

“This is exactly why we sweep things under the rug:” A Polite approach to ABC’s *Modern  
Family*

Presented to the Faculty  
Liberty University  
School of Communication Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts  
Communication Studies

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December 2013

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This is dedicated to:

Janette, who always believed

Wavi, who offered to collect my tears when I doubted

Adrian and Owen, who hold my heart

Nancy, what's wrong?

### **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been written without the guidance and support of my committee. Dr. Faith Mullen taught me the love of communication theory, Dr. Lynnda Beavers taught me to see it everywhere, and Dr. Bill Mullen taught me its scholarly pursuit.

The Lacy family provided me with a roof over my head and so very much more. I wish to thank Timothy and Stephanie for stretching me and putting up with a very preoccupied babysitter. I promise to pay better attention to you now that this is complete. My dear friends, Janette and Wavi listened patiently while I laid out countless “worst case scenario” plans, and always knew they would never be implemented.

I found so many friends in the desks around me. Their support and criticism throughout my program has made me a better scholar and person. I will always look fondly on our time learning together.

### **Abstract**

The sitcom has remained a popular choice for television viewers since its inception. They have evolved in their methods of entertaining their audiences, often depicting unlikeable characters engaging in antisocial behaviors. This study examines one such sitcom, *Modern Family*, through the lens of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and related concepts contributed by other theorists. These theorists maintain that a primary motive behind any interaction is the presentation and maintenance of a chosen identity or "face." Those actions that fail to maintain face, for either participant are called "face-threatening acts." This study attempts to determine if the characters behave in ways consistent with the assumptions of these theories. The researcher examined the complete first season of *Modern Family* and found that half of the main characters freely and frequently commit politeness violations. The ramifications of such a narrative are discussed, as well as limitation of the current study. Finally possible avenues of future related research are provided.

Key words: Face Management Theory, Politeness Theory, Modern Family, Face Concerns, Television, Sitcom, Mockumentary

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The sitcom genre has enjoyed much popularity and success throughout the television era. As a ubiquitous form of mass communication, the genre warrants study into its functions and the appeal it holds for various audiences. Many sitcoms have received various critical treatments. Kocela (2009) reported on the popularity of *The Office*; Walte (2007) analyzed the humor represented in the sitcom *Friends*. However, few researchers have used social science theories of communication to frame a rhetorical analysis of any television sitcom. A notable exception, though, is Paolucci and Richardson (2006), which analyzed the sitcom *Seinfeld* according to Erving Goffman's interaction paradigm.

Goffman's face management theory and its related successor, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, have remained popularly accepted theories of human communication. They are theories of impression management, describing how human beings interact with one another in an attempt to present a specific, predetermined identity, or face, to the world. As previously mentioned, these frameworks have not extensively been applied to the interactions between characters on sitcoms. While much literature exists on the topic of sitcoms, a study such as this one will provide a further understanding of how characters created for entertainment either adhere to or depart from behaviors we would expect based on these theories. Specifically, in the current study, the researcher examines the interactions between the characters on *Modern Family* from these theoretical frameworks.

The purpose of this study is to determine what, if any, politeness violations are portrayed in this mockumentary sitcom. The researcher will use these frameworks to establish expectations of human behavior and then note when the characters do not meet them.

The following chapters present a review featuring some of the past research done related to these frameworks to be studied as well as the methods for examining them, and then background information on the program in question. The literature review will provide the reader with a thorough understanding of these identity management frameworks and their basic assumptions about human behavior. This chapter also presents both qualitative and quantitative studies using these frameworks applied to real-life situations. Here the reader will also encounter various studies on certain sitcoms, which will function as a reference point for the study to be conducted. The methodology section will contain the research focus as well as a thorough description of how the researcher will conduct this examination. This chapter will also explain the scope of the study, and provide information on the popular culture text to be examined.

The following literature review contains extensive information on the theories of face management and politeness, as well as examples of studies performed on sitcoms. This chapter will provide results of past studies on politeness, and therefore function as a frame of reference for the behaviors described in the analysis. These theories have been well supported by past research, and the upcoming pages provide examples of that. The past analyses of television programs describe various possible approaches and validate the importance of such a study.

Few would argue that sitcoms are not a staple of the average American's entertainment diet. Many of these programs have left seemingly indelible marks on society, from *I Love Lucy* to *Seinfeld*. As a reflection of society, the sitcom warrants much study, particularly within the communication field. The understanding of successful mass communication contributes to our knowledge of communication practices and preferences, and our ability to produce impactful media. It is valuable, then, to know what characteristics a given successful television program

possesses, for program creators, audiences, and scholars alike. An understanding of typical human behavior, and whether or not sitcom characters display this, may contribute to a better understanding of what will constitute a successful sitcom. The following presents literature on face management and politeness theories, and studies that have validated these theories quantitatively. It will also present past research showing the ways sitcom has successfully been studied. While, few researchers have chosen to study sitcoms in the way this study does, this literature review will serve to justify such a study.

Erving Goffman's face management theory explains everyday social interaction as humanity's method of establishing and presenting their desired face, or identity, to the world, and also working to preserve and protect that identity once established. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory builds upon Goffman's work to further explain the ways people attempt to protect their own and others presented faces and the ways their identities can be compromised (Baldwin, et al, 108). These theories maintain that people, in general, naturally concern themselves with affirming these identities. Of course, there are exceptions, but under most situations, and within most relationships, people frame their communication and interactions in ways that prevent themselves and others from having their identities compromised. The exploration of these theories will provide a set of behavioral expectations with which to evaluate *Modern Family*. This sort of behavior is observable, and in some cases, quantifiable in real-life studies, some of which will be presented in this chapter.

The American public has available to them countless sitcom options from *Everybody Loves Raymond* to *Arrested Development*. Joanne Morraele provides a brief history of the sitcom genre in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*. She includes an insightful section on television in the 1990s and beyond which provides a necessary cultural context for the change in sitcom

popularity. The advent and ever-increasing availability of new technology posed the challenge of gaining and maintaining an audience's attention to television as a whole. She also chronicles the shift away from the traditional family sitcom in the 1990s. As this decade drew to a close, audiences seemed to lose interest in the sitcom. However, following the events of September 11, 2001, the public's taste for sitcoms drastically increased. In fact, "ratings for familiar sitcoms such as *Friends* and *Will and Grace* soared as viewers seemed to seek solace in familiar rituals" (250). Sitcoms have an undeniable place in the American psyche. Tad Friend wrote that they are "our most pervasive, powerful and cherished form of media output" (174). Therefore, it proves valuable to study them in order to determine what makes a successful one, and what will constitute a failure within the genre.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review will explore the works of Erving Goffman and Brown and Levinson to provide the reader with a sufficient understanding of the theories and how they will function in this research undertaking. It will then explore some of the ways this theory has been used quantitatively to study actual human interaction and discuss those findings and their ramifications for the current study. Finally, this literature review will explore some of the ways the sitcom genre has been explored in the past. Since little research exists that studies sitcom within the face management/politeness theory framework(s), this literature review will primarily function to explain the goals of this current study and justify its methods, framework, and topic.

### *Face Management and Politeness Theory*

In his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman likens human interaction to performing on a stage. Just as actors and actresses do, people use their communication to present a desired role for an audience. Goffman uses the term *performance* to refer to “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his conscious presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence over the observers” (22). Within this definition then, performances occur in every situation from board meetings to birthday parties. Almost any time an individual is in the presence of others, according to Goffman, he is performing a role.

Within the first chapter of his book, Goffman differentiates between cynical and sincere performers. A cynical performer is one who is “not taken in at all by his [or her] own routine,” while at the other extreme, a sincere performer is one who “can be fully taken in by his [or her] own act” (17). Cynical performers do not believe in the role they are presenting, nor do they concern themselves with the beliefs of the audience for which they are performing. Goffman

explains that a cynical performer does not of necessity behave in this way with malicious intent. While sometimes cynical performers communicate in ways to deceive and take advantage of their audience, people may also engage in this kind of performance with the purpose of serving the good of the community, or protecting the feelings of their audience.

According to Goffman, there are many ways people can unintentionally present conflicting messages. These are referred to as “unmeant gestures” (*Presentation*, 52). They can include anything from physically losing control (e.g. tripping and falling, yawning) to stuttering or laughing during an inappropriate time of the conversation. Goffman explains the tension this way: “The expressive coherence that is required in performances points out a crucial discrepancy between our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves. As human beings, we are presumably creatures of variable impulse with moods and energies that change from one moment to the next. As characters put on for an audience, however, we must not be subject to ups and downs” (56). In other words, people make a priority of somewhat suppressing their true selves when performing for an audience. Essentially, at times, the real self is battling with the presented self, according to Goffman.

Goffman points out another challenge of those presenting a role: the audience. A performer always takes the risk that the audience will somehow misinterpret his or her behavior and therefore reject the reality of the presented self. Performers, both honest and dishonest, must take care to use situation-appropriate expressions. Performers need to “enliven their performances with appropriate expressions, exclude from their performances expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered, and take care lest the audience impute unintended meanings” (66). Therefore, people have many things to take into consideration before entering any kind of communication situation. Goffman presents a concept of an unseen audience as

well, explaining that “an individual may privately maintain standards of behavior which he [or she] does not personally believe in, maintaining these standards because of a lively belief that an unseen audience is present who will punish deviations from these standards. In other words, an individual may be his [or her] own audience or may imagine an audience to be present” (82-83).

Goffman also explains the way teams function to form impressions and perform roles. While the term *team* may bring to mind images of sports or professional groups, Goffman uses the term to simply mean “any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine” (79). Therefore, families can function as teams when they wish to present themselves a certain way to the community, or friends can function as teams when they spend time together among people they implicitly may consider to be observing them as an audience. The possibilities for individuals to form these kinds of teams and perform these identity roles together are endless.

People functioning as a team have an innate understanding of their responsibility in this role. Teammates are aware that they must share information with one another, essentially to make sure everyone is aware of what performance the team wishes to engage in. This is of grave importance when functioning as a team, because “to withhold from a teammate information about the stand his [or her] team is taking is in fact to withhold his character from him, for without knowing what stand he will be taking, he will not be able to assert a self to the audience” (89). Also, when functioning as a team, individual members generally understand that they must not punish members who make a performance mistake while they are still in the presence of the audience. This would make it glaringly obvious to the audience that the team member had erred, and, therefore, the entire team’s face would incur more damage. Rather, team members will often wait until a more appropriate and private time to confront the offending member and instruct him or her to prevent further role compromise. This, perhaps, explains why parents will

sometimes wait until they arrive home to correct their children over a social misstep, or employers may see an employee privately to correct some professional misbehavior.

Teams (nor individuals) do not only perform for passive audiences. There are times when teams mutually perform roles for one another. This could occur when families spend time with other families or discriminant professional groups meet either to collaborate or compete, as well as countless other situations. When this occurs, the members of the respective teams tend to “stay in character,” or they continue to “maintain the line that they are what they claim to be” (169). Teams also assist one another (in benevolent situations) with maintaining each other’s presented identities. Teams, therefore, will often mutually affirm the impression set by one another.

However, teams are not always so charitable. Goffman claims that teams often treat their audiences unkindly once they are removed from their presence. Teams may become gossipy, disrespectful, and derogatory, the moment the audience is not there to observe it. Teams may also praise their audience more freely when they are not present, but, according to Goffman, the former seems more often true. Teams may mock their audience by performing a satirical interaction in which some of the teammates actually assume the roles of their audience. This very often occurs among employees in service or sales roles who cope with being forced to deal with difficult or unkind customers not by mistreating them in face-to-face interactions, but by creating situations in which they can defend themselves against unreasonable customers. When teammates (in this case, fellow employees) take on the roles of an unkind audience, they can provide their colleagues with the opportunity for catharsis. Teammates may also exchange understanding glances meant only for one another when forced to assist especially demanding or demeaning clients.



All of this and other types of interaction are classified as communication out of character, and while Goffman uses professional examples, this is surely observable within familial and friendship relationships as well. Dealing with exhausting relatives or incompetent friends is likely to drive people to cope in this way as well.

In his collection of essays, *Interaction Rituals*, Goffman defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line [a manner of expression that indicates one’s view of a situation and its participants] others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (5). Many things factor into face maintenance. One must not only take into consideration the current social situation, but also his or her social place in the world beyond it. One’s past can also determine his or her ability to maintain face in a given situation. Those who successfully maintain face in an interaction are those who “abstained from certain actions in the past that would have been difficult to face up to later” (7).

Individuals in interaction situations can be said to be “in face,” “out of face,” “in the wrong face,” “losing face,” “saving face,” or “giving face” (8-9). Those in face are those successfully presenting a line or self-image that is “internally consistent” and that receives supportive, affirming feedback from others in the interaction as well as from “impersonal agencies” in the scene. Those “out of face” participate in interactions in which they do not or cannot present the line normally expected in that scenario. Those in “in the wrong face” encounter information in the interaction about themselves which cannot be reconciled to the line he or she is attempting. Persons not in face will often experience shame or feel inferior when they feel a threat to their reputation. People attempt to “save face” and “give face” when they act as though they themselves or others, respectively, have not, in fact, experienced any face loss in the interaction.

Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* explains the plight of the stigmatized as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (preface). Those who are stigmatized, then, are those whom the social world can readily categorize as disgraced, discredited, or otherwise suffering from a threatened identity. While these chapters primarily deal with those stigmatized because of physical deformities or mental incapacities, the principles can apply to those ostracized for social ineptitude or misbehavior as well. Goffman explains that characteristics or behaviors that cause one individual to be stigmatized may have no such effect on individuals in different roles or situations. He points out that depending on the profession, people may hide the fact that they are under- or over-educated. Those stigmatized face the challenge that "[normals] believe the person with the stigma is not quite human" (5). This belief leads people to marginalize and discriminate within their interactions. The stigmatized may attempt to correct it by addressing the objective basis of his failing," or by attempting to master the area that his stigmatizing feature makes difficult for him. For example, an individual may undergo plastic surgery to hide an unattractive physical feature or practice extensively to become a better athlete. These individuals may also use their undesirable feature as "an excuse for ill success that has come his way for other reasons" (10).

The stigmatized face challenges not only in interpersonal dealings, but also in intrapersonal ones as well. As mentioned, this book mostly deals with those with very obviously stigmatizing characteristics, but Goffman argues that even "the most fortunate of normals is likely to have his [or her] half-hidden failing, and for every little failing there is a social occasion when it will loom large, creating a shameful gap between virtual and actual social identity"(127). These are failings to meet the "normative expectations" necessary for establishing a "social life" (127). Goffman implies here that even those who seem to most

effortlessly meet these expectations, then, understand the discomfort of even the mere anticipation of failure. This concept serves to explain why we can engage in a sitcom that repeatedly places its characters in these undesirable social situations. Such storylines will allow an audience to deeply identify with the suffering character.

Brown and Levinson expanded upon Goffman's contribution to the field with their politeness theory. The main aspects of this theory that will be relevant to the current study are the concepts of positive and negative face needs. Brown and Levinson propose a Model Person (MP), a "willful fluent speaker of a natural language, further endowed with two special properties – rationality and face" (58). Brown and Levinson's face model consists of "two specific kinds of desires ('face wants') attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)" (13). Interactions that oppose these desires are called face-threatening acts. They provide five basic points in order to simply explain their framework. All MPs, they maintain, have both positive and negative face needs. MPs are also rational, meaning they "choose means that will satisfy their ends." Because both negative and positive face needs can only be satisfied through the choices of others, two MPs will typically find it in their best interest to maintain face for one another. Some acts (such as requests) "intrinsically threaten face." When forced to commit such acts, the speaker "will want to minimize the face threat" provided their desire to preserve either their own or the other's face is greater than their desire to achieve their goals with "maximum efficiency." Finally with the increase of the level of potential threat of a face-threatening act (to either the speaker or the hearer), a speaker will use a strategy that increasingly minimizes risk.

Brown and Levinson also provide some assumptions that form the basis of the theory. First, as face is risked in every interaction, people both cooperate and expect cooperation in maintaining face for themselves and others. Actions that threaten negative face include “orders and requests, suggestions and advice, reminders, threats, warnings and dares” (66) as they each indicate to the hearer a disregard of their autonomy on the part of the speaker. Interestingly, offers and promises also qualify as potential negative face threats, as they can force the hearer to receive or decline them, or possibly become indebted to the hearer. Threats to positive face include “criticism, contempt or ridicule, complaints and reprimands, accusations, insults, contradictions or disagreements, and challenges” (66) as each either indicates a non-acceptance of a hearer’s desire attribute, or other characteristic. If, in conversation, a speaker mentions bad news about a hearer and good news about him- or herself, this can also cause positive face damage.

When forced to commit a face-threatening act, a speaker has a variety of strategies at his or her disposal. If a speaker makes a statement “on record” (68), the statement made has only one possible interpretation, and lacks deniability. Statements “off record” have multiple possible interpretations, and allow the speaker deniability if the hearer perceives face threat. To perform an act “baldly, without redress” means to make a statement as clear, precise, and efficient as possible, with no attempt to mitigate the face threat associated with it. Positive politeness strategies include any actions taken to affirm the presented self of the hearer, while negative politeness strategies include those taken to signify awareness of the hearer’s desires and freedom to fulfill them.

As an expansion of Goffman’s ideas then, politeness theory places a great emphasis on the way others affirm or deny the role an individual presents. If “every competent adult” wants

his or her actions to be “unimpeded by others” and his or her wants to be “desirable to at least some others” (62), the actions that either impede the individual’s efforts or show a lack of concern for the fulfillment of his or her desires would be considered a face-threatening act.

According to Brown and Levinson, rational people seek to avoid committing face-threatening acts. The following studies show how these concepts of face needs and politeness have been explored in the past.

### **Review of Literature on Face and Related Concepts**

These theories have inspired much fascinating work. Thomas Holtgraves has been particularly active in its study. Holtgraves and Yang (1990) tested face management processes across cultures, by enlisting subjects from the U.S. and Korea. They explain that, while scholars have assumed politeness strategies to be universal, there is a great potential for cultural difference in its manifestation, due to varying “values that are assigned for the distance, power, and imposition variables” (720). In explaining these variables and their influence, they cite Scollon and Scollon (1981) which “argued that English-speaking Americans tend to assume greater familiarity with other (low value for distance) than do native Athabaskans” (720). Because of this, Athabaskans will more often prefer more polite strategies when forced to commit a face-threatening act. Holtgraves and Yang conducted three experiments in this study and found support for the assumption of Korea as a “negative-politeness culture (polite strategies preferred) and the United States as a positive-politeness culture (less polite strategies preferred)” (725). They also found that, for both Americans and Koreans, participants perceived greater speaker power when reading a request that showed less hearer face-concern. For other assumptions of the theory, the authors were only able to find mixed support, and they call for further research and refinement of politeness theory.

Holtgraves (1991) studied indirectness and the interpretation of indirect remarks or questions within the framework of face management and politeness theory. He presented 144 participants with scenarios that manipulated for level of face-threat and gender. Following each scenario, participants read a question and response by targets. Holtgraves explains that people often use indirect speech as a means of saving face, either their own or the recipient's. Holtgraves also notes that a speaker can ask a more personal question directly or indirectly. They can also respond directly or indirectly. These are the sorts of scenarios Holtgraves presented to his subjects for interpretation, and his research yielded interesting findings. Holtgraves found that in a more threatening situation or interaction, the subjects were more likely to predict an indirect (threatening) interpretation on the part of the recipient (20). Holtgraves differentiated between threatening and non-threatening situations by stating whether the "speaker wanted the hearer to provide information pertaining either to one of the interactants (threatening situation) or to a nonpresent person (nonthreatening situation)" (19). So, an indirect response from a hearer about the speaker will elicit an indirect (threatening) interpretation from the speaker. In his research, Holtgraves also found a significant distinction between male and female respondents. He found that females were much more likely to predict an indirect interpretation of replies and hints than their male counterparts; however, no significant difference existed in predicting the "likelihood of indirect interpretations of conventional indirect questions" (22). Holtgraves's study did not provide an explanation for this gender difference.

Holtgraves (1992) studies the relationship between face management and language use, interpersonal perception, and cross-cultural communication. In introducing his study, he cites Erving-Tripp (1976), and points out that, indeed, people's motivation to save face leads them to "rarely use the imperative when making requests" (144), as such an act always constitutes a

threat to the hearer's negative face. He cites past findings on politeness variables, including the influence of speaker power, level of imposition of the request, and relationship distance. While higher speaker power has been associated with less politeness, and more imposing requests with greater politeness, Holtgraves laments that research on relationship distance has yielded inconsistent results. In summarizing past research, he notes, that, while indirect (and ostensibly, less imposing), off-record requests, such as hints, may not actually function well as a polite strategy, because they may seem manipulative. In examining past research, Holtgraves draws five general conclusions about face and language use. "First, when people perform face-threatening acts, they will construct their utterances so as to encode face concerns" (155). Also, as acts become more threatening, the speaker encodes face concerns to a greater extent. Third, in these situations, concerns for the speaker's face take priority over concerns for the hearer's face. Fourth, face management plays a role in both comprehension and production of language. Finally, as individuals perceive different levels of face-threat, so they will frame their speech with varying levels of concern for face. He explains that this could potentially be the basis for many cross-cultural and interpersonal misunderstandings. These conclusions further solidify the framework from which the current study examines *Modern Family*.

Holtgraves and Yang (1992) contribute again to the understanding of politeness strategies, this time with regards to cultural and gender influences. They claim early on an "assumption of a universal concern with face and the linguistic means for conveying face concerns" (247) and a need for further investigation into what interpersonal variables can affect politeness. 177 Americans and 161 Koreans participated in the study, which involved viewing short scenes in which one person was about to make a request of another. After viewing, participants then reported how they would frame the request. As predicted, the researchers found

that “increases in perceived hearer power, relationship distance, and act imposition” all corresponded in increased politeness” (251). While Americans, overall, made more polite requests (and women more polite than men), the researchers argue that this does not by any means indicate greater levels of face concern in American versus Korean cultures. Rather, they point out that this can be at least “partially explained by significant differences in perception of one of the interpersonal variables” (251). This is clear, because while Americans were more polite, Koreans showed much greater variance in politeness based on power and distance. The authors conclude from this that politeness theory provides insight into both cultural similarities and differences in face management; however, more research should be done on how interpersonal variables influence people’s use of polite requesting strategies.

Holtgraves, et. al. (1997) continues this line of study with five experiments related to face management and question presentation. They explain that typically, in self-report measures, people’s motivation to appear socially desirable will cause a bias in any collected data. Their research here exists to consider socially desirable responding from the perspective of face management theory and, in particular how face management is “linguistically realized” (1651). They defend their study, explaining that certain questions require that the responder answer in a way that causes his or her positive face to suffer; however, question wording may significantly impact the potential level of face threat. For example, they point out that being politically ignorant is a socially undesirable quality. Therefore, when asked pointedly, “Are you familiar with NAFTA?” (1652), a responder can potentially suffer more substantial face damage than if the question were worded in a way that allowed the responder to claim a reason or excuse for being thus uninformed (e.g. “Have you had time to familiarize yourself with NAFTA?” [1652]).



The researchers conducted multiple different studies to test the effects of question wording on responses.

The researchers drew some general conclusions from these extensive studies. First, people are indeed less likely to engage in socially desirable reporting when responding to face-supporting questions regarding being informed. Their studies also showed a similar effect when responding to questions about behavior, but it was far less significant and consistent. They surmise that this may be due to the objective nature of behavior (“one either did or did not vote” [1665]) versus the subjective nature of knowledge. They conclude from their study that lessening face concerns in self-reporting situations will likely produce more accurate results.

Holtgraves (1997) studies cultural variability and indirectness as a linguistic strategy. He explains that while indirectness has long been acknowledged as such a strategy, there is little empirical research on it, so he proposes and uses a method to measure the variable. In his discussion on the topic and the results, he cites face management as an important motivator for indirectness, but not the only one. Others include manipulation and deniability. He also discusses the tradeoff of speaking indirectly, regarding perception. Based on past research, he explains that while speaking indirectly can result in greater perceptions of politeness, it can also result in perceptions of lower competence and status (634).

Holtgraves (1998) takes a fascinating approach by applying face management to indirect speech responses. He provides a brief dialogue between hypothetical classmates, Bob and Al:

“Bob: What did you think of my presentation?”

Al: It’s hard to give a good presentation” (1).

He immediately asserts that while, at its most literal interpretation, Al’s response is a mere observation that presentations are not easy, most would interpret this statement as something

quite different. He claims face management as “a fundamental motivation for indirectness” (5) in conversation. In social interactions, he explains, people want to maintain face for one another, but sometimes, are forced to rather perform face-threatening acts, as Al was in the example above. He clearly did not enjoy his classmate’s presentation, but to say so would cause damage to both his own and Bob’s positive faces. He conducted three different experiments to determine how people interpret such replies and provides a general discussion on their findings. He deduces that people indeed “mean more than they say” (18) and speak indirectly. However, the strategy of indirectness may not suffice, because in all three of Holtgraves’s experiments, such replies were interpreted as “indirectly conveying a negative opinion or disclosure” (19) and thus constituted a face-threatening act after all.

Kotthoff (1996) studied conversation recordings and transcripts and analyzed the use of humor in relational conversation, and its relation to politeness. She notes that humor can promote both social convergence and social divergence: humor has the potential to either strengthen or harm a relationship. She explains that some social actions that would normally be judged inexcusable become excusable when the actor employs humor. In the data she gathered, within the framework of politeness theory, the interactions should have resulted in threatened faces and damaged relationships. Yet she reports that these interactions apparently did not harm the relationships. This study reveals some of the everyday occurrences and dynamics that politeness theory cannot predict or account for.

Carson and Cupach (2000) study the perception of face threat in the workplace. In their introduction they explain that a manager must “weigh the importance of correcting employee behavior against the desire to maintain a positive working relationship with the employee and the need to avoid threatening the employee’s face” (216). The researchers test five hypotheses: (1)

different types of reproach will result in varying levels of perceived face threat, negative correlations between perceived face threat degree and (2) perception of reproaching manager's "interactional fairness," (3) communication competence, and (4) employee satisfaction with outcome; and a positive correlation between level of perceived face threat and employee's anger level. From their results, the researchers conclude that while indeed types of reproach resulted in different levels of perceived face threat, even polite approaches do not necessarily significantly lessen the perceived face threat of a correction. This is possibly due to the fact that corrections must by nature cause face threat. Not surprisingly, the results showed a strong relationship between perceptions of face threat and perception of interactional fairness. Those requests perceived as unjust or imposing were associated with higher levels of perceived face threat. They also found that higher levels of perceived face threat in fact predicted employee anger, suggesting that managers alienate and disillusion their employees when they fail to consider their face needs. Those reproaches that threatened face resulted in perceptions of lower levels of communication competence as well. Because of the potential professional implications (such as lowered employee morale, lack of supervisor-employee communication), the researchers suggest that managers "conduct reproach privately, [ensure that the] reproach is warranted and commensurate with the violation, and that they are courteous, positive and informative" (230). In addition to this, they also suggest that employers be direct with their subordinates and allow them autonomy to address the problem independently. This serves to affirm the employees as competent, which in turn will reduce face threat.

Johnson, Roloff, and Riffie (2004) studied requests and refusals within the framework of politeness theory and, more specifically, face threats. In their research, they discuss the fundamentals of politeness theory and then explain how refusals of requests can threaten both the

face of the requester and the face of the refuser. They first note that other researchers have found that, perhaps not surprisingly, people make requests of the ones they expect are most likely to comply, as noncompliance would result in negative face loss. They then explain the different possible face threats that exist in a request/refusal situation, which include: threats to the refuser's positive face, threats to the refuser's negative face, and threats to a requester's positive face.

If person A deems person B likely to comply with a request, person A will present that request to person B. If person B refuses, his own positive face may be threatened if he appears unwilling. Also by refusing, he may threaten his negative face (autonomy) if his refusal damages his relationship with person A to the point that person A is eliminated as an option to provide assistance when person B needs to make a request of his own. Even if person B refuses in a way that highlights his inability to comply (such as a lack of skill for desired action), this will threaten person A's positive face, because it implies "poor relational knowledge" on the part of person A. A refusal that reflects unwillingness obviously also threatens person A's positive face because, again, it "reflects poorly on the requester's choice" (230).

To study this concept, the researchers had 133 participants respond to a questionnaire. The participants answered questions about a friend that measured the level of intimacy in the friendship and were then presented with hypothetical request situations. Each request had 15 possible refusal statements following it and the respondents were asked to "write out on the lines below EXACTLY how you would respond to what your friend said" (231). The study found that in a refusal situation the "threat to the requester's negative face was greater than the threat to the refuser's negative face" (233). The autonomy therefore, of the requester suffered more than the autonomy of the refuser, which is not surprising, as a denial maintains the hearer's freedom from

imposition. They also found that refusals that still expressed willingness were less threatening to the requester's face.

Duthler (2006) studied politeness theory and requests made via computer-mediated communication (CMC). He analyzed the CMC request messages of 151 university students for politeness. He found that the more imposing the request made, the more highly rated its politeness. In other words, people were more likely to make efforts to save face when making highly burdening requests. He predicted that email messages would be rated as more polite, other things being equal, than voicemail requests; however, he did not find the email request messages to be significantly more polite. He did find that, for less imposing messages, the politeness measurement of the email and voicemail messages were similar; however, if the message was more imposing, the email was deemed more polite than the voicemail.

Although politeness theory does provide substantial insight into human communication behavior, like any theory, it is not without its limitations, some of which discussed by Kasper (1990). In examining past research, Kasper calls into question the universality of face wants in collectivistic versus individualistic cultures. Cultural differences, based on Kasper's analysis of the available research, can change politeness enactments and behaviors based on ideas of power and threat perception, which have been shown to vary from culture to culture. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind the Western bias that seems to exist when examining or applying the theory.

Meier (1997) also raises some criticisms against the framework, pointing out several limitations. Meier argues that face wants and facework can vary from culture to culture. The article calls into question the relationship between politeness and indirect speech as well, explaining that entire cultures and languages have been shown to be "more or less direct," (22)

which challenges the universality notion characteristic of the approach. Data analysis, Meier continues, is difficult because of a lack of speech act classification. The proposed solution is to define politeness for “second/foreign language pedagogy” (24) as appropriateness with the understanding that appropriateness is situation and context-based. Essentially, this article serves to remind that human behavior is varying and dependent upon many factors. What may be acceptable communication for one culture at one may not be for another.

Oetzel, et. al. (2003) examine facework in the context of parent and sibling conflicts cross-culturally, a topic particularly relevant to the current study. They point out that politeness theory, though it has been very influential in the field, has also been criticized for its shortcomings. One such shortcoming is its emphasis on concern for other-face, which, they argue, may be of little weight in conflict situations. They cite (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998) and define three orientations of face concern, according to the related face-negotiation theory. Self-face is the “concern for one’s own image,” while other-face is “the concern for another’s image,” and mutual-face is “concern for both parties’ images or the ‘image’ of the relationship” (70). In studying family conflict then, they favor this approach because of its expanded concepts of face-concern. They indeed found cultural differences in face-concern and that those representing an individualistic culture had higher concern for self-face than those from collectivistic cultures. Interestingly, they also found that the particular familial relationship did not have great bearing on face-concern or conflict strategies. They conclude from their results that, while national culture does have some relationship, the greatest influence of face and facework within family conflict is the “individual family members’ characteristics” (89).

Hahn and Hatfield (2011) examine the cultural influence of “how people manage the face of a third party” (25), specifically, based on an individualistic/collectivistic dichotomy. In this

study the third party was a family member. The factors studied included participant's country and gender, the relative's gender, the intimacy of the situation, and the speaker's presence at the time of the offense. In justifying their study, they again point to a criticism of politeness theory's focus on individual face, claiming that it is "inadequate." They provide examples of research that call for research into a concept of "group-face," noting instances of Koreans and Korean-Americans experiencing feelings of shame, and offering apologies, despite having "no direct involvement as individuals in the event" (29) of the Virginia Tech University killings of 2007. Based on this and other evidence for an existence of group face, the researchers developed two research questions: "Do Koreans apologize more for the actions of family members than Americans?" and "How do gender and formality affect the likelihood of an apology in Korea and the U.S. when a family member commits a possible face-threatening act?" (31). The researchers developed six scenarios, each of which involving a possible face-threatening act committed by a relative of the speaker.

The researcher found no significant difference related to a participant's country, but rather that Americans, though individualistic, "often do apologize for the actions of their family" (59). They caution that this could be due to "the difficulty of distinguishing a full apology from an expression of sympathy in English," as both employ the word *sorry*. In regards to research question 2, the study showed that Koreans speakers were less likely to apologize to the hearer if they had a more intimate relationship with him or her, and that Korean males more often apologized for relatives than females did. They suppose that this may be true because Korean males "feel more comfortable representing the family," but call for further inquiry into this matter. For American participants, the speaker's gender had no significant effect; however, American participants did more often apologize for female than for male relatives.

Hahn and Hatfield call for more systematic study of group face. In particular, they claim that a shortcoming of their study is that it does not differentiate between those offenses committed against the a hearer's individual face or group face. Also, their scenarios do not allow for a distinction between the individual face of the speaker's family member in the wrong and the group face of the speaker's family as a whole.

In an extensive study, Oetzel, et al. (2000) developed a conflict behavior typology and identified 13 facework categories in conflict situations: aggression, apologizing, avoiding, compromising, considering the other, self-defense, expressing feelings, giving in, involving a third party, pretending, discussing privately, remaining calm, and talking about the problem. Aggression and self-defense were classified as behaviors showing self-face concern. Other-face concern was associated with avoiding, pretending, and involving a third party. Considering the other and apologizing were associated with both other-face and mutual-face concern. Three factors, they explain, underlie their typology: avoiding, integrating, and dominating facework, which are associated with other-, mutual-, and self-face concerns, respectively. These varying behaviors associated with face orientation again caution the researcher against thinking in universal rules.

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2003) contribute a chapter in *Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication* which summarizes some foundational assumptions of face-negotiation theory. Two of them follow: "(a) People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations;" and "(b) the concept of face becomes especially problematic in anxiety-laden or goal-frustrated situations (such as embarrassment situations and conflict situations)" (138). Following an extensive examination of past research, they conclude that, in general, members of individualistic cultures will show greater concern for self-face, while



members of collectivistic cultures tend to favor other- and mutual-face concern. This variance in face orientation must be considered when evaluating politeness across cultures, then, in order to overcome the western bias identified by some of the research presented here.

The following studies provide some basis for the proposed study by showcasing other research and findings on texts related to *Modern Family*.

### **A Survey of Literature on the Sitcom**

This section of the literature review will include studies and findings on various sitcoms with some attention to those sharing *Modern Family*'s mockumentary style. Savorelli provides a description of the genre's categorization: "a neologism that conveys the concepts of imitation and derision." While this is true, the victim of derision is not the documentary genre, but rather those characters it portrays, "framed as they are with an appearance of realism" (65). In describing one very popular representation of the genre, *The Office*, he discusses its characteristic "breaking the fourth wall" (65), by presenting characters who are not only aware that they are being observed, but also take opportunities to communicate directly with the audience. The following pages, then, will show how sitcoms and mockumentaries have been studied in the past.

Pehlke II, et. al. (2009) examines the sometimes ambiguous role of fathers as portrayed in twelve television programs airing during fall 2004. They justify their study with the relative lack of research on portrayals of fatherhood compared to research on families and women in the media. Because Television has "the potential to influence people's understanding of" (115) families, understanding exactly what that influence may be could prove to have far reaching benefits for society. They selected twelve programs featuring a father figure in a family to analyze: ABC's *According to Jim*, *George Lopez*, *My Wife and Kids*, and *Rodney*; UPN's *All of Us*; CBS's *Center of the Universe*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Listen Up*, and *Still Standing*;

WB's *Grounded for Life*; and FOX's *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Quintuplets*. They observed three primary fatherhood themes in these programs: Father-Child Interactions, Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic themes in Fathering, and Negative Messages about Fatherhood.

The researcher further divided the first theme into three sub-themes: "(a) spending quality time, (b) emotion-based interactions, and (c) teaching life lessons" (125). They observed the fathers spending quality time in eight of the twelve programs analyzed for a total of 21 occurrences. In regards to the second sub-theme, the researchers observed father figures engaging in supportive behavior in nine episodes, and unsupportive behaviors in seven. The researchers coded ten scenes in five episodes in which fathers engaged in manipulation of their children, or acting in a manner that took advantage of their children" (127). Fathers were observed teaching life lessons in seven episodes as well.

In their examination of racial and ethnic themes of fatherhood, the researchers found that Latino and African-American fathers in general received better treatment than European-American fathers. They more often engaged in "parental negotiation and emotional support," and also "were portrayed as either foolish or immature" far less often (129). In a related theme of socioeconomic status, middle-class fathers acted in more supportive ways than working-class.

Researchers also identified two sub-themes related to the theme, "negative messages about fatherhood." Fathers were often portrayed as immature and foolish, in nine and six of the programs, respectively. Related to this, fathers were often depicted as "overgrown children" (132) dependent upon their wives to take care of basic needs. Fathers also often appeared sloppy and irresponsible, especially compared to 12 "at or below their healthy-body weight," "very attractive" wives (134). They caution that such themes regarding fatherhood in popular culture could serve to influence our ideas about real fathers, and their function within a family.

Cooper (2003) studied audience reception of one quite successful representation of the genre, *Will and Grace*. In justifying this study, Cooper points out that this program is the first to achieve “significant critical and ratings success with a lead character who is openly homosexual” (514). When this article was written, that was true. *Modern Family* features openly gay adoptive parents and has also garnered critical and popular success. The researcher tested audience reception by showing five groups of college students a single episode of the show, and then collecting responses to a questionnaire. The findings showed that women were more likely both to watch the show, and to rate it “extremely” or “very” funny. In this article, Cooper maintains that the show’s success is significant when its presentation of lead gay characters is taken into consideration. Participants also ranked characters by how embarrassing they were to the communities they represented. This brings to mind Goffman’s ideas about identity management. While Cooper did not conduct his study through the framework of face management/politeness theory, he very well could have. Viewers responded with how embarrassing a given character was to the community he represented, and, therefore, essentially ranked the characters by how grossly they failed to present the line they are obligated to as members of that community. In other words, these ranked the characters by their failure to maintain face.

Gillon (2006) discusses the comedic success of *30 Rock*, arguing that its humor is achieved, paradoxically, by being unfunny. In explaining this curiosity, Gillon offers a theory meant to explain how the program creates comedic effect, why its strategy frequently fails to be funny, and how the author believes it manages to be entertaining and philosophically engaging even when not humorous. He cautions that humor is difficult to theorize, with its three most prevalent (superiority, relief, and incongruity) failing to provide a completely adequate

explanation. Gillon's central argument is that *30 Rock*'s finds its entertainment value from comic plot structures that intentionally set up and then abandon various opportunities for jokes, "comically flouting expectations about how comedy works" (324). Gillon identifies some basic components of humor in the programs *Arrested Development* and *The Office*, that he argues apply as well to *30 Rock*. The programs, he explains create competing expectations for viewers, some of which they violate in order to fulfill others, and consistently depict likeable characters. He identifies this pattern as "second-order humor." As *30 Rock* has this in common, based on a thorough analysis of plot examples, with other programs, Gillon argues that the program's subject matter is where its strength lies, as it allows for the creation of meta-humor. Because the program depicts a group of people who are all somehow connected to the production of a comedy show, it allows for the creation of meta-humor ("second-order humor become self-referential"). He provides a recurring example: the theme for a character from the fictional show sometimes plays during scenes that feature the main character, Liz Lemon, who writes for it, drawing parallels between Liz and her creation, "an overly confident, morbidly obese woman." He cites another example in which a character is unintentionally funny when he sets up a well-known-joke, only to abandon it: "You know what they say about rumors, Jack. They make a run out of mor and s." This breaking of a pattern, he argues, refers to *30 Rock*'s own tendency to achieve humor through such means. This analysis provides a thorough understanding of how one sitcom appeals to its audience.

Kocela (2009) examines the popular American sitcom, *The Office*. This article introduces its topic with a description of the show's British counterpart from Brett Mills: "By using the conventions of documentary for humour, *The Office* undermines the distinctions between sitcom and documentary, between seriousness and humour, demonstrating that the

outcomes of one can be achieved through the conventions of the other” (107). Kocela also draws from R. W. Kilborn’s explanation of the mockumentary sitcom in order to provide some context for the program: “mockumentaries poke fun at the strategies customarily employed by documentary makers to attract and hold the attention of viewers” (176). Kilborn maintains that these shows survive and thrive in significant part due to the recent “wildfire proliferation of factual/reality formats in recent years, which has in turn led to audiences becoming overly familiar, or ultimately just plain bored with, what they are being offered.” Kocela offers that this format of television gives the audience the sensation of being in the know, so to speak, and that, “what viewers look for when watching reality TV is that sense of affective connection between themselves as individuals and a ‘collective psyche’” (163). Mockumentaries, then, it would seem, offer something different from traditional sitcoms for viewers. Kocela even asserts that, while audiences are aware that reality TV is not really presenting reality, that the editing and interviews are all presented in a way that manipulates the audience into perceiving something that may not really be there. However, he argues, audiences think this is a fair trade-off if they feel as if they can connect to real people and emotions. Therefore, this could explain the appeal of the mockumentary sitcom. While it functionally looks like reality TV, audiences are able to let their guard down and not concern themselves with the probability that they are being manipulated. At the same time, since the format, camera work, and even the characters all imitate those of reality television, audiences still experience the sensation of being able to connect with and identify with “real” people.

Tackas (2011) challenges the dismissal of the sitcom as a meaningless or “infantile” component of popular culture, and supports her claims with a thorough analysis of two representatives, *Whoopi*, and *That’s My Bush!*, and their treatment of the George W. Bush

administration. *Bush!* more focused on the President's social blunders than on his politics. Based on her analysis, the program belies a lack of individual understanding of and control over political happenings, and the private realm, or "family structure," (420) is an individual's best hope for growth and fulfillment. She identifies another episode that challenged Bush's "rhetoric of compassionate conservatism" (423), portraying the main character, George, staging an execution to prove his masculinity. The program essentially questions the value and efficacy of American politics. After 9/11, Tackas explains, the sitcom *Whoopi* took aim at Bush's policies, claiming their responsibility for the economic hardships of the time. Tackas cites instances during which the program depicted an administration fearful and intolerant of diversity and difference of opinion. In concluding, Tackas remarks that television can and does influence ideologies, and that these two programs in particular presented a dissenting voice in a "stifling consensus culture of post 9/11 American Society" (432).

Pierson (2000) presents the sitcom, *Seinfeld*, as the "modern comedy of manners," with characters who are fully aware that "they are involved in an elaborate, largely contrived social game of witty dialogue, false deception, and desires" (49). He claims that what sets *Seinfeld* apart is that it presents social ineptitude and failure to follow rules as the comically absurd rather than genre-standard jokes or "wisecracks." Pierson's article is relevant to the current study as it argues that *Seinfeld* portrays characters "preoccupied with discerning, following, and sometimes evading" the complexity of social rules. He argues that one possible explanation for the program's success is its acknowledgement that social rules are unstable and constantly evolving, which appealed to a cultural disregard of the importance of these rules. Many storylines, he explains, involve the characters facing various misfortunes as a result of failing to abide by the rules, and facing consequences. The author identifies several themes characteristic of *Seinfeld*

and comedies of manners in general. For example, social constraints often dictate that personal drives (relational, professional, or otherwise) must be suppressed. Several instances are identified in the program that support this. “Maintaining social appearances” (56) is another identified theme of the program, with the failure to do so often resulting in characters facing consequences of social codes. Through its humorous storytelling, the author argues, *Seinfeld* portrays the ways that “civility” both facilitates and limits human interaction.

Paolucci and Richardson (2006) also analyze aspects of the sitcom, *Seinfeld*, according to Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical paradigm. The author argues that Goffman’s paradigm and *Seinfeld* both focus on the same issue: undiscussed or unnoticed aspects of everyday life and interaction. This also provides a foundation for the justification of the study to be conducted. This author notes that Goffman focused more on interactions occurring in institutional settings. The program’s use of humor, the authors explain, provides criticism of “our absurd and arbitrary” social rules, and provides situations audiences can empathize with. This article is qualitative in nature, as it is largely based on interpretation.

Magnotta and Strohl (2011) apply the incongruity theory of humor to perform a linguistic analysis of select scenes in *Seinfeld*. As a justification for their study, they reference *Seinfeld*’s enormous popularity during the duration of its run. They describe the basic plots of two episodes: one in which a main character, George, pretends to be a professional marine biologist in order to impress an old female acquaintance, and another, in which George is confronted for inappropriate social conduct in an office. For each episode, the authors choose one scene, which they argue, provides the necessary incongruity, and provide an in-depth analysis of each. In the first scene, George recounts a tale of how he, acting to maintain his image as a marine biologist, actually saves a whale’s life. The incongruity arises through George’s over-the-top delivery as

though he were telling an epic tale, as well as in George's act of heroism itself, as, they inform, he has been previously and consistently portrayed as a loser to the audience. In the second scene, when George is approached about his behavior, his reactions create incongruity in several ways, most interestingly, by lying, but not about the act itself. George feigns ignorance that his act was unacceptable, which contradicts obvious "social codes" embedded in "American culture" (131). Based on their analysis, they conclude that this particular sitcom does employ incongruity both for humor and to comment on human flaws as well as "exploiting them as content for humor" (133).

Beeden and de Bruin (2010) conduct a comparison between the British sitcom, *The Office*, and its American successor of the same name. They give an account of the concern that arose when an American remake was announced, as the original found much of its appeal in being "quintessentially British" (3). The original series centers on the lives of employees of a paper company and how they must interact with a socially inept boss. The remake, they argue, is successful because of its "ability to incorporate the context of the new country" (4), and their analysis includes six "parallel episodes" each of both series. They stress the importance of this cultural assimilation, explaining that what is funny in one culture may be offensive in another as cultures assign different values to various behaviors and attitudes. The authors reference cultural proximity theory, discussing how programs can instill a feeling of "cultural belonging" in their audience through "references to objects, practices, and beliefs of a particular nation" (6).

Beeden and de Bruin turn their discussion to the sitcom genre as a whole. Historically, sitcoms shared recognizable characteristics; recently, however, some have strayed away from these tropes and forged new ground, including, *The Office*. Because sitcoms derive much of their material from "socially derived problems" (7), they have a distinct ability to comment on



issues like “race, class, gender, and sexuality” (7). Their analysis focuses most on class and race issue. They separate their analysis into three sections: situations, characters, and humors. Their situational analysis includes the observation that while both programs take place in paper distribution offices, there are clear details meant to foster cultural belonging for the audience. “Visual signifiers” in the American version include a water cooler, a basketball hoop, various university memorabilia, and a Homer Simpson figure. While the national objects are less apparent in the original series, the geographical location of the workplace denotes British “industrialization and urban banality” (10). Cultural variability is evident even in the programs’ opening credits: the British depicts no people, only gray city scenes scored by a slow ballad, with scenes that echo the monotony the characters are trapped in, while the American program’s opening credits include an upbeat theme song, over scenes of characters performing their work, indicating at once a more optimistic tone for the program, in line with “community” characteristic of American sitcom. The authors choose parallel that best illustrate cultural variance in situations portrayed in the programs, each involving characters in a competition scenario. The British episode references its culture distinctly with a quiz game at a local pub, while the American episode’s humor results from a competitive basketball game between its characters. The parallel episodes illustrate the importance of the “public house” and sports in British and American culture, respectively.

For the second section of their analysis, the researchers present an analysis of each program’s four main characters. Each program’s boss treats humor in a manner representative of his culture. The British manager uses humor as a way to gain and maintain status, while the American manager uses it to entertain and build workplace camaraderie. Each program also depicts an assistant manager with a fixation on rules, power and status. While each holds a

separate volunteer position that highlights this, it is much more explored in the British version, with only a brief mention in the American pilot. Parallel employees Tim (British) and Jim (American) also provide cultural distinction. Tim is portrayed as bookish, much too smart for the position he finds himself in with an “aura of lost hope” (13), while Jim is a “jock.” While Jim shares some of Tim’s professional frustration, he is more invested in his profession, again denoting a more optimistic feel of the program.

The authors finally discuss how culture is expressed through humor. David (the British manager), as mentioned before, uses humor primarily to exert power, while Michael (the American manager), again, uses it to unify and divert. David’s humor highlights the culturally relevant British class issue, as David is continually attempting to be perceived as more competent and more powerful than others. Michael’s insensitive “Chris Rock routine” highlights the culturally significant issue of race. Beyond the episodes and instances discussed in this article, the authors maintain that these issues are examined frequently throughout the duration of their respective programs. Based on their analysis, the authors conclude that adaptations are possible, as the two programs do have some strikingly similar characteristics, but each one’s success is due to its successful cultural adaptation.

Simmons and Rich (2013) address the “war between the sexes” as a recurrent theme in sitcoms, analyzing select examples airing from 1952-2004. They present *I Love Lucy* as an example of a sitcom that excelled in “incorporating as well as influencing social mores” (1) with particular attention to gender roles. They explain a recurring theme of Lucy failure anytime she wanders outside the realm of “domesticity,” and claim that such childish representation of women was common in this era. The authors “chart the depiction of women” then, in thirteen distinct programs. Early television, they conclude, depicted the “traditional woman” as foolish,

irresponsible, impulsive, and incapable of taking care of herself without a man's intervention and supervision. They describe instances in *I Love Lucy* and *The Andy Griffith Show*, among others, in which female character, Lucy and Aunt Bee, must be subversively convinced to abandon non-domestic aspirations at which they obviously cannot succeed. As they shift their perspectives toward the 1970s' "liberated woman" (5), they describe a television generation of often-single women with roles defined more vaguely than those of their matriarchal predecessors. Female characters in this era, they explain, began to assume traditionally masculine roles and ideals, such as providing for and leading a home, and displaying a reluctance to marry, while shattering certain feminine stereotype, like being a proficient cook. The role of the "modern woman" (6) became more defined as television entered the 1980s, which perhaps proves to be an overcorrection. Programs such as *The Cosby Show* and *Roseanne*, for example, "overstate the dominance of their leading women" (6), which in turn necessitates a role reversal, rendering male characters as "simplistic boob[s]" (7), who must be parented by their wives. They conclude that while a clear progression in depiction of women in television is evident, whether it is progress or not is less sure. They argue that rather than a shift towards respectful portrayals of either gender, these changes represent only a "superficial change" in the media's treatment of femininity.

Wang and Jin'an (2008) apply face-negotiation theory to a popular television program, *Desperate Housewives*, a concept nearly identical to the current study. They analyze conflict between two different mother- and daughter-in-law dyads. The results of their analysis indeed support past findings that members of individualistic cultures are more concerned with self-face. The conflicting pairs repeatedly engage in dominating style of conflict. However, the characters

can also be observed prioritizing social harmony, which is typically associated with collectivistic cultures (6).

Staricek (2011) describes and challenges the illusion of progressiveness and modernity surrounding the program in question, *Modern Family*. A thorough analysis shows that indeed, each of the three families in the program reinforces social beliefs about gender and gender roles. She identifies a traditional mother figure in each family, based on feminine characteristics and maternal behaviors. Two of the three father figures in the program represent the traditionally masculine father as strong, authoritative and detached. The third father figure, who strays from these expectations by being sensitive and submissive, is punished by other family members, thus again reinforcing audience belief about gender roles.

This literature review has presented a thorough background for the theories and frameworks to be utilized in the study, as well as studies conducted on sitcoms in the past. Goffman's face management and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory will provide the current study with a standard by which to evaluate the actions and interactions of the characters portrayed in the popular sitcom, *Modern Family*. Using these principles of normative human behavior, the researcher will look for adherence to or deviations from these two patterns of interaction within the adult familial relationships portrayed on the program. The following section on methodology will explain how the current study will implement and further the knowledge already obtained on these frameworks.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

*Modern Family* has been referred to as “the most adored sitcom of television” (Stelter). It is currently airing its fourth season on ABC, following three consecutive Primetime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Comedy Series. With such success as a form of mass communication, it warrants study into any patterns and themes it consistently displays. The purpose of this research study is to examine this program and analyze the scenarios and interactions it presents in an effort to understand what it is portraying to the public.

The following pages will present some background information on the television show, including examples of its critical success. A list of the episodes to be analyzed and a justification will follow. The chapter will then present the research focus and the method for such an endeavor.

At the 63<sup>rd</sup> Primetime Emmy Awards, *Modern Family* received multiple honors, including best writing, and best directing (Strachan). Ty Burrell and Julie Bowen received the Emmy Award for best supporting actor and actress in a comedy series, respectively, for their roles as Phil and Claire Dunphy (Stelter). Other nominees in these two categories included the winners’ costars Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Ed O’Neil, Eric Stonestreet, and Sofia Vergara.

*Modern Family* also received its second consecutive Emmy Award for outstanding comedy series for its second season. It won this honor against *30 Rock*, a series that triumphed in this category three times in previous years. *Modern Family* has also enjoyed good ratings throughout its run. When it aired in competition with the World Series in 2011, the show managed to maintain 12.9 million viewership for the episode, “Go, Bullfrog!” (Miller). As a popular, successful piece of mass communication, then, understanding how it functions well and

continually reaches its audience will be valuable information for communication scholars, those in the entertainment industry, and consumers alike.

In order to study an artifact such as this, one needs to understand its intended function before one can understand if and how it succeeds in fulfilling that function. As a sitcom, *Modern Family*'s purpose is to draw viewers to make a profit and remain a cost-effective production to place on the air. Because it has proven to be successful in its first three seasons, the researcher thought it a valuable rhetorical text to analyze. Therefore, the researcher weighed the program against the discussed frameworks, and then, based on a personal analysis, discusses the social and rhetorical implications of the program.

The scope of this study will be limited to the first full season of the program, which aired from September 2009 to May 2010. Since the program is still airing as of the writing of this thesis, an analysis of the entire series is impossible. The researcher therefore limited the focus to season 1, which contains 24 episodes, listed in an appendix following the results chapter. This season introduces the mockumentary format of the program, as well as the depicted extended family, comprised of three separate units. Jay Pritchett, the patriarch, is recently remarried to a much younger Colombian woman, Gloria, and they live with her son from a previous marriage, Manny. Jay has two grown children, Claire and Mitchell. Claire Dunphy and her husband, Phil, have two daughters, Haley and Alex, and a son, Luke. Mitchell lives with his boyfriend, Cam, and in the first episode, the two are in the process of bringing home their recently adopted Vietnamese baby, Lily.

With the assumptions of face management and politeness theory serving as a guide, the researcher viewed each episode in sequence on the DVD of the first season, with the purpose of determining what, if any, politeness violations occur in the program. The researcher noted,

based on perception, if and when characters suffer face damage, what the cause is, and how face restoration is attempted or achieved. By viewing an entire contained season, the researcher was able to observe what, if any, themes emerge from these politeness violations. The researcher also provides an analysis based on these results of the social implications this particular program holds. Goffman assumes that “maintaining face [one’s own or another’s] is an underlying motive in all interactions” (Baldwin, 108). The researcher will attempt to determine maintaining face serves as a motivation for interactions in a scripted sitcom.

*Modern Family* is a mockumentary sitcom; it imitates a reality television program in that it depicts ostensibly (though the audience knows it is scripted) natural interaction situations and interview segments, during which characters may speak directly to the audience. During these, the characters observed in supposed everyday life get the opportunity to explain their actions or motives to an unseen interviewer. These mock interviewers will be evaluated as potentially the characters’ primary way to engage in the “supporting and maintaining of [their] own and the other’s publicly presented self-image,” also known as facework (Baldwin, 108). The researcher, therefore, will take careful notice of what explanations the characters provide for the audience that their fellow characters are not present to hear, to determine if they are indeed engaging in facework, and attempting to either maintain a healthy image or restore a threatened or damaged one. These interviews provide the characters an ideal time to re-present their images to the audience, and the researcher will determine if they do in fact take advantage of them for that purpose.

## Chapter 4: Results

The researcher found multiple face-threatening acts and instances of face loss in the program. Because of the program's mockumentary format, the researcher also identified times when the characters used them to promote and restore face. Due to the vast number of these instances, the researcher only includes here those face-threats performed or suffered only by the main characters introduced. They are discussed here by character in order of episode, with identified themes presented following.

### Pilot

In the opening scene, Claire orders her eldest daughter Haley to change her skirt as the one she is wearing is too revealing. After she gets little support from her distracted husband, Phil, she takes advantage of the interview segment to explain her harsh behavior: "I just don't want my kids to make the same mistakes I made. [If I can avoid this], I've done my job." Phil interjects, "Our job," to which she replies, "Right, I will have done our job." In this brief exchange, Claire restores face for herself and simultaneously threatens Phil's face by implying to the audience that she must be harsh to make up for Phil's shortcomings.

Gloria, at Manny's soccer game with Jay, gets very angry when another parent heckles the coach to take Manny out. She immediately turns it around, and calls into question the skills of this woman. Immediately following, Jay is mistaken for Gloria's father by another parent. This incident calls into question Jay's sense of desirability. Jay, having lost face when his wife lost her cool, confronts her later and tells her not to be "so emotional all the time." Gloria disagrees, but later restores Jay's sense of belonging and acceptance: "You should only care what I think, and I love you, and I don't care how old you are." However, this is not enough for Jay, who, at the mall, shops for "younger clothes."



Mitch and Cam are introduced as they are boarding a plane home with their newly-adopted daughter, Lily. When one passenger remarks, “Look at that baby with those cream puffs,” Mitchell immediately perceives face threat; he proceeds to give “the speech” to all the passengers, calling them “small-minded” and “ignorant,” attempting to repair the positive face damage suffered at the assumed racial slur. When Cam points out that in fact, Lily is holding cream puffs in her hand, Mitchell sits down, obviously embarrassed. Later, as they are bringing Lily in, Mitchell, concerned, says to Cam, “Maybe she can’t fall asleep unless she feels a woman’s shape. So, here.” Cam obviously suffers face damage here, as he snaps back at Mitchell. He immediately takes advantage of the interview to restore face by claiming scientific reasons for his recent weight gain: “Apparently, your body does a nesting, a very maternal, primal thing where it retains nutrients, some sort of molecular, physiological thing.” Mitchell does not participate in this restorative facework (“I’m not saying anything”), which further frustrates Cam. Cam suffers face loss again when he shows Mitchell the artwork he had completed in Lily’s room while they were gone. Mitchell snaps, “Can you call Andre? Have him paint something a little less gay?” In this question, both positive and negative face suffer, as Cam’s labor of love is quickly dismissed and he is rudely asked to change it.

Later Mitchell reveals that he has not told his family about Lily yet, because they are judgmental, and he wanted to avoid the confrontation. He explains that his father is not comfortable with his lifestyle. Cameron, who knew this would happen, has already invited the whole family over to meet Lily.

Later, the rest of the family arrives at the Tucker-Pritchett home. While Cam gets Lily ready, Mitchell prepares to give his family the news: “About a year ago, Cam and I started feeling this longing for something more, like maybe a baby.” Jay immediately shoots down the

idea, arguing that kids need a mother, and they should get a pet if they are “bored.” Gloria takes the opportunity, not to stand up for Mitch but to give Jay a hint about how she wants him to treat Manny: “I support you, Mitchell, even though you are not my son.” Gloria subtly calls into question Jay’s parenting ability (threatening positive face), while appearing to restore face for Mitch. The hits keep coming for Mitchell, when Claire very subversively threatens face by masking her opinion behind Jay: “I think what Dad is trying to say is that, Mitchell, you’re a little up tight, kids bring chaos, and you don’t handle it well.” When Jay assumes, due to Cam’s absence, that the announcement is their break-up, Jay, again with no regard to Mitchell’s face, calls Cam a “drama queen” and essentially congratulates Mitchell on the split.

At that moment, Cam arrives with Lily, to everyone’s shock. Jay attempts to restore his own and Mitchell’s face, while the rest of the family fawns over Lily. Jay offers the couple support and accounts for his remarks (“It’s not like I wrote the book on fatherhood . . . I’m still screwing up. . . Anyway, I’m happy for ya.”), without ever apologizing, thus maintaining self-face. This is enough for the family, and they end the episode happy in each other’s company.

### **Run for Your Wife**

This episode opens with the Dunphys and Pritchetts preparing for the first day of school. Claire and Phil explain to the audience how difficult it is to get the kids out of the house on time. Claire points out that she wakes up an hour earlier than Phil, again framing herself as the more responsible, hardworking parent. When the kids finally get out of the house, Phil surprises Claire with plans to spend the whole day together. Claire, has been looking forward to a day to herself and is not pleased. When Phil offers to run with her, she tries to manipulate the situation first indirectly, saving face, then directly. She tells Phil she is sure she can outrun him, threatening his image as an athlete. Phil’s corrective facework includes comments throughout

the day that indicate his physical strength, and eventually he challenges her to a race to completely restore his image. She agrees, and he continues taunting her as they prepare for the race. Claire has an easy lead, but eventually decides to let Phil win the race, knowing that he has missed the kids. She does this, knowing that he could “use a win,” and performs corrective facework for the damage she caused.

At Jay and Gloria’s house, they argue over Manny’s choice to wear a traditional Colombian poncho. Jay does not want Manny to look foolish. He agrees to take Manny to school, but Gloria finds the poncho in the back of the car leading to an argument. Jay attempted to save face by having Manny take off the poncho in the car, rather than in front of Gloria, but ends up losing face because he appears manipulative and subversive. He confides that he did not want Manny to be teased because of the poncho. Gloria insists on taking the poncho back to Manny.

At the Tucker-Pritchett home, Mitchell works to baby-proof the house, while Cam dresses up Lily for a photo-shoot. When the two address the audience, Cam says he is embarrassed he has forgotten to dress Lily up as Cher. “*That’s embarrassing?*” Mitchell replies, threatening Cam’s image as a normal father. Mitchell and Cam argue the virtues of being practical and fun parents, respectively, each implying a parenting failure in the other. When Mitchell concedes and dances with Lily, he knocks her head into the wall. Cam, though given the opportunity, commits not face-threatening act as the two work together to make sure she is okay. After a visit to the doctor, Mitchell explains that he does not feel equipped as a father, and Cam makes great efforts to restore face for him: “What are you talking about? We are new at this! You took care of all the adoption paperwork. Now, Who are amazing parents?” Mitchell acknowledges that he brings something to the family that Cam cannot bring.

This episode does not show the entire family interacting together, but each couple, again, has reconciled by its conclusion, despite some clear face attacks throughout.

### **The Bicycle Thief**

This episode opens with three segments that feature each of the fathers answering the question, “What’s the key to being a great dad?” Phil responds, “Be their buddy.” Claire counters, “*That’s* your answer?” again calling into question his competence as a father. The storyline involves Phil and Claire arguing over getting Luke (who is using his sister’s old bike until he learns to be responsible) a new bike. When Jay mocks Luke’s bike as the family are out riding together, Phil threatens Claire’s autonomy by stating plans to get Luke a new bike that day. Phil takes the next opportunity to restore face in front of the audience by explaining that, in essence, sometimes a man has to stand up for himself, but not before making sure Claire is out of earshot, thus preventing further face loss for them both. Phil buys Luke a new bike, and attempts to prevent self-face loss by instructing him to take care of it and not make Phil look like a “jerk” for buying it. Later that day, Phil sees the bike abandoned on a sidewalk, and takes it, to teach Luke a lesson. On the way home, an attractive neighbor asks Phil to help her get back into her home as she has locked herself out. Phil hesitates and looks toward the camera (as though aware of possible face-loss before the audience) before he agrees. Directly after that, he restores face by explaining to the camera that while he is attracted to her, he would never act on it “while my wife is still alive.” Upon leaving the house he sees that the bike has been taken, from him this time. He attempts to prevent face loss by buying another bike, rather than explaining the situation to Claire. When Phil confronts Luke for his carelessness, he learns that Luke has his bike in the garage. He restores face by reframing the event for the camera: “I taught some random kid a valuable lesson by stealing his bike.” Phil’s plan to further save face by returning

the new bike to the scene (and avoid explaining to Claire where he was when it was stolen) is thwarted when Claire finds him leaving the house with the bike. Phil lies to Claire, saying the bike was stolen while he was getting gas, and Claire is surprisingly supportive, telling him he does not need to hide things from her. At that moment, however, the neighbor arrives with the bike, and explains, "One of the neighbors put it in my garage while you were in my bedroom." Claire is visibly upset at this, but this issue is never resolved within the episode.

Mitchell and Cam are getting Lily ready for "toddler time," an activity for young families to socialize. Mitchell again shows his fear of losing face by not being accepted as a gay father, by asking Cam to change his pink, paisley shirt, and "tone it down." At the event, when each parent is instructed to introduce their child by dancing them in, Cam participates in Mitchell's preventative facework by agreeing to "dance like a straight guy." Mitchell tries to get Lily to "scoot and grab," like the other kids her age to avoid looking like an incompetent parent, while Cam continues to downplay his flamboyant personality in conversation with the other parents. When another child receives praise for stacking blocks, Mitchell tries to maintain face by placing a stack of blocks in front of Lily. When a facilitator offers a video-tape of the event to him, Mitchell quickly collects Cam and leaves to avoid a confrontation over stealing "a baby's intellectual property."

Jay and Gloria tell the audience of the weekend trip they have planned while Manny spends time with his father. Jay compares Manny to "fog at an airport," lamenting the fact that he and his wife cannot make these trips often, and sending Gloria a message of non-acceptance. Gloria instructs Jay to help Manny install a ceiling fan before they go, in an effort to encourage bonding. The frustration of the task gets the best of Jay, and he loses face when he tells Manny he does not want him around. When Jay later finds out that Manny's dad has cancelled in order

to extend a gambling trip, Jay works to save face for Manny by telling him that his father could not be there because he gave up his plane seat for an elderly person. To further restore face for Manny, Jay uses the limousine and time off intended for a weekend with Gloria to take Manny to Disneyland so that he will not feel unwanted.

### **Come Fly with Me**

This episode first alludes to the uncomfortable dynamic between Jay and Phil. When Phil expresses surprise that Haley's boyfriend does not seem at ease with him, Claire points out that Phil still walks on "eggshells" around her father. Phil argues that they are in fact "buds," and in an effort to feel and seem accepted, shows up at Jay's house "to just hang out."

We find out that Jay has been putting together a model airplane which he intends to fly alone later that day. In an interview, Gloria inadvertently demeans Jay's safe-seeming hobbies by listing some of her ex-husband's, including jumping from helicopters and wrestling alligators.

Mitchell is appalled to learn that Cam shops at Costco. When Cam labels him a "snob," Mitchell restores face by countering, "No, I'm discerning." However, Mitchell ends up loving the place, thrilled at the shopping possibilities, to the point where Cam has to gently reign him in, refusing to pick up two more boxes of diapers. Cam reminds Mitchell of his sour attitude towards the store moments before, but commits no extensive face-threatening acts.

This episode features the first extensive interaction between Jay and Phil. When Phil arrives, both lose face, as Jay's sense of autonomy is threatened, and makes it clear that he is not enthusiastic about Phil joining him. After we observe Phil standing idly by while Jay continues to work on his model plane, Phil attempts to save self- and mutual-face by describing Jay as "not a talker. Or a hugger. Once he ran over my foot with a car. . . But basically, we're buds." When the model is complete, Jay suggests they go fly it. Outside Phil asks for a turn, but is flatly

denied, so he hints at wanting to try it, “I should get one of those. I’ve always loved planes.” Phil keeps talking in an effort to connect with Jay, who, in an effort to get rid of him, suggests he grab a hoop, “go to the far, far, far end of the field,” and hold it so Jay can fly the plane through it. With this, Jay is able to perform facework for both himself and Phil. He is able to restore his sense of autonomy by getting Phil to leave, and in so doing include Phil in an activity with him, but, unfortunately, ends up crashing the plane into Phil’s face. When Phil and Jay arrive at the Dunphy home, Jay loses face when Phil, Claire, and Gloria insinuate or outright accuse him of doing it on purpose. Claire is especially upset, and attempts to salvage Phil’s image by reprimanding her father for the way he treats Phil. She explains to him that his mistreatment of Phil threatens her face as much as Phil’s (“How do you think that makes *me* feel, Dad?) and shows him to the door. Jay defends himself by reminding Gloria and Claire that Phil is not technically his son, which prompts Gloria to remind him that Manny is not either. Jay heads for the door but, rather than leaving, opts to restore face for both him and Phil, by apologizing and explaining that he does like him. Mitchell and Cam have arrived now, and are threatened by Jay’s sudden acceptance of Phil “since he’s never said anything like that to my boyfriend.” Gloria encourages both Cam and Manny to join the group hug, while Claire subtly thanks Jay. It is clear once more that by the end of the episode, face is restored for all, despite some overt threats to both positive and negative face.

### **The Incident**

This installment introduces Jay’s ex-wife, and Claire and Mitchell’s mother, DeDe. Without warning, she shows up at Mitchell and Cam’s home, asking for Mitchell’s help in getting past what the family refers to as “the incident.” Old footage reveals that DeDe became quite intoxicated and made a humiliating scene at Jay and Gloria’s wedding, which she attended

to prove she had “moved on.” By insulting the bride and groom she damaged both their image and her own. She explains that new spirituality and a new relationship require that she find closure regarding her shameful outburst at the wedding. She says, “When I think about the awful things I said to Gloria, and Jay, and you and Claire, I feel such guilt.” In essence, then, her entire visit is an act of restorative facework, but she is unwilling to perform it herself. Mitchell is reluctant at first, suggesting they repress the event rather than address it. She begs Mitchell to convince the family to invite her to Sunday dinner, and Mitchell, anxious to save face for her, agrees. “Everyone’s mad at me. Maybe you could pave the way so I can apologize.” Cam describes the mother-son relationship with the audience this way: “There’s a fish in nature that swims around with its babies in its mouth. That fish would look at Mitchell’s relationship with his mother and say, ‘That’s messed up.’” Here Cam implies that Mitchell and his mother have an unhealthy attachment. Mitchell is not present to defend himself.

With Dede’s visit, many characters reminisce on times when she threatened face for them. Cam tells the audience that her most recent Christmas gift to him was exercise equipment and a salad spinner. This obviously caused face loss for him, as he recaps: “I gave her a beautiful pair of diamond earrings, and she gave me a hint.” Claire also laments: “You know how growing up we all have that voice inside our head, telling us we’re not good enough? Well, mine was outside my head driving me to school.” When Mitchell brings Dede over to Claire to initiate the image repair, he greets her with, “Do you remember how Mom gave up a career to raise us?” His attempt at image restoration is thwarted, however, when DeDe first insults Claire’s appearance and then undermines her authority as a parent. When Haley tells DeDe that she Claire “won’t even let me go to a concert,” DeDe tells Haley about a time that Claire went to a concert with an old boyfriend and did not return until late in the night. Claire suffers both



positive and negative face damage here, as she is made to look hypocritical in front of her daughter while her mother gives her daughter something of a justification to rebel. When Claire implies that Mitchell has a dysfunctional relationship with his mother, he attempts to save face by blurting out, “If anything, you’re the one who has a screwed up relationship with Mommy – with Mom.” Mitchell loses face with this confirming response, but only briefly as Claire agrees, provided he clear it with “Daddy.”

When Mitchell explains the situation to Jay, he also calls into question Mitchell and DeDe’s relationship, commenting, “Still her errand boy, I see.” Mitchell attempts to restore face by claiming that he is “trying to piece this family back together.” Jay agrees that it would be good to get the incident behind them all, but that Gloria will never agree to see her. He instructs Mitchell to bring DeDe over, but not to let Gloria know that Jay knows about it. He says, “I would love to get this thing behind us, but Gloria would never forgive me if I pulled a fast one on her. That’s why *you’re* going to pull a fast one on her, and *I’m* not going to like it one bit.” With this stunt, Jay is able to prevent losing face with Gloria, but only at the cost of damaging Mitchell, who, defeated, agrees to this.

Later, at the Dunphy home, Jay and Gloria are the last to arrive. Jay, again preventing face loss, acts surprised to see DeDe, and says to Mitchell, “So you just spring it on her like this? This is a terrible idea by *you*.” making Mitchell appear unsympathetic and incompetent and himself understanding and loyal. DeDe finally appears as though she is going to restore face for all by apologizing and moving on. She begins a speech explaining her pain at losing Jay to a “young, and smart, and beautiful woman.” Gloria decides to forgive DeDe, and Mitchell claims credit for it: We’re all gonna move past this, because of me, who is not a mama’s boy, but is a caring person with wisdom and emotional insight.” Mitchell’s final attempt at face restoration

fails, however, when DeDe physically attacks Gloria. The family pulls them apart, each placing blame on the other, until Haley's boyfriend, Dylan, saves face for the entire group by accounting for the outburst with the passionate, accepting, and loving nature of the whole family. As Dylan sings the family a song written for Haley, Gloria and DeDe share a smile and a nod, once again resolving major family tension rather easily.

### **Coal Digger**

The entire plot of this episode centers on a face-threatening act, which Claire commits against Gloria, and how each member of the family works to save face for both or either party. The first line in the episode comes from Jay: "Gloria, if you want to get together with the girls later, I can just, you know, watch the football game or something." He appears flexible and understanding, while allowing Gloria to maintain her sense of independence, and ultimately, gaining himself the chance to watch a game uninterrupted. As clever as this is, Gloria reminds him that the family is coming over later, so that will not work out.

Claire finds out via phone call, that Luke has been in a fight at school, so she and Phil agree to meet at the principal's office. Upon arrival, they learn from Gloria and Jay that the other student involved was Manny. When the principal catches on that everyone in the room is related, he suggests that they simply work it out at home, offering a final consolation that they are good boys, but "it's just tough when one kid's a little different." Both Gloria and Claire quickly agree "yes," each implying that he must mean the other's son. On the way home, the show cuts between the couples in their car, and the audience sees the way each couple plans to save face. Claire wants to cancel their plans, while Phil encourages her to "talk it out" with Gloria. Gloria wants to talk things over with Claire, but Jay encourages her to "sweep it under the rug."

Nevertheless, the entire family gathers later as planned for food and football. Phil encourages Luke and Manny to talk through their differences, but Jay interrupts with a few terse questions directing the boys to behave better, thus calling into question Phil's competence as a father and mediator. The boys leave to play, and Gloria and again lose face when they realize that both have brought pies for the family's dessert. Phil suggests again that they sort through their differences. Gloria seems willing, but Claire remains avoidant, perhaps motivated by a fear of losing face in such a confrontation.

Phil urges them to reconcile until Gloria finally admits that she has never felt Claire's acceptance. Claire, then, has failed to meet Gloria's positive face needs of belonging and connection by treating her as an outsider. Having lost face, Claire engages in restorative facework by claiming that Gloria has misinterpreted events, therefore making herself appear innocent of any relational wrong-doing. Claire presents a positive self-face again, claiming that she has always made efforts to make Gloria and Manny feel welcome and part of the family. She concludes, "We really love having you and Manny in our family, so you don't have to be so defensive." Happy to move on, Gloria hugs Claire, and it seems the whole family has been able to restore face.

Luke and Manny arrive, laughing and having fun together, eagerly recounting all the things they fought about at school. The family laughs, enjoying the stories, until Luke, enjoying the attention, innocently tells them that he teased Manny "because his mom used to dig coal." The laughter stops, as the family becomes visibly uncomfortable at this remark. Gloria asks Luke to explain the remark and he says he heard his mom say it. Phil ushers the boys away to prevent them from adding any more to the tension, but the damage is already. Claire and Gloria have each sustained damage to their positive faces: Gloria because her fears of being unaccepted by

Claire are confirmed in addition to having her reason for being with Jay questioned; and Claire, because she has been shown to be untruthful, disloyal, and mean. Claire begins denying any memory of calling Gloria a gold digger, but Luke, again innocently, lists several occasions when she said it. Embarrassed, Gloria leaves the room.

Claire tries to save face in front of the audience: “If I say something that everyone is thinking, does that make me a mean person? Or does it make me a brave person? One who is courageous enough to stand up and say something, behind someone’s back, to ten-year-old . . .” She trails off, realizing that she may not be able to restore her image by reframing events. Back in the kitchen, She threatens Jay’s face when trying to restore her own: “You know what, Dad? It was a year ago, and it was a natural question to ask. She’s a beautiful, hot woman, and you’re . . .” Jay continues to condemn Claire’s comments: “You know, this is exactly why we sweep things under the rug, so people don’t get hurt.”

Phil finds Gloria and attempts to save face for her and Claire by explaining Claire’s comment. He tells her the family is protective, that Claire made the comment before getting to know Gloria, and that the family now understands that Gloria has no ulterior motives for her relationship with Jay. This seems to restore face well enough, as Gloria is ready to forgive Claire when she apologizes, on the condition that Claire experience the same embarrassment by jumping, fully clothed, into the family pool.

Mitchell experiences his own face loss in this episode as well, when his father again shows a lack of acceptance for his lifestyle and questions his masculinity. At Cam’s prompting, Mitchell reads up on football, in an effort to connect and fit in with both his dad and his boyfriend (“part of being in a relationship is pretending to enjoy your partner’s interest). The three watch the game as the Claire-Gloria drama unfolds elsewhere in the house. Cam is thrilled

with Mitchell's efforts, but Jay is less impressed. Mitchell attempts to keep up with Cam and Jay's game commentary, but Jay shoots down Mitchell's strategic suggestions: "Blitzing wouldn't have helped them, get outta here!" Mitchell leaves the room, once again feeling that his father does not accept him. When Mitchell leaves the room disappointed, Jay calls him "such a girl." "Nice apology," Mitchell counters, justifying his feelings, and further questioning Jay's relational competence.

In spite of all this, after Claire jumps in the pool, prompting entire family to forget their grievances and push each other in to enjoy a spontaneous fun evening.

### **En Garde**

This episode begins as the family is gathered all together at Manny's fencing competition. Manny is clearly doing quite well, and as the family cheers him on, Jay yells, "That's my boy!" once again threatening Mitchell's sense of acceptance and belonging. When Mitchell then comments on Cam's over-the-top method of filming the event, Cam restores face in an interview: "Any monkey can shoot home movies; I pride myself on shooting home *films*."

Jay continues threatening the faces of his children by telling Phil and Claire how glad he is to finally have trophies in the house and eagerly explaining how much he enjoys having "a kid in your house who's the best at something." Phil and Claire address this comment in an interview segment, praising Alex for her general competence. They conclude that Haley is beautiful and will therefore end up with someone who is the best at something. The couple cannot think of a good thing to say about Luke and finally confide, "We dropped the ball a little on that one." Phil announces his plans to Claire to make Luke the best at something, by logging 10,000 hours of baseball practice with him. Phil seems disappointed when Luke proves to have

little natural ability, but lights up later when Luke becomes an asset in showing a buyer that a house is “kid-friendly.” Excitedly, he tells Claire that Luke is a natural salesman.

Later that day, when Mitchell picks a fight with Cam, he brings up a childhood event where Mitchell obviously lost face. They tell the audience that Claire and Mitchell were an accomplished childhood figure skating team, but that Claire quit the team before the regional championships, causing Mitchell to lose a sense of both acceptance and autonomy. Mitchell tells Cam, however, that resentment is “not a good color on me, kind of like you and yellow. It makes you look like the sun.” In trying to take attention off an embarrassing grudge he is holding, Mitchell fails to meet Cam’s positive face needs of acceptance.

Jay’s self-image is threatened later when Manny, without explanation tells him he has retired from fencing. Jay, out of concern for his face as father of a successful child, pushes Manny to reconsider, and Gloria agrees when she finds out it is because Manny does not want to fight a girl. To their delight, Manny finally agrees.

When the family shows up to support Manny once again, Cam encourages Mitchell to work things out with his sister, forcing Mitchell to consider his self-image as caring and considerate by claiming that the whole family can feel the tension. When Claire shows up, Cam tramples on Mitchell’s autonomy by telling her, “Mitchell still resents you for quitting the figure skating team when you were kids. . . Work it out.” Forced into a confrontation, Mitchell lets Claire know how he really feels. “You stole my moment, Claire.” Claire attempts to lessen the offence by reminding him that it happened 21 years ago. When Mitchell threatens face by calling her act “selfish,” she restores face by claiming that, as she was bigger than he, she was afraid he would not be able to lift her and he might get hurt. When Claire asks for forgiveness, Mitchell hugs her and lifts her, thus proving the strength she called into question.

Inside, Jay and Gloria encourage Manny to fight his best fight and not hold anything back. When his opponent's caretaker reveals that she is an orphan, Jay and Gloria become nervous, presumably because they have just encouraged Manny to be as competitive as possible, and the family could appear unsympathetic and mean-spirited because of her circumstances. They gesture at Manny to go easy on her but he misinterprets their signals and enthusiastically indicates his intention to defeat her.

Outside, Mitchell and Claire are lamenting their relationship with their dad. Claire expresses surprise at Mitchell's belief that figure skating would have made Jay proud, and Mitchell agrees and apologizes. Claire saves face for him, explaining that she always felt guilty for quitting, believing it was something important to him. Mitchell confides that he was losing the chance to skate is not what upset him. Rather, he explains, "I miss being on your team." Claire takes this all in, stands up and immediately strikes a skating pose, inviting Mitchell to finish the routine. "Don't drop me," she warns.

Inside, Manny is far out-performing his opponent. Gloria, wanting to appear sympathetic, offers to take the girl to ice cream, only to find out she is diabetic. They all walk out, Jay carrying Manny's huge trophy. He hurries out to put it "in the trunk" to avoid being noticed and thought overly-competitive and cruel. While Jay tells the family he is not sure if he should be proud or humiliated, they run into Mitchell and Claire who are still performing their skating routine on the cement. Gloria comments, "How about now?" implying that their behavior is something to be mocked, but the family continues to watch as the two siblings engender a sense of acceptance, belonging, and love in each other. In one final act of face-saving, Jay displays Manny's trophy right next to an old photograph of his children in their skating costumes.

### **Great Expectations**

Phil surprises Claire with a very creatively presented bracelet for their anniversary. As she fawns over it, she instructs Phil to open his present, a card on the dresser. Phil is disappointed to find coupons for things like “free hugs” but even so, praises Claire’s creativity. Claire presents an image of a thoughtful gift-giver, saying she thought of it because Phil “never want[s] anything.” Phil smiles and says nothing, maintaining face for both of them. He does not appear selfish and demanding, and Claire’s gift-giving abilities are affirmed. However, to the audience, Phil reveals that there are many things he wants, and Claire is not a good gift-giver. When flowers come to the door for Claire later, Phil indirectly hints that her gift was disappointing, apologizing for going overboard when he only got “little coupons.” Having lost face receiving such a meaningless gift, Phil is able to express his frustration without an outright face-threatening act. Claire acts surprised though, telling him his actual present is coming later and that he will love it. This is revealed to be an act of face restoration when she tells the audience: “I’ve got nothing.” Later that day, as the couple prepare dinner, a stranger arrives at the door and greets Phil, who does not recognize him. Claire excitedly introduces him as a member of Phil’s favorite band, here for a private concert, and tells Phil, who had previously questioned her gift-giving creativity to “read it and weep,” ostensibly restoring her image. Phil, though confused, acts as though this is a wonderful surprise, thus participating in her image restoration. In separate interviews, Claire reveals the significance of the band, supposedly Phil’s favorite, while Phil wonders if he can even pronounce the name correctly. Phil is able to sustain the act for a while longer, until the musician finally refuses to continue the charade

Later, as the man is playing for Phil and Claire, she leaves to get some tea, and Phil continues to act as though he knows the player, asking him to just play the “classics,” when



prompted for requests. The musician catches on however and becomes angry but Phil asks for his help in maintaining face for Claire: "Please don't say anything to Claire. She made a mistake. This means so much to her, and I don't want to hurt her feelings." Finally, Phil confesses, "It's not our song, Claire." Claire, embarrassed, replies, "Oh, I'm an idiot. You're so sweet and nice and I can't even give you a decent anniversary present!" Phil assures her that he knows how much she loves him and thanks her for the "awesome gift of "a new song." This is enough restoration for Claire, as the couple share a dance in the living room.

Jay tells the viewers that that evening is "Jay's night," a time when each of the grandchildren comes over for dinner, movies, and a sleepover. While the couple prepare for the evening, Gloria sings a very unpleasant lullaby to Lily. Though obviously annoyed, Jay attempts to end the singing without directly questioning her ability: "So, Lily really likes that, that singing?" When Gloria replies that she does, Jay says to himself, "So Lily's deaf." Jay greets each of the grandchildren as they arrive. When Haley tells him there is party going on down the street with her friends, Jay finds a non-threatening way to achieve his goal (having the grandchildren all stay). He tells her. "When somebody invites you over, the last thing you want to do is insult them." When Haley misinterprets this remark in her favor, Jay replies, "I'm glad we agree" and instructs her to change into her pajamas. Haley agrees, but later tries to sneak out. Jay greets her outside the house, pretending to change a light bulb, "There! Now I can see everything that goes on around here," further maintaining his autonomy by keeping his granddaughter at the family event. Later, Gloria believes Jay has taken things to far when he reveals he has hidden Haley's shoes and "taken [her] freedom." She discusses this with him, careful to not threaten his face, by explaining that she was the same way towards her grandfather when she was young. "It's great that you want to spend time with your granddaughter, but is this

really that way?” She is able to get Jay to reconsider his actions while simultaneously providing positive face support. Jay allows Haley’s boyfriend Dylan into the house to pick her up. Dylan inadvertently affirms Jay’s face by asking for some dinner and staying to finish the movie. Haley never makes it to the party after all.

Mitchell and Cam realize they have not had any time away from Lily since her arrival and plan to go out with an old friend, Sal. At dinner, Sal proves to be a wildly uninhibited person, pressuring them to go on a trip with her. When the couple repeatedly mention needing to be responsible for Lily, Sal makes comments like, “You should kill that baby.” When she leaves the table the two discuss whether they heard her correctly, and the possibility that she was only joking. To maintain face, Mitchell plans to “mention Lily and see what she says,” while avoiding a confrontation. Sal threatens their image as a fun couple, calling them “the guys who always bring Lily.” When they do confront it, they realize that Sal has been feeling very jealous of Lily, as she emotionally recounts the things in their relationship that Lily has made impossible (such as calling in the middle of the night after a bad dream). Mitch and Cam, eager to save face for her, apologize for being less available, and assure her that she is welcome any time, preserving Sal’s image of self and the relationship.

### **Undeck the Halls**

On Christmas Eve at the Dunphy house, the entire family are dressed in homemade sweaters “just until Grandma can see them” on a video call, during which Phil shows his father the tree, and makes special mention of the ornaments that Mr. Dunphy gave to the family. Phil and Claire both work to meet the positive face needs of Phil’s parents by acting very appreciative of their gifts. The call is cut short, however, when Claire discovers what looks like a cigarette burn on the sofa. When no one claims responsibility, she declares, “Now I’ve got a family of

liars and smokers!” threatening face for each of her children. Claire explains that if no one will confess, she and Phil will be forced to punish all three. In an effort to get the culprit to speak up, Phil proclaims that the next step will be to “cancel Christmas.” Claire shoots him a look, and the two discuss Phil’s “habit of making big pronouncements to the kids” to the audience. However, Claire questions his ability to follow through on them. Back in the living room, Phil moves toward the Christmas tree hoping to prompt a confession and maintain an image of following through. When no one provides one, he proclaims Dunphys to be liars and removes the tree. Later, Phil and Claire discuss their potential face loss as “the parents who cancelled Christmas.” They discuss the consequences of lifting the punishment, and Claire fears that doing so would lose face when the kids “never take any of our threats seriously again.”

Claire and Phil are able to avoid potential face loss when Alex confesses to burning the couch. Later, as the family celebrate together, they realize that the position of one of the Christmas ornament caused concentrated sunlight to burn the couch. They commend Alex for making the sacrifice so her siblings could have Christmas, but lose face again when Haley say, “You were gonna take Christmas away for something that none of us did?” making them appear reactionary and unjust. Phil tries to restore face by making another sweeping suggestion – taking the whole family to Italy – but its obvious by Claire’s expression that he will again need to restore face when this trip falls through.

Jay and Manny are watching Christmas movies together. When a monster shrieks onto the screen, frightening Jay, Manny yells, “Inocente!” indicating that Jay has been the victim of a Christmas prank, according to Colombian tradition. Jay, angry at having appeared foolish, tersely scolds them for playing jokes on the wrong holiday. Later, he provides a detailed schedule of events planned for the holiday, each related to a tradition he held when Claire and

Mitchell were young. When Manny remarks on some other Colombian traditions, Jay threatens his and Gloria's autonomy to celebrate according to their culture by sarcastically reminding them that they are not in Colombia. He further threatens face by saying, "Maybe next year we'll talk about your little Colombian traditions. Maybe." Jay rethinks his attitudes later when a family member tells him he now has the opportunity to create new memories with the people close to him. When Jay arrives home, he shocks his family by announcing a "new rule: when we're in Colombia we do Colombian things; when we're in America, we do American things." However, he immediately restores positive face for both him and his family by yelling, "Inocente!" and producing fireworks for them to have a traditional Colombian Christmas. This allows them the freedom to celebrate as they want, while also showing them that Jay accepts them and wants to participate with them.

Mitchell and Cam are waiting in a mall line to see Santa Claus with Lily, when a choir group appears, angering Cam. "It's them," he tells Mitchell. He explains his reaction to the audience, revealing that he formed a popular caroling group a few years back, only to be ousted when one member "staged a coup." This story tells of both positive and negative face damage that Cam suffered because of this group. The group makes their way to Cam, thus further threatening his autonomy by forcing him to watch them perform without him as he waits in line. "Is there a slap mark on my face?" Cam remarks as they leave. When it is Lily's turn to see Santa, Mitchell notices that the larger, more authentic-looking Santa has been replaced by a much smaller man. He works to maintain autonomy by requesting a "Santa that actually looks like Santa." Outside they run into the man and find out that their remarks cost him his job as he helps them load their car. The couple maintains face by calling it "terrible" that someone would complain. Feeling guilty, Cam invites the man, who has just revealed that he lives in his car, to

come for dinner that night, possibly as a means of maintaining face only before themselves, as they do not believe he knows what they said. After finding out through conversation that the man has a history of violence and a bad temper, they agree to not confess their actions at the mall. Again restoring their self-image, they decide things will be even after a meal and a place to do laundry. When the time comes to dismiss their guest, they meet the caroling group again. Cam loses face once more as the group sings outside his door, rubbing his “nose in it.” Their guest convinces Cam to forgive them, explaining that he forgave them for losing his job. At this prompting Cam goes out to compliment the group and is attacked again when the leader tell him his apology is “off-key.” The visitor assaults the leader and saves face for Cam, yelling, “You were nice, he was naughty,” before running off.

The final scene features the whole family eating Christmas dinner together, again implying that any loss of face has been restored.

### **Up All Night**

This episode again opens in the Dunphy home. After playing outside with Luke, Phil suddenly experiences an intense pain in his side. Alex offers to call 911 and Phil quickly brushes it off. To the audience he reveals why: “The firemen in our town have a reputation for being hot. Do I resent that? Of course not. These guys are my friends. . . My question is: what’s hot?” Phil’s facework here includes presenting an image that has no reason to be threatened by attractive men, while also calling into question the validity of the label. Later that night, Phil’s pain has worsened, but he still tries unsuccessfully to avoid needing an ambulance. When the firemen arrive, Phil is alarmed to learn that Claire has changed into a “clingy” blouse, presumably for the firemen. Phil threatens her image as a faithful and conscientious wife by remarking, “I’m out here convulsing in agony and you’re looking for cute tops to wear?” Claire attempts to repair

face for both by claiming she only wore it out of convenience. At the hospital later, Phil is preparing for his procedure and tells the nurse that his wife got dressed so nicely for his kids' "new fireman daddy," making Claire look completely unsympathetic. She continues to deny it until Phil, under sedatives, appears unconscious. She whispers to him, "I might have gotten dressed up just a tiny bit." As she exits, Phil whispers, "I knew it," causing Claire to further lose face.

When Phil is ready to be discharged from the hospital he tells Claire that he is feeling great "except for that fireman thing." Claire apologizes profusely, telling Phil that with her hectic lifestyle, she just took the chance to feel attractive. Phil remains distant but reveals to the audience that he was not bothered by Claire's actions at all. He just wanted her to owe him something. Claire is visibly disappointed at this, as his lack of forgiveness constitutes positive face loss for her, until, on the way, three very attractive women surround Phil and thank him for spending so much time entertaining them in the hospital. Phil tries to prevent face loss by obscuring Claire's view of the woman, but Claire's face says that she knows exactly what happened.

Jay is preparing to surprise his family with a nice dinner out, but loses face when Manny's father, Javier, shows up unannounced with a boat, and Manny clearly expresses disinterest in what Jay has to say. Javier brings excitement, fun, and material gifts for Manny, and Jay fears he may lose his standing with both his wife and his stepson. Gloria restores face for him by assuring him that she has no lingering feelings for Javier; she only wants Manny to maintain a relationship with his father. Jay expresses surprise that Gloria ever fell for a man like Javier, but agrees when Gloria tells him she is with the right man now.

That night, when Jay is awakened by the sound of the pool table, he goes to “check things out.” Javier and Jay play a game and have a meaningful conversation in which Jay finds out that Javier fails to show up for Manny because he feels inferior to Jay. They discuss Manny, and Javier comments that Jay is good for teaching stability, which threatens Jay’s image as spontaneous and daring. When Manny wakes up and joins them, Javier cashes in on an old favor and takes them both to a baseball stadium to hit curve balls. The next morning, Gloria wonders why Manny is so tired as she is trying to get him ready for school. Hoping Gloria will not find out he took Manny out in the middle of the night, Jay offers to take Manny to school and tries to get him more alert. When Gloria realizes that Manny was out with them in the middle of the night, she calls into question Jay’s parenting wisdom: “I didn’t say take Manny up all night and play games.” Javier arrives in the middle of the argument inviting Jay to ride motorcycles. Gloria tells him to do whatever he wants, but this is not allowing Jay the autonomy it seems to be when she yells, “You’re the one that’s acting crazy!”

They talk later, and Jay tells Gloria he is waiting for Javier to pick him up for another exciting event. Gloria reminds him that he was only yesterday making fun of her for allowing herself to be seduced by Javier. Jay saves face, claiming that he is developing the relationship with Javier for Manny’s sake. When Javier never shows up, Gloria graciously saves face for Jay by meeting him in the driveway and walking him in the house with an understanding smile.

Mitchell comes out to the living room in the night to find Cam sitting with Lily, which proves to be an encroachment on his decision to ferberize her, a “method of getting the baby to sleep through the night by letting her cry herself to sleep.” Cam passively promotes a caring and compassionate self-image and threatens Mitchell’s face when he explains that the method is “just hard if you happen to be a person who hates to hear another person suffer.” Throughout the

episode, Mitchell repeatedly stops Cam from getting a crying Lily out of bed. Mitchell imposes on Cam's parenting freedom by coming home during Lily's naptime. When Mitchell again blocks Cam from Lily, Cam again alludes to Mitchell's insensitivity: "There's something wrong with you that the sound of our child in such distress doesn't bother you more." Mitchell argues that with Cam's emotional response to the situation, he is ferberizing two babies. After a day arguing over it, Mitchell asks Cam for his help in facework for Lily, explaining that he does not want her to have one "huggy, happy, cuddly dad and one frowny, lesson-teachy dad." Cam agrees, and the two negotiate which of the harder things (dentists, vegetables) each of them will be responsible for.

Each couple must perform both restorative and preventive facework in this episode.

### **Not in My House**

Phil's phone call is interrupted when Claire rushes into the kitchen to show him the "smut" Luke has been viewing on her laptop. Phil agrees that they must take action, calling it "completely unacceptable," but this proves to be an effort to avoid losing face, when he reveals to the camera that the picture actually came from a colleague at work, who repeatedly send out questionable links. Phil saves face by telling the audience he "had every intention of telling Claire," but he would wait until she was calm. To prevent Claire from finding out the picture is not Luke's, Phil suggests that he be the one to confront Luke, and Claire agrees. To lessen the severity of the act (and therefore lessen face loss if Claire ever finds out the truth), Phil says that what Claire considers porn would be a "cereal commercial" in Europe. Phil does give Luke a very generic talk about avoiding inappropriate Internet content, so that if Claire ever does ask Luke about, he will be likely to give an answer that satisfies it. To further ensure Claire does not



pursue it, though, he tells her Luke is very embarrassed and would be humiliated if she ever talked to him about it.

Luke later approaches Claire, explaining he feels bad about something he did on the computer, and Phil suffers significant face damage when Luke reveals his guilt over viewing Haley's journal. Phil must restore face and apologizes to Claire, explaining that the picture was sent to him by a coworker, and that he does not "do that stuff." Claire accepts his apology, and the two move past the incident. Phil also apologizes to Luke.

Gloria tells the camera how grateful she is for her wonderful family and beautiful surroundings, but reveals one addition that has threatened her autonomy, the "dog butler," a statue of a dog, standing upright, directly inside the front door. Gloria jumps in fear every time she sees it as it resembles a human being at first glance. Jay, however, is unaware of Gloria's feelings, calling the statue, Barkley, a "family favorite. Rather than threaten Jay's autonomy by asking him to remove it, Gloria relocates it to the guest room. She comes home later to find the statue in front of the door again, and Jay asks if she knows how it got moved. Not wanting to reveal her feelings about it, she claims she just wanted to see how things would look rearranged. Jay inadvertently threatens Gloria's sense of worth when he shows more concern for the statue than for her after her bracelet is snagged on its jacket. Jay soon realizes that Gloria does not like the dog. She tries to deny it, but does tell him that the dog is a nuisance. Jay responds to this face threat by telling Gloria that all her pillows on the bed are also a nuisance, questioning her ability as a homemaker. "If I can put up with those, you can put up with a piece of art," he says, showing himself to be tolerant and at the same time, reestablishing autonomy by implying that Barkley is there to stay. This leads to an argument and Gloria leaves in anger. Jay finally

decides to give Barkley away, but the episode never shows any face restoring interaction between the two.

Mitchell and Cam are getting ready to take Lily to a show, when they notice the gardener outside, crying. Mitchell, not wanting to get involved suggests they leave through the back door. Cam again threatens both Mitchell's autonomy and his desire to be accepted by asking, "How can you just turn your back on a friend like that?" Mitchell defends himself asking if Cam even knows the gardener's name, and Cam loses face by appearing hypocritical when he hesitates through, "Caesar Salazar." Mitchell points out that Cam is as uninformed on the gardener's life as he is: "You were gonna say Caesar Salad." Cam, wanting to reestablish his caring image invites the gardener inside. Cam, trying to communicate in Spanish, offers the gardener a seat and a glass of water, and he accepts, heading towards the bedroom. This causes face damage for both; Mitchell's autonomy is threatened as he wants his home free of strangers and to make the show on time, and Cam's competence is questioned when his attempts to be kind to the man do not go as planned.

Later, the man has still not come out of the room, and Mitchell works to restore his negative face by urging Cam to just leave him there and head for the show. In frustration, Mitchell tells Cam, that his needs are always second to those of strangers, showing how Cam's concern for others results in face loss for Mitchell. Cam, to prove he is not an "obsessive helpaholic" agrees to leave, but does so in a manner that lets Mitchell know he is not happy with the accusation or the situation. When a woman in a wedding dress shows up, and heads to see the man, Mitchell tries to restore face by encouraging Cam to go see what is going on. However, Cam does not participate in this facework, insisting that they leave because he is not a "manic Mother Theresa." Both having lost face, Cam decides to stay home at the scene, while Mitchell

takes Lily to the show. Mitchell rethinks this, however and returns home, restoring face for Cam by telling him how much he appreciates Cam's compassionate nature. Cam tries to prevent losing face again by keeping Mitchell out of the house, where he has staged an entire wedding for the gardener and his fiancé, which essentially confirms Mitchell's accusation of "taking things too far."

The two appear before camera, Cam maintains face by comparing himself to "a runaway Charity" and Mitchell to his "off-ramp full of safety gravel." Mitchell loses face when Cam further explains this concept: "Mitchell knows how to say no, he can always put himself first. . . ." The episode ends with Mitchell and Cam taking Barkley to a thrift shop, but no further instances of face restoration.

### **Fifteen Percent**

Claire and Phil open this episode with Phil explaining that he believes people can change, and he always will. Claire questions his logic, pointing out that his statement disproves his point. Phil redirects the threat, saying that Claire changed and "use to be very supportive of" him. Alone, Phil tells the viewers that he has installed a new theatre system in the home but threatens Claire's competent face by explaining that she does not understand how to use technology. When Claire later calls Phil with questions about the universal remote, the program reveals Phil's pattern of being condescending when assisting Claire. He confronts Claire after coming home to find a destroyed remote. When she tells him she broke it because it was useless, he implies that she is not very smart. She counters by comparing her 4.0 college GPA to his "almost that." Phil asks Claire to apologize, and she threatens his autonomy by providing a sarcastic and condescending non-apology. Phil's plan to restore face, he reveals, is to replace the remote and teach their "dumbest kid" how to use it.

Phil works very hard to get Haley to understand the remote, but she only takes it seriously when Phil reminds her of all the times she and Claire have argued about things. When Claire is unable to stump Haley, she leaves the room in defeat, but Phil tries to restore face for her by yelling: "I taught Haley how to use the remote in twenty minutes, so think how fast *you* can learn it."

Cam runs into Jay who is talking with his friends. Jay threatens both Mitchell and Cam's positive face when he introduces Cam as his son's "friend," thus showing Cam a lack of acceptance of their relationship. Cam is surprised at this but does not correct Jay, who is obviously trying not to lose face in front of his friends. When he tells Mitchell later, it is clear that Mitchell is more threatened by the remark than Cam is. Cam encourages him to let it pass because it did not offend him. Mitchell returns to the scene to confront his father and thus restore the face of his relationship. He tells Jay that he has "never been completely accepting" and that it is insulting. Jay tries to maintain face by claiming that his friends would not understand and he was trying to avoid an awkward situation. Mitchell implies that one of the men in Jay's group, Shorty, is in fact gay before he leaves. Later, Mitchell expresses surprise that Jay's comment did not offend him, and Cam expresses tolerance of Jay "just being who he is." Mitchell reveals to the viewers the significant positive face loss he experienced after he told Jay that he was gay: "After that, I pretty much just talked to my mom."

Later, Jay tells Gloria about Mitchell's speculation, and she agrees, encouraging him to talk to Shorty. She inadvertently causes face damage when she tells Jay: "I'm sure you made it easy for your son to come out." Jay decides to try to connect with Shorty and show that he is a kind and accepting individual, so he invites him to go golfing with him. They find a bench to sit and talk, and Jay assures Shorty that he can tell him anything in confidence. He explains that he

knows Shorty has a secret, and offers him help explaining that his son had the same situation. He allows Shorty the autonomy to choose whether or not to reveal it, and Shorty confides in Jay that he is in serious gambling debt, and thanks Jay for offering to bail him out. Jay loses and threatens face when he asks, "You're not gay?" Shorty says that if Jay were not giving him so much money that he would hit him. Jay offers a check to avoid further face threat.

Jay visits Mitchell to let him know that he was wrong about Shorty, only to find out that Mitchell set him up purposely to look foolish in front of his friend. Jay explains how the whole thing ended up costing him a great deal of money, and Mitchell apologizes, letting Jay know that he is proud of him for reaching out to his friend, before the two get into another argument. Mitchell's voice-over ends the show explaining that people can change by only about 15%, but that can be enough, implying that all the face threats occurring in this episode did not have any real lasting effects.

### **Moon Landing**

At the Dunphy home, Haley announces that she has just broken up with Dylan but instructs her family not to "make a big deal out of it." When Claire tells the family of her plans to meet for lunch with a woman she used to work with, the kids all express surprise at Claire's having ever had a job. Phil tries to help but inadvertently insults Claire when he says: "Your mom works very hard. It's just now she works for us." Claire takes her facework into her own hands, telling the children that she had a successful career that she gave up to focus on raising a family, thus providing an image of herself as both professional and nurturing. Later, as Phil is driving through town, he sees a realtor advertisement with his image defaced with a thick mustache, and explains the face loss suffered: "I need strangers to trust me. I don't take kindly to it when someone Tom Sellecks my bus bench." Back at the ad, Phil receives a call from a

colleague informing him that buyers want to get out of a deal and asking if he has seen the ad. Phil decides to wear a fake mustache after seeing the ad, to see what people's responses are.

Claire meets her friend Valerie, and based on some of her remarks, concludes that Valerie must be jealous of her family life. However, Claire begins to question her choices when Valerie explains that she has made huge career advancements since Claire left the workforce. Claire's image as fulfilled and happy is challenged when her only response to all of Valerie's exciting news is, "Last night I vacuumed the radiator thingy under the fridge." Claire further loses face when the conversation is interrupted by a phone call telling Valerie she has received a promotion. Valerie's reluctance to tell Claire, though probably meant to prevent face loss, actually causes it, when Claire realizes that rather than envying her, Valerie pities Claire. Claire invites her to meet the family, telling the audience that she wants to show Valerie what she is missing "in her sad, childless, husbandless, life." This attempt at face restoration fails, however, when the woman come home to a family in chaos. Claire makes one final attempt: "It's not usually like this." When Valerie leaves, Claire reveals her frustration at the loss of face by lashing out at her family. She leaves in an outrage, but later reveals that she wanted to be back with her family but she knew she would have to find a way to apologize to the people she had "belittled and rejected." Claire is pleasantly surprised when she arrives home and her entire family works to restore face for her by greeting her warmly and pretending her outburst never happened. She describes her appreciation for her family and the way they handled the events of the day, lamenting that Valerie did not see them like that.

Mitchell tells the cameras that Jay has asked for his legal assistance for Gloria, who has had a car accident. Though probably not intentional, this supports Mitchell's face by making him feel respected, accepted, and needed. Cam explains that while Mitchell is helping Gloria, he

and Jay are finally able to play racquetball at the gym, something they have been trying to coordinate for months. Jay, however, tells the audience he has been avoiding the event “like the plague” as he is nervous about going to the gym with a gay man. Gloria rolls her eyes beside him, implying to the audience that she thinks Jay’s attitudes are ridiculous. She later takes Mitchell to the scene of the accident, and explains what happened. She tells Mitchell that a “crazy driver came out of nowhere” and hit her. They plan to sit at a café and write the statement. While Gloria goes to get a table Manny stays back and tells Mitchell that the accident was his mother’s fault. When Mitchell asks why he did not say this sooner, Manny’s answer shows how concerned Gloria is with maintaining face: “Once an old lady yelled at her in a crosswalk; she honked so long, the horn ran out.” Mitchell calls Jay to confirm this and Jay tells him everyone believes the accident was her fault. Jay reveals his strategy to save face even if it means requiring Mitchell to lose face: “Someone has to tell her she’s in the wrong, and better you than me.” This comment completely negates the face support Mitchell thought he had received earlier. Mitchell asks Gloria to recount the events of the accident again, stalling his inevitable face-threatening act. Gloria remains defensive and gets angry with Mitchell when he suggests she may have been driving too fast. Gloria accuses Mitchell of blaming her because she is Latino, and leaves them to walk home, telling them they will be safer. She returns later and apologizes, thus restoring face for all. Her motives become clear, however, when she leads them to yet another accident and tells Mitchell that this one was definitely not her fault.

As Jay and Cam get ready for their match in the locker room, they share an awkward moment when, as both are changing clothes, they accidentally back into each other. Jay, very embarrassed, hisses at Cam to “stop talking about it,” and leaves to change elsewhere. Cam proves victorious on the racquetball court, and Jay saves face by claiming he was preoccupied by

what happened in the locker room. Jay becomes angry when Cam suggests that he won because he is the better player, and determined to restore face, challenges him to a rematch. Jay wins the rematch and is eagerly gloating in the locker room until he has a similarly embarrassing moment with another man and rushes out.

### **My Funky Valentine**

This Valentine's Day reveals some of the issues in each of the three couples. In the opening scene, Phil and Claire give each other the same card and agree to meet at the same restaurant, showing staleness in their relationship. Jay's plan's to take Gloria to see his favorite comedian do not impress her, they surmise because they come from different generations. Mitchell, distracted by an important case at work, fails to notice and appreciate the work Cam has put into making the holiday special.

Phil suggests that he and Claire change up their plans and meet at a hotel later than evening. They share a dinner, but on the way upstairs, Claire's coat becomes caught in the escalator. The couple risk face loss when they see acquaintances who suggest she just take off her coat, because Claire has changed into something very revealing. She repeatedly gives the excuse, "I'm chilly," as a justification for staying with her stuck coat. Claire fears more face loss when her father and Gloria walk by, but Gloria supports her face by helping her discreetly change into another coat.

Mitchell returns home from work, disappointed that his client chose to settle, taking away his opportunity to deliver a closing speech he has worked hard to prepare. When Manny arrives for the evening, he reveals to them that his Valentine's Day was ruined when another boy claimed credit for a poem that he wrote. Cam convinces Manny to confront the other boy, with their help. The three embark on a quest to restore Manny's dignity and head the restaurant



indicated in the poem he wrote. When Manny goes to speak to his crush, Cam lets Mitchell know indirectly how he feels about Mitchell ignoring the day: “If we can’t have our own Valentine’s Day, it’s nice that we can give somebody else one.” Mitchell apologizes, accounting for his distance with his missed opportunity at work. Manny returns, and confesses he was too nervous to speak to the girl while the boy sat with her. Cam finds a way to distract the boy and Manny heads over to the table. When the boy returns to the table and orders Manny to leave, Mitchell steps in and eagerly exercises his autonomy by delivering an altered version of his speech to the bully. As vindicating as this is, the speech does not work and the three exit the restaurant.

Jay is enjoying his evening seeing his favorite comedian’s show until he becomes the butt of the joke. When the performer thanks Gloria from the stage for bringing her father to the show, Jay corrects him: “I’m her husband, Dave.” Dave then publicly ridicules Jay with a series of jokes about his age, causing Jay to feel unaccepted and stigmatized. He tries to maintain face however, by laughing and smiling along. Gloria laughs, genuinely amused, until she realizes that Jay is not enjoying it. She restores face for him later by telling him to disregard the comic’s statements. Jay admits that he is more concerned with what Gloria thinks of him than the comic or the audience, and shows concern for their future. Gloria assures him that she is not so shallow as to leave him when he is old, thus performing facework for both.

### **Fears**

Each couple shares in separate interview segments what their greatest fear is. After Claire indicates a family tragedy, she threatens Phil’s face by calling into question his answer, “being too much of a perfectionist.” Phil later reveals his plans to take Luke into the house’s crawlspace to explore after a cable worker remarked on the “collection” they have. When Phil

removes the grate from the entrance, he is startled by an odd squeaking noise but feigns bravery for Luke, explaining to the audience that parents never want to show fear to their children. Eager to maintain face, Phil stalls, explaining that he will go in, but that it would be more fun with barbecue tools and goggles. To avoid going into the crawlspace and being ambushed by whatever animal is in there, Phil presents Luke with his “ingenious” toy truck rigged with a light and a camera to provide them with information. Phil loses face when Luke implies that Phil is just too scared to go in. Phil saves face by suggesting they do not go in at all, because treasure is “more sparkly in your imagination.” Luke decides to go in anyways, excited at the possibilities, threatening Phil’s face by showing that he is not as brave as a young boy. Phil finally decides he must face his fears when Luke’s belt loop is caught on a pipe. He maintains face, explaining to the audience that his son’s safety is more important than his fears, calling himself a “hero.”

Jay, wanting to appear strong and courageous quickly replies that he has none. Gloria threatens this image by reminding him of his fear of pigeons, which he explains away saying he simply does not like them. Later when Manny fakes a fever to avoid a trip to an amusement park, Gloria tells the camera that he is afraid of roller coasters, and once again inadvertently threatens Jay’s image by describing Javier as fearless. Jay saves face by interrupting her to explain that Javier is afraid of the check coming at dinner. Later, to take his mind off missing the party, Jay and Gloria take Manny fishing at the pier. When the three arrive, Jay and Manny are both surprised to learn Gloria’s ulterior motive of getting Manny to face his fears on the nearby roller coaster. Jay performs preventive facework by discouraging the idea and making medical excuses (“inner-ear thing”). Gloria does not support this facework, accusing him of being scared, which he flatly denies. Gloria, frustrated, decided to ride it alone, further

threatening face by directing them to the ladies' room, should they need it. Jay and Manny both decide to join Gloria on the roller coaster to restore face.

Mitchell receives positive face support when Cam declares that his worst fear is losing him, but fails to return it when he immediately identifies hotel bedspreeds as his. Later, the couple discuss their plans to have brunch with their pediatrician after having an awkward first visit with Lily. Mitchell uses sarcasm to let Cam know he thinks it is a bad idea, and Cam takes the hint, but does not change his mind. Cam maintains face, claiming that a good relationship with the pediatrician will result in better care for Lily. Mitch and Cam both lose face when, as their visitor holds Lily, she coos, "Mommy," claiming that word as "every gay father's worst nightmare." Their guest tries to save face for them: "I don't even think Lily said the "M" word." But Cam both loses and threatens face when he sharply tells her that Lily only said it because she is Asian. She continues to maintain face for them, however, assuring them it was only a random utterance, and the two look relieved until they hear the word from Lily again. As the pediatrician is leaving, she saves face for them one last time by describing her own strained relationship with her mother, and assuring them that Lily is lucky to have two loving parents.

At the episode's close, Phil has maintained face by joining his son in the crawlspace, Jay has restored face by not showing Gloria his discomfort on the roller coaster, and Mitch and Cam are relieved to find a doll in Lily's possession that says, "Mommy," when squeezed. The two celebrate this discovery, having been reaffirmed in their relationship with Lily.

### **Truth Be Told**

In the opening scene, Phil inadvertently causes face damage for Claire when he tells her he cannot see a movie with her that night because he has plans to catch up with an old girlfriend, Denise. Claire subtly indicates her face loss when she hears Phil's plans: "That sounds innocent

enough, drinks with an ex-girlfriend at an intimate French restaurant.” Phil picks up on the hint and questions Claire about it. When Claire finds out that Denise is recently divorced, she tells Phil he must be naïve to think Denise only wants to catch up. Claire denies jealousy at the relationship, not wanting to appear clingy or insecure. Eager to maintain face himself, Phil invites Denise to the house instead, to prove Claire wrong. When Denise arrives and charms Claire with her bubbly, gracious exterior, Claire pulls Phil aside and excitedly admits that he was right, and bemoans her cynical nature. Phil saves face for her by objection to her self-deprecation. However, when Denise privately gives Phil a hotel room key and invite him to join her later, Phil, though not looking to have an affair, does not ask Denise to leave or tell Claire, for fear of losing face. However, when he becomes very uncomfortable he tells Claire that she “may not have been completely wrong about Denise.” Claire, however, remains oblivious thinking Phil is overreacting to what she said earlier. Phil tries to get her to leave, but loses face in front of both women when an old photo suggests that he dated both women at once for a time. Denise loses interest at this and leaves angrily. The episode never depicts any resolution to this matter between Claire and Phil.

Jay and Gloria each try a different method to cheer Manny up, who has not received a part he was trying to earn in a play. Jay’s competence is questioned when Manny challenges a statement (What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger) on a motivational poster Jay has brought him. When Gloria agrees, Jay tells them they are only making him stronger, thus attempting to validate his choice. When the two leave, Jay heads into Manny’s room to hang the poster, accidentally dropping it into the tank below, killing Manny’s turtle. When Manny comes home, Jay performs some preventive facework by explaining that he heard a commotion in Manny’s room and rushed upstairs to find that a raccoon had broken in and killed Shel Turtlestein. When

Jay leads Manny upstairs, the full extent of his facework is revealed. He has broken Manny's screen, scattered gravel from the turtle's tank and even used a stuffed animal to make tiny animal footprints. When Manny leaves, Gloria tells Jay that she "knows a fake crime scene when she sees one." Jay is forced to admit the truth, but urges Gloria to keep his secret, recounting the image damage sustained when, under his care, Mitchell's bird flew into a fan years ago. Later, when Manny points out some inconsistencies in the evidence in his room, Jay maintains his story, adding more and more implausible details to explain the oddities, and finally suggests a memorial service for the turtle to provide Manny the closure he needs to stop asking questions. At the memorial service, Jay loses face again, when Manny confesses that the incident is his fault, and that he was not there for Shel in the end. Gloria is alarmed at this and asks Jay if he has something to say to Manny. Jay, determined to maintain face merely assures Manny of Shel's forgiveness. When Gloria later tells Jay, "it's hard to sleep in a bed of lies," Jay attempts to restore positive face and maintain autonomy by downplaying the severity of the offense, and therefore negate the need to fix it. However, Gloria guilt trip proves effective and Jay reluctantly gets out of bed to talk to Manny. Jay explains to Manny that he was afraid the truth would damage their already-strained relationship. Jay expresses hope to regain Manny's trust in the future, but has a chance immediately when Manny begins to explain how his car got a scratch. Jay prevents face damage for Manny, telling him, "I know how it happened. Raccoon did it."

Mitchell and Cam explain that they want Lily to be comfortable with animals. Cam compares the farm animals of his childhood to siblings, and Mitchell threatens face with a comment that shows how ridiculous he thinks that comment is: "Delicious brothers and sisters." On the way out to feed ducks, Cam tells Mitchell not to answer a call from work, fearing he will be asked to work his day off. Mitchell answers anyway, and goes to work while his family heads

to the park. In the car, Mitchell shares with Cam his frustration over repeated negative face loss. He has missed numerous family events because of his job, and Cam encourages him to save face by reestablishing autonomy and not going in. Mitchell begins to rant about his boss over the phone, using some choice language. Mid-sentence, he notices his boss in the car next to him and worries that he may have been overheard. He asks Cam to recreate the scene during lunch to see if Cam can hear him from the car beside him, hoping to determine what, if any, face loss he suffered griping about his boss. The two have a conversation, and Mitchell is alarmed to realize that Cam can hear him easily from the next car. He attempts to save face by approaching his boss later and trying to casually tell him that he pulled up next to his car when Cam and Mitchell were actually talking about Cam's boss. His boss changes the subject and further threatens face when he insists Mitchell be "on time" tomorrow, even though it is a Sunday. His boss tells him to "come in tomorrow or don't bother coming in again." Mitchell meets his negative face needs by walking out. When he tells Cam he has quit his job, both are initially very enthusiastic until they start to realize the implications. Mitchell resolves to "lie grovel and debase [himself] until [he gets what he wants]," in other words, sacrifice his positive self image to meet his negative face needs, until Cam encourages him not to.

### **Starry Night**

Claire informs Phil that both Luke and Haley have pressing obligations for school and enlists his help with Luke's, instructing him to "stay on him" to maintain his focus. Phil expresses his autonomy to take a different approach, which Claire threatens by insisting he does not. Phil threatens Claire sense of acceptance by sarcastically apologizing for not being a "micromanager." Claire does not begin an argument, but only asks Phil to see the assignment through to completion. Phil dismisses her concerns, telling her to have more faith in their son,

but agrees to supervise his project. After leaving Luke to “run with it,” he is eager to show Claire the progress but is shown to be a fool when they walk in on Luke playing with toys next to an incomplete project. Claire takes the opportunity to challenge Phil’s parenting autonomy and flaunt her own rightness: “I don’t want to hear anything about your new method of doing things. There is one thing that works with these kids, and that is staying on top of them, which thanks to you, I will now be able to do all night long.” Frustrated, Phil scolds Luke who insists that he is indeed working with the Mr. Potato Head, but Phil cuts him off and leaves. He apologizes to Claire for “not underestimating Luke enough,” and promises to pay close attention until the task is done. However, in the middle of this act of facework, Luke enters the room with his completed Van Gogh project, Mr. Potato Head ears sprinkled throughout. Claire affirms Phil’s first instinct and he replies, “Don’t apologize, apology accepted.”

Mitchell expresses excitement over his plans to watch a meteor shower with his father, explaining that it is one of few interests that they share and a special way for the two of them to connect. When Jay comes to pick Mitchell up however, his anticipation of positive face support is disappointed when he finds Manny in the front seat. Mitchell continues to lose face when he becomes the butt of many of Manny’s jokes. Mitchell is further humiliated when, after being sprayed by a skunk, he must change into an outfit of Gloria’s, the only clothing in the car. The two ridicule him, prompting him to turn back and wait in the car. Jay attempts to restore face: “I’m sorry if things got a little out of hand back there, but in our defense, look at you. I mean, smell you!” This apology also maintains face for Jay as it admits no wrongdoing. Jay explains why Manny is with them, which helps to restore face for Mitchell. Jay tells Mitchell that he invited Manny on their trip because his friends were making fun and him and excluding him. Jay explains that he only invited Manny to take his mind off of things, and that astronomy is his and

Mitchell's "thing." He affirms Mitchell as an emotionally intelligent and compassionate person, hoping that he will be able to talk to Manny. Mitchell finds Manny and encourages him, telling him that, in adulthood, being "different" is an asset, rather than something to be mocked, and that is how Manny will "win."

While Jay and Mitchell are out, Cam and Gloria spend some time together. Cam reveals he is nervous because of "a minor setback" he would have to overcome, in which Gloria overheard Cam making a comment and perceived face threat, though none was there. At the time, it is revealed, that Cam's attempt at face restoration was so clumsy that it only made things worse. Cam's intention for the evening, then, is to restore face for them both by creating a time for them to enjoy each other's company and strengthen their relationship. Cam abandons his plans of a fancy restaurant when Gloria suggests a casual Latino restaurant, eager to not offend her. In an attempt to meet her positive face needs by affirming her tastes, Cam order the same entrée, despite warnings from both Gloria and the server. Cam tries to choke down the food, even though it is entirely too spicy for him, evidenced by his flushed, sweat-soaked face. If he were to reject the food, would imply that Gloria does not have good taste in food, and that he was wrong not to take their advice, thus threatening face for both. When Cam becomes physically ill, Gloria asks him why he insisted on eating the dish. He answers, "I wanted to have this awesome night between the two of us, where we end up best friends, having lunch, buying shoes. . ." Gloria restores face for Cam by expressing enthusiasm at all of these ideas, showing acceptance and respect.

### **Game Changer**

Phil expresses his birthday wishes for his family, without openly requesting it, and threatening autonomy: "The iPad comes out on my actual birthday. It's like Steve Jobs and God



got together to say, ‘We love you, Phil.’” He reveals his plans to camp out in line to get the product on its release date. Claire insists on waiting in line for the “toy” instead, at once showing concern for Phil and mocking his interest in the device. Claire tell the audience that she is willing to wait in line for the iPad because of the “lame gift” she had gotten Phil; getting him something she knows he really wants, then, will support face for both of them. Unfortunately, she falls asleep on the sofa before leaving, only rousing when she hears her family in the next room. She overhears Phil telling the kids, “She is standing in line at the Apple store making all my birthday wishes come true.” Knowing that both she and Phil will lose face if the family finds out she has not been at the store, she quickly sneaks out to buy his gift. When she comes back in the house, she has obviously not been successful, telling Phil he cannot see his present until his party that night. When Phil calls her “the best wife ever,” she confesses, “I went to the store and they were all out. I’m so sorry.” Surmising that she was late, Phil questions her competence, bemoaning the fact that he entrusted the task to her. Phil leaves the house in disappointment. Claire, wanting to restore face for both, enlists the help of all her children in tracking down an iPad for Phil.

Jay shows Gloria and Manny his gift to Phil, a beautiful wooden chess set, and offers to teach Manny “real chess” instead of Colombian chess before wrapping it. Gloria prevents face loss for Jay by subtly instructing Manny to let Jay win, revealing to the viewers that Manny is a skilled player, but Jay a very sore loser. Later, Jay very arrogantly consoles Manny for his loss, finally offering him whatever he wants if “the day should ever come” that he beat Jay. Manny quickly requests Jays watch and proves victorious in fewer than ten moves.

When Mitchell later shows up to return a tool belt, Jay threatens his sense of masculinity and handiness by asking if the belt worked well for his “costume.” Mitchell defends himself,

claiming that they indeed built something, but loses face again when he admits it was a “gift-wrapping station,” which does not impress Jay. Jay again belittles their relationship, suggesting Mitchell must be having problems with Cam, when Mitchell asks him to teach him self-defense. He explains the advantages of underrepresenting strengths to an opponent when he realizes Manny tricked him into giving away his watch. He tells Gloria and is angered to find out that she knew Manny threw the first game. He confronts her, and she shows no face concern when she tell him he is “like a baby” when he loses. Learning this, Jay loses face, not only because he did not win, but also because of his undesirable behavior when it happens. When Gloria tells Jay she has also let him win chess games, he is eager to show his mastery of the game and quickly challenges her; however, the two do not play until arriving at Phil’s party. During the game, Jay, seeing his imminent defeat, prevents face loss by telling Gloria, “One of us is going to win the game, the other’s going to feel lousy, and we both lose.” Gloria agrees, but later tell the audience she knew she was winning: “I’m a good chess player. But I’m a better wife.”

Mitchell hears a man’s voice on the baby monitor in Lily’s room, and quickly wakes Cam, who grabs a baseball bat and rushes in to find Lily safe and sound. He assures Mitchell that it must be a neighbor’s monitor with the same signal, but threatens Mitchell’s face, joking that they would be in real trouble if a spider had made its way into the house. Cam however is unfazed by the event, eagerly sharing with Mitchell the “drama” he has been overhearing at Jake and Debbie’s house. He tells Cam that Jake has been lying about working late, and the Debbie is planning to file for divorce. Mitchell explains his lack of interest in the gossip: “I froze last night; I thought Lily was in danger, and I froze. But not you, you sprung right into action.” Mitchell questions his own face as a parent in light of this. After his unsuccessful lesson with Jay (he loses consciousness in Jay’s chokehold), he meets Claire in another line, and has

opportunity to restore face when someone cuts the line in front of them. However, he is unsuccessful when he puts the stranger in his version of the chokehold and repeatedly instructs him to “go to sleep.” Security then removes them both from the line. Later, Mitchell eagerly tells Cam that he got in trouble for fighting, happy to have his toughness affirmed by the news.

Phil later arrives home, to find out that the cake has been dropped and the pizzas have yet to be delivered. He plasters a smile on through all this, having told the audience that he lowered his expectation for a great birthday. Claire arrives home to an oddly happy husband, but before admitting that she was again unsuccessful, Luke tells her he was able to convince one of Phil’s friends to bring an extra iPad. She surprises Phil with the iPad and he admits his happy exterior was itself an act of facework: “All this time I said I didn’t care, but I care so much!” Claire has been able to restore face as a competent and careful wife, while reaffirming Phil’s importance, by giving him the gift he wanted.

### **Benched**

This episode further explores the strained relationship between Jay and Phil. The whole family has gathered at the Dunphy home for steaks and Jay tells Phil he is “destroying” steaks, questioning his grilling competence. Gloria asks Jay to leave him alone, hoping to prevent Jay from appearing mean and Phil from seeming foolish, but Jay proceeds. Phil simply says, “Fun!” not wanting to show his embarrassment. Jay later calls Phil “such a woman” for agreeing with Claire and Gloria that their sons’ basketball coach is too tough.

Mitchell and Cam arrive, and Cam is very pleased to inform everyone that he is late because he got held up at work. He has taken a job while Mitchell seeks new employment. Jay offers Mitchell contact information that could lead to a job, but both he and tell him that Mitchell is not looking while Cam is “bringing home the bacon.” Immediately following this exchange,

Jay later takes the steaks off of the grill, calling it “ridiculous” that Phil has left them on, and Mitchell apologizes, trying to restore face for Phil. Phil acts unaffected.

The two couples later attend a game together, and Gloria points out to Jay that the coach indeed takes things too far. When the coach again calls one of the boys “stupid,” Phil confronts him. However, Jay steps up and cuts him off, giving the coach his own speech, implying that Phil could not stand up the man. The coach tosses his clipboard down and leaves. Phil tries to restore face, telling Jay he “was handling it,” but Jay again implies that he thinks Phil is weak. Phil takes over, and while he is talking to the boys, Jay interrupts him and says he will be coaching, because he has experience coaching football. When Phil counters that he is qualified because he has coached basketball, Jay tells him to “relax,” because he has the “assistant’s job.” Phil walks away, defeated. Claire apologizes for her father’s behavior, just as Mitchell did.

Later, after Jay has repeatedly dismissed Phil’s suggestions, he reestablishes his ability to coach by challenging Jay’s: “According to the score board, the only thing you have is four points. Good luck!” Phil continues to restore face for himself when Jay, frustrated, asks him to take over: “I was dealing with the coach, you pushed me aside. I was dealing with the boys, you pushed me aside. Believe it or not Jay, there are some things that I am better at than you are.” Jay tries to repair Phil’s face damage without risking his own, I should’ve let you coach from the get-go; I’m just used to taking charge, that’s all. . . I’m sure your steaks would have been delicious. And not chewy.” Phil is satisfied at this and agrees to take over.

Cam walks out to find Mitchell researching the man his father told him about. Cam asks if Mitchell plans to call the man, and Mitchell reminds Cam of his promise to take a little time off. Cam suggests that Mitchell call the man, but only to get Jay to let it go: “The last thing I want you to do is get a job right now; I am loving our life.” This entire exchange proves to be

one misguided attempt at face management, however, when both men in separate interviews reveal that they are very frustrated with the arrangement. Mitchell is feeling stifled being at home all day, and Cam feels as though he is losing his connection with Lily. They feign contentment, though, rather than risk threatening one another's freedom. After the phone call Mitchell tells Cam that Charlie, the contact, has invited them to an event at his home. Mitchell, careful not to show interest in the professional possibilities, tells Cam they should go because "it would be rude not to hear him out," and Cam agrees. When they drop Lily off with Gloria, Cam acts unaffected when Gloria inadvertently threatens face, commenting that Lily must be getting used to his absence.

When Mitchell sits down and talks to Charlie, he offers him a job on the spot, and Mitchell dismisses himself to talk to Cam. He finds Cam and continues to avoid threatening face: "Relax, I told you I wouldn't take the job," but is happily surprised when Cam tells him to take it. Cam apologizes for being selfish and Mitchell maintains face for him, admitting that that is what he wants as well.

### **Travels with Scout**

This episode opens with Claire calling Phil with surprising (to her) news that his father has arrived with a dog for the Dunphys to keep. Phil tries to restore face, by telling her he meant to discuss it with her, and that his father showed up a few days earlier than expected, but Claire does not help him when she says, supposedly to the dog: "We have a new rule. No sleeping in the bedroom." When Phil returns home, Claire lets Phil know how his actions have constituted threat to her negative face: "I cannot believe you got a dog without consulting me. This was a major family decision." Phil's defends himself, claiming the dog will help teach the kids

responsibility. Claire maintains her position, “That’s exactly what you said about Luke’s paper route,” and reminds Phil that she ended up delivering papers for her son.

Claire later overhears Phil’s father crying in his vehicle and encourages Phil to talk to him. Phil assures Claire that he would know if something were wrong, but Claire expresses doubt in the depth of their relationship: “You guys never actually talk about anything.” Phil goes to talk to his father, insisting that it is “nothing,” but does not actually address what Claire heard. When he goes in, he lies to Claire to avoid losing face as an emotionally aware person, as well as to avoid threatening Claire’s face, by refusing to fulfill a request.

When Phil’s father later reveals that his travel plans are to go “wherever the wind blows” him, Phil becomes nervous, explaining that his father has never spent so much time away from his mother. Phil gives Claire opportunity to drive home her victory when he says: “I’ve always felt bad for people with emotionally distant fathers. It turns out I’m one of them,” but Claire only reassures him with a hug. As Mr. Dunphy prepares to leave, Phil asks again to speak with him, and learns that he was crying about giving up the dog earlier. Phil insists he keep the dog, and Claire admits later that she grew to love the dog and “can’t believe he took” it. Phil maintains face for her without bringing up her initial harsh objection to keeping the dog.

Jay lets the audience in on some facework he has been doing: taking Manny out of school early for quality time, with the hopes that he will look like a caring father to Gloria. He rethinks his strategy when Manny does not handle a horror movie very well. As expected, his attempt to maintain positive face backfires, when Gloria asks: “What were you thinking? Who takes a little boy to a horror movie?” Jay responds to this threat by downplaying the severity of the offense: “This is not scary. When I was his age, I lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis!” He further attempts restoration, claiming that being scared is part of growing up and building character,

implying that his poor choice will actually benefit Manny later on. Jay is forced to agree with Gloria, however, when Manny wakes up from a nightmare in their bed.

Cam offers to help Haley's boyfriend, Dylan, when a band member suddenly quits before a gig. Dylan expresses reluctance because Cam is "old" but eventually agrees. When Mitchell arrives home to find the band practicing in his living room, he expresses his loss of autonomy and threatens Cam's image as a careful parent when he indicates one band member with Lily and says: "I'll always remember him as the stranger holding my baby." Mitchell loses face again when he reminds Cam of their plans tomorrow night and Cam replies: "I just feel like I kind of need this." The family all show up for Cam's performance.

Mitchell ends up supporting Cam's face by showing up and staying for his entire concert. He loudly cheers, explaining later that it was his "moment." Cam is pleasantly surprised later when he finds out Mitchell stayed to watch him instead of fulfilling his other social obligations, thus prioritizing Cam. However, when Cam reveals he plans to continue filling in, Mitchell feels imposed upon. Before he can address this, the original band member returns, explaining that he can play for them again, and Cam loses face when the other band members make it clear they are willing to replace him.

### **Airport 2010**

Jay and Gloria walk through an airport, ready to embark on a trip celebrating Jay's birthday. Jay, excitedly, compliments Gloria because he is so happy about their plans. As they wait to board, the Dunphys arrive, and Gloria announces that they are coming too, as part of Jay's surprise. Jay keeps a smile on his face despite two threats to his autonomy: his family is joining their trip, and Gloria paid for their tickets with his money, explaining to the audience, "I love my family, but do I have to love them in Hawaii?"

When Mitchell and Cam arrive at the airport, Mitchell realizes he has forgotten his wallet and threatens Cam's face rather than risk lose his own: "If you had done what I asked you to do this morning, then I wouldn't have been overwhelmed and I would've remembered my wallet." Phil springs into action, assuring Mitchell that they can get his wallet and be back in time. Claire's makes it clear that she is unhappy with this news, and the audience learns from a scene earlier that day that Claire is nervous about air travel. A later scene depicts Cam clapping at a sleeping Lily, and the he appears before the cameral with Mitchell, explaining that he does not Lily to be awake and bothering other travelers on the plane. Mitchell appears to support this notion, recounting a horrible experience he had flying next to "baby who was very upset, and Cam takes some time to realize this is a face attack: "I was on that flight, and I don't recall – oh, I get it, you're talking about me. That's very funny."

Jay, who was looking forward to relaxing and reading, continues to suffer negative face lose when Gloria surprises him with plans to take the whole family hiking each morning. Jay does not show his frustration again when he finds out that the family has planned some sort of show for his birthday, further encroaching on his freedom.



Claire calls Phil and tells him what needs he has not mean, calling into question again, his competence as a husband, “You’re supposed to be here with me. I told you, I get more and more freaked out as we get closer to the flight. I was counting on you to be here, so thanks a lot.” Phil attempts to save face for Claire following her outburst, as well as restore face for himself following the scolding, telling Mitchell that Claire is simply tightly wound, and some people are like that. Mitchell inadvertently proves his point and challenges his driving ability: “Could you drive any slower?” Phil does not respond in kind, even when they get to Mitchell’s home and he realizes he has forgotten his keys with Cam. Rather Phil takes the opportunity his problem solving skills. While Mitchell and Phil are coming back to the airport, Mitchell and Claire both threaten the faces of their significant others to Phil and Cam respectively. Claire tells Cam that Phil “abandoned” her, and Mitchell tells Phil that Cam let him down. The two conversations show the inherent difficulties in both relationships. Claire suggests that Cam pay better attention to what Mitchell needs (like she wishes Phil would), and Phil suggests Mitchell just ask Cam for help (like he wishes Claire would). Phil and Mitchell make it to the airport just in time, and the couples’ separate talks have given each insight into their own relationship. Claire and Mitchell both apologize for their frustration, and Phil and Cam heartily forgive them expressing a desire to be more aware of their needs.

Claire later meets her father at the airport bar, and he reveals the actual reason for his face loss: “It just kinda feels like Gloria is going out of her way not to spend time with me.” Claire performs facework for both Jay and Gloria, assuring Jay that Gloria loves him and that she wants him to be happy, giving Jay a feeling of acceptance, and casting Gloria in a wholesome light. Jay face is further restored when he later finds out Gloria’s final surprise: plans for the couple to stay in Hawaii longer than the rest of the family.

## Hawaii

The family all arrive in Hawaii. Phil and Claire reveal that an unexpected pregnancy with Haley interfered with their plans to have a traditional wedding and honeymoon in Hawaii. When Phil jokes that their trip to the courthouse got him a life sentence, Claire sharply reminds him, “You begged me to marry you.” As the whole family is walking into the hotel, Phil reveals his plans to make up for their missed opportunity, suggesting they turn their vacation into a honeymoon. Claire tells him that a mother travelling with her children is not taking a vacation, but a business trip, implying that Phil’s work as a father is not equal to hers as a mother, as well as pointing out a foolishness in his suggestion.

Phil later suggests couples’ massages for himself and Claire. When she again threatens face by declining, Phil restores face telling the audience the reason for his overbearing persistence: wanting to give Claire “the honeymoon [she] never had.” In an effort to make his plans work and maintain his autonomy to “woo” his wife, he tries to get his children to spend time with their uncles and Jay and Gloria. When this proves unsuccessful, he makes a more overt attempt, directing Claire to “just keep walking” when the children are stopped at the entrance to an “adults only” pool. When Claire later becomes concerned that the children are unsupervised, Phil asserts his position again, reminding her that “turning a family vacation into a honeymoon takes commitment.” Claire agrees. Later that evening however, Claire again shows disapproval of Phil’s plans when Alex informs them that Haley is drunk in the bathroom upstairs. “Remember earlier in the pool when you convinced me to let Haley go next door with complete strangers?” With this question, Claire not only threatens Phil’s face, but defends her own, by implying that Phil is solely responsible for negligence that she was complicit in.

By the pool, Mitchell and Cam reveal their plans to take Lily to see the “world’s largest banyan tree.” Jay ridicules their entertainment choice, but they defend themselves to the cameras, explaining that their mutual sense of adventure is one of the things they appreciate most in each other. Cam however, tells the audience that he “may have exaggerated [his] interest in adventurous travel by implying that [he] had any.” Cam explains that he cannot tell the truth now, because it is something Mitchell loves about him. Revealing the truth then, would cause face damage to Cam, who would be shown a liar, and Mitchell, who would have been duped into believing something by someone he should be able to trust.

Later, when the two are about to leave for a lavender farm, Cam finally tells Mitchell, that he is in fact “the stay-by-the-pool guy” he claimed not to be. At this, Mitchell suffers both positive and negative face damage, because he at once feels the loss of a fundamental similarity with Cam, as well freedom to continue having adventures with Cam. Mitchell later returns and makes up a story about how wonderful his trip was, telling Cam, “I’m just trying to get back at you for bailing on me.” Cam does not retaliate, but instead gets Mitchell some refreshments and calls a masseuse over for his feet. Later when the two are celebrating Mitchell’s new appreciation of relaxation, they accidentally leave Lily in her stroller on an elevator. They realize too late to stop the elevator from leaving, and begin to panic.

Jay, who has been lounging by the pool, and turning down invitations to be active, receives a phone call from his brother wishing him a happy birthday and reminding him that he is now as old as their father was when he died. His brother comforts him, reminding them that their father took poor care of himself. This causes face loss however, as Jay takes a look at his hamburger and fries and realizes he is not in the shape he should be in. He quickly leaves to join Gloria at the gym. In continued concern for his health, he tells Gloria that they have a tennis

court reserved. Gloria explains to the audience how Jay's new active lifestyle is imposing upon her: "I thought that one of the advantages of marrying an older guy was that I was going to be able to relax."

Later, the whole family is looking for Jay to begin his birthday party. Phil finally finds him in a hammock, "stuck," having hurt his back. Gloria has found Lily and Mitch and Cam are relieved to see them together. Gloria restores face for them, "Don't beat yourself up, these things happen." Phil and Jay finally meet with Gloria and Jay dismisses Phil. Jay again begins to confess some of his concerns for his health, but Gloria restores face for him by explaining that she was exhausted from all of the activities Jay had planned for them. Each of the couples ends the vacation the way they had hoped: Jay and Gloria relax and have their meals brought to them by the pool. Mitchell and Cam take Lily sightseeing, and Phil surprises Claire with a wedding ceremony on the beach with her family. Phil, wanting to prevent face loss, says as he walks her towards the aisle, "I still can't tell if you think this is lame or cool." She affirms face for him, telling him it is "incredibly cool."

### **Family Portrait**

In the Dunphy home, Phil is getting ready to go to a game, when Claire reminds him of their plans to have a family portrait done. When Phil tells her he has not tried on the pants for the picture, she urges him to, so that he will not look like "Where's Waldo." Phil ridicules her, pointing out that the purpose of the game is to find Waldo, and that his name is only Waldo. Claire prevents potential negative face loss when she tells Phil, "I have spent weeks trying to find a time that works for everybody and finding the right photographer. So if you could just promise me that you'll cooperate, okay?"

Jay shows a disinterest in Gloria's culture when he asks her to talk to the maid because they speak the same language. Gloria counters, "She's Portuguese. Do you know how offensive it is that you put all of us in the same mixing pot?" Jay does not try to restore face, but sarcastically asks Gloria to apologize to the maid for him. Phil and Alex arrive for the game, explaining that Luke had to cancel for a school project. Jay loses face, when after extolling the virtues of keeping commitments; the phone rings, reminding him that he agreed to an interview with Luke for the assignment. When Luke tells Jay that his classmates' have more interesting grandparents, Jay restores face by making up stories of famous people frequenting his father's barbershop.

At Mitchell and Cam's home, Mitchell asks Cam a question, phrased in a way that discourages face threat. "You're okay with me not going with you today, right? I'm really bad at small talk, so. . ." Cam has been hired to sing at a wedding. Mitchell's question implies that Cam should not be upset, and he provides a face maintaining excuse for wanting to stay home. Not wanting to start an argument with Cam, Mitchell whispers his concerns to Lily: "I feel tension." After Cam leaves, Mitchell begins to panic when a pigeon enters the house. He calls Cam for help but loses face when Cam hangs up to prepare before giving Mitchell advice. After cowering in Lily's room, Mitchell finally tells her, "I am a man, I am going to the kitchen to get your milk." Mitchell ends up destroying the house fighting the pigeon.

Phil and Gloria are at the game with Manny and Alex. When Claire needs to ask Phil a question, she calls his cell phone, but has her autonomy threatened when she sees Phil ignore the call on camera. Phil becomes uncomfortable when he sees himself and Gloria on the kiss cam at the game, but, when the crowd begins to boo them, Gloria grabs Phil's face and kisses him.

Meanwhile, Haley sends Alex a text to let her know that Claire saw Phil on the camera and she is very angry.

Later, at Jay's house, Claire is preparing for the family photograph, and again asserts her will, instructing Jay to put his wine glass down to avoid ruining her picture. Phil and Gloria arrive, and Phil immediately apologizes to Claire, but she promises him they can work it out later. When Jay says he heard they enjoyed the game, Phil tries to restore face: "No I didn't . . . I love your daughter." After Gloria changes into a very revealing dress, Claire, annoyed, asks Phil if she has seen it, and he takes the opportunity to present himself as a dedicated, loyal husband: "What? Why would I look at her dress? I love you!" Mitchell and Cam arrive arguing about the damage to the house. Cam passive-aggressively notes that none of the damage would have been done if Mitchell had come to the wedding with him: "I get it. You're terrified of small talk, and birds. You're lucky that pigeon didn't want to chat you up about the weather."

Tensions high, the family finally prepares to set up outside for the picture. Phil, eager to make amends, apologizes to Claire again but tries to save face: "I didn't do anything. She kissed me." Jay becomes angry hearing this as well, but urges them to all cooperate for the picture. Cam chooses that moment to explain the face loss Mitchell caused him: "It was a big day for me and he didn't want to go because he doesn't like small talk!" Claire again asserts her authority, demanding that the family participate together and revealing her concern with image: "We are gonna get together and act like a normal family for one-tenth of a freaking second, and we're gonna do it right now." When Jay steps in to lecture his children about being too "up tight," she challenges him for a solution. He defiantly throws mud on her white shirt, which results in the entire family venting their frustration through a mud fight. This is just the outlet they all need, however, and they all happily take a string of muddy pictures together.

## Discussion

The instances of attacked, lost, restored and maintained face described above allowed the researcher to identify predominant patterns of face orientation and damage suffered by the main characters. The characters can each be seen acting out of motives to protect self-, mutual-, and other-face, in response to various instances of face loss. The researcher found that one member of each couple (Jay, Claire, and Mitchell) greatly favored concern for self-face, while their partners (Gloria, Phil, and Cam) showed greater concern other-face in their interactions.

Jay, who repeatedly suffers face damage regarding his role as a husband and father, shows a predominant concern for self-face. Jay's sense of belonging with his young, attractive wife and his role as a caring and able father suffered damage in nine of the 24 episodes. Jay's worthiness of such a wife is repeatedly scorned. He is mistaken for Gloria's father by strangers ("Pilot"). "Coal Digger" reveals that Jay's own family members believe that he is not attractive enough to warrant the attention of such a woman. Jay is even publically mocked for his marriage to such a youthful and beautiful woman by his favorite comedian ("My Funky Valentine"). Jay clearly feels inferior when Gloria's attractive and spontaneous ex-husband comes to visit Manny. Though Gloria is careful and attentive to remind Jay that her opinion of him is the only one that matters, Jay responds to all these threats by trying to alter his image to that of a younger, stronger, and more attractive man. He buys "young" clothes, opts for more physically demanding activities with his wife (dancing, hiking), and even fishes for compliments from his son and Cam, since they are "like women." Jay's response to these threats shows a debilitating insecurity, but not in his relationship with Gloria. He is not so much doubting her love for him, as he is doubting that others could believe it and accept it. Jay is more concerned with the face of the relationship than the relationship itself, finding his happiness in how happy others perceive

him to be, rather than a marriage to a wife who truly loves him. Even when Jay acts to preserve the image of his relationship with Gloria, it seems to be a roundabout way of esteeming himself: the happier his relationship appears, the more desirable he will appear. If the relationship seems strong, people will not assume Gloria is only with him for financial security. Such assumptions would leave Jay appearing naïve, easily manipulated, and undesirable. Jay's overwhelming concern for self-face is clear in the series, but it goes beyond that. Jay is not neutral regarding other-face; in fact he seems to go out of his way to cause threat.

Jay repeatedly shows a lack of acceptance for both of the partners his children have chosen. Two episodes are devoted to Jay's dislike of Phil ("Come Fly with Me" and "Benched"), with allusions to it throughout the season. Despite Phil's devotion, loyalty, and provision for Claire and his children, Jay does not respect Phil as a husband or father, and communicates his disdain through frequent and severe face threats, without the slightest attempt to mask his animosity. When confronted, he excuses his behavior, petulantly stating that Phil is not even his son. Jay's relationship with Phil shows a lack of willingness to compromise on even the smallest detail (rather than enjoy a meal, he harasses Phil about his grilling in front of everyone). Phil shows regret on multiple occasions at the status of his relationship with Jay, but it is typically presented as a humorously one-sided quest for approval. Though clearly not entirely comfortable with Mitchell's sexuality and family life, Jay's relationship with Cam seems far less hostile. He typically treats Cam with civility, perhaps because of his discomfort, rather than in spite of it. Interestingly, Jay seems less accepting of his own son than of his partner. On multiple occasions, he belittles Mitchell by mocking his less-than-masculine traits and lifestyle. Jay's words and behaviors consistently show no effort to protect the feelings of his family members. Indeed, the opposite is true.



Even with his wife, Jay shows little concern for other-face. Despite his frequent dependence upon her face-giving reassurances, he does not hesitate to belittle her or make light of events that clearly caused her distress. For example, as the two are explaining DeDe's outburst at their wedding ("The Incident"), Jay shows tremendous insensitivity to Gloria's feelings. He makes a self-congratulatory joke blaming DeDe's behavior on his desirability, thus twisting an event that caused face damage for Gloria in order to glorify his own face. Jay seems to be unaware or dismissive of external face threats to Gloria, unless they somehow pertain to him as well, as in "Coal Digger." When Luke accidentally reveals that his mother has been calling Gloria a "gold digger" behind her back, Jay shows only brief concern for Gloria before revealing how the comments affected his own sense of self. The implication that Gloria is only with him for his money prompts him to turn to Mitchell and Cam for face restoration, asking them if they find him attractive.

Jay's role as the patriarch of this family seems to present a cautionary "sins of the father" tale for the viewers. His two adult children, Claire and Mitchell, each seem to share his philosophy on family and his regard for self-face at the expense of other-face. This is evident throughout based on their behaviors, but most clearly shown in the same episode ("Coal Digger"), when Luke and Manny fight at school, putting both mothers at odds. A very telling scene reveals face strategies shared by Claire and Jay, and by Phil and Gloria. Phil encourages Claire to work things out constructively with Gloria, but she insists on ignoring the matter. Jay argues with Gloria that the best course of action is to passively pretend that nothing has happened at all. Later, when Gloria leaves, upset at being ill-spoken of, Jay reveals the Pritchett strategy for relational and conflict management: "This is exactly why we sweep things under the rug, so people don't get hurt." Mitchell participates in this as well, passive-aggressively hinting

at being angry with both his father and his partner in this episode. This happens frequently throughout the program, but this method of conflict management is rather dysfunctional (Cahn and Abigail, 39).

Unfortunately, however, Jay's influence is clear in the way both of his children treat their partners and other family members. Jay's children, Claire and Mitchell also show greatest concern for self-face in their interactions with their families. Even when Phil is the clear victim of Jay's face-threats in "Come Fly With Me," Claire shows concern for how the actions affect her, asking her father, "How do you think that makes *me* feel, Dad?" Her reaction is notably similar to Jay's when Gloria loses face in "Coal Digger." Both defend their spouses, but primarily (perhaps only) by defending themselves.

Later in the season, Claire goes to great lengths to present a perfect family life to her visiting friend, Valerie ("Moon Landing"). This (like Jay's behavior described above) ostensibly seems to be out of concern for mutual-face, as Claire works to present a functional, happy family to her friend. However, Claire's outburst when things do not go as planned denotes a more self-centered impulse. She wants her friend to believe that Claire made the right choice in abandoning her career to raise a family. Claire wants to appear fulfilled and happy. If she does not, she risks certain face damage if Valerie believes that she was foolish enough to throw away her profession for a dysfunctional family. Like Jay, Claire is more concerned with the appearance of a happy family than the reality of one. This is clear again in "Family Portrait," when Claire is adamant that the family look perfect for the photograph, and ignores the clear tensions each couple is experiencing.

Claire also shares Jay's seeming disdain for other-face. She is eager to criticize her family members. She treats her husband as though he were a fourth child, repeatedly

undermining his choices and instincts as a parent. In two consecutive episodes (“Pilot,” “Run for your Wife”), Claire makes comments to the audience implying that Phil is of little help in raising the children, while Phil sits next to her, visibly uncomfortable. She also questions his parenting choices in front of the children in multiple episodes (“Undeck the Halls,” “Travels with Scout,” “Hawaii”). Perhaps more telling than Claire’s behavior is Phil’s in “The Bicycle Thief.” When he thinks Luke’s bike has been stolen, he goes to such great lengths to avoid letting Claire find out, as this would give her another reason to berate him. Claire shows again and again a willingness to belittle her husband, but little tolerance for having her own face threatened.

Jay’s son Mitchell also shows a tremendous concern for self-face at the expense of other-face. Like his father and sister, Mitchell’s occasional display of concern for mutual-face seems to thinly mask his predominant concern for self-face. There is also a clear double standard in his treatment of Cam’s and his own face, particularly in regards to homosexual stereotypes. This is addressed almost immediately in the first episode, when Mitchell vehemently defends their lifestyle against an entirely imagined face threat, but later chastises Cam, ordering him to make Lily’s room “less gay.” In the first instance, Mitchell valiantly defends his relationship with Cam, condemning his fellow plane passengers for judging them. He heroically tells them of their adoption of Lily, and how impactful it will be for her life, almost daring them to make another derogatory comment. While, at first glance, this could appear to be in the interest of mutual-face, his subsequent treatment of Cam in their home betrays his lack of concern for Cam’s face. After his comment to Cam, it is clear that he was only interested in defending the relationship as it reflected on him. He reacts similarly when his family arrives to meet Lily. He defends his relationship with Cam, when Jay and Claire both imply that they would be terrible parents, but Cam is not even present to suffer face damage. Therefore, this is clearly an attempt

to salvage his own self-image before his very critical family. In the subsequent episode, he again passive-aggressively mocks Cam's dramatic and flamboyant manner of expression, implying that he should be embarrassed. Later, in "The Bicycle Thief" Mitchell again instructs Cam to act more "like a straight guy" so that the couple will not be ostracized by the other couples present at Lily's event. This shows a lack of acceptance for Cam's personality and mannerisms, and, again, a willingness to threaten Cam's face in order to protect his own.

Throughout the season, these three characters prove to have the least concern for other-face and the greatest concern for self-face. Not only are they willing to commit face-threatening acts, but often they are even eager to do so. According to this analysis, these three only worked to protect other-face when self-face was not threatened. When it was, they were quick to risk face damage of their partners to preserve it. Despite this, Jay, Claire, and Mitchell are each married to people who support them, tolerate them, love them, and maintain face for them.

Gloria, Phil, and Cam all show a great concern for the face of their partners, and willingly take a great deal of abuse from them. Gloria is careful to reassure Jay when others have doubts about their relationship. Phil works to make Claire feel like a competent wife and a good mother, and often ignores her poor treatment of him rather than punish it. Cam, on many occasions, tries to alter his behavior in order to avoid embarrassing Mitchell, passively acknowledging Mitchell's judgmental view of him. Somehow, despite the insensitive behavior described above, each couple ends each episode happy to be a family together.

In "Great Expectations," Phil, though disappointed in Claire's sub-par anniversary gift painstakingly maintains face for her throughout. He feigns enthusiasm over her gift of "little coupons," and later assures her that she should not feel bad about it. In this and other situations like it, Phil does not threaten Claire's face, though he would perhaps be justified in doing so,

given Claire's habitually threatening treatment of him. Even Claire's outrageous behavior in "Moon Landing" (described above), does not tempt Phil to treat her in kind. Rather, he ignores the outburst on her return, choosing not to make her answer for or even acknowledge her ill treatment of the entire family.

Gloria is also careful to maintain face for Jay, rushing to mend the damage when he feels unattractive, unworthy, or invalidated by others. This occurs most obviously in "Pilot" and "My Funky Valentine." In the former, she urges him to ignore the opinions of strangers, assuring him that he can trust that she is with him for the right reasons. The latter depicts her again soothing Jay's insecurities when a celebrity that he admires publically mocks him and his relationship with Gloria. In "Up All Night," after Jay has belittled Gloria for falling for her first husband, she does not retaliate even when given the perfect opportunity to do so. When Jay becomes friendly with Javier only to be stood up, Gloria simply goes out to bring him back in the house, refusing to indulge in an "I told you so" speech. In her relationship with Jay, then, Gloria consistently shows greater concern for other- than self-face. She maintains and restores face for Jay tirelessly, despite his apathy for her own.

Cam, the victim of many a hypocritical face threat at the hands of his partner, still takes care to protect Mitchell's self-image. He indulges his requests to behave in a manner "less gay," and attempts to smooth things over when Mitchell overreacts in social situation, as in "Pilot." When Mitchell has his outburst on the plane over nothing, Cam attempts to take the other passengers' attention off of it by offering to pay for everyone's headphones on the flight. Like Phil ("Moon Landing"), and Gloria ("Up All Night"), Cam shows a reluctance to point out the hypocrisy of his partner, as in "Come Fly With Me." Mitchell begins the episode chastising Cam for shopping at a discount store, but becomes enthralled with the place when he sees all the

options it holds as they make their way through it. Cam is careful not to point out Mitchell's inconsistency too sharply, showing kindness to his very unkind partner.

The three characters who primarily favor concern for self-face, Jay, Claire, and Mitchell, are married to the three characters who not only put up with such behavior, but sometimes go out of their way to communicate acceptance and kindness. Essentially, the three cruelest, most selfish, and inconsiderate characters not only get away with their dysfunctional behavior, but are rewarded for it. Their partners treat them well, despite the more or less abusive behavior they indulge in. Such a pattern, if implemented in a real family, could surely not sustain itself.

The mockumentary style of sitcom provides a unique opportunity to discuss politeness theory and strategies. The characters, in their day-to-day actions, seem aware of an audience, though they only address them during talking head sequences. After scenes play out between family members, those involved are often given the chance to save face in front of the audience through elaboration, explanation, and justification of their action. Often, when these interview are conducted alone, a single character will restore face with an explanation that threatens the face of the non-present family member as well, showing even less concern with maintaining face for one not present to maintain his or her own. Characters can be seen performing preventative and restorative facework during these sequences. However, these acts of facework are almost always in the interest of self-face, often at the expense of another not present.

Based on the above analysis, this program provides for society a model of a family in utter dysfunction: members are willing to mock, undermine, deceive, ridicule and control one another. Such a family in reality would likely be very unhappy and unhealthy, yet in each half-hour program, questions of fidelity, honesty, and other major sources of family conflict are neatly wrapped up in a heartfelt and often comical way. In reality, however, the acts portrayed

on this program could have potentially devastating relational consequences. This unrealistic presentation of a family dynamic could have a terribly negative impact on society. Characters who shame and abuse their family members are intended to make their audience laugh rather than think. The family issues are portrayed in such a light-hearted manner that viewers could easily become desensitized to the face and relational needs of their families. Not only are these face threats portrayed as humorous, but those who habitually and mercilessly commit them receive gracious and kind treatment from their victims. This is an ugly cycle portrayed, and audiences who learn behaviors from this family may be shocked and dismayed to find that their family members are not so forgiving. Being in a family means forming a shared identity. If one suffers face threat, all do; however, half of the main characters in this program repeatedly threaten the faces of the ones they should be most motivated to protect.

The recurring themes in this program could have a disastrous effect on audiences. It teaches its viewers to take family for granted, because, no matter what happens in each episode, at the end of it, the family is intact. No matter how these characters behave, the consequences are always unrealistically minimal, if they exist at all. Rather these frequent face threats within the families are to be laughed at. To the passive viewer, this program teaches that face-threatening acts have absolutely no negative impact on family relationships, and may even be beneficial to strengthening the bond between family members, as when Claire's subversive gossip about Gloria resulted in the entire extended family spending some fun quality time together in the pool. The program indeed trivialized face threats, treating them as an everyday occurrence within families, and certainly nothing to be avoided. However, the repeated threat to characters' competence, attractiveness, and independence that would surely lead to broken trust and damaged relationships do not take any toll on this family. While at times face-threatening

acts will be necessary within a family, this one takes every chance it can to commit them, all in the name of comedy. Family is a fragile thing, and one not highly valued today. The messages in this program further devalue it and teach its audiences to do the same. The implications of this analysis show a necessity and provide a gateway for further research into sitcoms and what they teach, with possible avenues following.



## **Chapter 5: Limitations, Recommendations for Future Research, and Conclusion**

While this study contributes to our understanding of popular entertainment, it was not without its limitations, for which remedies are discussed here. Though an entire season is examined in this study, an analysis of the entire series was impractical and impossible, because as of the writing of this thesis, the program was still airing its fifth season on ABC. While this program then, could not be analyzed in its entirety, such a study could show long-term relational consequences, if any exist, for the communication choices outlined here. It could also reveal whether characters hold to these tendencies throughout the series or if they learn how to better manage face for one another. Such an analysis could also be applied to other sitcoms as well in order to determine if such disregard for face is commonplace throughout the genre.

However, such studies should not be limited to the genre represented here. By its very nature, a sitcom is not likely to portray the relational fallout we should expect from the above-described behaviors, but this is probably not true of all genres. An analysis of popular drama programs would likely return different results with regard to face concerns. With television featuring so prominently in society, an understanding of the various themes and patterns represented could only benefit those in the industry as well as those consuming its output.

Along these lines, researchers could examine perceptions of this and other programs in a variety of ways. Various studies featured in the literature review showed that face concerns and threats vary from culture to culture. This being the case, future researchers could expose audiences representing different cultures to the text and measure reactions. It is possible that such a family would not be so “adored,” or perhaps even tolerated, in a culture that is more collectivistic or higher power distance. Researchers could also measure attitudes towards the characters and their face concerns, comparing male and female responses.

O'Driscoll describes the "discomfiture" experienced not only by the person losing face, but by all present on their behalf. He provides the example of an actor forgetting his lines, arguing that the audience will be embarrassed for him or her, experiencing vicarious anxiety in direct proportion to that of the victim (known as "fellow-feeling"). This raises an interesting issue regarding the program, *Modern Family*, then, as the characters are repeatedly losing face before the audience. Future research could examine the link between face loss and humor on this or possibly other sitcoms, with the purpose of determining why audiences laugh at such misfortune on television, while cringing at it in real life. This could be achieved either by a rhetorical analysis of types of humor used, or by measuring audience response to the instances of face loss. Exposing subjects to these scenes and providing them with an opportunity to react to them, perhaps through interview, focus group, or questionnaire, could shed some light on this discrepancy. An understanding of what makes something undesirable in real life into something relished in television would provide insight into our media choices. Such a study could also incorporate uses-and-gratification theory, which explains that we make media choices based on our moods, "needs and desires" (Wood, 310).

The researcher was alarmed and fascinated by the characters' often-total disregard of one another's face. It would be beneficial to determine if audiences find this behavior acceptable in the characters, or if they experience any discomfort at their actions. Exposure to scenes followed by interviews or focus groups could answer this. If television indeed influences the actions and attitudes of its audience, then understanding this program's effect on society could serve to improve family communication. This program could have tremendously damaging effects upon society. The portrayal of this family minimizes the consequences of habitual, viciously face-threatening statements and actions. Cruelty and backbiting within families is

commonplace, something to be laughed at. Because of this, the researcher thought a comparative analysis would be an appropriate way to further study this sitcom. This program could be analyzed in a method similar to that presented in Simmons and Rich (2013) which observed changing themes and tendencies of sitcom throughout the decades. While the past article dealt specifically with feminism and evolving sitcom treatments of women, future researchers could examine changing treatments of politeness and face within sitcoms and perhaps determine how they reflect changes in society. A comparative analysis of politeness themes in *Modern Family* and programs from past television eras could accomplish this. In addition, a study which measured generational perceptions of the programs themes could yield valuable results. Perhaps someone who grew up with *I Love Lucy* or *The Andy Griffith Show* would not be amused by a family who treats each other as flippantly as this one.

While this study focused primarily on issues of face and politeness within a particular sitcom (a topic not frequently addressed in past literature), it is by no means the only applicable theory of social science. Many others could also be used to explain or challenge the relationships and behaviors portrayed in this and other television programs. Festinger (1957) writes of cognitive dissonance, citing its reduction as a primary motivation for human behaviors. “Just as hunger” leads one to act “toward hunger reduction,” so dissonance, any conflicting “knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one’s behavior” (3), will lead an individual to change either his or her beliefs or behaviors to restore consonance. Future research could examine this concept in much the same way, again looking for consistency or its lack between the actions portrayed and expectations based on established theories of human behavior.

Another potential avenue would be the analysis of the characters' favored styles of conflict management. Rahim (2011) identifies five strategies and provides examples of when they might be appropriate choices: integrating, avoiding, obliging, dominating, and compromising (52). He cautions that while some behavioral theorists have labeled integrative problem-solving as the most effective method of resolution, the efficacy of each style may be situation-dependent. This opens up the possibility of identifying which characters choose different styles in varying situations. The findings of such a study would have benefits and implications similar to those of the current study.

A study such as the one described in Cooper (2003) could provide feedback on why such a program is successful. Based on the assumptions of politeness theory, these characters are not rational or typical adults. Receiving feedback from focus groups could reveal the appeal of such characters and stories. Perhaps there is a vicarious quality to these programs, in that they allow audiences to identify with a character who either says what they wish they could say or is mistreated as they are.

Shifting gears, an examination of what makes this show funny could provide insight into why audiences laugh at situations that could potentially cause distress in real life. Morell identifies superiority theory as the more prevalent current theory of humor. He explains that, according to this theory, "laughter is an expression of feeling of superiority over someone else, or over the way we used to be" (24). This concept seems especially applicable to expanding the current study, as it focused on face damaging acts of family members against one another. Future research could examine whether or not we laugh at these because they make us feel superior. This could be achieved again through measuring audience response to this or another comedy program.

Finally, while this study adds important knowledge to our understanding of popular culture, it is important to remember that the researcher analyzed scripted behaviors of fictional characters. Therefore we can draw no conclusions of actual human behavior or motivation from the analysis conducted here. It is important that we do not blur reality with fiction, but equally important that we understand what our mass communication is teaching us. Galvin, et al. (2004) maintain that no functional family is without its conflicts, but the fictional family examined here clearly does not handle them constructively. However, we must be careful to avoid drawing inferences about genuine human interaction from false representations of it. *Time Magazine* once predicted that television “would change the American way of life more than anything since the Model T” (Goldstein, 299). Researchers and society in general would do well to understand just what influence it is having.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding pages have presented past and current research on human behavior through the framework of politeness theory. This study’s purpose was to determine if the main characters in one sitcom, *Modern Family*, behave in ways consistent with the assumptions of politeness theory. The literature review provided an overview of research related to the theory as well as a sampling of studies that have examined texts related to the program in the current study. The methodology chapter provided some background information on *Modern Family*, as well as a list of the episodes in question, spanning the entire first season of the program. The results of this study showed that these characters typically show little effort to avoid committing face-threatening acts against one another. These findings raise questions about the nature of our entertainment choices today, as, according to politeness theory, it is in the mutual best interest of rational communicators to maintain face for one another. They also warrant further investigation

into audience perception of relational behaviors portrayed onscreen, as described in the most recent chapter. While it apparently does not portray true-to-life behavior, the sitcom does provide an interesting avenue with which to frame a study of human communication behavior, or perhaps its misrepresentation. As its popularity continues to maintain and rise, there will be no shortage of research options. Carter's (1998) account of the decline of American morality with the growing prominence of televisions in the average home (158) and the results of this analysis do not contradict that. We must be careful to ensure that we make art rather than allowing it to make us.

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Print.

Appendix – Episode List

1. Pilot
2. Run for your Wife
3. The Bicycle Thief
4. Come Fly with Me
5. The Incident
6. Coal Digger
7. En Garde
8. Great Expectations
9. Fizbo
10. Undeck the Halls
11. Up All Night
12. Not in my House
13. Fifteen Percent
14. Moon Landing
15. My Funky Valentine
16. Fears
17. Truth Be Told
18. Starry Night
19. Game Changer
20. Benched
21. Travels with Scout
22. Airport 2010
23. Hawaii
24. Family Portrait