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Keely Gonyea

University of Maine, gonyeak97@gmail.com

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“PUTTING OUT FIRES”: AN ORIGINAL SITUATIONAL COMEDY PILOT  
EPISODE EXAMINING MODERN MOTHERHOOD

by

Keely Gonyea

A Thesis Submitted to Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(Media Studies)

The Honors College

The University of Maine

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Advisory Committee:

Jennie Woodard, Lecturer in Honors, Advisor  
Mimi Killinger, Associate Professor of Honors, Rezendes Preceptor for the Arts  
Chris Mares, Honors Preceptor, Lecturer in English as a Second Language  
Holly Schreiber, Assistant Professor of Communication and Journalism  
Clinton Spaulding, 2nd year Ph.D. Student in Communication and Journalism

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## ABSTRACT

Even in an age of easily accessible and ever-changing digital content, television remains one of the most influential modes of media. Shows, on television and on streaming services, play key roles in informing their audiences of societal conventions. Situational comedies are an easily identifiable genre on television and their popularity has not wavered as seen by their steadfast presence during primetime viewing slots. This thesis explores and analyzes how situational comedies have created spaces for potentially harmful stereotypes for their female characters, specifically mothers. The creative work of this thesis offers an original situational comedy pilot episode that looks to provide an example of a mother character that evades and defies the stereotypes that would be expected of her.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## PART ONE

### THE SCRIPT

EXT. Williford Heights Fire Department - DAY  
A reporter and his cameraman are stationed outside of the Williford Heights Fire Department. The doors of the department are open and viewers can see into the bay area. The reporter clearly takes his job very seriously. The cameraman is far more relaxed, acting as though this is just another day on the job. The shot moves into the cameraman's perspective on the reporter.

Reporter

Today we're at Williford Heights Fire Department. The department will be hosting an educational open house this coming Saturday, November 2. The event promises to be a great time for young and old alike. We're here with Chief Nicholas Sawyer and Firefighter Heather to see how the planning is coming along.

Once more the camera pulls out from a tight shot on the reporter to show the exterior of the department in its entirety.

Cut to a shot of the reporter, Nicholas, and Heather talking. The reporter is still serious, wanting to be sure that he is doing his job well and making his interviewees feel comfortable. Nicholas and Heather are very relaxed, they've done this plenty of times before. The Chief is in his Class A uniform, Heather is more relaxed in a department tee-shirt and jeans.

Reporter

So, we're just going to ask a couple of simple questions to each of you about the event, the planning, and the department itself. Sound good?

Heather and Nicholas nod.

Reporter

So, who's first?

Heather, motions for the Chief to go first.

HEATHER

I've got a few things to take care of anyway.

Heather walks away toward a table inside filled with decorations. Many are autumnal, some are fire department themed. Lydia is also at the table. Like Heather, she is dressed casually in a tee-shirt and jeans. The two women are organizing the decorations into boxes labeled KEEP and GARBAGE. Lydia pulls out a plastic pumpkin with the black paint of the face melting down its side.

LYDIA

Um..?

HEATHER (laughing)

Oh yeah, that caught on fire last year. I told Chief to throw it out.

Lydia places it into the garbage box. Next to her is Kyle, the live in student. He is seen messing around with what appears to be a Dalmatian mascot outfit.

Reporter

How would you describe this year's event, Chief Sawyer?

Nicholas

This is going to be our biggest open house yet! We will be hosting some members of the rescue team and the sheriffs department as well. There will be games, food, and a chance to experience a smoke house. The smoke house will give visitors an opportunity to -

Nicholas is interrupted by a rogue hose. His head snaps in the direction of the hose.

Nicholas

What...

Nicholas starts walking in the direction of the hose while trying to not lose contact with the reporter. He wants to remain professional but is slightly flustered by the clatter.

Nicholas (walking backwards)

Excuse me for a moment. You just happened to visit us on a day where we were hose training some new live-ins.

Reporter

Oh, that's okay. I can move on to Heather.

The cameraman for the news station doesn't follow the reporter immediately. He instead films Nicholas struggling to contain the hose. He is laughing to himself. The reporter notices.

Reporter

Hey, we have a job to do.

The cameraman walks away from the scene and toward the reporter. Heather notices them walking toward her. She is surprised but prepared.

Heather

Done so soon?

Reporter

We thought we'd take a break with the chief and ask you a few questions.

Heather looks behind the reporter and notices that the chief is now rolling up the hose. She tries to take away the attention from Chief, a little flustered herself. The more she speaks, the more her nerves get the best of her.

Heather

I see, that's probably a good idea. Mishaps like that happen every now and then. Better than other mishaps we could have, am I right? Nowhere near as bad as the great Stevenson accident of 2015. We thought it was all good and the flames were out but then realized that we actually forgot the cat. (A beat and then Heather begins speaking at a faster pace). Good thing firefighters are dog people, huh? You know, Dalmatians.

Quickly, Heather realizes that that joke did not land and cuts off her rambling with a nervous laugh.

Heather

So... what can I do for you?

The reporter looks at Heather, confused but brushing it off.

Reporter

Oh, good. Um, so, Chief Sawyer was describing something called a smokehouse?

The reporter looks toward the cameraman who is still chuckling to himself about the incident.

Heather sees this as an opportunity to recover from her failed joke. Presenting herself as the most chipper she's been all day, Heather regains the attention of the reporter and the cameraman.

Heather (recovering herself)  
Oh, yes! I could give you a tour of the smoke house if that's what you're interested in.

Reporter  
That sounds great.

Heather starts working toward the smoke house, the reporter and cameraman follow suit.

Heather (confident again)  
This will be a station we hold outside, right on the playground.

Reporter  
What exactly is the point of the smoke house?

Heather  
Well, it fills up with smoke, like it would do if it were actually to catch fire. One of our firefighters will go through the mock home with a small group of kids. Inside they will teach the kids how to escape the home in a safe and timely manner.

Reporter  
The smoke house is a new addition to your safety days, right? I don't recall seeing it in the past.

Heather  
Yes! In the past year we were awarded a grant that gave us the funding to purchase the trailer for the smoke house. We are excited to introduce something new to the community that will be truly beneficial to fire safety education.

Heather starts walking toward the door of the trailer.

Heather

Come on in!

KYLE meanders into the shot. He seems to have gotten the mascot head stuck on his own head. He doesn't speak and only walks by, obviously struggling.

The screen goes to black. Opening credits for the show play.

INT. ELEM. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

The date, Saturday November 2 flashes in the bottom right corner of the scene. In the center of the gymnasium an outline of a one-story home is laid out. There is furniture to mimic the rooms and tape to indicate where rooms start and end. Doors are propped up as well. The chief is stationed here with the other firefighters. A snack table is in the corner. It has been left unattended and a swarm of children are next to it. The shot catches a glimpse of a Dalmatian mascot head left sitting on an empty seat next to the table. Kyle is missing.

The chief is teaching the children how to move through the home if it were on fire.

CHIEF

When you're leaving your room, you'll want to feel how hot it is with the back of your hand.

The Chief and other firefighters are working with the kids demonstrating this move. The camera pans away from them once they begin shimmying across the makeshift home to get out.

One kid is shimmying across the floor without moving his arms, doing the "worm" dance.

KID 1

Like this?

CHIEF

Not quite. You can use your arms.

The kid continues his "worm" antics. He is making himself and the other kids burst into laughter. The Chief even starts to crack a smile. The camera pans to Heather who looks concerned. Heather walks up to Kent, one of the firefighters, helping Chief Sawyer.

HEATHER

Hey, Kent. Where is Kyle?

Kent is caught off guard.

KENT

He's not supposed to leave the snack table, right? He should be there.

HEATHER (nervously)

He's not there.

Kent looks toward the unsupervised children getting snacks.

KENT

Oh, no.

A kid runs up to Heather. They have a snack, similar to a pixie stick, in one hand and a large can of Gorilla energy drink in the other hand. Their hair is a mess and their eyes are wide as they tug on Heather's shirt. Heather momentarily abandons her efforts to find Kyle to take on the maternal role that is wanted of her.

HEATHER

Yeah, buddy?

KID 2

Firefighter Kyle brought us snacks!

HEATHER examines the treats in the child's hands. She looks up in horror. It is clear that this panic washes over her while she considers the sugar rushes that are coming soon.

HEATHER (masking her stress with a painfully high-pitched tone)

Did he? Can you tell me where firefighter Kyle is? I just think he might need to buy more snacks.

KID 2

He's in the cafeteria!

KID 2 runs away, excitedly yelling to the other children in the gymnasium. The camera follows Heather as she moves from the gym and into the cafeteria. As soon as she opens the doors she hears the screams of excited children. They are climbing on the tables, doing cartwheels, and making a

mess. Kyle is sitting at one of the tables laughing. Two little girls are drawing on his face.

KYLE

Hey, Heather! I think I nailed the snacks. Good choice giving that job to me, huh?

A young boy runs up to Kyle. Heather watches, she is concerned but not angry.

KID 3

Firefighter Kyle, my friend is in the bathroom.

KYLE

Okay?

KID 3

Yeah. He threw up all over the floor.

HEATHER

Is there anybody else in the bathroom right now?

KYLE (overlapping Heather)

Gross.

KID 3

I don't know. I ran out cause' it was gross.

KYLE

Dude.

HEATHER

Do you know where your friend's parents are?

KID 3

Yeah, you can follow me, Firefighter Heather.

KID 3 grabs on Heather's hand.

KID 3

We dared him to have lots of candy. Our friend Billy did it at my birthday party two weeks ago and he didn't throw up.

But everybody stared at him. (Becoming very serious and pointing from his eyes to Heather) Stared at him. But, I turned seven. How old are you? Probably old. Have you ever thrown up?

HEATHER (processing the rambling)

Hmm, yes? Wait, what? Okay, I just need you to wait for one second before we go help him, alright?

KID 3 (interrupting)  
Okay.

HEATHER grabs the bucket of candies that Kyle brought into the cafeteria with him and keeps them under her arm. She moves to Kyle who is no longer under siege by young face painters.

HEATHER (confused)  
I said healthy snacks.

KYLE  
Well, this is what I eat and I'm pretty healthy. I thought it would be okay.

Heather puts her arm around Kyle. She's not angry; he made an honest mistake.

HEATHER (comforting but educating)  
Kyle, these are elementary schoolers. They can't handle all of this sugar like you do. Look at them!

The camera briefly pans to a shot of children wildly taking control of the cafeteria. It is as if they are escaped zoo animals.

KYLE (sheepishly)  
Sorry.

HEATHER  
Hey, now you know what to avoid next time.

KYLE  
I promise it won't happen again.

Kyle finishes one of the pixie stick-like snacks.

KYLE  
One less for the kids to have.

HEATHER looks toward LYDIA who is at a registration table. She raises her eyebrows and laughs before walking away toward KID 3.

In the next shot HEATHER is seen at the door to the bathroom.

KID 3 (rambling again)

Yeah, he's in here. Stall three. It's the best one. The second one doesn't lock. And the first one always smells bad. But the third one is always good. I use it before gym on Mondays.

HEATHER

That's cool. (She breaks away from KID 3 and without walking in begins speaking to KID 4). Hey, buddy. I heard you're not feeling great.

KID 4

I ate too much sugar.

HEATHER

I've done that before too.

KID 4

Really?

HEATHER

Really. And I've got your mom and dad right here.

KID 4

Really?

MOTHER

Really.

FATHER (overlapping)

Right here, bud.

KID 4

Are you guys mad at me for throwing up?

MOTHER

No, let's just get you cleaned up.

HEATHER

We got a brand new t-shirt for you. It's even got Smokey Bear on it.

Heather hands the shirt to the father. The mother looks to Heather and mouths 'thank you' before heading into the bathroom to clean up her son. The father gives her an embarrassed smile.

KENT  
Hey, Heather?

HEATHER (gesturing toward the bathroom)  
I'm kind of in the middle of something, Kent.

KENT  
They really need you outside. I think the smokehouse is broken.

HEATHER  
Broken?

KENT  
It's not broken, per se. We just can't get any smoke to come out. It's basically just a house right now.

HEATHER  
Seriously?

KENT  
Yeah, well... Chief never taught us what to do. We just hit a button and nothing happened.

HEATHER (understanding)  
I'll be right out. Can you distract the kids until I get it started up?

KENT  
Can do. I'll tell them some stories.

HEATHER  
Just don't tell the Stevenson story.

Kent laughs.

The scene fades out into a shot of Heather sitting in an office at the department. At the bottom right of the screen the words '2 hours later' flash. Blinking. Exhausted. She rests her head in her hands. Then, a deep sigh.

HEATHER  
Could've been worse.

HEATHER eats a pixie stick.

INT. High School Hallway - EVENING

At the bottom right of the screen "That same day. 4:30 p.m. flashes on the screen". LILY sits in black leggings, a plain tee-shirt, and sneakers. She is in a school hallway. A row of plastic seats lines the lockers. Fluorescent lights beam down onto LILY as she leans her head back against a locker. LILY is the last student in the hallway. She is humming the Addams Family theme song to herself and snapping. The camera begins to pan down to the floor. The audience sees her anxiously bouncing her leg. Next to her feet are multiple empty water bottles.

A wooden door swings open and NATE, the boy who Lily is convinced is the love of her life, exits.

LILY  
Hey, Nate.

NATE  
Hey, Lil.

LILY  
How'd your audition go?

NATE  
It was pretty fun, actually. Ms. Spring is in a really good mood today.

LILY  
That's good news. And I mean, I'm not surprised you had such a good time. You're so great. You'll probably get Lucas. [A beat]. Oh, god. I'm so nervous.

NATE  
You'll be fine. Break legs! Hopefully, I'll see you at callbacks.

Lily blushes. Her theatre teacher, MS. SPRING, pokes her head out of the auditorium, the door opposite the one Nate just walked out of.

Ms. Spring  
Lily, you're up!

Lily takes one last swig of another water bottle and drops it amongst the others. She looks down at the graveyard of plastic bottles and back up sheepishly at Ms. Spring.

LILY  
I'll pick all of these up after.

Ms. Spring smiles. Her presence is warm and inviting. Lily smiles back. Then, Lily cracks her fingers and follows Ms. Spring into the auditorium. The camera follows them down to the stage.

MS. SPRING (looking at a clipboard)  
So, you're auditioning for the role of Wednesday Addams, right?

LILY (confidently)  
Yes, that's correct!

MS. SPRING  
Alright! First I'll have you sing a few measures of a song of your choice and then I'll show you some of Wednesday's choreography to see if you can follow it with me.

LILY (with a smile)  
Okay. The song I wanted to sing was "Pulled" from the musical, if that's doable?

MS. SPRING  
That is certainly doable.

LILY  
Can I do a quick warm-up?

MS. SPRING  
Of course. Let's do a practice scale.

Lily wiggles her jaw and massages her face. She sings the scale, pitch perfect.

LILY (quietly)  
Okay.

MS. SPRING goes to the piano to accompany LILY. LILY takes a deep breath and shares a smile with MS. SPRING.

The camera pulls out and we see LILY standing confidently. She begins singing, quite beautifully. She finishes the

snippet she had prepared for the audition. She quickly crosses her legs. LILY has to pee.

MS. SPRING pats LILY on the back, nudging her toward the staircase that leads toward the stage. We watch Lily as she slowly makes her way to the spotlight at center stage. She stands on stage, legs crossed, obviously uncomfortable. Ms. Spring is a few steps to the right of her. She attempts to lead some stretches and notices Lily isn't moving.

The camera shifts to Ms. Spring who furrows her brow in confusion.

MS. SPRING  
You feeling alright?

LILY (embarrassed and laughing to hide her discomfort)  
Huh? Oh, yeah. Just audition jitters, ya know.

MS. SPRING  
Okay, just stand tall, Lily! Let's dance!

The camera pans back to a tight shot on Lily's face. Her eyes are wide and she looks terrified, frozen in fear. She begins to follow Ms. Spring. Her dancing is ridiculous and awkward. Lily is trying to make it work but is moving exclusively her upper body while her legs remained crossed. This is both funny and mortifying.

The scene slowly fades from Lily's face to her cleaning up her bottles in the hallway. MS. SPRING walks out of the auditorium.

MS. SPRING  
For your callback tomorrow, I want you to be prepared to sing some of Uncle Fester's songs. I think you may be well suited for that role.

LILY (taken aback, face becoming flushed)  
Oh, okay. Sure. Yeah I can do that.

MS. SPRING  
Awesome. See you tomorrow. Have a good night!

MS. SPRING walks away, LILY waves.

EXT. High School Parking Lot - NIGHT

We follow LILY out to the parking lot, where her car is the only one left.

LILY (right outside of her car, screams)  
UNCLE FESTER? (exasperated sighing and groaning) What does that even mean? What's wrong with me?

LILY (climbs into her car, singing to herself)  
I. Hate. My. Liiiiifffee.

The scene ends.

INT. Price Household - EVENING

There is an abrupt cut to JAMES and JULIEN in the kitchen. James is standing in the kitchen in an oversized button-up shirt and a pair of colorful patterned pants. His hands are adorned with rings. He captures a new-age aesthetic. Julien is in a t-shirt and gym shorts, the average tween boy. JULIEN is practicing his trumpet. JAMES is chopping up some cilantro for taco night. JAMES has moved the trashcan closer to him so he can throw away paper towels and plates easier while he is making dinner. JULIEN proves that this was a bad idea fueled by his father's poor planning in the kitchen.

JULIEN stops playing his trumpet. He begins to inspect it.

JULIEN  
I'm sounding spitty.

JAMES (inquiringly)  
Excuse me?

JULIEN saunters across the kitchen and begins to clean out the spit valve into the trashcan. The sound is impossibly loud and disgustingly wet. JAMES looks at his son in bewilderment. Accompanied by the sound of Julien's trumpet spit, the door slams against the wall. LILY barges in, dropping (throwing), her bags to the floor. She is crying. James is facing the other way when she walks through the door. He is oblivious to her sadness.

JAMES  
Hey, sweetpea!

James turns around and his face drops upon seeing his daughter in tears. Before he can console her, her teen angst beats him to the punch.

LILY  
Sweetpea? Don't you mean Uncle Fester?

JULIEN  
Who?

JAMES  
Oh no.

LILY runs down the hall, another door slams.

JAMES  
Okay. Um..

Julien is now alternating between spitting out his spit and just slamming his trumpet against the trashcan.

JAMES  
Juli!

As he is calling to his son, the smoke from the beef sets off the smoke detectors in the house. JAMES rushes for the nearest magazine or towel to fan the smoke detectors with. He can't find anything.

LILY begins blasting music in her room to drown out the sounds of smoke detectors. JULIEN is still spitting. JAMES is caught in the middle.

LILY (from down the hallway)  
Turn that off! Or fix the wire! I hate hearing it go off all the time!

Lily slams her door.

HEATHER arrives home, mail in her hand. She is met with this chorus of chaos. She walks toward the smoke detector and shakes it around while she waves the mail next to it.

HEATHER (while fixing the smoke detector)  
So, how are things?

JAMES laughs. Hard cut to the next scene.

JULIEN has moved from the kitchen to the living room. LILY is still blasting music in her room. JAMES and HEATHER are sitting on the couch. JAMES has a kitchen towel draped over

his shoulder. HEATHER is holding a beer in one hand and one of the confiscated candies in another.

JAMES

So my guess is that she got a call back for Uncle Fester?  
And not Wednesday? She didn't say much upfront.

HEATHER

Do you think I should talk to her?

JAMES

Probably. I can try first if you want.

HEATHER

No, no. I've got this. I've done this before.

JAMES (looking down and fiddling with his rings)  
I mean, not when the moon's been in Capricorn. I'm just saying, it might be hard for you tonight. It's in the stars.

HEATHER (playfully combatting his astrology knowledge with jokes)

I mean, if the moon is in Capricorn, then it must also be conjunct that one constellation in Pisces. Which is also sextile the sun probably. So that makes me more powerful. Because I'm a Pisces.

JAMES

That made no sense. Also you're not a Pisces. I am.

HEATHER

Okay well, I will just use the sun's powers to absorb your Pisces energy and I'll go talk to Lily.

HEATHER walks away muttering under her breath. She is walking toward the end of the hallway and stops outside of Lily's door. James just smiles.

JAMES

Good luck.

HEATHER (knocking)

Lily?

LILY (from inside her room)

Leave me alone.

HEATHER  
It's just me.

LILY  
I want to be alone.

HEATHER (opening the door)  
What's wrong?

LILY pauses her music. Mascara is running down her face.  
She is a mess.

LILY  
I'm just tired.

Heather pauses at the door and takes a long look at Lily  
before plopping down on the bed with her.

HEATHER  
Me, too!

LILY  
Mom!

LILY rolls away from her mother and starts crying again.  
Heather moves to her side and begins to play with her  
daughter's hair, trying to comfort her.

HEATHER  
When you were a baby you always cried if you needed a nap.

LILY (still not looking at her mom)  
Then maybe you should get out so I can nap and feel  
better.

HEATHER (sitting up, trying to recover the mood)  
You don't want to tell me about your day first?

LILY (knowing this is her last resort)  
Dad!

HEATHER  
No, don't worry. I'll go.

As HEATHER shuts the door, LILY's music begins blaring  
again. HEATHER stops outside of her door. She thinks before  
she speaks again.

HEATHER

Turn that down a little!

HEATHER makes her way back toward the living room. James is waiting at the end of the hallway, a glass of wine for himself and Heather's unfinished beer in his hands. He gives the beer to Heather.

JAMES

Sounds like it went really well.

HEATHER

So good I almost don't need this glass of wine.

JAMES

Always better off safe than sorry after talking to Lil.

Heather takes a sip of her wine.

HEATHER

Why won't she talk?

JAMES

Teen angst?

Heather raises her eyebrows and sighs.

HEATHER begins to move from the living room into her bedroom. She passes by JULIEN and ruffles his hair. A big grin falls across his face.

JULIEN (eagerly)

Wanna hear my trumpet part for the concert?

HEATHER has already passed by JULIEN. We see her exhausted and uninterested. After rolling her eyes, she turns around to her son.

HEATHER

I would love that.

JULIEN

I have a solo so that's what I'm going to practice.

JAMES shares a smile with HEATHER. She nods to James with a soft smile and closed eyes. James starts to make his exit before Julien can get him too.

JAMES

The table is all set for dinner too. You guys can dig in whenever you're ready. I'm going to let Lily know.

HEATHER (empathetically)

Good luck.

JULIEN

Tell her to play better music.

HEATHER

Let's just listen to yours, Juli.

JAMES walks down the hall to Lily's room. He knocks lightly on the door, in a more sensitive manner than HEATHER had done.

JAMES

Lil?

Unlike before, the music continues to play. This time it is music from the Addams Family Musical. JAMES slowly goes into the room. Lily is practicing choreography. JAMES watches quietly for a minute. He is in awe at Lily's talent but more so at her hard work.

JAMES

Hey! That's not too bad.

LILY (embarrassed)

Dad! Can you knock first?

JAMES

I did. I think your music might've been a little too loud.

LILY

Oh.

JAMES

Where did you learn those dance moves?

LILY

It's the choreography I have to know for tomorrow. For callbacks.

James is thrilled not only with the news but also with the fact that she shared it with him. He maintains his calm but does not miss out on encouraging his daughter.

JAMES

So, you got a callback! That's great news, honey!

LILY

Not really.

LILY sits down on her bed. James walks further into her room and sits down next to her. She has stopped the music. The quiet moment is interrupted by Julien's trumpet playing at the other end of the house. JAMES laughs.

JAMES

How was your audition? It can't be worse than what we're hearing right now.

LILY cracks a smile for the first time since she got home.

LILY

It was worse, probably.

JAMES

Why?

Lily crosses her legs and grabs a pillow. She sits for a moment before letting out a deep sigh. That sigh releases all of her feelings about the day.

LILY (word vomiting)

I drank too much water and then I couldn't do the choreography. Because I had to pee, but I was too embarrassed to ask to use the restroom so I just tried to dance through it and then I ended up looking like a fool. Like a big enough fool to be Fester. Not Wednesday.

JAMES

Okay. That's not the whole audition though, right? You sang?

LILY

Yeah, I sang. I think that part went really well.

JAMES (putting his arm around Lily)

Then focus on that!

LILY

Yeah, I guess. I just don't want to be Uncle Fester.

JAMES

Why not?

LILY

I auditioned for Wednesday. And my callback is Uncle Fester. So basically I failed.

JAMES

We can work on the dancing after dinner and maybe then tomorrow Ms. Spring will see what a good Wednesday you'd be.

Lily leans her head on her dad's shoulder and sighs again. This time she nods in agreement with him. A beat.

LILY (changing the subject)

What's for dinner?

JAMES

It's Tuesday.

LILY

Oh, yeah. I'll be out for tacos in a minute. I need to wash my face.

JAMES

You got it. And maybe you should talk to Mom soon too.

Lily picks her head up off her dad's shoulder and raises her eyebrows at him.

LILY

Why? She's going to be disappointed in me. And I can't handle that.

James starts to stand up and looks right into Lily's eyes.

JAMES

She won't be. I promise.

JAMES leaves LILY's room. LILY sitting on her bed, pulls out a stash of candy that was hidden under her bed. She rests her head in her hands and lets out a deep sigh, just like her mother.

JAMES walks into HEATHER and JULIEN in the living room. They have not even gone into the dining room, let alone eaten any of the food. Instead they are sitting on the couch together, debating what to watch. JULIEN is wrestling HEATHER for the remote.

HEATHER

We are not watching another cartoon!

JULIEN

Mom, I never get to watch what I want.

HEATHER

You never get to watch what you want?

JAMES (from behind them)

We're ready for dinner when you guys are.

HEATHER (to JULIEN)

You lucked out this time, kid.

JULIEN laughs. The two of them get off the couch and move to the dining room. HEATHER pulls JAMES to the side.

HEATHER

Did she talk to you?

JAMES

Yeah. I'll tell you when we go to bed.

HEATHER

That's so far away!

HEATHER walks away, practicing patience. The family sits around a table and begins crafting their tacos.

JULIEN

What do you guys think of my solo? Can you pass me the hot sauce?

HEATHER

It's great, Juli.

JAMES

You'll steal the show tomorrow.

LILY (under her breath)

That's one way of putting it.

HEATHER (not so successfully stifling a laugh)  
Lily.

Lily smiles, proud of her own joke.

JULIEN  
Yeah, I definitely agree.

A silence hangs in the air, we only hear the crunch of their hard taco shells being bitten into.

HEATHER  
So... you guys heard of Pinterest?

The rest of the family looks at Heather. Still silent. But now more confused than before.

HEATHER (desperately trying to get Lily to talk)  
Well, I think we should do our highs and lows of the day. I read online that that is a good way to reflect on your day. I think we should do it together.

LILY (immediately)  
I don't want to do that.

JAMES  
We should do it. It'll be good to talk about our feelings.  
LILY rolls her eyes. HEATHER looks to JAMES for help.

JAMES  
I'll start.

The scene fades out.

INT. Williford Heights Fire Dept., Lydia's office.  
Daytime.

"The next day" flashes on the bottom right of the screen. Pictures of Lydia and Lily and Lydia and Julien sit on her desk. Heather picks one up and smiles. Heather is sitting at Lydia's desk, flipping through call sheets, working on payroll. LYDIA walks into the office.

LYDIA  
Hey, Heather.

Heather is ecstatic to see Lydia. Being apart for even a couple of days is hard for these best friends who usually see each other every single day.

HEATHER

I am so happy you're here. It feels like it's been forever.

LYDIA (laughing but matter of fact)  
It's been two days.

HEATHER

Yeah. Two days! No more vacation days for you!

LYDIA lays down two burrito bowls. She pulls silverware and a bag of chips out for herself and HEATHER.

HEATHER

You don't know how much I need this.

LYDIA

I think I do. I need it too!

HEATHER

These lunch dates are the only reason I'm sane.

LYDIA

You're sane? Nobody told me that!

HEATHER (laughing)

Hey!

HEATHER AND LYDIA start eating their lunches and HEATHER begins to vent.

HEATHER

So, Lily had a bad audition.

LYDIA

She'll live. We all embarrass ourselves. Tell her when Auntie Lydia was in high school she was an ensemble member in every musical and play. And in one of them she had to have a prosthetic nose to look like an animal and it fell off in the middle of a song and one of her cast mates stepped on it and squished it.

HEATHER

That would make her laugh but she won't even let me speak to her so I can't even tell her the story.

LYDIA (confused)  
She won't speak to you?

HEATHER  
I went into her room the other day and all she did was kick me right out! She told James everything though which isn't fair.

LYDIA  
Well (a beat), how did you approach the situation?

HEATHER (leaning back in her chair, eating a chip)  
Is there a right way to approach the situation? I knew she came home upset so I thought trying to make her feel normal was the right thing to do. Is that wrong?

LYDIA  
I mean, there's no rulebook if that's what you're asking.

HEATHER  
I did my best. I think that's the right way to handle any situation.

LYDIA  
You weren't angry with her for being quiet were you?

HEATHER  
I don't think so. Maybe I'm just too straightforward?

LYDIA (feigning shock)  
What? You!? Come off strong? I personally could never imagine that being a problem for you.

Heather knows Lydia is teasing but still sticks her neck out and defends herself.

HEATHER  
I just care.

LYDIA  
That's the best thing you can do. I think you just need to give her time. She is a teenager.

HEATHER  
You say that as if you have a teenager yourself. (Beat).  
You are so lucky, Lydia.

LYDIA

Well, actually, I've been wanting to tell you that...

Right as LYDIA is about to share that she's adopting, the department gets a call. The tone to page out the firefighters goes off.

RADIO VOICE

Attention, Williford Fire. Attention Williford Fire. You're wanted at...

The voice continues and HEATHER shoves a bite of her burrito bowl down her throat, as elegant as ever, and begins to run out of the room.

HEATHER

Tell me tonight at Juli's concert!

LYDIA

Okay. As long as you won't run off.

HEATHER (reassuring)

I won't. Have fun at your doctor's appointment!

HEATHER runs out of her office. LYDIA pokes around her burrito bowl with her fork. She speaks when HEATHER is totally gone. She is not bitter or irritated, more so just rambling to herself.

LYDIA

Adoption agency. Which you'd know if you weren't doing your job right now.

LYDIA grabs a picture off of HEATHER's desk of the two of them.

LYDIA (slightly exasperated)

Why do people have to have their houses catch on fire...  
(eating a chip) It's inconsiderate really. I have stuff to talk about too, universe!

The scene fades out. At the bottom right of the screen "later that day" flashes at the bottom of the screen.

INT. Price Household - NIGHT

JAMES

And this is how you tie a tie.

JULIEN

That was too many steps.

JAMES

It gets easier the more you do it. Sometimes Mom still helps me tie my ties.

JULIEN

Well that's just embarrassing. I'm a kid. You're not.

JAMES

Fair enough.

JULIEN

I'm gonna go grab my trumpet. Can't forget that.

HEATHER walks through the door and JAMES meets her in the kitchen.

HEATHER

I need to change.

JULIEN (from the other end of the house)

Hi Mom!

JAMES

Don't worry about him. He's all ready.

JULIEN

Do you know where my mouthpiece is? Dad couldn't find it earlier!

JAMES

I forgot about that.

HEATHER

Look in your case again, sweetheart.

JULIEN

OKAY!

HEATHER

Where's Lily?

JAMES

Oh, she's in the basement. She had her callback today. I think she's still practicing the choreography that she was doing yesterday. I think it distracts her.

HEATHER  
How'd it go?

JAMES  
Didn't say. She looked better than yesterday though. That's for sure. I think I even saw a smile.

HEATHER  
I'll go grab her. Make sure Juli eats something before we leave. He gets all nervous and I don't want him to pass out in front of everyone.

JAMES  
Not again.

JAMES yells from the kitchen to JULIEN. HEATHER makes her way downstairs. She stands by the bottom of the stairs in the basement.

HEATHER  
I think you've got those moves down. More than Julien has his solo down.

LILY is startled by her mom's entrance. But, she appreciates her mother's joke. A beat.

LILY  
I didn't know you were home. I'll get my coat on and we can leave. Sorry.

HEATHER  
Theres no rush! Juli still has to eat.

LILY  
Oh.

HEATHER  
You know how he is.

LILY (softly)  
Chronic fainter.

Heather laughs. Another beat.

HEATHER

I'm sorry if I did something that upset you yesterday.

LILY

Huh?

HEATHER

Ya know. When you kicked me out of your room.

LILY

Oh. Yeah. I just had a bad day. And I guess I took it out on you.

HEATHER

What was so bad about it?

LILY

My audition. Dad didn't tell you?

HEATHER

Well, he did. But, you had a callback.

LILY

That was today, yeah. I don't know how that went. I was so nervous because I messed up so much yesterday.

HEATHER

When do you hear back?

LILY

Tonight.

HEATHER

Do you want to talk about it?

LILY

I think I need to stay distracted. I don't want to know just yet.

HEATHER

I can definitely distract you.

HEATHER starts attempting the dance that LILY was doing when she walked in. LILY cracks up.

LILY

That's not even close.

HEATHER  
Teach me, then!

LILY starts going through the choreography with her mother, who is a horrible dancer. The two of them cannot stop laughing.

HEATHER  
You're way better than me. That has to mean something.

JAMES (from upstairs)  
Time to go!

JULIEN  
Hurry up!

LILY stops her music and hugs her mom. HEATHER is surprised but happy. HEATHER grabs LILY by her shoulders and looks her in the eyes.

HEATHER  
You know I'll always cheer you on, right?

LILY  
Yeah.

HEATHER  
Wednesday, Uncle Fester, Morticia, ensemble. I don't care.  
You're my star.

LILY  
Thanks, Mom.

HEATHER  
And if you ever doubt it, don't *fester* in those bad feelings... Get it?

LILY (smiling)  
Yeah, I get it, Mom.

The two of them laugh and head upstairs. Heather looks at James and Julien all dressed up and pauses.

HEATHER  
Oh, no. I forgot to change.

JAMES  
You look good!

JULIEN

It'll be dark and nobody cares. LET'S GO!

Heather, James, and Lily chuckle at his nerves and follow him out the door.

EXT. Price Yard - NIGHT

The Price family piles into their sedan. and hits the road.

INT. Williford Heights High School - NIGHT

The next scene shows them walking down the hallway outside of the auditorium where JULIEN is about to play. LYDIA and IAN are waiting outside of the doors for them.

JULIEN (running into the band room)  
Hi, Auntie Lydia!

HEATHER shakes her head as she hugs LYDIA. LILY hugs LYDIA. JAMES and IAN share a hug. The group walks into the auditorium and finds a row, close to the back where they can all sit together.

BAND DIRECTOR

Thank you for coming out tonight for the fall semester concert. The kids have been working hard in and out of the classroom and we're excited to show you what we've got up our sleeves.

INT. High School Auditorium - NIGHT

LILY  
Here we go...

The camera shows the Price family and LYDIA and IAN sitting in the row. A montage of uncomfortable and cringing faces is shown. Then, the camera shifts to the stage. JULIEN is front and center with his trumpet. It is made clear through shots of the band that Julien is the only trumpet player they have. This is why he is a soloist. He begins to play, off key and out of tempo.

The family and friends scrunch their faces in pain but maintain a smile through the poor music. After all, JULIEN is doing his best. The song ends.

BAND DIRECTOR

And give it up for our soloist, Julien Price.

HEATHER and JAMES scream and cheer. LILY laughs while clapping. JULIEN bows dramatically onstage.

BAND DIRECTOR

That's all we have for the evening folks. Thank you for coming out and drive safe.

The lights come up in the auditorium. The camera shows JULIEN fumbling for his sheet music while his trumpet is tucked into his arm. He trips over the foot of a music stand and knocks it over as he falls down. JULIEN gets up and looks to his music teacher.

JULIEN

I'm good!

The Price family nod, understanding that that is just how JULIEN is. Clumsy but durable.

LILY's phone buzzes.

LILY (losing her breath)  
Oh, guys, guys, guys, guys.

HEATHER

What is it? What's wrong?

JAMES

Are you okay?

LILY

The casting email has been sent. Should I open it?

LYDIA and HEATHER

Open it!

LILY unlocks her phone and spends a minute looking at it. She takes a deep breath and looks at her parents.

LILY

Uncle Fester.

JAMES

Oh, sweetpea. I am so sorry.

LILY

No, it's okay. Mom said I could probably steal the show as Uncle Fester earlier today. So. I guess I'll just try to do that.

HEATHER

I know you'll do that.

LYDIA

Uncle Fester was always Auntie Lydia's favorite character so you've already got one adoring fan.

LILY

You liked Uncle Fester?

LYDIA

He's the funniest one!

IAN

And you can wear a cool cloak.

LILY smiles. HEATHER and JAMES share a fist bump and a knowing nod with each other, one that says "we did it", behind her.

JULIEN runs up to them interrupting the good news.

JULIEN

Pretty sweet, huh?

JAMES

You did awesome, buddy.

HEATHER

My favorite one up there!

JULIEN

What did you think, Lily?

LILY (looking at her parents first)  
You sounded great, dude.

JULIEN hugs his sister, happy to have her approval.

JULIEN

Do you know about the play yet?

LILY  
I'm in it!

JULIEN  
No way! That's so cool. I'm gonna tell Nate's brother.  
Nate's in it, right?

LILY (blushing)  
Yeah.

JAMES  
We ready to pack into the car?

HEATHER  
I think so!

JULIEN  
But, I wanna talk to Nate's brother.

LILY  
You can do that tomorrow. I don't want you to embarrass me.

JULIEN  
You think I'm embarrassing?

LILY (backtracking)  
Oh no, I just mean, you're the more talented one. I'll look  
bad if you bring me up.

JULIEN (nodding)  
That makes sense.

JAMES  
Say goodbye, to Aunt Lydia and Uncle Ian and then we can  
hit the road.

LYDIA (catching Heather before she can leave)  
Not so fast.

HEATHER  
Oh, right. Sorry. Forgot.

LYDIA  
I figured I'd have to remind you.

JAMES  
Huh?

HEATHER

Lydia has to tell me something, so maybe you can walk the kids out to the van and I'll meet you in just a minute?

JAMES

Sounds good. Price kids, let's roll out!

LILY

You don't have to yell, Dad.

JULIEN (blares his trumpet before speaking)

Rolling out!

HEATHER makes a face of loving tiredness at her loud and odd family.

HEATHER

Okay, okay. So? What is it?

LYDIA

You know how you said I was so lucky I didn't have a teenager of my own earlier today?

HEATHER

Yeah. I meant it. They're a lot.

LYDIA

Well, it's not necessarily true.

HEATHER

Excuse me? What do you mean?

LYDIA

I've been missing Tuesdays at work because Ian and I have been having meetings at the adoption agency. They haven't been doctor appointments.

HEATHER (scattered and trying to put the pieces together)

Wait, so does this mean...?

LYDIA

Yeah.

HEATHER

I need you to say it out loud to me.

LYDIA

Ian and I are going to be parents. We're adopting.

HEATHER (yelling)  
Are you serious!?

Heather and Lydia embrace.

The screen goes black. End of episode.

## PART TWO

### THE DISQUISITION

A fifteen to thirty-second title card comes onto a screen, backed by an upbeat and cheerful instrumental. Clips of actors caught in quirky scenes are followed by a shot of them all standing amongst one another as a big, happy family. As viewers get comfortable on their couches, feelings of familiarity and safety set in. The television show features a diverse cast in age, race, gender identity, and sexual orientation yet despite their differences, the characters are a family. The show that captures this spirit is ABC's *Modern Family*. On the surface, *Modern Family* looks like a show that would make strides in diversity and representation. Most noticeably are the show's gay fathers, Cameron and Mitchell, and the show's Latinx characters Gloria, Manny, and Joe of the Pritchett family. It is important to recognize, however, that diversity is not synonymous with representation. Even with *Modern Family*'s progressive and inclusive array of identities that are being represented, the show continues to feel forced into conformity through the reproduction of stereotypes. The characters whose stories hold the most weight in the series are those of the entirely white family, led by Phil and Claire Dunphy. While unfortunate, there still could have been an opportunity to show a modern and progressive representation of what would normally be considered a nuclear family. This was not achieved though. The matriarch of the Dunphy family, Claire, is a mother who pushes her family too hard, is neurotic, and, at times, called a "nag". Although she has autonomy in her family, the character uses this autonomy to control her family members.

In particular, she targets her husband Phil with her nagging behaviors. Phil is a warm and kind-hearted father but is shown ultimately as a doofus dad stereotype. Phil needs guidance and direction which he seeks and receives from Claire. In spending a majority of her time doing this, Claire loses time that she could spend building an identity for herself.

After researching representations of motherhood similar to Claire Dunphy, I decided that I wanted to try and solve the problem myself. I realize that I could do more than critique and analyze the existing problem. Although acknowledging all of the “Claire”-type mothers is an important step in identifying a lack of representation it offers little solution. I decided that creating my own mother character could lay more groundwork for a future vision of motherhood not already on television. Thus, “Putting Out Fires,” my own original show, was born.

The pilot episode of “Putting Out Fires” is more than an episode of television that is written for fun or for profit. “Putting Out Fires” is an academic and personal exploration of the role of motherhood on television and in particular in situational comedies. Motherhood is a complex institution in modern society. The high expectations of mothers can be found in one quick search on Google. When searching the word “maternal” on Google, the words that appear as having similar meanings, or more so in this case connotations, include: protective, caring, nurturing, loving, devoted, affectionate, warm, gentle, kind, comforting, and compassionate. Being maternal, and as a result being a mother, is then associated with words that evoke feelings of positivity and safety. She is expected to be the glue that holds her family together, especially emotionally. The mother lacks both the opportunity to make mistakes and the ability to

publicly feel negative emotions. A mother has no room to falter in a society like this. While completing academic research, I was able to identify the pattern of motherhood being idolized and idealized on television. Various scholars identified categories of motherhood that reinforced a societal expectation for mothers to have no flaws; these categories will be explored in depth in the literature review of this academic disquisition.

The straightforward categorization of different mothering styles makes mother characters one dimensional and unrealistic. “Putting Out Fires” gives me the chance to create a mother character who is not defined by these restricting expectations. Expectations include the belief that the mother character is entirely invested in her family or that she exists solely in relation to them rather than as an individual. These expectations place the mother on a pedestal and her newfound idealized status leaves her one dimensional and without room for fault and sequential growth. Heather Price, the main mother character of the show, is an attempt to create what I am calling the “uncategorized mother”. Heather cannot be defined by one style of mothering or parenting. She is a human being who has parts of being a parent figured out, and is figuring out the rest day by day. She attempts various mothering styles but ends up doing what works for herself and her family. Ultimately, the primary goal of this pilot episode and of the show is to show that Heather is unafraid to be imperfect. In doing this, Heather would hopefully be able to embody a more realistic representation of motherhood on television. As a result of that, Heather would help cultivate a trend of no longer expecting perfection out of mothers in society in a more general sense. Along with that, this would be done without having Heather fall into a frazzled and neurotic stereotype that trended in 1990s and 2000s moms of television. By avoiding these conventions the mother character

will ideally have more power and will steer clear of being perceived as a joke on the show.

One of the first steps in understanding the societal expectations for individuals is being aware of the spheres in which people of a society exist. Being aware of these spheres is essential to understanding the settings, relationships, and power structures that are represented in various forms of media. In order to begin creating, and in turn dissecting, the idea of a family and home I began to consider the concept of separate spheres. I was introduced to the concept of the private or domestic sphere versus the public sphere in my first semester of college. An introduction to journalism course brought forward the private and public spheres through a discussion of advertising. A few semesters later in another advertising course, the spheres were elaborated upon. In *The Advertising and Consumer Culture Reader* scholar Susan Strasser makes the claim that the family, based at home, was completely separated from the rest of society. Strasser also recognizes that the family and home are associated as a woman's domain. She goes on to say that the woman's domain is one "of consumption and of leisure... that stood apart from and even opposed a public sphere of men, work, and production" (Strasser, p. 27). This way of approaching society, enabled by the early age of advertising, fabricates a distinct line between what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. In this way of thinking, a man is one who works and provides for his loved ones. A woman stays stuck at home performing unpaid labor that is both physical and emotional. The woman must take care of the home through curating, cleaning, and cooking. Beyond that, a woman must also take on the task of making sure her household is constantly happy and mentally healthy, even if it means she is not.

The expectation that women exist primarily in the domestic sphere is moved into the social consciousness through television. Scholar Inger L. Stole writes that “suggesting that women’s leisure time was conterminous with their work time, the television industry ‘addressed the woman as a housewife and presented her with a notion of spectatorship that was inextricably intertwined with her useful labor at home” (Stole, p. 63). In short, Stole believes that the beginning of daytime television targeted a female audience made up of housewives whose husbands were at work. This foray into developing a consumer culture also developed an ideology where pressure was put on women to become wives, and more importantly, mothers. Further, Stole argues that television sold the belief that women needed to remain in the private sphere for the benefit of their families, which would ultimately benefit them.

A prime example of this type of television program is *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963). June Cleaver, the matriarch of her family, was among the first to catapult the stereotypical good mother, who performed all of her familial duties with a smile on her face at all times. Including the stereotype of the good mother, scholars and theorists have identified other various types of mothers that have appeared on television throughout history. It is necessary to identify and understand the types of mothers that mass audiences are exposed in order to explore how the notion of family is shifting, or not shifting, in front of society’s eyes. Types of mothers that have been identified by scholars will be addressed later in this disquisition.

Although there are people who would argue that individuals are clever enough to come to their own conclusions, it is problematic to think media, particularly television, does not in some way have any influence over the masses. Theorist George Gerbner

addresses television's influence in his 1968 essay "Television in Society." In this essay, Gerbner coins the term "cultivation theory." According to Gerbner, cultivation theory is a process where television "can exert an independent influence on attitudes and behaviors over time" (Gerbner, p. 180). Essentially, Gerbner argues that gradually over a long period of time television teaches its viewers a set of societal values, morals, and expectations of the society in which it is produced. Under cultivation theory, these teachings from television ultimately influence viewers to believe that what is on television should mimic what reality and society actually look like. Gerbner contends that it does not matter which came first, the society or the messaging about society. In Gerbner's eyes the prevalence of television in people's homes means that "people are born into a symbolic environment with television as its mainstream... Television viewing both shapes and is a stable part of lifestyles and outlooks. It links the individual to a larger if synthetic world, a world of television's own making" (p. 180). Gerbner acknowledges that society and the media that come out of it are constantly interacting with and informing each other. What Gerbner means is that people and their society behave in a cyclical nature. What is on television will find its way into reality. Its heightened presence in reality will then increase and influence its existence in media. This connection can easily become blurred, giving cultivation theory the plausibility it needs to stand on its own two legs. Cultivation theory is more than a claim that audiences are mindless; it is an understanding that audiences interact with their culture in order to negotiate how they would like to operate within that culture.

Gerbner's cultivation theory is vital to this thesis because it reminds me, specifically as a writer and creator, that if stale and harmful representations of mothers

and motherhood are on television, they could be taken and reproduced by viewers in their real worlds. Essentially, people will learn what motherhood is as a whole through representations on television and will adhere to and replicate those ideas. Although reality is subjective and every individual has a vastly different lived experience, it is important to perceive what myths and stereotypes I can avoid in order to lessen any negative effects that women and women characters have gone through. In 2016, theorist Anneke Smelik compiled a history of feminist film history which has been crucial to further developing my knowledge of representations of women on screen. Along with that, Anneke Smelik's work has been vital in creating a base understanding of how visual culture, which is primarily made up of film and television, affects its viewers and their perceptions of reality. First and foremost, Smelik declares that "cinema as a cultural practice... represents and reproduces myths about women and femininity" (Smelik, p. 1). Though Smelik identifies that women are typically "portrayed as passive sex objects or fixed in stereotypes oscillating between the mother and the whore" (p. 1). Smelik suggests these stereotypes and roles for women as they are seen in film can still be applied to the women on television. Scholars who will be addressed later in the disquisition have also identified these types of female characters on television. In either circumstance, it is important to pay attention to the lack of autonomy female characters are given in visual culture. In both the role of the "mother" or of the "whore", the woman is expected to behave in a way that will satisfy a male viewer. The male viewer will be satisfied because the woman will be submissive to the other male characters or to the gaze of the camera.

The gaze of the camera in a majority of film and television is one that can be associated with a male's point of view. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey investigates what she calls the "male gaze" in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In this essay Mulvey defines the male gaze as camerawork that gives female characters two roles to fulfill: "[the] erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as [the] erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" to look at and enjoy (Mulvey, p. 719). The male gaze subjects women into being seen in only pieces and fragments, rather than as a whole human being. Mulvey gives an example of Marilyn Monroe in the film *The River of No Return* to further describe the male gaze. She notes that when Monroe's character begins to sing in the parlor, her body is shown in fragments. The camera begins by panning up her leg, showing Monroe in pieces all the way up to her face. When Monroe's full body is shown in that particular shot, a room filled with men are peering in at her. Monroe is something visually pleasing both in and out of the film. Mulvey argues that this objectification of female characters places audience members into the shoes of heterosexual men. For viewers, this puts men in a place of action over the female characters, making them stronger and giving them unrestrained power over them. The essay also introduces the idea of "scopophilia" which is defined as the pleasure of looking. When the male gaze is used, audiences take a scopilic approach to looking at female characters. Mulvey suggests the looking is meant to be enjoyable in a way that is seemingly perverted and reminiscent of the actions that a voyeur would partake in. The audience can look at these objectified women without the fear of being seen; once again, they are in control over the women. Ultimately, Mulvey calls attention to the sexist nature of film's representation of women.

Another one of the most pertinent issues introduced in Mulvey's essay is the theory known as castration anxiety. Castration anxiety explores the idea that a female character "symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of a penis" (p. 715). The female's lack of male anatomy makes her a threat to the construct of masculinity. As a result she is treated as a threat. However, she is not physically harmed like an attacker would be. Instead, the portrayal of the female character is manipulated in a way that makes her less likeable and again, less autonomous. She becomes objectified and viewed as lesser primarily by her male counterparts and thus, also by viewers. Castration anxiety is particularly interesting when included in television studies and more specifically, in this thesis. A mother, only the matriarch of the family, could be deemed as the "bad guy" in a heterosexual parenting dynamic simply to give the father, the patriarchy, more power over his environment. The theory, as a direct result of the male gaze, could play a role in how mothers are disrespected and viewed as nagging, fun-killing, and ultimately evil in their role in the family.

Scholars Jack Simmons and Leigh Rich explore the fun-killing trait mothers seem to carry in situational comedies in their 2013 study "Feminism Ain't Funny: Woman as 'Fun-Killer,' Mother as Monster in the American Sitcom." In this study, Simmons and Rich look at the "broadcast network situation comedies with the highest seasonal Nielsen ratings from 1949 to the present" (Simmons and Rich, p. 3). Simmons and Rich use the seasons with the best ratings for each program by watching and analyzing them to determine any gender role patterns that may arise or occur throughout the years. In the study, the pair of researchers identify three types of women: the traditional woman (1960s-1970s), the liberated woman (1970s-1980s), and the modern woman (1980s-

2000s). The traditional woman captures the passive nature of June Cleaver, mentioned earlier. The traditional woman leaves behind the hard working woman depicted in wartime advertisements of the 1940s such as the Rosie the Riveter campaign. She is “no longer spirited and independent [women] but ‘housewife-mothers who cherish their... unique femininity’” (p. 5). The traditional woman is a woman who lives in the domestic sphere without complaint. Originating in the 1970s the liberator woman is typically a single, working woman. The liberated woman is also one who is characterized by her more masculine presentation of herself and her ideas. She is loud and authoritative. Simmons and Rich claim that these seemingly progressive traits are paired with the liberated woman’s “own self-incriminations [that] lay the blame for demonizing women at feminism's feet” (p. 6). This seemingly self-deprecating behavior shows the liberated woman is one who operates regardless of any judgments held against her. Finally, the modern woman brings motherhood back to the small screen in abundance. Simmons and Rich write that the modern woman is dominated by “women, wives, and mothers, [who] whether merely nagging or truly monstrous, threaten to end the modern man’s happiness, tying him down and freezing the pleasure-driven sitcom narrative” (p. 7). This representation of motherhood pushes the narrative that women are a threat to men, a call back to Mulvey’s castration anxiety. In any of the three types of women discovered by Simmons and Rich, the women are not enough; female characters are still second best to their male counterparts among the most popular sitcoms, no matter the year. And no matter the year, perfection is expected out of mother characters and when it is achieved, like in the traditional woman era’s *Leave it to Beaver*’s June, she is still docile and submissive.

When perfection is not achieved, for example in the modern woman era's *Roseanne*'s Roseanne, she is a massive threat. Roseanne is a threat because she is a free agent who can be flawed without being belittled or undermined by those flaws. But, Roseanne is also more than that. Roseanne is an example of the "unruly woman", a term coined by scholar Kathleen Rowe in 1995. In Rowe's definition of the unruly woman there are eight specific pieces that typically come together to solidify her identity as unruly. This goes to prove that the unruly woman is an archetype that is complex and layered which endangers three-dimensional male characters. These eight traits of the unruly woman include that she "creates disorder by dominating... men... Her body is excessive or fat... Her speech is excessive... She makes jokes... She may be androgynous... She may be old or masculinized... [she is] associated with looseness... dirt, liminality... and taboo" (Rowe, p. 31). This sums up that the unruly woman's identity is one that challenges traditional ideas of gender performance. She behaves in a way that cannot be neatly defined as feminine giving her the ability to take up space among masculine characters; her self identification as a woman is what threatens these masculine characters. Obviously Roseanne can be recognized as an unruly woman because of her physical body but it goes beyond that. Rowe acknowledges that Roseanne resists objectification of her body through her ability to present "as author rather than actor or comedian... Roseanne is a persona she has created for and by herself" (p. 65). Like the liberated woman type established by Simmons and Rich, Roseanne is a woman who has freed herself of the pressure to exist in a way that makes other people comfortable. The threat that Roseanne represents is the dangerous idea that a woman can

be something other than what a man wants her to be. She can be unsightly, rude, and loud without feeling compelled to fix those things about herself.

The role of the mother, particularly how the mother is expected to be without faults or flaws, is considered further in Linda Williams essay “‘Something Else Besides a Mother’: Stella Dallas and the Maternal Melodrama” from 1984. Williams looks at the film *Stella Dallas* and the genre known as the “Woman’s Film” to analyze the institution of motherhood as it was presented in women's films during that time. In the essay, Williams suggests that motherhood as an institution has been deified in film. These films show motherhood, in theory, as idealistic and divine. However, while these films “exalt an abstract ideal of motherhood... [they are] stripping the actual mother of the human connection on which that ideal is based”; the mother in these films is “devalu[ed] and debas[ed]” (p. 727). Through this analysis, Williams suggests that the patriarchal nature of film must not be ignored; it must be studied in order to better understand how it reproduces the oppression of women in society. She replies to work from Laura Mulvey and differs with her slightly. Williams writes that “the psychoanalytic concept of voyeurism and fetishism can inform a feminist theory of cinematic spectatorship... by examining the contradictions that animate women’s very active and fragmented ways of seeing” (p. 736). She argues that women are not always perceived as the passive subjects that Mulvey suggested they were in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Female characters then are particularly complex when presented in a woman’s film. Female viewers can view these characters as empowering but Williams believes that even though this positive exists, ultimately, the genre’s patriarchal attitude will keep female viewers submissive and critical of female characters.

Directly responding to Williams' work, scholar Ann Kaplan categorizes mothers who do not fill the traditional mother mold. In her 1984 essay "The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stellas Dallas*", a direct response to Linda Williams' work, Kaplan identifies four paradigms of mothers that exist in media: the Good Mother, the Bad Mother, the Heroic Mother, and the Silly/Weak/or Vain Mother. The Good Mother is one who is entirely devoted to her family; an autonomous personality for her does not exist because she is so entwined and concerned with the lives of her family members. The Heroic Mother is one who is self-sacrificing; she does what she must in order to make the lives of her family members comfortable. The Bad Mother is one who is autonomous to a fault. She is concerned with herself and her own happiness which is portrayed as a negative quality in melodrama films. The Heroic Mother, although closely aligned with the Good Mother, differs from her because she is more active and participatory in the action of the plot. The Silly or Vain Mother is one who is seen as immature or inappropriate at times and as a result, she is thought to be unfit to play the role of a mother; a classic example of this type of mother is Lucille Ball from the sitcom "I Love Lucy". This response and the paradigms that have grown out of it are important to this thesis because it identifies categories of mothers that no mother in the real world can ever fully embody and certainly not on a daily basis. In *Putting Out Fires*, I am attempting to make Heather what I would call an "uncategorized mom" or a "day-to-day" mom. Heather works, grows, and changes daily, as any human being would do and does.

A number of texts were crucial in assisting me in writing a screenplay. First and foremost, was Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. The University of Maine did not offer classes dedicated to crafting a screenplay, and Field's text was

vital in teaching me how to write a script in a technically correct way. With the help of *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* I learned the rule of thumb that one page of script is approximately one minute on screen. Along with that, I learned tips that helped me defeat writer's block. Field suggested breaking down the writing into scenes. Although it was noted that writing chronologically was not necessary, Field suggested writing the opening scene first, to develop an understanding of the script's voice and direction. Field tells readers that screenplays behave as a whole noting that "if you change a scene or a line of dialogue on page 10, it impacts and influences a scene or a line of dialogue on page 80... it becomes essential to introduce your story from the very beginning" (Field, p. 106). I took this advice to heart, and wrote the first scene of the episode first. From there, the scenes were written out of order. But, I felt confident in doing this because I had a working knowledge of how I had set up my storyline and my characters for the show's audience.

My ability to move beyond developing writing strategies and into understanding the formatting of a script was thanks to Lew Hunter's text *Screenwriting 434*. *Screenwriting 434* is a text that is used in Hunter's UCLA screenwriting course. Through the text, Hunter shows readers the creation of a script from start to finish. Not only does Hunter describe how he is writing the script, the script is shown in the text. Being able to see a script in front of me helped me visualize what mine should look like. Beyond that, reading a variety of scripts taught me how to better introduce setting, characters, and action, and how to organize and differentiate between description and dialogue on the page. Hunter's text also suggests writing a script that can easily be broken into three acts, an easily identifiable beginning, middle, and end. Although there are a number of scenes

in my pilot episode, I used Hunter's idea of a three act structure to help me create my original plot line for the episode. I wanted to be able to structure Heather's introduction into three main portions: Heather has a hard day/has a difficult time communicating with her family, Heather addresses the problem, and Heather reaches a solution. Creating this very bare skeleton for myself gave me room to explore different ideas while giving me something I needed to adhere to. The need to adhere to that structure helped me stick to an idea once I found one I enjoyed and helped me pace myself once I began writing.

The process of building the series from the ground up included a lot of planning. The first step was coming up with a basic concept for the series. I knew that I wanted to write a show that focused on a mother character as my attempt to solve, or at least work on the problem of stereotypical mothers on television. Knowing this, I knew that the basic structure of *Putting Out Fires* would be the structure of a family focused situational comedy. From this point on, I had to make the decision of whether or not the series would be better suited for primetime television or a streaming service. With primetime television, *Putting Out Fires* would have more boundaries. Most importantly, each episode would have to be 22 minutes long. With a streaming service, I could have more freedom and, in a sense, swing for the fences. With this in mind, when I began writing my show, I wrote it as if it would be an original series airing on a platform like Netflix or Hulu. This decision gave me more room to explore personality, dialogue, and length in my script. In a similar vein, I also wrote my script with an idea that there was no budget for my series. Without a limit on expenses, I was able to incorporate a more vast array of locations and what I believe is a somewhat larger cast than I would have had with a

budget. After deciding on these logistical factors, I was able to begin crafting the characters themselves.

Before I began writing for the script, I wanted to know my characters and their general identities and attitudes. After a meeting with my thesis advisor, I came to the conclusion that the best strategy in the beginning stages of my creative work would be to write what I know. The biggest inspiration for my thesis has been my own mother. My mother is the reason that I decided to study motherhood on television in the first place. In my eyes, my mother was always so much more than what was represented on television. Her life was far more complicated than the ones mothers had on television: they always had an answer or a game plan even when unexpected things happened to them. My mother on the other hand did not, she had a much more human reaction to life throwing curveballs her way. There were times when she knew what to do and other times where she was being pulled in a million different directions and had no idea what people wanted from her. In those moments, she simply did her best. Along with that, my own mother is a firefighter. Her job is one that is regarded highly in society because of its importance but is oftentimes overlooked in the media, especially in comedy. Along with that, firefighting is an occupation that is dominated by male employees. Frequently people are surprised to hear that my own mom is a firefighter and remark how cool that is. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to have a mother character in my show who was based off of my own mother, and thus, Heather Price was created. Although Heather is not a carbon copy of my mother and has her own quirks and traits, the larger parts of her identity are inspired by my own mother.

Once Heather was created, I needed to decide what her family would look like. First I had to make a decision on Heather's sexuality and then choose whether or not Heather was married. Once I chose to have Heather be a straight married character, I needed to decide on how many children I wanted her to have. I knew from the moment I thought of the show that I wanted the mother character to have more than one child. Based on the "write what you know" strategy, I decided that Heather would be a mother to two children, a son and a daughter. This family dynamic closely reflected the family dynamic that I grew up with which helped give me a sense of authority when writing scenes in which they were all interacting with one another. After the family was created, I thought of my mother's fire department and how many other people I saw regularly working with her. I gave Heather five coworkers, all but one of them being male, all with different relationships to her in regards to power dynamics and closeness. After I had officially determined my cast of recurring characters, I put in the work of deciding their ages, gender identities, sexualities, and personalities. It was not until the first draft of my script was finished that I had decided on their races. All of this information can be found in a table format in Appendix B. Once the basic identities were created for my cast, I did a little more in depth character building for Heather and her husband James, because they are my main characters. After some discussion in person and research online, my thesis advisor and I compiled a list of questions that helped deepen my own knowledge of these characters. The questionnaire that was created and decided upon was 43 questions long and was split into three categories: questions regarding facts about the character's life, questions regarding the history of the character's life, and questions regarding the personality of the characters. The questionnaire that I created for Heather at the beginning

of this process can be found in Appendix C. Admittedly, these questions would be answered very differently if I were to fill it out today as the characters have evolved in ways I could never have predicted.

After getting to know my characters as best as I could before writing the script, it was time for me to create a plot for the pilot episode of the series. Before I began writing out a plot outline, I thought about what shows inspired me. A short list came to mind that included *Parks and Recreation* and *Brooklyn-99*. I looked to these shows to help inform the comedy, the pacing, and the workplace scenes in my show. Characters including Leslie Knope from *Parks and Recreation* and Amy from *Brooklyn-99* were the primary inspirations for how I wanted Heather to be in her workplace. I wanted her to be driven, knowledgeable, and reliable. And I wanted all of these traits to be so amplified for Heather, that they almost made it harder for her to do her job, because, in her eyes, she often feels as though the only one who knows how to do it. This trait of Heather's is inspired mostly by Amy from *Brooklyn-99*, particularly moments where she is seen as annoyed by her coworker Jake Peralta's carefree attitude. Heather's confidence at work is inspired primarily by Leslie Knope in the pilot episode of *Parks and Recreation*. In this episode, Leslie is seen tirelessly working to achieve her goal of building a park in Lot 48 of Pawnee, Indiana. She faces many struggles but most obviously struggles with sexism especially when her hard work leads a man to label her as "insatiable". Despite these microaggressions toward her character, she continues to work, simply brushing it off her shoulder.

The way *Putting Out Fires* addresses social justice issues is also heavily inspired by *Brooklyn-99*, especially from its pilot episode. In the first episode of *Brooklyn-99*, the

characters are introduced to the viewers and the chief of police, Raymond Holt talks about his sexuality in a way that does not make it the focus of the episode or the center of his identity, but still drives home its significance. The main character, Jake Peralta is shocked that it has taken Chief Holt so long to get his first command and asks him why it took so much time. Holt nonchalantly tells Jake “because I’m gay” and moves on. The moment is candid and honest while remaining humorous. The humor of this joke is important to recognize as well because it is making fun of Jake’s ignorance rather than poking fun at Holt’s sexuality. A quick moment like this takes something that is so important for a person, like sexuality, and makes it something that is just a part of everyday life. This is what I wanted my series and pilot episode to do. After thinking of these shows and re-watching their pilot episodes, I created the plot outline for my script. I wanted to show Heather both at work and at home while also giving viewers a reason to come back to watch another episode. With these needs in mind for my script, I started brainstorming.

After completing the outline of my plot, the first step to writing my show was a step suggested by Lew Hunter’s *Screenwriting 434*. In this text, Hunter suggested that writers begin to write the any scene of their script for two pages without stopping; Hunter calls this the “two-minute movie” (Hunter, p. 61). Hunter suggests that this strategy helps the writer find their voice. Once the two pages are complete, the writer can have a working understanding of the direction they want to take their script. They can decide if they want to rewrite the scene completely, or, they can continue on with it. I decided that this would be the best approach to take as it would force me to write down the ideas that I had without forcing me to commit to those ideas. Once I did this, I felt inspired. After

stopping and taking a moment to read the first two pages, I made the decision to keep writing the script as I had planned it. Once I had finished the first two scenes entirely, I sent them to Jennie for feedback. The first critique that I received on my script was that I needed to be more in depth. My script was lacking description and personality because I was afraid it would end up making my pilot episode too lengthy. Jennie reminded me that I needed to swing for the fences and not confine myself to traditional screenplay boundaries. After being reminded of this, I edited my first two scenes and finished a draft of my episode. The first draft was read only by Jennie and a close friend of mine. After receiving feedback from them, I workshopped my script more. After receiving feedback that my work still needed to be more specific, I went back to the draft and added more detail to my script. In particular, I spent time developing the relationships between Heather and her coworkers. After thinking about the depth of the relationships Heather would have with her coworkers and reanalyzing the personality traits of each of them, I deepened and lengthened the interactions she had with them in the opening scenes. Another important piece of adding detail into my script included incorporating what I would consider extended log lines before each scene. In these extended log lines, I offer more elaborate explanations of setting, time, and most importantly, the characters current moods and feelings. Traditionally, explanations like this would not be found in a script. However, I decided that because this script's academic nature and because it does not have a table read it would benefit my readers to have a better understanding of what my vision truly is. The most important changes I made though were regarding Heather.

Heather needed to be workshopped. She was leaning dangerously close to becoming a stereotypical nagging mother archetype herself, the opposite of what I

wanted her to be. The second round of editing my script was far more intense. I completely reworked Heather's scenes where she is seen scolding or upset and turned them into more positive moments for the character. Along with that, I paid close attention to my dialogue, working to make it feel more natural. The second draft was then sent to Jennie for feedback once again. But, this time that is not the only person who read it. I sent the script to a group of my friends and to my mother. The group of friends received the script and met up with me that same day to read it aloud with me. As I went into this read-aloud, I thought of a Ted Talk held by Brene Brown on the topic of vulnerability called "The Power of Vulnerability". In this Ted Talk, Brown discusses her work and her identity as not only a researcher but also as a storyteller. In the talk, Brown notes that she had to "lean into the discomfort" of her work (Brown). Even if it was uncomfortable or awkward, Brown recognized that it would be helpful in the long run. I clung onto this as I heard my closest friends read aloud my creative work. Allowing them to read the work they had only heard about for months was terrifying. I was worried that they would think it was not as good as I had made it sound. Perhaps they would think my writing was bland and unfunny. I feared that they would question how I could make them laugh in person but not on paper. I acknowledged that these fears were normal in multiple meetings with Jennie and decided that the discomfort would ultimately allow my script to grow into the best thing that it could be. Hearing multiple voices read my script aloud was less intimidating when it actually began, they helped me out of a "maze of subjectivity" I had built for myself by being so close to my own script for such an extended period of time (Field, p. 289). My friends put their all into the characters I gave them, truly bringing them to life. Their dedication to the reading let me pinpoint dialogue

that sounded stale or unnatural. Along with that, their laughter, which actually happened and eased my anxieties, let me know what was successful in the script. At the end of the reading, I gave them time to give me feedback. They offered ideas on how to better work dialogue from making it more natural in some places to making it easier to understand in others. They also asked questions about my characters and their relationships, particularly the relationship between Lydia and Heather. Their questions on the two's closeness helped me identify that I needed to add more to the script to show how close the two characters truly were so the audience would understand from the beginning. At the end of it all, the read aloud proved to be something that inspired one of the final rounds of editing that my script received. This round of editing was different though, I was taking audience feedback and using it to improve my show. It felt like the show had reached a point where I could truly and fully accept that it had the ability to mean something to people.

*Putting Out Fires* is a show that is not complete. The series pilot was not a one-time effort. The plot, characters, and overall voice of the show have room to grow. It is important to recognize that a show must introduce its setting, characters, storyline, and moral standing into, traditionally, a 22-minute period. In fact, writing what I did for the pilot inspired a number of ideas for future episodes if I find the opportunity to continue writing this show. These can be found in Appendix D. It is a difficult task as a writer though, grappling with editing and eliminating moments that showcase the show's voice. One must ask themselves what is absolutely necessary to keep because of the restrictions television has placed on the situational comedy genre. Along with that, writer's must make sure an audience cares about the characters in the first episode. How are they to do

this when they only get one first impression? After completing multiple drafts of the first episode of *Putting Out Fires*, I can say with confidence that I am still in the learning process of this. What offered me the most insight on how to make this pilot the best it could be with the tools that I have at my disposal, was sending it out to trusted individuals to read on their own or to read in a group setting aloud with me present. This was the closest I was able to get to the experience of truly working on a series professionally. In an ideal situation with time and funding, the show would have the opportunity to live out at least one full season. In doing this, the series would most greatly benefit from a diverse writers room that would lend a multitude of lived experiences to inform and enrich the characters of the series. This is the future that I want for *Putting Out Fires*, and especially for Heather. With more people providing feedback on Heather, she will become even more of an uncategorizable mother. However, at this point in time, I do believe that the Heather that exists now is the groundwork that I was hoping to achieve: rather than a stereotyped mother, she is a flawed, honest, and complex individual.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TABLE OF CHARACTERS

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexuality</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Relationship</b>
Heather	Mid 40s	Female	Straight	White	Firefighter	Main Character
James	Mid to late 40s	Male	Straight	Black	Graphic Designer	Husband to Heather
Lily	16	Female	Straight	Mixed	Student	Daughter to Heather
Julien	11	Male	Unknown	Mixed	Student	Son to Heather
Lydia	Late 30s	Female	Bisexual	Native American	Secretary at the fire dept.	Heather's best friend
Ian	Late 30s	Male	Straight	White	Firefighter	Lydia's partner
Alex	15	Nonbinary	Queer	White	Student	Ian and Lydia's adopted child
Ch. Nick Sawyer	Early 50s	Male	Straight	Black	Firefighter	Heather's boss
Lt. Sam Gallanz	Early 30s	Male	Gay	Hispanic	Firefighter	Heather's coworker, her superior
Kyle Sacks	18/19	Male	Straight	White	Live in student firefighter	Heather's coworker, her subordinate
Kent Steele	Late 20s to early 30s	Male	Gay	Asian	Firefighter	Heather's coworker

## APPENDIX B: CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

### Character Descriptions

*Heather Price:* Heather Price is in her mid-to-late forties. White. She is a firefighter at the local Williford Fire Department. She is the mother of two children. Her role as a mother extends beyond her family as she is often found having to play the maternal role at the fire department where she works with only men. The pressure of her maternal identity often leaves her feeling frazzled or confused, but this does not mean she is unsuccessful. She deals with family and fire department issues quickly and emotionally. She is loud and unafraid to make her feelings known. It would be apt to describe Heather as being organized, smart, assertive, and yet still warm. Heather is the protagonist of this show.

*James Price:* James Price, Heather's husband, is in his early-to-mid forties. Black. He is an intellectual property lawyer at a local firm. Although a lawyer would be associated with someone more ruled by their left brain, right brained James thrives in his workplace, fighting for the rights of the artists he works with. On the surface, James is a typical Vermont stereotype of a granola/hippie-esque individual who practices a new-age way of life. Beneath that, he is a warm-hearted individual who finds it most important to emotionally connect with those around him. The children often come to James with their problems first because they know he will remain level-headed and understanding. This trait of his leaves Heather a touch jealous but she appreciates his big heart more than he knows.

*Lily Price:* Lily is 16/17 years old, a junior in high school. Mixed. She is the eldest child of the Price family. Lily is bright and talented. She wants to become an actress. However,

like many young adults, Lily faces bouts of insecurity and shyness. Lily has a strong relationship with her parents.

*Julien Price:* Julien is 11 years old, in seventh grade. Mixed. He plays the trumpet and wants to become a jazz musician. He is a horrible trumpet player but he is confident in his abilities. Julien gets along with his parents, especially Heather. He does not get along with Lily, mostly because of the age difference. Julien and Lily argue so frequently that it is almost as if they argue for fun.

*Lydia Finch:* Lydia is in her late thirties. Native American. She is Heather's best friend. Like Heather, Lydia is loud but unlike Heather she is quite eccentric and vulnerable. Lydia does not have kids, but she is seriously considering adoption and trying to go through with that in the first season. Lydia is the secretary at the fire department Heather works at. Lydia is engaged to Ian Walker, another firefighter at the department.

*Ian Walker:* Ian is in his late thirties. White. He is a firefighter. He is athletic and masculine. More importantly, he is incredibly kind.

*Alex:* Alex is 15-years-old. White. Alex is the child that Lydia and Ian will be adopting in a later episode. They are a quiet but warmhearted individual with a sense of humor and a strong sense of justice. Alex is nonbinary.

*Chief Nicholas Sawyer:* Sawyer is in his early fifties. Black. He is a chaotic mess with a big heart and good intentions. He cannot keep track of anything and relies heavily on Heather and Lydia to keep the fire department from falling apart.

*Lt. Sam Gallanz:* Sam is in his early thirties. White. He is stern, cold, and detached.

*Kyle Sacks:* Kyle is 18 years old. White. He is a live-in student at the Williford fire department. Kyle can be described as being charmingly dumb. He needs guidance and validation from Heather constantly.

*Kent Steele:* Kent is in his late twenties to early thirties. Asian. He is a firefighter at the Williford Fire Department. He is an emotional and weepy hopeless romantic. He is often looking for love advice.

## APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE

### FACTS QUESTIONS:

What is your full name?

Heather Lee Price.

What is your birthday (month, date, and year) and astrological sign(s)?

August 18, 1978; born at 6:23 in the morning in Burlington, VT. She is a Leo sun, Aquarius moon, Leo rising.

Do you have any siblings? What are their names, birthdates, and birth order?

Heather has one older sister; her name is Elle. Elle was born on March 4, 1975 (making her a Pisces).

Where were you born?

Heather was born in Burlington, Vermont.

Where were your parents born?

Heather's mother was born in Montour Falls, NY (Schuyler Hospital). Heather's father was born in Burlington, VT.

Where do you live now?

Heather stayed in Vermont and lives in Williford, VT.

Do you have any medical problems, diseases, injuries? (Relation to Heather's occupation)

Insomnia/Sleep Deprivation as a result of sporadic calls to work throughout all hours of the day. Heather also regularly attends therapy (something that could be explored in later episodes). Many first responders experience post traumatic stress symptoms and the rate

for suicide among first responders is rather high. Heather goes to therapy as a preventative act and to keep her mind healthy.

What religion are you, and why?

Heather is not religious. She did attend a Catholic church with her mother and father when she was younger but the strict attitudes left her feeling suffocated so she stopped attending in high school.

What is your annual income?

Heather's annual income is \$43,097.60. The average hourly wage of a Burlington, VT firefighter is \$20.72 and Heather (typically) works 40 hours a week.

Is there a comfortable savings?

Heather does have a comfortable savings. Her parents made her start saving and preparing for retirement when she got her first job at Dairy Queen in 1995 (she was 17).

What kind of house/apartment do you live in?

Heather and her family live in a large, two story home. The home has a wraparound porch and a nice backyard. The Price's even have a fully furnished and decorated basement (James' idea) and an attached garage. It is located in a suburban style neighborhood of similar homes, Williford Heights.

What kind of car do you own?

Heather drives a yellow 2014 Volkswagen Beetle. She always wanted to be the reason people played the punch buggy no punch back game.

Do you have any pets?

The Price family does not have any pets. But, Heather did have a pug when she was younger and she brings it up to James frequently. She wishes they had a dog. James is just scared of them.

#### HISTORY QUESTIONS:

Where did you go to school?

Before moving to Williford, Heather did attend elementary/junior high/and high school in Burlington, VT.

How many times have you moved in your life?

Heather has moved three times in her life. Once into her college dorm, then into her first apartment after college, and then again into her current home in Williford.

Did you attend college, trade school, etc. and where?

Heather went to the Vermont Fire Academy. But, she often would visit Middlebury College to visit her best friend at the time Molly.

What did you study in school?

She studied to receive her Firefighting certification.

When you were a child, what did you dream of being when you grew up?

Heather dreamed of becoming a baker. She grew up making all kinds of baked goods in the kitchen with her mom and for years she thought she would open up her own bakery and share her love for sweets with the world.

What is the first historical event you remember? (September 11th)?

The first historical event / big news story that Heather remembers vividly is the OJ Simpson trial. But, the first that actually affected her in a personal way was September

11th. 9/11 happened during Heather's first year at the Fire Academy (she was 23 when she decided to go into firefighting).

How did you feel/react to the 2016 election?

Heather was appalled. She woke up the day after the election, shed a few tears (incredibly vulnerable for Heather) watching the news, and made pancakes with extra chocolate chips for breakfast with her kids. She also called them out of school for the day so they could just spend time together as a family. Heather needed her kids to help bring her back to her usual self.

Who was your best friend in college?

Molly (who was her best friend in high school too).

Who is your best friend now?

Lydia Finch who she met at the fire department.

What is the worst thing that ever happened to you?

The worst thing that has ever happened to Heather has been losing her grandparents. She only has one set (on her mother's side) left. Her grandparents on her father's side passed away when she was just entering high school. She never felt like she was able to truly make them proud and it has been hard for her to cope with that, even in her adulthood.

What is the best thing that ever happened to you?

Although it may be a cliché, Heather does believe the best thing to ever happen to her was becoming a mother. She loves her kids dearly but what she recognizes the most is that becoming a mother made her a stronger individual.

What groups, organizations did you belong to in high school, or what sports did you play?

Heather played field hockey and softball when she was in high school. She had always liked sports but she loved the ones where she could let off some steam in a more aggressive way (pitching, driving a field hockey ball down the field). And she still does softball as an extracurricular with some of the other people at her fire department.

How did you meet your current significant other?

Heather met James when she went to a poetry event with her friend Molly at Middlebury College. Molly bumped into James while they were walking to their seats and recognized him from class. She introduced him to Heather, not thinking anything of the interaction. Heather asked her more about James and then Molly knew she would have to play wing-woman for her best friend.

Who important to you has died in your life and how did you cope with their deaths?

As stated earlier, Heather's grandparents on her mother's side have passed away.

Growing up, they would always visit for the summers. They knew that's when Heather wouldn't be at school so they could spend as much time as possible with her. She was incredibly close with them and is still coping with losing them when she was just starting high school. In order to cope, and keep their memory alive, she makes sure to keep the traditions they had with her alive with her own kids. (ex: on the fourth of July Heather used to go to an ice cream shop with her grandparents and they would all get a two scoop cone of the same flavor and watch the fireworks together. She does this with her kids).

#### PERSONALITY QUESTIONS:

What is your favorite color?

Heather's favorite color is yellow. One time she read that yellow makes people happy and she decided that a color that could change someone's mood was worth being her favorite.

What is your favorite book?

Heather's favorite book is *The Little Prince*. She read to both Lily and Julien when they were in kindergarten. It reminds her of the days when they were younger. The escapism is nice, too.

Who is your favorite actor?

Heather's favorite actor is Keanu Reeves. She loved him in *The Replacements* (2000) and he instantly became her celebrity crush.

Who is an actor you can't stand?

Heather cannot stand Jim Carrey. She has the impression that he would be hard to work with and she refuses to look past her own idea of him.

What are your favorite movies/TV shows?

Heather does love *The Replacements*. But, her favorite TV show would have to be *Grace and Frankie*. She sees herself and Lydia as a younger version of them.

Which movies/TV do you absolutely hate?

Heather hates the *Bring it On* series; she's often heard asking why they thought they needed to make so many of the same movie. She also despises reality television. She doesn't think it's real and can't find it entertaining because it's too dramatic for her tastes.

What is your favorite food(s)?

Heather's favorite food is oatmeal. She likes how quick it is to make and boasts about its health benefits to her husband whenever he asks "oatmeal again?". She just likes a warm, easy comfort food.

What most annoys you about [fill in the blank]? (James).

What annoys Heather most about James is his snoring. Not only does she have insomnia, but she has to deal with listening to him snore all night long while she hardly gets any shut eye.

How often do you exercise?

Heather exercises three times a week. One of those times is an aerial yoga class that Lydia talked her into going to with her. The other two times Heather just does simple at home workouts.

Are you an introvert or an extrovert?

Heather is certainly an extrovert. She never gets tired of being around people.

What things might you be asked to do that you hate doing but do anyway (attend birthday parties, weddings, do chores for your elderly aunt, etc.)?

Heather gets home after James each night and he always asks her to check the mailbox because he forgets. She HATES doing this because it's another step before she gets to go inside and put on her pajamas. It's only 10 steps from her car to the mailbox but those ten steps feel like a mile, at the very least.

Have you ever broken the law?

Heather jaywalks frequently. She always jokes about how she's a criminal when she does it. She also was caught smoking a cigarette on her high school campus when she was 14 and though she didn't face any repercussions for underage smoking, she did get yelled at

by her parents. She thinks about to this day and is embarrassed that she even tried. She is often disappointed that she just coughed the whole time and “didn’t even look cool”.

What are your spending habits?

Heather is an impulsive shopper. Although she hates getting the mail, she loves seeing the coupons that get piled in her mailbox. Even if she doesn’t think she’ll use them, like Ulta coupons, she still cuts them out and walks around the stores looking for potential gifts or fun things to buy just for the fleeting moment of adrenaline that comes with swiping a debit/credit card.

Do you enjoy hot weather, or do you prefer colder temperatures?

Heather loves the heat (good thing because she’s a firefighter). She prefers warmer weather mostly because she can spend more time outside. She despises the cold because it keeps her locked up indoors and glued to Netflix and Hulu. She complains about winter whenever she can.

If you could describe yourself in one sentence, what would you say?

If Heather had to describe herself in one sentence she would simply say “I’m the best person you’ll ever meet”. The Leo sun and Leo rising really combine to make her incomparably confident.

If your (best friend, wife, daughter, boss, neighbor etc.) were to describe you in one sentence, what do you think he/she would say?

If James had to describe Heather in one sentence he would say “Heather is loud, bold, and the most noticeable person in any room she walks into” he would follow that up with “it’s a good thing she’s the nicest person in any room she walks into too” when Heather glares at him.

## APPENDIX D: FUTURE EPISODE IDEAS

### *Idea One:*

One of the ideas I have for a future episode in the first season centers around Lily's casting as Uncle Fester in the school's production of the Addams Family Musical. I would like Lily to address her casting nonchalantly, or off the cuff, by asking her parents if she was not cast as Wednesday because she is not white or white passing. The Addams family very clearly represents and is associated with the gothic aesthetic. The vision that comes to mind when discussing a gothic aesthetic is more often than not one that is predominantly white. Films such as those from Tim Burton are a strong example of a modern look at what "gothic" is expected to look like. What's most important about Burton's representation of gothic is that the majority of the actors in his films are white or strikingly pale. The whiteness that is related to gothic style can be attributed primarily to its roots in European countries, but most in particular Germany. However, Lily is not concerned with the past of the gothic aesthetic and why it is so white. Lily is curious as to why in this day and age, it cannot be challenged, especially in an artistic setting where diversity and subversion are typically celebrated and encouraged. Her interest in exploring this with her parents will create an episode that is concerned with how race can and does affect the lives of young people of color while maintaining a lighthearted tone (due to the show's nature as a situational comedy).

### *Idea Two:*

Another idea for a future episode focuses on the dynamic between Lydia, Ian, and their adopted child Alex. Alex is a non-binary character, and the only non-binary character in

the show. I want Lydia and Ian to have little to no experience in working to understand what it means to be non-binary before they meet Alex. I would like Lydia and Ian to be accepting of Alex's gender identity. Along with that, I would like to see them, primarily Ian, be (lovingly) confused at the initial meeting. I want the confusion to surround pronouns. I believe that including a scene/episode dedicated to the discussion and exploration of gender identity would allow a look into how mothering can relate to various social justice topics and issues.

*Idea Three:*

I want one episode in the possible future of the series to directly approach conversations regarding motherhood. I would like Heather and Lydia to have a disagreement about how they raise their children. Perhaps the disagreement would be regarding something more menial along the lines of dating/going out/or a curfew. Ultimately I would like the argument between the two of them to be based on Heather fighting with the belief that she knows better because she has been a mother longer than Lydia has. Lydia's rebuttal would be cemented in what she learned in the classes she had to take before she could adopt (per Vermont law). In the end, I would like the two of them to finish their fight by coming to an understanding that there is no correct way to raise a child. Perhaps this episode could also explore the various categories of mothering that I was unable to introduce in the pilot (ex: the eco/green mom, the soccer mom, the Pinterest mom, the tiger mom, the best friend mom, and so on). If the episode were to do this I would like to be one that is filled with vignettes of these mothers and how Lydia and Heather reacted to them in real time and then in moments of reflection as well as how they compared themselves to these mothers.

A final episode idea that I have for the future of *Putting Out Fires* is dedicated to Heather in the workplace. Not only does Heather work in a male dominated field (only 7% of firefighters in the United States are women), but, she also works in a department that is male dominated. Heather and Lydia are the only women who work the Williford Heights Fire Department. In the episode, Heather would be experiencing gender microaggressions. Maybe these microaggressions would be sly digs at her maternal attitude or simply just remarks about how she's the only female firefighter in the department. Ultimately, I would like her to make the decision to call out the men in her workplace in a way that remains funny but enlightens the men in her department to her lived experience.

*Rationale:*

These ideas for future episodes are meant to show that the series takes everyday issues that people face and makes them an everyday reality. By making them a reality for the characters, *Putting Out Fires* avoids the trope of having a special episode per season that is dedicated to vaguely addressing a social justice issue. For a majority of these characters, existing within their identities calls for an everyday awareness of how their identities are inherently political. *Putting Out Fires'* goal with these episodes is to address this part of living in a humorous and awkward way to, hopefully, better reflect reality for its viewers.

## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Keely Gonyea was born in Bangor, Maine on May 16, 1997. She was raised in Hermon, Maine and graduated from Hermon High School in 2015. Majoring in Media Studies, Keely also has minors in Theatre and English. She is a member of Lambda Pi Eta. Upon graduation, Keely plans to continue screenwriting for both film and television.