and could continue to achieve and be satisfied with her life.

Emily extends her analogy to Lorelai saying, "You are in a kayak. You know how to do all of this. You steer it by yourself." She admits that Lorelai has done very well for herself, despite her resistance to a relationship. Lorelai expresses her hope to find someone to share her life with someday, but her wants and needs take precedence over a relationship with a man. She wanted to create a life for herself and Rory and she wanted to establish a career before taking the time to find a man. Rejecting the proposal would be Rory's commitment to do the same.

Rory's decision about the proposal comes down to much more than just the proposal itself. It represents choosing her future, establishing a strong sense of identity backed by feminism, and the start of her adult life, ending the era of growing up *Gilmore Girls* has followed her through. There is no truly right or wrong decision here, although many fans of the show had very strong feelings regarding Logan. Both choices are doors to the future and could satisfy Rory. It comes down to becoming a canoe or a kayak. Both can get her to where she wants to go and bring her happiness, but they do both come with negative sides as does any decision.

Rory ultimately rejects the proposal, embracing the uncertainty and freedom that comes along with it, becoming a kayak. She explains to Logan, "There are a lot of things undecided in my life right now...for the first time I kind of like it" ("Unto the Breach," 7.21). While she is sad

to end her relationship with Logan, she is excited to discover what the world has to offer and have the ability to experience it string-free. This decision doesn't definitely align her with Lorelai's feminism nor does it put her in opposition to Emily's, it merely establishes the next phase of her life. She embraces Lorelai's lifestyle centered on freedom and choices to explore her own version of it, inheriting some of Lorelai's feminist traits such as her outward expressions of femininity and sexuality and her empowering independent attitude. However, Rory has also learned over the years to be wary of Lorelai's fierce independence and the negative effects it could have when she is ready to settle down in the future. Similarly, Rory's rejection of the proposal doesn't cause her to abandon Emily's version of feminism altogether. Yes, it may be outdated or too traditional at times, but Rory has already found aspects she has connected with and come to embody like Emily's expectations of respect in relationships and her continual breaking of stereotypes. While Rory is choosing to be totally independent right now, she isn't going to embody Lorelai's fear of commitment in the future because Emily has shown her to be a strong, independent woman that is able to depend on someone else. One of the biggest aspects of the emerging post-third wave of feminism is the ability to see beyond defined waves or generations. Rory goes back and forth between both Emily's and Lorelai's examples of feminism throughout the entirety of the show and figures out how they can fit into her life, creating a melting pot of feminism. This finale leaves Rory facing the future as a confident post-third wave feminist on the brink of exciting new beginnings, leaving *Gilmore Girls* strongly aligned with the future of feminism.

Gaps within the Legacy

When *Gilmore Girls* aired in 2000, it began creating an iconic feminist legacy in league with that of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Looking back at the show today, strong components of this legacy remain such as the female-focused storylines, the empowering independence of the Gilmore

women, and their embodiment of multiple feminist ideals. There is little doubt that this show was feminist in its time, however as time continues and feminism continues to evolve it brings to light shortcomings within the show's feminism. The largest complaint of *Gilmore Girls* is its lack of intersectionality in multiple facets mainly being race, sexual orientation, and class. The show also has a hidden negative perspective on sex for young women, which is shocking considering its seemingly open attitude toward sex. Overall, these shortcomings cannot harm *Gilmore Girls*' past reputation, as it was reflective of the feminism of the 2000s. However, as modern feminism continues to aim focus on issues that the show falls way short of it, the original series is considered less and less feminist in today's viewing.

Intersectionality

The largest gap in *Gilmore Girls*' feminism is its intersectionality. Intersectionality, as the word suggests, is the intersection of race, gender, class, and more (Bartkowski). The post-third wave of feminism is abundantly grounded in this concept and therefore *Gilmore Girls* lack of it disrupts its legacy in modern times. Feminists believe that recognition of each other's differences is essential to the progression of the movement, hoping to eradicate the notion that to be in solidarity with other women requires the removal or ignorance of their differences (Bartkowski). By recognizing intersectionality, women can take on different lenses of race, class, age and more to examine and contribute to the feminist movement rather than solely through gender.

Gilmore Girls falls extremely short of "acceptable" standards of intersectionality in terms of race, sexual orientation, and partially social class. The majority of the cast, main or supporting, is white with the two main exceptions being the Kim family (Lane, Rory's best friend, and her mother) and Michel, the concierge. When these diverse characters come into play, their race is

either acknowledged stereotypically like the Kim family or is completely ignored like Michel's. The Kims almost solely represent the entire Asian community in *Gilmore Girls* and their storylines follow that of a stereotypical "strict Asian household." Some argue that because the Kim family was written into the script at all gives *Gilmore Girls* the diversity it needed in the 2000s, however solely having one diverse family that almost only plays out stereotypes of their culture counteracts the goal of diversity in television. Michel (Yanic Truesdale), the concierge at Lorelai's inn, is a black, effeminate French man whose sole purpose is comic relief throughout the series. Being the only consistent African American actor on the show puts him in the position of representing the black community, yet his race (or sexuality) is never discussed. Miss Patty, town dance teacher, is played by Latina actress Liz Torres. However, Miss Patty's ethnicity is unremarked upon, essentially labeling her as white. Gypsy, the town mechanic, is played by Rose Abdo who has the traditional eastern European dark complexion. The word "gypsy" is now recognized as an ethnic slur for Romani people, which evokes more than just a funny name in her characterization.

Gilmore Girls' attempt to inject the show with color flopped due to either its ignorance of race or the over-the-top storylines based on racial stereotypes. Creating a diverse cast and having conversations about it without playing into stereotypes is possible, yet *Gilmore Girls* is unable to turn its representation of diversity into a positive addition within the series. Not including diverse characters that further the show's feminism creates the notion that *Gilmore Girls'* feminism is almost exclusively for white women, taking away from the impact the show could have on the movement as a whole.

The show also excludes any discussion of sexual orientation, other than a few jokes here and there. Not only does this reiterate the show's weak intersectionality, but it also takes away from feminists' fight for equality regarding women's sexualities. By showing only heterosexual,

white couples (minus interracial couple Lane and eventual husband Zach(Todd Lowe)), *Gilmore Girls* pushes sex-positivity in those types of relationships only across to its viewers, negating the additional struggle and oppression that different relationship types face that feminism has fought against. Only mentioning LGBTQ+ communities within the context of a joke does not align with modern feminism and at times could be construed as homophobic, which is a critique the show has faced on multiple occasions. In the episode “Scene in a Mall” (4.15), one of Stars Hallows’ quirky residents Kirk (Sean Gunn) walks into Luke’s diner with a pink tote bag over his shoulder. When Luke approaches him laughing, Kirk quickly shouts “It’s not a purse” defensively. Luke chuckles and says, “So, what’s with the gay bag?” This abrupt joke highlights the show’s willingness to use homophobia as a punchline. This LGBTQ+ critique has a tendency to be swept under the rug, as many argue that it was perhaps a network intervention that allowed such a lack of representation. Amy Sherman-Palladino, the creator, has stated she intended Sookie, Lorelai’s best friend, to be a lesbian, but was quickly shut down by the network (G). This could be a credible claim for *Gilmore Girls*’ lack of LGBTQ+ representation, as the early 2000s were much less accepting and open to varied sexual orientations and thus network intervention is very probable. *Gilmore Girls* also was sponsored by the Family Friendly Programming Forum (FFPF) and writers on the show have stated that were struggles between staying family-friendly and maintaining viewership (Burke Erickson). However, none of these obstacles towards discussion and representation negate its homophobic jokes throughout the series. These comments and sparse representations may have been acceptable during the show’s airtime, however as time progresses it becomes less and less tolerable, thus discrediting its feminism.

From a brief overview of the show, it does appear to have a decent grasp on class differences. Lorelai is comfortably middle class, Emily is of the upper elite class, and Rory floats

in-between the two, which is played out in many scenes and intersects with their embodiments of feminism, creating an aura of intersectionality within that context of societal class. Viewers witness Lorelai and Rory have hardships with money several times throughout the series such as affording private education and opening a business, as many middle-class families do. However, their lack of money is quickly solved when the grandparents swoop in and offer to front the bills with vague talk of paying it back at some point in the distant future. This half-in stance in the middle class takes away from *Gilmore Girls*' representation of it. Most middle-class Americans do not have that privilege to fall back on, taking away its authenticity. *Gilmore Girls*' lack of intersectionality pushes its feminist legacy more towards wealthier, white women, which is not the legacy that modern feminism wants to follow.

Sexualities of Young Women

Aside from the lack of intersectionality, *Gilmore Girls* also has an off-message portrayal of young women's sexualities throughout that series that seems to combat its feminist stance established previously. Every young woman of relevance on the show that loses her virginity faces negative consequences, creating the uncharacteristic message that sex distracts young women from their education (Detmering). The first being Lorelai, who gets pregnant at the age of 16 and barely finishes high school before beginning work as a maid. Granted, she does eventually complete business school and open a successful inn, however that doesn't make up for the fact that her sex life and unexpected pregnancy derailed her educational future. This example on its own doesn't create a negative view of sex for young women, as it is a common narrative plot; however pairing it with the experiences of Paris, Rory, and Lane creates an unsettling anti-feminist point.

Paris has sex with her boyfriend for the first time and the next day is rejected from Harvard, essentially her one goal in life at this point. While the scene of her breaking down on stage at an assembly and blaming her rejection on losing her virginity is comical, it has an uncharacteristic implication underlying it—hinting that having sex derailed her educational dream. Rory loses her virginity to married, ex-boyfriend Dean and all hell breaks loose. Not only does Lorelai express extreme disappointment in her, but her infidelity is discovered by Dean's wife and is outed in the town square. Despite the dramatic beginnings of their second-wind relationship, Dean and Rory continue to see each other, forcing Rory to drive from Yale to Stars Hollow frequently due to Dean's lack of a car. While not as dramatic as Paris' rejection, the show adamantly shows Rory skipping classes and falling behind in her schoolwork just to see Dean, something she never did when first dating him whilst still a virgin. A bright, dedicated student loses her virginity and suddenly school isn't as important to her as it once was.

Perhaps the most disappointing storyline regarding sex and a young woman, however, is Lane's. Lane makes the decision to remain abstinent until marriage, following in her mother's footsteps. Viewers were so excited when Lane finally married Zach in the seventh season and was whisked away to Mexico on her honeymoon. Lane returns home with a terrible "stomach bug" and a terrible first experience in the episode "That's What You Get, Folks, for Makin' Whoopee" (7.02). Upon her arrival back in Stars Hollow, she tells Rory, "That [sex] is bad. It's terrible." She continues to explain her disbelief that women continue to "maintain this ridiculous, pervasive, media-supported charade that sex is normal. That sex is a wonderful part of life. That sex is sexy." Rory tries to convince Lane otherwise to no avail and to make matters worse Lane finds out that her stomach bug is, in fact, a set of twins. She was an aspiring drummer in a semi-decent band and lived up to her virginity pact and is seemingly punished with a terrible first time that resulted in

twins she isn't ready for, emotionally or financially. While it doesn't detract from her education per say, it does significantly diminish her hopes to become a successful musician. *Gilmore Girls*' did send a strong, positive message about expressions of sexuality for women, but it is restricted to mostly white, heterosexual women and has a seemingly odd negative view towards young women's virginites which ultimately detracts from the strides it made.

The Revival

In its airtime, *Gilmore Girls* created an iconic form of feminism on television, however as the movement progresses this legacy is diminished. For every attempt the show made to be intersectional, it backfired or was underwhelming. As time moves on, *Gilmore Girls* loses its iconic feminist status as modern feminism makes its shortcomings more unacceptable than ever before. When the Netflix four-episode revival was announced, fans were excited for the chance for *Gilmore Girls* to revamp its feminist image and continue its legacy while living up to modern feminist standards. It was a chance to listen to the critiques and complaints of its fan base and adapt Stars Hollow accordingly. And it was a chance that the *Gilmore Girls* revival wholly ignored.

Gilmore Girls ended on May 15, 2007, leaving Rory and Lorelai with exciting futures. Rory, a recent Yale graduate, landed a job as a reporter alongside Obama's campaign, leaving Lorelai to begin to build a life for herself that existed outside of raising Rory. Fans of the show daydreamed about where these roads would take the girls and when Netflix announced its revival it seemed that their daydreams were about to be actualized. In November 2016, Netflix dropped four new episodes in a series titled "*Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*." Fans quickly grabbed their remotes and settled onto their couches to finally learn the answer to their burning question: "What had the Gilmore girls been up to over the past 10 years?"

The Stagnant Plot

The answer to this question is quite simple: not much. In the first episode “Winter,” viewers watch Rory whiz into Stars Hollow with multiple cell phones and talks of big plans, alluding to a successful career. The conversation quickly turns when she begins telling Lorelai, “This is my time to be rootless and just see where life takes me,” thus shattering the image of her booming career. Viewers left Rory in 2007 on the brink of adult life and an exciting career path only to find her now, essentially jobless and lost. She turned down Logan’s grand proposal in the series’ finale so she could find herself and “be rootless” only to find out that ten years later she is still in that same spot. Rory has even gone as far as to rekindle her romance with Logan, creating almost an identical snapshot of her life in the final few episodes of the original series, except this time, they both have significant others lingering in the background.

Similarly, with Lorelai, viewers find her living the same life she always has: in Stars Hollow and working at the inn. “Winter” tries to deceive viewers with the perception that Lorelai has evolved, just as it does with Rory. There is a wide shot of the exterior of Lorelai’s house, which for the first time ever is fully decorating and exuding the traditional home holiday vibe, giving fans hope that she finally has settled down. Minutes later it is revealed that just because the house has changed doesn’t mean Lorelai has. She is still with Luke, whom she reconciled with in the series finale, but remains unmarried for reasons that Lorelai cannot even seem to put into words. Her communication is still as poor as it was ten years previous, unable to fully disclose her thoughts and feelings to Luke with no concept on how to improve. She goes as far as to suggest having a baby with him to fill the void their communication has created in their relationship, which for obvious reasons did not work out.

Emily, on the other hand, has recently had her entire life turned upside down following the passing of her husband, Richard. Although she tries to act as though she can continue to be the same woman she always has, little by little viewers watch her evolve into an entirely new person. The subsequent episodes follow the Gilmore girls try to find their footings in life once again. Rory tries and fails several different approaches to breach into the journalism industry until finding her way to a new project: a book detailing her and Lorelai's lives. Lorelai runs off to the mountains before she is able to finally able to commit to Luke fully and decide her next career move. And most shockingly of all, Emily packs up and moves to Cape Cod to become a tour guide at a whaling museum.

Between seasons six and seven of *Gilmore Girls*, its network Warner Brothers merged with another, creating the CW network. With this merge came the renegotiation of all Gilmore-related contracts, from the actors to the writers. Amy Sherman-Palladino and husband writing partner Daniel Palladino decided to leave the series during these renegotiations due to the network's inability to meet certain demands, leaving a new writing team to carry the show into its final season. Sherman-Palladino has long talked about how she always had a vision of the entire series, down to the final four words. Obviously, she was not entirely satisfied with the direction the final season took *Gilmore Girls*, as it was not the one she had envisioned. When she was offered the ability to be the head writer for its revival it is no surprise she took the opportunity to rewrite the wrongs of the seventh season. This controversy could be a significant factor in why the revival picked up almost exactly where it left Lorelai and Rory—not having grown in spite of the 10 year gap—so Sherman-Palladino could rebuild her vision of their life.

The revival cannot be discredited as a feminist show solely due to its stagnant character development within Lorelai and Rory and their disappointing inability to “figure life out.”

However, the analogy between the show's plot and its feminism raises a true threat to its legacy. Just as the show reintroduces its main characters in almost exactly the same place as they were left, it also brings back its original feminism lacking any attempt to correct its shortcomings or adapt to its modern version. The revival's feminism is stuck in the 2000s and simply does not live up to modern feminist standards to continue its iconic legacy.

Continued Lack of Intersectionality

The original *Gilmore Girls* series' main critique was its lack of intersectionality in multiple facets; the most prominent being sexuality and racial diversity. These critiques were well-established and readily available to be heard for the almost ten years *Gilmore Girls* was dormant. It was abundantly shocking to fans and critics of the show when its revival not only did not expand its representation hardly at all but also made pointed jokes at these critiques. The revival of *Gilmore Girls* remains abundantly lacking in terms of intersectionality and can therefore not adhere to modern feminist standards. Just as the characters remain in almost identical places in their lives as the original series left them, *Gilmore Girls*' representation in the revival remains the same as well, sparking further controversy when paired with its unflattering self-awareness.

In the early 2000s, intersectionality was not as visibly important as it is today with feminism and that is why *Gilmore Girls* could become the feminist icon that it did. While critiques of its diversity arose during its original airtime, they did not seriously threaten or condemn the show's standing as such an icon because the feminist movement simply didn't put as much focus on intersectionality at that point in time. The show's strong feminist angles on motherhood, femininity and more were unlike anything else on television at the time, weakening the power its flaws had. Re-watching the show through a modern lens further intensifies its lack of diversity in

multiple facets and seriously detracts from its feminist standing. However, oftentimes people will adjust their expectations and perceptions of a show to its era and are willing to sidestep its flaws and see the show for its strengths. This thinking leads to why many still consider the original *Gilmore Girls* series to be a strong, iconic, feminist show, regardless of whether it is true to the actual movement or not. However, this is not possible for this revival. There is no discrediting or overlooking its major feminist flaws because it is set in modern day and had ample time to grow and develop its feminism as the movement itself did. The original series remains a snapshot of 2000s feminism where its legacy can remain solely within that era, but it cannot be carried forward with the revival.

Amy Sherman-Palladino, the creator of *Gilmore Girls* and its revival, has been confronted in the past directly, about the lack of diversity in her shows. Sherman-Palladino wrote *Bunheads*, a show about a ballet studio, in 2012 and immediately received harsh criticism about its lack of diversity from some of Hollywood's top creators. The most notable criticism came from Shonda Rhimes, most commonly known for her ABC dramas *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*, through Twitter (G). Rhimes wrote, "You couldn't cast even ONE young dancer of color so I could feel good about my kid watching this show?" Sherman-Palladino had no response regarding the lack of diversity in *Bunheads* and passive-aggressively attempted to rebuke Rhimes for her critique, commenting, "I've always felt that women, in a general sense, have never supported other women to the level that they should" (Kappel). Her audience was thoroughly underwhelmed with her response, claiming she didn't address the critique and instead redirected a critique back at Rhimes.

In later interviews, Sherman-Palladino continues to redirect questions on diversity by saying, "I don't do message shows. I don't give a s*** who you learn your life from" (G). This statement shows her disregard for the responsibility for the messages and characters her shows

create and their real-life impact many people believe she has. She has continually stated that she never intended for *Gilmore Girls* to become the feminist icon it has and she simply wanted to write about strong, independent women. Regardless of whether or not she wanted it, *Gilmore Girls* has created a feminist responsibility to its viewers and drove a wave of feminist pop culture. Many agree that Sherman-Palladino disregarded critiques of her diversity-lacking shows and rejected her “feminist responsibility” while creating the revival. Sherman-Palladino’s denial of her responsibility of her shows’ messages is a weak excuse that attempts to redirect all criticism her shows receive away from herself. She has no problem accepting the awards, the recognition, and more for her work on *Gilmore Girls*, yet refuses to face the show’s valid critiques. Continuing to create limited, problematic representation within shows that have been blatantly called out in the past harms *Gilmore Girls*’ reputation and Sherman-Palladino’s, regardless of her attempts to eliminate her fault in the matter. While her critiques for lack of diversity and rambunctious interviews do not discredit her work as quality, it does discredit her work as feminist in today’s world.

As mentioned, racial diversity has always been an issue in *Stars Hollow* and the revival does not change this. Underrepresentation paired with stereotypes does not make an intersectional, diverse show and that is a core incompetency of *Gilmore Girls* and its revival in and of itself. Another source of intersectionality critiques is its ignorance of the LGBTQ+ community, which was attempted to be corrected within the revival. No characters in the original series were affirmatively “out of the closet,” though many fans speculated about various characters, such as Michel. Michel, as previously mentioned is the only man of color that holds a consistent presence through all seven seasons and due to his effeminate personality and lack of a girlfriend, was thought to be gay by many viewers. He occasionally mentioned dating women in early seasons,

but grew quiet on the topic as time progressed. His first appearance on the revival consists of him complaining to Lorelai that his husband wants to adopt a child. Although not quite a shock to most fans, they still questioned why he was purposefully kept in the closet all throughout the original series. Perhaps it was an intentional writing move or a conflict with the network, but it does not truly matter the reason behind it. The revival did attempt to interject a little more diversity and directly (but briefly) talk about it, which is a step more than it has tried to do with its other critiques.

This step forward is quickly forgotten at the first town meeting of the revival where they discuss a pride parade. Taylor Doose (Michael Winters), the town selectman that is often read as a closeted gay character by fans, starts the meeting off with, “They’re just not enough gays in Stars Hollow.” The town’s discussion is a direct comment on the criticism of its lack of sexual diversity, attempting to show its self-awareness on the issue. The goal of this commentary is to acknowledge its shortcomings at the very least and show it is trying to move forward with expansions of characters, like Michel. However, this commentary falls flat when analyzing their actual conversation, proving the show may be self-aware of its problems but hasn’t learned from them. They discuss recruiting “the gays” to come to Stars Hollow in an attempt to attract certain celebrities and host a pride parade since their current town demographic doesn’t contain enough to warrant one. They discuss “the gays” less like people and more like accessories and an excuse to throw another extravagant town party (G). The show’s attempt to insert a discussion including LGBTQ+ topics was its attempt to correct its shortcomings in the past but fails when its discussion turns into talking about these groups of people as items or things to be had rather than actual people.

A bolder, perhaps “newer” issue within the show’s intersectionality is its abundantly negative view on body types. While body types may not traditionally be considered a part of

intersectionality, it rings the same bell. Underrepresenting a group of people or making jokes at their expense is damaging and creates a one-sided show. In “Summer,” Lorelai and Rory spend some time at the local pool, casually chatting while young boys of the town comically fan them. At one point a plus-size man stands in front of them, blocking their sunlight. While asking him to move, Rory calls him “back fat.” She immediately corrects herself and refers to him by his actual name, but continues to giggle with Lorelai about the slip of words as he walks away. Later, another plus-size man walks by in a speedo and Lorelai warns Rory about the “belly alert” and they quickly look away in disgust. The girls don’t just have an aversion to large body types, they are also appalled by a girl walking past them in a bikini, exclaiming, “Oh my god!” and “Just go naked.” The only body types at the pool the girls don’t seem to have an issue with are their own. These outward negative opinions towards body types in the revival are eye-opening to viewers and upon re-watching the original series turns little jokes into full-blown dilemmas.

In “Die, Jerk” (4.08), Rory writes a scathing review about a ballerina for the *Yale Daily News*, focusing mostly on her looks rather than her performance. Rory decidedly focuses on the weight of the ballerina, referring to her as a hippo and commenting on the fat roll around her bra strap. Rory is reprimanded for her review, by both the ballerina and Lorelai for its harshness, but also received praise from her editor and grandparents, sending mixed signals. Rory eventually concedes and realizes that she maybe shouldn’t have published the article, but never brings thought to the idea that maybe she just should not talk about other women in that manner or acknowledges her prejudice towards other body types (Dall’Asen). Many viewers originally perceived this storyline as pure comedy and never questioned the show’s overall position on body type. However, after the pointed comments on body image in the revival this episode’s message, or lack thereof, is concerning and disheartening to its feminist following. “Die, Jerk” is the most prominent episode

containing body shaming, but there are many small comments and jokes throughout the series that avail to the same effect when pooled together.

One of the most unsettling aspects of *Gilmore Girls*' body shaming is its glorification of binge eating. One of Lorelai's and Rory's defining attributes—for which they are admired—is their ability to eat massive amounts of junk food in one sitting and be proud of it. Despite their intense binge-eating, the girls are never seen battling issues with their weights or body images. While it is not necessary for a show to explore these ideas, especially in a light-hearted dramedy as *Gilmore Girls*, making repeated negative comments on body image while glorifying binge eating and never mentioning its ramifications is troubling. *Gilmore Girls* promotes binge eating but only if you can remain skinny with little to no effort and if not, it's gross. This is inherently not feminist. It does not support other woman and it does not create inclusion and acceptance. The revival's outward negative stance on body image further exposes its lack of intersectionality, brings to light its negative, yet subtle stance in the original series, and damages its feminism.

Overall, the revival does not correct its shortcomings with intersectionality. Because intersectionality is a crucial element of today's feminism, it demolishes *Gilmore Girls*' claim to its past feminist legacy. Continuing to underrepresent different races and other sexualities, while making pointed jokes on its lack thereof creates the perception that the show's creators simply didn't attempt to go the lengths to fix its past mistakes and would rather just continue with what “worked” in the past. The revival's outward negative stance on body image brings to a light an issue the original series always had remnants of but was typically overlooked. Today's feminism does not allow for this type of exclusivity to a particular type of person and therefore *Gilmore Girls* and its revival can no longer take claim to their feminist icon status. While Amy Sherman-Palladino may not write “message shows,” being aware of the strong, crucial critiques her shows

have received in the past paired with what the original series has come to represent and not furthering the storyline, characters, or town is a grave mistake in terms of *Gilmore Girls*' representation and cannot be excused.

The Final Four Words

In the final thirty seconds of the revival, Rory and Lorelai sit on the steps of the town gazebo. Rory turns to Lorelai and utters the four most shocking words of the entire series, "Mom, I am pregnant." Lorelai makes a look of shock and perhaps a subtle sadness and the screen fades out. Fans were left speechless. Amy Sherman-Palladino had always said she knew what the final four words of *Gilmore Girls* would be from its inception. When her contract ended before the original series' last season was created, fans were distraught about never knowing the destined final words. Now that they do know what was always fated to happen to Rory and Lorelai, they wish they didn't. This ending brought to light the show's lack of discussion regarding pregnancy options and beliefs that this ending was a narrative copout, rather than a stunning finale. The revival continually let its feminist legacy down and this ending tied its failures into a perfect knot, ending its feminist reputation for good.

Gilmore Girls has always been a show about mothers and their relationships with their children, the focus being on daughters. Emily, Lorelai, Sookie, and Lane are all main characters that are or become mothers within the original series. In the revival, viewers learn Paris and Michel also now have (or are about to have) children of their own along with Rory's shocking reveal. For a show based on feminism and women empowerment, its abundance of mothers and its lack of intentional pregnancy or a real discussion on their options at the start of their pregnancies is disappointing.

Lorelai got pregnant at the age of 16 with Rory and as far as the show explains, she was always going to have and keep the baby without a doubt. Sookie always wanted kids, but she was very clear on how many. After baby number two, she essentially forced her husband to get a vasectomy, or so she thought. Later, Sookie finds herself pregnant again because her husband had lied about getting the procedure and Sookie had stopped birth control without telling him. Obviously upset, Sookie reprimanded her husband, made sure he got the procedure for real, and that was that. There was never a mention of any option other than having and keeping the baby. Lane had a regrettable first time with her husband, Zack, on the beach in Mexico only to then end up pregnant with twins. Lane was 22 and she and Zack were in a rock band together that seemed poised for success. They were both upset that this pregnancy happened to them and worried how that was going to affect their careers and how they didn't want to be responsible for anyone but themselves. Yet, no mention of any of their options ever occurred. Lane was going to have the twins, whether they were ready or not, and stay at home to raise them while her husband gets a boring job as a route supervisor. Their band's success stayed stagnant in the revival and many fans attribute it solely to their children and forced a change of lifestyle.

None of this is to say that having kids was the wrong thing for these characters or that they would ever consider adoption or termination in the first place. However, having an abundance of mothers who unexpectedly get pregnant without ever mentioning their options in a show that has a reputation for its pointed feminism creates a presumed pro-life stance. Typically, strong feminists are pro-choice rather than pro-life politically, as many believe that women should have the right to choose on issues concerning their own bodies. Regardless of the side of the political debate the show's creators were on, the outright avoidance of the topic is an oversight (Hallett). Certainly, not every single woman in Stars Hollow had the same beliefs and wanted to become a mother, no

matter the circumstances. If the writers had wanted to attempt to push their beliefs into the show, it could have been easily accomplished by having a potential mother question her options, make a decision, and talk about it. This show has always been about mothers and daughters and how those roles don't define them (Tiffany). Ignoring the topics of adoption and abortion portrays the idea that all women want to be mothers, regardless of the timing (Tiffany). Ignoring the real world conversations that women have about pregnancy is not remaining politically neutral; it, in fact, pushes one option forward as the only one in existence. This does not support feminism because it only condones one type of woman and acts as if women with any different opinion on the subject do not exist.

In all seven seasons, Rory never talked about having a family of her own one day. She constantly talked about her dreams of traveling and writing, but never of settling down and having children. In fact, when Logan proposed to her at the end of the original series, he told her of the house they would have with the avocado tree in the backyard, all alluding to settling down and starting a family. Rory turns him down so she can focus on her budding career. Perhaps in the ten years viewers were absent from Rory's life she began discussing such topics, but it never shone through in the revival. Rory seemed to still be on the hunt for what her career would entail and was floundering aimlessly. Some fans believe that this pregnancy will give Rory the purpose she was looking for, just as she did for Lorelai (Denninger). However, many fans believe that her pregnancy will stop her career altogether and she will just become a mom in Stars Hollow, following Lorelai's footsteps almost exactly. One thing is clear though, Rory did not want to become pregnant, especially when she was single and trying to figure out her next career move. Viewers will never know where Rory and her unborn children will end up. It is widely assumed that Rory will have this baby, regardless of what she wants due to the show's precedent towards

unwanted pregnancies. This storyline is not anti-feminist in and of itself, however, it is not a pleasing one that upholds a standard feminist ideology. Whether or not one believes in certain pregnancy options, one does have all the options available to them. *Gilmore Girls* falls flat on this, pushing a “one option only” idea across to its viewers.

Amy Sherman-Palladino has always complained about fans of the show only caring about which of Rory’s boyfriends were the best (Tiffany). She thought it took the focus away from the better storylines of the show and detracted from its image. She focused on writing Rory in a way that seemed like she could achieve anything and based the entire revival on her trying to get back up on her feet. To drop a bomb in the last seconds of the show is a discredit to both the show and Rory. This narrative pushes Rory’s love life even more into the spotlight than ever before as viewers try to determine who the father is. Is it one of her past boyfriends’ or is the Wookie she had a casual encounter with in New York? Having a predetermined tumultuous ending such as this one leaves viewers more angry than not. Watching a main character approach a huge hurdle, such as an unexpected pregnancy, isn’t worth much if viewers don’t get to watch the aftermath. One can only assume that Rory follows right into the footsteps of Lorelai, creating a full circle and fulfilling a cliché narrative.

The original series left the girls on the brink of greatness. Lorelai was presumably getting married and expanding her business and Rory was ready to take journalism by storm. Fans were comforted by this ending and felt happy for the girls. With this finale, a majority of fans were outraged at the quick cutoff right after a momentous announcement from Rory and felt it was a disservice to not be able to see it through. This full circle ending creates the idea that one cannot change the stars whether you want to or not while watching the characters just goes through the motions (Tiffany). Rory couldn’t escape becoming her mother. She did everything Lorelai didn’t:

attended college, lived the elite lifestyle, and more. Yet despite all that, her life seems to follow Lorelai's. Lorelai was adrift when she became pregnant with Rory. She took the opportunity to step up and dramatically change her life, leaving behind her parents and home. However, many are afraid that Rory will just accept the pregnancy and not make anything more of it. The strong difference between these two women, especially in the revival, is complacency versus taking charge. The idea of Rory merely accepting her pregnancy and staying in Stars Hollow to become a single mom is not a satisfying ending. It's a disappointment. *Gilmore Girls* is all about showing that women are defined by more than men, marriage, and children (Rivera). This ending seems to say the opposite, pushing all focus onto Rory's pregnancy and the man involved.

Conclusion

Gilmore Girls was a show that embodied some of the best aspects of feminism in the 2000s. It focused on positive female relationships where women learn from one another and embrace their individualities. Rory embodies the post-third wave of feminism that aspires to merge historical waves of feminism together in a modern world. *Gilmore Girls'* real-world representation of feminism helps combat some of the negative connotations the term evokes in popular culture. It shows feminism at its core, putting its focus on women thriving and becoming their best selves through empowerment, individuality, and equality, looking away from its politicized meanings and extremities. In the 2000s, *Gilmore Girls* was an advocate for feminism and was able to build a wildly successful legacy.

However, the original series is not perfect and has some gaps within its representations of feminism, mainly its lack of intersectionality. In its time, this critique was not a deal-breaker for its feminism as it was not a key focus of the movement at that point. When *Gilmore Girls'* revival aired, many viewers who enjoyed the feminist impact of the original show's run expected that the

revival would respond to these critiques and shortcomings, growing along with modern feminism and continuing with its legacy. The revival's feminism stayed unchanged from its original form, if not straying further away from it. Its continued lack of intersectionality, body-shaming, and more paired with an unflattering awareness crumbled *Gilmore Girls'* remaining feminist legacy. *Gilmore Girls* is a wonderful show that contains many important life lessons and many witty jokes, however it can no longer be considered the iconic feminist show that subsequent generations could look to for feminist inspiration as it was once.

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