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According to cultivation theory, teenagers are one of the most impressionable groups of people who watch television. Teen girls specifically are groups that are targeted the most. This research looks at the mother-daughter relationships in teen television, specifically *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*. Using feminist criticism, these shows were analyzed to see what messages of modern day females are being sent to teen girls.

The research found that *Gilmore Girls* sets a better construction of the female gender than *Gossip Girl*. Lorelai and Rory on *Gilmore Girls* displayed more traits of being stronger role models than Serena and Lily on *Gossip Girl* because of their work ethic, lack of emphasis on social status and not putting romantic relationships as one of their highest priorities in the lives. Since this show was before *Gossip Girl*, it suggests that as of late teen television has been creating characters that are not as good role models.
Introduction

Teen television gained its prominence in the 1990’s, but the Warner Brothers Television Network (The WB) was the first station that targeted specifically to the teenage demographic (McFarland, 2006). In 2006 it was announced that the channels The United Paramount Network (UPN) and The WB were folding to create the new channel the CBS Warner Brothers network (The CW) (Coyle, 2006). The older channel, The WB and the current television channel, The CW are the only channels that have been known to market specifically to teenagers (Coyle, 2006). This proposal will analyze two popular teen girl shows, *Gilmore Girls* which aired from 2000-2007 and *Gossip Girl* which aired from 2007-2013.

It is important to analyze what kind of material is being shown to people of the impressionable teen age range. According to many cultivation theorists, television has an effect on the viewers (Nacos, 2000). By looking at the mother-daughter relationships of these two popular shows, we can see what types of messages are being shown to teen girls. Using feminist criticism specifically it can be shown what these shows are telling girls about modern day females.

A columnist from the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, Melanie McFarland believes that The CW has recently been getting rid of smart female characters and replacing them with trashier characters to increase sex appeal (2007). *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl* together aired for 13 years on The WB/The CW, so this study can show if these changes in female characters did occur. This study will compare and contrast these two shows to see the differences in their construction of gender.
Purpose of Research

The purpose of this rhetorical analysis is to analyze the mother-daughter relationships of Lorelai and Rory Gilmore on the television show *Gilmore Girls* and Lily and Serena Van Der Woodsen on *Gossip Girl*. Feminist criticism will be used to explore these relationships that a primarily teenage audience is exposed to. Feminist criticism will examine gender issues in the shows and see how they encourage or discourage female oppression. Only female characters will be analyzed in this criticism and analyzing the gender construction of these characters may show what types of role models are shown to teen girls.

Rationale

Cultivation theorists believe that watching a lot of mainstream television will make people believe that it is reality (Nacos, 2000). Teens watch an average of four hours of television a day (Flint, 2012). With that much daily exposure to television, many theorists believe the messages in the shows are bound to influence them. Since the CW is a channel targeted to teen girls, they should make it a priority to show strong female characters for these impressionable teens to admire. Many studies have been done on cultivation theory and analyzing what kinds of messages are being sent to the masses. However, there haven’t been many studies done specifically on the shows on the CW television station. Seeing how characters are portrayed in shows that teenagers watch is important because we need to learn what kind of messages are being sent to them.

Collins et al. (2004) found that teenagers who watched high amounts of sexual behavior on television were more likely to engage in sexual behaviors than teenagers that viewed low amounts of sexual behavior. Studies like these show that television has an effect on the actions of
teenagers. This is why ongoing research is necessary to see what material on television shows are being targeted to teenagers.

**Thesis Questions**

How do the interactions of Lorelai and Rory Gilmore on *Gilmore Girls* differ from Lily and Serena Van Der Woodsen on *Gossip Girl*?

How do the interactions between these two sets of mothers and daughters affect their actions?

Through these interactions of these characters, how is the female gender constructed in each of these shows?

**Socio-Historical Context**

Teen television started in the 1990’s but The WB was the first station that specifically targeted the teenage group (McFarland, 2006). The WB was known for targeting female teenagers with their smart female characters on shows like *Felicity, Dawson’s Creek, Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* and then *Gilmore Girls* (McFarland, 2007).

*Gilmore Girls* first premiered on October 5, 2000 on The WB (“Gilmore Girls”). Over time The WB and The UPN were losing revenue (McFarland, 2006). Instead of folding, they decided to merge to try to increase ratings and gain revenue (McFarland, 2006). In 2006 it was announced that the UPN and the WB were coming together to create the new channel The CW (Coyle, 2006). *Gilmore Girls* was one of the shows that transitioned to The CW when there was this channel switch. *Gilmore Girls* had its finale on May 15th, 2007 on The CW (“Gilmore Girls”).
*Gilmore Girls* is a show that tried to be family oriented with its storylines and themes. In fact it won “Best New Series” at the 3rd Annual Family Television awards (“Gilmore Girls, Malcolm”, 2001). After *Gilmore Girls* was finished, *Gossip Girl* premiered on The CW on September 19th, 2007 (“Gossip Girl”). Although *Gilmore Girls* had plot lines relating to sexuality it was not marketed as a sexual show like *Gossip Girl* was.

*Gossip Girl* was a teen show that was known for its excessive use of sexuality. The Parents Television Council protested the show after advertisements were shown on television suggesting three of the characters were to partake in the sexual act of a threesome (Stanley, 2009). The producers of *Gossip Girl* added this risqué threesome plotline to gain attention after ratings started to drop (Stanley, 2009). The Parents Television Council also had complaints about the show after they started an “OMFG” ad campaign (Stanley, 2009).

*Gossip Girl* premiered on The CW only four months after *Gilmore Girls* had its finale. It’s noticeable to see the changes that The CW wanted to make in its programming. Through analyzing the two shows we can further see if there was difference in the overall tone of these shows. Changes in the female characters could be explained based on the actions of the mothers and daughters.

**Description of the Rhetorical Acts**

*Gilmore Girls* first aired on October 5, 2000 (“Gilmore Girls”). In the pilot episode we learn that Lorelai Gilmore (Lauren Graham) is the single mother of Rory Gilmore (Alexis Bledel). They live in the small town of Stars Hollow, CT. Lorelai is the manager of a local inn and Rory is a smart girl entering a prestigious preparatory school with her hopes set on Harvard. Lorelai is 32 and Rory is 16. This tells the audience that Lorelai had Rory when she was 16.
Teen pregnancy is something that is never encouraged in this show. Lorelai is seen as a strong character because she accepted help from no one and eventually has a successful career. The show deals with the troubles she endured and how she now tries to give her daughter Rory the best life possible. Immediately the audience is shown that they have a very close relationship, much closer than an average mother-daughter relationship.

*Gossip Girl* premiered on September 19, 2007, the year that *Gilmore Girls* ended. In the pilot episode of *Gossip Girl*, the audience is introduced to one of the main characters, Serena Van Der Woodsen (Blake Lively). She is returning from a boarding school in Connecticut to her home in New York City. It is revealed that she is from a very rich, elite family on the Upper East Side. Within the first five minutes of the pilot episode her mother, Lily Van Der Woodsen (Kelly Rutherford) is just becoming aware that her daughter is coming home from boarding school. The fact that she didn’t even know this information shows they have a more distant relationship than other mother-daughter relationship. Lily is a stereotypical extremely rich New Yorker. She doesn’t work and lives off the money from the settlements of her many divorces. Her daughter Serena is the total opposite of Rory from *Gilmore Girls*. Serena has been kicked out of many boarding schools. She left New York City after a sex scandal with her best friend’s boyfriend.

These two television shows were very popular among teenagers of the new millennium. *Gilmore Girls* had seven seasons while *Gossip Girl* had six. Although, they had their popularity in common, the mother-daughter relationships were total opposites. Rory would share almost everything with her mother Lorelai. On the other hand, Serena and her mother Lily had a distant relationship. She didn’t even tell her that she was returning home from boarding school.

These two shows will be interesting to compare and contrast because although they reach the same audience but they send completely different messages. In an article by *The St. Louis*
Post, the reporter said that *Gilmore Girls* had been supplanted by *Gossip Girl* and the main thing that they had in common was their core audience of female teenagers ("Spotlight"). The mothers are polar opposites and this could be the reason why their daughters are the way they are. It will be interesting to analyze these characters using feminist criticism because of their different portrayals of modern day females.

**Literature Review**

According to Lay and Daly (2007), "feminist theory offers a perspective for understanding human behavior in the social environment by centering women and issues that women face in contemporary society" (pg. 49). Using this definition of feminist theory this criticism will analyze Rory and Lorelai Gilmore on *Gilmore Girls* and Serena and Lily Van Der Woodsen on *Gossip Girl*. “Feminist theories attempt to explain differences between men and women and call for centering gender and consideration for how gender differences effect human behavior in the context of historical, political, social, and cultural concerns, as well as oppressions that are gender based.” (Lay and Daley, 2007, p. 50). This sets up the main function of the analysis to see the construction of the female gender displayed in the shows.

Linna’s (2007) study, analyzed single motherhood in *Desperate Housewives, Gilmore Girls* and *Sex and the City*. This study is very similar to this one being proposed and used feminist theory along with agenda setting theory to argue how the media portrays the positives and the negatives of single mother households. The conclusion of this study states that the shows depict positives and negatives of single motherhood. Overall Linna found that these mothers break the stereotypes of roles of mothers that the media created (2007). Linna also showed a good classification for reviewing the series. She broke her data into four groups: negative
representations, positive representations, portrayals of the internal relationship of single mother and child and the portrayal of the external relationships of single mom and the outside world. This is useful in deciding how to break down the critique of *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*.

One main part of Griffin’s (1995) study was analyzing the construction of gender of the title characters in *Thelma and Louise*. Griffin identified the ideograph of power structure to analyze the action of the men throughout the movie and to justify their rash decision in the end of the movie. Sex roles were a main theme of this film. It began with men overpowering the main characters and then they felt the need to express their freewill. The single mothers in *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl* both try to prove themselves and show where they stand in society compared to men. The main idea of Griffin’s (1995) study is to analyze how Thelma and Louise face the oppression against them in society. The critique describes how the majority of their actions counteract the roles of females that are expected from them.

Baxter’s (2009) study analyzed *Sex and the City* from a feminist perspective. In this paper, the term feminine is taken to be constructions of how females are supposed to speak and behave within western culture (pg. 91). Baxter (2009) does make the point that the characters could be considered feminists, “there are also ways in which the program significantly challenges traditional definitions of femininity, moving into the realm of the feminist. Three of the female characters, Carrie, Samantha and Miranda have careers and therefore have independent means of financial support” (pg. 92). Baxter’s analysis supports the idea that people see feminist theory differently. Unfortunately, it can be a biased critique and based on the author’s own opinions. Therefore, Baxter was unable to conclude whether or not she believed *Sex and the City* embraced feminism or not.
Cantor (1990) critiqued fathers in prime-time television but it was done in a way that can relate to analyzing mothers as well. Not surprisingly he found that overall modern women characters were more independent than they were in family programs from the 1950’s and the 1960’s. Mothers and fathers were also seen as equals. However, *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl* both represent single mother households. His study did conclude that shows often send the message that “women are incomplete without a man” (1990, pg. 282). It further goes on to say that “middle class men are kind, gentle, loving and supportive and are therefore worth getting and keeping” (1990, pg. 283). It is relevant to the proposed study to see if *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl* fit his conclusion.

Schwichtenberg’s (1992) study looked at how Madonna used the sexual subjects in her music video as an act of feminism and deconstructing the female gender. There are many sex-related subjects in *Gossip Girl*. During the analysis these subjects will need to be assessed as to how they add or detract to the image of these characters.

O’Brien (2011) qualitative study looked at the effects of television on mother-daughter relationships of different races and social classes. Her study was 200 pages and examined almost all the most popular shows from the 21st century - including the shows *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*. The proposed study however will be specifically on shows that target teen audiences. This represents the type of study that could evolve from this proposed study on *Gossip Girl* and *Gilmore Girls*. Understanding the messages that the shows are sending is the first step in seeing how they affect people.
Critical Methodology

Feminist theory is the criticism used to analyze these two television shows. Both shows are mainly about females and the characters analyzed are both from single-mother households. Many plotlines show their struggles with being females in contemporary society. While there are many similarities, there are also differences between the characters and the shows. Lorelai from *Gilmore Girls* is a strong independent working woman. However Lily from *Gossip Girl* is her opposite. She has been married many times and lives off of the settlements from her divorces. These two opposite mothers will be interesting to analyze using feminist theory to see the differences in the messages that they are sending about modern day females.

According to Foss (2009), a feminist critic approach is a four step process. 1. Select an artifact and formulate a research question. 2. Select a unit of analysis. 3. Analyze the artifact and 4. Write the critical essay.

The artifacts analyzed were the first season of *Gossip Girl* and the first season of *Gilmore Girls*. The first season of each show was analyzed since these seasons develop the foundations for the relationships between the mothers and daughters. The interactions between the mothers and daughter were analyzed along with their actions that happen soon after the interactions. After each show was individually analyzed, the two shows were compared to see the difference between them and how they show the construction of the female gender.

The unit of analysis refers to the interactions between the mothers and daughter. Foss said “in feminist criticism, one should analyze the construction of gender in the artifact studied and explore what the artifact suggests about how the patriarchy is constructed” (2009). The construction of gender will we analyzed based on the interactions between the mothers and daughters and their actions.
The mother-daughter relationship is the main storyline in *Gilmore Girls*. Rory and Lorelai are the main characters so they have many interactions in every episode. Every third episode in season one of *Gilmore Girls* were analyzed. Included were the first episode and the finale and five other episodes through the season. This totaled seven episodes throughout the first season.

It is important to note that unlike *Gilmore Girls* there are many main characters in *Gossip Girl*. Serena and Lily Van der Woodsen were analyzed because they are the mother-daughter pair that has the most interaction. However, the show does not revolve around them like Rory and Lorelai on *Gilmore Girls*. Since seven episodes of *Gilmore Girls* were analyzed, seven episodes of *Gossip Girl* were also analyzed. The pilot episode was analyzed along with six episodes where Lily and Serena have the most airtime.
Analysis

*Gilmore Girls* Analysis

*Gilmore Girls* first premiered on October 5, 2000. In the pilot episode the viewers are introduced to the small New England town of Stars Hollow, Connecticut. Lorelai Gilmore is 32 and lives there with her 16 year old daughter, Rory. Lorelai grew up in Hartford, Connecticut, but once she got pregnant with Rory, she got a job as a maid at The Independence Inn in Stars Hollows. Over the years she worked her way up to being the manager of the inn. She rarely accepts help from others and is constantly trying to prove her independence. Rory is a quiet, studious teenager. In the pilot episode she gains acceptance to a highly esteemed preparatory school named Chilton.

In this episode, pride and lies are two major themes in the interactions between Rory and Lorelai. Lorelai finds out that she can’t afford the tuition to the preparatory school. However, she does not tell Rory this problem. Her friend Sookie suggests that Lorelai asks her parents for the money since they are extremely wealthy. But Lorelai has too much pride to ask her parents for the money. This pattern started when she was 16 didn’t accept their help when she got pregnant. Instead she moved to the town that she currently lives in. Although she resists, she ultimately decides to ask her parents for the money to pay for Rory’s tuition.

Lorelai lies to Rory about where the money is coming from. Rory believes that she received a lot of financial aid and Lorelai can afford the remainder. Rory only finds out Lorelai’s secret about borrowing money from her grandparents after she overhears Lorelai and her grandmother arguing about it. She confronts Lorelai about it and Lorelai tells her that she could handle it and she just didn’t want Rory to worry.
When Rory first meets her future boyfriend Dean, she explains that her name is short for Lorelai and her mother named her after herself. Rory explains that her mother says “Men do it all the time, so why can’t women?” Comments like this show that Lorelai has a feminist streak and wants to break the barriers between men and women.

In the last scene of the episode, the local diner owner Luke jokingly says to Rory “Stop drinking coffee; you’ll end up like your mother.” Rory smiles at her mother and says “Sorry too late.” This shows that Rory sees Lorelai as a role model and someone to aspire to.

In the fourth episode of season one, “The Deer Hunters”, Lorelai becomes confused when Rory is acting strange. Whenever Lorelai suggests doing something, Rory blows her off. Lying comes up again in this episode. However, instead of Lorelai lying in this episode, Rory is the one who lies. Lorelai and Rory both lie to each other to prevent the other one from worrying. In this case Rory is not telling Lorelai that she has been getting bad grades and is really worried about whether or not she can succeed at Chilton.

Lorelai finds out at a parent-teacher meeting that Rory got a D on her first paper at Chilton. Hearing this news she rushes home immediately and states “If Rory got a D then she’s not feeling well and I should be there for that.” Lorelai confronts Rory and tells her that she should have told her. Rory replies and says “I’m sorry. It was too humiliating.” Like Lorelai, she has too much pride to admit her faults. Lorelai reminds Rory “we tell each other everything.” But throughout the season it’s seen that they do not always do this.

For the next seven days, they spend as much time as they can studying. Lorelai quizzes Rory and helps her as if she were taking the test herself. They both oversleep on the day of the exam and Rory arrives late to her exam. The teacher doesn’t let her take it and she throws a tantrum. Lorelai also gets into an argument with the headmaster after she explains that Rory
deserves to take the exam. The headmaster remarks “Well your family sure does like to throw tantrums don’t they?” This is another scene which shows the similarities between Lorelai and Rory.

After they leave the school, Lorelai ask Rory if this school is really for her. She’s worried that she’s stressing herself out too much. She says to Rory “You know, if you wanted to go back to your old school, that would be fine with me.” Overall, Lorelai isn’t concerned with status. Even though it is an elite school, she doesn’t mind if Rory quits it to be happier. Lorelai is also afraid that Rory is going to this school simply to make her happy. Rory reassures her and says “Harvard is my dream, I swear. I’m not ready to give up on Chilton.” She wants to go to a good college for herself, not for Lorelai.

The third episode analyzed is the seventh episode of season one “Kiss and Tell”. In this episode, Rory gets her first kiss and doesn’t tell Lorelai. Again the topic of lying comes up. Rory says she can’t tell Lorelai because “The last time the topic of guys came up, it got really ugly”. This was after Rory had second thoughts about going to Chilton after she started hanging out with Dean and got more situated at her old school.

Lorelai eventually hears this information from Lane’s mother. Lane claims that Lorelai should “Be less busy and keep Rory from running around and kissing boys”. She claims her daughter is a young impressionable girl who doesn’t needs to hear about Rory kissing boys. Unlike Lorelai, Lane’s mom is extremely uptight. Lorelai is a character that is seen as successful and put-together. However, this is one of the instances where her character is questioned and she is not seen as a success.
As soon as Lorelai comprehends this information she declares “I have to go”. This scene is much like when Lorelai find outs that Rory got a D. Whenever, there is a major life event or problem, Lorelai feels like she must get in contact with Rory.

Lorelai doesn’t just come out and tell Rory that Lane’s mother told her about this kiss. Instead she talks to Rory about *General Hospital* and a storyline on the show about someone lying about a kiss. Rory still doesn’t tell Lorelai and claims that she has to leave. This makes Lorelai act a bit bizarre. It’s clear that Lorelai is very uneasy when there’s something that she isn’t talking about with Rory. Lorelai knows that the boy that kissed Rory, Dean, works at the grocery store so she proceeds to go to the store to watch him. Luke sees Lorelai acting weird at the grocery store and tells Luke that this was the boy that kissed Rory. He tells her that she’s being crazy. She asks Luke “Why wouldn’t she tell me?” She is confused because usually they talk about everything. But this is a case where they’re lacking communication.

When Rory gets home Lorelai bluntly says to her “So, kissed any good boys lately?” This bluntness is what is needed because Rory makes it clear that she isn’t in a rush to tell Lorelai. Lorelai wants to convince Rory that she is “cool” with the boy situation. To show this she invites Dean to their movie night. When Rory hears this, she declares “My first date with dean is going to be with my mother? What is wrong with you?” Although Lorelai has good intentions, she doesn’t always know her boundaries as a mother.

The tenth episode of season one is “Forgiveness and Stuff”. Rory and Lorelai are currently fighting because Rory didn’t come home the night before because she fell asleep while reading with Dean. Lorelai believes Rory when she says that they didn’t have sex. But, she is still angry at her for the incident. The major problem was that Lorelai’s mother was there that morning and yelled at Lorelai for letting Rory make the same mistakes that Lorelai did.
Although Rory is not seen as a mistake, Lorelai sees teen pregnancy as something that should be prevented. Lorelai knows Rory, and she knows that Rory did not have sex with Dean. Since there are so many comparisons between Lorelai and Rory, Lorelai is still afraid of Rory making the same mistakes that she did.

When Rory calls Lorelai to tell her that her grandfather has had a heart attack Lorelai instantly forgets about their problems and goes to the hospital to be with Rory. As soon as she arrives she acts like nothing happened between them.

Once they know that the grandfather is okay. Lorelai brings up the fact that Dean visited the house when Rory wasn’t home. Rory again reassured her that nothing happened. Lorelai told her “I know. You just gotta understand the major panic factor that went on there.” Rory swears that nothing like that will ever happen again. Lorelai tells her “Don’t swear. Things happen.” Regardless of the situation Lorelai wants Rory to know that she will always be there to support her.

The next episode analyzed is the thirteenth episode of season one “Concert Interrupts”. In this episode Lorelai, Rory, and Sookie are all planning on going to a Bangles concert. This shows how close their relationship is. Most mothers and daughters would not go to concerts together.

Rory is studying at her house with three of her schoolmates. Louise says “I find you mother fascinating. It’s almost like having a big sister.” They are all amazed that Rory would go to a concert with her mother. When Lorelai sees the girls bonding she gives the tickets to the girls and decides to scalp extra tickets later. Like when Lorelai invites Dean to movie night, this is another time when Lorelai interjects into Rory’s personal life. This time however, Rory is pleased with the offer.
At the concert Madeline and Louise overestimate Lorelai’s coolness and decide to go to a party during the concert. Rory tells them “The band won’t miss you but Lorelai certainly will.” They leave and Rory asks what she should tell her mother. Louise responds and says “Tell her that you’re a really good girl.” Rory does not sink in to the peer pressure that they are putting her under.

Lorelai finds out that two of the girls went to the party and declares “I left with four girls; I’m coming back with four girls.” She then proceeds to go to the address that they gave Rory and finds out exactly where the party is. She sees them and declares “Move your asses! Outside now!”

Overall, Lorelai is seen as a “young” mom. She understands teenagers more than most mothers because she is closer in age to them. However, she knows when she needs to put her foot down and use her role as a mother to look out for the girls. Before Lorelai drags them out of the party, they thought that she was very relaxed and wouldn’t care what they did. Throughout the show Lorelai has to balance being a mother and a friend.

The sixteenth episode of season one is “Star Crossed lover and Other Strangers”. Rory and Dean are celebrating their three month anniversary. Meanwhile Lorelai goes to dinner with her parents and her mother ends up inviting a man that she’s trying to set up with Lorelai. Her mother reminds her “Your daughter is celebrating her 3-month anniversary. When is the last time you had a relationship that lasted that long?” At first she gives it a chance. Having her relationship status be compared to her sixteen year old daughter’s clearly made her insecure. She is completely uninterested in the guy and decides to sneak out of a window to leave the dinner. This is a bit of a childish move compared to just telling her mother that she wasn’t interested in the man.
Dean tells Rory that he loves her and she doesn’t say anything back. Instead she says “This is something that I need to think about.” Rory tries to defend herself, “Saying I love you means a lot. Think about it from my point of view, I mean my mom and our life…I mean my Mom said she loves my Dad and…..” Dean interrupts her and says “You don’t get pregnant by saying I love you.” They end their conversation with Dean still upset.

Rory is clearly affected by her mother’s actions when she was 16. She’s now afraid to let others in after Lorelai’s life changed so much when she that age. The episode ends with Rory telling Lorelai that she and Dean broke up. She might have been taking the easy way out and ended the relationship instead of letting it get more serious.

The finale episode of season one of Gilmore Girls is episode twenty-one ‘”Love, Daises and Troubadours”. Although major things happen in this episode, there are not many interactions between Rory and Lorelai until the last scene.

Rory decides that she might want to get back together with Dean after they break up. Instead of talking to him directly, she instead goes to areas where he would be and observes him. Since she previously had a fear of commitment, she might also have a fear of rejection.

Lorelai has had a good relationship with Max. Max however gets jealous of her friend Luke. They get into a huge argument and Max announces that the only way to stop all these little fights would be to declare that they are serious and get married. Lorelai freaks out and says “A proposal should be magical, not just a way to end a fight.”

Big things happen in the lives of Lorelai and Rory at the end of this episode. Max proposes to Lorelai much more seriously a second time and she contemplates accepting it. Rory and Dean get back together. The final scene of the season shows Rory and Lorelai running to each other throughout the town square. At the same time, they shout to each other “I have so
much to tell.” They are each other’s most important people in their lives. The last scene shows that above everyone else, they need to speak to each other.

Gossip Girl Analysis

The pilot episode of Gossip Girl opens with Serena Van Der Woodsen getting off a train at Grand Central. She is returning from a year at boarding school back to her home on the Upper East Side of New York City. The first problem with the mother-daughter relationship of Serena Van Der Woodsen and her mother Lily Van Der Woodsen is their lack of communication. Lily is surprised along with the rest of her acquaintances when she shows up at a party and announces that she’s back in town.

Immediately Serena asks her mother “Where is he?” She’s referring to her brother Eric who we later find out attempted suicide and is now in a hospital. At first Lily gives her a dumb expression pretending not to know what she is talking about. Serena goes on asking and finally Lily says “We don’t need to talk about that right now.”

Most of their interactions in this first episode are not very deep. One scene Lily says to Serena “Guess what? I got a dress for you for Blair’s party”. Serena then proceeds to lie to her mother and says she can’t go to that party because she has a date with someone. The real problem is that she and Blair are fighting. But this is one of the many things that they do not talk about. To Lily, superficial things like dresses are ways to bond. Since they do not talk things out, she instead will buy gifts. Serena does end up asking Dan Humphrey out so it’s not a total lie that she couldn’t go to the party because of a date.

Later Lily and Serena are fighting because Lily doesn’t want Eric to leave the hospital yet. No one knows about his condition and instead she tells people that Eric’s visiting their Aunt
Carroll in Miami. Serena criticizes her mother because she has been lying to people about Eric. Lily replies “As much as I’m glad that you’re home, you have no idea what has been going on recently.” Perhaps Serena shouldn’t be so harsh on her mother. After all, she did leave town suddenly without explanation as to why. However, instead of talking further, that’s how the conversation ends. This pilot episode shows how Lily and Serena do not express themselves to each other.

“The Wild Brunch” is the second episode of season one. Serena doesn’t want to go to a brunch with Lily and other elite families. Lily asks her, “Why are you being like this? You love parties. This is very unlike you.” Serena responds and tells her “Maybe you don’t know what I’m really like.” Lily goes on and says “Well please tell me.” Then there’s silence.

Lily continues to push questions asking Serena about her personal life. Serena doesn’t want to respond to any of them. “I know how hard it is for you to be back, but the more you hide yourself away. The more people think you have something to hide.” This is very hypocritical of her and Serena reminds her that she is lying to people about Eric being in the hospital. This is a scene that shows that Serena and Lily are similar to each other. They both are closed off. However Lily is the one asking questions about Serena’s life and is putting the effort in to build their relationship.

Lily goes behind Serena’s back to talk to Dan’s father, Rufus. She explains that Serena is finally back and doing well and “She doesn’t need a new boy influencing her and distracting her from her needs.” It’s the revealed that Lily and Rufus once dated. It is unknown if Lily talks to Rufus because she misses him or if just disapproves of Dan and doesn’t want them to date.

Lily tries to get Serena to go to the brunch again. Serena says she can’t because she already promised Dan that they would eat together. Lily asks her, “Serena, what do I have to do
to get you to go to that brunch?” The screen then switches to Dan and Serena at the brunch together. This suggests that Serena would only go if Dan was allowed to as well. Lily could have put her foot down and forced Serena to go. At least she tried to comprise with Serena and allowed Dan to go.

The third episode of season one is “Poison Ivy”. Serena did not sleep at home the night before because she was at the hospital with her brother Eric. Lily asks Serena “Why do you even stay at Eric’s? He’s just sleeping”. Serena asks, “Do you have one maternal bone in your body?” Lily tries to justify herself by explaining “well it’s not like he knows you’re there while his eyes are closed.” Overall though, Lily does not act very motherly in these beginning episodes.

It’s “Ivy Week” at Serena’s preparatory school. Serena tells her mother “I just want to impress that Brown rep.” Lily is delighted to hear this and exclaims, “I’m so thrilled to hear that’s still your plan. To be honest I wasn’t sure if your mind was still on college. How are things with Dan by the way?” Although Lily is very obsessed with image and making sure that Serena attends a good college, she also expresses interest in Serena’s love life. However, it is suggested that she doesn’t like Dan and she wants them to break up.

At a dinner with Ivy League representatives, Serena’s “friend” Blair announces that Serena is actually at the hospital instead of Eric. This is false information and Serena has to address everyone about it. But first Lily says to Serena “Whatever you are doing, think about whom is standing in this room right now.” Lily is referencing the facts that there are many people representing colleges that could accept or decline her applications. This shows that Lily is looking out for Serena’s future. It might just be that she also doesn’t want to lose the family’s status.
Afterwards Lily asks Serena, “Why is Blair outing you for a problem that you don’t have? You don’t, do you?” Serena is upset that she would ask her that. Lily says “Well it’s not like we have some free, open relationship.” Serena asks if that is her fault. Lily simply says “Look. What happened to Eric put a huge strain on our family. But we are still a family.” In this scene it is actually acknowledged that they are lacking communication. Lily’s statement suggests that despite their problems they still need to try their best to be there for each other.

The next episode of *Gossip Girl* analyzed is episode nine of season one, “Blair Waldorf Must Pie”. After a fight with Blair, Serena gets her and her family uninvited to Thanksgiving dinner. Lily decides that she can take things into her own hands. Her idea of this is going to Chinatown and buying food. She says “I’m just trying to provide my family with a home cooked meal”. It’s much more unconventional than what other mothers would do.

Serena’s boyfriend, Dan Humphrey, invites Serena and her family to his family’s Thanksgiving dinner. However, Dan and Serena do not know that Lily and Dan’s father, Rufus, used to date. Instead of telling Serena this is why she doesn’t want to go, she instead says she “doesn’t want to impose.” Dan convinces Lily not to spend Thanksgiving alone. She calls Rufus to remind him that the kids do not know about their past relationship but she looks forwarding to see him. Even though, Serena and Dan are dating, Lily still suggests that she still has an interest in Rufus.

At dinner it is revealed that Lily and Rufus dated. Serena leaves with Dan, Eric and Dan’s sister Jenny to a diner. Serena exclaims, “Mom is such a hypocrite. All these years she’s been riding me about my behavior”. Eric interrupts and says “She’s just mad at you for being her”. Since Lily is frustrated with the relationship that she had with Rufus, she takes it out on Serena. She never discusses all this information with Serena.
Lily then joins the kids at the diner. Everyone leaves except for Lily, Serena and Eric. This would be a time where the family should discuss what just happened. Instead they all pretend that things are normal and don’t discuss anything pertaining to the events that just happened.

In the tenth episode of season one, “Hi Society”, Lily is upset after Serena chooses not to go to her cotillion ball that Lily is organizing. She is annoyed with Serena but she does not force her to go. This could have been a sign that she was trying to respect Serena and allow her to make her own decisions.

However, Lily’s mother, Cecilia, tells her that the doctors may have found something in her lungs and she may not have much time left. The one thing she wants is to see her granddaughter, Serena, go to cotillion. Without an explanation to Serena, Lily simply tells her that she has to go now. If Serena knew the information about her grandmother she would have gone without any complaint about it. But like most things in their relationship, the grandmother’s illness is kept a secret and is not discussed.

After Cecilia disapproves of Serena’s presentation, Lily changes it behind her back. Serena finds out and to “get back” at her mother, she changes it to an inappropriate speech that embarrasses her family. Lily confronts Serena about it and they erupt into a huge fight. Serena says “I would actually accept my kids for who they are, and I would make damn sure that they knew it”. Serena does not understand why her mother is just deciding things for her. Lily is not explaining that she is making these decisions because of her sick mother. She really does have her family’s interests at heart, but she doesn’t explain herself so it makes sense to Serena.

Dan was not invited to Cotillion because Cecilia did not want him there. Dan was never fully accepted by Serena’s family because of his lack of wealth. Lily also didn’t approve of him
because of her past relationship with his father. Despite this Lily goes to Brooklyn to tell Dan to come to the cotillion. Even though Cecilia doesn’t want him there, she knows Serena does. Later Lily sees Dan and Serena dancing and she smiles to herself. She knows that she did the right thing and did what Serena wanted.

“School Lies” is episode twelve of season one. Bart Bass has proposed to Lily and she is deciding whether or not to accept his proposal. She goes to tell Rufus that she is going to marry Bart and wants him to find out through her, not their kids. Rufus tells her that he’s still in love with her and she shouldn’t get married. She decides to give Rufus a chance even though their kids are dating.

Serena and Lily are talking while Lily is packing. Lily tells Serena that she is going for a spa trip for the weekend. Yet another lie that she tells Serena. What she was really planning on doing was going away with Rufus for the weekend. Serena later sees that Lily’s phone is going off and it’s from Rufus. “You can’t…” she says to her mother. Lily responds “listen I can’t base my personal life on you preferences.” Serena reminds her that she is dating Rufus’s son. “You can’t do this to me mom. I know we’re young but Dan is the single most important thing in my life right now”

Lily ends up accepting Bart’s proposal. She does not explain to Rufus that the reason she isn’t with him is because Serena asked her not to. It does show that she puts her children above her own wants. However, her first instinct was that to be with Rufus even though she knew Serena would not approve.

In this episode Serena and Dan got in trouble with other students after someone breaks into the school to have a pool party. They all agree not to say anything and no one will get in trouble. Dan however is concerned because he is on scholarship and is worried about getting
expelled. After Serena’s conversation with her mother she decides to confess to the headmaster of the school that she was actually the one who broke in. Since she told Lily that Dan was one of the most important people to her, she decided she really needed to protect him.

Episode seventeen of season one of Gossip Girl is “Woman on the Verge”. After Serena’s old friend, Georgina comes back to town; Serena goes back to her old partying lifestyle. Blair and her friends are taking care of Serena after she has a bad night which involves drugs and alcohol.

Blair’s housekeeper, Dorotta, calls Lily. She tells her, “I know it’s not my place to say, but Serena is back to her old ways. I think you should be worried.” Lily could have talked to Serena about it. But instead her first thought was to look through Serena’s room. While doing this she finds a flash drive in Serena’s dresser. Lily starts to watch a video on it. It begins with Serena and a boy in bed. She watches some of it but then closes the laptop and jumps to the conclusion that it must be a sex tape. If Lily talked to her she would have known that it was a video of the boy overdosing. Georgina is holding this video over Serena’s head because even though she called 911, she didn’t stay to make sure that the boy was okay. He died from his overdose and this is why Serena is going through something and dealing with it by drinking and doing drugs.

Lily confronts Serena about the video. She tells her “I always knew that you had a wild side. But look at what you’ve become. I thought we were past this.” One positive of this statement is that she uses “we” suggesting that she is trying to stand by Serena.

Blair tells Lily that it’s not what she thinks and she needs to talk to Serena. Lily leaves her own rehearsal dinner to go find Serena. She tells her fiancé, “I’m sorry I can’t tell you. This is between me and my daughter.” Lily ends up taking Serena to see the family of the boy who
died. Even though it wasn’t Serena’s fault, she knows that Serena needs to talk to them to forgive herself. Serena asks her “How can I talk to them?” Lily replies “I’ll be right by your side.” After talking with the family Lily apologizes to Serena and says “I’m sorry I doubted you.” She is willing to admit her mistakes. She still wants to be there for Serena for the good and bad. The only reason why she was so harsh with her before was because she was disappointed in her decisions after she changed her ways after returning to the city.

**Interpretation**

Lorelai and Rory in *Gilmore Girls* have much more interactions than Lily and Serena in *Gossip Girl*. One explanation could be that Lorelai and Rory have a closer relationship. This could be because the shows have different focuses. After all, Lorelai and Rory are the main characters in *Gilmore Girls*. On *Gossip Girl* there are several main characters but mostly the show is about six teenagers. The parents have major roles compared to other teen shows, but they are still secondary characters.

Both shows have examples of how the actions of the characters are influenced by the interactions of the mother-daughters. At some point in the first season of each of these shows there are scenes where the mother/daughter is thinking about their mother/daughter counterpart while making decisions. Overall, Lorelai in *Gilmore Girls* thinks about her daughter more while making decisions compared to Lily in *Gossip Girl*. Throughout the season, Lily fluctuates in putting herself or Serena first. When Lily is interested in Rufus (Serena’s boyfriend’s father), she knows that it would hurt Serena, but she does it anyways. Serena has to beg Lily to not go away with him. In *Gilmore Girls* there isn’t a scene (in the episodes analyzed) when Lorelai puts her wants over Rory wants to that extent.
Rory also lets her interactions affect her actions more than Serena’s actions based on her interactions with her mother. Throughout season one of Gossip Girl Lily and Serena are building up a relationship again. Lily comments “It’s not like we have some free open relationship,” (“Poisson Ivy”). In Gilmore Girls Lorelai says “We tell each other everything,” (“Kiss and Tell”). In the episode “Forgiveness and Stuff” Rory is trying to win back her relationship with her mother after they get into a huge fight. Although she doesn’t think she did anything wrong, she still apologizes to her mother because she wants them to be close again. In Gossip Girl, Serena never tries too hard to get closer to her mother. Lily puts in the effort like in “The Wild Brunch”, but Serena usually just ignores it. Overall, Rory cares more about her mother’s opinion than Serena.

Comparison of Construction of Gender in Gilmore Girls and Gossip Girl

Family

Both shows send the message that families are important to females. In both mother-daughter relationships, family is a big factor. From the first episode of Gilmore Girls, it is emphasized how close Rory and Lorelai are and how important family is to each other. Rory says that Lorelai is her “best friend” (“Concert Interrupts”). In Gossip Girl the show starts off with Serena questioning if Lily has “one maternal bone” in her body (“Poison Ivy”). However, by the end of the season Serena is asking for her mother’s help with one of the worst moments of her life.

Both of the mothers overall also put their daughters’ wants and needs above their own. In Gossip Girl Lily decides to stop seeing Rufus because Serena asked her not to (“School Lies”).
Before their conversation, Lily decided that she was going to pick Rufus over Bart. At first she says she isn’t going to base her life around Serena’s preferences. But in the end she does that exact thing and does not go away with Rufus. In *Gilmore Girls*, Lorelai does not want to go to her parents. She never asks them for help. But she does because she knows it’s the only way she can afford Rory’s tuition.

Another interesting aspect of the theses shows is that Rory and Serena have both been compared to their mothers. When Serena finds out that Lily once dated Rufus she calls her mother a hypocrite because she always chasing boys. Her brother comments that it’s because Serena is like her. (“Blair Waldorf Must Pie”). After Rory doesn’t come home after falling asleep with Dean, Lorelai and Lorelai’s mother are terrified that Rory is going to end up like Lorelai and get pregnant at sixteen (“Forgiveness and Stuff”).

Honesty

Honesty is a quality that is not seen much in the construction of the female gender in *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*. Lorelai, Rory, Lily and Serena all lie to each other at least once in the episodes analyzed. These characters lie when they think that the other person would worry about them. However, it is important to note that in every case, the truth eventually comes out and the character apologizes for doing it.

On *Gossip Girl*, Serena lies to her mother about being with the boy when he overdoses (“Woman on the Verge”). She was afraid of what her mother would think of her if she found out. Lily lies to Serena when she finds out that her mother is sick (“Hi Society”). She doesn’t feel that Serena should worry about this.
On *Gilmore Girls*, Rory lies to Lorelai when she isn’t doing well in school (“The Deer Hunters”). She doesn’t want Lorelai to worry after she put so much time and effort getting into the school itself. Lorelai lies to Rory about how they are paying for the school (“Pilot”). She thinks that it is her motherly duty to worry about the money instead of her daughter.

**Pride**

Both shows emphasize that modern day females have a great deal of pride. On *Gossip Girl*, Lily’s pride is the reason why no one knows that her son is in the hospital after attempting suicide (“Pilot”). When Georgina is blackmauling Serena with the video tape she goes back to her partying ways (“Women on the Verge”). It’s her way of dealing with her guilt. She has too much pride to discuss her problems with other people. She doesn’t want people to be disappointed in her. This is why she left New York City in the first place. She didn’t want people to know about the sex scandal with Nate.

On *Gilmore Girls* Lorelai does not like to accept help from others because of her pride. When she accepts money for Rory’s school she reminds her parents, “You know I never ask for help,” (Pilot). Rory’s pride gets in the way of her asking for help after she isn’t doing well at Chilton “The Deer Hunters.” She doesn’t want anyone to think that she can’t handle the school and its pressure.

**Social Status**

Social status is seen as necessary for a female in *Gossip Girl*. In *Gilmore Girls* social status is not an emphasized aspect of life. Lorelai runs away from her life of status and money status in *Gilmore Girls*. Lily on the other hand runs towards it. Getting engaged to Bart when she
is still interested in Rufus is an example of how she doesn’t want to lose her high status in society. Status in society is something that Lily feels is necessary. The show references her countless marriages many times although it is never said how many times she is married. It is assumed that they were not all for love, but rather for protection and wealth.

When college is discussed Lily is thrilled to hear that Serena is planning on going to her alma-mater, Brown (“Poison Ivy”). She states that she was “afraid” college wasn’t on Serena’s mind. Lorelai never went to college so it’s a bit surprising that Rory wants to go. She is worried that Rory is only trying to go to Harvard to please her (“The Deer Hunters”).

It is also important to note that in *Gossip Girl*, Dan is not accepted by members of Serena’s family including Lily. This is because he lives in Brooklyn and is not from a wealthy member of the Upper East Side.

**Romantic Relationships**

*Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girls* both show that men are a big aspect of the lives of females. Although in *Gilmore Girls* Rory and Lorelai are both are very successful without males in their lives. Lorelai did not marry Rory’s father which shows that she did not need the help of a man to raise her daughter. Rory did not start dating until she was 16. She and Dean also break up throughout season one so it seems like she does not need to be in a relationship.

However, the episodes examined also show that males do take up a lot of their conversation. The last scene of the season is about Rory telling Lorelai that she and Dean are back together and Lorelai telling Rory that Max proposed.

Lily in *Gossip Girl* is a character that never seems to be single. She ends up marrying Bart Bass not for love, but for security. This is not a healthy message to send to viewers. Serena
also tells Lily that Dan is the most important thing in her life and that was why Lily couldn’t be with his father (“School Lies”). This sends the message that her life revolves around males. In *Gilmore Girls*, Rory and Lorelai are more independent.

The sex lives of the teenage girls are quite different. The most “scandalous” thing that Rory does in *Gilmore Girls* is fall asleep with her boyfriend while reading (“Kiss and Tell”). Serena on the other hand leaves town because she slept with her best friend’s boyfriend (“Pilot”). Both characters are the same age in these seasons, yet their actions are quite different. Rory’s decisions regarding sex set a better example for teenagers to watch.

**Work Ethic**

Lorelai and Rory have a much stronger work ethic in *Gilmore Girls* than Lily and Serena in *Gossip Girl*. Although in “School Lies” Serena mentions that her “grades are up,” she’s never actually seen doing work. Lily is also never seen as having a job. It is never mentioned that she does work. It is assumed that she just lives off of her inheritance and the money from past marriages.

Many scenes in *Gilmore Girls* take place with Lorelai working at the Inn. Rory is also seen at her preparatory school, Chilton. At home she is seen doing homework in many scenes. Overall, it is emphasized that both women needed to work hard to get to where they were in life. In *Gossip Girl* wealth is handed to them.
Discussion

Although there are faults in all the characters, the mother-daughter relationship of Lorelai and Rory on *Gilmore Girls* sets a better construction of the female gender than Lily and Serena on *Gossip Girl*. Lorelai and Rory set stronger role models because of their work ethic, lack of emphasis on social status and not putting romantic relationships as one of their highest priorities in the lives. Overall Lorelai and Rory on *Gilmore Girls* show more independence than Lily and Serena on *Gossip Girl*. Since *Gossip Girl* was on the air after *Gilmore Girls* it is suggested that teen television, specifically on the CW, has been setting a worse example of females to the young female teenage audience.

Only seven episodes of each show were analyzed. There were many more interactions throughout the season of the mother-daughters that were not analyzed. If all the episodes of the first season of each show were analyzed then there is a possibility that the results may have been different.

In future research, more shows should be analyzed to see how females are being presented to teen audiences. A series of shows could be analyzed from multiple seasons of the CW to see how the messages on teen television are changing. The next step for this research would be a qualitative study to see how these shows are affecting teenagers.
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