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ON YOUR BLOCK: FAMILIAL REPRESENTATIONS WITHIN THE HIT NETFLIX SHOW

ON MY BLOCK

GRACE TELFER

66 Pages

Family is a large part of everyone's everyday lives, and so is the media. In this study, I examine the Netflix hit show *On My Block*, looking at the family structures presented, the family interactions and functions, the influences that family has on the main characters, and the familial messages presented through the show. This is significant to both family and media studies as it adds to the conversation surrounding family representation within the media. In this study, I examined the first three seasons of *On My Block* using an open coding methodology to discern what emerged regarding my research questions: (1) What family types emerge within *On My Block*?; (2) What are the functions and interactions of the family types represented in *On My Block*?; (3) In what ways are the main characters of *On My Block* shown to be influenced by their family experiences?; (4) What are the messages about idealized families and other types of families that are presented in *On My Block*?

ON YOUR BLOCK: FAMILIAL REPRESENTATIONS WITHIN THE HIT NETFLIX SHOW

ON MY BLOCK

GRACE TELFER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

School of Communication

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2023

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ON YOUR BLOCK: FAMILIAL REPRESENTATIONS WITHIN THE HIT NETFLIX SHOW

ON MY BLOCK

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G.T.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

We open with a family of four: a mother, a father, and two sons, all of whom have light skin. The mother and father are sitting on a couch while the two boys are kneeling on the floor. The youngest is holding up a toy for the rest to see. They are all looking at it with great interest. Flash forward and we find ourselves in a scene with five people with five different skin tones. There are two that look feminine and three that look more masculine. Three are sitting on a couch, one is sitting on a separate couch, and another is standing in front of them, presumably talking. Those on the couches appear focused on what the standing person is saying. These two scenes highlight two different families across television shows, one from the 1950's and one from 2018. The first highlights the notion of the traditional, idealized American nuclear family, and the second highlights the different family types and performances that emerge in lived experience.

Family has been an interest of study to me, as I come from a family that strays from the ideal: I was adopted, as was my sister, both from different biological families. For most of my life I have viewed my family as different and at times almost unacceptable because we did not fit that traditional American family fold that society has deemed “normal” and even “best.” More recently, however, there has been a shift in the representation and acceptance of more nontraditional families, which leads me to my current study. Indeed, although mainstream American culture places the “traditional” nuclear family at the forefront, this often differs from one's lived experience, such as my own.

The idealized American family structure refers to a family with two parents (typically one male and one female) and their biological children (Anderson, 1991). When it comes to understanding family, people tend to look at their own families, and those families around them,

in order to get a grasp at what family is and what it should look like. For me, my family looks biologically related, in the same way that my best friends' family looks biologically related (which they are), even though my family consists of my parents, myself (adopted), and my sister (adopted). Family will often look different to ourselves than to others. While people can get a sense of what family is through their own experience, it is also possible to gain an understanding of family through what is presented to us. This can come through in media representations, or what one sees on television.

When looking at television shows with families in them, I have yet to come across one that immediately parallels the type of family of which I am a part. There are instances of foster families or single-parent families, but it is rare to see families in television shows centered just around adoption. As mentioned before, people often look to the media to make sense of their own lives, and people often watch television shows for this purpose. For me, I have been unable to do this. However, I have gained a larger appreciation for nontraditional families in general as there are several nontraditional families being represented in the media now.

The present study contributes to the conversation surrounding family representation within the media. In reviewing relevant literature, I will introduce a site of study, offer definitions of different family styles, and present a media representation framework before turning to the goals of the present study: a deep dive into the hit show *On My Block*, which can be found streaming on Netflix. I analyze this show for which family types are represented, what family type is at the forefront, and how each family style affects those involved.

In *On My Block*, each main character has membership in a different type of family. Monse lives with her dad because her mother left when she was younger, but he travels often for his job. Ruby lives with both of his parents, two younger siblings, and his abuela (grandmother),

with his older brother visiting occasionally. Jamal lives with his mom and dad. Jasmine lives with her dad, but he is paralyzed and cannot speak due to injuries, so she essentially takes care of herself, much like Monse. Lastly, there is Cesar who lives with his brother and the gang they are a part of, with his father being in jail. While these are all the immediate family situations of the main characters, they find a family with each other, and this family of friends is emphasized throughout the entirety of the show. Aside from the families being shown in *On My Block*, the show itself can be found on Netflix, which is a widely used streaming service. Because it is on such a popular site, potentially millions of people can watch the show and could witness a source of media representations of these family types. *On My Block* has a demand 3.7 times higher than the average TV series within the United States (parrotanalytics.com), which confirms the popularity and accessibility of the show.

Introduction to the Remainder of the Paper

Within Chapter Two of this paper, I will define the idealized American family, as well as looking at post nuclear families. Next, I will discuss the importance of family, as well as the history and prevalence of family. After this, I will define media representations and look at families within the media. Following this, I will outline the scholarly frameworks for the study. Lastly, I will outline my approach and introduce the study at hand. Within Chapter Three I will introduce the method I have used to analyze *On My Block*. Within Chapter Four I will thoroughly describe the analysis of the show *On My Block*. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will discuss what I have analyzed.

It is important to look at the media representations of families, specifically within *On My Block*, because, even though there are several different family structures, and people experience these different structures in their everyday lives, the idealized American family is still being

represented as the central, most prominent family structure most commonly within television shows. Within *On My Block* specifically, there are several different family structures being represented, with single-parent families and absent-parent(s) families existing alongside idealized family structures. Within *On My Block*, it is Ruby's, one of the main characters, household that is central, but it is the family of creation that is arguably the center of the show. Another note to the importance of looking at the show *On My Block* is that it can be found on a widely popular streaming service, which makes it available to potentially millions. Aside from this, it is easier for viewers to relate with the characters within the show (the families), as viewers can watch the entirety of the show all at once, if they so choose, rather than having to wait a week for a new episode to air.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I cover the key concepts of the study at hand. To start, I will define the idealized American family as well as post nuclear families. Next, I will discuss the importance of family, as well as the history and prevalence of family. After this, I will define media representations and introduce some families seen within the media. Following this, I will introduce the scholarly frameworks for the study. To end, I will discuss my approach to the study at hand, and then introduce the study.

The Idealized American Family

The idealized American family has been defined as the nuclear family which consists of a husband, a wife, and their biological children, with their extended family living separately (Popenoe, 1993). This family type was very prevalent in the 1950's; according to Popenoe (1993) "the 50s was certainly an era of high birth rates, high marriage rates, low divorce rates, and general family 'togetherness' and stability" (p. 528).

Indeed, the idealization of what a family is generally consists of a mother and father who may have children and other extended family, either living with them or separately from them (Popenoe, 1993). These members have a shared set of beliefs, gender role differentiation, and other standards that each member is supposed to follow (Haraway, 1996). While there are many different variations to the definition of an American family, the family tends to be the unit of society that forms the building blocks of culture. In turn, the influence of culture imposes on the norms, rules, standards, and expectations that the family may have (Haraway, 1996).

Post Nuclear Families: Families in Practice

While the nuclear, "traditional" American family type is idealized, it is not the only way of constituting or practicing family. The American family type is one of the most common

family types amongst innumerable others. I will define the extended family, the nontraditional family, and those structures that fall under the nontraditional category. Aside from these family structures, I will also define the family of creation. The aforementioned family structures were chosen and defined as they are central to the study at hand, as *On My Block* showcases these family structures.

To start, there is the extended family. This family consists of family members beyond one's parents and siblings, referring to the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Georgas et al., 2001). This family stems not only off the traditional family type, but off all other family types. Next there is the nontraditional family which can include adoptive parents, stepparents, extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (ReGain, 2023). The family types that fall in this category are those that are not within the idealized traditional family. One type of nontraditional family is an adoptive family. This is where a parent, or parents, adopt a child into their family. This child legally becomes theirs but is not biologically related to them (Leon, 2002). Third is the foster family. This type of family is where a minor is placed into a group home or the private home of a certified caregiver, also known as a foster parent. This placement is arranged by the government and is usually an interim placement until the child is adopted or turns eighteen and can no longer be in the foster care system (Rosenfeld et al., 1997). Next there is the single-parent family that can happen either when one parent has a child by themselves, or when a divorce happens, and the parent(s) decide to not remarry and take care of the child on their own (Horowitz, 1995). Last in this limited review, there is the family of creation that is created by two or more people. This dynamic is different from one's family of origin because it is the family that they create and are not born or raised with (Gerhardt, 2016).

Importance of Family

Families shape individual members in numerous ways; as such, they are considered a building block of society. “Families are instrumental in the promotion of caring through processes such as attachment, peer relationships, prosocial behavior, empathy, agency, and self-control” (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995, p. 515). Children learn how to navigate life based on their upbringing and whether they receive care from their parents or siblings. According to Prakash (2020), “The way a child is loved, cared for and nurtured at home provides the opportunities for a child to thrive better in their life” (p. 1). What happens at home can be reflected in how a child acts outside of their home. Some children growing up might experience different aspects of care and might not understand others’ experiences.

Cultural Framings, Ideologies, and Assumptions about Family

Even though many families do not fit the idealized nuclear form, there is still a stigma surrounding those families that do not fit within the ideal. Baxter talks about how those families that depart from the ideological standard of the nuclear family tend to face a burden of legitimizing their family structure (Baxter, 2014). Since those in nontraditional families do not fit into the idealized family structure, they are looked at as different – and even lesser than – the nuclear “norm.”

Ahlburg and De Vita (1992) begin to discuss the transition away from the traditional American family, stating, “today, many family forms are common: single-parent families (resulting either from unmarried parenthood or divorce), remarried couples, unmarried couples, stepfamilies, foster families, and doubling up of two families within the same home” (pg. 5). Here we can see that scholars in the 1990’s recognized a shift toward the acceptance of less

traditional family types. Although the idealized American family is still present, in practice, nontraditional families were, and still are, both present and important.

When it comes to understanding one's own family, the members are influenced by those within their family. Schermerhorn and Cummings (2008) discuss the process of transactional family dynamics which refers to the ways in which family members influence each other. These influences can happen amongst several family relationships, including those of individual family members on overall family relationships, on one another, and overall family influences (Schermerhorn & Cummings). One's family often influences how one thinks about their family and how they think other families should look and act. This is important as one's family will influence one's overall outlook on family which can lead to an acceptance of one family type and a disapproval of others. This is something to note when looking at *On My Block* as each of the main characters have a different family style which then influences how they view family overall.

History and Prevalence of Family

America's culture evolves to reflect the predominant values of the current day and age. Ultimately, there is no consistent definition of the American Family, but most are familiar with the idealized version of a family consisting of two parents, biological children, and relatives (Concordia University, 2020). However, with single parents, varying structures, and fewer children, the modern family defies categorization.

Understanding of Family and How it has Changed

When it comes to understanding family, there are two ways to do so; structurally and functionally. Family structure is defined by the characteristics of the family members, such as those living in the same household and who are related by blood or legal ties (Purdue, 2015).

Family function, then, moves away from blood and legal ties and instead focuses on the functions that families perform. These functions can consist of sharing resources, having caring and supportive relationships, and a commitment to each other (Purdue, 2015).

Why the Understanding of Family Definitions Has Changed

The understanding of family has taken a turn away from that of the idealized traditional family and has become more accepting of a nontraditional family structure. Since the early 1990s, stepfamilies and single-parent families have begun to outnumber the idealized traditional family, due in large part to an increase in divorce rates and potential remarrying (Pill, 1990). Aside from this, many people are choosing to get married later in life and have fewer children (Adamczyk, 2016). Another aspect that has changed is that people are no longer putting religious or political views at the forefront of their relationships. Instead, there has been an increase in interreligious and politically mixed marriages (Cox, 2022).

Another aspect that has led to a change in family structure and dynamics is due to an increase in support for the LGBTQ community. With an increase in same-sex couples, there is also an increase in same-sex marriages, given that it is legal in the state they are in (Scommegna 2016). This adds another dynamic to families as someone could be a part of a family with same-sex parents.

Another important aspect of family to look at is that of the gendered nature of parents and children. Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2015) discuss this idea in their study regarding gendered behavior. Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2015) talk about the traditional views of genders roles, which emphasize the woman's expectancy for nurturance, and the men's expectancy for leadership capabilities (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2015). Loosely put, the traditional view of gender roles is that women are suited for domestic tasks (housework) while men are suited for

the business world. Contrasting this is the egalitarian view of gender roles. Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2015) note this as “minimizing the differences between the genders and promotes equality in terms of men’s and women’s roles within the family” (p. 528). These views can be different from family to family, which adds another layer to the changing within family structure and dynamics.

Due to the change in structure of families and differentiating between traditional and egalitarian views within the family, there has emerged a new understanding of what a family is both structurally and functionally. Definitions have strayed away from the traditional definitions and are looking more towards the discourse dependent definitions, using communication and an understanding of one’s own experience to make sense of what a family is and how it functions (Galvin & Braithwaite, 2014).

Media Representations

Media representations refer to the portrayal of certain types of people or communities in the media. The concept of media representation worked to move past the idea that media messages are a representation of reality (Fursich 2010). Instead, media representations are working towards constructive representations of culture, meaning, and knowledge not only about others but about oneself (Fursich 2010). These representations are becoming available 24/7 as the media becomes more and more present in everyday life. These representations are also embedded with norms and ideas about certain people and groups. With these representations being openly available, they often influence its users' views (Furisch 2010).

When it comes to representations, Mambrol (2016) quotes Baudrillard in offering the term “hyperreality” to make sense of representations. Mambrol talks about how Baudrillard defines hyperreality as “where reality has been replaced by false images, to such an extent that

one cannot distinguish between the real and the unreal” (p 1). Essentially this means that hyperreality is a representation without an original referent. Mambrol (2016) talks about how Baudrillard offers four phases of hyperreality: (1) there is truth, a basic reality that is represented; (2) reality exists but is a distorted representation; (3) reality does not exist but is hidden through representations that feign reality; and (4) there is no relationship between reality and representation simply because there is no real to reflect. It is argued that western society is now in the fourth phase and people find fulfillment through simulation and imitation of reality rather than interaction with a “real” reality (Mambrol, 2016). This is important to note because this is what people do when they interact with the media.

While Baudrillard makes a good point about how images are portrayed within the media, the viewpoint does not account for all forms of media, let alone television and the vast array of genres. In Baudrillard's case, his viewpoint can be aimed towards fantasy, or make believe, media. *On My Block* centers around a fictional setting, but “one of the show's greatest strengths is how real and familiar the characters and world all feel” (Hector, 2019). This alludes to the genre of reality television, where there are elements of “entertainment with a discourse of the ‘real’ (p. 49). This adds to the importance of looking at *On My Block*, as it offers a sense of realism by presenting a group of young adults living within different family dynamics.

Understanding Media Representations

One way that people understand the world is through media representations. Whether it be through traditional media or new media, one is constantly surrounded by it. Traditional media consists of newspapers, magazines, and really any physical form of media (Dimmick et al., 2009). New media is online media, whether it be websites, news sites, journals, blogs, or social networking sites (Pavlik 1999). These two types of media make it easy to access representations

of family within the media, which help one to make sense of their own family, whether by structure, interaction, or function.

With the increase in media use, as well as the different forms of media, it is making it easier for families of all types to stay connected. Parents in a traditional family can stay in touch with their children when they go off to school, as well as adoptive parents and their children. Stepparents can stay updated on their biological and stepchildren. Biological parents have an outlet to reach out to their children they put up for adoption. These new media outlets open a world of opportunity for connection between all types of family dynamics.

Family dynamics and media are changing constantly, whether it be families changing their structure or the media adding a new platform. With this constant change, how does this affect the people involved in families and with the media? This paper will delve into what media is, what media representations are and why they are important, and how representations of family in media have changed over time. Specifically, this paper will pose a historical view of how family representations have changed over time, looking at the top ranked family television show from 1950 until now. Given that the traditional / ideological family has never truly been the norm, it becomes important to understand how media representations of family guide our relationships and sensemaking within our own family structures and interactions.

How People Interact with Media Representations

Everyday people interact with different media platforms, from newspapers to magazines to televisions to our smartphones. Today's generation is very technologically involved, and therefore this generation is almost always interacting with the media (Nikirk, 2009). Users are constantly being exposed to different representations of different groups or people. People use

the media in different ways depending on when people interact with and why they are interacting with media.

When viewers watch something, they tend to mimic what they are seeing. This can be noted through social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of observing and initiating the attitudes, behaviors, and emotions of others (McLeod, 2023). Aside from social learning theory, cultivation theory also adds to how viewers interact with the media. Cultivation theory predicts that the more time a viewer spends watching something in the media (a television show), and the more time the viewer spends immersed in the media world, the more likely the viewer's feelings about their reality will reflect what they see on television (Morgan, et al., 2014). Gerbner (2002) argues that the more a viewer watches television, the more likely the viewer is to see the real world and the television world as the same. O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) suggest that if there is too much of a difference between the viewers' real-world experiences and what they see on television, the viewers are going to tend to believe what is on television. This leads to an anomaly where viewers believe that what is on television is more typical of people's experiences, as opposed to what viewers experience in the real world (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997). In this study, I looked for which family structure was at the forefront of the show, how each character interacted within the family structures, and how those family structures affected those involved. This is important, because those prominent family structures and family interactions are what viewers see when watching the show, and this is what they mimic in their lives.

Streaming vs Network Television

Lotz (2009) discusses the differences between network television and streaming television. To start, Lotz talks about network television and how it was a nonportable medium

that brought the outside world into the home. These televisions and their programs delivered content of a linear schedule throughout the day (Lotz, 2009). Since these programs worked on a linear schedule, the viewers had little control over what they could watch. Aside from this, the televisions in one's home often acted as a way for families to come together and view something together (Lotz, 2009). This began to change with the introduction of the digital video recorder, also known as DVR.

DVR was a way for viewers to record shows throughout the day and then go back and watch them whenever they pleased. This started a shift towards streaming rather than sitting and watching at a certain time due to linear programming (Lotz, 2009). Aside from this, it changed the aspect of family viewing, as members of a family could watch their programs whenever they wanted, rather than gathering at a certain time to view a program. A final shift came with the introduction of streaming services and portable devices.

Lotz discusses how “video content long perceived as ‘television’ programming is now being accessed by viewers on computer screens and on portable devices...” (Lotz, 2009, p.57). Due to an increase in portable devices, decrease in television set costs, and streaming services, families detached from the living room television set and began watching solo (Lotz, 2009). Viewers are now able to watch a wide variety of programs from anywhere and whenever they please. Lastly, due to the change in viewing and programming, television content now works to represent a larger collection of ideas, forms, and people than ever before (Lotz, 2009).

To continue, with the easier accessibility to television shows, viewers are now able to spend more time with the characters they love, in the shows that they love, because viewers can now watch shows whenever, wherever, and as often as they want (Lotz, 2009). This differs from the past, when shows would air an episode a week, which did not allow viewers to create

relationships as easily with the characters in a show. This leads to a term referred to as parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships are perceived, interpersonal, relationship by the viewer with a media persona (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Since viewers have an easier access to television shows, and can watch episodes back-to-back, it is easier for viewers to create these parasocial relationships with the characters, which, in turn, can have an influence on their everyday lives. In this instance, viewers of *On My Block* can binge the show and create these relationships with the characters (and their families) and apply this to their lives or compare the content to themselves.

Families in the Media

Every person is born, adopted, or fostered into a family, and often without a choice in the matter. Family representation within the media, specifically families that do not always fit into the idealized American family mold, are important as they offer viewers a way of relating and making sense of their own familial situations. The media tends to put that idealized American family structure at the forefront (Gerbner, et al., 1980) which can make it hard for the viewers to identify with the characters (Smith, 2015). The idealized American family structure is arguably one of the most stubborn ideals that America has in its culture. While our (American) culture has started to work towards accepting other familial structures, such as same-sex marriage and adoption, society still says that the traditional mother-father coupling is still best, with only three-in-ten adults thinking that it is a good thing to move away from this structuring (Thomas, 2020). Media representations of other family types, while still uncommon, are important because they validate the experiences of those who are a part of a familial structure that does not fit within that idealized American family structure.

Where People see Family in the Media

Mass media has taken a role in offering images of family that can act as a touchstone by which its viewers work to make sense of their own experiences with family. Gerbner and colleagues (1980) discuss in their study the idea of family in the media. They say that “families and family life make up an integral part of the world of the mass media. The mass-produced and mass-distributed images are shaped and constrained by other characteristics of the media world, and stem from the institutional needs, interests, and policies of major media” (Gerbner et al., 1980, p. 4). This is important to note as it can suggest that the families portrayed in the media may not accurately represent a family in real life (Benharoon, 2013) as those producing the images have guidelines to follow set forth by mass media.

What Family in the Media Looks Like

When it comes to representations of family within the media, it is important to look at the number of nontraditional families in real life versus those within the media. Roughly 54% of children under the age of 18 live in a nontraditional family (Livingston, 2014). Given this percentage, one would think that it would match the representation of nontraditional families seen in the media. In a study conducted by Skill, Robinson, and Wallace (1987) they found that roughly 34.3% of television shows portrayed an unconventional family. This shows that there is less representation of nontraditional families within the media compared to the amount in real life. However, there are still a handful of popular shows and movies that have nontraditional families within them. Media today has progressed to showing more diverse families, and families that do not typically fit into the traditional family definition. There are several television shows that present a nontraditional family, some being *The Fosters*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Gossip Girl*, *Euphoria*. These are just a few popular media texts that represent nontraditional families.

Importance of Family in the Media

Looking at media in general, children often identify with characters within media. They “identify with family characters, form parasocial relationships, and experience emotional connections with them” (Callister et al., 2007, p. 1). Families represented in media provide a way for children to learn about different family roles, rules, and relationships in which they can draw conclusions about their own families. It is these representations that allow children to form an identity within their family and to start to make sense of their own family and what role they play within it (Callister et al., 2007).

Existing Work on Family in the Media

In her dissertation *A Modern Family: The Performance of “Family” and Familialism in Contemporary Television Series*, Jennifer Fogel discusses how television shows affect their viewers and their ideals about family. Fogel states that “Even though ‘family’ strikes a distinct picture for each of us, it has long been interpreted or framed on television in a way that valorizes a certain ‘right’ configuration of the White patriarchal nuclear family...” (Fogel, 2012, p. 3). She goes on to talk about how viewers hope to attain the image of the family that they see on the screen, even though the families around them may not be that nuclear family. Fogel adds to the discussion, then, on how families today are more diverse, and it is not uncommon for there to be single parents, gay or lesbian households, and multigenerational families both in real life and on television.

Fogel continues to talk about how television shows from the 1980’s-1990’s presents the nuclear family, while others present the unrealistic expectations of the nuclear family. She claims that “...television continues to favor this elusive illusionary ideal” (Fogel, 2012, p. 6) referring to that of the nuclear family. Even though there has been an increase in diverse representation of

families on television, the nuclear family remains at the forefront because it affirms the idea of familialism, which emphasizes the commitment to one's family over one's individual needs. She states that "Thus, depictions of family life on television...always return to the family facing adversity together and reaffirm the primacy of the familial institution..." (Fogel, 2012, p. 12) whether it be one's immediate family or their family of creation.

How Family Representation in the Media has Changed

Family representation has changed from generally being traditional to becoming more nontraditional. In a study done by Skill and Robinson (1994), they looked at television shows featuring families from 1950-1990. They found that extended families were the most frequently represented. Aside from this, they also found that the nuclear family was continuously dominant, followed by the single-parent family (Skill & Robinson, 1994). Even in the years prior to this generation, there was a change in the media representation of families from the nuclear family to more single-parent families being portrayed.

In her book *The American Family on Television: A Chronology of 121 Shows, 1948-2004*, Brooks (2015) discusses how the portrayal of family in television shows has changed. She starts off in the early 1950's where television family's show the ethnic working-class family, where immigrants, Black, Hispanic, or Asian families were almost never dealt with. These shows depicted these families where the parents were working hard to provide for their children. Aside from this, the shows represented an era where the men went to work, and the women stayed home and cared for the children. There were also depictions of families leaving the business of the city and moving to a surrounding suburb. This led to women bonding with other women in the neighborhoods as the men were at work (Brooks, 2015). As the family dynamics in the real world were changing, show writers also shifted their portrayals of family. Brooks talks about

how, in the 1960's, there was a shift to single-parent families within the television shows. "By 1967, most of the classic domestic comedies that featured intact nuclear families were canceled, while the broken families thrived" (Brooks, 2015, p. 4). By the 1970's women were no longer being depicted as dependent housewives and the men were left to the background of the show. In the 1980's, shows shifted to a more soap opera dynamic, portraying marital infidelity, incest, alcoholism, and several other issues that made families seem dysfunctional (Brooks 2015). Once the 1990's hit, there were representations of all types of families on television shows, and several different channels were offered. Because of this, people could pick and choose a family show to watch and feel they related to it.

Scholarly Frameworks

Discourse dependency, then, works to describe how families communicatively constituted their family membership to themselves and to others. Members within a nontraditional family structure depend on communication to define themselves with respect to their family as well as with how they interact with those not in their family (Galvin & Braithwaite, 2014). Galvin also discusses the idea that language plays a larger role in constituting family, rather than the textbook definitions that come with family structures (Galvin & Braithwaite, 2014). Galvin and Braithwaite (2014) talk about how discourse-dependent families define family as "a group of intimates who generate a sense of home and group identity, complete with strong ties of loyalty, emotion, and experience" (p. 103).

Dixon adds to the conversation of discourse dependency. Dixon references Galvin when defining discourse dependency as "the need to communicate one's family into a status of community of acceptance" (Dixon, 2017, pg. 271). Dixon goes further to explain how certain family structures must work harder, or not at all, in validating their family structure to others.

She talks about how those within the traditional, opposite sex biological child(ren), structure do not have to work as hard, or at all, to prove their familial relationship. Those in a stepparent structure communicate that their child(ren) is their child(ren). In an adoptive family, parents must communicate often to reinforce the parental connection to their children. Lastly, Dixon notes that the family of choice “requires the most discourse in an attempt to construct that the family is indeed a family, despite the fact that no one is bound by blood or law” (Dixon, 2017, pg. 272).

In addition, Galvin and Braithwaite outline what the communication processes constituting family ties and membership can look like, both externally and internally. Externally, those in families can reinforce family relationships in four ways: (1) *labeling* positions to indicate the nature of the connections; (2) *explaining* the relationship to others; (3) *legitimizing* the ties within the family; (4) *defending* the relationships (Galvin & Braithwaite, 2014). Next, they look at the internal reinforcements: (1) *naming* positions for those that are considered family but don't have legal or blood ties; (2) *discussing* the nature of the ties to others to one's family; (3) *telling* stories that represent the family's identity; (4) *having* traditions or celebrations surrounding these members (Galvin & Braithwaite, 2014). Using these practices as examples of possible communication practices, I will be looking at how language and communication plays a central role in defining family throughout the first three seasons of *On My Block*, as well as the role that communication plays in defining and defending the family structures and functions.

My Approach

When looking at family within the media, it is important to look at what type of family is being represented and what roles each person takes on within the family structure. Whether those in the family are biologically related or legally related, where they get their support from, and

how each individual plays into the structure. Aside from this, it is important to also look at the potential that those involved may get their support from others outside of their immediate family structure. To accomplish this, I used open coding.

Open coding is a way of performing qualitative data analysis. Open coding consists of noticing, collecting, and thinking about interesting things that are collected. Noticing what takes place is when the observer takes notes based on observations. For this study, that means recording interactions throughout the show. The next step in open coding is analyzing. Analyzing the data collected means going through the data and labeling sections and adding descriptive names. For this study, I labeled each section by season and episode. Lastly, open coding then compares similarities and differences within labeled sections and noting whether the data is important or not to the study at hand. For this study, I coded interactions within each section based on what research question the interaction could help me to answer. By using this concept, I looked at themes and other aspects that emerged throughout the first three seasons of *On My Block*. I looked for what family structures are represented, which family structure seems to be at the forefront, what functions each family performs, and which functions are the most prevalent.

The Study at Hand

It is important to discuss how the media impacts whoever is watching. It is very common for people to mimic the media as it is all around us, and it often influences how families look and act. For families watching, they might pick up on different aspects of the families represented in media and try to replicate it in their own family. Families within the media provide examples of how a family should behave, the attitudes they should have, and the values they should share. The families within the media also offer patterns for how a family should act. The

reinforcements and punishments within media families are also represented. With all these aspects of family being portrayed in the media, it is easy for real-life families to see that and modify or adapt it to their own family (Gerbner et al., 1980).

I chose to do this study because it is important to look at the representation of families within the media as it is a way for people to make an understanding of their own family, and it is also a way to educate viewers on situations that differ from their own. This study will dive into the representations of family within the show *On My Block*. For this study I pose the following research question(s):

RQ 1: What family types emerge within *On My Block*?

RQ 2: What are the functions and interactions of the family types represented in *On My Block*?

RQ 3: In what ways are the main characters of *On My Block* shown to be influenced by their family experiences?

RQ 4: What are the messages about idealized families and other types of families that are presented in *On My Block*?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This study aims to gain a better understanding of family representations within the media, specifically within the television show *On My Block*. Families have been studied through a plethora of ways including the notion that viewers mimic what they see and adapt it to their own family (Gerbner et al., 1980). This study will be looking at what family types emerge, what the functions and interactions of the families represented are, in what ways the main characters are influenced by their family experiences, and what the messages about idealized family and other types of families are, within the show *On My Block*. By watching, and rewatching several times, I was able to take extensive notes and determine which family type(s) were present, which family type(s) has the most presence, what the functions, interactions, and/or discursive constitutions the family type(s) had, and how each family type(s) affected those involved, within *On My Block*.

Sampling

To determine which family structure was at the forefront, meaning which family type(s) is granted the most presence, in *On My Block*, as well as how those family structures affected those involved, I watched, and rewatched several times, the first three seasons of the show. I chose to leave out the fourth seasons as there was a “two years later” jump within the final five minutes of the last episode of the third season. I decided to stay within the time perimeter within the first three seasons. While viewing, I took extensive notes using an open-coding framework (Khandkar, 2009). This allowed me to use what was in the show to see what emerged, rather than using a set lens while viewing. My notes included what family structures were present, who was a part of which family structure, and different interactions between the characters. These interactions noted were mainly conversations surrounding the subject of family, as well as

conversations between family members. I took note of these conversations in order to understand how the characters talked about family, as well as how the characters interacted with their family members.

To assist with determining which family structure was at the forefront, and to determine how each of the characters were affected by family structure, I used different organization tactics within my notes. To start, I watched each episode with the closed captions on so that I could make note of the conversations word for word. I was also able to pause and note timestamps for the conversations. Next, I made sure to label and section my notes by season and by episode. This allowed me to go back, episode by episode to find certain interactions or family structure ideas. Aside from this, I also made sure to note which character said the quotations that I wrote down. There are limitations to this method of note taking, as I was the only viewing the show and taking notes, and it is possible that I could have missed something. However, I rewatched the series several times, had the closed captions on in order to make note of exact verbiage, and made note of timestamps.

Schiele and colleagues (2020) used a similar method within their study surrounding feminism within Disney and Pixar films. They watched 17 Disney and Pixar films. After viewing, they each created a summary for each film, including notes on characters, key scene descriptions, and quotes that were relevant to gender representation (Schiele et al., 2020). While their study outcomes differ from my own, Schiele, Louie, and Chen used a similar framework for finding and coding.

Data Analysis

To answer each of my research questions, I used Khandkar's (2009) description of open coding. Khandkar describes open coding as noticing, collecting, and thinking about interesting

things. Khandkar (2009) goes on to explain that noticing is when the observer takes notes on what is being presented to them. When analyzing the notes, the observer then goes through the data and marks important sections and adds descriptive names for these sections. For the purpose of this study, I watched the first three seasons of *On My Block*, and I noticed what was being presented. I collected information based on interactions within the show, and I thought about how each of these interactions could help me to answer my research questions. Throughout this process, I labeled the sections based on episode and season. After this, I went back through my notes and coded interactions based on which research question those interactions would help to answer.

To answer question one, my notes included what family types emerged within *On My Block*. Within the first episode of the entire series, the viewers are introduced to the main characters and their families. While watching *On My Block*, I made note of the fact that the main characters take turns referring to each other - their friend group - as 'family.'

While my notes included the different family types that emerged within *On My Block*, my notes also included several different interactions between the characters. These interactions centered around discussion of family. This allowed me to answer question two. It is through these noted interactions that I was able to identify how each of the family structures functioned, and how each of the family types interacted with one another. To start, I made note of the main characters and how they all interacted with their biological families. While each of the main characters has their biological family, through my notes and viewing of the show, I observed that these biological families did not function much beyond providing the necessities: food, shelter, and other necessary things for survival. While each of the main characters was a part of a biological family, there was another family structure that emerged: the family of creation. While

watching and taking notes on *On My Block*, I noticed that each of the characters was lacking something within their biological families. To finish, I noted how each of the characters looked up to someone outside of their biological family to guide them.

Amongst the noted interactions, and using Galvin's (2014) discourse dependency as a heuristic, I noticed the use of discourse dependency regarding defining each of the family structures and validating those structures. Those within the traditional, two parents and biological child(ren), structure did not have to defend their relationship to each other at all. Next, those within a single-parent and stepparent structure had to work a little harder in terms of validating their relationship to each other. Lastly, the chosen family, that amongst the main characters, often talked about their family in each other, working hard to validate that they are, in fact, a family.

Aside from taking note of family structures, functions, and interactions, I also made note of the influences that families had within *On My Block*. It is through these notes that I was able to answer question three by identifying the two influences that emerged: conflict and growth. While I noted several instances of conflict, it was often these conflicts that lead to the safety of the friend group.

Beyond finding what family structures, functions, interactions, and influences that emerged, I was also able to successfully answer my fourth, and final question: what messages about family emerged within *On My Block*. The family of creation that was noted between the four main characters can be seen as, arguably, the most important of the family structures within the series. Each of the characters, throughout several interactions, had referred to their friend group as a family. Aside from this, each of the characters had taken action to protect one another. Majority of the interactions that I took note of were between the four main characters.

This structure and approach I took, regarding collecting and analyzing data, guided me as I took an in-depth look at the representations of individuals and families within *On My Block*. It further guided me in the ability to successfully answer my research questions.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

On My Block premiered on Netflix on March 16, 2018. According to Nakamura (2018), on thewrap.com, *On My Block* was the most-binged show of 2018. This means that it was the top-rated show for watch-time-per-viewing; the one's viewers watched the most episodes in a single sitting. After viewing the series several times, and using Khandkar's (2009) open-coding, I discovered themes to assist with answering my research questions. Some of the themes that I found pertaining to each research question were similar but followed different concepts regarding each of my research questions.

When looking through my notes from viewing the series, I discovered overarching themes, such as the type(s) of families presented, the family type(s) that was fore fronted, and the functions and impacts of the family forms.

Family Structures (RQ1)

My first research question focused on the structure and presence of families, asking: "What family types emerge within *On My Block*?" Overall, family types on the show range from biologically focused to the(much) more discourse dependent. From the beginning the audience is thrown into the first family structure within *On My Block*, this family structure being that of the family of creation. Since this family structure is the first to emerge within the series, it is arguably the most important type of family. While each of the main characters is a part of a biological family, and each has instances of interactions with their biological family members, most of the show centers around the friend group, the family of creation.

Family of Creation

A family of creation is created by two or more people who are not related by more traditional framings of family (e.g., biology, legality). This dynamic is different from one's

family or origin because it is the family that they create and are not born or raised with (Gerhardt, 2016). The series starts with Monse returning from summer camp and meeting up with Rub and Jamal. Monse, then, goes off to find Cesar after learning that he started a rumor that they hooked up. While this conflict between them is happening, Monse exclaims; “I was tryna keep the crew together” (S1:E1, 22:02). This is the first instance within the series that one of the members emphasizes the importance of the group, the family, that they have with each other. In season one, episode six, Jamal says “Our friends are like a family” (S1:E6, 6:50). In that same episode, Olivia says “You are each other’s family, and now you’ve become my family” (S1:E6, 16:03). This instance is important, because it is one of an outside member making note that their friend group is viewed as a family. In season one, episode seven, Ruby is giving a speech and he says, “we are not just friends and family...” (S1:E7, 7:27) making this the first instance where he refers to the friend group as a family. It is not until season two, episode nine, that Cesar makes a comment, referring to Jamal as his brother “It was an honor being your roommate and your brother” (S2:E9, 25:51). Each of the members within the group, and even some outside, notice that the friend group is more of a family than anything.

Biological Families

While each of the main characters is a part of this family of creation, they each have a biological family of their own, and each structure of these families is different. Each of these families, except for Ruby’s, is introduced within the first episode.

Idealized American Family Structure

To start, the audience gets a glimpse of Jamal and his family. The audience gets a quick insight into Jamal’s family while he and Monse are walking and suddenly Jamal starts rolling around in the first and pouring water on himself. This happens before they walk past Jamal’s

house, and because Jamal feels as though he cannot confront his parents about the fact that he does not like football and does not want to play, he pretends as though he does. Hence, the rolling in the first and water, to make it look like he was coming from practice. The following scene with Jamal and his parents is in episode six, where his parents (mom and dad) are so excited about Jamal playing football, and Jamal finally comes clean to them both, which they, in turn, are very accepting of him and his decision. His family is not pictured all together again until season two, when they are all sitting at a table to discuss, with the coach, about how Jamal is going to work to pay off destroying the field (which Jamal dug up in order to find the Roller World money). The final notable instance is in season three, episode two, where Jamal and his father are seen arguing at his father's restaurant, and the argument ends with both saying, "see you at home, love you" (S3:E2, 25:37). Aside from Jamal's family, Ruby's family is also an idealized American family structure.

Ruby's family consists of his mother, father, older brother (Mario), younger twin siblings (boy and a girl), and Abuelita. In season one, episode three, there is a scene where all of them are making empanadas. The next time the entire family is shown together is at the end of the season, in episode ten, for Olivia's quinceanera. In the beginning of season two, there is a scene where Abuelita is comforting Ruby. In season two, episode two, there is a scene shown where Ruby's mother is yelling at him to go to church. In episode five, there is a sentimental moment between Ruby and his older brother where his brother exclaims "I didn't know how cool my brother was then, but I do now" (S2:E5, 19:30). In episode seven, the ending scene centers around the entirety of Ruby's family together. As well as Monse, Jamal, Cesar, and Jasmine, all in Ruby's living room laughing and having a good time.

Throughout the entire series, there are several scenes where the friend group is hanging out at Ruby's house, but the only family member of his that is home is Abuelita. Abuelita, then, plays a large role in the friend groups' lives. She is often seen motivating them all to follow their dreams, to not give up, and is often seen helping them in whatever adventure they are taking part. Within season one, Abuelita is seen driving Ruby, Monse, and Jamal around in search of clues about the Roller World money, and there is a montage of all of them, Abuelita included, surrounding the laundering process. In season three, she helps the group to find Lil Ricky. In this way, in addition to being a part of Ruby's biological family, Abuelita is an extended member of the group's created family.

Single-Parent Family Structure

Another notable family structure is that of the single-parent structure. To start is Jasmine's family. In season two, episode three, Ruby goes to see Jasmine. In this scene, Jasmine is seen talking at her father. I say 'at' and not 'to' because Jasmine's father cannot speak or move due to injury from war. It is in this scene that the audience learns that Jasmine has such an independent character style. She even says, "some people may not like me, but that means I gotta love myself that much more" (S2:E3, 19:11). It is because Jasmine was forced to grow up and take care of her father, that she became who she is.

One prominent single-parent family is that of Monse and her father. Monse comes from a divorced family. She lives with her dad, and her mom left when she was little. Within the first season, the audience gets glimpses of Monse and her father. Monse's father works a lot and is often not home, so Monse must take care of herself. This is introduced in the first episode when Monse is on facetime with her father, who is away because of work (S1:E1). Throughout the remainder of the series, there are very few instances shown with Monse and her father.

In season two, episode nine, there is a conversation between the two where he wants to send Monse to boarding school because he does not think that where they live is safe enough for her. In season three, episode five, there is a conversation between the two regarding Monse being at her mother's wake. She does not feel like anyone cares if she is there or not, but her father reassures her that her brother and sister and stepfather do care. These are the only notable instances between the two throughout the series. While Monse and her father seem fairly content with each other and their lives together, Monse starts to get curious about her mother, and in season two, she seeks her out.

Stepfamily Structure

Monse finds her mother on Facebook and reaches out regarding babysitting her mother's two new children. Initially, Monse talks with her mother using a false name. At the end of one of the babysitting sessions, Monse leaves her phone on the table, and she goes to use the bathroom, and her mother sees a phone call from Monse's father. It is in this instance that she realizes who Monse is. After this, Monse fesses up and they begin to talk openly to each other. Later in the season Monse's mother even offers that Monse come and stay with her and the new family for a little while. Monse agrees and is immersed in her mother's new family, her stepfamily. Monse's stepfather even mentions at one point that "from week one we've been trying to make this permanent" (S2:E6, 5:48). This sense of a perfect family, however, does not last long. When Monse is spending time with the friends she made while living with the new family, they mention that Monse's mother had told their mother's that Monse's father abused Monse's mother, and that is why she left. Monse, furious about this because it is not true, erupts on her mother and leaves to go back to her father.

Sibling Family Structure

The final notable family structure is that of Cesar and Oscar. When Monse goes to confront Cesar, he is at home with his brother. Cesar and Oscar have a complicated relationship, as both are also a part of a gang, the Santos. Aside from this, their father is in jail and their mother left when Cesar was little. Throughout the series, Oscar is shown to act as an authority figure over Cesar. In season one, Oscar forces Cesar to put him and the gang above his friends. He even goes so far as to force Cesar to shoot someone (he does not follow through) (S1:E8). In season two, when it is revealed that Cesar did not follow through, Oscar kicks him out of the house. At the end of season two, it is revealed that the two of them worked together to protect each other and their friends from the rival gang (S2:E10). Lastly, in season three, their father returns for a short time. In this timeframe, Cesar becomes close with his father. There is even an instance where their father helps Cesar get ready for a school dance. When the father ends up leaving, Cesar blames Oscar for letting him leave, when Oscar had said “You’re going to crush him the same way you crushed me” (S3:E5, 19:35) to his father before he left. When Cesar gets mad, Oscar exclaims “You know the worst part about growing up without a father is having to be a father to a brother without ever being a son” (S3:E5, 19:58), and this perfectly sums up Cesar and Oscar’s relationship. The structure surrounding Oscar and Cesar is important because it highlights how sometimes a sibling can be a stand-in for a parent, meaning that the sibling takes on the role of the parent.

It was through the noting of all these instances surrounding the main characters and their families, that I was able to identify what family structures emerged within *On My Block*. The first being that of a family of creation, with Monse, Jamal, Ruby, and Cesar. The second notable family type to emerge was that of the idealized American family, with Jamal and his two

biological parents, and Ruby with his two biological parents, three biological siblings, and Abuelita. The third notable family type to emerge was that of the single-parent structure; Monse and her father, Jasmine and her father. To note, also, is Monse's stepfamily with Monse's mother, her new husband, and their two children. Lastly, the final notable family type is that surrounding Cesar and Oscar, which is more of a sibling family than one with any parents.

Family Functions and Interactions (RQ2)

My second research question aimed to unpack not only what families can be but what they can do for their members, asking: "What are the functions and interactions of the family types represented on *On My Block*?" Given the youth-focus of the show, it might be unsurprising that family functions on the show centers around offering intergenerational guidance and mentoring. In addition, the family relationships on the show also function to expand upon, or compensate for, family forms that might be considered lacking when compared with traditional, binuclear framings of family.

Guidance and Mentoring

While each of the characters is shown to have a biological family of their own, whether it be parents or siblings, each of the characters turns to others for parental guidance. Collectively they all turn to Abuelita. Abuelita is often present when the friend group is hanging out, whether it be in the background listening in, or interjecting herself to push them to follow their dreams. Within season one, Abuelita is the person the group turns to regarding the Roller World hunt, and Abuelita is the one to drive them around. In season two, Abuelita is the one to come up with the idea to launder the money, and she helps them to do so, as seen through a montage scene (S2:E3). Abuelita is constantly the person the main characters go to for help or advice, often acting as that parental figure to them all.

While Abuelita is often there for everyone in the group, she forms a stronger friendship with Jamal. Throughout the first season there is the relationship between Jamal and Abuelita as she encourages him to follow his heart with the Roller World treasure hunt. There is even an instance in season one episode four where Abuelita calls the school and picks Jamal up just because she found a lead for the treasure hunt. Aside from Abuelita, Jamal forms an attachment to Chivo. This can be seen when Jamal is working for Chivo, and Jamal starts to form the same relationships with the gnomes that Chivo has. This is a 'relationship' that only Chivo and Jamal have and understand.

Another unlikely parental figure is Oscar. In season two, Oscar begins to take on a parental role for Ruby. After Olivia passes away, Ruby begins to spiral. While he is walking one day, Oscar calls out to him, and Ruby ends up yelling at Oscar for not caring about Cesar. After this, Oscar asks Ruby to come and hang out together and talk things through. Oscar reminds Ruby of how lucky he is to have the family that he has, and the future he can have, "I live in a house with bars on the window" says Ruby, and Oscar responds with "With two parents inside and a college future waiting outside" (S2:E2, 21:33). In a later episode, Mario (Ruby's older brother) calls Oscar to come and get Ruby out of his bed, because he cannot do it himself (S2:E5). Oscar steps in and can get Ruby out of his depressive state and to a part where he lets loose and gets his happiness and hope back. Oscar acted as a mentor to Ruby throughout these few episodes.

Lastly, within season two, Cesar also finds unlikely parental figures in Jamal's dad, Monse's dad, and Chivo. For a short time, Cesar goes to stay with Jamal. In this time, there are interactions between him and Jamal's father that seem like fatherly interactions. One of these being Jamal's dad tying a tie for Cesar before the Valentine's Day dance (S2:E4). Another

instance is when Cesar is saying that he wants to make it up to them for taking him in, and Jamal's father offers him work at their family's diner (S2:E4). When trouble pops up at the diner, Jamal's father takes precautions to protect Cesar. These precautions include changing Cesar's location, and Monse's father takes him in (S2:E6). At this point in the plot, Monse is at her mother's and mad at Cesar, so she is not home to interact with them. There is a scene showing Cesar and Monse's dad eating wings on the bed and chatting, and Cesar asks for advice on how to make things right with Monse (S2:E6). Lastly, Cesar finds a role model in Chivo, who is an ex-member of the Santos gang. "Santos are a family. So, Cesar is a part of your family" (S2:E8, 10:59) is what Ruby says to Chivo to get him to take in Cesar, and Chivo agrees. Their time together is short, but Chivo and Cesar talk about the gang and Chivo takes a liking to Cesar, reassuring him that what he did was the right call and that he is a good person (S2:E8).

Aside from finding parental figures and mentors, Monse finds connections with Olivia and Jasmine that she has never had before. Since Monse grew up without a mother, she did not have any female influence in her life. This is seen in season one, episode five during a conversation between Olivia and Monse. A similar interaction happens between Monse and Jasmine in season three, episode two when Monse confides in Jasmine about how she does not have much of a female influence in her life.

The message I received from all these instances, of the main characters turning to members outside of their immediate family, is that not one family style is perfect, not even the idealized American family. Each of the main characters actively seeks out someone outside of their own family to confide in, look up to, and turn to when they need them. Aside from this, each of the main characters had to work hard, using discourse dependency (e.g., externally explaining the relationship to others and defending that relationship; internally discussing the

nature of the ties to each other and having traditions and celebrations surrounding the members), to validate their friendship/family with each other. The characters mentioned repeatedly to themselves, and others, that they are a family.

Expanding Family Networks

To piggyback off the main characters turning to others for guidance, they also turn to others to compensate for what they are lacking in their immediate families. According to Kendra Cherry, “compensation refers to a defense mechanism in which people overachieve in one area to compensate for failures in another” (Cherry, pg. 1, 2022). Within the series, each of the characters lacks something, whether it be a solid parental figure, someone to talk to, overall relationships, or even a sense of control. Each of the main characters sells out a way to make up for what they are lacking.

When looking at each of the main characters’ families, each is lacking something in comparison to the idealized American family structure, which most family structures do not meet. Monse’s dad is rarely around, Cesar’s mom is gone, and his father is in prison, Ruby’s family is not very present aside from Abuelita, and Jamal’s parents push him to do things he does not want to do (i.e., football). Within the first season, there is also Olivia who goes to stay with Ruby and his family because her parents had to return home. Within the later seasons, there is Jasmine who lives with her father, but takes care of herself as her father cannot move or speak. These five, alternating Olivia and Jasmine, compensate for their lack of family by creating a family of their own with each other. There are several instances in which the characters refer to their group as family; “Our friends are like family” -Jamal (S1:E6, 6:50). While they find a family in each other, each character tries to compensate for individual shortcomings as well.

Within season two, Cesar is wholly without a bio-nuclear family (i.e., he has no present father, mother, or siblings and no permanent residence) (see Georgas et al., 2001). Cesar hops among each of the friends within the group, staying with each of them for a period. To start, he stays with Monse, until her dad finds out and forces Cesar to leave (S2:E2). He then stays with Ruby but is soon overwhelmed by the sheer number of people in that house, and he feels like he is in everyone's way (S2:E2). Lastly, he stays with Jamal and Jamal's parents. In this situation, Cesar not only got a home, but a brother. Jamal even labels the relationship as familial, at one point exclaiming, "I finally have a brother. Someone who gets me" (S2:E4, 2:48). Cesar later reciprocates when he says, "It was an honor being your roommate, and your brother" (S2:E9, 24:51). While Cesar started the season with no bio-nuclear family, he ends up finding a family and a home. Jamal, while being an only child, also finds a brother.

Through viewing Cesar jumping from one family unit to another, it is important to note that finding, or creating, an effective family unit is difficult. While Ruby's family structure may have seemed appealing to Cesar, as they give off a sense of closeness in sharing a space and experiences, once Cesar is within that family structure, he realizes that it is way too hectic and overbearing for him (S2:E2). Cesar continues to search for a stable structure in going to stay with Monse, and later Jamal. However, in each of these instances, he fails in gaining what he was looking for. This goes to show that there is an ongoing struggle in trying to find, or create, that perfect family structure.

With Jamal being an only child, and often on the outs with the group, he compensated for his lack by finding a brother in Cesar, but also finding friends by making imaginary relationships with a set of garden gnomes. Throughout season two there are a handful of scenes surrounding Jamal and his 'conversations' with a garden gnome, Juanita. He acts protective of her and treats

her like a person, and even goes so far as to defend her to the friend group. Aside from making ‘friends’ with Juanita, Jamal also turns to Abuelita. Throughout the entire series, there are several conversations that take place solely between Jamal and Abuelita because of their friendship. Within season one, there is a scene where Jamal and Abuelita are hanging out at Ruby’s house, while the other main characters are all at Monse’s. The audience sees the depth of their relationship at the end of season two, when Jamal exclaims “You believed in me when no one else did” (S2:E10, 21:10). Jamal turned to Abuelita because she was the only one that would listen to him; she became the person he could talk to.

Monse and Ruby both compensated in similar ways; they both turned to their friend group to get the family that they wanted and needed. While Monse basically lived alone, Ruby was overshadowed by his three siblings. In season two, Monse refers to herself as “the mother of this ship” (S2:E10, 15:15) aka the friend group. Monse places the pressure on herself to keep the friend group (family) together because her own family fell apart. While Monse tries to keep the friend group together, Ruby plans everything for the friend group to do. This can be seen in season one when Ruby takes over planning Olivia’s quine and gives everyone tasks to do (S1:E7). Ruby likes to take charge and plan because he cannot do that within his own chaotic family. However, Monse and Ruby are not the only ones to look at their friend group like a family.

Cesar works to protect the friend group at all costs, because his family is his brother and the gang that put him at risk. At the end of season two, Cesar gambles away the Roller World money to the opposing gang, in order to buy his friends’ safety. While he knows that this will get him in trouble with his brother and his gang, he does not care, so long as his friends (his family) are safe (S2:E10). Within season three, Cesar takes it upon himself to kill the Santos leader so

that his friends do not have to be under her power anymore, nor bear the weight of murder (S3:E7). Where Oscar did not put his family (Cesar) first, Cesar ensures the safety of his biological and voluntary family members.

Lastly are the two side characters, Olivia and Jasmine. Within season one, Olivia plays a large role within the friend group, having moved in with Ruby because her parents had to move back home. While she has no immediate family with her, she finds a substitute family within the friend group: “Truth is, you’ve all become my family” (S1:E10, 15:46). When Olivia exits the series at the end of season one, Jasmine takes her place for the remainder of the series. Jasmine lives alone with her father, who cannot speak or move, so she takes care of him and herself. She, too, turns to the friend group as a voluntary family, to supplement her relationship with her father.

When looking at every interaction and family function discussed previously, I conclude that the immediate families of the main characters function as any typical immediate family should. The defining characteristics of a family is that the members live together, do things together, contribute to the resources necessary to live, and to have children (Anastasiu, 2012). Within the series, the immediate families live together, partake in a few activities together, provide for each other, and (the parents) have children. Aside from this, it can be concluded that, while immediate families are valued and important, some friendships hold an even higher importance. I say this because it is that friend-based, non-biological and non-legal, voluntary family, or family of creation (Galvin, 2014; Gerhardt, 2016), that is shown most often and that the friends work so hard to protect throughout the entirety of the show.

Family Influence on the Main Characters (RQ3)

Given that families are central to many individuals' lives, my third research question aimed to illuminate the impact of family within the show, asking: "In what ways are the main characters of *On My Block* shown to be influenced by their family experiences?" Within *On My Block* there are two main influences that emerge: conflict and growth. While conflict is often an unwanted interaction, it tends to lead to growth within the main characters. This is important to note because each of the main characters within the series experiences conflict; the conflict brings them closer together. This can be seen in season one episode six when Monse, Cesar, Olivia, and Ruby are all fighting because Olivia and Cesar kissed, but they decide to put the conflict aside to be there, together, for Jamal during his (one and only) football game. There are several other instances of conflict amongst the main characters throughout the show, but these conflicts all serve a purpose.

"The Santos are a family. Families are complicated" -Oscar (S2:E2, 14:00). All families have conflict, and it is presented throughout *On My Block* in several aspects. Conflict is defined as "an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings towards each other" (Fisher, pg. 1, 1977). Within the show, there are several instances where two, or more, characters are involved in conflict. Whether it be incompatibility, an attempt to control a situation, or antagonistic feelings towards one another. Fisher also states that "conflict has the potential for either a great deal of destruction or much creativity and positive social change" (Fisher, 1977, pg. 1).

The entire series starts off with a conflict. The first episode starts with the return of Monse from her summer camp, right before the start of the school year. She is hanging out with her friends, Jamal and Ruby, and inquiring about the whereabouts of their fourth friend, Cesar.

Ruby and Jamal get flustered and try to steer Monse and the conversation away from Cesar. Monse eventually gets Jamal to crack and explain why they are upset with Cesar (S1:E1). Cesar claimed to have banged Monse and this piece of information has spread. Naturally, Monse is pissed at Cesar for saying this and hints him down and yells at him. This initial conflict introduces the audience to the four main characters and highlights the importance of their friendship due to the emotions surrounding the conflict. Initially, this conflict seems like one of destruction, leading to a rift in the friend group. However, later in the episode Cesar explains that he made this comment in order to get the other members of his gang to leave her alone (S1:E1). It was an act of protection.

Following these two characters and their relationship, there are several other instances of conflict. To add, there is the instance when Cesar kisses Olivia and Monse finds out. At this point in the season, Monse and Cesar have made up and are 'hanging out' without letting the others know. They chose to keep their relationship a secret because they did not want to cause any other conflict within their friend group. Olivia kisses Cesar, under the impression that Cesar is single (S1:E5). Cesar and Olivia decide to keep the information secret, to save not only Monse's feelings, but Ruby's as well because he has a crush on Olivia. Ultimately, everyone finds out and they fight about it. This slight destruction in the friend group does not last long as they ultimately decide that their friendship means more than the conflict. "You are each other's family, and now you've become mine" (S1:E6, 16:03). While this conflict centers around Monse and Cesar's romantic relationship, it involves everyone in their friend group.

To continue in follow Cesar and Monse's relationship, in season two, everything seems to be going well between the two, until Monse tells Cesar about going to stay with her mom for a bit. Up until this point, Monse's mother has been out of the picture, but Monse tracked her down

and wants to get to know her. Cesar gives her an ultimatum to either choose him or choose her mom, and she chooses her mom; “Of course you would leave, you really are your mother’s daughter” (S2:E4, 28:05). It is only when they learn that Latrelle (who tried to shoot Cesar in season one) is back in town that Monse and Cesar put their conflict behind them to try and protect everyone. The friend group then works to get Cesar out of town so he can be safe. Monse decides that she is going with Cesar. In order to protect Monse and keep her from leaving with him, he tells her that she hooked up with someone during their time apart. Even though it was another act of protection, it is yet another conflict between the two.

Aside from conflict surrounding the friend group, there are also several instances of conflict between members and their family. To start, there is the conflict between Cesar and his brother Oscar. In season one, Oscar not only forces Cesar into his gang, the Santos, but he also forces Cesar to do a lot for the gang. One of these activities include shooting someone. Oscar tries to justify this by saying “ain’t no future if you don’t handle your past” (S1:E8, 24:12). Oscar does not care about how Cesar feels about doing this, just that he gets it done. In the end of season one, the audience finds out that Cesar did not follow through, and Oscar kicks him out of the house. Throughout season two, Cesar is essentially homeless, and when he goes back to Oscar to beg him to let him come home, this happens: “Go,’ ‘Where? I have nowhere to go!’ ‘Not my problem...there’s nothing I can do for you...I love you mano, but you’re done” (S2:E9, 14:12). At the end of this season, Cesar repaid his debt to the gang and is finally allowed back, but the conflict does not end there. In season three, Cesar’s dad shows up, for a very short time, and then leaves again. Cesar gets mad at Oscar and blames him for his dad leaving again; “I’m your brother. For most of your life I’ve been your dad. If you’re gonna be mad at someone, be mad at him. He’s the one that up and left. Again!” (S3:E5, 24:30).

Examining another family, there is conflict between Monse and her (divorced) parents. Monse lives with her dad but finds her mom in season two. At one point within the series, Monse's dad wants to send her to boarding school in order to keep her safe from the environment she currently lives in; "you are the kid. I'm the dad. End of discussion" (S2:E8, 10:59). Aside from this, Monse experiences conflict with her mother. After finding her mother and revealing who she is to her, Monse's mom offers that she come stay with her. Monse agrees for a while, but Monse finds out that her mother has been lying to her friends about why he left Monse's dad; "you lied to put on a better face. To hide the truth. Just like you lied about the real reason you left. You never left because you needed to clear your head" (S2:E6, 21:46). While Monse does not have a lot of interaction with either of her parents, it is mainly conflict.

Lastly, there is conflict between Jamal and his parents. Throughout season one, Jamal lies to his parents about being on the football team. His parents put a lot of pressure on him to be athletic and were so excited about him possibly being on the team that Jamal felt like he could not be his true self. In the sixth episode of the season, Jamal tries to talk to his mom about his friends, but at one mention of football she becomes fanatic about the sport and does not pay attention to what Jamal is trying to tell her (S1:E6). At the end of this episode, Jamal finally breaks down and tells his parents that he never was on the football team and that he hates football, he just felt like he could not tell them because he did not want to disappoint them (S1:E6). Ultimately, his parents did not care, and they just wanted to be supportive.

Throughout the series, there were several instances of conflict, whether it was between those in the friend group, or members of the group and their respective families. While this conflict led to temporary destruction, it ultimately led the friend group to be stronger together and the family members to be close, because "Families fight, but you have to fight for family" -

Ruby's Mom (S3:E7, 21:40). Conflict can be an opportunity for those involved to grow. By approaching conflict with the idea of growth in mind, those involved can recognize the conflict as a learning experience that will allow for an understanding of oneself and others (Best, 2023). It is through conflict that each of the characters are influenced the most. Each of them learns something through the conflict, whether it be a life lesson or that they were overreacting and being protective of each other.

As seen throughout the series, conflict is seemingly inevitable amongst family members, whether it be biological or family of creation. It appears that the main characters turn to their friend group, their created family, when they are experiencing conflict with their biological family members. Cesar turns to Monse, Ruby, and Jamal when he and Oscar fight (S2:E2). Jamal turns to Ruby for help when he cannot confront his parents about football (S1:E6). Monse turns to the group when her father wants her to go to boarding school (S2:E9). However, there is also often conflict amongst members within the created family. Monse and Cesar are constantly fighting regarding their relationship. The friend group gets frustrated with Ruby when he takes over planning Olivia's quinceanera (S1:E7). Jamal gets upset with the group when he thinks that they do not listen to him (S1:E9). While there is conflict between the main characters, within their biological families and within their created family, the main characters always communicate with each other to overcome the conflict within the group, while avoiding the conflict within their biological families. This speaks to the importance of their friend group, their family, with each other.

Familial Messages Presented in *On My Block* (RQ4)

The main conclusion I draw from watching these seasons of *On My Block* is that the family of creation is arguably the most important family structure. It is the first family structure

that is noted within the entire series, and it is the structure that takes the forefront throughout the entire series. The entire show is centered around this friend group and their friendships with each other, as opposed to their biological families: “In a rough Los Angeles neighborhood, four smart, funny and streetwise teens find their lifelong friendship tested as they begin high school” (Netflix.com). Without watching the series, those looking at the description can grasp the importance of these four friends and their friendship with each other, but it is truly emphasized while watching. Each of the seasons, and each of the episodes, show several instances where the four members are together, hanging out, growing their relationships with each other.

While each of the main characters is seen as part of a biological family, each of the main characters look to each other to supplement or fill in a gap that they are missing within their biological families (see Braithwaite et al., 2010). Monse gains female perspective and takes on a motherly role, Ruby gains a sense of control, Jamal is accepted for who he really is, and Cesar, basically, gets a family that he does not have at all. It is because they value each other so much, and the family that they have with each other, that they work so hard to protect this family.

Each of the main characters work hard to protect what they have with each other; the family that they created in one another. This can be seen when Cesar gambles away the Roller World money to the rival in order to buy the protection of his friends (S2:E10), and when Cesar decides to take it upon himself to kill the Santos leader in order to protect his friends not only from her, but from the weight of murder (S3:E7). Aside from this, Monse and Cesar often put their feelings aside in order to work to eliminate conflict within the group (S1:E6). Ruby exclaims in season two, episode nine that “I’d take another bullet for you” (S2:E9, 24:41) which is an ultimate act of protection.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from watching the series, is that blood does not always come first, meaning that those in immediate biological families will not always put each other first but may choose others. This can be seen when Oscar puts the gang above Cesar; when Cesar does not follow through with the shooting, Oscar kicks him out of the house (S2:E1). Even when Cesar comes back, begging for Oscar to let him come home, Oscar does not let him: “‘I’m your little brother’ ‘I don’t know you’ ‘I’m your blood’ ‘You’re not a Santo’” (S2:E1, 14:53). In season two, episode one Monse puts Cesar above her father by letting him stay at their house, even though Monse’s father does not want this. Another instance is that Abuelita often puts Jamal first; whenever Jamal needs someone to confide in, no matter when or where, Abuelita is always available. Overall, the main characters put each other first, rather than their biological families, because their friendship means so much to them.

Through discussing the results found throughout the study, I was able to successfully answer each of my research questions. I was able to identify what family structures were represented within *On My Block*, I was able to identify the functions and interactions of family within the show, I was able to understand the influences that family had on the main characters, and I was able to identify the messages surrounding family that were presented in *On My Block*. Now I will discuss the implications of the method I chose to use, the professional, scholarly, personal, and practical implications of the study, the limitations of the study, and finally, the potential for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

When looking at the television show *On My Block*, it is likely that most people viewing it would not study it for family, family interaction, family structure, or family culture. I say this because there have been numerous studies that look at the show for racial identity, or the fact that it is a cast predominantly of people of color. In my first watch through of the show, I approached data without a lens and made note of this, rather than the family structures and interactions happening within the show. It was only on my second watch that I really started to notice the several different family types and interactions that were happening. Throughout the show, there was a focus on the friendship between four main characters, and how this friend group acted as a family to one another, all while each of the characters was a part of a biological family. These family forms and interactions hold professional, personal, and practical implications, presented in the following Discussion chapter.

Method Implications

By using open-coding, I was able to view the show without any lens, which led me to have an unbiased viewing of the show, at least for the first watch through. After viewing the series initially, I went back and rewatched, several times, with a familial lens, using discourse dependency as a base for discovering what family structures were present and defended. When using open-coding, and a familial lens, I was able to take note of what was emerging through the show, which in turn allowed me to successfully answer my research questions. I was able to see which family structures emerged, what functions and interactions the families had, what influence each family had on the main characters, and what messages about family the show was trying to tell. I prefer this method to others as it is open ended, which allows for more

interpretation of the data that emerges. I was able to start my study with a notion of family but came away with so much more.

Professional and Scholarly Implications

On My Block is truly a family-oriented show, meaning that the show is about families, while also being a show that can be watched by families. Each of the characters comes from a different family structure, and each tries to compensate for what is lacking in their biological families with the family that they created in each other. Monse's mom left her when she was three, and her father is rarely around because of work. Monse took on a controlling role within the friend group and I took this as her acting as the parent of the group because she did not have parental figures to look up to. Cesar's mother also left when he was little, and his father is in prison for most of the show. He only has his brother to look up to, and his brother is more focused on the gang than him. Cesar comes across as the 'loose cannon' type in the friend group, and they are constantly trying to save him. This, to me, is because he has only ever known the gang as his family, and they tend to be destructive. Jamal has his two parents, making him essentially a part of the perfect idealized American family. Jamal is often ignored and overlooked within the friend group, which I found interesting as they are ignoring the person that comes from the 'perfect' family. Lastly, Ruby is a part of a larger family with his siblings, parents, and Abuelita. While he also comes from that idealized American family type, the only family member that is constantly around is Abuelita, which breaks that traditional norm of the parents being there. Each of the friends take on a role in the friend group that reflects their family structure; Monse is the parental figure, Cesar is the loose cannon Jamal is ignored, and Ruby is the planner as he comes from a large and rather chaotic family. While these characteristics and

seeking out of others may seem anti-family, it opened the door to other ways of doing family. Family is not necessarily all about blood.

Braithwaite, and colleagues discuss the concept of voluntary kin. They define voluntary kin as “persons outside of blood and legal ties who are considered as family” (Braithwaite, et al., 2010, p. 392). They also discuss how this concept is derived from discourse, as well as social constructionism, meaning that this voluntary kin is dependent on communication and is constructed based on communication: “literally talked into being” (Braithwaite et al., 2010, p. 392). Essentially, they argue that not all families are tied through blood or legal ties, but some families can be constructed through communication. This type of family, also known as a family of creation, is central to *On My Block* as seen through Monse, Jamal, Ruby, and Cesar and their family of creation, or voluntary kin.

To add to this notion, *On My Block* showcases each of the characters looking up to someone beyond their biological family to act as a parental figure for them. Cesar creates a relationship with Jamal’s father, as well as Monse’s father, and even Chivo. Monse turns to Olivia in the first season, as she has been the only female friend she has ever had. In season two, Monse turns to her long-lost mother, and while this is technically biological, her mother has not been around for 13 years of her life. Oscar, Cesar's brother, starts to look out for Ruby and they create a relationship there. Lastly, Jamal has his friendship with Abuelita. Each of the characters has someone outside of their biological family that they have grown up with that starts to take on that parental, mentoring role for them.

Each of the characters looks up to someone, which can be defined as a natural mentor (Zimmerman et al., 2014). According to Zimmerman and colleague’s natural mentors are non-parental figures from whom a person receives support and guidance because of a relationship.

Natural mentors lend a lot to their mentees, such as support, security, and reassurance.

Zimmerman and colleagues (2014) also note that people tend to go searching for a natural mentor when they have a low level of parental support. Each of the main characters within *On My Block* are seen to be lacking parental support, and each seeks out a natural mentor in someone else; Cesar turns to Jamal's father and Monse's father (S2:E2), Ruby turns to Oscar (S2:E5), Monse turns to Olivia (S1:E5) and Jasmine (S3:E2), and all of them turn to Abuelita throughout the entire series.

Through expanding family ties and/or compensating for lack in biological families, voluntary kin, and looking to mentors for support, discourse dependency takes a role in all of it. Voluntary kin is a discourse dependent structure as it is based solely on communication/ Braithwaite (2010) mentions that this type of family is literally talked into being, therefore it is dependent on discourse. There are several instances throughout the show where each of the main characters refers to their friend group as a family, thus talking their family with each other into existence. While the friends within this voluntary kin spoke their family into existence, they must use discourse dependency to keep it intact.

Galvin (2014) discusses the internal and external ways that discourse dependency works within a family structure. The family structures within *On My Block* use these internal and external methods to validate their experience. To start, the family of friends found between the main characters. Externally, the characters explain and defend their relationship to others which legitimizes their tie to each other. There are several instances throughout the series where each of the main characters refers to their group as a family. In constantly referring to their friend group as a family, they are defending their structure to themselves and to others. Through defending their friend group as a family, they are legitimizing their ties to each other. Internally,

the characters discussed their friendship often and their ties to each other. Aside from this, they shared many memories, stories, and celebrations together that strengthened their bond. While the family of friends had to work hard to validate their structure, there were other structures that relied on discourse dependency, and others that did not rely on it as much.

As seen with Monse and her stepfamily, there were a handful of external and internal discourse moments between the members. Externally, Monse had a conversation with her mother about how her mother was trying to change her to “fit in” with her stepfamily. From straightening her hair to getting her new technology and clothes. Her mother was working to validate Monse as her daughter. In this instance, Monse’s mother was trying to defend their relationship by making Monse look more like her and her new family. Internally, Monse’s stepfather had a conversation with her about wanting her to be a permanent part of their family. Monse’s mother and stepfather used discourse dependency to try and validate Monse as their daughter. However, Monse’s father never once had to use any discourse to show that Monse was his daughter, since they truly look biologically related.

Lastly, Ruby’s family and Jamal’s family did not have to use any sense of discourse dependency to show that they were a family. It was obvious through biology and culture that Ruby and Jamal were the sons of their parents, and members of their families.

Ruby’s family centers around their Hispanic culture, which plays a large role within their family structure and interactions. Hispanic families are close-knit and very important. The Hispanic family unit goes beyond parents and children to include extended family members, in Ruby’s case, this includes his Abuelita. The members within the family share a responsibility in financial problems, unemployment, health, and anything else that may come up (Clutter & Nieto, 2009). There are several instances within the series where Ruby must sacrifice to help his family,

whether it be giving up his room to another family member or helping with finances. Aside from this, Hispanic family ties are very strong. They spend time together celebrating several holidays. This can also be seen throughout the show, in several instances, where Ruby's entire family gathers for Christmas, New Years, and Olivia's quinceanera. Culture plays a large role in Ruby's life, as his family is the center of his culture.

While there is often a lot of conflict throughout the show, and it causes rifts between the characters, *On My Block* showed that it was often a mechanism to protect someone. At first, Monse gave up her crush on Cesar to protect their friend's from potentially breaking up. Cesar used his hookup to protect Monse from leaving with him and giving up on her life. There was then conflict surrounding the Roller World money because Oscar took the money from Jamal and Ruby but did not say yes to protecting Cesar. Cesar got beat up for snitching on the Santos. Lastly, Monse was mad because she did not agree to give up her cut of the money at all. They all gave up the Roller World money to protect each other; first Jamal and Ruby gave it up to Oscar to protect Cesar, then Cesar gave it up to buy protection from the Prophets for Monse, Jamal, and Ruby. Lastly, Oscar gave up the money to the Prophets to buy Cesar's safety.

Louis Hinkle (2002) discusses the family conflict communication model and how this model centers around conflict, or disagreements, arguments, verbal aggression, and the outcomes of this conflict. Hinkle notes that conflict is "a fact of life and is neither intrinsically good nor bad" (Hinkle, 2002, p. 3). Hinkle then goes on to discuss that constructive conflict communication is ideal, and centers around individuals arguing about a presented issue. The conflict then is resolved when the individuals resolve the disagreement (Hinkle, 2002). Throughout *On My Block*, there are several instances of conflict amongst the characters, and each time there is a conflict, the characters eventually talk it out and resolve the conflict. In these

instances, each of the characters eventually revealed why they did what they did (why the conflict started) in order to resolve the conflict.

Personal Impacts

Given that this project initially stemmed from personal experiences and interests, it makes sense that it has also produced impacts on me, personally. While working on this study, I noticed that I started to watch shows and movies with a family lens. I noticed that I was analyzing everything for what family structures are present and what interactions are taking place. I first noticed this when I was watching the show *Parallels*, which can be found on Disney+. This show centers around a friend group that ends up being separated into parallel universes and tries to find their way back to each other and their proper universe. This show has absolutely nothing to do with family, but while I was sitting there, I noticed myself commenting on ‘oh he’s a part of a single parent’s family’ and ‘oh he’s from a traditional family, which his parents and brother’ and ‘ah yes a family of creation amongst the friends.’ This inner commentary started to happen with nearly everything I was watching.

It even got to a point where I would open my notes-app on my phone and take note of which shows I was watching, what families popped up in them, and any family-centered quotes said throughout the show. There is one specific quote that I noted from the Netflix show *Sweet Tooth*, from when I was watching back in April: “Maybe it goes without saying but we’re all looking for family from the moment we’re born. Turns out we just never know where we’re gonna find it” (S1:E4, 37:34). This quote seemed significant in that it says we are looking for family, not that we are born into one. This shows through *On My Block* as well because the friend group looked for a family in each other, they found family in each other. This can be applied to anyone, really. I know for me, I found family in the friends that I have, but also within

my immediate family. I found family with my immediate family in the sense that we are not biologically related, so we did not have that biological tie to *make* us a family.

Aside from noticing families within shows, this study affected me in a personal way. It really made me think about my family and the structure we have. I noticed that I was more aware of my family, biological and adoptive. I was paying more attention to what my biological family was posting on social media, and noticing how they were all still connected: to note, my biological mother had two sons before she had me (one of which I'm fully biologically related to, the other only half), and my biological father now has a son and two daughters (half biologically related to). I noticed that my biological siblings all seem to have a relationship with each other, but not with me. However, this is my choice. I also started to notice how much I am like my adoptive family. My hair color is my adoptive mom, my puns come from my adoptive dad, and my sister is my best friend. Recently (mid-July) my mom posted a photo of me, and people were commenting on how much I looked like her. In the past, people have commented on how similar I look to my sister. All of this makes me giggle because we have no biological ties to each other, but regardless of this, we are all similar in the way that families (biological) are. As seen in *Gilmore Girls*, Rory and her mother *look* similar because of their similarities in behavior and nonverbals, even though they have no biological ties in real life. This is interesting as I have been told that I *look* like my adoptive family, even though there are no biological ties between us, it is those behaviors that make us similar.

Practical Implications

This study has several practical implications as family is everywhere, and everyone is a part of a family. Whether it be taking note of similarities between you and your family members, noticing families within the media, or even using clips of *On My Block* to teach about different

family types and how there are different ways to go about doing family. For me, being a part of an adoptive family has taught me that not everyone comes from the perfect idealized American structure. It has also taught me that everyone comes from a different familial background. As an instructor, this has been a major teaching point within my classroom: discussing how each person comes from a background that may be similar or different from your own experience, and it is these backgrounds and experiences that make us who we are and influence the way we act towards and see the world.

While this study has personal practical implications, it can have practical implications for anyone. This study took a dive into a singular television show, examining different aspects of family. Everyone is a part of a family, whether it be biological, or not, and we all observe families daily in real life, or through the media. A large percentage of today's youth come from a variety of different family structures, which allows them to take away something different from viewing *On My Block*. When viewing the series, those watching will get a sense of several different family structures, which can work to inform the viewers about what other family structures may look and act like. Whether the viewer is a part of a traditional structured family, or a nontraditional structured family, the show can inform the viewers of how other family structures look and act. Aside from this, if a viewer sees a family structure that is like theirs, they may walk away feeling affirmed in their own family structure; seeing one like their own, in a popular television show, can work to validate their own experience.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

To finish, it is important to note that this study had its limitations, and that there is direction for future research. While conducting this study, I was the only one involved in the open-coding process. It is possible that I may have missed interactions within the show, thus

limiting the interactions analyzed. While analyzing, it is possible that others may have coded the interactions differently from myself. Aside from this, I only analyzed three seasons of the show, which limited the access to the entire show. It is possible that I may have missed important interactions within the final season. However, for the purpose of this study, I chose to stay within the time constraints of the first three seasons, rather than adding the ‘two years later’ jump that is presented within season four. Lastly, I only looked at one television show, amongst many. While I believe that *On My Block* is an important show to analyze, there are several other shows out there that are equally as important and could add more to the conversation surrounding familial representations within the media. This leads into the potential for future research; it could be, and is, important to continue to analyze other television shows to further the conversation of familial representations within the media.

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