

## **Girl Power Can't Help You If You're Racist**

### **A content analysis on "Gilmore Girls"**

'Gilmore Girls' is an early 2000's TV show about mother-daughter duo, Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, living in fictional Stars Hollow, Connecticut. Nearly every episode passes the Bechdel test, a measure of how women are represented in fiction.

This makes 'Gilmore Girls' one of the more progressive television shows of that time, but the absence and misrepresentation of women of color discredits that. As a woman I feel empowered by the feminist themes in this show, but as a woman of color, I feel unwelcome. In this analysis, I will look at how 'Gilmore Girls' takes advantage of positive representation of women in the media, and how they reflect those standards onto their largest percentage of women of color.

#### **1. Lack of diversity**

Stars Hollow is based off Washington Depot, CT. To get an accurate perspective, I referred to the year 2000 U.S Census and found that:

- Out of 3,596 people living in Washington Depot, 156 of them are POC, meaning only 4.34% of the population are POC.

In the seven-season run of 'Gilmore Girls', they inaccurately depict that number, with 3 people of color existing in both the main cast and recurring cast combined. Upon further analysis I found that 2/3rds of the POC are women.

#### **2. Women representation**

In season 1, women compose 55% of the main and recurring cast combined. Of that 55%, 7% are women of color. At the end of season 7, 50% of the main and recurring cast are women, and only 10% are women of color.

What 'Gilmore Girls' lacks in inclusivity; it tends to make up for in how it portrays women. There are very few men that hold positions of power. Men in this show seldom act as a requirement to move the plot. Mothers are unattached or separated from their partners. The appearance of a father figure would serve as the filler to a plot hole, rather than an addition to the storyline. This is used to emphasize the relationship between a mother and daughter when a father figure is not needed.

#### **3. WOC representation**

The Kim Family are the only Asian characters and women of color that consistently appear throughout the entire show. While Mrs. Kim and her daughter Lane are Korean, they are played by Japanese actors. Most of the Korean they speak on the show is Japanese and they often misrepresent Korean culture.

Mrs. Kim is your stereotypical Asian mother. Not much is known about Mrs. Kim outside of her devotion to the Seventh Day Adventist church, her concern for Lane's wellbeing, and the fact that she runs an antique shop on the first floor of her home. It is later revealed that

she had a similar upbringing to Lane, and that her relationship with her mother is damaged. Mrs. Kim does not have a first name.

She pushes Lane to do well in school, marry a doctor, and attend a religious, all girls university. Lane is the only person on the show that has a rough relationship with her mother from beginning to end.

#### **4. Women in relationships**

Looking past the female dominated society, this show emphasizes women having motivations outside of their romantic relationships. All the romantic relationships feature a hardworking woman, and a man with half-hearted aspirations.

Rory, and her boyfriend, Dean argue constantly because Rory is focused on attending an Ivy League school and becoming a journalist, while Dean has few goals past graduating high school and working in the town grocery store.

Lorelai's love interest, Luke, has inherited his father's hardware store and turned it into the town diner, where he also lives. Lorelai owns her house and takes night classes to get a business degree to fulfill her dream of starting her own business.

#### **5. WOC in relationships**

Because Lane and her mother are the only consistent women of color, and because father figures are not a necessity in this show, Lane is the only WOC shown in a relationship. Before she can date, she must get her love interest approved by her mother, which causes her relationships to fail.

Of her three boyfriends, her longest relationship is with her bandmate Zack. They get married in a subtle act of defiance towards Lane's mother. At 22 years old, Lane is the youngest character to get married and start a family.

#### **6. Women with ambitions**

'Gilmore Girls' inserts a sense of purpose into female characters to dismantle the stereotype that women are co-dependent. The theme of women with real ambitions is never mentioned in dialogue or action, which tells us that this is how things have always been. This goes past the titular characters and is reflected onto every woman in the series.

Lorelai, who was born into a wealthy family, got pregnant at age 16. She refused the arranged marriage set up by her parents, and cut ties, both financially and socially. She drops out of school, runs away from home and raises her daughter by herself. She has a large house, a nice car, and a stable job that she obtained on her own.

Eventually she reconciles with her parents, falls in love and becomes a successful business owner. She hardly struggles to reach her goals and gets a happy ending.

#### **7. WOC with ambitions**

After graduating high school, Lane dreams of drumming in her own band. Once she achieves this, she is kicked out of her home and struggles financially. She depends on her bandmates and concert revenue for money.

At the end of the series, her husband leaves her at home with their twin newborn babies to follow his dream (and her dream) of going on tour with a famous rock band. Unlike the non-POC on the show, Lane struggles to meet her goals and does not receive a happy ending.

### **8. Passive discrimination of WOC**

Emily Gilmore, Lorelai's mother, is a high society housewife. Out of 153 episodes and the 4-episode revival, Emily fired 59 maids, where a large percent are women of color and do not speak English. Emily treats her maids with disrespect like getting their names wrong and shouting commands at them when they don't understand instruction.

It is assumed that Emily's anger for her maids comes from a place of disdain, once it is revealed that Lorelai was once a maid. She praises her making a living and has respect for the craft, but she scolds the maids that work for her. It takes the entire series for Emily to learn to respect and coexist with someone that she cannot communicate with.

### **9. In conclusion**

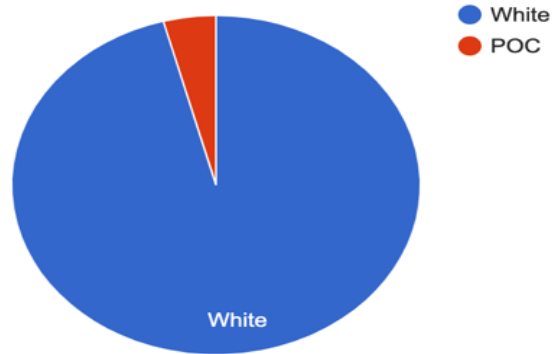
While the casual presentation of empowered women is always present, the feminism in this show is not intersectional. They acknowledge the hardships that women face today, but only the hardships of white women. This is something we refer to as "white feminism," where only the advancement of white women is the priority. Oppression towards women is still rampant today, and movements to encourage the advancement of Black, Indigenous women of color are becoming more prominent.

WOC fall victim to portraying racist stereotypes/caricature, only exist to diversify a room, or to meet a quota. Through little character development and no sense of purpose, those characters were not valued the same as the white women. Taking this show for example, having two WOC present in the plot for all 7 seasons added no substance to the show. Admittedly, they were used as comedic relief.

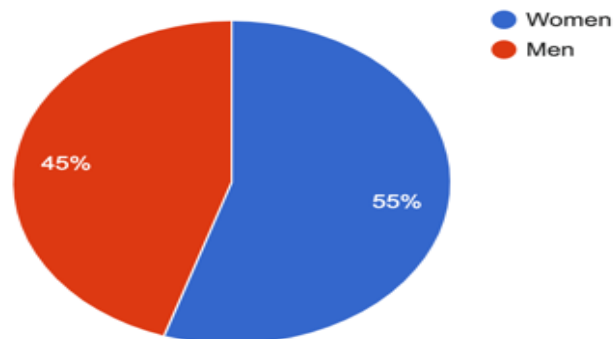
By using themes that endorse modern feminism, the use of women existing outside of stereotypical realms is well done. Those themes are discredited when they don't extend past white women. Gilmore Girls managed to build the female morale but dishonor the WOC at the same time.

## Graphs:

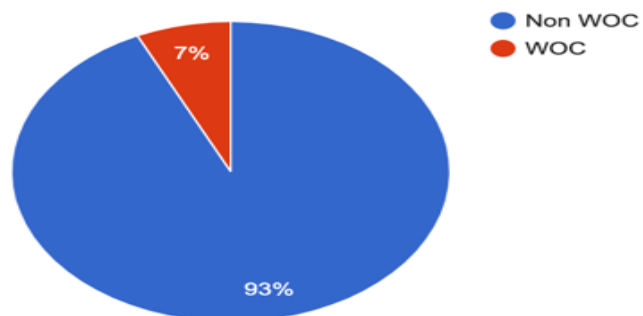
**POC in Washington Depot, CT.**



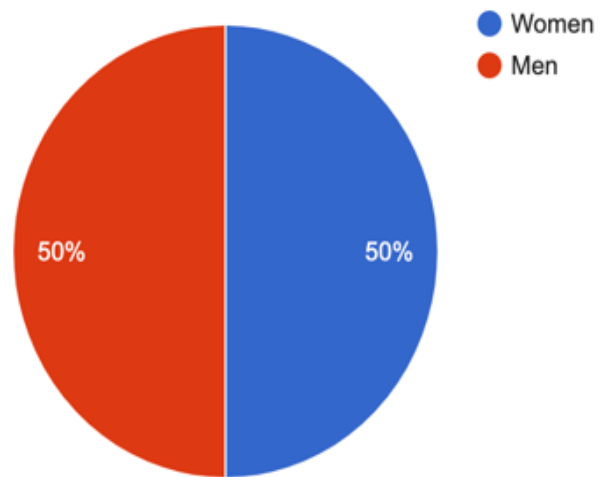
**Women in the cast (season 1)**



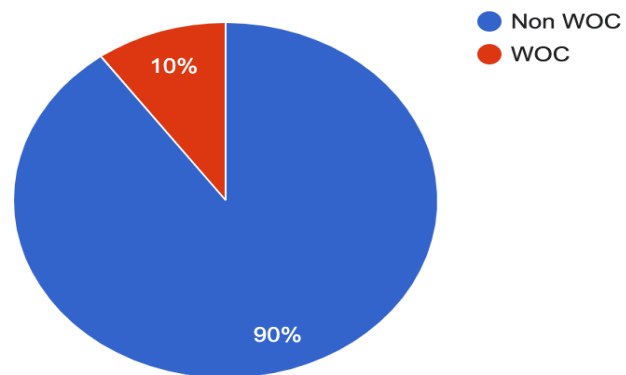
**WOC in the cast (season 1)**



**Women in the cast (season 7)**



**WOC in the cast (season 7)**



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