

“Let Them Drink Cosmos”: The Problem of Class in *Gilmore Girls*

Gilmore Girls was a television series that ran from 2000 to 2007, finishing with seven seasons, each containing about 21 forty-minute episodes. The show centers on a young woman named Lorelai Gilmore, and her teenage daughter, Rory Gilmore. Lorelai had Rory as a teenager herself and was ousted from the elite society her parents live in. The show takes place in the future with an adult Lorelai that has a successful life for herself: she runs her own inn, and later goes on to own her own inn, the Dragonfly Inn – a life dream of hers we get to see accomplished in the series. Rory, on the other hand, is a bright, intelligent young girl, who at the beginning of the series is Harvard-bound, but by the end is a proud graduate of Yale.

Gilmore Girls is a show that uplifts women, however, it is a show about white American women with a wealthy background; meaning that, with regards to a portrayal of women that feels empowering and relatable, it can lack. At the beginning of the series, as a humble high school student, it is easier to identify with Rory; she studies hard, is dating the boy she likes, has a great best friend, and an amazing mom that she watches movies and eats junk food with. Towards the end of the series, Rory is now in an Ivy League university and has to perform community service because she attempted to steal a yacht with her boyfriend, Logan Huntzberger – a boy that also comes from a wealthy family. She becomes involved with the things her grandmother does, such as her Daughters of the American Revolution club. Rory eventually adapts to this elite society so much that she fails to be an uplifting heroine that women see themselves in; instead, she becomes the very thing that her mother ran away from when she was pregnant with Rory. The blurred lines between social class within *Gilmore Girls* result in the series aiding in the erasure and invisibility of the working class in America and point to larger economic issues happening within the country.

Having a show about an unmarried woman that had a baby as a teenager air on television and to depict her life in a positive light was notable in 2000, and this detail is part of what made the show interesting, but it's worth investigating how it fails in its empowerment: while there are many great messages in this show, many aspects of the series do not apply to most women, such as Rory going to an Ivy League school. While Rory and Lorelai have no doubt worked hard to get what they want, they also had the ginormous advantage of having wealthy grandparents to help -- something most women cannot relate with. The audience is to understand that Emily and Richard's upper class life is something to be held in disdain, and frequently does Lorelai point out to Rory reasons why she ran far away from this environment. This great divide between Lorelai and Emily is most heavily emphasized through their class differences, which when analyzed begins to reveal much of the series' predicaments.

In the series, Lorelai has Rory while she is still in high school. Rory's father nor her grandparents are present until much later in her life when she is in high school herself, leaving Lorelai and Rory with just each other. While Lorelai and Rory have an intensely strong bond with one another, Lorelai and her mother, Emily Gilmore, have a notoriously strained relationship. In Nancy Chodorow's essay, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality", she examines the importance of mother-daughter relationships and how it can affect the stability and development of children, which makes it clear that the oppressive environment which Emily kept Lorelai in was a result of her own insecurities being projected onto Lorelai.

Chodorow describes the type of relationship between a mother and daughter that is more commonly seen in Western families: "Various kinds of evidence suggest that separation from the mother, the breaking of dependence, and the establishment and maintenance of a consistently individuated sense of self remain difficult psychological issues for Western middle-class women

(i.e. the women who become subjects of psychoanalytical and clinical reports and social-psychological studies)” (379). Throughout Lorelai’s life, one of her biggest struggles has always been her relationship with her parents -- particularly, her mother. The reason for this is largely because Emily tends to behave in controlling ways towards Lorelai, often meddling with her personal life in completely inappropriate ways. She either is not involved in Lorelai’s life whatsoever and is effectively estranged, or she involves herself so much to the point that it is toxic.

There are several examples of this throughout the series, but the biggest example would be in season five: Emily and her husband, Richard, are renewing their vows, and she invites Rory’s father, Christopher, to the ceremony. Emily and Richard have always wanted Lorelai to be with Christopher, but have never respected the fact she does not wish to; not even when she is in a serious relationship with another man, Luke. Emily appears at Christopher’s apartment and insists that this is the time for him to try and win her affection once again, saying that he “has good breeding” and that Luke is “completely unsuitable for Lorelai” (Come Home) -- essentially, arguing that he is of a superior social class, and is therefore more worthy of Lorelai.

In the following episode, Christopher drunkenly gets in a loud argument with Luke at the ceremony, accidentally revealing that Emily urged him to come in order to win Lorelai back.

This sparks a huge fight between Lorelai and Luke, causing them to break up for a short period of time. Emily shows up two times afterward at Luke’s diner in an attempt to persuade him to take Lorelai back -- the second time, Lorelai appears and tells Emily that she only wishes for her to “butt out of our lives” (Pulp Friction). Upon realizing they are now a couple again, Emily fails to see the issue, saying that she “obviously fixed it.” Lorelai makes it clear that her mother has overstepped her boundaries: “If I want your input on my life in any way, shape, or form, I will

ask for it; until then, do us all a favor and *shut up!*” Emily, rarely speechless, simply looks at Lorelai, defeated, and leaves. This is a prime example of the strain between the two Gilmores: Lorelai’s entire life, her mother has never been able to respect her own wishes, mainly due to the rules that exist within their society about class and status, and it immediately sets the Gilmore grandparents and their upper class world up as an antagonist -- the supposed opposite to our protagonists.

Chodorow points out that in areas such as Atjeh, Java, and East London, all the value in a women’s life is not placed on her caring for her children, but many other things as well: “Women gain status and prestige as they get older; their major role is not fulfilled in early motherhood. At the same time, women may be important contributors to the family’s economic support, as in Java and East London, and in all three societies they have control over real economic resources. All these factors give women a sense of self-esteem independent of their relationship to their children” (383). This is the defining difference between Lorelai and Emily. Lorelai has a fulfilling career with her best friend and business partner, Sookie St. James. Emily, on the other hand, dedicates most of her life to making her family look good, and puts all of her worth into this. After listening to Lorelai talk about the work she does at her inn, Emily marvels at her. “I’ve never done anything ... I buy things, things I don’t even want. It’s all I have” (Scene in a Mall). This is shown two seasons later, in the episode “The Prodigal Daughter Returns,” when Emily goes out to buy a plane after finding out Rory has moved out from her and Richard’s home. Lorelai confronts her on the plane about how ridiculous of a purchase this is, and Emily insists that this is something she needs until she lashes out at Lorelai: “You know what? I am sick of this. I am tired of your attitude towards me. You look at me as a thing of amusement -- something to be pitied, to feel sorry for. ‘Poor, out-of-touch Emily, she has nothing. She lives to

organize parties and frivolous affairs. Who would want to do that, to be that?’” She then immediately goes on to blame herself for Rory’s shortcomings, and within seconds rebuffs herself, saying she gave Rory everything she could have.

There are other recurring examples of the family’s wealth being used in the show to depict their toxicity, such as when the series shows Emily shouting at maids and being cruel to them. In Daniela Mastrocola’s article “Performing Class: ‘Gilmore Girls’ and a Classless Neoliberal ‘Middle Class’,” she explores how Emily and Lorelai’s relationship is used by the series to display Lorelai and Emily’s differing values: “Functioning as a proxy for other upper-class women, Emily figures as an emotionally stifled character who is unable to forge intimate relationships (Rossi 89) ... While, as Matthew Nelson points out, “many of the series’ upper-class characters are depicted as ‘arrogant, unlikable, and unpleasant’ (204), Emily’s character also serves to invoke pity from the audience” (9). This is the chaos and the dysfunctional behavior we are shown that Lorelai desperately wanted to escape from. Emily uses this wealth to feel better about herself, and she throws money at her daughter and granddaughter, hoping it can make up for the lack of an emotional connection.

Emily is much more dysfunctional than Lorelai because she has put all of her worth into her child, and now her grandchild, to the point where she has smothered them and created a suffocating relationship. “... Satisfactory mothering ... comes from a person with a firm sense of self and of her own value, whose care is a freely chosen activity rather than a reflection of a conscious and unconscious sense of inescapable connection to and responsibility for her children” (Chodorow 380). While Emily is consistently burdened by Lorelai and Rory’s choices, Lorelai typically does not let her daughter’s own decisions affect her that much. When Rory decided to date Jess, Lorelai made an effort to like him, even though she detested him.

“Why can’t we have what you and Rory have?” Emily asks Lorelai (There’s the Rub). Lorelai gives Emily a couple of different reasons: “I grew up in a different environment,” “I was so young when I had Rory,” but ultimately, the reason she gives Emily is “Rory and I are best friends, Mom. We’re best friends first and mother and daughter second. And you and I are mother and daughter always.” Within the upper class world depicted in the show, there is not that flexibility, that room to breathe, between Emily and Lorelai that is seen between her and Rory, or in the matrifocal societies as described by Chodorow.

Compare this with Rory and Lorelai’s relationship. When Rory is a teenager in Stars Hollow, she and Lorelai have a strong bond that is known by everyone; they come as a package deal and you can’t be friends with one and not the other. Neither one of them feels bogged down by the other, rather they frequently appear to be strengthened by each other’s presence. Lorelai rarely ever *tells* Rory to do things: “because I said so” is a phrase you will hardly ever hear her say to her daughter. The two usually settle things peacefully and are not seen fighting each other often. In Chodorow’s essay, she looks at the strong mother-daughter relationships within matrifocal societies, and identifies the key traits of what makes the relationship strong is “companionship and mutual cooperation, and to be positively valued by both mother and daughter” (382). This clearly applies to the relationship described between Lorelai and Rory. They are more often than not each other’s most important priority -- this makes their relationship strong, but unfortunately, once Rory leaves for university in season four, this strong bond does not test well against the distance – indeed, it rather pulls the curtain on the codependent tendencies between the two. This is where Rory and Lorelai’s relationship, and the show as a whole, falls from its peak.

Likewise, the environment in which Lorelai and Rory live, as well, allows for more independence, less judgment, and many of the inhabitants of Stars Hollow have their own

fulfilling careers. Something that Stars Hollow has, as well, is the tight-knit community. There are no strip malls or busy, congested roads running through Stars Hollow -- rather, this is a town with predominantly locally owned businesses, and there is rarely any traffic to be seen as the townspeople often are able to walk. In this way, Stars Hollow has many traits resembling that of a village, which is fitting for its New England setting. Alyson Buckman comments on this exact theme in her essay, “‘You’ve Always Been the Head Pilgrim Girl’: Stars Hollow as the Embodiment of the American Dream”: “Street names as well as the types of stores and products that are made available mostly depend on a specifically Puritan and Revolutionary history or, at least, a sense of nostalgia for a bygone era; these historical aspects interact with the lives of the characters, helping to shape them, to provide humor for the audience, and to situate Stars Hollow as a true place, one that is not only American but specifically New England” (139). Not only is Stars Hollow a beautiful town full of interesting characters, but it withholds an element of nostalgia for its audience, as well. Stars Hollow is safe and the community is close and knows one another, with town meetings being regularly held and designated town meetup spots. Not only is this environment homely and comforting, but it also highlights many things that are not as common anymore in many modern day towns and cities across America.

There are many elements of Stars Hollow that deliberately place distance between Lorelai and Rory, and the elitism of Richard and Emily. One of the biggest ways that this is seen is through a lot of the media which the girls enjoy. A huge part of what made the show interesting for audiences is its eclectic choice of music, giving exposure to a lot of independent, less-known artists. Indeed, the soundtrack for *Gilmore Girls* is unique and a staple of the series, but it also does a lot to establish the social class of the Gilmores within the show. Lorelai brings a lot of music into her home, but much of her tastes are 1980s oriented -- when she was a teenager. Rory

shows a great interest in a lot of indie and alternative music within the series, such as the Shins, Belle & Sebastian, and Sonic Youth; notable artists to be mentioned on a popular cable network series. Much of this music, however, Rory does not discover on her own; rather, she discovers it through her friend, Lane Kim.

One of the most interesting characters in the show, Lane is there from the beginning, and by the end of the show has her own separate plotline that isn't involved with Rory's own plotline much at all. Lane lives in Stars Hollow with her strict Christian mother, who greatly disapproves of Lane's love for rock music. She resorts to hiding her music under floorboards and having Rory smuggle her music. Though Lane does not have the background of someone such as Paris and does not hold as high of a social status, she has an overwhelmingly more positive image than Paris does. However, at the end of the series, Lane has a much different trajectory than girls like Paris or Rory do; Lane does not go to an Ivy League school, rather she stays back in Stars Hollow and starts a band called Hep Alien. All is well, until Lane eventually falls in love with her bandmate, Zack, and they soon fall pregnant -- with *twins*. While the show does depict Lane getting to play with her band, it is clear by the end of the series that due to the children, she is not able to tour, while Zack and the rest of her old bandmates are. An ultimately strange, and somewhat anticlimactic conclusion, in comparison with our characters of a more elite class (Rory, or even Paris). While at the beginning of the series, Lane and Rory don't seem to be incredibly different, it is as the series progresses that a large difference between them becomes overwhelmingly apparent: Rory has money, status, and connections, and Lane does not. As we watch Rory go to Yale, we see Lane experience things like having sex for the first time, which, as she confides to Rory, was terrible; this *one*, terrible time is also what results in Lane having children.

This is not a one-off, either; the show has a history of showing lower-class people as being doomed to marriage, kids, and dead-end jobs, even if you have a character like Lane, whose entire plot was heading in an entirely different direction. There is Dean, Rory's first boyfriend, who throughout the series she encourages to go to school, and find a fulfilling career, like she is doing. Instead, Dean gets married right out of high school, gets a house, and is constantly working. The audience never sees Dean (or Lane, for that matter) ever achieve what they had hoped for him; his full potential never comes to fruition. Indeed, the last Dean is seen in the series is when he is waiting outside the Gilmore manor in Hartford as Rory's grandparents are throwing a party. Rory and her Yale friends, who have been drinking, stumble outside after Dean has been waiting for a long time. It is then that Dean looks at Rory -- in her elaborate party dress, with a tiara on her head, as he listens to her talk of her Yale friends and how the party was "so boring" -- and says, "what am I doing here, Rory? I don't belong here. Not anymore. Do I?" (The Party's Over) Dean climbs into his big, blue pickup truck, and drives away. This is where Dean's story ends in the show. Dean is another example of how as the show goes on and we see Rory succeed and somehow evade every problem that comes her way, people such as Lane and Dean do not have the sort of freedom that Rory has always had. This is where the show actually ends up *reinforcing* the very negative attitudes that it created in order to subvert them in the first place. When Rory first starts seeing Dean, her grandparents do not like him because they think she can do better than him; much like how Emily acts towards Luke when he and Lorelai begin dating. While this is somewhat counteracted by Rory suggesting he go to community college (which he does for a while, before dropping out after he gets married), but none of these things posited for this character ever end up happening. Instead, he more or less falls into just what Rory's grandparents said.

Dean's "failure" is rooted in his lack of "good breeding." Rory, on the other hand, is well bred, so her entry into the world of elite culture and elite education was predestined, a fulfillment of the Puritanical and later American Dream to which Buckman refers (136). Despite living in Stars Hollow as the daughter of a single mother, Rory is always ultimately a Gilmore, a member of that elite class. Because she was born into privilege, Rory is able to achieve the American Dream, while Dean is not. Instead of highlighting Dean's inability to achieve the American Dream, though, the writers simply write him out of the show when the relationship has run its course, leaving Rory perhaps to believe that Dean did not achieve as much as she did because he just did not try as hard as she did to fit into that world.

(Detmering 8)

Instead of becoming a successful musician, Lane has her original love interest, Dave, suddenly and with no real reason written out of the show, and replaced with a character that in comparison is much less intelligent, caring, or interesting: Zack, who she frequently has to baby and take care of. She is then written to be a stay-at-home mother with twins. While there is nothing wrong with this inherently, disapproval from fans has been vocal, and sparse is any positive commentary on the trajectory of Lane's plot. Likewise for Dean, the show continually points to Dean going to school and starting his own career, as well; instead, he is confined to dead-end jobs and a miserable marriage, before being written out of the show.

When Rory goes to university, there is an immediate disconnect between the average viewer and Rory now -- that is, she is an Ivy League student. While previously Rory attended Chilton, a prestigious private university attended by other wealthy and gifted students, she still lived in

quaint Stars Hollow and remained with her friends she grew up with. Now, she is completely removed from that small-town environment, which was one of the audience's biggest connections to Rory; this is where the show begins to truly disappoint with its representation of social class. Rory's mother deliberately left the high-class society her parents raised her in for a simpler way of living that made her happier. This is the life Rory had always known, and up until she was about 16, she had not had a look into the life Lorelai had left behind. Since she has, she has not shown as much distaste for it, such as agreeing to attend the debutante ball, and she never hated the Friday night dinners as Lorelai did. Now Rory is away from Lorelai and has to begin to make a life for herself, and for the most part, she doesn't seem to know what to do.

Growing up she always wanted to be a writer, but when she is told by her boss that she doesn't have what it takes to take to be one, she falters and decides to completely reevaluate her life choices. She takes a break from Yale, which Lorelai greatly disapproves of; she does not respect this decision at all and is aggressive in her disagreement. When Rory moves in with Lorelai's parents after dropping out, this damages their relationship so much that they stop having regular contact. With her mother now absent, Rory is left all alone to make a choice. This part of the series reveals that Rory, who once appeared to be independent, strong-willed, and bright, now crumbles without constant guidance. When she must make her own decision, she chooses her grandparents, and she chooses the D.A.R., and from this point on welcomes more aspects of her privileged family that she did not previously. While there is, from the beginning of the show, the factor of Rory's wealth that distances her from the audience, once she attends Yale this is exacerbated and the elements that did make her relatable begin to wilt. Rory is not a hard-working heroine, rather she is now conforming to much of what her grandparents desired for her mother. In Danielle Stern's article titled "Gilmore Girls and the Problem of

Postfeminism,” she makes the point that while the hard work and success Lorelai has gained in the show is empowering for a character who is a single mother, when Lorelai cannot accomplish something due to her financial status, the series touches on something that is an all-too-real struggle for the average viewer at home but does not deliver. Instead of using this as an opportunity to expand on real struggles single mothers have, Lorelai has her wealthy parents to turn to.

While audience analysis (Diffrient, 2010) of *Gilmore Girls* demonstrates fans’ appreciation of a single mother sacrificing her own young ambitions for her daughter’s livelihood (or rather, *life*, as the alternative to not keeping her baby is not presented on the series) feminists cannot ignore the fact that most single working mothers do not have the luxury of affluent parents, nor a fairy godmother at a country inn to provide a job and discounted living space when sacrifice is not enough. (Stern 11)

Stern shows here that there are issues that cannot be dismissed with regards to the example and standard Lorelai sets for other single mothers; though audiences do see and appreciate Lorelai as the hard-working, single mother. Rory possesses these same problematic traits, however we see her actively participating in and enjoying many of the activities and privileges that the show, through Lorelai and Emily’s relationship, had been setting up as obnoxious and undesirable. After this happens, Lorelai turns away from Rory: a mirror of sorts, reflecting the audience’s feelings for Rory back at them. Ironically, though, Lorelai also becomes the very thing she ran from -- her mother.

When Rory does not follow the exact path Lorelai had lined out with her, and -- for once in her life -- makes a decision that differs from her mother, she lashes out and makes an elaborate

scheme to interrogate Rory and manipulate her back into going to school. The rejection of all the things that made these women so admirable and lovable has now become a shell of who they once were, and they instead morph into characters that the audience can hardly recognize. As Stern affirms in her article, the show sets up what could be an interesting take on class issues, but ultimately falls short every time. By the end of the show, the audience has seen these two women be saved by the wealthy lifestyle of their grandparents that they previously denounced so many times, and so many plots have centered around their wealth, that the powerful and empowering image does not seem so potent anymore. Rory begins to seem entitled, such as by sleeping with Dean at the end of season four when he's married, dropping out of the school she has received so much help to attend only because one person in her life criticized her harshly, then proceeding to steal a yacht. This is not the confident, head-strong, bright Rory we once knew. She now has become flighty and careless and had an entire storyline in which she fell back on the wealth of her grandparents.

During Rory's time in Yale, the quality of the show clearly decreases, in large part due to the inconsistencies the series has towards social class. Possibly the best example of Rory's complete ignorance to her place in society is when she attends a party with her boyfriend, Logan, and writes a piece on how elite and privileged the attendees all are. Logan is upset by what she's written and accuses her of hypocrisy. "I'm a rich trust-fund kid, I'm not ashamed of it," he says to her. "Wake up, Rory; whether you like it or not, you're one of us. You went to prep school, you go to *Yale*, your grandparents are building a whole damn astronomy building in your name!" (Introducing Lorelai Planetarium) Rory responds by storming out and leaving. When her article apparently has statements describing the people at the parties she attends as, "these overprivileged sons and daughters of somebodies who fail to grasp how out of touch they seem

to those of us who don't have an errant domestic employee or a construction problem on Beef Island," there is an almost comedic level of cognitive dissonance, as Logan points out to her. Income inequality has been on the rise in America, and class identification has since been a confusing mess of labels and images. Just as Rory lacks enough self-awareness to recognize her standing in society, so too do many in America today, reflecting a larger issue at hand; when Celine-Marie Pascale interviewed 23 people of various backgrounds, she found that many different people identified as middle class; some of them millionaires.

... four of the five multimillionaires I interviewed characterized themselves as middle class and asserted that perceptions of them as wealthy were mistaken. For example, Brady, a white attorney specializing in estate planning explained: 'I guess we define class by wealth since we don't have nobility here. So [...] I guess I'm in the middle, based on our tests, our society, probably middle class.' I found it difficult to think of Brady, who held assets of nearly \$5 million at the time of our interview, as 'in the middle' of the economic spectrum. As Brady continued, he described upper-class people as 'pretentious' and added: 'I don't feel class is that important and I don't care for folks who think it is.' (7)

Alongside this, Pascale notes, "those people who did not identify themselves as middle class resisted characterizing themselves by class at all – regardless of whether they reported high or low incomes and assets" (10). She found that most of the people she interviewed "understood class as a social judgment, not just an evaluation of someone's economic resources, but of their 'self'" (13). This sounds incredibly similar to Rory, who writes an article besmirching people at a party that *she herself* is attending and is a part of, but puts herself in a different class because of

her personal sense of self; much like Brady. This abstract notion of a middle-class is something that is fostered within this show, as Lorelai or Rory do not ever fully acknowledge the wealth that helped them get this far; they view it as a simple identity, that can be used and discarded as needed.

In this way, the series reflects the overwhelming issue of class identity within the United States, which is a lack of representation and understanding of different social classes within the nation. Rory, in particular, reflects much of this issue, as out of everyone in the series, she is the most ignorant, particularly with regards to *her* place in society. Though Rory may be a fictional character, the problems highlighted are far from fictional, as seen in the interview Pascale conducted with five multi-millionaires. Indeed, many within America have warped understandings of social class, but this is not surprising when one considers the amount of exposure they have to these issues in the first place. Economic status is not something discussed as frequently as other social issues, even though often it is irresponsible, at best, to discuss things such as sexism or racism without bringing up the ways in which these groups are economically disadvantaged by society. As Vivyan C. Adair points out in her essay, “Class Absences: Cutting Class in Feminist Studies,” even within academic, feminist circles (similar to Rory’s environment at Yale), there is hardly any discussion to be had on class differences, and many still fear being judged for their class status.

An examination of sample U.S. syllabi reflects that class is being taught less often and with fewer resources than are other crucial aspects of identity, oppression, and resistance in feminist studies classes. In an examination of more than 100 introductory-level syllabi from a range of public and private colleges and universities, I found that instructors

devoted strikingly disproportionate amounts of time to an examination of race, class, gender, and sexuality in their courses. (Adair 4)

Not only in academic and scholarly circles is the topic of class being neglected, but in culture as a whole. *Gilmore Girls* is just one example of the way television and film tends to erase the experiences of the lower class. Adair tells the story of how in fall 2003 she and one of her classes read a book by Barbara Ehrenreich called *Nickled and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. In short, the book is about how its author Ehrenreich, travels America and tries to survive on low-wage jobs. Adair's "welfare recipient students who represent a range of races, sexualities, ages, and disabilities" were not impressed with the story, with it "evoking anger and resentment" among them. "My students were bitterly aware of the irony of the fact that their lives, voices, and stories were being discounted, whereas Ehrenreich, a white, middle-class, well-educated, and well-paid woman, was invited by her publisher ... to tell their stories, and, as one of my students pointed out, 'getting it wrong at that!'" (14) This scene is interesting because it reveals frustration among lower class individuals specifically with regards to misrepresentation.

Ehrenreich is not the only one guilty of getting working class experiences wrong; indeed, as has already been displayed, *Gilmore Girls* frequently is guilty of this. However as the examples given by Adair show, this is not something unique to *Gilmore Girls*, but rather indicative of a refusal to let working class individuals speak about and write their own experiences, and their own stories. Though there are not many media narratives about working class lives or experiences, it is worth examining how they *are* depicted when they are shown. Erika L. Paulson and Thomas C. O'Guinn decided to explore this in their essay "Working-Class Cast: Images of the Working Class in Advertising, 1950—2010." In it, they unsurprisingly find that images of the

working class are lacking. “Over the entire 70-year span, the working class is significantly under-represented. Within that dominant pattern is an overall increase until 1990, followed by a dramatic decline up to the present. This roughly corresponds to the onset of the ‘Great U-Turn,’ a period of declining traditional blue-collar industries, such as manufacturing, and a very pronounced increase in income inequality” (18). They also comment on how the working class is frequently depicted as friendly and non-threatening (18). “What is not present is also worth noting. Stories that run counter to capitalist realism are missing. As happy, hard-working, and competent, the working class presents no threat to the system. They evoke no guilt, no envy, no troublesome worries concerning income inequality” (19). This further confirms the erasure of the working-class from American media, with working-class individuals hardly being acknowledged; when they ever are, it’s only for the comfort and benefit of the upper-classes. In this way, *Gilmore Girls* frequently treats its lower-class characters as disposable, simply removing them from the script the moment they fail to fit in with Rory’s more elitist crowds. The show’s portrayal of wealthy elite, such as Emily and Richard or the Huntzbergers, as always having the nicest houses and cars and being ridiculously high maintenance sets a standard in which Lorelai had the freedom to turn away from, but still reap some of the benefits from. By taking away weight from identity, these groups have less of a voice and less power, and it’s worth noting that as unionization has decreased in this country, so has visibility of the working class. “Fifty years ago, more than one in three American workers were unionized; today, one in eight is. ... Not only were workers visible to the classes above them, they had their own voices, their own cultural institutions, their own sense of who they were and what they did; in short, they weren't dependent on the middle class to define them” (Deresiewicz 8). While Lorelai’s life, especially toward the beginning of the show, shares similarities with middle and working-class

lives, she does not face the same struggles that anyone from those backgrounds would. The issue of working-class lives not being seen, told, or heard from working-class characters themselves is an issue within media, and the only images shown are romanticized versions made for others' enjoyment and satisfaction.

The traits that Mastrocola outlined in Emily, that cause the audience to feel pity for her, and that are set up as this symptom of the frivolous high society life that made Lorelai so miserable, begin to be seen in both her and Rory later in the series the more they involve themselves in it. Lorelai distances herself from this at the beginning, but she still frequently benefits from her parents' wealth, and in that way, she and Rory do not actually ever face the same struggles a single, working-class mother and her daughter would. With income inequality growing and issues of class becoming more relevant in the United States, it's essential that lower class people are able to be heard and represented, without the romanticization nor judgment that *Gilmore Girls* can be guilty of.

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