ROCKISM IN A POPTIMIST WORLD: *GILMORE GIRLS* AND "ROCK'N'ROLL"

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ABSTRACT

SOPHIA MARIA ANDRICOPULOS: Rockism in a Poptimist World: *Gilmore Girls* and "Rock'n'Roll"
(Under the direction of Aaron Harcus)

This thesis examines the mobilization of popular music in the soundtrack and characters' fan and music-making practices in the TV series *Gilmore Girls* (2000–2007). I focus on the series' portrayal of a rock band, Hep Alien, and its drummer, Lane Kim, who is the series' only developed, non-static character of color. I analyze Lane's activities in the band and performative musical consumption to contend with the character's ambivalence toward the gender and racial politics of rock music and fandom. Despite the satirization of rockism—a critical disposition applying the values of raw sincerity, artistic integrity, and rebellious anti-commercialism to all pop music—through genre-based humor, women-centered narratives, and an overall poptimist ethos, the series perpetuates rather than critiques the racial, sexual, and aesthetic hierarchies underlying rockism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES....v

INTRODUCTION....1

CHAPTER 1....5

Introduction....5

On-Screen Playing....7

Listening and the Performance of Taste....14

Hep Alien as Rockism....24

CHAPTER 2....30

Introduction....30

The WB Network and Teen TV....30

Stylistic Features of Teen TV....33

Feminism in *Gilmore Girls*....38

Lane Kim's Subjectivities....44

Conclusion....56

APPENDIX A: LIST OF *GILMORE GIRLS* EPISODES CONSULTED....59

BIBLIOGRAPHY....61

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 — Tracks covered by Hep Alien……………………………………………………...9

INTRODUCTION

Gilmore Girls, a one-hour primetime dramedy that aired from 2000 to 2007, revolves primarily around the titular Gilmore family. Rory Gilmore, who is about to turn sixteen when the series begins, lives in the fictional small town of Stars Hollow, Connecticut with her mother, Lorelai Gilmore. Lorelai and Rory have lived estranged from both Rory's father and Lorelai's parents, Richard and Emily Gilmore, for Rory's entire life. Lorelai ran away from her parents' upper-class lifestyle and, to her, its repressive norms after becoming pregnant with Rory at sixteen. She found a job as a maid at a Stars Hollow inn and worked her way up; when the series begins, Lorelai is a homeowner and runs the inn she had begun working at sixteen years prior. She and Rory enjoy a very close mother–daughter relationship, "more like best friends." In order to send Rory to an elite prep school in nearby Hartford, Lorelai is forced to borrow money from her wealthy parents; as a condition, Lorelai and Rory must attend dinner at the elder Gilmores' residence once a week, and all four family members struggle to establish bonded relationships with each other. The show is premised on the tensions they face in this process, which intertwine generational conflict with differences in class while "foregrounding female identity and ideology."[1] Because much of *Gilmore Girls* revolves around Rory's life through three years of prep school and four years at Yale, the series also takes up the theme of finding oneself and one's place in the world, as in many coming-of-age tv shows and films. These themes are developed not only around Rory and her teenage peers, but also around Lorelai—who missed

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[1] Faye Woods, "Generation Gap? Mothers, Daughters, and Music," in *"Gilmore Girls" and the Politics of Identity: Essays on Family and Feminism in the Television Series*, ed. Ritch Calvin (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 127.

many typical coming-of-age moments after becoming pregnant—and other adult main characters.[2]

This study however, focuses on Rory's best friend, Lane Kim. Lane and Rory grew up and attended school together in Stars Hollow. They share many of the same interests and tastes in food, hobbies, and entertainment, though Lane is particularly invested in popular music. While Rory also participates in these same activities with her mother, Lane hides her interest in music, movies, trendy clothing, and junk food from her mother. Mrs. Kim is a Korean immigrant who owns and operates an antique store; she is vegan and a Seventh Day Adventist, and expects her daughter to share in this lifestyle, which Lane finds repressive. Lane and her relationship with her mother present a foil for Rory and her relationship with Lorelai. For the first half of the series, both Lane and her mother are mostly comedic characters, and many of Lane's plot lines center around keeping her double life hidden from Mrs. Kim.

In this thesis, I examine the use of musical humor in *Gilmore Girls*, especially as it manifests in their use of the genre label "rock'n'roll," focusing on seasons three through six, during which Lane is a member of the rock band Hep Alien. The band consistently describes their activities, both musical and non-musical, under the label "rock'n'roll," though they never explicitly articulate what that label signifies. Because of this, I refer to the band members' use of "rock'n'roll" in quotation marks. This emphasizes the construction of meaning(s) particular to this fictional group, and distinguishes it from other meanings (e.g. historical, academic) to which it may or may not be related.

[2] *Gilmore Girls* was created by Amy Sherman-Palladino and initially developed for the WB broadcast television network with support from the Family-Friendly Programming Fund. *Gilmore Girls* aired for six seasons on the WB; its seventh and final season aired on the CW, the network created by the 2006 merger of the WB with its main competitor, UPN. It began airing in syndication in 2004 and streaming on Netflix in the United States in 2014 and globally in 2016. In November 2016, a reboot of the series featuring most of the original main and recurring cast of characters was released by Netflix.

The first chapter of this thesis engages a close reading of *Gilmore Girls*' long-term portrayal of a rock band. Though Keiko Agena played Lane for all seven seasons of the series, her character's band, Hep Alien, mostly appears in short scenes, advancing subsidiary plot lines or no plot lines at all and functioning mainly as comedic relief. The humor of these portrayals comes from their dedication to the tenets of "rock'n'roll," both in terms of the music they play and the lives they lead. I analyze the group's repertory of cover songs as well as their performative consumption of recorded music in order to articulate their shared understanding of "rock'n'roll." I demonstrate that the term, despite purporting to signify a broad grouping of music, actually stands for a narrow subset of alternative rock cohering around a grunge, lo-fi, DIY sound and rebellious punk ethos. The chapter concludes by reframing Hep Alien's "rock'n'roll" as rockism, a disposition that applies the same aesthetic values—sincere expression, raw depth, artistic integrity, and rebellious anti-commercialism—as the standard for all popular music. I argue that although *Gilmore Girls* points out the narrowness of rockism and exploits it for humor, the series does not offer a critique of rockism or its underlying values. The second chapter looks beyond the fictional world of *Gilmore Girls*, situating the series in a broader television and pop culture context to understand the stakes of its representations of popular music. To accomplish this, I briefly review the history of the WB broadcast network on which *Gilmore Girls* aired. This history positions *Gilmore Girls* in the "teen TV" genre and draws attention to, among other stylistic traits, the series' popular music soundtrack. To conclude, I reflect on poptimism—a would-be counter to rockism that attempts to level the playing field by re-valuing the artificial, superficial, mass-produced performative spectacle of pop music—and consider what the close reading developed across this thesis might say about the

pleasures and pitfalls of such a pursuit in light of the explicit claims *Gilmore Girls* makes to feminism.

In addition to the literature on *Gilmore Girls* itself, this thesis draws significantly on popular music studies and television studies in order to question the subjectivities—what Valerie Wee calls the "version of teenhood"—the series constructs as well as how they are taken up (or rejected or contested) by viewers. For example, I deploy the literature on *Gilmore Girls* and feminism to demonstrate the series' representations of women and feminism to be ambivalent at best and point out some of the limits of its narratives of women's empowerment —limits which become clearer under the lens of critical intersectionality. Drawing on the work of media and communications scholars Hye Seung Chung and Danielle M. Stern, I subject Hep Alien's "rock'n'roll" to intersectional critique through the character of Lane Kim in order to articulate the political implications of *Gilmore Girls*' failure to critique rockism. By combining close viewing and listening with critical interventions from gender and popular music studies in particular, I argue that *Gilmore Girls*' genre-based humor both exposes the postfeminist, postracial, consumerist logics that structure the series and limits rather than promotes the agency of women characters.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For Hep Alien, “rock’n’roll” itself is something of a rallying cry. More than a description of the music they perform, the term is used by band members to express desires, ideals, and commitments—both aesthetic and otherwise. As such, members of the band apply the term to express approval or disapproval about a broad range of topics, not only music. This is especially true after late in the fourth season when Lane moves in with her bandmates, Zack and Brian. For example, they usually struggle with money, but when Brian points out that using coupons would help stretch their grocery budget, Zack refuses, claiming coupons are “un-rock’n’roll” (Season 5, episode 4). Conversely, the band justifies a tour of Seventh Day Adventist churches by acknowledging that “It’s freaking crazy—which also happens to be completely rock’n’roll!” (5.22). Setting up for their first gig (a high school classmate’s illicit kegger), Brian cautions against damaging the home’s miniature date palm and Zack scolds him: “Dude, don’t call plants by their specific names, it’s very not rock’n’roll” (3.19). Though the characters make such declarations seriously, these moments are clearly meant to be humorous. The group’s understanding of “rock’n’roll” stretches to unexpected lengths and their commitment to this understanding frequently puts them at odds with more practical or material concerns like budgeting, communicating clearly, or playing to receptive audiences. The members of Hep Alien understand their participation in a rock band to govern not only the time they spend rehearsing or playing gigs, but also to imply a system of values across their lives more broadly. Because the series uses “rock’n’roll” in such a diversity of ways, its specific musical meanings are difficult to

extrapolate from any one scene or episode. This is compounded by the fact that when "rock'n'roll" is invoked musically, it is used without qualifiers and usually without standing in contradistinction to other styles. Though there are times when "rock'n'roll" is revealed to exclude sounds ostensibly different in kind (including emo, bluegrass, boy bands, and prog rock), much more often, specific artists (such as Milli Vanilli or Sarah McLachlan) are excluded from "rock'n'roll" as a category. This latter type of reference is more in line with the intertextuality that pervades the Gilmore Girls, which generally relies on specific references over general ones.[3] In fact, the repeated invocation of "rock'n'roll" stands out in the show for its purported non-specificity.

In order to understand the political implications of *Gilmore Girls*' uses of popular music, this chapter specifies a definition for Hep Alien's invocation of "rock'n'roll." I reveal the term to signify both a narrow stylistic category and a set of practices/orientations toward music, but whose values have consequences beyond musical practice in the broader cultural and social realm within *Gilmore Girls*' fictional world. This close reading shows that "rock'n'roll"—in terms of both aesthetic and more broadly applicable values—is aligned with a real-world aesthetic and critical sensibility known as rockism. I examine the musical style the band values and adheres to by analyzing their on-screen playing time, which occurs in short snippets across seasons 3–7 of Gilmore Girls, and their repertoire of covers. The meaning of their musical style, however, becomes apparent through a consideration of the listening practices of the band's members. When the band members engage with music as listeners and fans, not only is the music they listen to much more stylistically diverse than Hep Alien's sound, but their conversations about this listening reveal a shared understanding of appropriate ways to listen to styles beyond

[3] The intertextuality that is a hallmark of the series is addressed more substantially in chapter 2.

the bounds of “rock’n’roll" or the group’s core sound. In band members’ performance of their musical consumption, however, only artists playing in the same style as does Hep Alien are straightforwardly appreciated—their music is “just good” and can be enjoyed without caveats. If understood in terms of the group’s listening habits, “rock’n’roll” may be a justifiably broad claim for a wide range of musical styles in the rock idiom, and whose ethos might be relatively diffuse. Instead, the phrase’s application to music is restricted to describing the group’s own playing. Throughout the chapter, I attend to the humor that surrounds Hep Alien and the aesthetic hierarchy they espouse and adhere to. Although this humor points out some of the contradictions of extending the musical values of “rock’n’roll” to other areas of practice (such as grocery shopping), they only ever result in superficial individual inconveniences. The chapter closes by contending with the relationship between “rock’n’roll” and rockism as a system of gendered and racialized aesthetic hierarchies in order to distinguish its humorous use in *Gilmore Girls* from substantive critique or intervention. The use of “rock’n’roll” is thus indicative of the series’ complicity in the hierarchies it purports to disrupt.

On-Screen Playing

Hep Alien is not seen or heard performing often. This is because, first, they (except Lane) are background characters whose stories are almost never primary or even secondary plot lines. Lane is often a parallel/foil to whatever Rory is facing in a given episode or season, but in general the most important function of Lane’s character and the band is comedic relief, a function that sometimes uses music, but generally doesn’t rely on it. Second, there was rarely room for extended performance by Hep Alien—both in terms of time and budget.[4] *Gilmore Girls*

[4] Ben Aslinger, “Rocking Prime Time: Gender, the WB, and Teen Culture,” in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 78–92.

scripts were famously lengthy and dense compared to other one-hour programs; dialogue was the series' primary vehicle. The rate of speech these scripts necessitated in order to fit all this dialogue into each episode remains such a hallmark that Lauren Graham (who portrayed Lorelai Gilmore) played off it in the title of her autobiography*, Talking as Fast as I Can: From Gilmore Girls to Gilmore Girls (and Everything in Between)*.[5] Another practical concern was that onscreen Hep Alien performances were difficult to coordinate. Other than Sebastian Bach (Gil), none of the actors who portrayed members of Hep Alien had prior experience playing their instruments (though Keiko Agena was briefly given drum lessons). Instead, when Hep Alien (or any of its members) play on screen, the instrumental parts were realized by musicians staged just out of frame—making these scenes that much more difficult to film.[6]

When viewers do see and hear Hep Alien playing, the music almost always consists of short snippets from the beginnings or ends of songs, which are used to mark transitions into or out of scenes in which they appear. Nonetheless, the audience gets a sense of the band's repertory from these occasional depictions of rehearsals and performances, as well as from conversations the group has about set lists or remembering events of past gigs. Hep Alien plays and discusses a handful of original tunes onscreen, but the majority of their repertoire consists of covers of existing recordings. A list of these recordings appears in Figure 1.

Though they span nearly four decades, the tracks in Figure 1 cohere around a fairly specific sound. Though most of these tracks (and recording artists' careers) fall outside the bounds of the specific scenes he analyzes, Matthew Bannister's description of 1980s indie guitar

[5] Lauren Graham, *Talking as Fast as I Can: From "Gilmore Girls" to "Gilmore Girls" (and Everything in Between)* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2016).

[6] Ada Tseng, "Ode to *Gilmore Girls*: Behind the Musicality of TV's Beloved Show," *Asia Pacific Arts Magazine*, UCLA Asia Pacific Center, August 23, 2006, https://www.international.ucla.edu/asia/article/51438.

Title	Artist	Year	Episode
London Calling	The Clash	1979	3.4
White Riot	The Clash	1977	3.19
Fell in Love with a Girl	The White Stripes	2001	3.19
Head On	The Jesus and Mary Chain / Pixies	1989 / 1991	4.7
Crazy Beat	Blur	2003	4.11
Time Bomb	Rancid	1995	4.19
Suffragette City	David Bowie	1972	5.2
Lithium	Nirvana	1992	5.2
Theme from Greatest American Hero (Believe It Or Not)	Joey Scarbury	1981	5.4
Hanging on the Telephone	Blondie	1978	6.3
I'm a Believer	The Monkees	1966	6.19
(unnamed tracks)	Radiohead The Kinks The Dandy Warhols The Velvet Underground		

Figure 1. Tracks covered by Hep Alien

rock's musical aesthetics are instructive for understanding Hep Alien's idealization and realization of this repertoire—particularly considering this aesthetic "anticipated and laid the groundwork for [the early 2000s'] alternative mainstream" and its "garage rock revival." Bannister argues that a particular set of attitudes toward popular music history not only aestheticized the limitations of musical creativity in these scenes (the cheapness of instruments and amateur vocal musicianship, for example), but also defined the resulting aesthetics as "intrinsic to the genre." The influence of these aesthetics on Hep Alien's sound is substantial. It is evident in the group's instrumentation, relatively unchanging texture of constant guitar strumming, and masked vocals delivering introspective or ironic lyrics.[7]

Fundamentally, the tracks in Figure 1 can be realized in Hep Alien's instrumentation (two

[7] Matthew Bannister, "'Loaded': Indie Guitar Rock, Canonism, White Masculinities," *Popular Music* 25, no. 1 (2006): 91–2.

electric guitars, electric bass, drum set, and vocals) with few adjustments. Importantly, they generally do not make prominent use of keyboards, synthesizers, winds, or other instruments that Hep Alien does not play.[8] In fact, the group's members deride music that features instrumentation beyond guitars, drums, and bass. Furthermore, guitars in most of these tracks incorporate distortion or noise similar to the sound Hep Alien uses. There is little extended instrumental soloing or similar displays of virtuosity. These choices for covers are appropriate to the challenge of filming a convincing rock band—even an amateur one—with relatively untrained actors. (Portions of these tracks that do include short instrumental features or solos, such as "Time Bomb" and "London Calling," are either not shown on screen or, as in the case of "Head On," assigned to Gil/Sebastian Bach).

Similarly, these tracks do not demand vocal virtuosity in terms of breath control, range, or melodic complexity. Zack's vocal delivery rarely displays lyrical or melodic qualities, instead aligning with the rougher vocal timbres characteristic of grunge, punk, garage rock, and other alternative rock subgenera. Paired with straightforward lyrics skewed toward the concrete rather than the abstract or metaphorical, these vocal stylings affect a sense of directness and immediacy very much in line with Hep Alien's understanding of authenticity and self-expression. To that end, several of the groups they cover are associated with bringing a rebellious or experimental

[8] There are significant exceptions to this, the most prominent of which is the Joey Scarbury track, which is addressed below. "Suffragette City" uses an acoustic piano and The Monkees' "I'm a Believer" uses electric organ, acoustic guitar, and percussion besides the drumset. In case of the former, the difference in timbre is bridgeable because the chordal piano part is used as harmonic filler and is generally assigned a less-than-prominent place in the mix. The prominent use of organ on "I'm a Believer," however, is avoided entirely as Hep Alien's performance bypasses the short introduction feature and replaces the organ in the chorus with guitar. The group performs this song on the occasion of Lane and Zack's wedding, and because of its instrumentation and associations with mainstream pop (emphasized in the scene's resonances with the use of the song in the 2001 animated blockbuster *Shrek*), I argue the song would otherwise not be found in their repertoire. Blur's "Crazy Beat" is also exceptional. It features distinctive programming and effects by Fatboy Slim. The title lyric, for example, is repeated incessantly in portions of the song, in each instance heavily distorted. Hep Alien are shown performing this in rehearsal, which is cut to give the sense that the viewer is just catching the end of the song at the top of the scene. Hep Alien is never seen performing with the type of equipment that would allow them to realize the kinds of effects used in "Crazy Beat," and for my hearing at least, a performance without these effects could not be considered the same song.

ethos to their sound—including David Bowie, Nirvana, Radiohead, and The Velvet Underground (though it is worth pointing out that the first three of these acts found significant mainstream success).

Almost all the artists Hep Alien covers are also discussed positively in conversations between the band members at other points in the series (discussed in more detail below). The impression based on these style traits is that Hep Alien covers songs from musicians they admire, and that emulating their sound is an aspirational act. On occasion, however, the band is asked (usually by other characters of Stars Hallow) to cover songs by artists its members consider aesthetically less-than. In such situations, the stakes of sticking to their desired aesthetics become explicit, as deviating from them is a threat to their performance (both individually and as a group) of patriarchal heterosexual masculinity.

Hep Alien's performance of heteronormative masculinity is threatened, for example, when Lane accepts a paying gig on behalf of the band—Lorelai asks her if the band would play at a rally for a local political candidate (5.4). Lane's agreement to play the rally uses a classic setup for a joke by explicitly leaving out crucial information. Lane accepts the offer immediately and then Lorelai lets her know that the candidate has already picked a song, which she'll send to Lane later. But when the band finally finds out what song they've been asked to perform, they face a dilemma. The group is shown backstage at the outdoor rally listening to "Theme from The Greatest American Hero (Believe It Or Not)" for what seems to be the first time. The scene opens on a small portable stereo, making clear that the music is diegetic. As the chorus of the track plays, a slow pan reveals each band member's reaction in turn. Their expressions show consternation, disgust, and disbelief. The long shot lands on Zack, who smacks the stereo to pause the music before announcing, "This is the day the music died." Gil disparagingly compares

the song to Seals and Crofts. Brian, still wearing a horrified expression, says, "My mom likes this song."

Lane, who is also unhappy about the selection, nevertheless insists they should play it because "It's for a good cause." A debate ensues in which Zack advocates walking away so as not to "sell out," and Brian suggests they perform in masks to hide their identities. The debate escalates before Gil takes a firm stance that they must play:

> **Gil:** We can't cancel the gig.
> **Zack:** Then what do we do?
> **Gil:** We do what we do. We make rock'n'roll. Hendrix rocked Woodstock with "The Star-Spangled Banner."
> **Brian:** That's true.
> **Gil:** No one saw it coming. It's a classic now. He turned it into an anthem!
> **Lane:** It's "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was kind of already an anthem.
> **Gil:** ....thanks to Hendrix!

Gil not only convinces Brian and Zack to play by likening the task in front of them to what the group agrees was a significant moment in rock history (although Lane contests the reason for its significance). Gil also makes the argument that Hep Alien can both play this song and play "rock'n'roll" at the same time, betraying a distinction between recorded tracks and performances of songs while also suggesting that "rock'n'roll," as a performance style can be redemptive for bad music. When they do eventually take the stage, the band alters the song significantly: their tempo is nearly double that of the recorded track, so the sound is more aggressive and driving. Zack's and Gil's vocal delivery largely eschew the more sustained and lyrical style of Joey Scarbury in favor of a more rhythmic delivery and coarser timbres. Gil headbangs as he plays and, at the end, steps out to the front of the stage to quote a phrase of Jimi Hendrix's performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock.

More important than the aesthetic alterations that facilitate Hep Alien's performance is that they understand these modifications as necessary for a satisfactory performance of their own masculine heterosexual appeal. Though the group's debate about whether to perform the song begins on relatively vague grounds (the song potentially ruining their credibility by not "rock[ing] hard" enough), Lane makes the stakes explicit by confronting Zack with the fact that he is merely concerned that their performance will hinder his ability to bring women home after the show. Lane sees this as a trump card over his arguments to walk out on the gig. Zack, however, sees this as self-evident: "Part of the point of all this [playing in a band] is appealing to chicks." Lane contests this, but Brian and Gil agree with Zack about the group's purpose. Their eventual performance of the song is not only successful because they adapt its sound, but because it successfully removes any emasculating elements—Zack is shown bringing two women backstage and then home with him after the show.[9]

The gendered anxiety about covering this track is consistent with the band members' consistent objections to prominently featuring acoustic instruments or synthesizers, both in other group's recordings and their own performances. All the changes Hep Alien makes to the performance of this song are predicated on changes to instrumentation relative to the recorded track. Other than a brief and internally controversial stint with a tambourine player (6.10), Hep Alien always performs with two electric guitars, electric bass, and drumset. The studio recording of "Believe It Or Not" features piano and multiple synthesized instruments (including strings) throughout; Hep Alien could not realize "Believe It Or Not" even if they wanted to. But, as the characters say more or less directly, that is exactly the point. Brian's horror at being asked to

[9] This scene is one of the few times Lane's gender becomes an explicit problem the group must navigate, though the viewer knows from Lane's conversations with Rory that she only objects to Zack's behavior because she's taken a romantic interest in him. Lane's negotiation of gender in the band is taken up in chapter 2.

play a song his mother enjoys is telling, indicative of the distance the group maintains from the feminine and its domestic realm. Adapting the performance to fit Hep Alien's instrumentation does not preclude their performing it in a style more similar to the studio recording, but it does go a long way in removing some of the elements that the group finds undesirable—elements they consider feminizing or otherwise hindering to the performance of masculinity. The absence of these same features from the group's repertoire of cover songs is not only a performance of their musical tastes, but also a conscious use of this music to reinscribe heteronormative masculinity for their own benefit.

Listening and the Performance of Taste

One of the effects of the hallmark intertextuality of *Gilmore Girls* is the constant performance and negotiation of taste on the part of fictional characters regarding viewers' real-world cultural texts. Performance of taste thus reaches beyond the fictional world to the social groupings performed through declarations of taste in the real world in a way that can at once contest and reinforce them. Though the series' characters discuss taste as a matter of personal and subjective opinions that, if shared, can engender social alignments, theoretical understandings since Bourdieu have recognized taste as both informed by and indicating social position. Bourdieu's study of 1960s French culture emphasizes positive correlations between social class and cultural consumption.[10] Studies based on Bourdieu's have further examined the relationship between taste and class distinction. Peterson and Kern, measuring musical preferences, argue that by the late 20th century, musical tastes associated with upper class status shifted from exclusive intellectual involvement with elite culture to an omnivorous consumption characterized by broad taste crossing traditionally highbrow and lowbrow genres. Omnivorous

[10] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

listeners tend not only to listen to a wide range of genres, but to be knowledgeable about those genres. Bethany Bryson's 1996 study instead emphasizes negative attitudes toward musical genres as indicators of social class. Like Peterson and Kern, Bryson argues that upper- and middle-class tastes have been reoriented toward inclusivity rather than exclusivity of genres; importantly, however, Bryson finds that this inclusive consumption relies on crucial exclusions—typically of styles associated with low-status audiences.

Through their performance of taste, Hep Alien members demonstrate their elite status among their peers (rock musicians and fans) in part by distinguishing themselves from mainstream culture. The characters are presented as listening nearly exclusively to rock, so would not be considered cultural omnivores as formulated by Peterson and Kern. Within this idiom, however, both their tastes are characterized by both stylistic breadth and depth of knowledge. The group's shared tastes and understanding of "rock'n'roll" become explicit in scenes that present the characters' evaluative comments about their repertory of cover songs. By considering these comments together with conversations that more explicitly center their musical taste, a more specific understanding of what Hep Alien means when they invoke "rock'n'roll" emerges than can be grasped through analysis of the band's limited rep list. I analyze the characters' tastes by separating likes from dislikes, then address the moments that problematize this binary distinction to give more nuance to the acts of grouping their tastes enact and reflect. My analysis finds that the group's performance of taste rests on a depth of knowledge about a rock canon and what they understand to be a critical distance from the hegemonic forces of mainstream culture that, like the group's sound, is consistent with the ideologies and aesthetics of guitar-based indie rock and the alternative mainstream of the 1990s and early 2000s.[11]

[11] Bannister, "Indie Guitar Rock," 82–9. See also David Hesmondhalgh, "Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre," *Cultural Studies* 13, no.1 (1999).

Most of the artists whose recordings Hep Alien cover are indeed given explicit positive evaluation by band members. This comes across both in statements of admiration and in articulations of aspiration for their own playing. When Lane gets drunk and calls her mother after the band's first gig, she enthusiastically compares their playing to both The Clash and Nirvana (3.19). When the group is in the green room of CBGBs, the legendary New York club that hosted many of Hep Alien's favorite artists, Gil is disappointed that he cannot find Blondie represented on the famously stickered and graffitied walls (4.11). In the process of writing her "Drummer Seeks Rock Band" ad, Lane agrees with Rory that David Bowie is among her most important musical influences—so much so that the 2000-word "cut-down" version of her ad not only lists him as an influence, but also includes Lane's rating of every Bowie album (3.3). Lane is shown dancing to Rancid in Rory's room in season 1 (prompting Lorelai to ask her, "Where does your mother think you are?"), a clip that is also used to depict the character/actress Keiko Agena in the opening credits (1.5). Viewers do not have to assume that Hep Alien covers songs recorded by artists they admire—members say so more or less directly.

Of course, Lane, Gil, Zack, Brian, and Dave do not only talk about music as it relates to their playing. Their musical tastes—in particular, their understanding of "rock'n'roll"—are also indicative of an ethos that extends to many areas of their lives. As such, there are no shortage of occasions for these characters to discuss music. The lines of dialogue in which these preferences are expressed are sporadic and fleeting, often part of the intertextual backdrop of the show, which I explore further in chapter 2. Rather than account for each of these instances individually, I will focus on scenes in which the stakes of these preferences are most clear. Lane's tastes—and their importance to her self-representation—become a topic of discussion when she attempts to fit an encyclopedic account of her preferences in a classified ad seeking bandmates (3.3). When

the band has enough original tunes to work into their set, Zack and Brian hatch a plan to substitute the groups usual repertoire with “crappy covers,” playing songs by bands they are sure their audience will hate so that their original tunes sound good in comparison (5.2). Finally, Lane not only proclaims her alignment with the “Death to Disco” movement of the 1970s, but recommends its vitriol be extended to several 21st-century musical styles and trends (4.18).

“Drummer Seeks Rock Band”

When Rory and Lorelai sit down to take a first look at Rory’s application to Harvard, they seem to be alone, but their conversation is interrupted several times by Lane, who consults with the pair on an ad she is writing for the paper: “Drummer Seeks Rock Band” (3.3). She presents Rory with a draft of her ad on a notepad from which Rory reads aloud: “Drummer with strong beat seeks band into The Accelerators, The Adolescents, The Adverts, Agent Orange, The Angelic Upstarts, The Agnostic Front, Ash—“ She breaks off to look at Lane and says with surprise and skepticism, “you went alphabetically.” Lane answers her skepticism with simply, “seemed tidy,” as if it is obvious, to which Rory points out “And a little long!” Lorelai chimes in, “And a little OCD.”

Lane, however, is more worried about crafting the *right* ad than the ad’s length at this point; the humor lies in her impatience that the practical details of drafting and paying for the ad are at odds with her ideals of self-representation. Slightly exasperated, she informs Rory that she can’t make any more cuts despite the ad being three pages in length. “This *is* the cut-down version! Just from the letter ‘A’ I excluded AC/DC, The Animals, and A-Ha—footnote, it is a guilty pleasure.” Rory tells Lane directly that if she and Lorelai can’t get through her massive list, no one else will be able to either. Lane says she’ll try but seems doubtful.

About a minute later, Lane enters the kitchen once again to announce that her ad as written is over 2000 words and would cost her $500, which she definitely cannot afford. Rory consoles her by suggesting she shorten her list of influences to the most important ones, like David Bowie. "Gotta have Bowie," Lane agrees. But Rory quickly counters by asking, "But do you have to list every album he ever recorded, plus your personal rating between one and ten?" Lane concedes she could delete this. She returns to the bedroom still frustrated about the length of her list, only to reemerge 20 seconds later to declare, "I'm going to have to crank the Ramones if I have to make deep cuts!" before marching back into the bedroom and slamming the door behind her. The muffled bass line of the Modest Mouse track Lane has been listening to is replaced with Ramones' "I Wanna Be Sedated" at a volume clearly audible in the kitchen, and the scene ends.

In addition to humorously mirroring Rory's concern about representing herself on her Harvard application, Lane's expressions of frustration and anxiety writing her classified ad gives insight into her tastes and the stakes of representing them. By this point in the series, one of Lane's recognizable character traits is her wide-ranging taste in music. The bands Lane excludes from her "cut-down" list are also telling in this regard. All three (AC/DC, The Animals, and a-ha) are bands with considerably more longevity and mainstream success than any of the other bands on her list. AC/DC and The Animals are inarguably part of the rock canon, both members of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and appearing on lists of influential songs, albums, and artists by Rolling Stone, MTV, VH1, and others. If the bands Lane lists in her ad are meant to be musical touchstones—an attempt to identify in writing a desired sound—popular groups would be more likely to clearly communicate that sound, as their music is widely familiar. Lane, however, has deemed these bands superfluous in her still-extensive list, while lesser-known and

short-lived punk groups such as The Adverts remain essential. This suggests that sound is not the only, or even primary, concern informing the choices she makes in crafting her ad. Lane views her list as serving at least two additional purposes. First, it performs her own tastes and depth of knowledge; her concern over the contents of the list is due to its importance as a representation of herself as both a musician and a connoisseur to an audience of rock musicians and connoisseurs. Second, the list serves to narrow its audience of rock musicians and fans, giving her a way to screen those respondents for compatibility—a compatibility that at this initial stage is based more on consumption than on musical ability.

While Lane is not a record collector in any traditional sense (having interest neither in vinyl nor in the rare, obscure, or distinctive artefact), her extensive CD collection affords her the knowledge over which she displays mastery in her ad, and it is this knowledge that ultimately allows her entry into the homosocial spaces of rock music. Will Straw, in his analysis of gender and connoisseurship, argues that rock music's masculine homosociality is produced in part by the circulation of knowledge and constant (re)production of canonical meaning through record collecting.[12] Lane's ad serves as not only a performance of her taste or a test for compatibility, but also her insistence on her own participation in these meaning-making activities. Though her gender is never an explicit obstacle to her full participation in the band, Lane does express awareness that women participating in this scene are unusual (3.4, 5.1), suggesting that she may understand the stakes of performing her own connoisseurship on gendered terms (even if only implicitly). Bannister further argues that record collecting plays a fundamental role in indie guitar rock's ascription of subcultural capital and its continually shifting orientation toward the

[12] Will Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997): 3–16.

rock canon (which constitutes its aesthetics).[13] In this light, Lane's performance of taste in the ad is more clearly a strategy to promote her own subcultural capital.

"Play only crappy covers so our originals will stand out"

When Zack, Lane, and Brian meet to discuss their setlist for an upcoming gig, they are faced with the challenge of debuting their original tunes while having to fill out the rest of their set with covers (5.2). They worry about how to balance the set to help their original songs be well received. Zack and Brian especially lament that the group's cover songs are "just too good." This evaluation applies to both the group's execution of covers—Zack claims, "We play 'Fell in Love with a Girl' as good as The White Stripes"—as well as the quality of the recorded tracks their performances interpret. The covers they play are good because the source material is good. To solve the problem this creates, Zack and Brian first propose eliminating all the "good" cover songs from their set. Upon Lane's objections that this would leave them with a very short set indeed, they hatch a plan to "play nothing but crappy covers" so Hep Alien's new original tunes will be received positively by comparison. Zack and Brian have no shortage of ideas for "crappy covers," which they list off rapidly: Chicago, Styx, Culture Club, Quarterflash, Wings, and Men at Work. The pacing of the delivery (and editing) is key to the humor of this exchange, as is Lane's reaction, which shifts from confusion to incredulity before she finally cuts them off.

The abrupt end of the conversation precludes any further discussion of why these artists are undesirable to Zack and Brian, or how their sound would be distinct from that of Hep Alien's songs. The grouping does nonetheless leave room for interpretation. All the groups Zack and Brian name could fit under the broad generic label of rock, but they clearly do not fit into Hep

[13] Bannister, "Indie Guitar Rock," 81.

Alien's understanding of "rock'n'roll," betraying the narrowness of this label despite its all-encompassing gesture. Most of the "crappy covers" bands could more specifically be grouped under the labels of pop rock, soft rock, and even progressive rock. All the groups charted with anthemic or power ballad singles, which are certainly disjunct with Hep Alien's punk-flavored garage rock sound. Moreover, the distinctive sound of each "crappy" group listed by Zack and Brian comes from the consistent use of acoustic instruments and/or dominating synthesizers. Flutes, acoustic guitars, pianos, saxophones, and even full horn sections (in the case of Chicago) were common in studio recordings by these groups. Hep Alien, on the other hand, are never depicted playing acoustic instruments. Dave once plays acoustic guitar at the Kims' Thanksgiving dinner (3.9), and Zack confesses to secretly playing banjo in a bluegrass band (5.18), but these events stand out from the band scenes where only electric instruments are used. Similarly, Hep Alien never plays with synthesizers or keyboards; their sound aligns with the DIY or lo-fi aesthetic of their revered garage rock and punk bands, focusing on drums and electric guitars and bass. Whether or not heavy synth use or acoustic instruments necessarily mark substandard music for Hep Alien is unclear, but their timbres would be out of place in Hep Alien's sound. So, too, would the vocal style of these groups, all of whom use longer sustained notes and, at times, more lyrical style/phrasing absent from Hep Alien's short, rhythmic vocal style which is closer to speech.

All the salient features of Hep Alien's sound are consistent with the aesthetics of mainstream alternative music and in particular the garage rock revival of the 1990s and early 2000s (also represented in their setlist by the White Stripes). Bannister argues that the commercial success of these genres rests on the same aesthetic principles and cultural values that

cohered in indie guitar rock of the 1980s.[14] Furthermore, David Hesmondhalgh demonstrates that the consolidation of indie rock into a recognizable stylistic category depended on the rejection of the increasingly popular features of "black musical traditions, such as electro and hip hop," including funk grooves, danceable rhythms, and image-focused promotion. These particular features are not evident in all of the groups Zack and Brian consider sources of crappy covers. However, the groups they disparage in this scene and others are consistent with 1980s indie rock's recourse to a narrow set of musical resources. Hesmondhalgh writes that indie's claims to independence and "its counter-hegemonic aims could only be maintained, it seems, by erecting exclusionary barriers."[15] These barriers defining indie against a pop mainstream are the same boundaries that Hep Alien's members consistently police.

"There are other things that need wiping out"

> **Lane:** There was a "Death to Disco" movement in the late '70s. Very intense! We had Donna Summer on the run.
> **Rory:** "We"? You weren't born yet.
> **Lane:** I'm a kindred spirit.
> **Rory:** Gotcha.
> **Lane:** So where's the passion now, huh? Where is it?
> **Rory:** There's no disco to kill anymore, they wiped it out.
> **Lane:** But there are other things that need wiping out! Phony rappers, most techno, alt country, Christian rock, anything fusion; "classic alternative" radio when all they do is play the same Nirvana song over and over again; the Ruebens, the Clays, the Clarksons.
> **Rory:** It's gonna be a bloodbath.

This exchange between Lane and Rory occurs in a 30-second single shot of the two walking through the Stars Hollow town square (4.18). Functionally, the scene is transitional. It establishes Rory's presence in Stars Hollow (two scenes prior, she was in her dorm at Yale, but

[14] Bannister, "Indie Guitar Rock," 92.
[15] Hesmondhalgh, "Indie," 38.

the character needs to be in Stars Hollow for plot reasons). The scene also provides moments of levity between the dramatic scenes that precede and follow it. The conversation is not given any context—the scene opens with Rory and Lane already walking together with viewers having no idea what they were talking about immediately prior or why the "Death to Disco" movement comes up. Lane's diatribe borders on the absurd. Rory's verbal reactions alternate between corrective (pointing out inconsistencies between Lane's passionate descriptions and practical realities) and sardonic faux-understanding. Their dynamic in this scene echoes other exchanges between the two; while Rory appreciates her friend's enthusiasm, she neither completely shares her tastes nor condones her actions. During Lane's diatribe, however, Rory is both uncomfortable and distracted, which Lane doesn't seem to notice. Their walk through the town square is busy as adults with shovels and other implements search for leftover Easter eggs that have been rotting, further casting the exchange as humorous.

Though her rant is intended to be funny for the viewer, it is clear that Lane takes the subject seriously—in fact, her earnestness is part of the joke. More than sweeping gestures about genres she doesn't like, Lane's comments are also value-laden, asserting hierarchical views of music aligned with the racial and sexual hierarchies at play in the contested status of disco in the late 1970s. Specifically, they speak to musical values of authenticity and purity, expressed here by their supposed opposites. First on her list of "things that need wiping out" are "phony rappers." She does not dismiss rap as a whole, which is a telling detail, particularly given the paucity of hip hop references in the series.[16] Instead, she expresses disdain only for rap that is inauthentic (though it is difficult to say what she thinks makes rap in/authentic without more

[16] This is in line with the construction of teen subjectivity across the series and, indeed, on The WB programming generally, which was defined in part contra the teen subjectivity constructed on the only teen-focused network that preceded it—MTV. The implications and political stakes of this subjectivity are addressed in chapter 2. See also Valerie Wee, "Teen Television and the WB Television Network," in Ross and Stein, *Teen Television*, 43–60.

specific references, for example, to particular artists). This sense of inauthenticity, which is derided by Hep Alien members throughout the series, is also invoked by Lane's frustration with *American Idol* (she names contestants from the first two seasons of the show), classic alternative radio that she feels does not accurately represent the genre, and even techno. It is possible to read the entire list as a cry against fakeness, an echo of similar complaints Hep Alien members make about boy bands (4.11) or Milli Vanilli (3.19). But what of "anything fusion"? The phrase (and perhaps "alt country" as well) seems to espouse a concern for fidelity to genre, according to which mixing genres is to be avoided and boundaries are to be policed. Lane does not give any reason for including this on her musical kill list, nor does she use language that is explicitly value-laden or even descriptive as in "phony rappers." Yet it is significant in the context of Lane's and Hep Alien's overall concern with the boundaries of their professed genre, "rock'n'roll," from which not only fusion but also Christian rock are evidently excluded.

Hep Alien as Rockism

The musical preferences of Hep Alien and its members are not binary. They believe that some music that is uncritically good, which is represented by the artists in their repertoire of covers. However, when members discuss music, the grounds on which they value this music become clearer. In this on-screen discourse, "rock'n'roll" stands for more than a convenient flag for comedic moments, but less than the breadth this label, whose precise meaning and boundaries remain vague, purports to represent. Hep Alien's use of "rock'n'roll" coheres both aesthetics and values. Aesthetically, it refers to a sense of affective immediacy derived from rhythmic electric guitars, bass, and drums; distorted or rough timbres, including vocal timbres; speech-like vocal articulation; and straightforward lyrics. These aesthetics are prized by the group because they are

believed to oppose certain hegemonic limitations such as industry or financial pressures, among other constraints in the name of "authentic" art and genuine self-expression.[17]

The band's musical values align with rockism, a critical label given to a system of values once (or still) pervasive in popular music criticism. Though the term dates to the 1980s (and, according to Michael J. Kramer, the concerns of its critique had been raised in popular music criticism decades before[18]), the concept of rockism came to widespread attention following a 2004 *New York Times* article by Kafela Sanneh, "The Rap Against Rockism." Sanneh argues that this constellation of values "reduces rock'n'roll to a caricature, then uses that caricature as a weapon" against other kinds of music. Kramer identifies the values of the rockist caricature most directly—authenticity, seriousness, depth, anti-commercialism, sincerity, rawness, independence/autonomy, rebelliousness, and integrity—while Sanneh defines them comparatively: "Rockism means idolizing the authentic old legend (or underground hero) while mocking the latest pop star; lionizing punk while barely tolerating disco; loving the live show and hating the music video; extolling the growling performer while hating the lip-syncher."[19] Sanneh's comparisons get at the root of the critique. The problem with rockism is not that this constellation of values exists, but that it sets up rock music as a standard to which all other recorded popular music is measured (and, as I explore further in the second chapter, centering white male heteronormativity at the expense of all other subjectivities and perspectives). When rock's musical values are used to evaluate other kinds of music, it prevents appreciating, valuing,

[17] Bannister, "Indie Guitar Rock," 84–6.
[18] Michael J. Kramer, "Rocktimism?: Pop Music Writing in the Age of Rock Criticism," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 4 (2012): 591.

[19] Kalefa Sanneh, "The Rap Against Rockism," *New York Times,* October 31, 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/31/arts/music/the-rap-against-rockism.html.

and understanding those expressions on their own terms, instead relegating them to the necessary negation of rock's ostensibly more authentic artistry.

Hep Alien and its members not only hold these values but actively espouse them. These characters do wield as a weapon the same caricature of "rock'n'roll" that is critiqued as rockism. Excepting themselves from a mainstream pop culture is just as much (if not more) a gesture of social exclusion as musical exclusion.[20] In the name of this "rock'n'roll" caricature, Lane, Zack, Brian, Dave, and Gil define themselves in opposition to other groups of people—people who use coupons (perhaps suburban moms), fans of Matchbox 20 or Three Doors Down (teenagers, though of a different sort than themselves), and those whose engagement with music is apparently so superficial (in shows like *American Idol*, for example) that they can't or won't parse the fake from the authentic. In general, Hep Alien doesn't come into contact with the types of people whose musical values are purportedly antithetical to their own. Instead, their onscreen musical self-definition rails against the pop mainstream and the *idea* of its audience—people whose subjectivities are largely not represented in the show and from which its viewers are assumed to be excluded.

For the most part, a rockist critical disposition sets Lane and her bandmates apart from the show's other characters, albeit in less oppositional ways. For example, Rory and Lorelai both entertain Lane's opinions, though not without skepticism and occasional amusement. Their distance from Lane's rockist attitudes is clear as they provide feedback on Lane's "Drummer Seeks Rock Band" ad, where, rather than oppose her values, Lorelai and Rory exhort Lane to focus on the practical limitations of her expressing them. In this scene, her listening habits are also juxtaposed with the Gilmores' enjoyment of the *Brady Bunch Variety Hour*.

[20] Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 24.

A rockist bent not only distinguishes Lane from the show's protagonists, but perhaps more importantly, it emphasizes the character's struggle for independence from a family and home life she finds repressive. It is evident that Lane feels she cannot express herself authentically in the presence of her family. She is frequently seen changing clothes when departing from or returning to her parents' home and while she is there, hides or disguises books, music, and magazines that she enjoys. Lane does all this to conform to what she understands as narrow and somewhat severe ideals of a good life dictated by her parents. In this environment, rock and rockism are not only recognizable stand-ins for Lane's desire for independence and authentic expression, but in fact they are one and the same. Rockism's values of "authenticity, seriousness, depth, artistic autonomy, rebelliousness, integrity, and 'keeping it real'" are the same values that are lacking for Lane in her family life.[21] Thus, it is by pursuing these values through rock music that she achieves them throughout the series.

But the stakes of rockism go beyond aesthetics, individual or otherwise. Jack Hamilton and Robin James have both critically developed Sanneh's argument that part of the power of rockism is its alignment with and reproduction of other prejudices—in short that rockism aligns with racist, misogynist, and homophobic structural oppression. For Hamilton, rockism is virtually synonymous with the inscription of a rock canon; he argues that both rock and rockism are co-productive and co-dependent with imagined racial hierarchies.[22] James, on the other hand, finds that the rock-as-high-art attitudes of rockism are but another manifestation of the distinction between art and craft that emerged in the 18th century and upholds patriarchal gender norms. James critiques the politics of both rockism and its critical counter-disposition,

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[21] Kramer, "Rocktimism," 591.

[22] Jack Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 18–19.

poptimism, which "revises this gender script, putting 'thoroughly feminized' pop on an equal playing field with rock." The rise of poptimism coincided with the rise of popular feminism, both of which have been mobilized as a commercial strategy. Rather than providing the distance from which to completely reimagine the values of popular music criticism, poptimism "put[s] formerly low-status things in high status places without reconfiguring the underlying fact that there is a status differential in the first place."[23]

Gilmore Girls might be said to be critical of rockism and the prejudices it reproduces because of the way the series plays this critical disposition for laughs, but this humor should not be confused with substantive critique. Though members of Hep Alien are, as Gil says, "always serious about 'rock'n'roll'" (4.11), the series is decidedly not. As many of the scenes considered in this chapter show, "rock'n'roll" as conceived by Hep Alien and its members is principally an opportunity for humor. The series pokes fun at the values of rockism by placing them at odds with both practical constraints and with sympathetic characters, as they have to point these practicalities out (particularly to Lane). That the series places a woman of color in a rock band, largely without comment, is a potentially significant critique of rockism, albeit an implicit one. Lane does not have to earn her place in the band other than with her playing. Typically, she neither has to jockey for respect with the men in her group nor does she face barriers to safe experiences at any of the venues they play. That characters' musical values aligned with rockism are played for humor in a variety of ways furthers the conception of the show's overall poptimist ethos. Yet, as James cautions about poptimism in general, the series' humor around "rock'n'roll," even when it amounts to satire, stops well short of critiquing the structures and value systems that underlie rockism. While pointing at a problem is perhaps a necessary first

[23] Robin James, "Poptimism and Popular Feminism," *Sounding Out!*, September 17, 2018, https://soundstudiesblog.com/2018/09/17/poptimism-and-popular-feminism/.

step, it should not be confused with the actions required to take steps to address that problem.

In this chapter, I have defined Hep Alien's invocation of "rock'n'roll" as a stand-in for the aesthetics and ideologies of the alternative mainstream and garage rock revival contemporary to *Gilmore Girls*' production and original airing. The group's sound is conveyed through their repertoire of cover songs, their performances of which are dominated by distorted guitars, understated vocal delivery, and straightforward lyrics. These features consolidated as a distinct style in 1980s indie guitar rock scenes, at which time they represented a narrower set of musical resources than either preceding rock styles or the pop mainstream. As Hesmondhalgh and Bannister demonstrate, this stylistic exclusivity was indicative of a particular configuration of an extant rock canon—a disposition to popular music history which I argue Hep Alien has also adopted. This historical attitude emphasizes values of directness and authentic self-expression in a white masculine homosocial space contra a commercialized (and therefore inauthentic) pop mainstream. Hep Alien's distinction of their own aesthetics and ideology from that of the pop mainstream further reveals their commitment to ideals of musical and expressive purity, as well as performances of heteronormative masculine sexuality. Hep Alien's policing of this boundary aligns them with rockist critical dispositions. In the second chapter of this thesis, I explore the tensions that might exist between rockism—its assertion of hierarchical dominion over popular music situating it in line with white patriarchal hegemony broadly writ—within a TV show that both traffics in the pleasure of pop culture and makes explicit claims to feminism.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

In chapter 1, I analyzed the repertoire of Hep Alien and its members' performances of taste to reveal *Gilmore Girls'* treatment of popular music to align with rockism. Attending to the humorous nature of the depiction of a rock band in the series demonstrated that although the depiction exposed some of the contradictions inherent in rockism's underlying values, it stops well short of substantive critique. In the rest of the thesis, I situate this treatment of popular music in its contemporary media context. Fundamental to this is understanding the place of *Gilmore Girls* on the WB network and its relationship to the genre of teen TV. The aesthetics of the popular music soundtrack in this media configuration cohere complex ideas around youth, presenting teen subjectivities that engender the values of individualism and capitalist consumption. For this reason, I turn to one specific realization of this ethos in *Gilmore Girls*—that of Hep Alien's drummer, Lane Kim—building on Danielle M. Stern's and Hye Seung Chung's critical intersectional analyses of the character to consider Lane specifically as a musician. I argue that Lane's participation in Hep Alien not only aligns with rockism, but further that it both reproduces and obscures rockism's hegemonic hierarchies, implicitly casting their material consequences as superficial and contingent problems that affect and can be overcome by individuals.

The WB Network and Teen TV

The preoccupation with adolescents and adolescence as well as the need to capitalize on teen purchasing power long predate the rise of teen-focused television programming. The WB

network was developed by Warner Brothers beginning in 1995 as the first to define itself in terms of programming content and brand as specifically "teen." Time Warner Bros. began developing the WB network in 1992 with the hiring of Jamie Kellner as its managing general partner. Kellner had previously managed the 1986 launch of FOX television network. Though the big three broadcast networks—CBS, NBC, and ABC— had faced a splintering primetime audience since the 1970s and the advent of cable, their established strategies of broadcasting to a general audience still captured just under 50% of the market share and were understood by Kellner as impossible to compete with. Instead, Kellner developed a network that "narrowcast to a select, niche audience," specifically 12–34-year-olds of both sexes. Under Kellner's leadership, the network developed shows that would appeal to this segment of viewers and the advertisers who wanted to reach this segment, which had proved elusive.[24]

Rather than focusing on a specific age, Kellner and the WB sought to align their programming with the products accompanying the 1990s understanding of "teen" demographic and lifestyle. Just as the teen years of the baby boomer generation had prompted an evaluation of adolescence and teen culture broadly speaking, the 1990s saw a similar reevaluation of this category when the children of baby boomers (later named Millennials and the youngest of Gen X) began to enter their teenage years. This large generation of teens also came of age in a period of economic growth and had significant economic power. Wee explains, "By the 1990s, the notion of 'teenage' and the teenage identity had evolved; the term 'teen' had less to do with biological age and increasingly more to do with lifestyle and shared cultural tastes and interests." Wee further argues that qualities such as "vigor, promise, and cutting-edge interests" came to define the idea of a young attitude, and says that this teen/youth identity had particular potency

[24] Wee, "Teen Television," 45–7.

in a youth-obsessed American culture of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.[25] This demographic and cultural shift made the "teen" market a particularly valuable one, even as its core group of 12-to-24-year-olds remained particularly difficult for television advertising to reach.

The WB's programming thus consolidated a version of teenhood that fit with the teen demographic constructed by the marketing and media industries more broadly in the late 1990s. Teens on WB programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Felicity*, were generally attractive, sensitive, intelligent, witty characters. They faced relevant teen issues such as alcohol use, sexuality, and destructive behavior but remained "morally idealistic" as they struggled to find and do the right thing. They were fun-loving, self-aware, and responsible. The WB's primetime programming focused on relationships among friends and family. In addition to creating an image of teenhood that would appeal to advertisers, Wee notes another significant factor in this construction—the need to compete with the existing teen-focused cable network, MTV. This competition informed the WB's programming in two ways. First, it pushed WB executives to pursue a version of teenage lifestyle that stood in distinction to that of MTV, which portrayed this lifestyle as "more irreverent, hedonistic, and anti-establishment" and existing in a multi-racial, urban setting.[26] Second, the WB as a broadcast network faced different restrictions than MTV, which was a cable network. In particular, while MTV relied on cable subscriptions for a portion of its revenue, the WB could not and was therefore more dependent on constructing a conservative image of teenhood that would appeal to a broader base of advertisers. Though

[25] Wee, "Teen Television," 47.

[26] Wee, "Teen Television," 49.

teens on the WB programs were angsty and faced typical teen struggles, they still enjoyed their youth and resolved issues in uncontroversial ways.

Stylistic Features of Teen TV

In addition to sharing common strategies of characterization and narrative, teens and teen-focused programming on the WB were represented by a cohesive set of aesthetic properties. Generally, this programming adapted stylistic features of quality TV—cinematic visuals, ensemble casts, genre hybridity, intertextuality, and reflexivity—to stories engaging to a teen audience. In adapting quality TV's aesthetic properties, new teen-focused programs played up genre hybridity and intertextuality in particular, taking these properties beyond their use in quality TV to a level "excessive enough to constitute a categorical distinction."[27] By the time *Gilmore Girls* began airing in October 2000, these aesthetic features were cohesive enough to distinguish teen-focused programming on both the WB and UPN, and the early success of these networks saw other networks copy this aesthetic to develop their own teen-focused shows.[28]

All the stylistic features of teen TV are evident in *Gilmore Girls*, although it strikes a balance of these features appropriate for the series' purpose for the WB as a step toward more broadly family-oriented programming. Genre hybridity in *Gilmore Girls* is generally more subtle than in shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which make it more explicit. In *Gilmore Girls*, different styles of cinematography and dialogue align with changes in setting. Most distinctive are scenes at the residence of Richard and Emily Gilmore, which, in addition to using a more neutral color palette to contrast the colorful Stars Hollow, incorporate features of soap operas.

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[27] Wee, "Teen Television," 52. See also Valerie Wee, "Selling Teen Culture: How American Multimedia Conglomeration Reshaped Teen Television in the 1990s," in *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*, ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI Publishing, 2004), 90, 97n6.

[28] Wee, "Teen Television," 55–6. Ross and Stein, *Teen Television*, 15.

Dialog between Richard and Emily is more melodramatic and slower paced than that between the other characters, often addressing personal problems. The stylistic distance of these scenes emphasizes the remove of their setting from the younger Gilmores' main cultural and social world.

Though genre hybridity is more subtly present in *Gilmore Girls* than in other teen TV shows, two features of teen TV are extended beyond what had become the norm. First, *Gilmore Girls* extends its narrative focus on teen issues beyond its teen characters. At its core, the series thematizes at once both "the teen struggle against constraint" and the need to "define [oneself] as an adult with a role and purpose." This drive for autonomy primarily (though not exclusively) takes place as characters negotiate their relationships to both family and love interests. Although they are characterized as "teen struggle[s]," Stein argues that adults of *Gilmore Girls* regularly participate in these negotiations of self-definition. This is especially true of Lorelai Gilmore, who missed both an "innocent adolescence" and subsequent twenty-something transition to adulthood as a consequence of becoming pregnant and running away from her family home at age sixteen, a series of events that both accelerated and arrested her development.[29]

Just as its teen issues are experienced by more than just teen characters, *Gilmore Girls* demonstrates an extension of other stylistic markers of teen TV beyond the construction of specifically teen subjectivities. The series' intertextual references are both wider-ranging than what is typical for quality TV or teen TV and more densely packed into each script,[30] though it is

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[29] Louisa Ellen Stein, "Pushing at the Margins: Teenage Angst in Teen TV and Audience Response," in Ross and Stein, *Teen Television*, 226–30.

[30] Matt Hills, "*Dawson's Creek*: 'Quality Teen TV' and 'Mainstream Cult'?," in Davis and Dickinson, *Teen TV*, 62–5.

similar to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in this regard.[31] The scope and density of *Gilmore Girls*' intertextual references became such an iconic aspect of the show that booklets titled "Guide to Gilmorisms," which decode just a portion of the references incorporated into each episode, are included in the DVD packages for each season. There are numerous personal websites and blogs dedicated to cataloguing and explicating these references, such as "Black, White & Read Books," which lists every book to which the series makes reference.[32] On one hand, this intertextuality helps construct an understanding of teens as particularly savvy. On the other hand, extending the frames of intertextual reference beyond "a distinct corpus of teen texts" also allows the series' non-teen characters—and viewers—to author and perform their own identities.[33] This is yet another feature of the show that speaks to how *Gilmore Girls* was conceptualized by The WB as an opportunity to develop a teen-focused program that could appeal to the entire family. Clare Birchall argues that references to cultural texts of the past allow an adult viewer "to miss and feel nostalgia for teen trauma," or, "a 'safe' excursion into a generalized teen-age," which is cultivated as part of a marketing strategy.[34] Kay Dickinson attends to music as a specific type of intertext in teen TV, adding to Birchall's sense of looking back at music's role in shaping the "political and emotional registers of our teenage years." For Dickinson, musical intertexts can

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[31] Kathryn Hill, "Punks, Geeks, and Goths: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a Study of Popular Music Demographics on American Commercial Television," in *Music Sound, and Silence in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer,"* ed. Paul Attinello, Janet K. Halfyard, and Vanessa Knights, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 165–7.

[32] Black, White & Read Books, https://www.blackwhitereadbooks.com/the-official-list. There are a number of blog users who start the task of cataloguing all the references, but do not finish.

[33] Davis and Dickinson *Teen TV*, 8, 11. Wee, "Selling Teen Culture," 92–5.

[34] Clare Birchall, "'Feels Like Home': *Dawson's Creek*, Nostalgia and the Young Adult Viewer," in Davis and Dickinson, *Teen TV*, 185.

appeal not only to adult viewers' nostalgia for the past the music invokes, but also to their dominant positions within contemporary capitalism.[35]

Aside from its intertextuality, the popular music compilation soundtrack is a stylistic trait of teen TV that warrants more detailed attention here. As Ben Aslinger demonstrates, The WB and its parent company Warner Brothers built on earlier models of licensing popular music soundtracks with a strategy that especially encouraged the use of indie and alternative music. This strategy was mutually beneficial for television networks and musicians/record labels. Shows featured (or "profiled") lesser-known artists for reduced licensing fees, which helped the network's bottom line and, like other teen TV advertisements, marketed those artists to the crucial teen demographic. The financial benefit of this was even more significant when WB music supervisors could source music "in-house" from the catalog of Warner Music Group. Aslinger notes, however, that soundtracks that drew heavily on indie and alternative music also helped position WB programming as hip among teens with increased access to a variety of new media.[36] Using a popular music soundtrack "to introduce teen audiences to new music….consolidate[d] its image as a network for young, cutting-edge viewers."[37]

Because of these strategies promoted by Warner Brothers, by the time *Gilmore Girls* was in production, a popular music soundtrack skewed toward alternative and indie music was a convention of the teen TV genre. Like other stylistic features of teen TV, *Gilmore Girls* adapts the convention of the popular music soundtrack to cultivate a broader audience. Faye Woods argues that, rather than distinguish the teens of the show from their parents by their musical

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[35] Kay Dickinson, "'My Generation': Popular Music, Age and Influence in Teen Drama of the 1990s," in Davis and Dickinson, *Teen TV*, 109–110.

[36] Ben Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time," 77–91.

[37] Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time," 83.

tastes, the series' use of popular music constitutes a through-line between Lorelai's and Rory's generations (Gen X and Millennials, respectively).[38] For Woods, this aligns with a broader cultural phenomenon taken up by the series: the narrowing of the generation gap. Since the Baby Boomer generation, youth has been increasingly defined as an attitude or a feeling rather than a distinct part of one's life that ends naturally and necessarily upon reaching adulthood.[39] Not parting with youth, whether due to reluctance or inability to reach "traditional notions of adulthood," results in a narrowed generational gap. In *Gilmore Girls*, this narrowed generation gap is exhibited between Lorelai and Rory, exemplified by their shared tastes in cultural products and explained in part by their closeness in age. The intergenerational conflict fundamental to the show is instead displaced onto their relationship to Richard and Emily Gilmore where it is bound up with differences in class. The popular music soundtrack of *Gilmore Girls*, rather than mostly drawing on new indie and alternative music to appeal to teens as a wholly distinct category, instead establishes continuities with what is thought of as (but may or may not in actuality be) the music of previous generations.[40]

Hep Alien plays a crucial role in the series' popular music soundtrack and its construction of a popular music lineage. As I argued in the first chapter, the group's sound and performance of taste emphasize a version of popular music history aligned with that of 1980s indie guitar rock and early 2000s mainstream alternative. Though Hep Alien's performances thus musically bridge

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[38] Though this is generally true in the show, an obvious and notable exception is Mrs. Kim and Lane, though this has less to do with generation than with Mrs. Kim's characterization as perpetual Other; see Hye Seung Chung, "Escaping from Korea: Cultural Authenticity and Asian American Identities in *Gilmore Girls*," in *Screwball Television: Critical Perspectives on "Gilmore Girls,"* ed. David Scott Diffrient and David Lavery (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 176–82.

[39] Lawrence Grossberg, "The Deconstruction of Youth," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 183–90.

[40] Faye Woods, "Generation Gap?," 131–3.

the generation gap and facilitate the inclusion of viewers beyond the teen audience, they also manifest rockism. The presence of this critical disposition so salient within the series' cultural world reveals the limits of its ostensibly omnivorous middle-brow sensibilities—limits that are ideological as well as aesthetic. These limits are particularly significant because the show claims to transcend them by asserting the production as participating in feminism.

Feminism in *Gilmore Girls*

To take teen-oriented programming (and pop culture more broadly) seriously allows for both the naming and critique of the forms of normality these shows present and the subjectivities they engender. This has been a central concern of scholarship on *Gilmore Girls*, whether particular scholars understand the show in terms of the teen TV genre or teen marketing demographics. Literature on *Gilmore Girls* has engaged the series' relationship with feminism more than any other critical issue. One reason for this is, as several scholars have noted, that *Gilmore Girls* makes explicit claims to feminism from the show's first episode.[41] In the pilot, Rory introduces herself to a new Stars Hollow resident, Dean, as "Lorelai, but I go by Rory," relating the story of being named after her mother when "her feminism kicked in." Similar claims are sprinkled throughout the show's first season and more sparsely (if implicitly) over the duration of the series. Evaluating its engagement with feminism also seems to provide scholars a legitimizing entry point for bringing the series into academic discourse, a point with which the first two academic volumes dedicated to *Gilmore Girls* are admittedly preoccupied.

For all the ink spilled on *Gilmore Girls*' relationship to and representation of feminism, the literature as a whole is ambivalent. Much of it engages the representation of feminism as binary; *Gilmore Girls* (or a particular character, relationship, or plot) either aligns with the

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[41] Calvin, *"Gilmore Girls" and the Politics of Identity*, 12. Lara C. Stache and Rachel D. Davidson, *"Gilmore Girls": A Cultural History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 61–2.

series' feminist aspirations or it fails to do so. The definition of feminism used to make this determination generally relies on the representation of "strong women characters." Molly McCaffrey, for example, reads Lorelai and Rory's relationship in terms of feminisms separated by generation; while the financially independent and sexually empowered Lorelai represents the ideals of third wave feminism, Rory fails to enact feminism adequately until the end of the series.[42] Francesca Gamber traces the development of Rory's character across the series similarly: by the time the series ends, Rory has created her own model of feminism out of the "multiple feminisms" presented to her by other "strong women."[43] Like Gamber and Calvin, Lara C. Stache & Rachel D. Davidson are careful to place *Gilmore Girls*' feminism in its historical context. They argue that the series reflects a spectrum of diverse possibilities for feminism and successfully explores the contradictions presented by negotiating feminist ideology in everyday life. Therefore, Stache & Davidson see the question of whether the show is or is not feminist as a misdirection (although they ultimately take up a position for the former).[44] Other authors take up similar explorations of how ostensible feminist commitments affect the nuances of portrayals of particular characters and gendered relationships (romantic and otherwise) and the ways these portrayals are used to make meaning for viewers.

Yet other scholars' engagements with feminism in *Gilmore Girls* problematizes the notion of "strong women characters" upon which so much fan, journalistic, and scholarly discourse relies. Laura Nathan and Stacia M. Fleegal specify what the generations represented in the series bring to its relationship with feminism. Nathan outlines the privileges that historical

[42] Molly McCaffrey, "Rory Gilmore and Faux Feminism: An Ivy League Education and Intellectual Banter Does Not a Feminist Make," in Calvin, *"Gilmore Girls" and the Politics of Identity*, 35–49.

[43] Francesca Gamber, "Riding the Third Wave: The Multiple Feminisms of *Gilmore Girls*," in Ross and Stein, *Teen Television*, 114–31.

[44] Stache and Davidson, *"Gilmore Girls": A Cultural History*, 61–75.

feminisms have differently afforded all three Gilmore women as well as how these changes in feminine gender norms affect the expectations they each have of men and romantic relationships.[45] Rather than take up feminism directly, Fleegal focuses on how generational differences are expressed in mother–daughter relationships; while mothers (try to) impress upon their daughters an understanding of "strong womanhood," the series ultimately plays out a "pattern of the younger generation reflecting their enlightened ideals about female diversity back onto the older generation."[46] These teaching moments can be understood among the series' "multiple feminisms" as Gamber conceives of them—an indication that the younger character is indeed charting their own course. For Gamber, the multiple nature of feminisms and pluralist understandings of womanhood in *Gilmore Girls* are attributable in part to the series airing "at a historical moment in which few can agree whether or not feminism is alive, let alone how it should be defined."[47] Though still reliant on a conceptualization of feminism centered on the "strong woman character," Alicia Skipper demonstrates that the series problematizes good girl/bad girl stereotypes and challenges the hegemonic dichotomy between feminism and non-feminism in its characterizations of Lorelai and Rory. Skipper puts it more strongly than Gamber when she argues that *Gilmore Girls* as a whole—and particularly its representation of single, unwed mother protagonist—"presents feminism in a positive light" in a "time of liberal and feminist backlash."[48] In their examinations of fan discourses, both Daniel Smith-Rowsey and A.

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[45] Laura Nathan, "What a Girl Wants: Men and Masculinity in *Gilmore Girls*," in Diffrient and Lavery, *Screwball Television*, 321–46.

[46] Stacia M. Fleegal, "Like Mother-Daughter, Like Daughter-Mother: Constructs of Motherhood in Three Generations," in Calvin, *"Gilmore Girls" and the Politics of Identity*, 157–8.

[47] Gamber, "Riding the Third Wave," 115.

[48] Alicia Skipper, "Good Girls, Bad Girls, and Motorcycles: Negotiating Feminism," in Calvin, *"Gilmore Girls" and the Politics of Identity*, 94.

Rochelle Mabry bump up against some of the limits of the series' portrayals of feminism. Smith-Rowsey finds that online fan discourses, including fanfiction, generally do not subvert what he calls the "precious, protective worldview of the show." He elaborates on the tenor of these online discourses: "It is as though the fans have spoken and said: people like Lorelai and Rory and places like Stars Hollow are rare enough, let us not seek to radically remake them, but only to extend and illuminate their glory."[49] Yet, these discourses *do*, Smith-Rowsey argues, allow that the world of *Gilmore Girls* is perhaps not ideal, that there is room for improvement. Mabry, writing two years later, finds that fanfiction and other fan readings of the show understand its commitment to traditional gender roles, either by reaffirming those roles or offering more progressive conceptions.[50]

Although scholarship that takes up *Gilmore Girls* directly as an object of study has focused on feminism and/or gender more than any other critical perspective, the overwhelming majority of this work fails to situate the series in relationship to feminist politics. It conflates, sometimes uncritically, feminism with the availability of choice to individuals, using the adjective "feminist" to describe the presence of so-called "strong women characters." That *Gilmore Girls* is populated with such representations of women is not inconsequential, and this work certainly demonstrates that this is the case. This conceptualization of feminism, however, is unclear at best. To this point, Brenda Boyle & Olivia Combe argue that *Gilmore Girls*' version of a "strong woman character" is in fact, a double bind: "The series *explicitly* says that women may be whatever their hearts and bodies desire….However, the show's *implicit* options limit

[49] Daniel Smith-Rowsey, "Still More Gilmore: How Internet Fan Communities Remediate *Gilmore Girls*," in Calvin, *"Gilmore Girls" and the Politics of Identity*, 202.

[50] A. Rochelle Mabry, "Java Junkies Versus Balcony Buddies: *Gilmore Girls*, 'Shipping,' and Contemporary Sexuality," in Diffrient and Lavery, *Screwball Television*, 283–301.

those roles to being in a dichotomous pair, requiring women find their gender opposites, thereby reinstituting binarism as the only model for romantic relationships" and women's empowerment.[51] This argument exposes some of the limitations of feminism-as-individual-agency, if only in the *Gilmore Girls* world. Joyce Goggin argues further that a woman's celebrated ostensible agency in the *Gilmore Girls* world is actually agency limited by the logics of capitalism and consumerism: although the series "allows for a plethora of subject positions and interpretations," it also "complicitly participates in privileging the upper classes and American expansionist politics….the message here is clear: do not stop consuming."[52]

Such links to consumerism are crucial to Danielle M. Stern's critical analysis of feminism both in *Gilmore Girls* and in academic discourse about the series. Stern argues that representations of family, gender, and feminism within the series cohere around a postfeminist ideology, which understands that "feminist gains in the workplace and other realms have eliminated the need for an organized political movement against sexism."[53] In other words, the (illusion of the) availability of personal choice both stands in for the elimination of sexism and obfuscates the need for action toward structural change. Furthermore, this postfeminist representation of feminism (what Stern calls "televisual feminism") is often expressed, in *Gilmore Girls* as elsewhere, by recourse to narratives of "heterosexual love, upward class

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[51] Brenda Boyle and Olivia Combe, "Gender Lies in Stars Hollow," in Calvin, *"Gilmore Girls" and the Politics of Identity*, 173. Emphasis original.

[52] Joyce Goggin, "'Nigella's Deep-Frying a Snickers Bar!': Addiction as a Social Construct in *Gilmore Girls*," in Diffrient and Lavery, *Screwball Television*, 281.

[53] Stern is not the only scholar to refer to *Gilmore Girls* as postfeminist. Calvin claims the series as both feminist and postfeminist and, moreover, does not argue for a critical perspective on postfeminism. He also claims a postfeminist critical perspective for the edited collection, which almost none of its entries live up to. Stache and Davidson, on the other hand, are dismissive of the concerns Stern raises, including the need for a critical intersectional analysis of the series: "Perhaps the cast is a little too white and the Gilmore girls' problems a little too champagne, but what makes a show feminist?" Stache and Davidson, Gilmore Girls*: A Cultural History*, 62.

mobility, and post-race relations."[54] Stern explicitly invokes and theoretically grounds a central assumption of scholarship on television and popular culture—that the pursuit of nuanced understandings of representations of families and other interpersonal subjectivities in popular culture yields insight into how such subjectivities and relationships are for real people. For many scholars studying *Gilmore Girls*, this assumption seems to have contributed to a slippage between the characters represented and actual human beings. There is no need for politics in *Gilmore Girls* because its fiction exists in what Stern describes as a "classless, heteronormative utopian village;" rather than critique the implications of the series' apolitical representations of women and feminism (particularly given the importance of the series' relatability), academic discourse has generally accepted its premise, implicitly framing the real world as bound to its same postracial and postfeminist rules.[55]

Such ostensibly apolitical ideologies are not unique to *Gilmore Girls*. Rather, they are synonymous with the representational logics of the WB programming and teen TV more broadly. The responsible, moral, idealistic, self-aware teens depicted in WB shows both produce and depend on these logics; they are empowered to strive toward doing the right thing because the problems they face—socially, academically, emotionally, sexually—are personal rather than symptoms of structural injustices or systemic inequalities. It is therefore no coincidence that, as Wee notes, "'the WB teen' tended to exist in a white, affluent, and suburban context."[56] Stern is not the only scholar to comment on Stars Hollow's dearth of residents of color or to align *Gilmore Girls* with postfeminism, but she makes apparent the political stakes of these

[54] This is the same concept as what James 2018 calls popular feminism or pop feminism.

[55] Stern, "It Takes a Classless, Heteronormative Utopian Village," 167–8.

[56] Wee "Teen Television," 49.

representations using a methodology rooted in critical intersectionality. This analysis briefly engages the character of Lane Kim, mostly in contradistinction to the perpetually Other Mrs. Kim.[57] Lane is trapped not by institutional discrimination or implicit bias, but by her individual circumstances—a strict Christian mother. Likewise, she is able to overcome these limitations through her own actions by simply refusing to live by her mother's rules when not in her company.

I expand upon Stern's and Chung's analyses of Lane by engaging the character specifically as a musician. In centering her musical activities, it becomes clear that Lane does not merely "pass as White, or at least, not Asian" in Stars Hollow.[58] Instead, the elision of both race and gender is accomplished in part by Lane's ardent participation in rock music and rockism, which has long been understood in the United States as "the natural province of whites."[59] As discussed in the first chapter, Lane's participation in rock music is depicted in her performances of listenership and taste, that is in the mobilization of her agency as a consumer of commercial recorded music. My analysis closes, then, by discussing how the ideology of rockism aligns with the postracial, postfeminist logics of teen TV, providing insight into the political stakes of rockism and its poptimist counterpoints.

Lane Kim's Subjectivities

Lane Kim is undoubtedly a strong woman character, but one whose traits and choices, like those of *Gilmore Girls*' protagonists, align with the logics of postfeminism. Lane's participation in rock music underscores the character's existence within the gendered double-

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[57] Stern, "It Takes a Classless, Heteronormative Utopian Village," 177–9. See also Chung, "Escaping from Korea."

[58] Stern, "It Takes a Classless, Heteronormative Utopian Village," 178.

[59] Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, 3.

bind articulated by Boyle and Combe for strong woman characters in the series, as following examples will demonstrate. Through rock music, Lane asserts her independence from her family and earns the respect of her peers while engaging in stereotypically masculine behaviors; at the same time, as a member of Hep Alien, Lane consistently both performs gendered labor and prioritizes the pursuit of heterosexual romantic relationships. What makes this ambivalence more telling is that Lane rarely encounters barriers to participating in rock music beyond the restrictions of her parents' home. She seldom experiences discrimination that real women rock musicians experience. Systemic barriers in the popular music industry do not exist in the world of *Gilmore Girls*, so the show's strong woman drummer is ostensibly free to pursue her passion without gendered limitations; however, a critical reading of the character's narratives reveals that these real-world barriers are merely displaced onto Lane's interpersonal relationships and minimized as individual or incidental problems.

Lane's involvement in Hep Alien is outwardly depicted as allowing her significant agency beyond the norms of her everyday life. Participating in a rock band affords her self-expression and self-definition, as well as access to a discourse on music and popular culture she finds valuable. That she seeks and achieves these types of agency is evident when Lane begins learning to play the drums and in her efforts to find a band. As discussed in chapter 1, Lane endeavors to enter more fully into "rock'n'roll" culture not by sending around a tape, but by performing an exhaustive knowledge of a rock music canon. Eric Weisbard identifies this as "required decorum" of indie rock, which posits its scenes as oppositional to the commercial

mainstream.[60] Straw argues that this connoisseurship of a particular configuration of rock history is a gatekeeping mechanism that maintains rock culture's masculinist ethos.[61]

Lane understands her position in the band as relatively anomalous from its beginnings due to her gender. Contemplating what might happen if her mother finds out about her involvement in the band, she scorns the idea that they would have to find a new drummer, then adds, "And if it's a girl, I'm gonna be twice as mad!" (3.4) Lane is not, however, worried that her position or respect within the group is at risk. Her playing is never questioned, and comments about women (see below) are not directed at her. The few times that Lane's gender becomes an explicit topic of discussion for Hep Alien, she acts defiant and righteous. In a telling scene, Lane raises her voice to her bandmates, challenging them to be more understanding about her being late for band practice: "Hey! Shut up, all of you! Now that is my friend, and she is here in desperate need of some girl talk. And in case you haven't noticed, I am a girl, and this, right here, is what it's like to have a girl in the band! So all of you—deal!" (5.1). These scenes illustrate the character's (and viewers') awareness of Lane's exceptionality as a woman rock drummer. Characteristic of *Gilmore Girls*, her subject position explicitly presents only superficial obstacles.

However, Lane recognizes her heterosexual femininity as a threat not to her place in the band, but more fundamentally to the band's existence. On two occasions, she becomes romantically interested in one of her bandmates—in season 3, Dave, Hep Alien's original lead guitarist, and in season 5, Zack, the group's vocalist. In both cases, Lane initially suppresses, then denies, and finally acknowledges her feelings, hiding them from others, eventually taking

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[60] Eric Weisbard, "Over & Out," "Over & Out: Indie rock Values in the Age of Alternative Million Sellers." *The Village Voice Rock & Roll Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1994): 17.

[61] Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections," 3–16.

angst-filled approaches toward acting on them. She confides her feelings with Rory only, each time reminding her friend of the "rock'n'roll highway…littered with casualties of band members who have dated and broken the band apart" (3.4). When she does eventually begin a relationship with Dave, the two take pains to hide their romance from Brian and Zack. This subjects Lane to the only musical critique she ever faces from band members, when Dave disparages her drumming and focus. The moment is played for humor—Dave's ridicule being so convincing that Rory becomes concerned on Lane's behalf—and eventually the two confess their relationship to their bandmates. In the fifth season, Lane exhibits the same fraught cycle when working through her feelings for Zack, despite her having had a successful romantic relationship with a bandmate before. On one hand, this characterizes Lane as caring more for the band than for her love life. On the other hand, she is never forced to choose—the band thrives when her love life thrives and flounders or breaks apart when her romantic relationships suffer. Furthermore, the character's consistent involvement in romantic plot lines (both before and during her involvement with Hep Alien) attests to Boyle and Combe's point that while "the series *explicitly* says that women may be whatever their hearts and bodies desire….However, the show's *implicit* options limit those roles to being in a dichotomous pair."[62]

As both a member of the band and roommate to two of her bandmates, Lane disproportionately performs gendered labor. Living with Zack and Brian, Lane assumes a mothering role. Though they are shown grocery shopping together and share in certain household chores, she is clearly in charge of most domestic activities. When they first move in together, it is Lane who sets up utility service and takes the lead on procuring essential household goods while Zack and Brian bicker over their shared shelf space (4.15). Lane also takes care to shop around

[62] Boyle and Combe, "Gender Lies in Stars Hollow," 173.

her roommates' childish eating habits, and even makes a spontaneous trip to the store when appetites derail band practice and Zack fails to take his turn shopping. This mothering role also constitutes her administrative role in the band. In addition to shepherding the group's focus, Lane manages their summer tour and the group's finances (6.3). She usually assumes this role without being asked, but when she objects to being tasked with handling the guest list for an upcoming gig, Brian explains that it is because Lane is the most reliable (4.19). Thus, while romantic relationships with bandmates could be understood as emphasizing the character's feminine heterosexuality, when combined with the gendered labor she performs in the group and for her bandmates, these romantic entanglements instead neutralize her sexuality so as not to disrupt the homosocial space of the band.

Rather than freedom from gendered constraints that the postfeminist logics of *Gilmore Girls* imply, these scenes demonstrate that participation in a rock band demands a particular negotiation of Lane Kim's gender, occasionally involving a strategic denial of gendered subjectivities. Just because certain individuals—Lane because of her drumming skills and affective labor—can successfully access typically masculine spaces and activities does not render the barriers of systemic sexism and misogyny moot. Instead, the conditions for Lane's participation highlights their continued existence. Moreover, Lane's actions make her complicit in the expression of masculine heterosexuality fundamental to Hep Alien. Zack and Gil in particular police the boundaries of the homosocial space so as to exclude other expressions, particularly inferred or implied homosexuality. On several occasions, Zack complains about perceived violations of this narrow performance of masculinity during the group's shows. He chastises Brian for standing too close to him, although the two share a microphone (3.19), and reprimands Gil for a similar infraction: "What's with the shirt raise? …We need a sign or

something because I was looking right at you when you took it off' (4.19). In both cases, the culprit defends himself by claiming they had gotten caught up in the musical moment. When Lane during a band meeting points out that virtually all their song titles are women's names, Gil responds as if this point is self-evident: "If we were singing about dudes, I'd be out the door before you could say 'see ya!'" (6.10). The possibilities for performance of gender and sexuality in Hep Alien are narrow for all its members, not only Lane.

Yet, it is clear that to the men of Hep Alien, Lane is an exception that proves the rule of women's roles in "rock'n'roll"—objects of sexual conquest. Women are regularly referred to as "hot chicks" by Hep Alien members, including occasionally Lane. When Zack brings his friend Joel to a gig to join the group on tambourine, Gil objects, "The only reason to have a tambourine is if it's being played by a hot chick" (6.10). More telling still is the scene discussed in chapter 1, in which Hep Alien contends with whether to play an aesthetically subpar song at a political rally (5.4). Lane insists that they should play and accuses Zack of playing in the band primarily as a way to pick up women.

> **Zack:** Part of the point of all this is appealing to chicks.
> **Lane:** For you, not for us.
> **Brian:** No, for me too.
> **Gil:** It's how I met my wife.
> **Lane:** Well, then not for me.

In this scene, despite Lane's wishing to participate on solely aesthetic grounds, she is faced with accepting her own participation in performances of masculine heterosexuality that such aesthetics augur.

Objectification—reduction of women to (hetero)sexual roles—is co-productive with the boundaries of the masculine space that is "rock'n'roll," but crucially, Lane has constructed herself a role that allows her bandmates to treat her as exempt. The character becomes an

ostensible exception to the sexual politics typical of indie guitar rock by initially performing a cultivated knowledge of the genre and then by remaining sexually unavailable for the bulk of the remainder of the series. Both assuming the role of the band's manager/mother figure and sustaining heterosexual romantic relationships with bandmates represent a particular negotiation of a gendered body within a masculine homosocial space—one that, though reliant on the negation of normative expectations for sexual availability, is complicit with the misogyny and homophobia constitutive of that space.

Presenting an Asian American woman character as a drummer in a rock band opens up opportunities for critique of a genre that remains coded as both white and masculine. While *Gilmore Girls* certainly exploits this and many rock conventions for humor, it does not sustain critiques of rock's racial or gender hierarchies. Instead, the character of Lane Kim is distanced from racialized subjectivities, as Stern and Chung have demonstrated. I argue that rock music plays a significant role in this distancing, as well as in establishing a postfeminist understanding of gender for and through her character. While Lane's race and gender are not denied, the character's agency is constrained by their consistent presentation as superficial qualities that do not substantively affect her lived experiences. In this way, establishing Lane as a postracial and postfeminist character is mutually constitutive with her participation in rock music. The conventions of this participation demand the character's de-racialization and de-gendering while establishing her postracial and postfeminist subjectivity.

By the time Lane begins drumming at the end of season 2, her character has been defined as the negation of two others—first as a foil for Rory, and second in opposition to her mother, Mrs. Kim. Lane's functioning as a narrative contrast for Rory is a strategy of defining both characters, but one that only works because of their similarities. They are the same age, live in

the same town, and grow up attending the same local school and participating in the same town events. They have a similar intellect and sense of humor. Furthermore, they share similar consumer habits, particularly of entertainment and pop culture—though Rory has deeper knowledge about literature, while Lane has deeper knowledge about popular music. The parallels between the two characters allow their storylines to comment on each other, and they create a particularly sharp distinction between each girl's relationship with her mother. While Rory and Lorelai joke together, confide in each other, and make decisions collaboratively, the viewer understands Lane's relationship with Mrs. Kim as explicitly oppositional. At home, Lane is meek, obedient, and deferential to her mother; elsewhere, however, Lane is generally outspoken and enthusiastic, and expresses wry disdain for her mother's expectations and rules.

The character of Mrs. Kim, however, is not only an exceptionally strict parent, but "a stereotypically overbearing and traditional Korean mother."[63] In a filmed 2017 interview with Keiko Agena, Emily Kuroda (who portrayed Mrs. Kim) responds to a question about how she portrayed an immigrant mother without falling into Asian American stereotypes by recounting auditioning for the role. She demonstrates how she approached the role at her audition, reciting a recognizable Mrs. Kim line in a rushed, aggressive, and heavily accented delivery. Kuroda and Agena laugh at this potential Mrs. Kim, a portrayal that seems a far cry from the character's voice and demeanor in the show. According to Kuroda, her initial approach to the character was immediately corrected by Sherman-Palladino to the ostensibly non-stereotypical delivery *Gilmore Girls* viewers would become familiar with. Yet, that Kuroda would initially take this approach, I argue, suggests her recognition that the role is written as a caricature.

[63] Stern, "It Takes a Classless, Heteronormative Utopian Village," 178.

While the character of Lane does indeed—as fans, scholars, and actress Keiko Agena all note—stand out against stereotypical portrayals of Asian Americans, she does so only by embodying the myth of postracialism, in part through her distinction from Mrs. Kim's racialized "caricature of an overprotective, immigrant mother."[64] For Lane, the escape to the postracial, classless logics of Stars Hollow life are an escape from Korea and Koreanness as represented by Mrs. Kim. In the show's first two seasons, the dramatic tension between the two characters centers around Mrs. Kim's efforts to set Lane up with a Korean boy who will eventually become a doctor.

Lane's continual striving to escape the strictures of her home and her mother is a striving for both full participation in the social and cultural life of 21st-century U.S. teens and also the character's own authentic self-expression. From the series' outset, rock music is invoked metonymically to represent these goals. The first time viewers are introduced to Lane is through Rory's words to her as Lane pulls on an oversize tie-dye "Woodstock 99" t-shirt and jean jacket over her other clothes on the way to school: "When are you going to tell your parents that you listen to the evil rock music? You're an American teenager for god's sake." Though the word "normal" is absent, its implication is clear (and rock music is its stand-in). Lane would be a normal American teenager but for her parents holding her back.

Throughout the series, Lane's engagement with rock music is mutually constitutive of her lack of racial difference—what Stern calls the character's ability to "pass as white."[65] It is not so much that Lane is not Korean, but that her being Korean is limited to a set of phenotypical (and to a limited extent cultural) features rendered so insignificant by other characters that they are

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[64] Stern, 179.
[65] Stern, 178.

hardly worth mentioning. For example, when Lane shows a flyer bearing her photo to Lorelai for approval, she remarks, "I photograph so Asian," to which Lorelai responds, "I think Ming Na has that same problem" (6.16). Similarly, Lane reacts to her appearance in Hep Alien's band photos by dubbing herself "the Korean Buddy Holly," which her bandmates struggle to understand (5.12). The superficiality of difference extends to Korean and Korean-American cultural practices (to the limited extent that they are represented in the series).[66] Racial tensions do not exist in Stars Hollow, and the lived experiences of racial and ethnic minorities are certainly not represented in *Gilmore Girls*.[67] Neither Lane nor Mrs. Kim nor the other three people of color living or working in Stars Hollow are shown to experience discrimination from residents or visitors.

Following Chung and Stern, I argue that Lane's de-racialized subjectivity both depends upon and facilitates her participation in rock music. Over the series' first season Lane is shown to have built an enclave for herself within her parents' thoroughly "Korean" home, full of "American teenager" possessions: clothing, magazines, makeup, and most importantly her extensive library of CDs, which she takes pains to keep up-to-date. When viewers meet 15-year-old Lane in the pilot, she has well-developed strategies for living within the restrictions of the Kim household and for undermining those restrictions without attracting suspicion from her mother. Whenever Lane leaves her parents' house, she magically leaves behind any trace of racialized subjectivity. Chung demonstrates that the Kim home is "Korea" within Stars Hollow—a Korea that Lane is constantly trying to escape. The Kim household, and Mrs. Kim in particular, stand in not for Korea itself, but for the *idea* of Korea and "Koreanness" as "a set of

[66] Chung, "Escaping from Korea," 173–8, 182–4.

[67] Stern, "It Takes a Classless, Heteronormative Utopian Village," 178.

ideas, values, and lifestyles that are in direct opposition to the ones denoting or connoting 'Americanness.'"[68] For Lane to "escape Korea" (and ostensibly move beyond a racialized subject position such as that of her mother), she must only live by her own compass outside of her childhood home.

As discussed in chapter 1, Lane finds an avenue for this requisite self-expression and autonomy in "rock'n'roll." From the moment she is introduced, rock music is metonymic for the oppositionality and rebellious desire for independence that are her most salient traits. However, her lying and sneaking around reaches new heights when she joins Hep Alien. Despite the toll she suffers by keeping her drumming hidden from her parents, the character is fulfilled by her participation in the band. Because her actions are no longer defined only by subversion and denial, drumming in a band affords the character positive autonomy—Lane's actions are newly taken up with what she *is* doing, rather than what she is not. Eventually, Lane's participation in Hep Alien precipitates her permanent exit (and temporary exile) from the Kim household. Once Mrs. Kim discovers Lane's drumming in a band, she is unable to reconcile her daughter's lifestyle with her own values. Though the catalyst for Lane's move is a late-night gig (4.11), she is able to successfully set up a home of her own by rooming with her bandmates (4.15).

Just as rock music affords Lane a means of escaping from Korea to the utopia of white American teenhood, so too does her participation in indie guitar rock scenes *depend* on her distance from the site of difference. The whiteness of indie rock has been noted by critics since its emergence as a discernible category in the 1980s. As Hesmondhalgh argues, indie rock cohered as a style in part by "constructing a canon of white, underground rock references" at a time when "many musicians, fans and journalists had increasingly turned to pop and black

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[68] Chung, "Escaping from Korea," 185.

musical traditions, such as electro and hip hop, as fresh sources of inspiration."[69] In the United States specifically, the authenticity of indie rock was constructed contra the popularity of Black dance music, which was equated with "commodification and mass deception."[70] Indie rock's opposition to mainstream aesthetics and institutions was visibly the province of white men. The opposition and concomitant sexual and racial politics of 1980s and 1990s indie (guitar) rock were passed down to the garage rock revival and alternative mainstream that were contemporary to *Gilmore Girls*' production and airing.[71] Lane's participation in Hep Alien hinges on her investment, for example, in knowledge of indie guitar rock's white obscurantist canon.

The point is not that Lane fails to be "Asian enough" or "Korean enough" or a "strong woman." The accuracy of the character's depiction to an imagined ideal is beside the point because, as Edward Said argues, the Orient is to the West "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped define [the West] as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."[72] Were a racialized subjectivity foregrounded in this character, her participation in a rock band would necessitate different story lines—stories that could comment on Stars Hollow's small-town white utopian setting in productive ways. As it is, Lane Kim achieves her autonomy and fulfillment by uncritically and uninhibitedly participating in the power structures that continue to oppress women of color from actually achieving that autonomy in the real world. Rather than critique or even identify these problems, the logic of the series implicitly denies their existence and consequent material realities. Instead, the hegemonic sexual and racial hierarchies that indie guitar rock—not in spite of its anti-mainstream attitudes, but

[69] Hesmondhalgh, "Indie," 38.
[70] Bannister, "Indie Guitar Rock," 88.

[71] Bannister, 92.

[72] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1–2.

because of them—reinscribes are both upheld and minimized, presenting only superficial problems that can be overcome by individuals using talent and affective labor.

Conclusion

Lane's musical values and behaviors clearly align with rockism, the critical disposition underpinning many of her aesthetic evaluations of both music and broader lifestyle factors. This is perhaps most succinctly exemplified when Lane declares herself "a kindred spirit" to the Death to Disco movement and laments that the fervor (laden as it was with racism and homophobia) could be profitably extended to other musical styles and phenomena that "need wiping out": alt country, techno, "phony rappers," and American Idol stars. Here, as in much of the show, Lane's zeal sets her apart from the other characters. Rory listens to Lane's diatribe looking both skeptical and amused, and she responds sardonically: "It's gonna be a bloodbath." Lorelai and Rory both exhibit the same distance from these attitudes when they provide feedback as Lane crafts her "Drummer Seeks Rock Band" ad, a scene in which her listening habits are also juxtaposed with the Gilmores' enjoyment of the Brady Bunch Variety Hour (3.3).

Rockism is often played for humor. Sometimes, this humor manifests in the juxtaposition of Lane's aesthetic commitments with the reactions of other characters (usually Rory and Lorelai) who see her opinions and the actions they engender as extreme. These situations play differently, however, when Lane is with her bandmates, who generally share her attitudes toward music. With this group of characters, the humor is more often situational—as when the group must contend with competing values dictated by, for example, being asked to cover a song they deem beneath them at a paid gig (5.4)—or satirical—as when Zach plays an eight-bar portion of a new song and Gil describes it positively by comparing it to the sounds of five other bands

(6.10). That characters' musical values aligned with rockism are typically rendered funny furthers the series' overall poptimist ethos.

Moreover, rockism's humorous but not critical treatment in the series reveals the limits of poptimism's potential efficacy as a counter. Though the genre-based humor exposes some of the values of rockism for what they are—namely their investment in masculine heteronormativity—neither these instances of humor nor their juxtaposition with the overall more middlebrow poptimist ethos of *Gilmore Girls* does anything to critique rockism's hierarchies, much less formulate alternatives. In fact, the series' poptimism casts rockism as innocuous, one of any number of manifestations of individual taste, its hierarchical values camouflaged by a neutral label ("rock'n'roll") and superficial counter-hegemonic attitudes. James likens poptimism to commercial pop feminism and argues that it "values superficial markers of feminist progress because they obscure patriarchy's retrenchment."[73] In this way, poptimism not only fails to intervene in racist and sexist hierarchies that cause the devaluation of particular aesthetic objects and, more importantly, the bodies and people thought to be associated with them, but it precludes both critique and the formulation of alternatives by covering up the underlying values that cast them as subordinate in the first place.

Not only does *Gilmore Girls* incorporate rockism uncritically, but the series also capitalizes on its hierarchies—aesthetic and otherwise—by reinscribing them. Like any (teen) TV series, *Gilmore Girls* was primarily a commercial undertaking, designed to further its network's profits. The series fell within the WB network's model for appealing to a broad base of advertisers: presenting stories from the perspective of white heteronormative middle-class subjectivities, profiting off the successful inculcation in younger viewers of consumer capitalism

[73] James, "Poptimism and Popular Feminism."

and the exploitative racial and sexual politics on which it relies. This is not to criticize a television show for failing to present a revolutionary text, nor for operating within the bounds of a thoroughly commercial product. Rather, it is to specify the operationalization of genre-based musical meaning within a complex multimedia text and to articulate a more specific conception of feminism the text claims in order to critique the relationship between its musical representations and political claims.

That rockism lives so comfortably within a pop feminist text is not itself surprising. Sarah Banet-Weiser, writing of the much wider circulation of pop feminism in the mid 2010s, warns, "If popular feminism, no matter how commodified or banal, allows for an opening of space and mind to think about broader opposition to structural sexism and racism, popular misogyny performs a similar function, and opens up spaces and opportunities for a more systematic attack on women and women's rights."[74] Furthermore, because feminism is fundamentally threatening to a white patriarchal heteronormative status quo, popular misogyny shows up as insidiously disguised manifestations of more conventional and familiar performances. For Banet-Weiser, this predictable retrenchment and popularity of misogynist cultural expressions in the wake of a pop feminist zeitgeist calls for careful evaluation (though not necessarily abandonment) of the use of familiar media tools for spreading progressive political sentiments. This examination of the musical intertexts and corporatized pop feminism of *Gilmore Girls* suggests a similar need. If poptimism is truly to play a part in subverting the white masculine heteronormativity of rockism by altering the frameworks for researching, teaching, and writing about pop music, scholars and critics alike should be wary of doing so using familiar institutions and tools.

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[74] Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Popular Misogyny: A Zeitgeist," *Culture Digitally* (blog), January 21, 2015, http://culturedigitally.org/2015/01/popular-misogyny-a-zeitgeist/.

Appendix A: List of *Gilmore Girls* Episodes Consulted

Number	Title	Airdate	Director	Writer
1.1	Pilot	October 5, 2000	Lesli Linka Glatter	Amy Sherman-Palladino
1.5	Cinnamon's Wake	November 2, 2000	Michael Katleman	Daniel Palladino
3.3	Application Anxiety	October 8, 2002	Gail Mancuso	Daniel Palladino
3.4	One's Got Class and the Other One Dyes	October 15, 2002	Steve Robman	Daniel Palladino
3.12	Lorelai out of Water	January 28, 2003	Jamie Babbit	Janet Leahy
3.14	Swan Song	February 11, 2003	Chris Long	Daniel Palladino
3.19	Keg! Max!	April 29, 2003	Chris Long	Daniel Palladino
4.4	Chicken or Beef?	October 14, 2003	Chris Long	Jane Espenson
4.7	The Festival of Living Art	November 4, 2003	Chris Long	Daniel Palladino
4.11	In the Clamor and the Clangor	January 27, 2004	Michael Grossman	Sheila R. Lawrence, Janet Leahy
4.15	Scene in a Mall	February 24, 2004	Chris Long	Daniel Palladino
4.18	Tick, Tick, Tick, Boom!	April 20, 2004	Daniel Palladino	Daniel Palladino
4.19	Afterboom	April 27, 2004	Michael Zinberg	Sheila R. Lawrence
4.21	Last Week Fights, This Week Tights	May 11, 2004	Chris Long	Daniel Palladino
5.1	Say Goodby to Daisy Miller	September 21, 2004	Amy Sherman-Palladino	Amy Sherman-Palladino
5.2	A Messenger, Nothing More	September 28, 2004	Daniel Palladino	Daniel Palladino
5.4	Tippecanoe and Taylor, Too	October 12, 2004	Lee Shallat-Chemel	Bill Prady
5.5	We Got Us a Pippi Virgin	October 19, 2004	Stephen Clancy	Daniel Palladino
5.7	You Jump, I Jump, Jack	November 2, 2004	Kenny Ortega	Daniel Palladino
5.8	The Party's Over	November 9, 2004	Eric Laneuville	Amy Sherman-Palladino
5.12	Come Home	February 1, 2005	Kenny Ortega	Jessica Queller
5.18	To Live and Let Diorama	April 19, 2005	Jackson Douglas	Daniel Palladino
5.22	A House is Not a Home	May 17, 2005	Amy Sherman-Palladino	Amy Sherman-Palladino
6.3	The UnGraduate	September 27, 2005	Michael Zinberg	David S. Rosenthal

6.4	Always a Godmother, Never a God	October 4, 2005	Robert Berlinger	Rebecca Rand Kirshner
6.10	He's Slippin' 'Em Bread…Dig?	November 22, 2005	Kenny Ortega	Daniel Palladino
6.16	Bridesmaids Revisited	February 28, 2006	Linda Mendoza	Rebecca Rand Kirshner
6.17	I'm OK, You're OK	April 4, 2006	Lee Shallat-Chemel	Keith Eisner
6.19	I Get a Sidekick out of You	April 18, 2006	Amy Sherman-Palladino	Amy Sherman-Palladino
7.14	Farewell, My Pet	February 13, 2007	Jamie Babbit	Jennie Snyder
7.16	Will You Be My Lorelai Gilmore?	February 27, 2007	David Paymer	Gina Fattore, Gayle Abrams

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