Mum & Mother is a family drama about the Fishers, a fully female, working-class family struggling financially with the imminent arrival of two new babies; both mum, Natalie, and her fifteen-year-old daughter, Emily, are pregnant.

Though I initially pitched *Mum & Mother* during a six-month Thesis Advisory Panel, I decided to move on from the idea and develop something more plot-driven, with lots of drama and action. I started working on an unnamed sci-fi mystery in which police use memory recall to track down killers. Having already written a short script for this, *Murder at the Grand Swan Hotel*, I used this to help build my scene-by-scene breakdown, utilising parts of the existing script to build character and plot events. However, I soon found my passion for the idea dwindling, and after a long discussion with my supervisor, decided it was best to move on. This gave me the freedom to focus on something new, something that I wanted to write about: a family drama. Consequently, I began developing a screenplay focusing on a husband revealing to his wife that he is gay and the changes in family dynamics following the event. Though I preferred this premise, I quickly found that the story itself was not strong enough and needed changing. However, the changes soon developed the story from the family drama I wanted into a romantic comedy, vastly different from what I set out to write. After two failed attempts to begin writing, I found myself back in the development process of *Mum & Mother*. This was a story I always wanted to write. I knew who the characters were going to be and could relate to them and the themes involved. I've always been told to write what I know, and *Mum & Mother* is exactly that.

Coming from a female-led, single-parent household, I wanted to write something that encapsulated my experience of family, giving a positive representation of single mothers from working-class backgrounds. To contrast the male-dominated cast of my first screenplay, *Charlie in Space*, I felt it important to create a show with female leading roles. *Charlie in Space* featured only two female characters, one of whom is killed off within the first twenty pages. Whilst she was still an integral part of the film, her death acting as the catalyst for the main character's journey, she was still very much absent. The other female character was an afterthought, something I changed during the editing process after realising I lacked female characters. Originally an older brother, the character simply underwent a name change. Therefore, a focus on the female voice was something I wanted to get right in Mum & Mother.

Feedback from my Thesis Advisory Panel was mostly positive regarding *Charlie in Space*. The dialogue was identified as a strength, with both lecturers commenting that it was natural and believable. I was also told that my female character, Kate, the mother, was especially well written; she was likeable, authentic and had a great impact despite her limited screen time. Based on the feedback I leaned into this strength, confidently aiming to write a female-centric film about 'real' women. I wanted the film to be dialogue-heavy, allowing the characters to have natural conversations that appeared true to everyday life.

Knowing this, I decided to look deeper into the screenwriting process from a writer known for his captivating dialogue – Aaron Sorkin. The Aaron Sorkin Masterclass was hugely beneficial. Not only did it teach me about character building, structure, and other important factors of screenwriting, but it had a whole section on writing dialogue. Sorkin suggested treating dialogue like music. Seeing it this way may help the flow of dialogue – you want to

consider the pacing, tone, and volume, just like with a musical piece. He stated that a writer shouldn't be "intimidated if what [they're] writing is not how people sound. Take liberties and make beautiful dialogue" (Sorkin, 2016). Whilst a simplistic statement, this was impactful. I was strict about making realistic, true-to-life conversations between my characters, sometimes sacrificing a meaningful line of dialogue for something more colloquial. However, after the Masterclass, I eased up, allowing myself to incorporate dialogue that was effective, but wasn't necessarily how someone might speak in real life. I don't believe this removes the realism of the show, instead, it makes the conversations more impactful and entertaining - an integral objective of television drama.

Initially, *Mum & Mother* was going to be a feature film screenplay, however, it became quite clear that structurally, this format wasn't suitable. Problems that cropped up for characters were too easily overcome, and it never felt like Emily faced many challenges; to be a feature, the character had to have a clear journey. I wanted Natalie, Kate, and Emily to have equal importance throughout the story, however, this made the film confusing, as there was no clear main character to follow. If there were to be multiple main characters, the film needed to either follow Natalie and Emily's coinciding journeys, like in *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991)*, or* have a clearly defined theme with an ensemble cast, like *Love Actually* (Curtis, 2003). However, I found it hard to implement these necessary changes, wanting to keep the story about 'real' people, and exploring their everyday struggles. I was reluctant to add further drama and darken the dynamics within the family, fearing this would take away from the theme. Therefore, I re-structured the screenplay, transitioning it from a feature film to a pilot episode of a television show. Television drama tends to be more character-based than plot-driven, making this a productive change for *Mum & Mother*. Shows like *Gilmore Girls* and *This is Us* (2016) were an inspiration, helping me to work out episode structure and pacing.

This is Us was particularly helpful structurally; the show jumps between different characters within the same family, giving us a glimpse into each member's life through their own segment of the show. A strong storytelling device that I similarly implemented. These characters are treated with equal importance, essentially giving the show five protagonists, Rebecca and Jack*,* the parents of Kevin, Kate, and Randall. Whilst this ensemble cast might make the show harder structurally, the writer, Dan Fogelman, balances this using the Five Act Structure, though, in some acts, certain characters are missed – something that can't be helped with an ensemble cast (Miyamoto, 2021). This was something I took onboard, pushing my three protagonists, Natalie, Kate, and Emily, through five acts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. We meet all three together, however, it's quickly established who each character is and what they are going through. Natalie is heavily pregnant but rushing around her two daughters before work. Kate is pretentious but unemployed. Emily relies too heavily on her mother and is scared she herself might be pregnant. Natalie then gets fired, Emily's test is positive, but she doesn't believe it and Kate can't find a job. Natalie has a string of failed interviews and Emily's pregnancy is confirmed, but she and her boyfriend Sam plan to terminate. The show then focuses predominantly on Emily and Sam, shifting focus from the family to Emily's decision. She goes to the abortion clinic and only when the pill is in her hand, decides she can't go through with it. She and Sam agree to make it work and head back home on the bus without the abortion, their decision sitting heavy in the air. They avoid going home, scared to tell their parents. The

episode concludes with Sam telling Emily that everything will be okay as he drops her home, ready to tell Natalie. So, whilst the show follows the five-act structure, not all protagonists are present within each act. However, throughout future episodes the focus will continue to shift between storylines, sometimes giving more time to one character than the rest, however, they will gradually converge, showing the continuous interlinking of the family members.

As a female writer, I feel I am responsible for creating shows with a female voice and providing female watchers with some representation on screen. Therefore, the female characters in *Mum & Mother* are not one-dimensional. Despite her obvious pregnancy working as a visual reminder of her motherly status, Natalie is *more* than this, having a life outside of her girls. She has her own worries, ambitions, and inner turmoil. It's the same for the daughters too – they have their own lives outside the family unit, their own struggles, and journeys to go on. I think this is incredibly important. As a show about women, for women, my central female characters are fleshed out and deeply human so that audience members of different ages can relate to them and see a representation of everyday women on screen.

I took great inspiration from *Gilmore Girls* (2000). The show follows the life of Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, a mother-and-daughter duo who are more like best friends. Lorelai and Rory go through a lot in the seven seasons, evening coming back for a spin-off, *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* (2016), however, the central theme never changes – motherhood. No matter the storyline, be it Rory getting a boyfriend, or Lorelai buying an inn, the show always circles back to how the pair deal with the situations together, and how their relationship is impacted. This is what enabled the show to gain multiple seasons as there was so much to explore – if they existed, Rory and Lorelai can continue to develop, learn, and grow together, whether they get on or not. This is what I hoped to implement into my show. I wanted the focus of the show, despite any individual events occurring for the characters, to be on the relationship between mother and daughters. *Gilmore Girls* did this by always showing the duo dealing with the events together, sharing their worries and helping each other – I took note of this for my own writing.

I also wanted to create a show that focused on the everyday life of a working-class family. Since almost half (49%) of all Brits consider themselves to be working-class (Social Mobility Commission), I feel it is important that the media represents this population positively. Some existing shows on television already have commendable portrayals of working-class characters and were sources of inspiration to me. Soaps like *EastEnders* (1985) and *Coronation Street* (1960) follow a whole community of working-class families' day-to-day lives, giving them a real depth. Shows like *Waterloo Road* (2006), *Gavin and Stacey* (2007) and *Ackley Bridge* (2017) also follow the stories of working-class characters struggling with everyday issues, showing a dramatised version of the mundane. These shows represent the lower income, working population of the UK in a positive light, dramatising events for comedy, to evoke emotion or to highlight social issues for discussion. Soaps portrayals are often accurate, creating such 'real' characters that audience members react interpersonally, feeling they "know" the characters as if they were friends (Rubin, 1987). This is what I wanted to do with *Mum & Mother*. I wanted to create characters so true to life that

audience members can relate to them, know them and care for them. As Rubin's research shows, this is entirely possible.

One way I have tried to achieve this is through the character of Kate. The elder sister of the Fisher trio, Kate is struggling with unemployment following university. Her inability to find a job that utilises her degree is demotivating, and Kate finds herself in a slump, debating why she worked so hard for a degree she can't seem to use. This reflects current societal issues, with 1/3 of 18-24-year-olds believing it is harder for people from less advantaged backgrounds to achieve upwards mobility (Social Mobility Commission). Kate's story, therefore, reflects the target audiences' lived experiences, commenting on a working-class experience of social mobility and hopefully resonating with audiences.

Mum & Mother went through several changes. Not only did the script change format, becoming a pilot episode in place of a feature film, but the pilot had a few drafts. The first draft had a number of grammatical and formatting issues. The PDF copy of the script had random page breaks and spaces, as well as muddled-up elements, such as dialogue being formatted like action, or a scene heading formatted like dialogue. This highlighted the importance of thorough proofreading. As well as this, the script was too short, sitting at only forty-six pages (including the title page) in total. After a discussion with my supervisor, my new page count goal was fifty-six, giving me eleven pages to play with. When debating what to add, it was very apparent that Kate would benefit from an additional scene – she felt absent in my first draft. I wanted Kate to be an equally important protagonist in the show, however, from episode one, she appeared more like a secondary character, without a clear goal of her own. This was therefore something I wanted to work on in the next draft.

Draft two is much better. Hitting exactly fifty-six pages, it is a more suitable length for a television pilot. I added these extra pages by extending a couple of my pre-existing scenes and by adding new scenes. In Kate's new scene, she finds herself unable to apply for a job due to a lack of experience. The scene enables the audience to see that Kate is not unmotivated due to laziness but by a sense of helplessness – despite her degree and hard work, she still isn't good enough for the jobs she desires. With just this one scene, I have enhanced the audience's understanding of Kate and made a comment on social issues relating to predominately working-class individuals. This is directly followed by a short scene between Kate and Natalie, in which both characters discuss their shared unemployment. The scene shows Natalie's selflessness in putting her daughters' needs first. Though she makes a few comments about her own situation, Natalie quickly shifts focus, building up Kate's self-esteem and prioritising Kate's needs at that moment. This will provide something for Kate to build from – she will have to learn to be the selfless one.

The final scene that I added was between Emily and Sam at the end of the episode. Rather than ending with Sam and Emily on the bus home, the new ending sees the pair stalling their return, with Emily scared to disclose Natalie of her pregnancy. Contrastingly, Sam plays it cool, being the voice of reason. The addition of this scene will hopefully increase the anticipation of the following episode – Emily's anxiety will build up the intensity of the upcoming event, hopefully keeping viewers engaged, and willing to come back. I also aimed for the scene to lower audience expectations of Sam's reveal. Sam's calmness in the face of telling his parents will contrast their reaction in the following episode, with the intention of

surprising, and further captivating, viewers. We know that Evangeline 'Eva', Sam's mother, is stuck up and judgemental from episode one, however, audiences will match Sam's calmness, making Eva's outburst even more shocking.

Whilst I am happy with the screenplay currently, there are some changes that I would still like to make in future episodes. The major change that I intend to implement is to the character Jason, Emily and Kate's absent father. Throughout the first few episodes, Jason is a talking point for the characters, often mentioned and causing tension and arguments. When Jason does make an appearance, he is awful, does not recognise his daughter and doesn't care to talk to her when she introduces herself. He is unapologetic, and rude and shows no sign of change. Making Jason so one-dimensional, only allowing him to be the 'bad guy' might remove from the realism I am trying to create. Whilst he might have bad qualities, there must be something redeemable about him to make him feel human. I have therefore adapted his character description, mentioning that he often drives past the Fisher home to glimpse his family getting on without him. I think adding a scene to show this, even if just a small scene, will help to show that there is more to Jason than he allows people to see, making him more relatable and believable to audiences.

Another thing that I would like to develop further is the interlinking pregnancies of Emily and Natalie. The pregnancy of Natalie and her teen daughter at the same time is the thing that makes the show different, therefore, it would be good to explore this more. Currently, there are scenes that show a comparison of their experience of pregnancy to some degree. For example, Natalie's discussion with Stephen, a fling and future father of her baby, shows Natalie's struggle to convince him to be an active role in the baby's life. This greatly contrasts Emily and Sam, with Sam being overly attentive and excited about the birth of their child. Whilst this aims to show a contrast in their experience of pregnancy, there is a deeper intention. Despite Sam's clear desire to be a dad, Emily struggles to believe him, waiting for him to reveal his true desire to leave. This is intended to show the impact of Natalie's experience on her daughter. Emily can't truly believe a man wants to be a father when in her mother's experience, they always left. I like this contrast and its effect on the audience; showing their differing experience, but shared beliefs despite this, will reemphasise the theme of the show – mothers and their impact on their daughters.

Though there are a few scenes like this, I feel the show would benefit from more to really highlight the show's niche. Currently, Natalie and Emily's relationship remains much the same. They may argue or hold judgements against each other, but these never boil into real obstacles or change their relationship in a significant way. The scene described above doesn't currently lead to Emily voicing her feelings to Natalie, or Natalie internalising the impact her failed marriage had on her daughters. This could be impactful to explore, deepening the characters and testing their dynamics for a more entertaining and provocative series.

Mum & Mother is a show for women of all ages, though women within the age bracket of sixteen to forty may find themselves better able to relate to the characters onscreen. It is also aimed at the lower-income, working-class Brit. As such, it would be best suited for television broadcast through BBC, ITV or Channel 4, channels available on Freeview and financially accessible in comparison to streaming sites. These networks are also the home of

similar family shows; *Waterloo Road*, *Better Things* (2016) and *Gavin and Stacey* were all broadcast on Freeview platforms. This might guarantee a pre-established audience; people who watched these shows might come back for *Mum & Mother*.

To conclude, the writing experience gained in the development of *Mum & Mother* was incredibly insightful. I've learnt a lot about character development, structure, and the difference between a story for film and a story for television. The finished product is something I am proud of; I think the characters are believable and make for an engaging first episode. I hope this gets the opportunity to make it on screen.

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