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Josh Grube
Eastern Illinois University

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Q/A: A Semiotic Deconstruction

of Narrative Transportation on Episodic Television

Josh Grube

Eastern Illinois University

Department of Communication Studies

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Abstract

Narrative transportation is a captivating phenomenon in which an audience member psychologically departs from material reality and immerses into the narrative world (Gerrig, 1993). Existing literature on narrative transportation mostly consists of audience-level studies, primarily focused on the phenomenon's persuasive effects and audience attributes that mediate their ability to be transported. From a theoretical media perspective, transportation is conceived as an aspect of the larger audience cultivation process (Gerbner, 1998) due to its persuasive influence, revealing the importance of viewing it from the textual level. This thesis fills a significant gap in narrative transportation theory by examining television narratives through the semiotic perspective to inductively determine how their structural attributes coalesce to achieve transportation. The narratives of the third seasons of three exemplary comedy-drama televisual texts—*Gilmore Girls* (legacy broadcast), *Girls* (premium cable broadcast), and *Grace and Frankie* (streaming content)—were analyzed through a synthesis utilizing semiotic deconstruction (Barthes, 1974) and inspired by grounded theory (Straus & Corbin, 1990) to determine how television comedy-dramas invite transportation.

Informed by previous literature on transportation and narrative, 47 episodes were coded for elements of causality, conflict, enigma, character, and setting to determine structural similarities that invite transportation through immersion and identification. Cultural myths (Barthes, 1957/2013) of autonomy, authenticity, fulfillment, and meritocracy were prevalent throughout these narratives. This study interrogated how these myths impacted immersion and identification. This study determined that comedy-drama television narratives invite transportation through a combination of enigmatic immersion and mythic identification. Enigma is realized as the driving force of narrative through binary relationships of question/answer and problem/solution. The constant posing of questions and problems immerses the viewer in a participatory process of extrapolating outcomes and origins. This places the viewer in a perpetual enigmatic middle state where no ultimate conclusion is reached and no complete origin is ever realized. Myth is present through the character embodiment of values and beliefs and enacted through conflict with antithetical characters. The alignment of mythic belief evokes identification with the characters and forms a coherent narrative world that operates under mythic understanding. The synthesis of binary, enigma, and myth results in a transportive experience of immersion and identification. This study demonstrates that semiotic deconstruction is a valuable tool in media research to gain insights into our complex relationship with the narrative worlds that engage and captivate us.

Keywords: *narrative transportation theory*, *semiotic deconstruction*, *narrative*, *textual analysis*, *television*, *cultivation*, *myth*, *immersion*, *identification*

Dedication

To my wife Brittany for encouraging me to further my education

and pursue my passions for communication scholarship and pedagogy.

To my parents Mark and Tina for providing me

unconditional love and support.

To my grandmother-in-law Lelia and mother-in-law Mary

for always making Charleston home.

To all of my friends and colleagues that have shown support

and have motivated me by expressing interest in this research.

To my dog Ellie for (literally) staying by my side this entire time.

And lastly, to all of the creators responsible for the

narrative worlds that have inspired this work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Narratives dominate our media landscape, providing a portal to transport us outside of our daily lives and into the worlds of stories. As viewers, we ritually seek out this experience due to the enjoyable nature of the phenomenon (Green et al., 2004). Transportation is a psychological departure from our own reality in which we immerse ourselves into the narrative world and form emotional connections through identification with its characters. During these cognitive states, our personal concerns are temporarily replaced with those of the characters as the narrative poses various questions to answer and multiple problems to solve. This experience is so common within our current media consumption that the mysterious nature of the phenomenon is easily taken for granted. When watching our favorite television programs, we expect to abandon our lives in favor of the worlds on screen, greeting its inhabitants as old friends. Despite the desire of storytellers to craft transportive narratives, academic research into the phenomenon has yet to provide any definitive answers as to how to achieve this ultimate level of story engagement. This textual analysis of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie* provides a significant step toward uncovering the machinations behind transportational television texts through deconstruction of narrative structure to gain further understanding into the mechanics of this phenomenon.

When transportation metaphors are used to discuss narratives in popular press, they are usually referring to the benefits of escapism. Pantony (2021) of *Glamour* writes of the importance of escapist television to "transport us somewhere new and help us switch off from a tough day" (para. 2). An article from book publisher Penguin (2020) centers on the power of books "to take us to somewhere other than where we are, whether

that's a fantasy land, outer space, or to a different time and place in history" (para. 1). An article in *Stylist* even offers narrative transportation as a way to cope with job dissatisfaction (Brech, 2020). When this escapism is expressed by fans, they often express a deeply personal connection to the story characters. In an interview with *SELF Magazine*, a fan explains her relationship with the five-season HBO series *Insecure*: "I find comfort in this show because it feels like I'm hanging out with friends as I watch the characters navigate very relatable scenarios" (Braithwaite, 2020, para. 20). In the same article, another fan speaks about The WB's seven-season series *Gilmore Girls*: "I've watched every season at least 10 times, so now it feels like hanging out with my alternate family" (Braithwaite, 2020, para. 27). These deep emotional connections derive from character identification, which is an element of transportation. In this study, I am concerned with how a narrative can provide a transportive experience that is resonant enough for us to form such deep platonic and familial relationships with television characters.

An understanding of narrative transportation may additionally illuminate what keeps viewers revisiting the same programs despite the ever increasing library of new content conveniently available. Several popular publications have offered multiple explanations behind the common interest in rewatching television shows and movies beyond simple enjoyment, including comfort (Keller, 2017; Belle, 2020; Andrews, 2021), nostalgia (Thompson, 2014; Andrews, 2021), to revisit the text later in life with a new perspective (Thompson, 2014; Andrews, 2021), to avoid the pressure of choosing a new show (Keller, 2017; Belle, 2020), and to avoid committing to a disappointing program (Keller, 2017). Furthermore, Nielsen ratings show that CBS's crime procedural *Criminal*

Minds, airing from 2005-2020, was the most streamed television show in the United

States in 2021 with nearly 34 billion minutes watched on Netflix (Spangler, 2022). In the

previous year, Nielsen reported that NBC's mockumentary sitcom *The Office*, which

ended in 2013, was the most streamed television program in the United States with more

than 57 billion minutes watched on Netflix (Spangler, 2021). This reveals ritualistic

viewing practices, as rewatching shows such as *The Office* and *Criminal Minds* is

preferred to exploring new narrative worlds. Rather than spending time exploring new

narrative worlds, viewers frequently return to programs such as *Criminal Minds* and *The*

Office—regardless of their vast genre differences. It is important to note that these are

also character-based programs, further highlighting the significance of identification.

Transportation may be the link needed to explain why narrative worlds such as these are

so often revisited, as transportation is a pleasurable experience that viewers ritualistically

seek out.

Transportation is essential to the success of a narrative text through its ability to

captivate the audience. This study specifically examines televisual narratives, as the

underlying assumption is that a long production run is a testament of its likeliness to

invite transportation, as viewers continue choosing to return to the narrative because of

the enjoyment derived from the experience. For an episodic narrative to continue across

multiple seasons, it must provide an inviting narrative world in which the viewer

constantly wishes to return to throughout several years. This is in contrast to a standalone

novel or film, which must only maintain interest long enough for the duration of the

singular experience. Because of this imperative nature for television to be transportive, I

have analyzed the narratives of three exemplary episodic television texts—*Gilmore Girls*,

Girls, and *Grace and Frankie*—for the purpose of uncovering how their worlds offer this experience regardless of surface-level content differences.

Theoretical Foundation

I conducted this study as an initial step in advancing narrative transportation theory into the media criticism discipline. Theoretical concerns of previous literature have primarily been rooted in psychology, concerned with the end results of persuasive effects and overall transportability of the individual audience member. Furthermore, the studies' arguments regarding the transportability of narrative are achieved through audience data, rather than textual data. Instead, this study shifts research focus from the transported audience to the transporting text. I approached the phenomenon inductively through a semiotic lens in order to deconstruct different popular televisual texts to reveal similarities in narrative structure and mythic construction that are likely to invite transportation. I do so by focusing my examination specifically on larger elements of narrative structure such as causality and character. This approach is informed by prior transportation studies which link the phenomenon to immersion and character identification. In sum, I have bridged narrative transportation theory and the semiotic tradition by examining how signs coalesce to produce a transportational narrative with an immersive world and emotionally resonant characters.

Narrative Transportation

The fascination resulting from my own experiences with narrative transportation greatly inspired me to become a video producer and critical media scholar. When I first came across this theory, I thought that literature would reveal specifics into how narrative structure transports its viewer and how to craft such experiences as a visual storyteller.

However, through reading into this phenomenon I found a lack of studies concerned with how to actually construct a transportational text. This is largely due to theoretical origins in psychology with Gerrig's book *Experiencing Narrative Worlds*. Gerrig (1993) applied the metaphor of transportation to narrative from the perspective of cognitive psychology, focusing on mental processes that result in the phenomenon while stressing the ability of narratives to influence attitudes and beliefs. Lost in Gerrig's conception of narrative transportation is that this persuasive phenomenon is a description of audience cultivation. Gerbner (1998) developed cultivation theory to examine how television influences attitudes and beliefs by socializing audiences through storytelling. His concern was that the cultivation of audience perspective exists on a mass scale due to the mass-produced nature of television stories, leading to a common consciousness. The ritual of television viewing from an early age influences viewers to align with the attitudes and beliefs they see portrayed in the narratives on screen. With this study, I follow Gerbner's (1969) rule of observing an audience phenomenon from the narrative that produces it, shifting the focus of narrative transportation theory from audience to text.

Expanding from Gerrig, Green and Brock's (2002) foundational transportation-imagery model was focused on medium and audience, rather than narrative itself. Their focus on the text was limited to its generalities of artistic merit, the level of image generation it requires of its audience, and its adherence to a narrative format. Quantitative audience studies—relying on self-reported experiences of transportation—have largely resulted from this model to determine persuasive outcomes, including audience need for emotional response (Appel & Richter, 2010), narrative versus argument-based advertising (Brechman & Purvis, 2015), risk perceptions (Dillard et al., 2018), influence

of paratexts in viral advertising (Seo et al., 2018), and emotional and behavioral response

to climate change narratives (Morris et al., 2019). As a result, narrative structure has

largely been excluded from narrative transportation theory. Transportation is an element

of the larger process of cultivation and should therefore be explored through the text that

produces such effects.

The literature on narrative transportation theory provides two important elements

that inform this study: immersion and identification. First, Gerrig (1993) conceptualized

narrative transportation as a form of immersion in which the story world cognitively

replaces our own reality. Similarly, Green and Brock (2002) situate the phenomenon by

comparing it to similar experiences of flow and absorption in which a person loses track

of time and their own identity. Second, identification is conceived as a deeper form of

immersion integral to narrative transportation, orienting the viewer within the standpoint

of the identified character(s) (Carpenter & Green, 2012). Narrative transportation

literature has addressed the importance of character identification (Van Laer et al., 2014)

and likability (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Additional research has linked heroic characters

to an increase in transportation and affective response (Shanahan et al., 2019), as well as

affective response to identification (Appel & Richter, 2010). This theoretical foundation

operationalizes the familiar yet mysterious phenomenon of transportation as being

comprised of both story immersion and character identification.

The Semiotic Approach to Narrative

This deconstruction of televisual texts pulls inspiration from Barthes's (1974) *S/Z*

in which he conducted a structural analysis of Balzac's novella *Sarrasine.* Barthes

disrupted the reading process by breaking down the narrative into five codes—

hermeneutic, semic, symbolic, proairetic, and cultural—in order to examine how meaning

is achieved between the signs and their reader. Hermeneutic codes are unanswered

elements of the narrative, which Barthes defines as enigmas. Semic codes are story

elements with connotative meanings existing beyond their basic definitions, while

symbolic codes occur when these semes are juxtaposed in binary opposition to each

other. Proairetic codes are actions. Cultural codes occur when the narrative utilizes

common bodies of knowledge such as historical or scientific understanding. Similar to

Barthes's deconstruction of *Sarrasine*, I have broken down the narratives of the third

seasons of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie* into paradigmatic elements (i.e.

character and setting) and syntagmatic elements (i.e. coherence, conflict, and enigma).

My narrative analysis departs from Barthes in that I am coding specifically for attributes

that may invite transportation, rather than to uncover how narrative structures result in

understanding. However, two of his codes—hermeneutic and symbolic—prove

particularly germane to this effort. First, enigma is of critical concern in this analysis into

transportation, as the posing of questions and problems provides mystery and suspense

that can lead to audience immersion. The structure of enigma—and therefore narrative in

general—can be understood through binary opposition: question/answer and

problem/solution. The symbolic code is additionally important to uncover deeper mythic

understanding, as connotative meaning is structured through opposing values and beliefs

as manifested by characters and settings.

Any semiotic investigation into narrative is incomplete without addressing the

myths that inform its understanding. Myth is the second order of signification that

naturalizes ideological meaning and structures narrative in alignment with this sense-

making (Barthes, 1957/2013). Put simply, myth is the shared cause and effect structure

which we all believe, allowing us to make sense of both our material world and the

narrative worlds in which we are transported into. For instance, the myth of meritocracy

naturalizes the belief that an individual's hard work and ability are the only variables for

success and that such dedication will eventually be rewarded. This semiotic

deconstruction investigates how myth informs both syntagmatic elements of causality,

conflict, and enigma, and paradigmatic elements of character and setting. In short, myth

provides the structure necessary for the viewer to understand syntagmatic relations as

well the means to identify with characters that align with their values and beliefs. This

places significance on myth, as identification is an aspect of the larger transportation

phenomenon.

Semiotic Televisual Deconstruction

To uncover how television narratives work at a structural level to invite

transportation, I have deconstructed the third seasons of the episodic comedy-drama

series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), *Girls* (2012-2017), and *Grace and Frankie* (2015-

present), resulting in a sample of 47 episodes. The hybrid comedy-drama genre was

chosen to investigate both comedic and dramatic elements without the concern of genre-

specific differences in transportation. The three series were specifically chosen to provide

a wide sample of successful comedy-drama programming, as *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and

Grace and Frankie respectively represent legacy broadcast, premium cable broadcast,

and streaming content. The success of these programs is demonstrated through their long

production runs of at least six seasons. These exemplary television texts have been

deconstructed in order to introduce narrative-specific concerns into the study of narrative

transportation theory and reveal how their elements combine to produce a transportational text.

Emergent Theory and Narrative Coding

This textual analysis was conducted as a synthesis inspired by grounded theory and utilizing critical semiotic deconstruction to provide insights into how comedy-drama television narratives invite transportation. Grounded theory is an approach to research in which a theory is generated inductively from the data obtained (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This emergent method of qualitative research was necessary due to the aforementioned lack of narrative analysis in transportation literature available from which to build. However, this analysis departs from grounded theory in its more subjective and open-ended interpretation of data, as well as critical concerns of cultural myth (Barthes, 1957/2013) that drive the narrative. The objective of this semiotic deconstruction was to uncover if the three transportational television shows shared a similar narrative structure that may reveal why they each are capable of producing the phenomenon.

I conducted open coding by watching each of the 47 episodes while taking notes on a coding sheet designed to observe transportational elements. Each episode was watched once in its entirety while frequently rewinding and pausing to take detailed notes and to log timestamps. This disrupted the traditional linear television viewing process similar to Barthes's (1974) problematization of the reading process in his analysis of *Sarrasine*. The coding sheet was designed to observe and note syntagmatic elements of causality, conflict, and enigma, as well as paradigmatic elements of character and setting. Focus was placed on these elements due to previous transportation and semiotic literature as well as my own personal experiences of traveling into televisual narrative worlds.

Since this is an emergent study, I focused specifically on these larger structural elements

to understand more generally how these transportational television narratives function.

Causality involved a general inventory of setup scenarios and resulting payoffs to catalog

how the different storylines within the three series progressed coherently over the course

of the season. Conflicts within each episode were listed due to their ability to result in

transportation (McLaughlin, 2020), considering characters involved, types, levels of

resolution, and cultural myth signified. Enigmatic questions—inspired by Barthes's

(1974) hermeneutic code—were considered as an aspect of conflict, as the development

of problems results in suspense which can create immersion and audience participation

with the narrative (Gerrig, 1993). Paradigmatic elements of character and setting were

coded for the possibility of identification—a variable for transportation (Van Laer et al.,

2014)—through the manifested myths represented through beliefs and values, as well as

character agency to make choices based on these beliefs and values.

      Upon the completion of the open coding process, axial coding was conducted

during a 49-day period to inductively explore similarities in narrative structure and

transportive elements among the three seemingly different television programs. Over the

course of this process, the coding sheets were constantly reviewed in search of

commonality while segments of various episodes were rewatched anywhere between one

to five times to obtain further information. Once I realized the importance of enigma

throughout the sample, I created a separate document to list and categorized all of the

enigmas posed and revisited. Axial coding ultimately concluded in theoretical saturation,

revealing significant shared elements of binary construction, enigmatic constancy, and

mythic identification that coalesce to form a transportational chimera of narrative experience. These findings are summarized and discussed in the following section.

Findings

Transportational comedy-drama television narratives, as represented by *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie*, invite immersive narrative transportation through enigma and identification through cultural myth. Both enigma and myth exist in the narrative through binary construction. Enigma exists within the delay between structures of question/answer and problem/solution dichotomies. In many cases, the end result to an enigma exists as a link in a larger chain, as new questions and problems arise from provided answers and solutions. Due to the constant presence of enigma, the viewer permanently exists within the delay of answers and solutions. In this perpetual enigmatic middle, the viewer immerses into the story's world through participating in the narrative, attempting to predict possible future outcomes, and explaining past origins. Final answers and solutions are never provided because enigma is what drives the narrative forward. If there are no enigmatic concerns requiring viewer immersion to predict and explain, the narrative would have nowhere to progress to. The past/future binary is never fulfilled, as transportational narratives are driven by a strategic lack of information regarding origins and conclusions.

Cultural myth informs conflicts within the narrative as characters and settings embody values and beliefs. This is also a binary construction, as these characters and settings are juxtaposed with counterparts who embody antithetical values and beliefs. Within the perpetual enigmatic middle, character agency acts out mythic belief in an attempt to reach the anticipated yet illusive answers and solutions. Throughout the

differing programs in the sample, the same myths of autonomy, authenticity, fulfillment, and meritocracy are naturalized through the ways in which characters engage in conflict as an embodiment of ideology. Since these myths are shared by the viewer and the characters, identification is achieved. Coherence exists because the narrative confirms the myths we already use to make sense of our own material world. In turn, this produces an identifiable narrative world through belief alignment, as the story progresses in the manner in which the world is expected to operate. In summary, transportation is achieved through enigmatic immersion and mythic identification constructed through binary oppositions. We are transported by the immersive nature of narrative mystery and the identification achieved from seeing our beliefs realized on screen through characters overcoming conflict and arriving at desirable answers and solutions.

This study situates narrative transportation theory within the communication discipline through an investigation of the signs that result in the phenomenon. This shift toward textual analysis enables us to better understand our relationships with the narrative televisual worlds we frequently inhabit through a deconstruction of how these complex sign systems provide an experience of immersion and identification through enigma, structured through binary relation and informed by mythic belief. Narrative transportation is also worth considering for future research into the prevalence of rewatching television content. While this study only observed comedy-drama television texts, the structural revelations of binary, enigma, and myth can be applied to further analysis into different television genres and narrative-driven entertainment media. These findings can also serve as a valuable resource for visual storytellers and television producers as they work to craft transportational narrative worlds. In the following

chapter, I reveal the significant gap in narrative transportation literature and situate this

semiotic deconstruction as the first step to advancing the understanding of our

relationship to the narrative worlds we inhabit.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter engages with narrative transportation theory, examining the gaps in the literature in order to extend the theory towards textual concerns. Narrative transportation is the phenomenon in which an individual becomes immersed within the story and emotionally connected to its characters, mentally departing the physical world (Gerrig, 1993). With a foundation in psychology, narrative transportation theory research has primarily been conducted at the audience level, concerned with the cognitive processes behind the phenomenon and its resulting persuasive effects. While audience effects and the transportability— such as the ability to generate mental images (Green & Brock, 2002) and the need for affect (Appel & Richter, 2010)—of the individual are certainly important avenues of research, we cannot fully understand the machinations behind this phenomenon without examining it at the textual level. While some transportation research has begun discussing narrative elements through an examination of characters (ex: Van Laer et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2019), it has primarily been conducted through quantitative analysis of participant response, rather than a deep exploration of how the narrative operates.

Due to the surface-level treatment narrative has received in theoretical discussion, larger concerns of structure and content are ignored. To fill this gap in research, I applied the literature of semiotic deconstruction (Barthes, 1974) to episodic televisual narratives. Specifically, I employed how semiotic analysis breaks down the text into syntagmatic (i.e. causality, conflict, and enigma) and paradigmatic (i.e. character and setting) codes that are likely to invite transportation through immersion and identification. Advancing from audience study into textual analysis will provide insights into the phenomenon by

illuminating the inner workings of narrative that unite to provide a transportive experience. Put simply, I am building on research by advancing the conversation from *what* narrative transportation does at the audience level to *how* narratives invite transportation at the textual level.

Narrative Transportation Theory

Before discussing narrative transportation, narrative itself must be defined. Narrative is the inseparable structure of our media landscape, shaping the way we perceive the world and structuring events into causal relationships. It is hard to find a unified definition of narrative throughout literature. Hinyard and Kreuter (2007) try by defining narrative as "any cohesive and coherent story with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end that provides information about scene, characters, and conflict; raises unanswered questions or unresolved conflict; and provides resolution" (p. 778). Narrative is a form of viewing the world that makes sense to us, linking together events in a seemingly meaningful way. It has always featured prominently in mass communication research. Kozloff (1992) argues that "narratives are not only the dominant type of text on television, but narrative structure is, to a large extent, the portal or grid through which even nonnarrative television must pass" (p. 69). Due to the ubiquitous nature of narrative in televisual content, it is vital that we understand how it operates to immerse and persuade us through its representation of reality. Cultivation theory places narrative center to the resonance of television. Gerbner (1998)—concerned with how television influences attitudes and beliefs on a large scale—developed cultivation theory to examine how mass-produced narratives socialize viewers, arguing that "humans are the only species that lives in a world erected by the stories they tell" (p. 175). A close examination

into narrative can allow us to better understand our relationship with narratives by illuminating how these stories invite transportation.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Gerrig (1993) defines narrative transportation as a cognitive process in which an individual is immersed within a narrative to the extent that they feel transported into the story world, with the possibility of returning with their attitudes and beliefs altered. The theory began with Gerrig's metaphor of this narrative experience as transportation, arguing that the phenomenon is similar to that of a real-world journey in which we change ourselves to fit in with our new surroundings. This adaptation to the narrative environment has the possibility of a persuasive effect, as individuals choose to perform certain actions to align with the narrative while interacting within its world. Gerrig (1993) stresses that his metaphor of transportation "brings into focus a number of issues that warrant theoretical treatment" (p. 24). The theoretical treatment resulting from his metaphor has largely been audience-centered and therefore limited in scope. Instead, I observed the phenomenon from the textual level to uncover narrative attributes that invite transportation.

Since Gerrig, narrative transportation theory has primarily been rooted in psychology and explored through Green and Brock's (2002) transportation-imagery model, maintaining an audience-centered research focus. Green and Brock (2002) conceptualize "transportation as a convergent process, where all of the person's mental systems and capacities become focused on the events occurring in the narrative" (p. 324). An individual that is paying complete attention to the text may not notice what is going on around them and may even forget aspects of the non-mediated material world, such as certain known information and personal worries. The transportation-imagery model is

centered on the belief that the phenomenon is dependent on the ability of the individual to

create mental images and to immerse themselves within an activity. The content

attributes observed by the model are the artistry of the work and the level to which it

adheres to a standard narrative format. Artistry refers to the overall craftsmanship of the

work, resulting in an enjoyable experience. Adherence to narrative format refers to how

the story progresses linearly and maintains coherence. For example, a program such as

AMC's period drama *Mad Men* is more likely to invite transportation due to being an

artfully crafted audiovisual experience—through its use of music, acting, and

cinematography—and for following a logical story progression in which events occur in a

standard chronological order. However, these are surface-level variables that do not

consider specificities of the narrative structure such as conflict, characters, and setting.

Overall, Green and Brock's model is focused mainly on the cognitive process behind

transportation and therefore ignores components of the narrative that may influence this

phenomenon. Rather than observing what the narrative may to do to invoke immersion,

they focus on the ability to be immersed as an inherent attribute of the individual

audience member. Instead of applying this model, I viewed narrative transportation from

a media criticism standpoint and inductively explored how narrative operates to invite

this experience. Discovering the textual attributes that invite transportation means

producers are better equipped to craft transportational narratives, creating a deeper level

of engagement with the audience. Additionally, it is essential that we understand how

narratives can transport and ultimately persuade their viewers due to the possible belief-

altering results of the phenomenon.

Due to this ability to alter beliefs and attitudes, the persuasive effect of narrative transportation has been a primary focus in research. Bilandzic and Busselle (2008) used transportation in their research of long-term genre-specific cultivation effects of films, but found no linear effect between transportability and cultivation. However, their data suggested possible nonlinear moderation as "genre exposure influences related real-world attitudes only among more highly transportable viewers" (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2008, p. 521). Advertising research suggests high transportation positively impacts brand recall and affective response in television advertising (Brechman & Purvis, 2015), brand engagement across cultures (Kim et al., 2016), the sharing of viral advertisements (Seo et al., 2018), and trust in buyer-to-buyer advertising (Anaza et al., 2020). Research has also been focused in non-commercial areas of persuasion, such as cancer communication (Green, 2006; Dillard et al., 2018), cancer research participation (Neil et al., 2019), health communication (Oh et al., 2020), climate change (Morris et al., 2019), social justice (Addie et al., 2021), and classroom education (Moore & Miller, 2020). While the persuasive effects of narrative transportation are important, we have yet to discover much about how it actually works. This analysis fills a gap in previous research by uncovering the structural elements of narratives that combine to produce these persuasive results.

What is lost to much of narrative transportation literature—due to its origin in psychology—is that the persuasive nature of the phenomenon is because of its role in the larger process of audience cultivation. From a media criticism standpoint, narrative transportation is an element within the larger area of cultivation theory and should therefore be examined at the textual level, rather than the audience level. Gerbner (1998) founded cultivation theory to explain the effects of television narratives, arguing:

The repetitive 'lessons' we learn from television, beginning with infancy, are

likely to become the basis for a broader world view, making television a

significant source of general values, ideologies, and perspectives as well as

specific assumptions, beliefs, and images. (p. 185)

These lessons from television are the result of how narrative represents a naturalized

perspective of the world. The cultivation outcomes of adapting the narrative's values and

beliefs are the same as the aforementioned outcomes of narrative transportation, which

exists within this larger cultivation process. Gerbner (1969) argued to examine the

messages themselves that produce cultivation effects before observing the resulting

response from their viewers. The opposite has occurred through narrative transportation

literature. While Gerbner situated cultivation theory in analysis of narrative content,

narrative transportation theory has largely examined the cognitive process of

transportation through audience-provided data. Rooted in cultivation theory, I am

expanding narrative transportation theory through my examination of television

narratives.

We seek out narratives that provide transportation because this phenomenon is an

enjoyable experience. Green et al. (2004) claim "transportation theory provides a lens for

understanding the concept of media enjoyment and furnishes increased understanding of

why and how enjoyment occurs in response to media" (p. 312). This derived enjoyment

may lead to a ritualistic pattern in which people habitually engage with similar media.

Additionally, Appel and Richter (2010) found that "the affective component of

transportation is closely linked to affective responses such as identification, suspense, or

enjoyment" (pp. 127-128). Identification is where the viewer positions themselves with

characters of the story, and is one of the main elements explored through this televisual deconstruction. The notion that viewers deliberately seek out this experience illuminates the importance of approaching narrative transportation in terms of the emotional resonance of the text derived through character identification. Transportational television shows are more likely to be considered successful programs, as they encourage returning viewership due to the enjoyment derived from visiting their narrative world.

Literature shows a link between narrative transportation and affective response beyond media enjoyment. Affect, defined broadly as emotional resonance, is one of the responses to narrative used to measure the amount of transportation in Green and Brock's (2013) "Transport Narrative Questionnaire." Research into narrative advertising has found that transportation leads to decreased critical thinking and positive attitudes towards the advertisement and brand (Escalas, 2004). This is due to viewers failing to evaluate the strength of the argument when they are transported. Additionally, a study by Appel and Richter (2010) found that an audience member's need for affect predicts their level of transportation and persuasion, while Shanahan et al. (2019) argued that "affect functions to transport the audience into the story" (p. 18). For this textual analysis, I operationalized affect by examining the possibility for character identification as an indicator of its overall ability to invite transportation.

Narrative transportation requires a high level of immersion within the text. Immersion is a deep state of focus in which elements external to the experience, such as the viewer's surroundings or real-world concerns, are ignored. Gerrig's (1993) original metaphor of narrative experience as transportation implies that the audience is so immersed that they have mentally departed from the physical world. Green and Brock,

(2002) while developing narrative transportation into a testable theory, related the phenomenon to similarly immersive experiences of flow—a loss of awareness of self and time—and absorption—an altered perception of self and reality. For instance, an immersed television viewer is so engrossed with their program that they lose track of time, feel emotionally connected the characters, and temporarily forget about their own personhood. While we know that transportation results from immersion, it is unclear how narrative results in immersion. This textual analysis examines elements of televisual narratives likely to invite viewer immersion, such as enigmatic concerns and conflict.

Narrative transportation is an enjoyable belief-impacting psychological phenomenon in which an individual mentally departs from their reality and enters the narrative world. Based in psychology, and largely explored through Green and Brock's (2002) transportation-imagery model, research has been primarily focused on attributes of the individual audience member and the persuasive effects derived from the experience. Examining the phenomenon from a media criticism perspective as it relates to television positions narrative transportation as a component in the overall cultivation process (Gerbner, 1998) in which narratives influence their viewer's attitudes and beliefs. In line with Gerbner, I have shifted the focus of narrative transportation research from the audience to the text. To do so, this textual analysis was informed by semiotics, deconstructing the narrative to examine its elements and determine how they each function to invite transportation. My semiotic approach to narrative analysis is discussed in the following section.

Semiotics

Narratives can best be explored through a semiotic approach, as narrative is

constructed through a complex use of signs both symbolic and sequential. Onega and

Landa (2014) define narrative as "the semiotic representation of a series of events

connected in a temporal and causal way" (p. 3). As a form of representation, narrative is

an interpretation of reality rather than a transparent depiction of the material world.

Numerous choices are made by television producers that result in this representation,

such as how to depict the characters and settings, what types of issues to focus on, and

how these issues are handled. For instance, the Washington, D.C. depicted in Netflix's

political thriller *House of Cards* feels alien to the Washington, D.C. in NBC's political

drama *The West Wing* due to the former's critical view of political power and selfish

ambition. I analyzed televisual narratives through the use of semiotics to closely examine

how paradigmatic and syntagmatic elements likely to result in narrative transportation

operate. A paradigm is a group or classification of similar signs in a singular textual

location (e.g. a Ford instead of a Ferrari, lipstick instead of lip-gloss, or a can of beer

instead of a neat bourbon), while a syntagm is a sequential series of signs that must

maintain a specific order (Seiter, 1992). Paradigmatic combinations of observation are

causality, conflict, and enigma, while syntagmatic elements of grouping are character and

setting. For instance, the order of a paradigm must remain the same for the elements of

causality and enigma, or else logic and anticipation respectively will not follow. If an

episode of a medical drama such as NBC's *ER* began in the future by revealing the

patient's outcome, any suspense or concern that would have derived from the narrative

would be nonexistent. Likely causes of televisual transportation are illuminated through

my semiotic deconstruction into narrative that examines these five paradigmatic and syntagmatic elements.

Semiotic deconstruction is an invaluable method to examine how televisual narratives operate, and therefore can be applied to discover how narratives transport their viewers. Semiotics is the study of signs and how they are used to communicate meaning (Seiter, 1992). Since television is a complex sign system, "semiotics is extremely useful in its attempt to describe precisely how television produces meaning" (Seiter, 1992, p. 63). Television produces its narratives through cultural and societal understandings of the relationship between displayed signifiers and their signified meaning. Caldwell (1993) describes television as "a self-perpetuating and self-permutating semiotic machine" (p. 27) that constantly employs new stylistic codes. Through an understanding of signs and the complex way meaning is constructed through them, televisual narratives can be examined more closely to uncover how constructions of meaning also work to develop a story world we find worthy of visiting. For instance, if sign choices are employed to make a character more likeable and relatable, the audience is more likely to identify with them and become transported as a result. I examined how these meanings derived from televisual symbols of narrative coalesce to provide a means of transportation.

Many scholars have approached television analysis through semiotics. Polidoro (2016) examined ITV's historical drama *Downton Abbey* to uncover ideological themes of aristocracy and sacrifice within its narrative, while Kuruc (2008) analyzed how HBO's romantic comedy-drama *Sex and the City*'s use of fashion reinforces gender stereotypes. Randall (1998) analyzed BBC 2's food series *Rick Stein's Taste of the Sea* to determine how food and hospitality are represented on television, while Chouliaraki (2006)

examined "the semiotic aestheticization of suffering" (p. 267) present in television war

footage that legitimizes war. Television commercials have been examined through

semiotics for various concerns, such as the use of sports images (Balci & Özgen, 2017),

decisions behind setting choices (Solomon & Greenberg, 1993), the ideology behind

musical style (Rodman, 1997), and the construction of gender identity (Correa, 2011). All

of these studies demonstrate how semiotics is a commonly accepted and versatile lens for

television analysis. I have applied the same lens to explore narrative elements that are

likely to result in transportation.

Myth

My semiotic deconstruction of narrative was informed through an understanding

of cultural myth. Barthes (1957/2013) states that cultural myths are the second-order

signification of signs that reinforce and naturalize ideology. Put another way, myth is the

manifestation of ideology that is contained within the narrative and shared by its

viewership. For instance, the myths of the American Dream and the classless society are

present in HGTV's reality television series *Extreme Makeover Home Edition* through

how it portrays in-need families as morally righteous and deserving of financial

assistance (Winslow, 2010). In my semiotic deconstruction, I examined the myths shared

among my sample of television programs to determine their possible impact on

transportation. This was approached by conceiving of characters as the embodiment of

ideology through their expressed values and their agency to enact in-line with their

ideology. As a result, the level of identification viewers feel toward them relies on if they

share a similar mythic understanding of the world. In short, the myths we use to make

sense of our world must be the same that shape the narrative worlds we transport into.

Through the existence of myth, narratives construct worlds which can be understood by the viewer through an alignment of beliefs and values. Next, I will explain the syntagmatic and paradigmatic elements within narrative that are constructed through myth and relate to transportation.

Syntagm. Narrative is structured through a series of cause-and-effect relationships. Adams (1989) argues for critical consideration of how causality functions in narrative, as it is inseparable from narrative structure. Despite this canonical assumption, Adams claims that causality is often either ignored or attacked in narrative study. Kozloff (1992) states "television, like all other narrative forms, takes advantage of the viewer's almost unquenchable habit of inferring causality from succession" (p. 70). Even if there is no clear link between two sequential events in a story, the viewer will still make sense of it through a causal connection. For example, the in-air plane collision that closes season 2 of AMC's crime drama *Breaking Bad* is blamed on a chain of events that began with protagonist Walter White not preventing Jane Margolis's death from a heroin overdose. In addition to providing understanding, causality has been found to moderate the influence of narrative persuasion (Dahlstrom, 2015), which is a possible outcome of transportation. I have examined causality to uncover how it functions to provide conflict and enigma within transportational comedy-drama television texts.

Narratives are centered on their characters' engagement within conflict. Brooks and Warren (1959) claim that conflict is the essential process in a narrative as the story moves from complication to simplicity, summarizing the relationship by claiming "story means conflict" (p. 652). They argue that conflict can occur in many different places, such as between individuals, between people and society, between ideas, or internally. In

HBO's crime drama *The Sopranos,* conflict exists between Tony Soprano and his family, between the crime family and law enforcement, between Tony and his children's differing values, and between Tony and his anxiety attacks. McLaughlin (2020) examined the transportive outcome of conflict in political narratives, arguing that "as partisans get drawn into political tales of conflict, they may come to feel as if they have directly experienced political conflict and that the outcomes of political battles are of paramount importance in their lives" (p. 598). McLaughlin's study demonstrates the immersive nature of televisual conflict in terms of identification with characters engaged in the conflict. Conflict was examined in my semiotic deconstruction of televisual texts to determine the resulting likeliness of immersion and identification.

Another major element to televisual narrative structure is enigma, which is often discussed in terms of suspense. Gerrig (1993) explains that an individual engages with narratives through emotionally-charged participatory responses to suspense. For instance, it is common for viewers of the horror genre to occasionally participate by shouting "run!" or "don't go in there!" at their screens in an attempt to save the protagonist from their anticipated demise. A more complex participatory response is problem solving, in which the suspense provides a space for the viewer to predict possible outcomes. Problem solving is the key to how enigma drives narrative, as the unending posing of questions and creation of conflicts provides constant opportunities for the viewer to participate with the narrative. Due to the episodic nature of television narrative, suspense is also an important element in its incentive to bring the viewer back for the next episode (Kozloff, 1992). Since the narrative is divided into separate installments, suspense can be employed to ensure the viewer returns to watch in the future or continues watching additional

episodes. The common use of cliffhangers in television shows work to maintain interest

between alternating story lines and different episodes through their use of suspense.

However, ideas of certainty held by the audience present a problem in creating suspense

in episodic television, as viewers understand that the main cast must return largely

unharmed for the next episode. In contrast, films—with the exception of franchises—are

self-contained, making the fate of the main characters uncertain since they are not

required to return for a future installment. To work around this issue, television narratives

commonly employ minor characters that audiences are less certain about (Kozloff, 1992).

For instance, while watching NBC's comedy-drama *Scrubs*, we are sure that Dr. John

Dorian and his coworkers will return in next week's episode, but we are unsure of the

fate of their newly-arrived patients. These minor characters are not required for the larger

series narrative to progress in future episodes, so we acknowledge that anything is

possible. Barthes (1974) defined suspense as enigma, or the hermeneutic code, in which

the narrative presents questions to the audience to later be answered. I will be using the

hermeneutic code as a basis of analyzing how narrative creates suspense, participatory

response, and ultimately viewer immersion. Through examining enigma, I gave

consideration to Gerrig's concern of narrative suspense that has been underrepresented in

narrative transportation literature.

Paradigm. Television is primarily a character-driven medium. As such, an

analysis of television narratives would be incomplete without a close examination of the

characters that live within them. According to Kozloff (1992) "it is characters and their

interrelationships that dominate television stories" (p. 75). Much of the narrative content

of television is driven by the development of its characters and focuses on their

relationships with each other. For example, the plots contained in NBC's sitcom *The Office* are largely driven by character relationships, rather than the demands of the titular office they inhabit. The operations of Dunder Mifflin Paper Company are secondary to the romance between Jim Halpert and Pam Beasley, Jim's pranks against Dwight K. Schrute, and branch manager Michael Scott's constant attempts to be liked by his employees. Similarly, the ABC drama *A Million Little Things* revolves entirely around a group of friends coping after the suicide of their friend Jon Dixon, examining their histories and connections with each other. Due to the centrality of characters in television, I examined how they impact the transportiveness of the text through viewer identification.

Identification is a way for the viewer to immerse themselves into the text through positioning with certain characters. Carpenter and Green (2012) explain that identification is a form of immersion in which "the character serves as an orientation through which the reader experiences the story" (p. 181). Fiske (1987) argues that identification with characters within television narratives creates a perceived realism of the text and allows the viewer to empathize with the character, therefore viewing the narrative through their perspective. This is contrasted with alienation, which allows us to see the constructedness of the story. According to Fiske (1987), identification with characters "encouraged the audience to share the experiences and emotions of the characters and thus produced a feeling audience, not a thinking one" (p. 169). Identification is a decision by the viewer to either self-implicate when it is pleasurable to do so or distance when the situation or values do not mirror their own. Fiske (1987) states that identification is invited through "wish fulfillment, for the seducing character is

claimed to embody many of the unsatisfied desires (e.g. glamor, wealth, success) of the viewer" (p. 170). As an example, the success of AMC's drama *Breaking Bad* could arguably stem from the mass desire for success, excitement, and wealth, as viewers watch as mundane Walter White—an underpaid public school chemistry teacher and car wash employee—becomes the exciting Heisenberg—a rich, notorious drug kingpin involved in life-threatening situations.

Identification is derived from an alignment of ideology between viewer and character. Fiske (1987) argues that "on television the physical presence of the player is used, not to authenticate the individual self, but to embody (literally) discourse and ideology" (p. 153). Characters are more than simply fictional people used to progress the plot; they represent core values and beliefs through their actions and choices. Since we explore the narrative world through the perspectives of the characters, the ideologies they embody frame the overall experience. For example, in NBC's sitcom *Parks and Recreation*, Deputy Director Leslie Knope embodies the optimistic work ethic through her faith in her governmental role and servitude to the citizens of Pawnee, Indiana. Her antithesis is her supervisor Ron Swanson, who embodies libertarian ideals of small government and attempts to do as little work as possible. Since characters embody ideology, transportation could be negatively impacted if the viewer does not share similar ideals with the protagonist, as they will feel distinct from the story due to the disagreement. If a view is injected into a character, they are injected into the narrative the character exists within, therefore making it an important area in which to view transportation. In my semiotic deconstruction, I approached these ideological concerns by examining the cultural myths (Barthes, 1957/2013) enacted out through the characters.

Narrative transportation research points to character identifiability as an element that invites transportation. Van Laer et al.'s (2014) extended transportation-imagery model updated Green and Brock's previous model, adding the variable of character identifiability. Slater and Rouner (2002) explored character identification in relation to transportation, arguing the importance of emotional involvement over personal similarity. Emotional involvement with characters is an aspect of being invested in the narrative, as viewers are concerned with the wellbeing of characters they like. We can feel real emotions towards the situations of fictional characters. A notable example is the infamous "Red Wedding" scene in HBO's drama *Game of Thrones* in which several characters are killed, leading to intense reactions of fans claiming that they would stop watching the series (Fowler, 2013). In examining the role of characters in risk communication, Shanahan et al. (2019) conclude that narratives with heroic characters increase narrative transportation and affective response, while victim-based narratives had the opposite outcome. In this study, the victim character did not prepare for a disaster while the hero character did. This study highlights the larger concept of character agency to influence the narrative, as the hero/victim concept is ultimately an action/inaction issue. Through these varied studies it is clear that characters play a vital role in the overall transportive nature of the narratives they inhabit. Therefore, I further examined identifiability through myth alignment within transportational televisual texts.

The setting of the narrative is another paradigmatic element worth consideration. The setting of a television series can invite transportation by providing an alluring place in which the viewer would like to be. Sadler and Haskins (2005) examined multiple television shows based in New York, arguing that they operate through the tourist gaze

by marketing the location as worth visiting. They provide an example of *Sex and the City*, as notable landmarks (e.g. the Brooklyn Bridge, the Twin Towers), yellow cabs, friendly streets, and the comfort of shopping and dining all represent the city through metonymy and provide a tourist's dream. Metonymy is when a larger thing (i.e. New York) is represented through smaller attributes (i.e. landmarks, shopping) that comprise it. Reijnders (2016) examined media tourism, where fans travel to destinations they see represented in their favorite programs, stating:

> In many cases, the readers/viewers identify with one or more of the characters in the story and in their minds transport themselves into and through this imaginary world. When the media tourist finally makes his or her journey, this trip more or less represents a realization of an earlier imaginary journey. (p. 673)

Put another way, media tourism is the real-world fulfillment of an earlier experience of mental tourism, better known as narrative transportation. While the article argues television settings market physical tourist destinations, they do so by first providing a transportive experience for the viewer. If the setting is depicted as attractive, people will want to feel as though they are there and immerse themselves with the narrative world. These studies reveal the vital role of setting within narrative transportation.

Similarly to characters, settings can also embody values and beliefs. Solomon and Greenberg (1993) explain that elements in the physical environment "are carefully chosen to symbolize character traits and convey plot elements" (p. 12). It is therefore important to examine the signified meanings behind various setting choices. Similarly, MasterClass (2021) references insights from television screenwriter Aaron Sorkin, stating that "for television series, the setting informs the story and provides a constant well of

inspiration for storylines, plotlines, and characters" (para. 10). For instance, *Showtime*'s

revival season of ABC's mystery drama *Twin Peaks* felt like a different show largely due

to significant setting changes. Rather than primarily staying in the titular rural

northwestern United States town, *Showtime*'s season largely relocated away from the

Douglas fir trees into urban environments such as New York City and Las Vegas. This

allowed the narrative to explore beyond the interrelations of characters in a small logging

town. In my analysis of televisual narratives, I examined the way setting choices may

impact transportation through their deeper signification.

Codes. The mechanizations of transportation can be discovered through a deep

reading of both the syntagmatic and paradigmatic codes that comprise the narrative.

Barthes's (1974) analysis of Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* provides the foundation of how I

approached semiotic narrative analyzation. Barthes engages in a deep reading of this

Balzac short story to understand how meaning functions throughout narrative structure.

This structuralist reading—breaking down the narrative to uncover how its elements

function—was the basis of how my textual analysis was operationalized. In Barthes's

analysis, he breaks down the narrative and identifies five codes for interpreting its

signifiers in order to see narrative structures and to determine how the signs function to

produce meaning. These five codes are hermeneutic, semic, symbolic, proairetic, and

cultural. The hermeneutic code is concerned with enigmas, or questions that arise within

the text that linger to await an answer. Barthes claims the title of *Sarrasine* itself is the

first hermeneutic code observed, as readers question what it means. The way in which the

narrative poses questions and problems was a major concern of my semiotic

deconstruction, as the delay of answers and solutions invites immersion and the engaging

in participatory responses. The semic code is used to indicate connotative meanings, or semes, of signifiers while the symbolic code is a grouping of these semes within a binary relation. Barthes explains that the hosted party and private house of the Lanty family are both semes to convey their wealth. A provided example of the symbolic code is the juxtaposition made between indoors and outdoors. The symbolic code influenced my analysis through a deconstruction of binaries present within the televisual narratives. These two codes apply to paradigmatic elements of character and setting, as the signifiers employed to frame them will determine the level of identification and immersion felt by the viewer. For instance, identification can differ through NBC's comedy-drama *Freaks and Geeks* between the academic-turned-rebellious Lindsay Weir and her antithetical, well-mannered, nerdy brother Sam Weir. The semic elements associated with these characters define who they are and how they relate to each other, with the former often wearing a grunge, dark green jacket and the latter commonly in stereotypical nerdy attire with stripes and collared shirts. For the proairetic code, Barthes simply lists actions, such as a character hidden behind a curtain as the act of being hidden. Actions are important for examination, as they are the enactment of character agency and combine to form syntagmatic elements of causality and conflict. The cultural code is where the work draws from common bodies of knowledge, such as history or science. For an example of the cultural code, Barthes (1974) interprets the phrase "insidious drafts" (p. 26) as deriving from popular medicine, due to the belief that cold air leads to illness. The cultural code links to shared mythic structures of ideology between the text and its receiver. Therefore, if the cultural codes employed by the narrative differ from the viewer's understanding, coherence is broken. For Barthes (1974), "each code is one of

the forces that can take over the text (of which the text is the network)" (p. 21). He argues

that texts have a plurality of possible readings, as these five codes exist simultaneously

throughout the work. Inspired by Barthes's structuralist reading of *Sarrasine*, I have

broken down televisual narratives into a collection of codes to observe how they combine

to invite transportation.

The semiotic approach is essential to uncovering how narrative structure results in

transportation. Since narrative is semiotic representation (Onega & Landa, 2014),

examining the symbols that construct our television experience provides insights into

how its effects are achieved. This study illuminates how causality, conflict, enigma,

character, and setting all coalesce within televisual narratives to invite transportation. The

next chapter will outline how this semiotic deconstruction was conducted.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I will detail how I conducted a semiotic deconstruction of the episodic comedy-drama television texts *Gilmore Girls* (The WB and The CW, 2000-2007, seven seasons), *Girls* (HBO, 2012-2017, six seasons), and *Grace and Frankie* (Netflix, 2015-present, seven seasons) to determine how their narrative's structural elements work similarly to invite transportation. This sample represents transportational comedy-drama television programming due to the success of each series. Their success determined by their production runs lasting at least six seasons and their cultural impact. These three programs offer a wide variety of televisual content, accounting for legacy broadcast, premium cable broadcast, and streaming. I have deconstructed these exemplary television texts in order to introduce narrative-specific concerns into the study of narrative transportation theory and reveal how similarities in their narrative structures invite transportation through enabling viewer immersion and identification.

As discussed in the previous chapter, concerns of narrative structure and content have been largely ignored in favor of audience qualities that allow for transportation. When the transportive nature of the text is considered, research is conducted primarily through quantitative audience survey rather than a deep reading of the text itself. In short, narrative has been excluded from narrative transportation theory. This chapter will lay out my methodology for this textual analysis of televisual narratives.

This analysis shifts narrative transportation from psychology to media criticism, advancing the conversation of the phenomenon by exploring its machinations within the narrative itself. This exploration was inspired by Barthes's (1974) semiotic deconstruction of the Balzac short story *Sarrasine*, in which he uncovered how meaning

is conveyed through the text by breaking the story down into "the blocks of signification of which reading grasps only the smooth surface" (p. 13). Barthes disrupted the process of story reading by closely examining the text and dividing its elements into codes. I have disrupted the process of television viewing in the same manner. Informed by the emergent method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), I broke down televisual texts to uncover how narrative transportation is achieved through immersion and identification by open coding narrative elements of causality/coherence, conflict, enigma, character, and setting. After this open coding process, I conducted cross-series axial coding to compare these coded elements between the different episodes and series within the sample to inductively realize the transportive qualities of narrative structure.

Sample and Parameters

My sample was comprised of three successful television series to which represent transportational comedy-drama televisual texts across a range of television from legacy broadcast, premium cable broadcast, and streaming. I analyzed each episode from the third seasons of The WB's *Gilmore Girls* (22 episodes), HBO's *Girls* (12 episodes), and Netflix's *Grace and Frankie* (13 episodes) for a total of 47 episodes. The three audiovisual texts I have chosen provide maximum variation of television content while limiting spurious variables that may interfere with the examination of transportive attributes, such as differences of genre or levels of celebrity appeal. I have specifically chosen to examine episodes in the third season because the story, main characters, and the narrative style are well established by this point in the series. All of these programs are character-driven comedy-dramas with a production run of at least six seasons and are therefore similar enough to be compared with limited concerns about differences in

transportation variables. Examining programs from the same genre ensures that any notable differences in transportive variables are the result of their narrative, rather than genre-specific effects. Furthermore, this hybrid genre was selected as a way to include both comedic and dramatic elements in the analysis without approaching issues with intervening genre differences. I have selected shows in which characters play an integral role in the narrative progression to better examine how characters to invite transportation. In short, the three programs selected provide a wide view of the comedy-drama genre across television while being similar enough to compare transportive attributes. *Gilmore Girls* and *Girls* are both legacy broadcast programs selected to provide a representative view of broadcast television, with the former airing on network television (The WB and The CW) and the latter on premium cable (HBO). In contrast, *Grace and Frankie* is an original program produced for the streaming platform Netflix. This maximum variation of television content provided insights into how transportation is achieved on the episode-level throughout different televisual comedy-drama narratives.

      Gilmore Girls, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie* are each successful comedy-dramas that can provide invaluable insights into how televisual narratives transport their viewers. Their long production runs are indicative of a narrative world worth constantly revisiting by viewers, as transportation is a pleasurable experience viewers may purposefully seek out (Green et al., 2004). *Gilmore Girls* and *Grace and Frankie* are tied for the longest running series with seven seasons, slightly ahead of *Girls* with six seasons. While *Gilmore Girls* is notably older than the other two programs, I have included it due to its legendary status and current cultural relevance. Despite ending five years before *Girls* began airing, *Gilmore Girls* continues to be popular across generations and received a

2016 revival miniseries on Netflix (Ahsan, 2016). This Netflix revival series was a rare

instance of a streaming-to-broadcast licensing deal in 2020, as The CW acquired the

rights to air Netflix's series during Thanksgiving that year (Goldberg, 2020). The third

season of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie* all have positive aggregate

audience scores on the website Rotten Tomatoes: 92% (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.-a), 73%

(Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.-b), and 93% (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.-c) respectively. Additionally,

the third season of *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie* have positive aggregate critic scores: of

92% "Certified Fresh" (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.-b) and 100% (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.-c)

respectively. *Gilmore Girls* does not have an aggregate critic score due to a lack of

available data (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.-a). After the first season of *Gilmore Girls* averaged

3.6 million viewers, a schedule change resulted in the program eventually maintaining the

4.5 to 5 million viewer range before moving to The CW for its final season and dropping

to 3.7 (Adalian, 2016). According to Adalian (2016), "it's very rare for any TV show to

end such a long run with more viewers than when it started. That *Gilmore* did so is a

testament to the loyalty it inspired among its fans" (para. 3). Season 3 of *Girls* averaged

4.6 million weekly viewers, which was consistent with its second season. (O'Connell,

2014). Viewership data on *Grace and Frankie* is unavailable due to the lack of data

shared by streaming programs, but its popularity has made it the longest-running original

Netflix series (Jones, 2021). To control for any spurious variables associated with

celebrity appeal, the cast of each series features notable star power. For example: Lauren

Graham in *Gilmore Girls*, Lena Dunham and Adam Driver in *Girls*, and Jane Fonda and

Lily Tomlin in *Grace and Frankie*. The success of these shows is a result of their ability

to immerse and emotionally impact audiences, as viewers return each episode to seek out

narrative transportation. I will next individually provide a synopsis and context for each of these programs I have selected for my sample.

Gilmore Girls

Gilmore Girls is an American television series created by Amy Sherman-Palladino that ran on The WB from 2000-2006 and on The CW from 2006 to 2007. It has additionally received a miniseries revival titled *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* on Netflix in 2016. Set in the fictional town of Stars Hollow, the series focuses on the life of Lorelai Gilmore (Lauren Graham) and her daughter Rory (Alexis Bledel). After having Rory at a young age, Lorelai moved away from the control of her affluent parents Emily and Richard in Hartford to Stars Hollow in order to make a life for herself and raise her daughter independently. The series begins with Rory in high school as her academic prowess results in an acceptance letter from the esteemed Chilton Preparatory School. The downside of this exciting news is that Lorelai must reconnect with her parents to pay for Rory's tuition. As a caveat for the loan, Emily demands a weekly dinner with them, resulting in Lorelai having to face her strained relationship with her parents. The show focuses heavily on the theme of family and mother-daughter relationships, as Lorelai and Rory's close bond is harshly contrasted with Lorelai's distance from her own mother. Throughout the years following its conclusion, *Gilmore Girls* has proven to be a series that continues to maintain a strong fan base and cultural relevance. John Stephens, a member of the series writing staff for four seasons, told *New York Times*: "The world can be a terrifying place, but in Stars Hollow, you can go there and the world is still this wonderful, lovely place" (as cited in Austerlitz, 2020, para. 36). In this thesis, I explored

the enduring appeal of the series by uncovering how its narrative is able to transport

viewers across generations.

Girls

      Girls is an American television series created by and starring Lena Dunham that

ran on HBO from 2012 to 2017. The show focuses on aspiring writer Hannah Horvath

(Lena Dunham) and her millennial group of friends in New York. After being financially

cut-off by her parents, Hannah is forced to deal with her immaturity and narcissism by

finding a way to take care of herself. Dunham describes the characters in *Girls* in her

series pitch to HBO: "*They're beautiful and maddening. They're self-aware and self-*

obsessed. They're your girlfriends and daughters and sisters and employees. They're my

friends and I've never seen them on TV" *(*as cited in Rose, 2017, para. 20). Throughout

the show, these friends work to find their place in life through their relationships and

career aspirations. For instance, Marnie Michaels (Allison Williams) pursues a career in

music, Jessa Johannsson (Jemima Kirke) struggles between living adventurously and

becoming a better person, Shoshanna Shapiro (Zosia Mamet) struggles to discover a

career path, and Adam Sackler (Adam Driver) works toward an acting career. Issues

amongst the friend group are a common source of conflict for the series, such as the

falling out between Jessa and Hannah due to Jessa dating Hannah's ex-boyfriend Adam

or Shoshanna's realization that the other three girls are holding her back in life. The show

has been the subject of criticism due to its privileged view of millennial life (Howard,

2020) and its characters being "remarkably, unbelievably awful" and "self-destructive"

(Wright, 2017, para. 2). In contrast, positive popular press has argued that the series is

"uncomfortably relatable" (Logan, 2017, para. 2), revolutionary in "its portrayal of

female characters with realistic standards and relatable flaws" (Thompson, 2022, para. 3),

and "so well-written, so carefully directed, and so attuned to a narrow type of rarely-seen-

before verisimilitude that some portion of its audience simply lost the ability to

distinguish it from real life" (Tolentino, 2017, para. 4). Five years the series finale, a

2022 interview with Dunham in *The Hollywood Reporter* (Abramovitch, 2022) created

interest in the possibility of a *Girls* revival. Despite the show's controversial presence in

television history, it is a program that has deeply connected with audiences and endures

the test of time.

Grace and Frankie

Grace and Frankie is an American television series created by Marta Kauffman

and Howard J. Morris streaming on Netflix. The series is centered on the friendship

between title characters Grace Hanson (Jane Fonda) and Frankie Bergstein (Lily Tomlin)

resulting from a life-changing announcement from their husbands. At the beginning of

the series, their husbands Robert (Martin Sheen) and Sol (Sam Waterston) come out as a

couple and announce that they wish to get married. Grace and Frankie are two complete

opposites, as the former is a serious businesswoman while the latter is a free-spirited

artist. The series explores how the two navigate living with each other and bond through

coping with their shared life-changing situation. In a blog on her website, Fonda (2015)

expresses a desire to know why the show—featuring a significantly older main cast than

typically depicted on television—is commonly watched by college students. It is

questions like these that this analysis works to answer by uncovering how *Grace and*

Frankie's narrative can be a transportive experience regardless of age. The series has

fostered a dedicated and active fan base online. Controversy regarding the gender pay gap

surrounded the series in 2015 when Fonda and Tomlin revealed they were being paid the same amount as supporting actors Sheen and Waterston, resulting in fans creating a petition and gaining the attention of major entertainment press outlets such as *Entertainment Weekly* (Maas, 2015). The petition included more than 35,000 supporters at the time of closing (L., n.d.).

Coding

I have conducted a textual analysis of 47 television episodes through an open and axial coding process informed by grounded theory to answer the question: *How do comedy-drama television narratives invite transportation?* Rather than building on previous theoretical foundation, grounded theory is a research approach in which a theory is produced inductively from data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Since transportive attributes of narrative have yet to be researched through textual analysis, an inductive method is vital to uncover transportive narrative attributes from the process of data collection and analysis. While grounded theory provided guidance on the process of conducting the analysis across a large number of episodes (n=47), the analysis and examination of recurring narrative structures was more critical and open, informed by semiotic narrative deconstruction (Barthes, 1974). I also payed critical consideration to how ideology is represented and manifested within the narrative through the presence of cultural myths (Barthes, 1957/2013) and how these myths result in coherence and identification. For example, due to the myth of meritocracy, we understand the resulting success of characters who demonstrate ability and hard work while identifying with their effort and dedication. The resulting data reveals that the three programs result the

subjective experience of transportation, regardless of their surface-level content differences, because they each share the same narrative structure and mythic worldview.

I conducted an open coding process by watching the 47 television episodes over a 32 day period, taking notes on a coding sheet (see Appendix: Coding Sheet) developed with theoretical sensitivity derived from literature on narrative transportation theory and semiotics, as well as my personal experiences of being transported into televisual narrative worlds. During the viewing process, I frequently replayed certain segments and paused the program as necessary to take sufficient notes and log timestamps. Because of this, open coding was a process which disrupted the traditional experience of viewing television by dedicating as much time as necessary to specific aspects of the narrative. This is similar to Barthes's (1974) disruption of the reading process required for the deconstruction of *Sarrasine*, which informed this thesis. Ironically, I had to avoid the phenomenon of narrative transportation to maintain this detailed and analytic viewing of narrative structure.

The coding sheet was used while viewing the episodes to aid in the observation and coding of syntagmatic elements of causality/coherence, conflict, and enigma, as well as paradigmatic elements of character and setting. These are macro-level elements that were chosen to observe how the narratives function structurally. Causality and coherence refer to how the story elements connect in a meaningful way and will be coded by how the narrative sets up and then pays off these elements. An example is how one character's rude remark would result in a relationship issue, leading to a conflict that drives the episode's story. Occurring conflicts were listed out by describing the issue, as well as considering who is involved, the type of conflict (i.e. person vs person, person vs society,

person vs self, or idea vs idea), the level to which the conflict is resolved in the episode, and any second-order mythic signification present (Barthes, 1957/2013). Conflict is essential to narrative (Brooks & Warren, 1959) and can create a transportive experience for the audience (McLaughlin, 2020). Enigma was coded primarily as an aspect of conflict, as suspense results from questions that arise in regards to the setup of the issue and how and/or if the conflict will be resolved. This is because suspense results in immersion and narrative participation through problem solving, as the viewer tries to figure out what will happen next (Gerrig, 1993). For example, will the aforementioned rude remark result in an apology, further confrontation, or perhaps no resolution whatsoever? Barthes (1974) defined these posed questions as enigmas in his semiotic deconstruction of *Sarrasine*, filing them under the hermeneutic code. For paradigm, characters and setting were coded for the ideas they embody and the resulting wish fulfillment provided to the viewer. Viewer identification with characters is a result of wish fulfillment (Fiske, 1987) and a narrative element that invites transportation (Van Laer et al., 2014). Primary characters were coded at the episode level by identifying the larger ideas they represent, such as values (e.g. family, independence, determination) and ideology (e.g. meritocracy, fulfillment, authenticity). The analysis into the embodiment of ideology was observed through the character's choices that align with cultural myth narratives (Barthes, 1957/2013). If viewers disagree with the ideology inherent in the character, they will be less likely to identify with them. Similarly, settings were coded through the ideas they embody. Settings can represent larger ideas through their association with characters, such as how Stars Hollow represents Lorelai's freedom while her parents' town of Hartford represents her restrictive family. Additionally, the ideas

manifested through the setting make the location attractive for narrative transportation (Reijnders, 2016). For example, viewers may wish to live in the idyllic, friendly little town of Stars Hollow and therefore identify with the location. Coding for immersion through causality, conflict, and enigma and identification through character and setting was conducted to reveal how they all coalesce within an episodic narrative to evoke transportation.

After open coding for these syntagmatic and paradigmatic elements, I conducted an axial coding process which determined structural and mythic similarities among the three narratives and how their elements of coherence, conflict, enigma, character, and setting all similarly coalesce to produce a transportational television experience. Through this process, I frequently reviewed the coding sheets and rewatched select portions of the sample from one to five times for further information. This was an emergent process over the course of 49 days as I uncovered how similar these shows operate at the technical narrative level. For example, while the main characters of the shows feel completely different during a surface viewing, they embody many of the same ideals and operate in accordance to the same cultural myths. While the millennial twenty-something New Yorkers in *Girls* face significantly different conflicts than the senior citizens in *Grace and Frankie* or the rural townsfolk in *Gilmore Girls*, observing and comparing the way in which conflict and enigma is approached between the programs reveals similar narrative structures within each that provides an immersive and identifiable experience. This axial coding process was conducted until theoretical saturation had been reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and no new themes or possible codes are discovered. After noticing the prevalence of enigma throughout the three programs, I created a separate list to better

isolate the enigmas per episode, noting when new enigmas were posed and when older

unanswered enigmas where referenced (see Appendix: Enigma List). Once I had

compiled this list, I further categorized enigma in terms of predictive questions concerned

with future events or explanatory questions focused on the past. I also identified the

episode number in which the enigma was answered, if applicable. When an unanswered

enigma was revisited in a later episode, I labeled them "check-ins." This allowed me to

better observe how certain enigmatic concerns progress throughout the season with

various check-ins that maintain the delay of the answer. Lastly, I observed the

prominence of enigmatic presence by adding up the number of enigmas per show and for

the entire sample. This allowed me to determine the average amount of enigmas an

episode for each of the series and realize each show has a similar enigmatic presence.

Through an emergent textual analysis of a wide variety of exemplary

transportational television content, similarities in narrative structure are realized which

are capable of producing narrative transportation. First, I designed a coding sheet to

account for elements of coherence, conflict, enigma, character, and setting and conducted

open coding by watching each of the 47 episodes once, repeating certain segments as

necessary to properly code these elements. Second, I conducted axial coding to determine

similarities in these elements between the three programs. Seeing the significance of

enigma, I created a separate document to properly list the new enigmas posed and the

delayed enigmas referenced per episode while further separating them into two different

types—predictive and explanatory—and examining the delays between question and

answer. The next chapter will detail the results derived from this semiotic deconstruction

and how the similar elements of their narrative combine to produce transportational

television texts.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This textual analysis was conducted to answer the question: *How do comedy-drama television narratives invite transportation?* Through deconstructing the narratives of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie*, I discovered that transportation is evoked in these narratives through an interrelationship between binary construction, enigmatic immersion, and mythic identification. As discussed in chapter two, previous literature has explored the role of immersion (Green & Brock, 2002) and character identification (Van Laer et al., 2014) within the phenomenon of narrative transportation. Narrative deconstruction revealed that immersion results from enigmatic concerns while identification is invited through shared mythic belief. To explain how these two transportational elements are achieved requires a discussion of how narrative is constructed through binary oppositions.

Binaries construct narrative both syntagmatically and paradigmatically. First, syntagmatic binary construction exists in the form of question/answer and problem/solution relationships that drive the narrative forward. In both of these relationships, the delay maintains enigma as the viewer anticipates the answer or solution. Therefore, the answering of the enigma is also the fulfillment of the binary, as the question or problem is finally reunited with its anticipated answer or solution. In this delay state, immersion is evoked through the viewer's participatory responses (Gerrig, 1993) to the narrative that are invited through the existence of enigmas. This occurs as the viewer engages in an extrapolation process, attempting to predict possible futures and explain past occurrences during the delay between question/answer and problem/solution. Furthermore, enigmas are constantly produced and answers are indefinitely delayed

throughout the televisual experience, situating the viewer within a perpetual enigmatic middle state. In this liminal state, enigma invites the viewer to both look to an assumed future to predict possible outcomes and to look to an assumed past to explain origins of occurrences. A final conclusion is never reached, as the ultimate fulfillment of the question/answer and problem/solution binaries would mark the end of the narrative altogether. In short, enigma drives the narrative forward and evokes immersion as a result.

Second, paradigmatic binary relations exist through character embodiment of values and beliefs. Because characters are embodiments of ideology (Fiske, 1987), they exist as one-half of a lager binary through juxtaposition with opposing characters that embody antithetical beliefs. This presence of ideology is best examined through the cultural myths (Barthes, 1957/2013) that inform how the narrative world operates. Through conflict, the viewer is placed in the middle of myth as characters enact beliefs of autonomy, authenticity, fulfillment, and meritocracy. Identification is achieved through the alignment of mythic belief, as the viewer shares the values embodied and expressed by the identifiable characters. Furthermore, myth provides coherence as the narrative worlds operate under the same beliefs the viewer applies to understand the material world. The narrative world makes sense because it works exactly how the viewer believes the material world should. For example, attempts by characters to find greater meaning through work is logical to the viewer through the shared myth of career fulfillment. In sum, identification is invited by characters that share and enact the same values and beliefs within a narrative that operates in agreement with mythic understanding.

In this section, I separate these three elements of binary, enigma, and myth to demonstrate how they coalesce within *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie* and result in a transportational narrative experience. First, I provide an overview of how binary relationships construct the narratives. Second, I detail how enigmas exist throughout these binary constructions to evoke immersion. Lastly, I demonstrate how myths invite identification by informing these binary constructions and enigmatic concerns.

Binary Construction

Binary relationships allow us to achieve understanding through juxtaposing two opposing elements. Narratives utilize this sense-making shorthand by configuring elements in dichotomous opposition, such as good and evil. Barthes (1974) developed the symbolic code to categorize these relationships, considering antithesis as a battle between two signs. By situating two elements in a dichotomous relationship, each can be better understood through association with their opposite. A thorough understanding of narrative form is achieved through deconstructing the binary oppositions which structure both syntagm and paradigm. First, coherence is achieved through syntagmatic binary configuration through the relationships of question/answer and problem/solution. With the posing of a question or problem, enigma is produced as the viewer waits for the fulfillment of the binary with the answer or solution. Both of these relationships position the viewer in a middle state within the delay of the answer or solution, maintaining the enigma indefinitely. Second, paradigmatic elements of character and setting are conceived as the embodiment of half of a binary relation and can therefore be understood through their antithetical counterpart. The ideas that characters and settings embody are

constructed as half of a larger binary through the inclusion of antithetical counterparts.

Finally, the ultimate nature of binary opposition within the narrative is achieved through

conflict, combining these two aforementioned syntagmatic and paradigmatic binary

configurations. The character—as manifestation of half of a binary relation—enters a

conflict, which poses a problem—which is also half of a binary due to the anticipated

future solution. The following section will provide individual deconstructions of the

binaries inherent within the narrative elements of syntagm, paradigm, and conflict in

order to demonstrate how narrative is structured through dichotomous relationships.

Syntagmatic

Syntagms are a combination of signs within a specific, sequential order (Seiter,

1992). The syntagmatic analysis in this section is concerned with narrative structure and

how it is constructed through binary. Binary oppositions exist within syntagmatic

relationships of narrative by the posing and answering of questions and the introducing

and solving of problems. Question/answer and problem/solution are both binary

relationships used to form meaning throughout the depiction of sequential narrative

events. Enigma is created by introducing questions and problems, inviting the viewer to

contemplate possibilities within an uncertain narrative world in wait for the fulfillment of

these binary relations through the ultimate inclusion of their missing halves. Furthermore,

the resulting answers and solutions work as links within a chain, satisfying the current

enigma while creating opportunities for new enigma to emerge and continue to maintain

viewer immersion. In the following paragraphs, question/answer and problem/solution

will be separated and explored in depth to demonstrate how they provide coherence and

enigma through binary opposition.

Question and Answer. Within the three series, the dominant binary is the causal

question and answer format inherent to the narrative construction itself. Through

question/answer, an endless chain of enigmas and information reveals progress the story

in a logical order. In other words, question and answer are two halves of a binary relation

which create enigma through their separation. For instance, in season three of *Gilmore*

Girls a question/answer chain is introduced in episode three when Lane begins a romantic

subplot with Dave, posing a question regarding if her restrictive mother Mrs. Kim will

find out. This question lingers as they work to maintain secrecy, eventually answered in

episode 19 when Lane drunkenly tells her mother about their relationship over the phone,

creating further questions. These questions include how her mother will respond and how

Lane and Dave will be able to maintain their relationship. These newly posed questions

are answered in the following episode when Dave asks Mrs. Kim if he can take Lane to

the Stars Hollow prom, which is answered positively by the end of the episode and in

effect poses larger questions as to the longevity of their relationship beyond the season.

In *Girls* season three, episode two, aspiring writer Hannah discovers that her

publisher David unexpectedly died in the process of her first book deal, posing a question

of what will happen with this deal in the wake of his death. In the next episode, Hannah

learns that the publishing company Millstreet Press decided to drop David's projects,

answering the initial question while posing new ones regarding if she will be able to find

an alternative publisher and who it would be. These questions are quickly answered later

in the episode when she learns that Millstreet Press still owns the rights to her writings

despite dropping the book deal, which creates larger questions regarding what she will do

next in her career, such as write an entirely new book or give up altogether. This leads

her to a short-lived unfulfilling writing job at *GQ Magazine* and ultimately to apply to graduate school at Iowa Writers Workshop.

In the end of season three, episode 11 of *Grace and Frankie*, Frankie has a medical episode which poses questions regarding the specifics of the health issue and if she will receive help. Roughly halfway into the next episode, the answer is provided by the diagnosis of a mini-stroke while additionally revealing that Frankie is prone to suffering strokes in the future. This poses more questions regarding how she will change her lifestyle and if she will decide to move to Santa Fe with Jacob in light of her health. Additionally, since Frankie was reluctant to visit the hospital and would prefer not to know about her health, it poses questions about her relationship with Grace, who demanded that she visit the hospital. Question and answer chains such as these operate to immerse the viewer through enigma as they watch for the binary relation to be fulfilled through an answer. I will detail the nature of enigma and delay later in this chapter. It is first necessary to provide further information into how binary opposition structures questions and answers regarding conflict specifically through a syntagmatic chain of problem and solution.

Problem and Solution. Coherence within narrative conflict is achieved through a binary relationship of problem and solution. The solution often acts as a single link in a larger problem/solution chain, as it leads to the introduction of a new problem. The delay between problem and solution maintains enigma, as the viewer is left to question how the problem will be solved due to the suspension of the answer. In season three, episode 18 of *Gilmore Girls*, a problem from the beginning of the series is solved when Lorelai receives a large sum of investment money from Richard, freeing her from the burden of

her parents' loan for Rory's Chilton Preparatory School tuition and therefore from her

agreement with Emily requiring weekly family dinners. However, the introduction of this

solution causes a problem in Emily and Lorelai's already tumultuous relationship, as

Emily takes the cancellation of their agreement personally. It also causes a problem with

Rory's academic future, as the sudden increase in income makes Lorelai ineligible for

financial assistance for Rory's Yale tuition. By the end of the season, the latter financial

problem is solved ironically through financial assistance from Emily and Richard, while

the former problem remains.

In *Girls*, a problem/solution chain begins in season three, episode three as a result

of Adam's sister Caroline contacting him in need of a place to stay for the night. Her

surprise arrival to Hannah and Adam's apartment presents a problem for their

relationship, as Hannah wants to help despite Adam's refusal and eventually invites her

to her birthday party. Caroline herself is also a problem, as she bites their friend Ray at

the party and eventually emotionally manipulates them to let her stay by appearing

unstable, crushing a glass with her hand. While this problem is solved two episodes later

when Hannah kicks her out in a moment of frustration, it causes an additional

relationship problem between Hannah and Adam as he becomes furious at Hannah out of

concern for her sister's whereabouts. The more general solution to Caroline's living

situation is revealed in episode 12 when Hannah discovers that Caroline is in a

relationship with her neighbor Laird and is staying with him.

In the first two episodes of *Grace and Frankie*'s third season, a problem/solution

chain starts when Grace and Frankie are denied multiple loans due to their age. Grace's

daughter Brianna solves this problem later in episode two by lending the money to

Frankie under the condition that Grace does not know, as she would be too proud to accept money from her daughter. This produces a new problem for Frankie as she must lie to explain funding to Grace, which she solves by claiming that her boyfriend Jacob provided it. This leads to a further problem where Frankie must keep the secret from Grace. In episode five, the secrecy problem ends when Grace makes a comment regarding the funding to Jacob, who denies loaning the money. This lie leads to a problem in Grace and Frankie's friendship that is compounded with other unrelated issues. Through the introduction of conflict, the narrative constantly alternates between the problem and solution binary, where the solution fulfills previously established enigma while often also creating new enigma to maintain viewer immersion. Before conflict is discussed further, an examination of the paradigmatic binary construction is necessary to convey how characters and setting operate as half of a binary relation. A syntagmatic deconstruction of narrative allows us to see the larger picture of how binary constructs narrative structure through question/answer and problem/solution relationships. A paradigmatic deconstruction zooms into a micro-level, investigating how binary relationships inform the characters and settings that exist within these larger syntagms.

Paradigmatic

While syntagms are the larger structures that sequentially order narrative, paradigms are the singular elements (i.e. character and setting) that exist within these structures (Seiter, 1992). The paradigmatic narrative elements of character and setting are the embodiments of halves of dichotomous relationships. In effect, viewing a character's attributes in juxtaposition with their contrasting character provides an understanding into how they are constructed and connected. The contrast between differing settings works in

the same manner. Binary oppositions between the characters and settings of the three

series will be examined in depth among the following paragraphs to demonstrate how the

viewer comes to know the narrative locations and their inhabitants through binary

association.

Character. Characters manifest half of a binary relationship and are therefore

understood through juxtaposition with characters who share the antithetical trait. In

Gilmore Girls, Lorelai's rebellious nature towards her parents represents the value of

freedom and autonomy, contrasted with the family obligation and dependence her mother

Emily demands. Similarly, Lorelai approaches her relationship with her daughter as a

friendship, a harsh contrast the controlling nature of her relationship with Emily.

Additionally, Rory's academic prowess in season three is strongly contrasted with her

boyfriend Jess, as the former works her way through the esteemed Chilton Preparatory

School while the latter fails to graduate Stars Hollow High School. Another binary can be

seen between Luke and Sookie, as they are positioned as diner cook versus professional

chef, cooking as a job versus cooking as a passion, male versus female, possible romantic

interest to Lorelai versus best friend to Lorelai. This example is made humorously

explicit in season three, episode 17 when Sookie takes over Luke's Diner in an

emergency to feed the guests of a recently evacuated Independence Inn. Despite also

being a cook, his customers gladly agree to cancel their order in favor of Sookie's

cooking. Through occupying Luke's Diner, Sookie provides a partial solution to the

conflict originating with the fire.

In season three of *Girls*, Hannah, Marnie, and Adam's career-oriented focus is

contrasted with Jessa's aimlessness and lack of purpose. Jessa's damaging drug addiction

and lack of direction is further contrasted with Adam's sobriety and his newly-found

acting success. Adam's confidence in his career success also clashes with Hannah's

uncertainty resulting from career issues after her book deal is unexpectedly cancelled.

Hannah's nonchalant attitude toward friendship is contrasted with Marnie's demanding

and controlling attitude, most notable in season three, episode seven, as this binary causes

conflict when Marnie orchestrates a weekend trip for the group in which she attempts to

control every aspect. Shoshanna's academic life and recent sexual awakening is

contrasted with Hannah and Marnie's career pursuits and previous sexual experience,

while her efforts towards helping Jessa are contrasted with Jessa's self-destructiveness

and lack of motivation for improvement.

In *Grace and Frankie*, binary opposition serves as the premise of the show, as the

titular friends are polar opposites in several respects: serious and carefree, organized and

chaotic, structured and spontaneous, businesswoman and artistic hippie. This produces

various conflicts in season three, such as when Grace angers Frankie by intervening in

her medical decisions after a health scare. Also, Grace's business approach enters another

binary association with the introduction of Nick, owner of Omni Tech, in season three,

episode 11. Nick was introduced within a relationship of conflict, as his company stole

Grace and Frankie's vibrator concept. Grace represents proper practice through her

startup company Vybrant while Nick represents the ruthless side of big business. More

generally, Robert and Sol's romantic relationship is in binary relation to Grace and

Frankie's platonic one that resulted from it. In season three specifically, Robert and Sol

are contrasted by a willingness to retire versus a fear of retiring, inclusion versus

exclusion in the theater community, activism versus passivism regarding LGBTQ

identity. With their children, Brianna's freedom of single life is juxtaposed with Mallory's frustration with her husband and children, while Bud's independence is juxtaposed with Coyote's dependence on him. From these binary associations throughout the three series, characters are understood through the dichotomy established through other characters.

Setting. Similar to characters, settings also manifest half of a binary relationship within the text and can best be understood in juxtaposition with each other. Additionally, clarity is provided for characters through their association with certain settings. This is seen most obviously in *Gilmore Girls* as the setting alternates primarily between Lorelai and Rory's quirky Stars Hollow and Emily and Richard's affluent area of Hartford. Put simply, Stars Hollow can be understood as an extension of Lorelai, while Hartford can be seen as an extension of Emily and Richard. In the backstory of the series, Lorelai grew up wealthy in Hartford, but left home for quaint Stars Hollow to start her own life with her newly-born daughter Rory. In effect, Stars Hollow represents independence and autonomy for Lorelai as she was able to make a life for herself and her daughter working at the Independence Inn. In contrast, Hartford represents the restrictive and oppressive nature of her past, revived during Lorelai's weekly Friday family dinner visits to the city. Hartford is a place to be escaped while Stars Hollow is a haven to escape to. Hartford is the world she refused while Stars Hollow is the world she desired. To complicate matters, Rory attends Chilton Preparatory School in Hartford as opposed to Stars Hollow High School, which causes her to alternate between binary opposites of her school's affluence and her home's averageness, as well as the demands of her grandparent's traditionalist high-society lifestyle and the freedom of her mother's nonconventional upbringing. In

season three we encounter a third major location binary through Rory's decision between attending Harvard and Yale, as the two Ivy League universities are embedded with clashing signification despite being effectively the same in their literal actualization of Rory's academic pursuits. Rory has been pursuing the goal of Harvard since childhood, but complications arise after her grandfather Richard invites her and Lorelai to visit his alma mater Yale in season three, episode eight. Rory's decision of Harvard versus Yale is an extension of Stars Hollow versus Hartford, representing a conflict of autonomy versus family tradition and Lorelai versus Richard and Emily, causing Lorelai to believe Rory is being manipulated into the decision of Yale.

Girls is predominantly set in New York City, but Hannah's Midwestern roots provide the city's antithesis. Through this relationship, a New York City/Midwest binary is constructed through associations of progress/stagnancy and artistry/mundanity. In the backstory of the series, Hannah moves from a relatively small town in Michigan to the bustling city to pursue a future in creative writing. Marnie and Adam are similarly driven, with the former pursuing both an art and singing career and the latter becoming a Broadway actor in season three. New York City is established as a place where career aspirations can be achieved, as we see the three within the city constantly working towards their respective goals. This is made apparent when the series takes its characters outside of the city in three instances in season three to focus solely on relationship issues. In episode two, Hannah, Adam, and Shoshanna leave the city to pick Jessa up from a rehabilitation clinic, allowing the narrative to focus on character relationships and Jessa's drug addiction. In episode seven, the platonic relationships between the four titular girls are deeply explored during a vacation in a beach house, which detaches Hannah and

Marnie from their career pursuits in New York City. In episode nine, Hannah's career arc

is paused again as she returns to the Midwest after receiving news that her grandmother

Flo is dying, providing a deeper examination into Hannah's family and allowing her to

focus on her future with Adam. Interestingly, season three refuses to allow major plot

progression when the characters are outside of New York City, as Flo's miraculous

recovery shifts to an unexpected death only once Hannah steps off the train in the city.

     Grace and Frankie's location binary is the most subtle out of the three series,

alternating between Grace and Frankie's beach house and Robert and Sol's new home. In

the beginning of season three, Robert and Sol move into their new home to escape the

memories associated with their past marriages to Grace and Frankie and to live their lives

openly together. In contrast, before the series begins Robert and Sol had purchased the

beach house that Grace and Frankie inhabit to secretly engage in their affair. In effect,

Robert and Sol's new house and the beach house are set in a binary between Robert and

Sol versus Grace and Frankie, present versus past, secrecy versus openness in regards to

Robert and Sol's relationship, and romantic (i.e. Robert and Sol) versus platonic (i.e.

Grace and Frankie) relationships. Through the three series, narrative settings exist in

binary relationships to provide further character clarity.

Conflict

     Through conflict, we see the ultimate manifestation of syntagmatic and

paradigmatic binary relation within the narrative. Through syntagmatic configurations of

question/answer and problem/solution, conflict invites immersion through the generation

of enigma as the viewer watches to see where the conflict will lead and how it will

ultimately be resolved. Paradigmatic character binary associations act through conflict,

coding it with cultural myth that informs our understanding of the issue. However, before we discuss the role of myth within conflict, it is important to distinguish conflict sources and types to provide a deeper examination into how it operates within these television narratives. In the following section, conflict origins will be divided into internal character attributes and external occurrences existing outside of the characters. In the section afterward, conflicts will be categorized contextually into relationship issues— either romantic or platonic—between characters or professional problems regarding career or academic pursuits.

Sources. Categorization of conflict into its source of origin reveals yet another binary construction: internal versus external. Internal conflict occurs when attributes within a character lead to narrative problems. In season three of *Gilmore Girls*, the primary internal conflict sources are insecurity and jealousy existing between Rory and her two boyfriends Jess and Dean. Binaries of security/insecurity and unconcern/jealousy are implicit in how insecurity and jealousy within the three characters destabilizes both of Rory's relationships. At the start of season three, Rory is dating Dean, but he is aware that romantic interest exists between her and Jess which leads to insecurity. In episode seven, Lorelai and Rory participate in an annual Stars Hollow dance marathon which Jess attends with his girlfriend Shane to make Rory jealous. Rory complains to Dean about Jess being there, which triggers his jealously and results in him verbally fighting with Jess and breaking up with Rory. The beginning of Jess and Rory's relationship is implied afterward when Jess arrives to comfort her and alludes to having to break up with Shane. This relationship is confirmed in following episode when Lorelai informs Luke about it. Dean's jealousy towards Jess is revisited as he attempts to fight him in episode nine. Due

to Jess's unconcern regarding Dean, he refuses to fight. However, in episode 10, we see

insecurity in Jess when he discovers that Rory and Dean are remaining friends, as Jess

only agrees to take Rory to a carnival in Stars Hollow when he discovers Dean will be

there. In episode 14, Jess arrives late to dinner with Rory and Emily with a black eye and

refuses to explain his injury. Conflicts ensue due to the acknowledgement of Jess's

insecurity when Rory and Luke separately accuse him of fighting Dean. In actuality, the

black eye was completely unrelated and Jess is too embarrassed to admit the injury was

from a swan attack. In episode 19, Jess's insecurity and Dean's jealousy finally culminate

in a fight at a house party. At the party, Jess makes a rude comment in response to Dean

and walks off, retreating to a bedroom upstairs. When Rory finds him upstairs he

attempts to sleep with her, which she declines. Frustrated, Jess yells at Rory, causing her

to rush downstairs crying. Dean notices and punches Jess, resulting in a fight. The

conflict ends unresolved as their relationship never recovers. Jess leaves town at the end

of episode 20 and Rory formally breaks up with him near the end of episode 22.

Throughout this entire conflict, enigma surrounds issues of jealousy and insecurity as

they destabilize the unconcern and security of the relationship. Through the introduction

of opposing internal elements of jealous and insecurity within Rory's relationships, the

viewer is uncertain as to when, how, and if confrontations between Jess and Dean will

finally occur and if either relationship can re-stabilize.

  In season three of *Girls*, Hannah insecurity provides the primary internal conflict

source, resulting in issues with her romantic relationship with Adam and with her career,

producing a relationship/career binary that drives conflict between her and Adam. By the

end of the season, this insecurity results in Hannah losing her job at *GQ Magazine* and an

uncertain future for her relationship with Adam. In episode eight, Adam is cast in a

Broadway run of the George Bernard Shaw play *Major Barbara* and Hannah interviews

Patti LuPone for her new job as a writer at *GQ*. During the interview, Patti provokes

Hannah's insecurity regarding Adam's role in the play, claiming that he will have sex

with the cast and fans and that "he's not gonna even know you exist" (Dunham et al.,

2012-2017). Hannah becomes increasingly insecure as Adam begins to focus more

intently on preparing for the play and sets up an embarrassing role-play scenario two

episodes later to bring excitement to their relationship. This results in a serious

conversation in which Adam tells her that he is staying at their friend Ray's apartment

through rehearsals to focus on the play. In the next episode, Hannah ignores Adam's

attempt for distance as she arrives to visit him at Ray's apartment, increasing tension in

their relationship. Near the end of the episode, he tells Hannah he will be extending his

stay with Ray indefinitely beyond the play's opening night. Hannah's insecurity also

transfers into her career, as she feels unfulfilled writing at *GQ*. When Patti's husband tells

her in episode 11 that he quit his artistry to support his wife, Hannah becomes worried

that this will happen with her in regards to Adam's acting career. Her insecurity causes

her to lash out at work by insulting the magazine and her coworkers, which results in her

promptly being fired. In episode 12, Hannah receives a letter of acceptance into graduate

school at Iowa Writers Workshop and tells Adam on opening night before the play. After

the play, Adam is upset about his performance and blames Hannah for telling him about

Iowa and for being a difficult romantic partner, making the future of their relationship

unclear as the conflict continues into the next season.

Near the end of *Grace and Frankie*'s third season, Frankie's fear regarding her

health provides a major internal conflict source after a medical episode. Grace's

traditional, Western approach to health and medicine is juxtaposed with Frankie's

avoidance of medical attention. Grace wishes to discover the issue and approach it

pragmatically, while Frankie would rather live in blissful ignorance and continue as

normal. At the end of episode 11, Frankie has a sudden medical episode while in the car

with Grace. Throughout the next episode, Frankie refuses to visit the hospital for

treatment despite Grace's concern, preferring to live in ignorance regarding her health.

Frankie somewhat gives into Grace's demands and agrees to call her doctor Mark, who

turns out to be a shaman practicing eastern medicine. Mark requests that Frankie drink a

special tea for her health, which she cannot taste despite Mark asserting its

disgustingness. Frankie's lack of taste makes her fearful enough to finally agree to visit

the hospital, where she discovers that she has had two strokes and is prone to suffering an

additional one. The doctor recommends medication, frequent blood pressure checking,

and lifestyle changes. At the time, Frankie is still debating moving with her boyfriend

Jacob to Santa Fe, which Grace argues is not a good idea according to her phone call with

Frankie's doctor. Frankie is furious towards Grace for interfering with her health,

claiming that she "was much happier not knowing" (Kauffman, 2015-present). In the

beginning of episode 13, Grace apologizes for upsetting her and offers to help her make

lifestyle adjustments. Frankie comes to terms with her health issues and tells Jacob she

cannot go with him to Santa Fe. As Jacob leaves the beach house, he confronts Grace and

blames her for scaring Frankie. At the end of the season, Grace and Frankie's conflict is

resolved as Grace invites Frankie on a hot air balloon ride, apologizing for scaring her

and opening up about her own internal conflict source: the fear of losing her. Frankie's

ultimate decision regarding leaving with Jacob is left unclear.

Conflicts occur much more frequently from external sources, as issues arise from

forces outside of the character. A major external conflict in season three of *Gilmore Girls*

is the fire at the Independence Inn in episode 17, rendering it uninhabitable. This presents

a major conflict within the episode, as Lorelai has to relocate the guests for the night.

Conflicts resulting from the damage continue past this episode with the decision to keep

the damaged inn in business by temporarily turning it into a bed and breakfast in episode

18 and laying off employees in episode 19. The fire results in further conflict in episode

22, as Lorelai discovers they must close three more rooms and that the owner is planning

on selling the inn due to the repair costs. This coincides with an unexpected opportunity

two episodes prior of purchasing The Dragonfly Inn, which would fulfill Lorelai and

Sookie's dream of owning and operating their own inn. This job uncertainty from the

nearly inoperable Independence Inn is compounded with the unrelated external conflict

of Yale denying Rory's financial aid, leading Lorelai to tell Sookie that she cannot

provide her half of the payment for The Dragonfly Inn. This conflict is resolved when

Rory learns about the issue and asks Emily and Richard to pay for her tuition, which they

agree to. The Independence Inn fire that caused the problem regarding Lorelai and

Sookie's job future also provided the solution as it forced them to work towards their

shared dream of owning The Dragonfly Inn. Similarly, the problem provides the solution

with the financial conflict regarding Rory's tuition. Yale denies Rory's financial aid due

to Lorelai receiving large sum of investment money from Richard, making her ineligible

for financial aid. While causing the problem, Richard's money also provides the solution as he agrees to pay for Yale.

In season three of *Girls*, Jessa's drug addiction begins as an internal conflict but switches to an external one in episode eight when Jasper, an acquaintance she met in rehab, arrives to New York City to visit her. Through this season, Jessa fluctuates between the binary of recovery/addiction. Her cousin and roommate Shoshanna is unconcerned with Jessa's lifestyle at the beginning of the season, but becomes concerned when Jasper arrives. Through this internal shift between the unconcern/concern binary, Shoshanna offers help that works to solve the issue. By the end of the episode, Jasper ruins Jessa's previously stated self-improvement goal, influencing her to return to drugs which results in her robbing the store she began working at only two episodes prior. In episode 10, Jessa tells her friend and roommate Shoshanna about Jasper's estranged daughter Dot, which Shoshanna uses as a solution to get rid of him by setting up a surprise dinner with her. Despite Jasper and Dot's initial conflict at the dinner, she offers to help him through his drug addiction and demands for him to leave Jessa. Outside after the dinner, Jessa is upset at Shoshanna but admits to her that she has a drug addiction. With Jasper gone, Jessa's drug conflict is resolved as she returns to her recovery process in the next episode looking for employment. The problem of Jasper helped provide the solution to Jessa's drug addiction as the severity of the situation caused Shoshanna to finally take the issue seriously and provide help. The concern Shoshanna exhibits for Jessa through this conflict is a sharp change from her flippant attitude in episode 2 of the same season, where she defends her actions and her stay in rehab as "totally cool" and "a rite of passage for celebrities" (Dunham et al., 2012-2017). The resulting relational

conflict between Jessa and Shoshanna remains unresolved, as episode 10 is the last time in season three they appear together.

Grace and Frankie's third season features a story arc beginning in episode three when Robert is cast as John Adams in a gay community theater rendition of Peter Stone and Sherman Edward's musical *1776*. This leads both to external conflict as protesters picket the play and internal conflict as Sol angers Robert by confronting one of them. External conflict arises from this play in episode 11 when a Christian church group pickets outside of the theater in protest of gay theater. While the theater group largely ignores them, Sol escalates the conflict by confronting a protester and accidentally throwing a drink at his son. This confrontation also introduces potential conflict between Robert and Sol, as Robert, unaware of Sol's actions, explains to him that "some self-righteous idiot got into a fight with one of them" (Kauffman, 2015-present) and that the amount of protestors have increased and garnered publicity. Robert and Sol are positioned in inactive/active and inauthentic/authentic binaries regarding this issue, as Robert does not agree with Sol's actions. Near the end of the episode, Robert sees Sol fighting with the protestor again after a failed attempt at an apology. In the next episode, the protestor interrupts the musical's opening night performance, which Robert blames Sol for afterward. Sol claims he did the right thing by confronting bigotry and is seen in the next episode planning a protest in front of the heckler's bagel store with a few of the theater members, to Robert's disapproval. The conflict between the couple is resolved as a result of an unrelated conversation Robert has with his daughter Mallory, where she admits to being inspired by him doing what he had to do by coming out as gay. Robert arrives to the protest as Sol and his theater friends are being arrested. As an act of

solidarity, he throws a drink on the homophobic heckler to get arrested with them. The

problem provides the solution as Robert's conflict with Sol allows him to acknowledge

that he should take action and defend his identity as a gay man.

Types. The internal and external conflicts can be further categorized into two

primary types: relational and professional. First, the relational category can be further

divided into romantic and platonic conflict. Using the above conflict examples, internal

romantic conflict can be seen in *Gilmore Girls* as Rory is struggling with her

relationships with Dean and Jess as a result of insecurity and jealousy, as well as in *Girls*

when Hannah's insecurity leads her to aggravate Adam by demanding too much of his

attention. External romantic conflict is seen between Robert and Sol in *Grace and*

Frankie as a result of Sol standing up to the homophobic protestor. Internal platonic

conflict is seen in *Grace and Frankie* between the titular characters as a result of Grace's

concern for Frankie's health. Jessa's drug relapse provides external platonic conflict in

Girls as Shoshanna intervenes to help her avoid Jasper's destructive influence. Through

relational conflict, characters engage in various interpersonal issues as a result of both

internal conditions and external events.

The professional category includes any issues pertaining to character aspirations

of personal fulfillment, either in career or academic pursuits. From the above examples,

internal career conflict is seen in *Girls* as Hannah's lack of personal fulfillment at *GQ*

results in her insulting the staff and subsequently being fired. External career conflict is

seen in *Gilmore Girls* as the fire at the Independence Inn renders her career future

uncertain. Professional conflict can also be academic, which Rory faces in *Gilmore Girls*

as she works towards Ivy League college admittance. The A story of episode three of the

third season is driven by Rory's anxiety about crafting the perfect application letter to

Harvard, which Lorelai reduces by setting up a dinner with a Harvard alumnus.

Academic conflict merges with platonic conflict in episode 12 when the headmaster of

Rory's school threatens to rescind his letter of recommendation if she continues to fight

with her classmate Paris. These conflicts are resolved at the end of episode 16 as Rory

receives letters of acceptance into multiple schools. However, academic conflict is

brought to the forefront again five episodes later as Yale refuses Rory's financial aid. As

previously mentioned, this is resolved when Rory asks Emily and Richard to pay for her

tuition, but not before creating career conflict for Lorelai. Academic conflict also exists

in season three of *Girls*, albeit to a much lesser extent, as Shoshanna's self-proclaimed

"sexually adventurous time…alternating nights of freedom with nights of academic

focus" (Dunham, 2012-2017) in the first episode results in the episode 12 reveal that she

will not be able to graduate due to failing a class. Through professional conflict, the

characters' pursuits for success are brought into disequilibrium as viewers wait for a

resolution.

Enigmatic Immersion

Enigma codes are the primary yet invisible force that progresses narrative

forward. Enigmas are unknown elements of the story which drive the narrative from

question to answer through a period of delay (Barthes, 1974). Through enigma, the

narrative constantly engages the viewer through a process of posing questions for

consideration. In an effort to increase understanding, the viewer forms coherence by

analyzing previously provided information and speculating future possibilities as they

await the ultimate fulfillment of the posed questions. This orients the viewer in a

perpetual present state, straddling the binary of past and future in an attempt to make sense of the narrative world in which they find themselves occupying. This perpetual enigmatic middle provides an immersive experience in which the viewer is invited to link an assumed a source of origin with an ultimate future conclusion to generate coherence around the enigmas. Before discussing this middle state, I will convey the narrative saturation of enigma and explore how its two types operate. An examination into how enigma exists within narrative provides a deeper understanding of how a story can invite immersion through an engaging experience, as the viewer traverses the narrative world in search of answers.

Narratives are dominated by the constant presence of enigma. While this study is not a content analysis, the prevalence of enigma codes can best be observed by presenting the quantities of questions posed. It is important to note that the provided numbers are not entirely unique enigmas, as I have counted instances of "check-ins" where an episode will restate a question that was previously presented and left unanswered in another episode. For example, season three of *Gilmore Girls* constantly addresses the enigma regarding a potential relationship between Lorelai and Luke, which I have counted in episodes one, seven, 12, 17, 19, and 22. Thus, enigma is operationalized at the episode level; whenever an episode poses a question, regardless if it is a previously posed one. In the third seasons of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie*, I have determined a cumulative total of 344 enigmas posed throughout the 47 episodes, averaging nearly seven questions posed per episode. Across the three programs, the averages were very similar. Of this sample, the 22 episodes of *Gilmore Girls* contained a total of 156 enigmas, or an average of roughly seven questions posed per episode. The 12 episodes of

Girls contained a total of 89 enigmas, or an average of roughly seven and a half questions posed per episode. Lastly, the 13 episodes of *Grace and Frankie* contained a total of 99 enigmas, or an average of roughly seven and a half questions posed per episode. Again, these numbers are provided to convey the ubiquity of this often overlooked but dominant aspect of the narrative experience. In the next section, these enigma codes will be divided into two types—predictive and explanatory—in order to closely examine how these questions operate.

Types

The enigmas present within the three comedy-drama series can be separated in terms of what kinds of questions they pose for the viewer. The more prevalent of these two distinct types are predictive questions, accounting for 306 of the cumulative 344 enigmas. Predictive questions are concerned with future directions of the story. Much less common are explanatory questions, accounting for only 38 of the cumulative 344 enigmas. These questions arise from issues of sense-making that lead the viewer to look to the past in an attempt to gain understanding from an assumed source of origin. By separating enigma types into predictive and explanatory, the machinations behind how these questions operate to entice the viewer are made evident and the viewer state of the perpetual middle is realized.

Predictive. Predictive enigmas are the primary type driving the narrative. Predictive enigmas are questions that lead the viewer to look to the future in an attempt to predict what is going to happen, how something will happen, or how a character will react to something. For example, season three, episode nine of *Gilmore Girls* poses several predictive questions:

- Will the Independence Inn Thanksgiving dinner go well without Sookie cooking?

- How will Lorelai and Rory attend four Thanksgiving dinners?

- Will Lane and Dave begin a romantic relationship?

- Will Mrs. Kim, Lane's restrictive mother, find out about Lane and Dave's relationship?

- Will Rory choose to attend Yale or Harvard?

- Will Sookie and her husband Jackson have conflict regarding his annoying family?

- Will Dean and Jess physically fight each other regarding their relationships with Rory?

Girls poses similar questions, such as in season three episode 10:

- Will Adam forget about Hannah due to his Broadway role?

- What will Hannah do about the distance she feels in their relationship?

- Will Hannah and Adam have conflict over Adam being distant?

- Will Marnie accept the job at Soojin's art gallery?

- Will Marnie and Desi start a romantic relationship?

- Will Jasper reconcile with his estranged daughter Dot?

- Will Jessa forgive Shoshanna for reconnecting Jasper with Dot?

- Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction?

Similar concerns can be seen in *Grace and Frankie*, such as season three, episode five:

- Will Grace and Frankie overcome their gun conflict?

- Will Grace get rid of the gun?

- How will Robert's mother respond to him coming out as gay?

- How will Robert take his mother's negative response to his coming out?

- Will Robert's mother ever be accepting of his sexuality?

- Will Brianna begin a romantic relationship with Ryan, the man she met at the bar?

- What will Mallory do about feeling trapped in her family?

- Will Grace forgive Frankie for lying about the money?

- Will Grace return the money to Brianna?

All of these questions occur as part of a process of predicting future directions of the story. Questions such as these raise concerns about the characters and their fates, inviting the immersion within the narrative world as the viewer applies past information to speculate about what the future holds. Next, the differences of predictive enigma weight and frequency will be explored.

Not all predictive enigmas are equal in weight, as the questions can range from vital importance to frivolous curiosity in terms of how heavily the narrative future will be impacted by the revelation of the answer. For instance, will they/won't they questions hold significant weight as they exclusively concern romantic futures of the characters. Will they/won't they questions are commonly posed across the third seasons of all three shows. *Gilmore Girls* poses such questions regarding Lorelai and Luke, Lorelai and Peyton, Lorelai and Alex, Lorelai and Max, Rory and Jess, Lane and Dave, Nicole and Luke, Paris and Jamie. There are much fewer possible couple pairings in *Girls* and *Grace and Frankie*, both containing three each. However, the possible relationships between *Girls*'s Shoshanna and Ray, Marnie and Ray, and Marnie and Desi and *Grace and Frankie*'s Brianna and Ryan, Brianna and Barry, and Coyote and Nadia are no less important. Other heavily weighted predictive questions are similarly concerned with the

overall impact their predicted futures would have on the story. Predictive enigmas with heavy weight include *Gilmore Girls*'s questions regarding Rory's academic future, *Girls*'s questions regarding Hannah's writing career, and *Grace and Frankie*'s questions regarding the various conflicts complicating Grace and Frankie's friendship. All of these heavily weighted questions are raised out of concern for the future and well-being of the characters. These future speculations engage the viewer because they care about the characters and desire to know what will happen to them.

Conversely, predictive enigmas are low-weighted when they do not greatly influence the plotline and when their possible conclusions could not lead to a significant altering of the narrative future. For instance, in season three, episode two of *Gilmore Girls*, Lorelai contemplates how she will turn down Kirk's dinner date invitation. This is different from the previous heavily-weighted romantic enigmas because it is clear from the beginning that Lorelai is not interested in the date. When this enigma is fulfilled at the end of the episode, nothing of note happens and any possibility of a romantic relationship between the two is never addressed again. Compare this with the importance of the Rory and Jess's romantic enigma, which leads to the end of her previous relationship with Dean and a new relationship with Jess, leading to the generation of several new enigmas. In season three of *Girls*, several low-weight enigmas tease the possibility of future conflict but never result in any significant event, such as in episode two when Adam is angry that he, Hannah, and Shoshanna are traveling to pick Jessa up from rehab. Similarly, the possibility of conflict for Hannah's book deal is posed when Ray gets in a physical fight with her publisher David in episode three. This is made irrelevant in the next episode when David is revealed to have died unexpectedly. In season three, episode

eight of *Grace and Frankie*, a question is posed regarding if Sol will fire long-time

Hanson & Bergstein employee Joan-Margaret due to the issues she is causing for the

firm. Since she is a newly-introduced character, her fate does not hold significant weight

for the series. Rather, she is used as a plot device that leads Sol to the realization that he

should retire, answering a much heavier enigma posed previously. These low-weight

enigmas demonstrate that the predictive nature of narrative is a constant immersive force

to its own end, rather than a technique solely used to introduce significant changes and

progress the plot.

Predictive enigmas also exist in different frequencies in relation to their

resolution, producing delays of varying length. Predictive questions with shorter delays

are concerned with more immediate issues and often exist as part of a lager enigmatic

chain, self-contained within a singular episode. In season three, episode 20 *Gilmore*

Girls, it is revealed that Fran, the owner of The Dragonfly Inn, died, thereby producing a

question asking if Lorelai and Sookie will have the opportunity to finally purchase their

dream inn. Roughly 15 minutes later in the episode, the enigma is resolved as one of

Fran's relatives offers to sell the inn. It is important to note that while this progresses a

larger enigma introduced in a previous season regarding Lorelai and Sookie's dream of

owning The Dragonfly Inn, it does not conclude it. Rather, this short enigmatic delay is

just one link of a larger enigmatic chain surrounding Lorelai and Sookie's goal of starting

their own inn. Similarly, an enigma chain-link is quickly resolved in season three,

episode one of *Girls* in regards to Jessa's rebellious behavior in the rehabilitation clinic.

Her behavior poses a question regarding if she will be kicked out of the facility, which is

answered roughly 17 minutes after she is initially depicted causing tension. This

progresses a larger enigmatic chain within the season regarding her fluctuating recovery from her drug addiction. Another one of these delays occurs in season three, episode seven of *Grace and Frankie*, which begins with the pair hurting their backs and being stuck on the floor. When it is revealed that they have an important business meeting to attend that day, it poses a question regarding if they will recover in time to attend. This enigma is resolved 20 minutes later when Grace and Frankie attend the meeting virtually with the assistance of Robert and Sol. Ultimately, this enigma also exists on a larger chain regarding the success of their start-up company Vybrant.

Some delays last among multiple seasons, maintaining high-weight questions. In the end of season three, episode 16 of *Gilmore Girls*, a series-wide enigma concerned with Rory's dream of attending Harvard is finally resolved when Rory receives an acceptance letter from the university. Similarly, a high-weight enigma surrounding Adam's acting career introduced in the first season of *Girls* is resolved in season three, episode 8 when he receives a Broadway role in the play *Major Barbara*. A major enigma within *Grace and Frankie* surrounds the damaged relationship between Grace and her ex-husband Robert, who left her in the first episode of the series for his business partner Sol. In season three, episode nine, this enigma receives a significant conclusion when Robert begins sobbing and sincerely apologizes for hurting Grace. Through the small delays between enigmatic chain links and the large delays between significant resolutions, narratives constantly work to maintain an uncertain future that invites viewer prediction.

Explanatory. Explanatory questions are much less common among the sample. These questions lead the viewer to look toward an originating source in the past in order to make sense of an immediate concern or character motivation and to gain further

understanding of the depicted situation. For example, explanatory questions across season three of *Gilmore Girls* include:

- Why is Rory ignoring Dean while away from Stars Hollow?

- Why is Taylor taking pictures outside of Luke's Diner?

- Where did Jess get the money for his new car?

- Why is Paris—a Chilton Preparatory School student known for academic achievement—distracted in class?

- How did Jess get his mysterious black eye?

- Why is Rory's former schoolmate Lindsay acting odd towards her?

- Why does Sookie's food suddenly taste bad?

- Why was Paris rejected from Harvard?

- Who was the mysterious man that left his wallet in Luke's Diner?

Similar questions throughout season three of *Girls* include:

- Why is Jessa acting out in rehab?

- Why do Hannah and Shoshanna not take Jessa's drug use seriously?

- Why does Adam not want to help his sister Caroline?

- Why is Hannah emotionless in response to David's death?

- Why does Marnie sleep with Ray if she does not like him?

- Why does Adam not want an acting job?

- Why does Shoshanna want to help Jasper?

- What is the letter Hannah received that she's excited about?

Lastly, explanatory questions in *Grace and Frankie* include:

- Why is Robert so adamant to not go into work?

- Who robbed the beach house Grace and Frankie live in?

- Why is Frankie so upset about Grace owning a gun?

- What happened in regards to Frankie's medical episode?

- Why is Robert against standing up against the anti-LGBTQ protestors?

- Why is Allison suddenly sick?

- What does Grace see outside of the limousine?

All of these questions exist as standalone issues with coherence posed to make sense of the narrative. Explanatory questions are concerned either with the inner motives of the characters or immediate concerns of sense-making, requiring the viewer to seek out a source of origin to explain the enigmatic situation or to wait for this origin to be revealed later in the narrative. Regardless, the assumption of an originating cause is paramount to the existence of these questions. To generate coherence, there is an assumed origin to look back to. For predictive enigma, there is an assumed future to look forward to. The assumed existence of both origin and future places the viewer in a perpetual middle state, constantly referencing to the past and anticipating the future. Before this perpetual enigmatic middle is discussed, the differences of weight and frequency among explanatory enigmas must be explored.

Due to the nature of explanatory questions, their weight is determined through the sense of immediacy demanded for a resolution. In other words, the importance of explanatory questions is determined in regards to the extent to which they disrupt the narrative and demand an answer to reestablish coherence. For example, in season three, episode 14 of *Gilmore Girls* when Jess arrives late to Rory's planned dinner with a black eye, the surrounding enigma regarding this injury dominates the narrative through a lack

of originating source. This invites the viewer to hypothesize a source of origin, looking

back to link previous information in order to explain the situation while awaiting the

revelation of this origin. Previously-depicted conflict with Dean leads to the solution that

they had a physical altercation, which is parroted by Rory and Luke after Jess is reluctant

to reveal the origin himself. Despite the obviousness of this assumed origin, the actual

answer is revealed to be a swan attack, making the entire enigma an absurd case of

misdirection in order to maintain a sense of mystery. A heavily-weighted explanatory

question in season three of *Girls* occurs in the final episode when Hannah receives a

mysterious letter that causes her to appear shocked and eventually excited. The

significance of this enigma invites immersion as the viewer is left waiting for the

explanatory reveal of what could be so exciting for her. The episode promptly solves this

enigma by revealing her acceptance into Iowa Writers' Workshop before the narrative

moves on to address other issues. In *Grace and Frankie*, a heavily-weighted explanatory

question is posed at the end of season three, episode 11 when Frankie suffers a sudden

medical episode. Once this happens, all of the previous business concerns driving Grace

and Frankie's plotline are abruptly halted for the characters to exist within this enigmatic

delay.

      In contrast, low-weighted explanatory questions are largely concerned with the

internal state of characters. While the reveal would help to promote coherence generation

in understanding why a character is acting in a certain way, the enigma does not pose

immediate concern in following the narrative. In other words, the narrative can still

progress coherently regardless if the motivations and intentions of the characters are

made explicitly clear. Low-weight explanatory questions throughout season three of

Gilmore Girls include:

- Why Rory is ignoring Dean while away from Stars Hollow?

- Why Paris is distracted in class?

- Why Emily is so offended that Lorelai paid back her loan?

Similar questions in season three of *Girls* include:

- Why do Hannah and Shoshanna not take Jessa's drug use seriously?

- Why is Hannah emotionless in response to David's death?

- Why does Marnie sleep with Ray if she does not like him?

Lastly, season three of *Grace and Frankie* includes:

- Why is Robert so adamant about not wanting to go to work?

- Why is Frankie reluctant to receive medical treatment?

- Why is Sol so eager to stand up against the homophobic protestors?

While the resolution of these questions would help increase understanding, narrative

coherence is not threatened by the suspension of their answer. There is no immediate

need for an answer.

In contrast with their predictive counterparts, explanatory enigmas with shorter

delays between the question and answer are primarily more heavily-weighted concerns.

As previously stated, predictive enigmas with shorter delays between question and

answer are often links in a larger enigmatic chain, while heavily-weighted predictive

questions produce longer delays that focus on the primary concerns of the series and

frame the future in uncertainty. With explanatory enigma this is reversed as heavily-

weighted explanatory questions are often quickly resolved due to their complete

disruption of coherence. The delay caused by Jess's enigmatic black eye in season three, episode 14 of *Gilmore Girls* is resolved when he admits the swan attack to Luke only roughly 10 minutes after the black eye is introduced. There is a far shorter delay in season three, episode 12 of *Girls*, where it only takes a minute to learn that Hannah's exciting letter was an acceptance notice from Iowa Writers' Workshop. Season three of *Grace and Frankie* provides another significant and short explanatory delay that spans across episodes, as Frankie's medical event in the end of episode 11 becomes the driving enigmatic concern for the first 15 minutes of episode 12. Short delays such as these should are a sign of high significance because the enigma is so immediate that all involved characters cease progression in their other plotlines until the answer is provided. In other words, the delays are short because the enigma holds the entire narrative hostage until it receives its resolution.

Low-weighted explanatory questions produce speculation which may never be explicitly answered. This speculation invites the viewer to closely examine the characters in order to make assumptions on their internal states, values, beliefs, and motivations. For instance, Emily's anger towards Lorelai regarding the loan payment in season three, episode 18 of *Gilmore Girls* raises speculation regarding the intense negative reaction. While the narrative infers that Emily is angry out of fear that Lorelai will no longer stay in contact, no precise answer is given, leaving the surprising response as an invite for the viewer to examine the character in more depth. Character speculation is also commonly invited in *Girls*, such as when the main plot of season three, episode four centers around Hannah feeling emotionless in response to David's death. While it is an enigmatic focus of conversation that recurs through the entire episode, an answer is never given.

Similarly, viewers are never given a clear answer to the raised concerns in season three, episode nine of *Grace and Frankie* regarding if Robert is as emotionally stable as he appears in regards to his mother's death. These have been ranked as lower-weight explanatory questions because their answers are not necessary for overall narrative coherence and progression. Unlike the heavily-weighted questions, these low-weight concerns do not halt the narrative in suspense of an answer.

The Perpetual Enigmatic Middle

Narratives invite the viewer into an immersive extrapolation process through the use of both predictive and explanatory enigma, maintaining a perpetual middle state as the viewer alternates between looking to the future to answer predictive questions and looking to the past to answer explanatory questions. Put simply, enigma invites the viewer to explain origins and predict conclusions. The belief in a supposed origin and conclusion is required, therefore producing another syntagmatic binary (i.e. origin/conclusion or beginning/end) worth consideration. Predictive and explanatory enigmas both generate coherence, positioning the viewer in the middle of delay looking for a conclusion and origin, respectively. Predictive enigmas place the viewer in the middle of the delay while looking for the conclusion. Explanatory enigmas place the viewer in the middle of the delay while looking for the origin. In effect, the viewer is placed in an enigmatic middle that never ends, as there are always enigmas in need of prediction and explanation.

Television viewers work to maintain causality and coherence when engaging with narrative worlds in an attempt to link the past and the future, two opposite poles that can never touch. The narrative invites this linking process by providing check-in scenarios

which remind the viewer of previously established enigmas that have yet to be resolved. Furthermore, once an enigma is resolved, the narrative either produces another question from its answer or shifts focus to one of the several other coexisting enigmas previously posed. The constant creation and maintaining of enigma keeps the viewer existing within a perpetual enigmatic middle, with any resolutions only providing the illusion of finality. An ultimate end is never achieved, as the death of all enigma would result in the death of narrative itself, leaving the viewer without a world in which to be transported. Transported viewers inhabit narrative worlds from the positionality of the middle; an unending collection of narrative delays, never grasping the complete origin nor reaching the ultimate closure.

Mythic Identification

Myths are taken-for-granted understandings constructed through culture to make sense of both the material and the narrative world. An examination of myth is an examination of the ideologies contained and naturalized through the narrative. A semiotic deconstruction of narrative is incomplete without an investigation of myth because myth is an inseparable element of narrative, providing coherence and the shared emotional resonance. This section demonstrates how, despite the surface differences between *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie*, they each contain the same myths of autonomy, authenticity, fulfillment, and meritocracy. Furthermore, this section addresses how myth exists within binary opposition between characters representing dichotomous values. This opposition is the cause of conflict, which produces enigma and maintains the viewer in a middle state of delay in wait for the solution. The solution to the conflict confirms and reinforces the cultural myth shared by the viewer and the narrative, as the

events of the story play out as mythic understanding dictates. Ideology does not always work in the material world, but it traditionally does in narrative.

Myth invites transportability for the viewer in two essential ways: character alignment and mutual sense-making. First, characters represent mythic belief by their manifestation as one half of a binary opposition. Therefore, character identification and affective response is invited through viewer alignment with the values they embody. Put simply, myth informs how characters enact agency in their navigation of relationships, careers, and identities. Myth provides the similarity between the way in which the identifiable character operates in the narrative world and the way in which the viewer operates in the material world. Their mythic alignment in this navigation results in the possibility of viewer identification, an attribute of the experience of narrative transportation. Second, myth offers an unspoken understanding of how characters practice agency and react to conflict. Their motivations, aspirations, and actions are coherent to the viewer because the narrative world is structured through the same mythic understanding that informs their own material world. Narrative transportation is possible because mythic belief creates a coherent world with ability to immerse the viewer. Through mythic belief, a coherent narrative world is constructed that is possible to transport into.

Therefore, the goal of examining myth is to demonstrate how it functions to achieve transportability through coherence and identification, rather than to make judgement clams as to the validity of the values expressed by the myths. To clarify, I am not discussing myth as a critical inquiry into the ideologies expressed by these programs. Rather, I am demonstrating how an understanding of narrative worlds is impossible

without examining the myths that inform and shape them. While the worlds of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, *Grace and Frankie*, and our own each may seem vastly different from each other, they each operate under the same mythic beliefs. In the remainder of this section, I will highlight four of these myths that dominate the three programs—autonomy, authenticity, fulfillment, and meritocracy—to explore how they function under the same cultural understandings to produce coherence and the possibility of identification.

Autonomy

Each of the three series supports the myth of autonomy, or the individual freedom to act outside of any external control. Through this myth, autonomy is highly valued while family is constructed as a force of obligation that may impede on agency. The three programs provide instances in which characters navigate this conflict between these two opposite poles. First, value is heavily placed on autonomy within *Gilmore Girls*, constructed as a binary opposition to the family tradition and obligation Lorelai—as an embodiment of autonomy—constantly resists. Throughout the series, Lorelai faces multiple conflicts due to the controlling nature of her parents Emily and Richard. In the beginning of the series, Lorelai and Rory experience a loss of autonomy due to their obligation to attend required weekly Friday night dinners, part of an agreement Lorelai enters with Emily to receive tuition money for Rory to attend Chilton Preparatory School. Conflict often results from how Lorelai fights for the freedom to be an autonomous person. One example is depicted in season three, episode 13, which contains a series of flashbacks depicting a teenage Lorelai's relationship with Christopher and her unexpected pregnancy with Rory. In one of these flashbacks, Emily and Richard discuss with Christopher's parents how to approach the pregnancy while Lorelai and Christopher

listen from the stairs. Lorelai is furious that they are excluded from making decisions about their future and argues against the idea of staying in Hartford. When Christopher claims that they will need their parents' help, Lorelai argues that "we can take care of ourselves...we'll figure it out" (Sherman-Palladino et al., 2000-2007). Ultimately, as provided in the backstory, Lorelai chooses to give birth alone and later move to Stars Hollow to raise her daughter by herself, an extreme display of valuing autonomy over wealth and security. Her decision is able to be seen as heroic and positive, as opposed to reckless, because mythic belief in the value of autonomy is aligned between Lorelai and the viewer. This value of autonomy creates a binary between freedom and family, control and resistance, Lorelai's Stars Hollow and her parents' Hartford. Further complications regarding this value of autonomy construct another binary through Rory's enigmatic decision between her childhood dream of Harvard and her grandfather Richard's alma mater Yale. This Harvard/Yale binary involves the myth of autonomy as Harvard represents the agency for Rory to make her own choice, whereas Yale represents the guiding-hand of family tradition that restricts such freedom. In season three, episode eight, Lorelai is so concerned about Rory losing autonomy in her college decision that she accuses Richard of manipulation when he invites them to visit Yale. Viewers remain interested in the resulting enigmas from these binary oppositions because they wish to see autonomous defiance be rewarded, which fulfils the belief in the myth.

We see more severe issues related to autonomy in *Gilmore Girls* through Lane's conflicts with her restrictive mother Mrs. Kim. Mrs. Kim controls all aspects of Lane's life, including hobbies, college choices, religion, and romantic partners. This is an extreme contrast from Lorelai's friend-oriented, laissez-faire approach to raising Rory. In

season three, Lane fights for autonomy as she rebels against her mother's control, secretly joining a band and entering a romantic relationship with bandmate Dave. Enigmas arise regarding if Lane will continue to keep her activities a secret and, if not, if Mrs. Kim will find out. In episode four, Lane navigates between obligation/autonomy while struggling to gather the courage to advocate for what she wants. When Mrs. Kim demands that Lane apply to conservative religious colleges in this episode, Lane dyes her hair purple as an act of protest and to reclaim her autonomy. However, her cowardice eventually prevails as she dyes her hair back to normal before her mother is aware of her rebellion. Ultimately, in season three, episode 19 the enigmatic questions posed from Lane's secrecy are answered when she drunkenly tells her mother about her band and relationship. The problem provides the solution when Mrs. Kim surprisingly allows Lane and Dave to attend prom together regardless of her previous strictness. Through this fulfillment of enigma, autonomous rebellion is rewarded.

Issues resulting from family obligation are significantly less severe in season three of *Girls*, but the family/autonomy binary is still present. This is most notable with the introduction of Adam's sister Caroline in episode three, who calls him for help. Adam invites her to visit but does not want her to stay with them due to their strained relationship. Hannah—the embodiment of obligation—argues with Adam— the embodiment of autonomy—that they should allow her to stay with them, but Adam is firm in his effort to avoid the familial obligation to provide help. Despite Adam's reluctance, they let Caroline stay with them once she sneaks back into their apartment after a party. As the story progresses, the couple shift their binary embodiment within this conflict, as Hannah demonstrates autonomy by kicking Caroline out in episode five.

When Adam returns to this news, he is furious with Hannah and argues his obligation to help by stating: "I'm supposed to be taking care of her" and "she's my sister" (Dunham et al., 2012-2017). Adam feels an imperative need to help his sister Caroline despite their severe dislike for each other. This familial obligation overrides the autonomy he exhibited two episodes prior when he was refusing to allow her to stay in his apartment.

Furthermore, an implicit instance of the myth of autonomy can be seen in Shoshanna and Jessa's relationship, as their friendship appears to entirely rest on the fact that they are cousins. Jessa and Shoshanna are complete opposites: Dependent/independent, free-spirited/organized, and trendy/nerdy. Shoshanna is happy to house her cousin in the first episode of the series, but this relationship becomes strained by season three as a result of Jessa's relapse into drug abuse. In episode 10 of season three, Shoshanna is frustrated with Jessa and her friend and fellow addict Jasper when they distract her from studying. Rather than kick the two of them out of her apartment, Shoshanna feels obligated to help and develops a plan to get rid of Jasper. Without their knowledge, Shoshanna sets up a dinner to reunite Jasper with his estranged daughter Dot, which is successful. In this conflict, the problem of family obligation is solved by family obligation, as Dot offers to help her father with recovery and frees Jessa from his negative influence.

The struggle between autonomy and familial obligation structures the initial setup of *Grace and Frankie*, as Robert and Sol unfaithfully remained in their separate marriages with Grace and Frankie until the beginning of the series. While the primary reason for this is the closeted nature of their gay identities, there was also an effort to maintain the lives and families they had made with their respective spouses. Through the

series, the results from this refusal of obligation are shown in how Grace and Frankie recover through their friendship and how Robert and Sol attempt to repair their relationships with the two. Despite no longer being married to Grace and Frankie, Robert and Sol still demonstrate an obligation to support them in various instances throughout season three. In episode one, Sol, feeling a need to recover his relationship with Frankie, decides to support her art show regardless of his family's objection. Furthermore, in the previous season Sol admits to Frankie that he lied to her about musician Kenny Loggins purchasing one of her paintings, which upsets her. To apologize for this lie, Sol makes a grand gesture by getting Loggins to attend her art show. Another instance of Robert and Sol's obligation is when they help Grace and Frankie after injuring their backs in episode seven. Family obligation provides the solution and fulfills enigmatic concerns when Robert and Sol arrive to help them recover and virtually attend an important business meeting. Additionally, when Grace and Frankie are overwhelmed with the large quantity of orders for their Ménage à Moi vibrators in episode 10, Robert and Sol again solve the problem by arriving to help fulfill the orders. In episode 12, Sol he abandons his obligation to Robert by leaving his musical opening once learning about Frankie's medical episode. While not restrictive, Robert and Sol's obligation to their ex-wives influences their decisions, complicates the relationship between obligation and autonomy.

A more explicit example of the family/autonomy binary in *Grace and Frankie* occurs in season three through the juxtaposition of sisters Mallory and Brianna. Mallory is the embodiment of restrictive obligation as she feels unhappy with parenthood and her marriage with Mitch, jealous of Brianna's unrestrained freedom. In episode five, Mallory wants Brianna to have sex with a man she meets at the bar in an attempt to vicariously

live through her. This leads to a conversation in which Mallory admits that she feels

trapped in her home life without the freedom to make her own choices. When the two

discuss this issue further in episode nine, Mallory admits that her children are preventing

her from leaving her husband by limiting her options. Ultimately, Mallory exercises

autonomy by separating from Mitch, as revealed in a conversation with Robert in episode

13. Robert responds by echoing values of family obligation, appalled that a man could

walk away from his wife and family. Mallory admits that she asked for the separation,

crediting Robert's coming out and subsequent separation from Grace as inspiration. In a

complete display of the value placed on autonomy, Mallory explains to Robert: "You did

it. You knew everyone would flip their shit, but you put yourself out there and you did

what you had to do. And that's the kind of parent that I want to be for my kids"

(Kauffman et al., 2015-present). In this instance, the value of freedom overrides those of

a traditional two-parent household in which to raise children. Mallory's decision to

separate from her husband, regardless of their children, is understood to be the correct

and heroic choice through the value placed on autonomy by mythic understanding.

Authenticity

Authenticity is a core value maintained among all three series, as primary

characters place value on an assumed genuine existence. Authenticity assumes there is

one objective, true internal self that is uninfluenced by the external world and that acting

in accordance to social conventions is false and not genuine. This produces

authentic/inauthentic and authentic/idealized binaries in which conflicts and enigmas

arise from concerns regarding authenticity. The juxtaposition between Lorelai and

Christopher's fiancée Sherry in season three of *Gilmore Girls* provides a clear instance of

this, as the two represent respective halves of the authentic/idealized binary of pregnancy and motherhood. In episode six, this is presented in the foreignness Lorelai and Rory feel when they attend Sherry's baby shower. Despite being the only mother in attendance, Lorelai is casted as an outsider as the party-goers are overly concerned with the image of pregnancy, playing goofy games and claiming that green, rather than pink, is the new girl color according to the magazines. Additionally, Sherry asks Lorelai for a list of parenting books she read when she was pregnant with Rory, causing the entire party to become judgmental when discovering that Lorelai did not seek out parenting information. Another instance is in episode 13, where Sherry orchestrates a formal event for her C-section akin to a wedding, complete with invitations, dinner, and an RSVP list. When Rory is invited to this event, she and Lorelai scoff at the absurd display of inauthenticity. When Sherry goes into labor a week early, this façade of her idealized pregnancy begins to crumble as all of her friends abandon her in favor of their busy schedules. It is as though they only participate in events if they are perfectly planned, rather than naturally occurring. One of her friends echoes this while explaining the situation to Rory, stating that "Sherry screwed up" (Sherman-Palladino et al., 2000-2007) by going into labor early. While lying in the hospital bed, Sherry remains occupied with work, rather than focusing her concern on her delivery. Furthermore, this attempted idealized pregnancy is later contrasted with flashbacks of a teenage Lorelai navigating her own labor at the hospital alone. When Lorelai arrives to the delivery room, her authentic experience with childbirth provides a solution for Sherry's anxiety, as all of Sherry's planning has provided no comfort. The value of authenticity is further reinforced through the juxtaposition of how Christopher treats the two pregnancies, as his inauthentic attitude

towards Lorelai's pregnancy is contrasted with his help and support during Sherry's. This deeply upsets Lorelai as he could not offer the same authentic fatherly role for her and Rory. In episode six, Lorelai claims that Sherry is being inauthentic by copying her pregnancy since she is having a girl and naming her "G.G.," which she claims is identical to "Rory" due to sharing two repeated syllables. This conflict results from what Lorelai feels as though she has missed out on, as Sherry and Christopher's pregnancy represents the idealized version of the life that could have been between him and Lorelai. However, myth provides comfort through the perspective that Lorelai is the truly authentic mother.

In season three of *Girls*, issues of authenticity arise from the strained friendships between Hannah, Marnie, Jessa, and Shoshanna. In episode seven, Marnie attempts to construct an idealized girl's weekend at a North Folk beach house in an attempt to repair their friendship. Marnie makes Hannah miserable by controlling all aspects of the weekend, from assigning rooms to planning their schedule. Marnie is concerned more with repairing the image of their friendship, explaining to the other girls: "I thought this would just be a nice opportunity for us to have fun together and, you know, prove to everyone via Instagram that we can still have fun as a group" (Dunham et al., 2012-2017). Hannah coincidentally sees their former friend Elijah during the vacation and attempts to make the weekend better by inviting Elijah to the beach house. This act introduces authenticity to Marnie's idealized vacation because Hannah has physically invited the source of their relational conflict. Elijah represents authenticity in this episode because he is the embodiment of the damage in Hannah and Marnie's relationship. Marnie's idealized weekend is made impossible with the inclusion of Elijah because they are forced to address the problems in their friendship. In the previous season, Elijah had

sex with Marnie, thus providing the origin for Hannah and Marnie's primary conflict. By inviting Elijah into the idealized weekend, Hannah embodies authenticity by literally introducing the source of the avoided conflict into the situation and allowing them to address their true issues. Through this destruction of idealization, Marnie initially makes progress in repairing her relationships with Hannah and Elijah. However, her continued push towards perfection leads to a major argument between the four girls. Through this binary, the problem of Marnie's inauthenticity provides the solution by causing the four to finally be honest with each other and authentically address their issues and enter conflict. Shoshanna accuses Hannah of being a narcissist, to which Marnie seems to agree. Shoshanna complains that they never take her serious and that she feels invisible among their constant whining. Hannah admits they have not had fun together in two years, while Marnie argues says they would all enjoy themselves if her plans were followed. Hannah accuses Shoshanna of being intellectually unstimulating, to which Jessa disagrees. Shoshanna retorts by calling Hannah mentally unstable and accusing Marnie of being unpleasant due to her self-doubt and fear. Hannah argues that Marnie is not open about her issues and instead focuses on Hannah's. Marnie claims to be disappointed by Hannah's lack of self-improvement despite the lowered standards she has set for her. The argument ends with no resolution. The next morning, the four clean up the beach house together in silence. The episode ends with them sitting and dancing together in silence, their relationship apparently stabilized and the issues are never addressed again. Here, the value of authenticity provides coherence as to why they were able to wake up and remain friends. Because of mythic values an explicit resolution is

unnecessary, as honest conversation provides the solution to their strained friendships despite initially causing major conflict.

In *Grace and Frankie*, the most explicit occurrence of the myth of authenticity exists through the relationship between Robert and Sol. The premise of the series is founded on the authentic/inauthentic binary, as it begins with the two finally coming out as gay and announcing their love for each other despite their respective 40-year long straight marriages with Grace and Frankie. In season three, Robert is seen wrestling with his authenticity as he attempts to live true to his identity as a gay man. This internal conflict is first addressed in episode four when he hosts an after-rehearsal party for the gay theater group he has recently joined. At this party, Sol creates conflict by telling the group about Robert's relationship with Grace, which Robert was keeping a secret out of guilt. In the next episode, Robert admits to feeling shame for being in the closet for so long and for still not being out to his mother. He proceeds to tell his mother, who is unsupportive and calls him selfish. Robert's crisis of authenticity is again brought into the forefront when a homophobic church group begins protesting the play he is acting in in episode 11. Conflict arises when Robert discovers that Sol stood up to one of the protestors, as he believes such an action is pointless. Robert confronts Sol about this in episode 12, blaming him for the protestor situation escalating to heckling and thus ruining his opening night. Sol remains firm in his value of authenticity, claiming that taking action was the correct thing to do. This Robert/Sol conflict is an embodiment of the greater mythic conflict of inauthenticity/authenticity, as Sol expresses authenticity in fighting for what he believes in. In the next episode, Sol and a few members from the theater group plot a revenge protest against the heckler while Robert remains

unsupportive. In an unrelated conversation later in the episode, Mallory compliments

Robert for following his previous display of authenticity by coming out as gay, leading

him to the realization that he should take action. In the end, Robert arrives to Sol's protest

to get arrested alongside his husband and theater friends in a display of the true

acknowledgement of his gay identity. Myth frames this arrest as a victory, as Robert

demonstrates the courage to fully come out and live his true identity. Authenticity is

rewarded through the cheers and applause by his husband, friends, and onlookers.

Fulfillment

Throughout the three series, the characters work towards life fulfillment through a

mythic understanding of career paths. Rather than just providing a way to make income,

career aspirations are heavily valued in these narratives as they represent greater ideals of

achieving one's purpose and finding meaning in their world. In *Gilmore Girls*, this value

placed on a purposeful career is expressed through Rory's academic career. Rory aspires

to become a journalist, but the question is never raised as to why an Ivy League

university is essential necessary for accomplishing this or how her dream of Harvard

factors into this goal. The possibility of her future fulfillment is minimized in favor of the

immediate fulfillment derived from her academic career. Her fulfillment through

academic accomplishment is enough to validate her need to attend the most prestigious

schools, causing Lorelai to make the drastic decision in season one to ask her parents for

the tuition money for Chilton Preparatory School. Academic career provides fulfillment

because myth dictates that it is leading her to a purposeful future. In season three, Rory

works towards acceptance at Harvard University and graduates from Chilton. Although

her lifelong dream of attending Harvard is abandoned for Yale University in episode 17,

myth remains present as Yale is comparable to her overall goal of fulfillment.

Rory's academic career is juxtaposed with her boyfriend Jess's Walmart career, as

the former leads to graduation and Yale while the latter leads to failure and being kicked

out of Luke's home. It is important to note that this contrast is not due to the myth of

meritocracy that will be discussed in the next section, as Jess's failure derives from a

misplacement of application rather than any lack of ability or work ethic. In this case, a

career/job binary is formed in which school-focused Rory represents career concerns

while job-focused Jess represents a lack of aspiration. Jess's work ethic is clearly

demonstrated, as he is rewarded employee of the month at Walmart for his dedicated

service. However, not only does Luke's concern about Jess skipping school override any

sense of accomplishment, but he is even ridiculed for receiving the recognition. Through

mythic understanding, education is paramount in its ability to lead to a fulfilling career

while other work is regarded largely as worthless. In other words, occupation provides

deeper idealistic goals, rather than just a paycheck.

In *Girls*, Hannah's career pursuits are entirely driven through her attempt to

achieve a meaningful career as a writer. This mythic value placed on work is evident in

her internal conflict with her job at *GQ Magazine* in season three. Hannah begins an

advertorial writer job at *GQ* in episode six after her book deal was unexpectedly halted

due to the death of her publisher David two episodes prior. Hannah begins pleasantly

surprised with the amount of income and benefits and even makes a strong impression

during her first meeting. However, when complimented on this by her coworkers,

Hannah states her temporary status at the magazine due to being "a writer writer. Not like

a corporate advertising, working-for-the-man kind of writer" (Dunham et al., 2012-2017).

Once she discovers that her coworkers also had the same aspirations yet have stopped

their creative writing endeavors, Hannah becomes terrified of settling. The unfulfilling

nature of the corporate writing job makes her miserable, as the myth of fulfillment

dictates that a career should also serve and idealistic purpose.

Furthermore, Hannah's *GQ* job is placed in the latter half of the career/job binary

as it is juxtaposed with her boyfriend Adam's newly-acquired fulfilling Broadway career

which heightens her insecurity regarding its lack of purpose. In effect, Hannah's job is

framed as a career failure despite being a financially-stable writing job at a noteworthy

publication. The conflict culminates in episode 11 when Hannah is fired after insulting

her coworkers and ranting about the purposelessness of the job. Interestingly, Hannah's

interpretation of corporate work also involves the previously discussed myth of

authenticity as she attacks its assumed insincerity, asking her coworkers: "Am I seriously

the only one of us who prides herself on being a truly authentic person?" (Dunham et al.,

2012-2017). Put simply, creative work is only fulfilling and purposeful when it is

authentic. Hannah's problem of the myth of career purpose offers its own solution in

episode 13 when Hannah decides to attend Iowa Writer's Workshop in hopes of further

progressing her career, demonstrating the same value of education exhibited in *Gilmore*

Girls. Through myth, attending this graduate program is more meaningful than a

comfortable job at *GQ* because it can lead to a fulfilling career.

Grace and Frankie presents an interesting perspective on the myth of fulfillment

when compared to *Gilmore Girls* and *Girls*, as the four protagonists are at retirement age

in a secure financial situation. Due to this, Grace and Frankie's vibrator company

Vybrant is entirely a career deriving from a sense of purpose, rather than any financial

necessity. In the end of season two, they decide to begin this business to provide a

solution to the lack of vibrator options designed for older women. The two work on

launching their business throughout season three, attending meetings to acquire funding

in episodes one and two, holding a focus group in episode three, attending a business

meeting in episode seven, launching their website in episode eight, and fulfilling orders

in episode nine. Without the myth of career fulfillment, the hard work and enigmatic

concerns from this business plotline would not be coherent. For instance, why start a new

business at retirement age and fight against the resulting conflict if money is not a

problem? This question is never asked because of the universal mythic understanding that

work provides more than financial stability; it provides a purpose to life. The value

placed on this deeper purpose introduces conflict in season three, episode eight when

Grace and Frankie consider partnering with Grace's former colleague Mimi to further

develop their business. In a meeting, Mimi's company Purple Orchid pitches advertising

mockups that feature heavily edited photos of Grace and Frankie in which they appear

significantly younger, conflicting with their mission of Vybrant to serve older women.

Afterward, Grace and Frankie have a discussion between material success and their

idealistic mission, which Grace struggles with internally. Frankie argues to Grace: "What

kind of success do you want? Do you want people to say 'Grace Hanson died rich?' Or

'Grace Hanson did something for people like us?'" In the end, Grace aligns with Frankie

on the idealistic side of the binary by refusing Purple Orchid's deal, maintaining the myth

of fulfillment.

Grace and Frankie's altruistic, purpose-driven business mission of Vybrant is

given an antithesis with the introduction of Nick's greedy company Omni Tech in

episode 11, producing fulfillment/greed and small business/big business binaries

embodied through the two companies. While Vybrant operates out of market need for the

purpose of helping older women, Omni Tech operates out of market exploitation by

applying greedy practices such as stealing Vybrant's vibrator concept. The conflict

between Vybrant and Omni Tech results in Nick serving a cease and desist to Grace in an

attempt to get her attention in episode 13, shifting the focus from career to romantic

interest. Nick's corrupt business practices contrast heavily to the idealized fulfillment

Grace and Frankie are attempting to achieve by providing an example of the wrong

way—according to myth—to operate as a business.

Meritocracy

Another myth related to career concerns is the myth of meritocracy, or the belief

that success is derived through hard work and ability alone, regardless of any systemic

variables such as social class. Meritocracy promises viewers that all of the enigmas

surrounding character career paths and aspirations will eventually be positively fulfilled.

All three programs depict the actualization of this myth through rewarding their

determined characters and punishing less skilled or underdetermined ones. If any hard-

working and skilled character fails, it is a result of a freak occurrence rather than any

personal shortcoming. In season three of *Gilmore Girls*, meritocracy manifests in Rory's

academic career as her hard work at Chilton Preparatory School is rewarded with

acceptance to Harvard University and Yale University in episode 16, as well as

graduation as class valedictorian in episode 22. The series reinforces the myth of

meritocracy through positively answering heavy-weight enigmatic concerns regarding

Rory's academic future and her dream of attending an Ivy League school. The series

clearly frames Rory's accomplishments as a result of her dedication and merit several

times in season three by demonstrating her work and extra-curricular activities, ignoring

the contributing factor of privilege resulting from her grandparent's affluence and social

status. In the primary plot of episode three, Rory is concerned with crafting the perfect

Harvard application letter, organizing an application seminar at Chilton and meeting with

a Harvard alumnus for advice. In episode eight, she tours Yale and has an interview with

the dean of admissions. In episode 16, she co-writes and delivers a speech as the Chilton

Bicentennial Celebration. In episode 21, Rory is constantly studying and expresses

concern that she does not have enough time to finish all of her work before graduation.

At the graduation ceremony in episode 22, Chilton's headmaster Charleston introduces

Rory by describing her as "humble, hardworking, competitive when need be, and

unparalleled in her academic achievements" (Sherman-Palladino et al., 2000-2007).

Additionally, Rory serves an extra-curricular role as the Chilton Student Body Vice

President, which is shown in episodes two, 10 11, and 12. Since Rory's exceptional

nature has been demonstrated through these multiple instances, the narrative would not

make sense if she was not rewarded as this would be a violation of meritocracy.

The academic antithesis to Rory is Jess, due to him skipping classes and failing to

graduate from Stars Hollow High School, concerns of meritocracy produce another

binary when Rory is juxtaposed with her similarly accomplished classmate Paris. While

Rory and Paris are similar in their hard work, the latter's shortcomings are frequently

shown in season three, producing an ability/inability binary. For example, Paris loses

academic focus due to her romantic relationship with Jamie, arriving late to class in

episode seven and not paying attention in class in episode 10. By being rejected from

Harvard, Paris is punished for a misplacement of focus in her boyfriend rather than

academic career, which she explicitly states in episode 16 after learning about her

rejection. In contrast, Rory has two boyfriends throughout the season and juggles

academic responsibilities flawlessly. Additionally, Rory is charismatic and socially

skillful while Paris creates issues due to her abrasiveness and her unwillingness to work

with others. She becomes involved in frivolous issues as the Chilton Student Body

President, such as the resulting drama from rejecting Francie's hemline issue in episode

two that results in her attempting to impeach Rory in episode 12. The narrative maintains

coherence when it is revealed that Paris is rejected from Harvard in episode 16 because

the blame can be placed on these various depictions of Paris's inability to navigate her

academic career. Paris is emotionally wrecked as a result of this rejection, ranting in

frustration about what she believes to be a violation of meritocracy by stating "…who in

the world deserves to go to Harvard more than me? Have you seen how hard I've worked

over these past four years?" (Sherman-Palladino, 2000-2007). Despite Paris's incredulity,

the myth of meritocracy remains intact. Further evidence of her lack of social skills is

provided in the next episode when Paris plays a recording of her Harvard interview where

she is heard frantically raving about population control and yelling at the interviewer. In

short, meritocracy is naturalized through rewarding Rory's ability while punishing Paris's

inability.

     In season three of *Girls*, Adam provides the idealized meritocracy narrative

through his newfound success has an actor in a Broadway rendition of the George

Bernard Shaw play *Major Barbara*. Adam reveals that he received a call-back in episode

six, which he attends in episode eight and is promptly casted, thus validating his acting

skill. The series retroactively demonstrates his dedication as an actor afterward through

his constant rehearsing and his shift in attitude towards sex. His focus shifts entirely from

his romantic relationship with Hannah to preparing for the opening night of the play. In

episode nine, he chooses not to join Hannah on her emergency trip to see her dying

grandmother Flo due to rehearsals. In episode 10, Hannah unexpectedly stays away from

home overnight due to a night of drinking with her *GQ* coworkers, but Adam is too

focused on the play to show any concern. Later in the episode, Adam rejects Hannah's

sexual advances despite their history of constant sexual intimacy, citing his upcoming

rehearsal. When Hannah continues to push sexual intimacy, Adam reveals that he will be

staying at their friend Ray's apartment until opening night to avoid distractions. In the

next episode, after further attention from Hannah, Adam claims that he may extend this

stay beyond opening night. The severity of Adam's shift cannot be understated, as his

sexuality is a primary character trait throughout the series up until this point. By

demonstrating such an extreme shift in focus, Adam's efforts align with meritocracy's

value of hard work and determination, validating his newfound success as a Broadway

actor.

   Additionally, it is important to note that Hannah's contrasting career failure is not

a violation of meritocracy, as it is not a result of any lack of hard work and ability. This is

because the conflict and enigmatic concern about Hannah's career future is introduced

through the freak occurrence of her publisher David's death, rather than through any

internal shortcoming of Hannah. In actuality, Hannah is demonstrated to be exceptionally

gifted after David's death in episode four. When she meets with a new publisher in episode five, they love her writing and want to publish a physical book. This appears as an improvement from her previous deal with Millstreet Press which only involved an ebook. However, forces beyond her control again cause an issue as Hannah discovers that Millstreet still owns the rights to her book, stunting her ability to find an alternative publisher. Her merits are further displayed in episode six by how quickly she secures a writing job at *GQ* magazine and proves herself as an exceptional employee. She leaves the position in episode 11 due to a lack of personal fulfillment, rather than her lack of ability to perform her duties. Ultimately, she is rewarded in episode 12 with acceptance into the prestigious Iowa Writer's Workshop graduate program. The enigmas resulting from these various issues in Hannah's career are constructed and maintained through the myth of meritocracy, as it implies that Hannah's efforts and ability will be ultimately rewarded later on in the series. Viewers are invited to continue watching to experience the completion of this deeply-held myth through finally seeing Hannah as a successful writer.

Season three of *Grace and Frankie* provides a cause and effect relationship between episodes seven and eight which perfectly demonstrates meritocracy. In episode seven, Grace and Frankie both suffer back injuries which bring them to the floor without the ability to get back up. This struggle produces an enigma asking if they can recover in time to make an important business interview they have scheduled for later in that day. In this conflict, Grace and Frankie each represent two halves of a binary: the meritocratic value of determination and the lack thereof, respectively. Grace is determined to get up in time to attend the meeting, crawling around in an attempt to find the phone. In contrast,

Frankie remains still, resigned to the situation. Grace quickly becomes frustrated with

Frankie's lack of will, while Frankie argues that it is too late to make the meeting and

begins to crawl to the phone to cancel. This results in the two racing to get to the phone

first, providing a manifestation of the conflict between determination and resignation.

Grace reaches the phone first, yet wavers in her resolve. She acknowledges her body

limitations and claims that she is too old to run a business, telling Frankie a story of when

she was younger and felt the ability to accomplish anything because she could climb to

the top of a tall tree in her backyard. Despite her old age, she claims to still feel like that

girl she once was. Hearing Grace's story causes Frankie to change her perspective,

arguing: "You're still climbing trees, only now they're banks and incubators. I wouldn't

be your partner if I didn't think you could get us to the tippy-top" (Kauffman et al., 2015-

present). Meritocracy provides the background for the determination of the two women to

persevere despite the conflicts resulting from their age. The conflict is solved and the

enigma fulfilled when Robert and Sol arrive to help the two up and attend the meeting

virtually. The reward for their perseverance and dedication is provided in the following

episode as their business is the subject of the top story on the website *Flapper*. Despite

Frankie's initial concern about their low number of website visitors, Vybrant receives a

large amount of sales by the end of the episode. The myth of meritocracy provides

coherence by connecting their positive article to this influx of sales. The connection is

never explicitly stated because it does not need to be; myth does this work through

naturalized sense-making.

Summary

This semiotic deconstruction of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie* reveals that narratives invite transportation through binary constructions in which enigmas are posed, maintained, and answered through a manifestation of cultural myth. Binary opposition structures narrative syntagmatically through question/answer and problem/solution relations that maintain coherence, introduce enigma, and depict conflict. By being placed in the middle of binary conflict, transportational television narratives situate their viewers in a perpetual enigmatic middle state between the posing of a question and its assumed promise of an eventual answer. Through conflict specifically, this exists between the introduction of a problem and its awaited solution. By mentally working through the questions within the delay of the answer and/or solution, the viewer is placed in a potentially immersive experience between an origin state and an ultimate conclusion. All concerns related to conflict are included in this enigmatic binary relation, as the solutions for created problems are delayed to keep the viewer within this liminal middle state. Although it is common for the programs to resolve intermediate enigmas, no ultimate conclusion is ever reached due to the constant introduction of new enigmas as well as enigmatic chains in which an awaited answer leads to the formation of a new question. Although viewers expect and desire this closure, if an ultimate conclusion was ever reached, the show would cease to exist as nothing would remain to be answered. This constant state of delay structures narrative in a liminal state between syntagmatic binaries of problem/solution, question/answer, and origin/conclusion. Immersion is maintained due to the belief in an origin and conclusion, as the viewer maintains coherence by believing in these two states that can solve all enigmatic concerns.

Binary also structures paradigmatic (i.e. character and setting) elements. This occurs through relationships of conflicting values and beliefs embodied by characters and settings. Here, we see Barthes's (1974) symbolic code in action, as semes (i.e. characters and settings) are provided an antithesis with which they are contrasted with. These binary relations and enigmatic concerns are all situated within cultural myths that are enacted out through character agency. Put simply, characters are the embodiment of one-half of mythic belief, naturalizing myth through their navigation of the aforementioned syntagmatic enigma structures. Settings manifest similar binary relationships as they represent larger mythic ideals due to their relation to the characters and use in the narrative. Although the three television programs in the sample appear to be significantly different, they each contain the same myths of autonomy, authenticity, fulfillment, and meritocracy. These myths provide both coherence and character identification, as the viewer understands and agrees with the worldview embodied by the identified character. The major revelation of this study is that transportation is invited as these three elements of binary, enigma, and myth all culminate as viewers—existing in the perpetual enigmatic middle— immerse themselves by extrapolating possible answers and solutions while waiting for identifiable characters to reach an ultimate conclusion that provides fulfillment of the greater cultural myths that already shape their worldview. Narrative structures are constructed through binary relationships, driven by immersive enigmatic concerns, and informed by identifiable mythic understanding.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through this textual analysis, I have deconstructed exemplary comedy-drama televisual narratives to better understand the machinations behind the ever-present phenomenon of narrative transportation. This study supports prior literature which has pointed to immersion (Green & Brock, 2002), and identification (Van Laer et al., 2014) as possible components of transportation, revealing that these phenomena can be invited through enigma and myth, respectively. By uncovering *what* elements invite transportation, this study also illuminates *how* they are produced. My analysis indicates that televisual narratives are constructed through binary opposition, driven by enigmatic concerns, and informed by cultural myth. Enigmas posed and maintained through the narrative evoke immersion through inviting the viewer into an extrapolation process of attempting to predict conclusions and explain origins. Myths informing the narrative, and embodied by its characters, provide identification through an alignment of worldviews. Within this structure, the viewer is placed within a perpetual enigmatic middle state in which no complete mythic origin is ever provided and no ultimate conclusion is ever reached. When visiting narrative worlds, we forever exist in the slash between question/answer. The combination of immersion and identification derived within the perpetual enigmatic middle results in a transportational experience. These elements create an engaging and identifiable narrative world worth visiting.

Television provides a portal to worlds to which we cognitively travel with characters with which we emotionally resonate as friends and family. This study reveals that when stepping into this portal, we arrive in a perpetual enigmatic middle state of extrapolation in which we are constantly making connections in an attempt to answer

questions and solve problems. The same myths employed to make sense of our material world are used in this effort. These myths are fulfilled within the progression of narrative conflict, providing identification as the narrative world operates in alignment with our own ideological perspectives. This enables the narrative world to appear more desirable than our own, as it perfectly operates in alignment with our beliefs. The persuasive influence of transportation is made apparent when considering this naturalized mythic presence within narratives. These worlds invite transportation because they perfectly operate within the ideological rules of autonomy, authenticity, fulfillment, and meritocracy that construct the viewer's own social reality. The myths we believe might not always ring true in our material reality, but we can transport ourselves into narrative worlds where they are incontrovertible. In the remainder of this chapter, I will address theoretical and practical implications of this study, limitations, and future research considerations.

Implications for Theory

Narrative transportation is a captivating and enjoyable experience ubiquitous within televisual narratives. This study is the first step in introducing narrative transportation theory into the realm of media criticism, filling a gap in literature by examining the phenomenon at the textual level. By uncovering the machinations behind this common experience, we can better understand our complex relationships with the media we love. While textual analysis can expand theoretical perspectives of narrative transportation, it can also lead to furthering our understanding of audience cultivation (Gerbner, 1998). Cultivation theory was developed by Gerbner to investigate how television naturalizes long-term ideological perspectives which shape our understanding

of the world. Through approaching the persuasive influence of narrative transportation as existing within the larger phenomenon of cultivation, this study expands cultivation theory by addressing transportation as a new avenue of how myth is naturalized within narratives. The role of mythic identification within transportation has theoretical implications in regards to how audiences are cultivated by the narratives into which they journey. In the next section, I will discuss practical implications for content production.

Implications for Content Production

Narrative transportation is the ultimate form of audience engagement, making it a desirable goal for content producers. Episodic television programs were investigated in this study due to their success being dependent on maintaining engagement for multiple installments over several years. Connecting with viewers to this extent requires the production of narrative worlds they find ideal to frequently visit. This study provides insights into how narrative structure invites transportation through the perpetual presence of enigma and the alignment of myth. Expanding narrative transportation theory by investigating textual elements has exciting implications for praxis, as knowledge regarding how narrative structures evoke transportation could possibly be applied in the production of content. For instance, understanding how enigma is posed, revisited, and maintained within transportational texts equips storytellers with the knowledge to approach enigma similarly in their own productions. Next, I will detail the limitations of this study and areas worth consideration for future research.

Limitations and Future Research

While the results from this study were illuminating, the content analyzed only accounted for a small selection of narrative television. The sample of comedy-drama

television programming—the third seasons of *Gilmore Girls*, *Girls*, and *Grace and Frankie*—was chosen to examine similarities that would point to transportation while avoiding genre-specific differences. While these series were chosen to account for both comedic and dramatic elements, additional analysis is needed to understand how these genres operate individually outside of their hybrid form. Future research is also needed to explore ways in which transportation within comedy-drama narratives may differ from other narrative television genres, such as science fiction, sitcom, horror, or action. Additionally, due to the significance of character identification, this sample only included primarily character-driven narratives. Further research is necessary to uncover how transportation works within dominantly plot-driven programs such as *Law and Order*, *Silicon Valley*, or *Veep.*

The sample was also compiled to account for a maximum variation of television, including legacy broadcast, premium cable broadcast, and streaming content. Future research is necessary to examine how medium-specific concerns of televisual content may relate to transportation, such as commercial breaks in legacy broadcasting or the lack of restrictive episode durations in streaming content. As the definition of television in our digital age becomes nebulous, programs produced specifically for streaming services are often taken for granted as being the same as their legacy broadcast relatives, despite not having the pressures of broadcast television placed on their production. The content of broadcast television is shaped by numerous channel pressures, such as run duration, commercial breaks, government content regulations, aspect ratio, and broadcast schedule. The medium theorist practice of analyzing the medium itself divorced from content would be beneficial in uncovering how the medium may limit the narrative and therefore

its ability to transport the viewer. Future research could examine medium-specific traits to uncover how this shift in television alters our journey of visiting narrative worlds.

Another limitation of this study is the sample's lack of character diversity. The casts of all three shows, while a majority of the primary characters were women with a diverse age range, are predominately white, heteronormative, and upper-middle class. Therefore, the sample was lacking in representation of people of color, LGBTQ, and the lower class. The only LGBTQ representation present within *Girls* and *Grace and Frankie* were gay cis-gendered men, therefore lacking in bisexual, transgender, and non-binary characters. Future research is needed to apply semiotic deconstruction to a diverse range of narratives to investigate how they may invite transportation differently. Analysis into narratives with non-white, non-heteronormative, and less economically privileged characters could provide important insights into how these narratives may invite transportation through alternate approaches to character identification.

Transportation occurs everywhere that narrative exists in our media landscape. This study was a new approach to understanding narrative transportation by deconstructing transportational content at the textual level. Television was the chosen medium of analysis due to its episodic nature, as it requires narratives to engage the viewer over the course of several years. It is currently unclear how the findings of the study apply to narratives in other media, such as film, literature, or user-generated online content. Future research should apply textual analysis to investigate transportation beyond television, accounting for both medium-specific concerns and structural similarities existing across different media.

The scope of this study resulted in further limitations. First, this semiotic deconstruction was only concerned with examining macro-level elements of narrative structure. Future research is needed to observe how micro-level elements such as dialogue, shot composition, and music may impact transportability. Second, this study focused solely on how the text functions to invite transportation, rather than audience-level observation. The subjective nature of narrative transportation results in varying experiences among audience members. Future research could incorporate audience analysis into textual analysis to observe how viewer characteristics impact the transportability of exemplary narratives.

Final Conclusions

As referenced in chapter two, Gerbner (1998) states that "humans are the only species that lives in a world erected by the stories they tell" (p. 175). The progression of narrative transportation theory is a necessary step to understanding our inextricable relationship with the narratives that shape our lives. A journey into a narrative world has the ability to immerse us in pretend conflicts, emotionally connect us with fictional characters, and naturalize ideologies that shape the way we perceive the material world upon our return. Textual analysis has proven to be an effective tool to uncover the machinations behind this powerful phenomenon. This deconstruction reveals that narratives provide a portal to depart our lives through a synthesis of enigmatic immersion and mythic identification. By shifting the academic discussion of narrative transportation from *what* the phenomenon does to *how* it is achieved, we can realize the illusive qualities required for a captivating, emotional, and ultimately life-altering media experience.

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Appendix

Coding Sheet

Show: **Episode:**

Causality/Coherence - Setup (SU), Payoff (PO), Timecodes

Conflict – Types (T), Enigma (E), & Resolution level (LVL)   **2nd order**

Characters – Ideas manifested (I) & clarity level (LVL)   **2nd order**

Setting – Ideas manifested (I)

Open Coding / Moments of Transportation

Enigma List

Total: 344 (306 Predictive + 38 explanatory).
Roughly 6.8 questions posed per episode.
Enigmas are labeled [P] for predictive and [E] for explanatory.

<u>*Gilmore Girls*, Season Three</u>

Total: 156 (141 Predictive + 15 explanatory).
Roughly 7 questions posed per episode.

Ep1: "Those Lazy-Hazy-Crazy Days"
1. [P] (Check-in: Series-wide) Will they/won't they?: Lorelai and Luke (approached by Lorelai dreaming of pregnancy and relationship with Luke)
2. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Paris and Jamie. How will Jamie and Paris's date go? [ANSWERED IN EP7]
3. [P] (Check-in of previous season) Will Lorelai and Luke make up? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] (Check-in of previous season) Will Rory and Dean break up? (Rory ignores Dean's letters when out of town) [ANSWERED IN EP7]
5. [E] Why is Rory ignoring Dean?
6. [P] (Check-in of previous season) Will they/won't they?: Rory and Jess [ANSWERED IN EP7]
7. [P] How will Emily and Richard respond about Christopher in last season? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep2: "Haunted Leg"
1. [P] Will Lorelai and Emily mend to their previous relationship state?
2. [P] How will Lorelai respond to Kirk asking her out? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] What will happen with the Chilton hemline issue/Francie vs. Paris issue? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Lorelai and Christopher mend their relationship? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
5. [P] Will Rory forgive Christopher for breaking his promise and not marrying Lorelai?
6. [P] (Check-in) Will they/won't they?: Rory and Jess (Approached through introduction of Jess's new girlfriend Shane) [ANSWERED IN EP7]

Ep3: "Application Anxiety"
1. [P] Will Rory overcome her anxiety regarding the Harvard application? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Who will Rory choose as her essay topic?
3. [P] Will Rory be accepted into Harvard? [ANSWERED IN EP16]
4. [E] Why is Taylor taking pictures outside of Luke's Diner? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

5. [P] Will Luke let Taylor open soda shop next to the diner? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] Will Lane join a band? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Lane and Dave [ANSWERED IN EP7]
8. [P] (Check-in) Will Rory and Dean break up? [ANSWERED IN EP7]

Ep4: "One's Got Class and the Other One Dyes"
1. [P] How will Lane's band solve the issue of having to be quiet in their practice space? [ANSWERED IN EP12]
2. [P] Will Lane tell Mrs. Kim about the band? [ANSWERED IN EP19]
3. [P] Can Lorelai convince Luke to speak at Stars Hollow High School as requested? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Lane wants to rebel against her mom, will she follow through? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] How will Mrs. Kim react to Lane's dyed hair?
6. [P] Will Rory solve Lane's hair issue in time? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] (Check-in) Will they/won't they?: Rory and Jess (Approached through Rory vs. Shane, as well as Jess telling Luke he doesn't like Shane) [ANSWERED IN EP7]

Ep5: "Eight O'clock at the Oasis"
1. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Lorelai and Peyton, the man she meets at the auction [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Lorelai get the name of the man to get in contact? How? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] How will Lorelai respond after Emily was upset about bad date? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Sprinkler malfunction – How will Rory solve the issue? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in) Will they/won't they?: Rory and Jess (Approached through sprinkler malfunction) [ANSWERED IN EP7]

Ep6: "Take the Deviled Eggs..."
1. [P] How will Sherry's baby shower go for Rory? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [E] Where did Jess get the money for his new car? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] What is the deal with the protestor that Taylor is mad at?
4. [P] How will Sherry's baby shower go for Lorelai? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in) Will they/won't they?: Rory and Jess (Approached through confrontation regarding Jess's car, as well as Rory and Lorelai egging his car) [ANSWERED IN EP7]

Ep7: "They Shoot Gilmores, Don't They?"
1. [P] Who will be Lorelai's dance partner? Will she find one? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Who will win dance competition? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

3. [P] Will Paris be able to manage relationship with Jamie and school? [ANSWERED IN EP17]
4. [P] (Check-in) Will they/won't they?: Rory and Jess (Approached through Jess attending dance to make Rory jealous. Furthered by Dean breaking up with Rory and Jess comforting Rory) [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] Will Sookie continue with her agreement to having four children or enter conflict with Jackson?
6. [P] (Check-in: Series-wide) Will they/won't they?: Lorelai and Luke (approached via Lorelai and Luke discussing children)
7. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Lane and Dave [ANSWERED IN EP9]

Ep8: "Let the Games Begin"
1. [P] How will the visit to Yale go? Will Richard try any tactics to convince Rory to go there? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Lorelai argue with Richard over his alleged manipulation of Rory? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] How will Lorelai handle Rory's relationship with Jess?
4. [P] Can Rory and Dean be friends after breakup? (Setup with Rory apologizing) [ANSWERED IN EP10]
5. [P] Will Rory choose Yale or Harvard? [ANSWERED IN EP17]

Ep9: "A Deep-Fried Korean Thanksgiving"
1. [P] Will the Independence Inn Thanksgiving dinner go well without Sookie cooking?
2. [P] How will Lorelai and Rory attend four Thanksgiving dinners? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Lane and Dave (Lane gets Mrs. Kim to hire Dave so he can attend their Thanksgiving) [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Mrs. Kim find out about Lane and Dave's relationship? [ANSWERED IN EP19]
5. [P] (Check-in) Will Rory choose Yale or Harvard? (Set up by Rory admitting to also applying for Yale) [ANSWERED IN EP17]
6. [P] Will Sookie and Jackson have conflict regarding his annoying family? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] Will Dean and Jess physically fight each other? (Set up when Dean tries to fight him) [ANSWERED IN EP19]

Ep10: "That'll Do, Pig"
1. [E] Why is Paris distracted in class? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] How will Paris react when she discovers Francie set up meeting without her? [ANSWERED IN EP11]
3. [P] What will Francie do regarding her rivalry with Rory? [ANSWERED IN EP11]
4. [P] (Check-in) Will Dean and Jess fight? (Jess confronts Dean about them being friends) [ANSWERED IN EP19]
5. [P] Will conflict ensue between Trix and Emily? [ANSWERED IN EP15]

Ep11: "I Solemnly Swear"
1. [P] What will happen with Emily's lawsuit from her former maid? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Lorelai and Alex? [ANSWERED IN EP16]
3. [P] How will Sookie handle her friend Joe asking her on a date? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Rory and Paris make up? (Fencing match) [ANSWERED IN EP16]
5. [P] (Check-in) What will happen between Rory and Francie with their rivalry? (Conflict progressed)

Ep12: "Lorelai Out of Water"
1. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Lorelai and Alex (They have a fishing date) [ANSWERED IN EP16]
2. [P] (Check-in: Series-wide) Will they/won't they?: Lorelai and Luke (Approached via Luke teaching Lorelai how to fish for Alex)
3. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Nicole and Luke [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Lane go to prom? [ANSWERED IN EP22]
5. [P] (Check-in) How will Lane and Dave make relationship work with Mrs. Kim's rejection? [ANSWERED IN EP14]
6. [P] Will the band find out about Lane and Dave? [ANSWERED IN EP14]
7. [P] (Check-in) Will Rory and Paris make up? [ANSWERED IN EP16]
8. [P] Will Rory and Paris's fighting interfere with Rory's chances for Harvard? [ANSWERED IN EP16]

Ep13: "Dear Emily and Richard"
1. [P] (Check-in) How will Luke's date with Nicole go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Lorelai and Rory really backpack across Europe? [ANSWERED IN EP22]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Dean and Jess fight? (Approached via argument at the diner) [ANSWERED IN EP19]
4. [P] How will Sherry's birth go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] Will Christopher arrive in time to see the birth of his child? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] (Check-in) Will Rory and Paris make up? (Approached via a brief confrontation) [ANSWERED IN EP16]

Ep14: "Swan Song"
1. [P] (Check-in) How bad will Trix's return be for Emily? (Approached by Emily complaining about her) [ANSWERED IN EP15]
2. [P] How will Jess act at dinner with Emily? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [E] (Check-in) How did Jess get the black eye? Did he fight Dean? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [E] Why is Jess keeping the black eye a secret? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] Will Jess and Rory break up? [ANSWERED IN EP22]

6. [P] (Check-in) Will Lorelai and Alex maintain their relationship? [ANSWERED IN EP16]
7. [P] (Check-in) Will Mrs. Kim find out about Lane and Dave? [ANSWERED IN EP19]
8. [P] Will Rory have sex with Jess? [ANSWERED IN EP19]

Ep15: "Face-Off"
1. [P] Will Lorelai and Rory go to the hockey game that Taylor mentioned? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Jess contact Rory for Friday night plans? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Rory stick around and wait for Jess? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Rory admit to Lorelai she hung out with Jess despite him making her wait around? [ANSWERED IN EP20]
5. [P] (Check-in) How bad will Trix's return be for Emily? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] (Check-in) Will Mrs. Kim find out about Lane and Dave's relationship? [ANSWERED IN EP19]
7. [P] Will Emily tell about Trix kissing a man?[ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [E] Who was the man Trix was kissing? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
9. [E] Why is Rory's former schoolmate Lindsay acting odd towards her? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
10. [P] Will Rory get back with Dean? (Approached by her jealousy of Lindsay)
11. [P] Will Lorelai ever be accepting of Jess? [ANSWERED IN EP22 THROUGH CANCELLATION]

Ep16: "The Big One"
1. [E] Why does Sookie's food suddenly taste bad [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Jackson stop panicking about future fatherhood? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Who will get the speaking role at the Chilton Bicentennial Celebration? (Rory or Paris? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] (Check-in) Will Rory and Paris make up? How will writing the speech together go? [ASNWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in) Which school will Rory choose? Harvard or Yale? (She was accepted into both) [ANSWERED IN EP17]
6. [E] Why is Paris late to the speech? Why did she arrive silent and disheveled? [ANWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [E] Why was Paris rejected from Harvard? [ANSWERED IN EP17]

Ep17: "A Tale of Poes and Fire"
1. [P] (Check-in) Which school will Rory choose? Harvard or Yale? (Approached with a pro-con list) [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [E] Is Jess skipping school for extra hours at Walmart? [ANSWERED IN EP18]
3. [P] How will Lorelai take care of and relocate the Independence Inn guests after the fire? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] What will happen with the Independence Inn? [ANSWERED IN EP22]

5. [P] (Check-in: Series-wide) Will they/won't they?: Lorelai and Luke (Luke gives Lorelai a place to sleep, admits that Nicole doesn't like her)
6. [P] What will Paris do now that she's rejected from Harvard?
7. [P] Will Rory and Lindsay ever get along?
8. [P] How will Lane navigate Young Chui being in love with her? [ANSWERED IN EP19]

Ep18: "Happy Birthday, Baby"
1. [P] How will Luke meeting Nicole's parents go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] (Check-in) What will happen with the Independence Inn? (They discuss converting into a bed and breakfast) [ANSWERED IN EP22]
3. [P] Will Rory successfully organize Lorelai's big birthday party? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] How far will Michel's competition with Tobin go? (This is the only time we see Tobin in season 3)
5. [P] Will Luke confront Jess about not going to school? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] Will skipping school harm Jess academically? [ANSWERED IN EP19]
7. [E] Did Luke hide Jess's car so he had to go to school?
8. [P] What will Lorelai do with the $75,000 she receives from Richard? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
9. [E] Why is Emily so mad that Lorelai paid them back?
10. [P] Will Lorelai and Emily's relationship mend from her paying her back?

Ep19: "Keg! Max!"
1. [P] How will Luke react to Jess failing Star Hollow High School? [ANSWERED IN EP20]
2. [P] How will Rory react to Jess being unable to take her to the Stars Hollow High School prom? [ANSWERED IN EP20]
3. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Lorelai and Max. (Revived from previous season) [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] (Check-in: Series-wide) Will they/won't they?: Lorelai and Luke (awkward encounter with Lorelai, Luke, and Nicole staying at the inn)
5. [P] (Check-in) Will Lane and Dave be able to go to prom? [ANSWERED IN EP22]
6. [P] Will Lane's band perform despite anxiety? How will it go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] What will Lane's band choose as a name?
8. [P] How will Mrs. Kim react after Lane told her about Dave and the band? [ANSWERED IN EP20]
9. [P] Will the house get damaged during the party? [ASNWERED IN THIS EP]
10. [P] (Check-in) Will Dean and Jess fight? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep20: "Say Goodnight, Gracie"
1. [P] How will Luke react to Jess fighting with Dean and damaging the house? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

2. [P] (Check-in) How will Mrs. Kim react after Lane told her about Dave and the band? Will she let them go to prom? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Lorelai and Emily's relationship mend from her paying her back? (Approached by Lorelai's guilt. She calls Emily but it goes poorly)
4. [P] Will Fran's family sell The Dragonfly Inn to Lorelai and Sookie upon her death? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] Will Rory and Dean make up after their argument about Dean's proposal to Lindsay? [ANSWERED IN EP22]
6. [E] Who was the mysterious man that left his wallet in Luke's Diner? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] Where will Jess go after Luke kicks him out? What will happen to him? [ANSWERED IN EP21]
8. [P] (Check-in) Will Jess and Rory break up? [ANSWERED IN EP22]

Ep21: "Here Comes the Son"
1. [P] How will Rory manage her busy academic schedule?
2. [P] (Check-in) Where will Jess go after Luke kicks him out? What will happen to him? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Jess return to Stars Hollow?
4. [P] Will Jimmy bond with Jess? Let him stay with him?
5. [P] (Check-in) Will Lorelai and Emily's relationship mend from her paying her back?
6. [P] What will Lorelai do about Rory's Yale tuition after financial aid? [ANSWERED IN EP22]

Ep22: "Those Are Strings, Pinocchio"
1. [P] (Check-in) Will Jess and Rory break up? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] (Check-in) What will happen to The Independence Inn? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] How will Lorelai be able to buy the inn with Rory's tuition? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] (Check-in) Will Jess and Rory break up? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in: Series-wide) Will they/won't they?: Lorelai and Luke (set up via Luke dreaming of Lorelai telling him not to get engaged to Nicole)
6. [P] What lies instore for Rory at Yale in the next season?
7. [P] What lies instore for Lorelai and Sookie as they begin working on starting their inn?

Girls, Season Three
Total: 89 (77 Predictive + 12 explanatory).
Roughly 7.4 questions posed per episode.

Ep1: "Females Only"
1. [P] (Check-in of previous season) Will they/Won't they?: Shoshanna and Ray. [ANSWERED IN EP12]

2. [P] Will Hannah reconsider her relationship with Adam after running into Natalia? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] (Check-in of previous season) How will Marnie move on from Charlie? [ANSWERED IN EP5]
4. [P] Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction?
5. [E] Why is Jessa acting out in rehab?
6. [P] Will Jessa get kicked out of rehab for bad behavior? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] (Check-in of previous season) What will happen with Hannah's book deal in light of her mental breakdown last season? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] Will Hannah finish writing her book?
9. [P] Will Hannah and Adam have a conflict over finances?
10. [P] Will Hannah and Adam have a conflict over her friends coming over?

Ep2: "Truth or Dare"
1. [P] (Check-in) Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction? (Approached by Hannah, Shoshanna, and Adam picking her up from rehab)
2. [P] Will Hannah find out that Jessa lied about getting kicked out of rehab? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [E] Why is Adam so certain that they are not helping Jessa by picking her up from rehab?
4. [E] Why do Hannah and Shoshanna not take her drug use seriously?
5. [P] Will Adam's resistance to picking up Jessa lead to conflict? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] (Check-in) Will Hannah and Jessa make up for Jessa leaving Hannah at Jessa's dad's house last season? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep3: "She Said OK"
1. [E] Why does Adam not want to help his sister Caroline?
2. [P] Will Caroline lead to conflict? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Caroline end up staying with them? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Marnie be able to get her embarrassing music video removed from the internet?
5. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Shoshanna and Ray. [ANSWERED IN EP12]
6. [P] Will Ray fighting David harm Hannah's book deal? [ANSWERED BY CANCELLATION IN EP4]

Ep4: "Dead Inside"
1. [E] Why is Hannah emotionless in response to David's death?
2. [P] Will Hannah's emotionless response to David's death harm her relationship with Adam? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] What will happen with Hannah's book deal? [ANSWERED IN EP5]
4. [P] (Check-in) Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction? (Approached by Jessa finding out a friend faked her death to avoid her)

5. [P] (Check-in) Will Marnie be able to get her embarrassing music video removed from the internet?
6. [P] What will Marnie do career-wise after quitting her job? [ANSWERED IN EP10]

Ep5: "Only Child"
1. [P] (Check-in) What will happen with Hannah's book deal? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Adam and Caroline ever get along?
3. [P] What happened to Caroline after Hannah kicked her out? [ANSWERED IN EP12]
4. [P] Will Adam forgive Hannah for kicking Caroline out?
5. [P] (Check-in) Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction? (Approached through Jessa's self-stated mission of self-improvement).
6. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Marnie and Ray after hooking up. [ANSWERED IN EP8]
7. [E] Why does Marnie sleep with Ray if she does not like him?
8. [P] Will the girls find out about Marie and Ray? [ANSWERED IN EP11]

Ep6: "Free Snacks"
1. [P] Will Hannah be happy at *GQ*? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Hannah leave *GQ*? [ANSWERED IN EP11]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Hannah and Adam have a conflict over finances?
4. [E] Why does Adam not want an acting job?
5. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Marnie and Ray. [ANSWERED IN EP8]
6. [P] What will happen regarding Shoshanna's casual dating? [ANSWERED IN EP12]
7. [P] How will Adam's callback go? [ANSWERED IN EP8]

Ep7: "Beach House"
1. [E] What is Marnie doing at the beginning of the episode? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Hannah inviting Elijah to the beach house create conflict? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Hannah and Marnie fight due to Marnie's controlling behavior? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will the girls reconcile from the group fight? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in) Will the girls find out about Marie and Ray? (Approached through Marnie telling Elijah) [ANSWERED IN EP11]

Ep8: "Incidentals"
1. [P] How will Hannah's interview with Patti LuPone go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] How will Adam's callback go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Adam forget about Hannah due to his Broadway role? Does she have anything to worry about?

4. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Marnie and Ray [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] What will happen after Jasper visits Jessa? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] (Check-in) Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction?
7. [P] What will happen after Jessa robs the store she works at?
8. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Marnie and Desi. [ANSWERED IN EP12]

Ep9: "Flo"
1. [P] Will Hannah's grandmother Flo die? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [E] Why is Rebecca so mean to Hannah? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Rebecca and Hannah get along? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Hannah tell Flo that she's marrying Adam? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] Will Hannah and Adam's relationship work long-term? (Approached by Hannah's mother telling her to keep her options open)

Ep10: "Role-Play"
1. [P] (Check-in) Will Adam forget about Hannah due to his Broadway role? Does she have anything to worry about? (Approached by Hannah staying out overnight and Adam not being worried)
2. [P] What will Hannah do about distance in relationship? [ANSWER IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Hannah and Adam have conflict over Adam being distant? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP AND IN EP12]
4. [P] (Check-in) Will Marnie accept the job at Soojin's gallery? [ANSWERED IN EP11]
5. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Marnie and Desi. (Approached by the two of them performing music together and the reveal that Desi has a girlfriend)
6. [E] Why does Shoshanna want to help Jasper?
7. [P] Will Jasper reconcile with his daughter Dot? [ANSWER IN THIS EP]
8. [P] Will Jessa forgive Shoshanna for setting Jasper up to meet with Dot?
9. [P] (Check-in) Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction?

Ep11: "I Saw You"
1. [P] (Check-in) Will Hannah and Adam have conflict over Adam being distant? Can they make relationship work? [ANSWERED IN EP12]
2. [P] How will Jessa's new job as the photographer's assistant go? [ANSWERED IN EP12]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Jessa recover from her drug addiction?
4. [P] How will Marie and Desi's performance go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Marnie and Ray again.
6. [P] (Check-in) Will Hannah stay at *GQ*? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] How will Hannah react about Marnie and Ray? [ANSWERED IN EP12]

Ep12: "Two Plane Rides"
1. [E] What is the letter Hannah received that she's excited about? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

2. [P] Will Hannah decide to go to the Iowa Writer's Workshop? [AMBIGUOUS, BUT ASSUMED]
3. [P] How will Shoshanna respond to not graduating? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] What will Shoshanna do next about her academic career?
5. [P] Will Shoshanna forgive Marnie for sleeping with Ray?
6. [P] What will Shoshanna say to Ray about his relationship with Marnie? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] (Check-in) Will they/won't they?: Shoshanna and Ray. [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] Will Jessa agree to assist the photographer with suicide? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
9. [P] Will the photographer die from the suicide attempt?
10. [P] (Check-in) Will they/won't they?: Marnie and Desi. [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
11. [P] (Check-in) Will Adam and Hannah's relationship recover from the fight regarding her impacting his performance?
12. [E] What are Desi and Clementine fighting about? Does she know about Desi's relationship with Marnie?

Grace and Frankie, Season Three
Total: 99 (88 Predictive + 11 explanatory).
Roughly 7.6 questions posed per episode.

Ep1: "The Art Show"
1. [P] How will Grace and Frankie obtain financing for their vibrator business? [ANSWERED IN EP2]
2. [P] (Check-in of previous season) Will Sol be able to repair his relationship with Frankie?
3. [P] Will Sol go to Frankie's art opening? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Sol cause issues at Frankie's opening? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in of previous season) Will Frankie and Brianna make up from previous season conflict regarding the lubricant? [ANSWERED IN EP2]
6. [P] How will Frankie's art opening go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] Will Brianna and Barry stay in a relationship together? [ANSWERED IN EP2]

Ep2: "The Incubator"
1. [P] How will meeting with business incubator go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] (Check-in) How will Grace and Frankie obtain financing for their vibrator business? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Brianna and Barry get back together? [LEFT ABIGUOUS IN EP13]
4. [P] Can Grace and Frankie make their business relationship work long-term? (Approached by Grace being frustrated with Frankie's lack of focus)
5. [E] Why is Robert so adamant to not go into work? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

6. [P] Will Robert and Sol retire? [ANSWERED IN EP3 (ROBERT) AND EP8 (SOL)]
7. [P] (Check-in) Will Frankie and Brianna make up from previous season conflict? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] Will Grace find out that Frankie lied about Brianna giving them the money? [ANSWERED IN EP5]

Ep3: "The Focus Group"
1. [P] How will Grace and Frankie's focus group go? Then, how will the prayer group respond? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] How will they find another focus group after the church group issue? [ANSWERED THROUGH CANCELLATION IN THIS EP]
3. [P] Will Robert and Sol audition for the musical? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Robert and Sol get cast? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP
5. [P] How will Sol react to not being cast? [NSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] Will Brianna and Mallory make up for how Brianna acts towards her kids? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep4: "The Burglary"
1. [E] Who robbed the beach house?
2. [P] Will Frankie recover from the fear of the break-in?
3. [P] Will Frankie's fear frustrate Grace to the point of conflict?
4. [P] Will Sol fight with Robert due to feeling excluded from Robert's theater community? [ANSWRED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] Will Robert and Sol reconcile from their conflict resulting from Sol telling the theater group about Grace? [ANSWERED IN EP5]
6. [P] Will Frankie find out about Grace's gun? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] Why is Frankie making a mannequin? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] How will Frankie respond to Grace shooting her mannequin? [ANSWERED IN EP5]

Ep5: "The Gun"
1. [P] (Check-in) Will Grace and Frankie overcome their gun conflict? How? [ANSWERED IN EP6]
2. [E] Why is Frankie so upset about Grace owning a gun?
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Grace get rid of the gun?
4. [P] How will Robert's mother respond to him coming out as gay? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] How will Robert take his mother's negative response to his coming out? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP AND IN EP9]
6. [P] Will Robert's mother ever be accepting of him being gay? [ANSWERED IN EP9]
7. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Brianna and Ryan, the man she meets at the bar [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] What will Mallory do about feeling trapped in her family? [ANSWERED IN EP13]

9. [P] (Check-in) Will Grace forgive Frankie for lying about the money? [ANSWERED IN EP6]
10. [P] Will Grace return the money to Brianna? [ANSWERED IN EP6]

Ep6: "The Pot"
1. [P] Will Grace return the money to Brianna? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Bud and Allison get time to themselves like they are attempting? How will Bud navigate the issue? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Grace and Frankie overcome their conflicts regarding the gun and the money? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Coyote become more independent per Bud's wishes? [ANSWERED IN EP7]
5. [P] Will Bud's family lead to conflict between him and Allison? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] Will Robert move on emotionally from his mother's negative reaction to his sexuality? [ANSWERED IN EP7]

Ep7: "The Floor"
1. [P] How will Grace and Frankie recover from their back injuries? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Grace and Frankie recover from their back injuries soon enough for their business meeting? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Coyote become more independent per Bud's wishes? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Where will Coyote live? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in) Will Robert move on emotionally from his mother's negative reaction to his sexuality? (Robert receives closure from a priest) [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] Will Sol find out that Robert imagined his mother when they were romantic? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep8: "The Alert"
1. [P] Will the Vybrant website start receiving visitors? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Brianna and Ryan the escort. [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [P] How will Grace and Frankie treat the Panic Alerts? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Grace and Frankie partner with Mimi? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] Will they phase out Joan-Margaret? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] (Check-in) When will Sol retire? Will he retire? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep9: "The Apology"
1. [P] Will Frankie move to Santa Fe with Jacob or will they break up? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
2. [E] Is Robert actually fine in regards to his mother dying?

3. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Brianna and Barry. [LEFT ABIGUOUS IN EP13]
4. [P] (Check-in) What will Mallory do about feeling trapped in her family? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
5. [P] How will Grace and Robert's shopping go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep10: "The Labels"
1. [P] How will Grace and Frankie fill their large number of orders? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] When will Grace begin dating again? (Question posed by Robert)
3. [P] (Check-in) Will Frankie move to Santa Fe with Jacob or will they break up? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
4. [P] Will Grace find out about Frankie's Santa Fe issue? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] What will Grace and Frankie do in regards to Sex Tech/Omni Tech stealing their vibrator concept? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] Will the issue with the stolen vibrator idea harm Vybrant? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
7. [P] Will they/Won't they?: Coyote and Nadia.
8. [P] How will Bud confront Allison in regards to the vibrator? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
9. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Brianna and Barry. [LEFT ABIGUOUS IN EP13]

Ep11: "The Other Vibrator"
1. [P] Will Grace and Frankie resolve conflict regarding Frankie's consideration of moving to Santa Fe? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
2. [P] (Check-in) Will Frankie move to Santa Fe with Jacob or will they break up? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
3. [P] Will the Church protest group escalate to a conflict? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] Will Robert find out Sol was the one who fought with the protestor? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] (Check-in) How will Robert react to discovering Sol fought protestor? [ANSWERED IN EP12]
6. [P] How will the musical performance go? How will Robert do? (Posed through Robert stressing out) [ANSWERED IN EP12]
7. [P] How will Grace and Frankie's confrontation with Omni Tech go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] How will Grace and Frankie resolve the issue with Omni Tech? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
9. [E] What happened in regards to Frankie's medical episode? [ANSWERED IN EP12]

Ep12: "The Musical"

1. [E] (Check-in) What happened in regards to Frankie's medical episode? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] Will Frankie go to the hospital for treatment? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
3. [E] Why is Frankie so reluctant to get treatment? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [E] Why is Sol so adamant to stand up against the protestors? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [E] Why is Robert against standing up against the protestors?
6. [P] (Check-in) How will the musical performance go? How will Robert do? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [P] (Check-in) How will Robert react to discovering Sol fought protestor? What will happen win regards to that? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] Will Frankie forgive Grace for interfering with her health choices? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
9. [P] (Check-in) Will Frankie move to Santa Fe with Jacob or will they break up? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
10. [P] Will Frankie make lifestyle choices due to her health scare? [ANSWERED IN EP13]
11. [E] Why is Allison suddenly sick? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]

Ep13: "The Sign"
1. [P] (Check-in) Will Frankie move to Santa Fe with Jacob or will they break up? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
2. [P] (Check-in) Will they/Won't they?: Brianna and Barry [LEFT ABIGUOUS]
3. [P] How will Sol get revenge on the protestor/heckler? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
4. [P] How will the protest go? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
5. [P] How will Robert respond to Sol's plot? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
6. [P] (Check-in) How will Grace and Frankie resolve the issue with Omni Tech now? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
7. [E] What does Grace see outside of the limousine? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]
8. [P] (Check-in) Will Frankie forgive Grace for interfering with her health choices? [ANSWERED IN THIS EP]