

Season 1, Episode 16: *Gilmore Girls* x Normporn

SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor, Karen Tongson

[*Material Girls* Theme plays: “Shopping Mall” by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]

Hannah McGregor 0:29

Hello and welcome to *Material Girls*, a pop culture podcast that uses critical theory to understand the zeitgeist. I’m Hannah McGregor.

Marcelle Kosman 0:39

And I’m Marcelle Kosman. And this week we have a brilliant guest joining us. Karen Tongson is professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies, English, and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. She is the author of *Why Karen Carpenter Matters* and *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*. She also co-hosts the podcasts *Waiting to X-Hale* and *The Gaymazing Race*. Her newest book, *Normporn: Queer Viewers and the TV that Suits Us*, came out in November 2023 with NYU press and is available now.

Hannah McGregor 1:17

Karen, Welcome.

Marcelle Kosman 1:18

Welcome, Karen.

Karen Tongson 1:19

Thanks for having me, everybody. I’m so glad to get a chance to chat with you both.

Marcelle Kosman 1:24

Thank you for being here.

Hannah McGregor 1:25

I'm really excited to talk about *Gilmore Girls* for a variety of reasons, including my deep emotional attachment to it, and also how much I like watching Marcelle struggle to engage when she hasn't watched the thing that we're talking about. But before we dive into *Gilmore Girls*, I want us to just warm up a little bit. Normporn is in part about the self-soothing watching habits of queers. So I want to know what everybody's watching to self-soothe right now. Karen, what's your current self-soothing TV watching?

Karen Tongson 1:58

You know, it's funny because one of the things—spoiler alert—about the book is that I make a point about when I think normporn ends as a sub genre. And so when I recently faced a moment of grief and despair, I was sort of like, “What am I going to watch? Oh, no. What's left?” And to tell you the truth, it's the entire the *Traitors* franchise from the US to the UK to Australia. It was the only thing that absorbed me, other than watching the Australian Open for some reason, which was sort of soothing with its timed grunts and ball bouncing. *The Traitors*, Alan Cumming's over-the-topness, everything that's actually the opposite of what I described normporn as, became the thing that gripped me and I'm very sad that I can't get a hold of like the British Season Two yet, because I'm terrible at VPNs.

Hannah McGregor 2:59

Well, if you want me to help you pirate some TV, just let me know, I'm really good at stealing.

Karen Tongson 3:03

For sure. [Marcelle laughs] Give me more *Traitors*!

Hannah McGregor 3:06

Great. Marcelle, you've been sick. You've been a sickie. What are you watching?

Marcelle Kosman 3:10

Well, it's probably not for comfort. I just finished watching the latest season of *True Detective* which I really enjoyed. But that's not a comfort,

that's not comforting. It's very stressful. The comfort watch is that I'm rewatching *The Bear* with my partner, who's never seen it. And it's allowing me to actually understand what is going on [Hannah laughs] because I watched the entire first two seasons being like, I don't know what's going on, but I'm really into these characters. Why are they doing this? Why is there—why do they have so many cans of tomato sauce on the floor? I don't understand.

Hannah McGregor 3:45

[Laughs] So you're really able to dig into the tomato-sauce-based plot twist.

Marcelle Kosman 3:48

Love to figure out what's going on vis-a-vis tomato sauce.

Hannah McGregor 3:53

Man, Marcelle, you love stressful TV.

Marcelle Kosman 3:55

I know. I don't know why.

Hannah McGregor 3:57

I'm just rewatching old seasons of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The perfect comfort watching. Nothing has ever been so artificial and self-contained in the world. Nothing has ever been so simultaneously pleasing and yet profoundly low-stakes.

[Upbeat musical interlude plays]

Marcelle Kosman 4:15

In our first segment, "Why this, why now?" we ask the materialist question: what are or were the historical, ideological, and material conditions for our objective study to become zeitgeisty?

Hannah McGregor 4:28

And as I've already alluded to, our object of study today is *Gilmore Girls*.

So let's start by just talking about our collective relationships to this show, and Karen, I want you to go first. When did you first watch *Gilmore Girls*; how often do you rewatch *Gilmore Girls*; where does this show live in your heart?

Karen Tongson 4:45

I didn't start watching it until probably—I think midway through its run, when both an encounter with Laura Kipnis and becoming friends with my dear, dear friend Jennifer Doyle, who lives here in Los Angeles, both of whom are theorists, both of whom are theorists of harassment, shockingly, both had a real attachment to the show. Laura Kipnis mentioned it at a dinner once when she was visiting for a talk at USC. And Jennifer just really loved the show, and I am aligned with a lot of her tastes in other aspects of pop culture. So I just started watching it, and I became hooked, and then suddenly—it was still back in the DVD days, I had to get a hold of all of the DVDs of the previous seasons, because I was like, “Wait, what's going on?” Because I believe I entered into the show right when Luke and Lorelai were starting to get together?

Hannah McGregor 5:40

Oh, you need multiple seasons of sexual tension—

Karen Tongson 5:44

Exactly.

Hannah McGregor 5:45

—in that relationship.

Karen Tongson 5:46

So I was in media res, right, it was really like popping in the middle, and then having to go back and acquire the full texture and emotional feel of what was happening there. So that's how I first discovered it. It was through recommendations from critical theorists.

Hannah McGregor 6:05

I love that. How appropriate. **[Laughs]** I watched it when it first came out,

and I was almost the same age as Rory when the show launched. I'm right at that same age demographic, and I watched it from season one. I think I watched maybe the first two seasons live as they were airing. And the context for my viewing was that my mother, to whom I was extremely close, was dying of cancer, and then died during that time. And I have a very vivid memory of watching an episode of *Gilmore Girls* with her and her turning to me and saying, "Do you wish our relationship was more like this?" And me being like, "What a hard question. What an unanswerable question for you to pose to me now."

But I didn't make it beyond the first couple of seasons, I think in part because when you're in high school, it was really hard to follow serialized TV, because you had to make a commitment to be at a certain place at a certain time to watch the next episode and that was just something I was not prepared to do at the age of 17. But I revisited it in my undergrad, and that's when I sort of found my way back to it and watched it through on DVD, as one did at the time. You know, I have probably rewatched it three or four times all the way through in the years since, with some selective season skipping at times, depending on how I feel about the various boyfriends. **[Marcelle laughs]** But Marcelle, you missed it entirely, didn't you?

Marcelle Kosman 7:45

I did, I did. So I want to preface this by saying that I am here enthusiastically to play the role of "audience who has never seen the show" surrogate. So if you are listening and you're like, "I don't know that show; I've never watched it." I'm here with you man; I'm gonna ask all those hard hitting questions like "Who?" and "Why?" "Wait, what?" **[Everyone laughs]** The main reason why I missed it—I missed it by choice. I remember it being quite popular. Well, I should say I remember it being quite popular among the DVD-watchers when I was in undergrad because I didn't have cable, so I couldn't watch it when it was coming out the first time.

But when I tried to give it a go, I remember learning that the premise was this very, very close to mother and daughter. And for context, my mom and

I have over the years been extremely, extremely close at various times, and she was a single mom for most of my life, and I also grew up very poor. And so trying to watch the show was really hard for me because they were just so wealthy. **[Laughs]** And I was like, “Wow, my relationship with my mom would probably be a lot more fun if we had disposable income.” And so I was really turned off from it. I think I’m a lot less bitchy about shows that I don’t get into now than I was at the time. So I really made a choice to just not involve myself in it even though it was very popular because of, I don’t know, a lukewarm class politics, I guess? Maybe? Real lukewarm, though, certainly didn’t translate to shows that I did watch. Do you know what I mean?

Karen Tongson 9:36

Well, can I just say that they tried to have the class politics both ways, right? Because Lorelai herself was a single mom, purportedly of the service working classes, who worked at an inn at a desk and didn’t have money, but then she undertakes this project of pseudo-repair with her family, her very wealthy patrician family, in order to put her daughter through school. So presumably all the fun that Lorelai created was not born of wealth, and so that was organic fun somehow.

Marcelle Kosman 10:12

Aw, but her house was so big.

Karen Tongson 10:13

Yeah, right? So there’s a lot of magical thinking around that stuff. And also I should say that my mom was 18 when she had me, so I have a very young mom as well. And my mother also started watching the series, and in much the same way that there was tremendous discomfort around when she would put the *Joy Luck Club* on every time she wanted to talk to me about something **[Marcelle and Hannah laugh]**—I call it being “Joy Luck-ed,” honestly. But with *Gilmore Girls*, she was the one who said, “I wish our relationship was more like this.” And I was like, “Well, there are a lot of reasons that it’s not.” And I’ll just leave it at that. **[Laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 10:56

Okay. So, for the Marcelles who are listening right now, Karen, can you give us a two-three sentence summary of what the *Gilmore Girls* is before I dive into some historical context?

Karen Tongson 11:10

Sure. Mother-daughter pair living in a small town in Connecticut, a charming town filled with oddballs. Basically, they have a great time. They drink a lot of coffee, they fast talk, they're very, very close. The mom is only 16 years older than the daughter. And the series launches with precisely this problem: the gifted daughter needs the funds to attend fancy prep school so she could achieve her dream of going to Harvard eventually. And this reopens the relationship between Lorelai Gilmore, the mom, and Rory, named after her, so is Lorelai the Second, essentially. So it reopens the relationship with the patrician, older parents with whom she has been estranged essentially, since she left and went to the small town of Stars Hollow and had Rory and raised her on her own. And that's my briefest summary of how *Gilmore Girls* is constructed.

Marcelle Kosman 12:04

Very impressed.

Hannah McGregor 12:07

Okay, so this is the segment where we talk about the historical conditions of our object of study's production. But I want us to save a lot of our conversation for the next segment where we're going to dig into the concept of normporn. So I'm going to keep this on the short side. Here are a few fun facts about *Gilmore Girls*.

Marcelle Kosman 12:27

[Whispers] I love fun facts.

Hannah McGregor 12:29

It ran from 2000 to 2007 on the WB, which turned into the CW in 2006. So that last season was technically on the CW, but the CW kind of was also the same thing as the WB. I got really bored reading about network

relationships, but they're there. And then it returned in 2016 for the miniseries *A Year in the Life*, which followed up on the characters nine years later. It was created by Amy Sherman-Palladino, who interestingly got her start as a staff writer on *Roseanne*.

Marcelle Kosman 13:02

I loved *Roseanne*, just saying.

Hannah McGregor 13:04

Yeah, so there's some interesting history of her writing, supposedly, comedy about working-class families. And then later on as creator of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, she became the first woman to win a Primetime Emmy Award for comedy writing and for directing.

Marcelle Kosman 13:21

I also love *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. Should I try watching *Gilmore Girls*?

Karen Tongson 13:25

Yes, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 13:25

Yeah, you should. **[Marcelle laughs]** The lore of *Gilmore Girls* is that the premise, a show about a mother and daughter who are also best friends, was a last ditch attempt to get the network interested when the rest of Sherman-Palladino's pitches had fallen flat. Which truly reminds us of how different the landscape was for network television in the late 90s and early 2000s. And it's—Karen, you talked about this in the book—it's a sort of auteur-ish TV series in the sense that Sherman-Palladino and her husband Daniel Palladino wrote the majority of the episodes, like, a much higher percentage than showrunners will generally write for an ongoing series. And the episodes that they didn't write, they reviewed very closely, because the texture of the show, its really characteristic dialogue, pace, and patter, was really key to what the creators were going for. And apparently, the dialogue was so fast-paced, famously the scripts were like 30 pages longer than average hour-long network TV scripts. And apparently, Lauren Graham, who plays Lorelai Gilmore, the mom, had to

quit smoking so that she could deliver the dialogue at the pace at which it was written.

Marcelle Kosman 14:40

That's delightful.

Hannah McGregor 14:41

The other thing that I want to note is that when people talk about the history of the show, they really do focus on the sheer quantity of dialogue, and the way that it evokes the history of screwball comedies. So culture writer Constance Grady, for example, describes it as having the tone of a "His Girl Friday screwball throwback." But she also points out that the show has a tendency to use the sheer quantity of on-screen dialogue to emphasize how many important life events happen off-screen and are never discussed. So to quote Grady again, "On *Gilmore Girls*, the explosion is never what matters, it's the fallout that's true for the action, and it's also true for the dialogue." Which I just want to acknowledge, is incredibly WASP-y.

Marcelle Kosman 15:26

Okay, I know that this is just supposed to be some quick fun facts, but can the two of you give me an example of what this means?

Hannah McGregor 15:34

Yeah. So one of the forms it takes is that, for example, when there is a huge event, like a car crash that is going to really change the dynamic between Rory and her current boyfriend and how Lorelai feels about said boyfriend, that car crash happens off screen. So when major events happen, they often happen off screen because the show is much more concerned about playing out the emotional relationships and the emotional fallout of the events than it is about dwelling in the events themselves.

Marcelle Kosman 16:09

Okay, thank you. That's helpful.

Hannah McGregor 16:11

So this is just some background context, but Karen, we're going to get—as we talk more about normporn, we're gonna get further into the topic of rewatching and revisiting comfort series. But do you have any theories about what made the show so popular in the context of its original airing?

Karen Tongson 16:31

I think that one of the things that made *Gilmore Girls* so popular in that early aughts moment was that it presented a kind of small-town nostalgia that was in line with the national zeitgeist of pulling back from the scattershot, liberal urban moment of the 90s, where everybody was tracking the movement from—especially in young adult TV shows—from the country or the suburbs to the city, back to a quaint, snowglobe world, as Lorelai describes it. It was also peak Bush era. So it was something that was at once family-friendly in a way that did not disrupt the national narrative at the time, but also presented a counternarrative through the show's feminist politics, through the spunky *Gilmore Girls* who were clever and knew a lot about—they had voluminous, encyclopedic knowledge about pop culture and culture writ large. Lorelai is an autodidact; there's peak Gen X pop culture referentiality, and to see that playing out with Rory absorbing that and becoming its conduit as a millennial, I think that there's something there that makes it exciting.

And also there was a strange oddball array of “diverse characters” for family programming that included Lane Kim, let us not forget, who is a Korean American character, Rory's best friend, played by Keiko Agena, and her mother are essentially the shadow pair to Lorelai and Rory, who have a different set of problems, but who mirror within this strangely diverse small town, an alternate version of that mother daughter relationship. And there's all sorts of strange diversities that appear in this small-ass town in the middle of Connecticut [Hannah laughs] called Stars Hollow, including Lorelai's vaguely homosexual coworker at the first inn that she was working at named Michel. I guess he's supposed to be French-Canadian. His frequent references to Celine Dion allude to that fact, and I do think that he explicitly says he's from Quebec or something at some point.

Hannah McGregor 19:02

He hates other French people. So it checks out.

Karen Tongson 19:04

Exactly. So I could be manufacturing that, but all this said, I think that this strange play in the Bush era of playing with the hometown, manufactured, small-town politics of that era, and infusing it with these diverse characters, does something to thwart that narrative at the same time that it spoons it up for family TV viewers.

Hannah McGregor 19:30

And thinking about it in that context, in the the post-9/11 Bush era when people were being really fed the “we must unite across our differences,” really recontextualizes Lorelei’s attempt to rebuild her relationship with her parents, and Rory’s greater success at rebuilding her relationship with her grandparents. Because Rory, this explicitly liberal millennial with very—when we encounter her politics, they’re pretty left politics. And yet she is incredibly comfortable with her clearly Republican grandparents. Like, her grandmother is a member of the DAR.

Marcelle Kosman 20:19

What’s the DAR?

Hannah McGregor 20:20

The Daughters of the American Revolution, I think?

Karen Tongson 20:24

Yes. The DAR is essentially—it’s a long-running group, it’s very patrician, very WASP-y. It means that you are descended from the first settlers of the United States of America, essentially, and that you’re very proud of that heritage back to the early American colonial era.

Marcelle Kosman 20:43

I think the Canadian equivalent is probably the United Empire Loyalists.

Karen Tongson 20:49

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 20:49

Where I grew up, there's a lot of pride in being a descendant of a colonizer. So there's United Empire Loyalist, UEL-er identification.

Karen Tongson 21:00

I do want to say in reference to what you were just talking about Hannah, with this attempt to have friends in the red states and the blue states coming together, as Obama famously spoke about before he was even running for president at the DNC, is that—spoiler alert—Rory essentially ends up covering the Obama campaign in the final episode of the original run of the series as she runs off to try to achieve her dream. So I do think that there's a real through line to that vision of this, I don't know, an America that can get along again, and be brought together, that is deeply comfortable with its economic inequality.

Hannah McGregor 21:49

Yeah, I just rewatched the episode where Luke, who is the owner of Luke's diner and the on again/off again romantic interest of Lorelai, in the first season in particular, he is the most explicitly politically radical character. Like, he makes reference to America being built on stolen native land. He runs a diner, but he keeps telling people how dangerous both coffee and red meat are. So he's this very rough and tumble manly dude who's really woke, and he is really angered when the men in Stars Hollow gather to reenact a historical "battle." Because it's a battle that never happened, because it was just ten men staying up all night waiting for the army to arrive and they never did. But also explicitly, because he's like, "We shouldn't be celebrating a war fought by settlers on native land." But then, when all of these reenactors are out in the cold in the snow, he comes out and brings them all coffee. And it's this real, like, "Listen, I think that what you're doing here is fundamentally racist, but that doesn't mean I can't bring you a coffee." And that, I think, really gets to the tone of the politics of this show.

Karen Tongson 23:11

Can I just add one bit of trivia about Luke though?

Hannah McGregor 23:14

Please.

Karen Tongson 23:16

The lore is that initially that role was written for Alex Borstein, who ends up being the butch manager in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. And that Luke was initially going to be somebody not named Luke, and a woman with whom Lorelai had this repartee, which which gets enacted in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* later on in Amy Sherman-Palladino's oeuvre, right? So there is something about the butch lesbian identification also that I always have had with Luke in a strange way that I that makes sense in the show's crafting. And I don't think that that's just apocryphal, I'm pretty sure that I read that in a trade piece. I may have even cited that trade piece in the book. I can't even remember anymore. It's all a blur. But there you go.

Hannah McGregor 24:09

That makes so much sense because Luke is absolutely written like a butch lesbian. Oh my god, wow. That just made a lot of things come together.

Marcelle Kosman 24:18

So Karen, we recently did an episode about *Twilight*. And when we were talking about *Twilight* with our guest, Jackson Bird, we talked about the post-feminist hellscape that was the early 2000s. And so for listeners, post-feminism was the idea that feminism had achieved its ends and so we no longer needed it as a collective project. And in turn, mainstream feminist discourse then became really fixated on pop culture representations of powerful women, like Miranda Priestly from *The Devil Wears Prada*, for example, and individual women's narratives of success, which focused a lot on wealth accumulation and class ascendance for predominantly straight, white middle-class women.

So I would love to hear from the two of you a bit about reproductive politics in *Gilmore Girls*, because one of the only two things I know about

the show is one, Lorelai was a teenage mother, and then that Rory's best friend ends up getting pregnant at some point in the show. And I only know about that because it was a real bummer, right? Am I right? Is it a bummer in the show? Anyway, could the two of you talk about the reproductive politics, because I feel like—this feels like very, very Bush-era post-feminist kind of stuff.

Karen Tongson 25:36

That's basically the content of the *Gilmore Girls* chapter in my book *Normporn*, is to revisit its reproductive politics, especially to think about the show in the wake of *Roe v. Wade* going down here in the US. And I hadn't thought about it while I was watching the show in real time, which is funny. Maybe in part because I had my own mom who had me in 1973, which was the year abortion was made legal, but she was in the Philippines where it was not. And so, the feminist plotline of *Gilmore Girls* revolves around Lorelai's refusal to get married, essentially. But reproductive choice is never a part of that decision making process. It's like, okay, her original act in leaving the family was to have this baby. And mirroring some of those 80s films like *She's Having a Baby* or what have you, where the teen mom goes ahead and has a baby and doesn't have an abortion.

A lot of this has to do with production because it's on a family network; the WB and the CW are explicitly family primetime network broadcast entities. And so there are a lot of different rules and different mores that work themselves out around these brands. But a lot of it also is the extent to which women in the series seem to be punished for their reproductive freedom in various ways, or their sexuality. It's almost like Lorelai is the only one who's allowed to have sex and never again have a kid. Whereas Sookie, her best friend, who's a chef, played by Melissa McCarthy, suddenly becomes almost a baby factory in this series.

Hannah McGregor 27:23

Oh, man. It's how they manage having a fat person on screen. It's the only thing that they can figure out how to do with the fact that she's fat. They're like, well, there's no excuse, she just has to be pregnant all the time.

Karen Tongson 27:31

Yeah, it's pretty awful. And, Lane, after getting married and having sex for the first time on her honeymoon, terrible sex, which is a scene that I focus on in the book, and the depiction of this sex happening in Mexico during the honeymoon is incredibly awful, xenophobic, racist, etc. Anyway, ends up being pregnant and Keiko Agena has spoken up about how the series failed her character in particular, and many fans have had that feeling. But yeah, I don't want to go too far because I think then we end up with what happens in *A Year in the Life*, which also has to do with reproductive politics, right at the moment of Trump's election in the United States. Which is all to say that the reproductive politics of the series is terrible, and despite the fact that I write about this series as a comfort watch, or as something that's soothing, this is the focus of what I write about.

Hannah McGregor 28:31

Yeah, well, you know, that does seem to be, from the book, part of the nature of normporn, is that it's got that soothing quality, and then it also has that quality of "there's a politics here at work that I, as a queer viewer, must be so suspicious of."

Marcelle Kosman 28:48

Karen, nobody assigned me your book for reading. So could we move into the next segment to talk about it?

Hannah McGregor 28:56

I read it without you because I love keeping you in the dark, but I feel like we can probably dig into it a little bit.

Marcelle Kosman 28:56

Good.

[Upbeat musical interlude plays]

Hannah McGregor 29:09

Our next segment is called "the theory we need," and it's where we introduce some critical theory to help make sense of our topic. Luckily for

us, our distinguished guest has just written a whole dang book about our topic. So our theoretical frame today is going to focus on the concept of normporn. Karen, can you start us off by telling us what normporn is?

Karen Tongson 29:34

There are two definitions of normporn. One is very specific and material and the other is a more general description of a viewing practice. So, normporn is a subgenre of television that I've taken the time to explain. It's a sentimental realist television scene that's kind of aesthetically innovative for its time that begins in the late 1980s with the series *Thirtysomething*. It's a series about a group of liberal yuppies who are in Philadelphia, who are in their 30s and grappling with the vagaries of everyday life and the collapse of their youthful idealism as they deal with having kids, as they deal with career stress, financial stress, etc.

And that may sound like every other show you see on television now, but in the 80s, in a world dominated by *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, cop shows, doctor shows, again, not unlike what we see on network television now, *Thirtysomething* felt like—most people said it was very cinematic or theatrical, because one might describe it as a little bit mumblecore, it's a little bit whiny. Episode two of *Thirtysomething* is described as “Hope is disappointed that her bathroom remodel isn't going to be finished before her in-laws come to town.” So basically white people problems, right?

[Laughs]

Hannah McGregor 31:02

Yeah, relatable to me, a professional in their 30s.

Karen Tongson 31:07

Yeah, which is all to say that that's our starting point. But I focus on shows in the longer stretch of the millennium that we've had so far, mostly from the Bush era, the *Gilmore Girls* era, to a show like *This Is Us*, these series that depict these families that expand themselves through adoption and through other models of kinship to incorporate all forms of diversity, whether or not it's sexual diversity, racial diversity, etc. Like realist sentimental dramedies that are on network television that accomplish this work.

Normporn, though, is also a viewing practice. So while it describes this really specific subgenre, it also describes how we watch television sometimes, how we watch certain kinds of TV to release our tears, even as queer viewers who may be avowedly politically radical. It sometimes catches us off guard. Sometimes we begin hate-watching *Parenthood*, and then find ourselves reduced to a puddle and hating ourselves, or concealing our watching of this show from partners or what have you. And it all came about because I posted this precise sensation of watching *Parenthood*. I posted about it back on Facebook back in the day, and so many radical queer folks were just like, “I resent every tear it’s elicited from my dead cold eyes.” **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]** And so I wanted to think about that, like, against our better aesthetic and political judgment, why are we seduced by these depictions of new normalcy, especially in the Obama era?

Marcelle Kosman 33:00

That’s so interesting. So Karen, similar to *Gilmore Girls*, I’ve heard of the other shows that you’ve named, but I haven’t seen any of them. But the way that you’re describing the ethos of these shows, it’s making me wonder if the same kind of ethos makes its way into sitcoms as well. Like, I grew up watching a lot of sitcoms, and I feel like sitcoms are the sort of thing that I come back to for comfort watching. And so I’m wondering about—I don’t know, I’m gonna name another show that I never watched—*The Office*, like, things that are not dramedies, they’re definitely situation comedies, but are supposed to be relatable to average viewers, or some population demographic that’s considered an average viewer. They’re pretty white, but they have like a semi or something diverse cast. Do you see it seeping into other television genres?

Karen Tongson 33:54

As a viewing practice? Absolutely, yes. So that’s why I differentiate between the genre and the viewing practice. That said, people always ask me about *Modern Family*, which also has sentimental realist aspects to it. But the thing about sitcom as a format, is that it is built to be resolved after 30 minutes, whereas these dramedies are not, or there are these longer story arcs that happen across it.

This is why I use, in my introduction, *Wandavision* as an interesting entry point to this question, because the reason Wanda chooses the sitcom format to work through her bereavement is because each episode and each era presents a sitcom that will tidy up a resolution, even though part of what's happening is that both her affect and the format start to bust at the seams and fail to hold these things. So it's about the relationship between humour, bereavement, etc., and about why the sitcom format becomes the thing that she turns to, and it ultimately can't hold that, right? That's why I'm really insistent on this really specific microgenre of stuff. But in terms of normporn, you can watch the *West Wing* as normporn or *Madam Secretary*.

Marcelle Kosman 35:14

I was gonna suggest the *West Wing*! **[Laughs]**

Karen Tongson 35:15

I call that your civic normporn **[Marcelle laughs]** because it presents this operational fantasy of an operational government that mirrors one's ideals, or liberal ideals, at least. They're both really liberal shows. And that's the thing about normporn is its political orientation is liberal. And one could say neoliberal also, but it is like all shades of liberal, essentially, the full spectrum, maybe even broaching compassionate conservatism in some ways. Like, it is about the dream that the American family can absorb change, difference, and still keep intact the very notion of family.

Marcelle Kosman 36:01

Okay, that's so helpful. Thank you.

Hannah McGregor 36:03

Okay, Karen, you might not know this, but I wrote a whole book about sentimentality a couple of years ago, that in some sort of intriguingly overlapping ways, I'm trying to work through why I'm emotionally attached to a lot of media that has sentimental by definition, and what to do with that, and the politics of that. And so I'm wondering, partially for my sake, but also because I've made our listeners listen to me talk about sentimentality a lot, I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit more about the

relationship between normporn and sentimentality?

Karen Tongson 36:37

Yeah, it's interesting, because normporn leads with realism. If you take any 19th-century fiction course, we're going to talk about how sentimentality figures into realist narrative. But for the most part, there's supposed to be some form of clear separation of realism as a form of art and sentimentality as a form of cheap, popular engagement, or at least, one that elicits a certain kind of political—you know all of this stuff, right, really political response, melodrama, sentimentality, etc. Genre stuff versus *realism*. So I think that normporn very much leads with—because of the pedigree of a project like *Thirtysomething*—this fetishism of realism. And then it purports to just be depicting real emotion and not sentimentality, even though if you think about it, once you hear the soaring strings and the dramatic guitar plucks of these various series, they are definitely working with some sort of more contemporary iteration of what we would otherwise describe as sentimentality. So that's what I would just say, is it's a little bit of a shell game, that realism has played with sentimentality for a long time. But that makes its game more explicit to us as we watch these shows, as you see more and more television aspiring to the condition of art.

Hannah McGregor 38:06

Hmm, yeah, and still continuously sliding sentimentality in there as part of what makes it so compulsively viewable.

Karen Tongson 38:15

Yeah, absolutely. And it gives you a plausible deniability as a viewer to a certain extent, you'd say, like—

Hannah McGregor 38:24

[Laughs] “I'm highbrow.”

Karen Tongson 38:24

“I'm watching quality television, I'm watching quality TV. I'm sorry, but it's not like I'm watching *Seventh Heaven*. I'm watching quality—this is Emmy-

nominated shit.”

Hannah McGregor 38:35

“This is serious TV for serious people. Yeah, I’m a serious person.”

Karen Tongson 38:38

Exactly. So that’s sort of what it is. It gives you a bit of an alibi at the same time that it’s like, oh, actually, you know, it’s manipulating you in very similar ways.

Marcelle Kosman 38:48

Karen, can I ask you another question about normporn?

Karen Tongson 38:51

Sure.

Marcelle Kosman 38:52

Would you say that normporn has a particular aesthetic to it?

Karen Tongson 38:56

I would absolutely say so. Well, first of all, I think that it’s linked to aesthetic achievement, which I’ve just been saying. And that’s why so many of these shows have auteurist framing attached to them. The showrunner becomes an important person; the Sherman-Palladinos for *Gilmore Girls*, Jason Katims for *Parenthood*. He also did *Friday Night Lights*. Zwick and Herskovitz, who did *Thirtysomething*, they created a brand that continued over into *My So-Called Life* and other series later. And then you have Dan Fogelman for *This Is Us*, who is known for his film *Crazy Stupid Love*.

So there’s definitely a sense of the auteur behind them that that there’s a real story being told, like, the engine is art and not just commercial success. That said, there are also certain visual aesthetic signatures of normporn. There’s a slideshow that I show of all of these series with their cast photos, the large sprawling cast, diverse, sepia-toned. If you look at the font of all of their title cards, it’s the same font that I have on the book cover, where part of the title is bold and the other is not bold. So

it's like, *This is Us*. *Thirtysomething*, *Gilmore Girls* [Hannah laughs] or *Parenthood*.

Hannah McGregor 40:18

We're **doing** typography. **We** are artists.

Karen Tongson 40:22

Exactly. And also what I call the aesthetic visual signature of normporn is the candlelit repast—not candlelit, *twinkle-lit*, string-light repast in a garden. So it's like dining outdoors with your sprawling intergenerational milieu with string lights, that is the visual signature of normporn. And we can go also into the music. I mean, there is this the sonic landscape of normporn, from the plucky lute-like guitars of the *Thirtysomething* theme song, to all the Sufjan Stevens in *This Is Us*. And the personnel between these series, it's not just coincidental; Ken Olin, who plays Michael Steadman in *Thirtysomething*, ends up being a major producer and director on *This Is Us* decades later. And not to mention *Gilmore Girls* as the firmament of normporn actors, from Lauren Graham, who ends up being on *Parenthood*, and Milo Ventimiglia, who ends up being the patriarch on *This Is Us*, to Todd Lowe is in another series I write about, which is what I call the “funhouse mirror” of normporn and that is *True Blood*.

Yeah, so there's a lot of people who end up—and including Alexis Bledel, Rory Gilmore. It's not normporn, but I think that it's meaningful that she ends up as the handmade Ofglen in the *Handmaid's Tale* series, and then she goes from being Rory Gilmore from the land of Stars Hollow where there is no abortion, to the mutilated handmaid lesbian in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Marcelle Kosman 42:01

I really just want to start naming shows that I've watched and be like, “Is that one? Is that one?” But I won't.

Hannah McGregor 42:06

You know it's a good theoretical frame because it immediately makes

you want to hold it up to everything else that you've seen and see how it makes you see that thing differently. Karen, as you were describing the paradigmatic scene of normporn, I realized that that is a scene that I have attempted to reproduce in my own actual life so many times —

Marcelle Kosman 42:32

The twinkle lights?

Hannah McGregor 42:33

—because it is one—twinkle lights with a sprawling, diverse dinner party in a garden. Like, with everybody, with an Anthropologie-esque table set, and everybody passing around big bowls of food and laughing, like, that still lives in my head as the aesthetic ideal of living a good life.

Karen Tongson 42:58

Can I show you all an image, and it it appears in the *True Blood* chapter of the book, and to describe for your audiences what I'm showing you right now, it's two screen captures. One is from the opening credit sequence to *Parenthood*, which ran from 2010 through 2015, and the other is the final scene of the series finale of *True Blood* in 2014. For those of you can't see, it's nearly identical: a long table filled with people raising their glasses to a toast with twinkle lights strung up all around them. And, I don't know, just curious to hear your reactions to this contrast because it's very much where I see *True Blood*, again, being the funhouse mirror to these shows that traded very much not in fantasy and the gothic, but in realism.

Marcelle Kosman 43:55

For folks who haven't watched *True Blood*, it's also so pornographic. I tried watching it on a train one time and I was so uncomfortable. [laughs] So much sex, I mean, wonderful, wonderful, satisfying raunchy sex; drugs, or drug use but it's blood...

Hannah McGregor 44:18

A lot of blood, a lot of nudity. So seeing how it is reproducing aesthetically what is a family genre, but is drawing on those visual cues, which I never would have picked up on. And which also in turn makes me think about

an incredible scene in the series I've been making everybody watch, *Deadloch*—

Marcelle Kosman 44:43

Oh, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 44:43

—which is a fantastic Australian limited-run murder mystery series, but has this this incredible scene of all of these people outdoors, enjoying a beautiful meal at a long table under twinkle lights. But it's the scene where you realize that one of the people at that table is a murderer.

Marcelle Kosman 45:04

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 45:04

And so the thing that strikes me right away, is the way that these later representations or these later plays on that twinkle light dinner scene, are in part telling you that you should have seen something sinister in the original versions of this, that you should look at these scenes of normporn pleasure, and recognize that the whole bunch of the people at this table might be murderers, or that there's a violence that underpins this particular kind of pleasure.

Karen Tongson 45:41

And that makes this repast possible. And I will say that one of the things about *True Blood* and the reason it appears in normporn is that so much of the conversations of *True Blood*, if not the action, are about mainstreaming, about what it would mean politically to be normal about the kind of problematic behind that. Many people read it as an allegory for marriage equality. In many respects, I wanted to bring out that dimension of it and some of the wonderfully parodic things that series did with the visual signifiers of political campaigns and normporn. And even the discussions about normalcy that come up in the finale are remarkable, because they point to this prevailing wish, in the 2010s, in the US in particular, for all of its sins to be erased, and to start over with this more

utopian vision of the family.

Marcelle Kosman 46:43

I think part of what is so interesting about *True Blood* being a funhouse mirror is that Alan Ball, who is the creator, is coming from *Six Feet Under*, which, as you were describing normporn, I was thinking about *Six Feet Under*. And *Six Feet Under* feels like there's constant failure of normalcy in that family, because they run a funeral home, and so you have this classic family, this mother, father, and their three children who are almost all adults; they run a family business, but it's a funeral home, and then the father dies, and the teenage daughter is trying meth and putting a foot in some guy's locker because he did her dirty, and so much about these characters throughout the development of the series is them just not fitting in to normal suburban life, even though that's what they're supposed to have. So it's so fascinating to see him go from *Six Feet Under*, it was just about the misery of human existence, and then making this funhouse mirror version of normporn. I love it. I absolutely adore this.

Karen Tongson 47:50

I'm glad we found a show that could speak to you, Marcelle. **[Hannah laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 47:56

I do like it. Sometimes we do these episodes and I'm like, "I've never seen it. I've never heard of it. I've never done it."

Hannah McGregor 48:02

"I don't know her." **[Karen laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 48:03

I don't know her. And I feel like I sometimes come across as this person who, like, I only consume *good* things or quality things. And that is fundamentally untrue. I watch so much garbage. I read so much garbage.

Hannah McGregor 48:14

Marcelle's a snob.

Marcelle Kosman 48:17

I am not a snob. I'm just not with it.

Hannah McGregor 48:22

Okay, Marcelle, on the topic of snobbery and the things that we watch.

[Marcelle gasps; Hannah laughs] And the things that we watch maybe that we're proud of watching, and then the things we watch that we feel a little bit less proud of watching. Karen, you talk in the book about normporn as a form of entertainment that causes queer viewers in particular shame. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit more about how you're thinking about shame, and why it is that queer viewers are drawn to this media that causes us shame, and yet, and yet...

Karen Tongson 48:56

Well, it's middlebrow fare. So it's not quite prestige fare; it receives praise from critics, but from really mainstream outlets. So the thing about queerness is that it pitches its tent around avant-gardeism, usually, or the subcultural, or things that, aesthetically, are coming up against or counter to the mainstream. And so, of course, there's going to be guilt involved, especially around these depictions of normative arrangements and the glorification of them, the reglorification of them. Unless you are a homonormative viewer, it's going to run counter to a sense of queer radicalism or queer politics or queer aesthetic judgment, which is supposed to be exposing the vagaries of middling middlebrow fare. And you know, the reason I think that queer viewers others are drawn to this is that the amount of despair and suffering and dysregulation that people experience in their everyday realist lives, as well as in the broader political sphere or broader political environment, pushes us towards some sense of comfort at some point, or some sense of trying to soothe ourselves.

I say that normporn is thick with the guilt of assimilation, in part because what it plays out for us is this narrative about a new normal that everyone was talking about in the cultural sphere around the 2010s onward, in Obama's second term in office, and the sense that there was just going to be continuity. Of course, we knew what the enemy was going to be, it was going to be neoliberal assimilation and all of that, the typical engine of late

stage capitalism, etc. But we had no idea how much worse—or maybe we didn't have an idea, but to see the worst case scenarios materialize became something that we had to grapple with in a certain way and said, "Oh, shit, actually, that part of it, this, compromise aspect of it, it's something that we will never achieve, but it's also something that we might actually lose amidst all of this."

Hannah McGregor 51:25

I would like to keep talking about normporn forever, but I think that it's time to articulate a thesis.

[Upbeat musical interlude plays]

Marcelle Kosman 51:39

In our final segment, we can see how to bring together the history of our objective study and our theoretical framework to articulate a thesis statement that we then get to pick apart.

Hannah McGregor 51:51

Get ready; this is cribbing heavily from Karen's book. The return of *Gilmore Girls* to our screens in 2016 via the much-anticipated *A Year in the Life* miniseries became a collective disappointment, not only for the way the final four words of the show, teased for years by show creator Amy Sherman-Palladino, felt like a betrayal of the characters we had grown to love, but also for how the structural limitations of the show's post-feminist politics were thrown into stark relief by Hillary Clinton's loss of the US presidential race to Donald Trump. Ironically, this disappointment did little to undermine the comfort viewing popularity of *Gilmore Girls* for feminist and queer viewers, who were drawn to the contained normalcy of Stars Hollow as a space in which the bourgeois everyday was elevated to the status of drama, and the real costs of political events constantly brushed off screen. But *Gilmore Girls* reminds us that the fantasy of the normal is impossible without certain sacrifices, which are most notably borne in the show by women of colour. In this essay I will...

Karen Tongson 52:59

We need to talk about Lane Kim, we need to talk about Lane Kim, because we talked a little bit about Sookie St. James and the reproductive burden she carried, but Lane was done dirty. And it's really something that the fandom demands we talk about.

Marcelle Kosman 53:20

Stop, both of you. I need you remind me who Lane Kim is. I know it's the best friend, but tell me more; pretend I've never seen the show.

Hannah McGregor 53:26

All right, fine. Okay, so Lane Kim is Rory's best friend. And most fresh in my mind is her arc in the early seasons right now, because that's what I've been rewatching, which is that she is being raised by quite a strict immigrant mother, Mrs. Kim, who insists that she dress in conservative ways and go to church regularly and eat only very healthy foods and date only young Korean-American men with promising futures. And meanwhile, Lane wants to eat Snickers bars and listen to rock music and gets crushes on white boys. And so Lane is a counter to a lot of the freedoms that we see Rory enjoying via the mother who is raising her. And in that sense, also, her relationship with her mother is often the foil to Rory's relationship with Lorelai. But Karen, do you want to talk a little more about—

Karen Tongson 53:37

I guess I want to underscore that Mrs. Kim is Seventh Day Adventist, so part of the junk food thing is also that there's no space to eat anything but that dense bread that purportedly you have to eat as a Seventh Day Adventist and other things like—

Hannah McGregor 54:56

And so much tofu.

Karen Tongson 54:56

—so it's not even like that they have an immigrant diet, it's that they have this really strict religious diet. Also, Lane Kim has a father who we never see. And it's like, what's going on with that as well? It's just the the kind of

disappearance of the kind of larger family unit, there's an exact replication of the Lorelai-Rory diad.

Hannah McGregor 55:24

Yeah. And then there's this, like, part of the anxiety through the early years of the show, is will Rory get pregnant at 16 like her mother did; will she follow the path that her mother did, but instead the person who gets pregnant at a very early age in a kind of life-ruining way is Lane. She very frequently features on feminist listicles that are like "10 TV characters whose lives would have been improved by abortion." The impossibility of abortion within the logic of the show is evident there and obviously in Lorelai's past, but screams all the more loudly in Lane's experience of getting accidentally pregnant on her honeymoon after having terrible sex one time, and heartbreakingly, we never get to hear about her having good sex.

Karen Tongson 56:27

Well, first of all, there's a whole thing about blaming Mexican condoms—

Marcelle Kosman 56:32

What?

Karen Tongson 56:32

—in the scene where Lane reveals that she's pregnant to Rory, and Rory's first response is not "sell, you don't need to have the baby" but it's like, "you'd make a great mom." That's the dialogue. It's not even on the table. The same episode that Lane announces her pregnancy, we get flashbacks to Lorelai finding out she's pregnant and her parents fighting with the baby daddy's parents, right? And the baby daddy's parents just say, "Well, you know, she can—

Hannah McGregor 57:08

"Take care of it."

Karen Tongson 57:08

—fix this" or something like that. And Emily Gilmore, Lorelai's mom, was

like, “Get those words out of your mouth!” It was immediately shut down. And Rory replicates that in the conversation she has with Lane. And there’s some funny stuff about Britney Spears being a mom or what have you, that they throw into the dialogue to try to lighten it up. But there really is never “do you need support? Do you need help?” Like, “You are not ready to have this kid—these kids.” It ends up being not only one child but—is it twins, or triplets, or what have you?

Hannah McGregor 57:27

It’s twins. **[Cat meows in background]**

Karen Tongson 57:39

Yes, twins. So yeah. Anyway, my cat objects to all of that.

Hannah McGregor 57:48

Marcelle, you have a question?

Marcelle Kosman 57:49

Why is Lane—how old is—why is Lane married?

Karen Tongson 57:54

Because she’s Christian. Lane moves in with her bandmates, and she is getting ready to pursue her musical career, but obviously she and her paramour, who is also in the band—played by Todd Lowe, who happens to also end up in *True Blood*—Zack is his name, Zack Van Gerbig, okay, he’s got a silly, tweeby white boy name. **[Hannah laughs]** And they’re getting ready to essentially consummate their relash when Lane gets Mrs. Kim’s mores popping in her head just as she’s about to cross the threshold into independent womanhood etc. She realizes that she can’t have sex unless she gets married. And so that becomes the condition for her losing her virginity, and in the act of losing her virginity, she then becomes saddled with twins, which is just like, what the fuck?

Hannah McGregor 58:57

Yeah. **[Laughs]**

Karen Tongson 58:58

In a footnote to Normporn, though, I talk about how in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, there is an Asian character who gets pregnant and who may be reparations for Lane Kim, insofar as she doesn't, spoiler alert, end up having to keep the kid. And so she gets to have the promise of her life as a doctor perhaps fulfilled and that all happens off-screen. We don't see any of that. But I think that that's a bit of like a light cop out because the violence to Lane was so intense.

Hannah McGregor 59:35

I mean, it makes me think too about the storyline on *Grey's Anatomy* when Sandra Oh's character Christina gets pregnant, and the way that mainstream TV will brush off the problem of abortion through a miscarriage. So a character who would 100% have an abortion, instead, they have that character miscarry and then grieve the miscarriage and then it lets the show have it both ways. I think that's the famous "sedate me" scene.

Karen Tongson 1:00:05

Yes.

Hannah McGregor 1:00:07

Yeah, you know, a tour de force, I love Sandra Oh.

Karen Tongson 1:00:10

But if anybody wonders why we lost abortion rights in the United States, just think about the arc of television leading out to the Dobbs decision.

Hannah McGregor 1:00:18

Truly, just the the ongoing unspeakability of abortion through decades of it being legal, and yet still something that can't be present. You know, I think of *Juno*, which I love, but I remember one of my best friends at the time, who was working for Planned Parenthood Ottawa, and was really, passionately engaged in abortion provision, being like, "I cannot watch this movie; I got to the scene where she's at the abortion clinic, and it's so horrible." Like, it's such a bleak, miserable space, and she so quickly

changes her mind. And she was like, “That’s the kind of representation of abortion that makes it imaginatively impossible for young people.” And that’s one where abortion is actually spoken, let alone the *Gilmore Girls* of the world, where, that’s what I was watching when I was 15/16/17.

And the fact that motherhood is held up as a feminist ideal, that it is how Lorelai has liberated herself from her conservative family, and built a new life for herself, and that life is quirky and interesting and artistic, and that was facilitated through having a child. And then the fact that for any other character, it’s just never even offered as a possibility; it really does reshape the imaginative possibilities of what you do if you are accidentally pregnant. Karen, can we round out this conversation by maybe talking about the way that Lane’s marriage to Zack and then very young procreation with him locks her in Stars Hollow, whereas Rory’s boyfriends take her further and further away from Stars Hollow?

Karen Tongson 1:02:28

Yeah, Zack and Elaine are the sort of memento mori what would have happened if Rory stuck with Dean to a certain extent, and didn’t branch off into bad boys. And in fact, Lane is the one who’s supposed to travel the world, who’s supposed to be a musician on tour, right? All Rory needs, because she wants to be a writer, is a room of her own to a certain extent. And Lane’s ambition is to tour, to be in a band, to be a rock star. Yeah, to get to see many things beyond Stars Hollow and many things beyond the really insular world of Seventh Day Adventism that Mrs. Kim has established for her.

But what ends up happening, of course, is Rory, even though she goes to Yale, which is not very far away from Stars Hollow, apparently, she ends up hooking up with a very wealthy son of a media mogul while in college. And that attachment lasts and apparently endures; sure, they break up when the regular series ends, because we want to see Rory an independent woman. She actually ends up touring the country on the Obama campaign bus as the series ends, covering the Obama campaign for an online news magazine, or maybe Politico or something like that. And then when we revisit her narrative in *A Year in the Life* in 2016, the *Gilmore Girls* reunion

special on Netflix that happens over four seasons, summer, winter, fall, spring, we find out that she's still attached to Logan and that involves international bonking in the UK and other parts.

Hannah McGregor 1:04:19

Yeah, so she gets to travel the world and bonk a terrible WASP and Lane's stuck in Stars Hollow forever.

Marcelle Kosman 1:04:25

Lane has fucking twins.

Karen Tongson 1:04:27

Yeah, and Rory's on again-off again douche rich dude is named Logan Huntzberger.

Marcelle Kosman 1:04:38

No.

Karen Tongson 1:04:39

Yes.

Marcelle Kosman 1:04:41

You guys! **[Karen and Hannah laugh]**

[Upbeat musical interlude plays]

Marcelle Kosman 1:04:49

Material Girls is a Witch, Please production and is distributed by Acast. Why don't you grab an obviously empty coffee cup and head on over to ohwitchplease.ca to check out the rest of our episodes, as well as transcripts, reading lists, and merch. We have an excellent newsletter at ohwitchplease.substack.com and an even better Patreon at patreon.com/ohwitchplease. And also, we're on Instagram, X, and Threads @ohwitchplease and on TikTok @ohwitchpleasepod. Karen, where can people find out more about your work?

Karen Tongson 1:05:29

You can find me at karentongson.org, where you can link to a lot of my work. You can also purchase my books there, especially *Normporn*, which I encourage you to purchase on your independent bookstore platforms or in person at your favorite local bookstore. I'm active on Instagram @tongsonator, and I'm still around, despite all of the kinds of wicked changes at the platform formerly known as Twitter, X, as well as Threads and Bluesky @inlandemperor.

Hannah McGregor 1:05:59

Amazing. Thanks to AutoSyndicate for the use of our theme song "Shopping Mall. And of course, thanks to the whole Witch, Please Productions team: our transcriber, Ruth Ormiston **[sound effect: typing]**; our digital content coordinator, Gabi Iori **[sound effect: BOING]**; our social media and marketing, designer Zoe Mix **[sound effect: record player reversing]**; and our executive producer Hannah Rehak, aka COACH **[sound effect: sport whistle blowing]**!

Marcelle Kosman 1:06:27

At the end of every episode, we will thank everyone who has joined our Patreon or boosted their tier to help make our work possible. Our enormous gratitude goes out to: Grace, Sarah R., Sarah W., Anna, Maria L.—

Hannah McGregor 1:06:43

Oh my god, that's Lucia's sister! Thanks, Maria.

Marcelle Kosman 1:06:47

Aw. Leo, Sarah H., and Alexandra M.

Hannah McGregor 1:06:52

We will be back next episode to tackle another piece of pop culture through a whole new theoretical lens. But until then...

Karen Tongson 1:06:59

Later, Stars Hollow neighbors!

[Outro music: "Shopping Mall" by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]