FAMILIES IN MOTION. THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND MEDIA IN THE RECOGNITION OF PLURAL FAMILY EXPERIENCES. A PRELIMINARY DATA ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This article presents selected findings from a study developed within a scientific collaboration between the University of Salento and the University of Granada, aimed at exploring university students' representations of family diversity. The contribution focuses on the role of media, culture, and other agents of socialisation in shaping family imaginaries. The study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional design and involved 395 students enrolled at the University of Salento. Data were collected through an Italian translation and adaptation of the Questionnaire for Future Teachers on Family Diversity . The findings show that students encounter family diversity mainly through social media, films, television series, and streaming platforms. However, they attribute the strongest influence on their own idea of family-to-family experience and peer relationships, while university and media are perceived as less influential. These results highlight the distinction between exposure and perceived influence: media and digital environments broaden the symbolic visibility of family diversity, whereas meaning making remains closely linked to everyday relational contexts. The article discusses the pedagogical implications for higher education and initial teacher education.

KEYWORDS

Family diversity; Family imaginaries; Media representations; Teacher education; Inclusive education.

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1. From the Family to Families: An Evolving Construct

Contemporary scholarship on the family has increasingly challenged essentialist, static, and monolithic understandings of what constitutes family life. These views have traditionally been grounded in a single, supposedly natural model: the conjugal, nuclear, heterosexual, two-parent family. Historically dominant in Western societies, this model has long functioned as the main normative framework through which parental roles, belonging, educational responsibilities, and the boundaries of social legitimacy have been defined. However, demographic, cultural, legal, and relational transformations over recent decades have made increasingly visible the heterogeneity of the forms through which care, responsibility, cohabitation, filiation, and belonging are constructed today. From this perspective, the family can be understood as a plural category, since family life in Italy can no longer be reduced to a simple, linear, and univocal model (Di Nicola, 2017; Bini et al., 2024).

This pluralisation does not indicate the disappearance of the family, nor its irreversible crisis. Rather, it describes its historical and social transformations. Such multiplicity calls for more flexible interpretive categories, capable of distinguishing between family form, caregiving functions, the quality of relationships, and processes of social recognition (Adler & Lenz, 2023; Vallario, 2021).

Several authors have attempted to map this changing family landscape through different classificatory models. Kaslow (1996), for example, identifies seven family types, including three- or four-generational families; foster and adoptive families; multiracial or multicultural families; single-parent families; gay and lesbian families; families composed of divorced adults and their respective children; and, finally, forms of cohabitation among people who are not related by kinship but are connected by strong emotional bonds and mutual commitments. Zanatta (1997),

by contrast, proposes a classification based on four types: cohabiting families, single-parent families, reconstituted families, and one-person households. Gambini (2007) distinguishes between the modern and the postmodern family, arguing that the latter, by taking the centrality of affective logic to its extreme consequences, weakens the institution of marriage and opens up a plurality of family forms, including extended, childless, cohabiting, single-parent, blended, multi-ethnic, immigrant, adoptive, same-sex-parent, and one-person families.

Golombok (2016) also offers a useful distinction between traditional nuclear families, non-traditional families, and new families. Non-traditional families include, for instance, families with single, cohabiting, or step-parents, often resulting from separation, divorce, and repartnering. New families, by contrast, refer to family forms that, until the late twentieth century, were absent, poorly visible, or only marginally recognised in the social sphere. These include families headed by lesbian mothers or gay fathers, families created through in vitro fertilisation, gamete donation, or surrogacy, and families headed by solo mothers by choice. Within the systemic-relational field, Andolfi (2015) identifies nine family configurations, including single-parent, reconstituted and blended, cohabiting, adoptive, mixed-culture, immigrant, same-sex-parent, and one-person families. Finally, Oliverio Ferraris (2020) refers to eight family constellations: formal, informal, single-parent, reconstituted, extended, multigenerational, adoptive, and nuclear families.

Although these classifications differ from one another, they converge in showing that contemporary families cannot be described through a single organising category. Their main contribution lies in making visible the multiplicity of family forms. At the same time, however, they also present a limitation: the risk of turning plurality into a list of rigid types, as if each configuration were internally

homogeneous and clearly bounded. For this reason, classification should be regarded as a descriptive tool rather than as an evaluative criterion. From a pedagogical perspective, the key question cannot simply be "What type of family is this?" Rather, it should concern how a specific family constructs belonging, exercises responsibility, distributes roles, manages transitions, and ensures care, recognition, and continuity for its members.

2. Studies on Family Representations. A Literature Review

Studies on family perceptions suggest that "family" cannot be regarded as a merely descriptive, stable, and universally shared category. Rather, it should be understood as a social, cultural, and symbolic construct, continuously renegotiated within educational contexts, biographical experiences, and available normative repertoires. Empirical research highlights a persistent tension between the enduring influence of the heterosexual nuclear family model, which continues to represent the most immediately recognisable family configuration, and the gradual emergence of more affective, relational, and inclusive definitions of family life.

In a study conducted in New Zealand with 111 children aged between 9 and 13 years, Rigg and Pryor (2007) found that participants tended to recognise a plurality of configurations as families, including single-parent, blended, extended, non-resident parent, and couple-with-children families. Children often attributed greater importance to love, care, respect, support, and protection than to biological, legal, or co-residential criteria. These findings suggest that children's representations of family are not necessarily rigid or exclusively grounded in biological and marital norms. Rather, they may incorporate more realistic and inclusive understandings, shaped by personal experience and cultural context.

However, this openness does not automatically lead to the overcoming of stereotypes. More recent research in early childhood education points to the persistence of hierarchies of recognition. In the study by Peregrina-Nievas et al. (2025), involving 156 Spanish children aged between 3 and 6 years, the traditional nuclear family emerged as the most recognised family type, whereas the one-person family was the least recognisable. Moreover, extended, mixed, nuclear, and adoptive families were associated with higher levels of perceived happiness, while divorced families tended to be perceived as less happy. These findings suggest that early exposure to plural family models does not produce a full deconstruction of symbolic hierarchies, since the recognisability of a family configuration also depends on its socio-cultural legitimisation.

From this perspective, schools may play a crucial role. If educational contexts continue to rely on languages, materials, and activities centred almost exclusively on the nuclear family, they risk reinforcing the distinction between “normal” families and “other” families. Conversely, when family plurality is intentionally addressed, schools can become spaces for recognition, critical reflection, and the deconstruction of stereotypes.

A further strand of research shows that perceptions of new family forms vary according to cultural contexts, social belonging, and dominant normative models. Meler and Marnin-Distelfeld (2023), analysing drawings produced by Palestinian-Arab women and men in Israel on the “appropriate family”, show that family imaginaries may remain strongly anchored in heteronormative and nuclear representations, even in societies undergoing processes of modernisation, changing gender roles, and declining birth rates.

Similarly, the study by De Coninck, Matthijs, and Dekeyser (2021), conducted with Flemish university students at KU Leuven and based on a comparison between two

samples collected in 1997 and 2018, shows that understandings of family remain closely linked to parenthood and couple cohabitation, while also becoming selectively open to more complex configurations. These include family arrangements related to divorce, co-parenting, the inclusion of pets, and the symbolic continuity of deceased family members. Such openness does not appear to imply either the dissolution of the nuclear model or the full inclusion of friendship ties within the category of family. Rather, it points to a partial redefinition of family boundaries, influenced by gender, socio-economic status, and personal family experience.

The study by Zvyaglova and Elkina (2021), which examined university students' attitudes towards family, future family formation, and parenthood, also suggests the coexistence of continuity and change. Family retains a strong value for most students and is mainly associated with support, procreation, childrearing, and emotional well-being. At the same time, however, it is also perceived as a potentially constraining experience, capable of reducing personal freedom, time for oneself, career opportunities, and individual autonomy. In this sense, parenthood remains desirable, but within a more reflective and selective horizon, in which family formation is evaluated in relation to the subjective, economic, and biographical costs it may entail.

Overall, the literature suggests that perceptions of family are shaped not only by individual experiences, but also by cultural norms, minority affiliations, religious models, gender relations, and collective expectations. Studies on blended families further confirm that family belonging cannot be inferred from household structure alone. In stepfamilies, for instance, adolescents' perception of being part of the family is strongly associated with the quality of relationships with the mother and stepfather, rather than with the family configuration in itself (King et al., 2015). This

evidence supports the view that family should be studied not only as a form, but also as a relational process, in which belonging, recognition, and narrative continuity are constructed through the quality of interpersonal bonds.

In this direction, the literature on new family forms also calls for moving beyond the comparative-deficit paradigm, which evaluates these configurations against the heterosexual two-parent family assumed as the normative standard (Segal-Engelchin & Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2023). Available evidence suggests that the most relevant differences do not necessarily concern children's well-being or the quality of parenting. Rather, they relate to the social, legal, and institutional conditions under which these families are recognised, supported, and legitimised.

3. The Role of Media in Family Representations: Stereotypes and Clichés

Digital media may play a significant role in shaping perceptions of parenting and family forms. Cinema, television, streaming platforms, social media, advertising, and digital storytelling do not merely reflect transformations in family life; rather, they contribute to defining the expectations, models, and criteria of recognisability through which audiences interpret what, in a given historical and cultural context, can be socially understood as "family" (Hosseini, Bashir, & Oroji, 2024). In this regard, the study by Wang et al. (2024), conducted with university students, suggests that social media can influence attitudes, expectations, fears, and desires related to parenthood. Social media may therefore function as informal socialisation devices that, while facilitating the circulation and possible normalisation of different representations of becoming a parent, may also foster social comparison, idealisation, performance pressure, and anxiety regarding parental roles.

Media representations of the family cannot therefore be considered neutral. By selecting certain family configurations while marginalising or rendering others invisible, media narratives assign value to specific roles, relational models, and forms of care. In doing so, they contribute, often implicitly, to establishing symbolic hierarchies between families perceived as normal, desirable, problematic, or deviant (Zurcher, Webb, & Robinson, 2018). As Moss (2024a) observes, families portrayed in entertainment media are relevant not only as fictional constructions, but also because, through processes of identification, emotional engagement, and evaluation of narrative outcomes, they may shape perceptions of family behaviours as effective or ineffective, desirable or dysfunctional, reproducible or to be avoided.

In light of socio-cognitive theories and entertainment studies, the power of media in constructing family images may be linked to the audience's capacity to learn not only from direct experience, but also through the observation of symbolic models, characters, and narrative plots. By staging ways of managing conflict, exercising parenthood, distributing domestic roles, and defining affective bonds, audiovisual narratives provide interpretive repertoires through which audiences may understand who cares for whom, who makes decisions, who educates, who provides emotional support, who fails, and who is recognised as a good parent, child, or partner. In this sense, audiovisual media may perform an indirect form of family socialisation, as they allow audiences to develop forms of aspirational identification with characters or family units that are perceived as possible or ideal models or, conversely, as problematic examples from which to distance themselves (Moss, 2024b).

Within this process, stereotypes and clichés play a particularly powerful and performative role (Borry, 2021). The repetition of recurring family figures (Benshoff & Griffin, 2021), such as the naturally nurturing mother, the incompetent or emotionally distant father, the heterosexual couple as the normative family

structure, the separated family as a site of conflict, the same-sex-parent family as a narrative exception (Bertone, 2015), or the migrant family as an integration problem, contributes to the sedimentation of cultural biases. These images tend to simplify the complexity of family experiences by reducing them to easily recognisable and narratively functional schemes. The cliché operates precisely through this symbolic economy: it makes a situation immediately legible, but at the cost of rigidifying differences, erasing nuances, and turning family plurality into a typified repertoire. As a result, it produces a selective representation of family life in which some forms are normalised, while others are marked as "other", "new", "problematic", or in need of explanation.

A first area of concern is the persistence of the heterosexual nuclear family as an implicit reference model (Harsia & Adi, 2020). Even when media represent plural family configurations, they often continue to use the nuclear family as the benchmark against which other forms are compared. Non-traditional families are thus made visible, but within narrative frames that emphasise their distance from the norm: they are required to justify their legitimacy, demonstrate their functionality, overcome specific obstacles, or be presented through registers of exceptionality. This mechanism produces an ambivalent form of inclusion: on the one hand, it expands visibility; on the other, it may confirm the centrality of the dominant model, turning family plurality into a tolerated variation rather than an ordinary expression of social life.

A second area concerns the representation of gender roles within the family (Wegener, Jage-D'Aprile, & Plumeier, 2023; Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2022; Garrido & Zaptsi, 2021). Many narratives continue to reproduce stereotypical views of domestic and parental responsibilities. Mothers are often associated with care, emotional labour, and domestic management, while fathers are frequently represented as secondary, comic, inexperienced, or only belatedly involved in

children's upbringing (Engelbrecht, 2021). Even when fathers are portrayed as present and affectionate, their competence is sometimes constructed as exceptional, whereas maternal competence is represented as natural and expected. This produces a double effect: on the one hand, it reinforces the idea that caregiving is primarily feminine; on the other, it devalues the paternal function by reducing it to secondary support or a source of humour.

A third area concerns the representation of the "good family" as a harmonious, cohesive, happy, and high-performing space (Zurcher, Webb, & Robinson, 2018). Especially in advertising and digital content, the family is often constructed through aestheticized images of well-being, consumption, domestic order, and personal fulfilment. The idealised image of the "perfect family" produces a highly selective normative imaginary: families are shown as efficient, smiling, well integrated, economically stable, and able to manage the complexity of everyday life without visible fractures. Such an idealised representation may generate social comparison, feelings of inadequacy, and performance pressure, particularly when it is internalised as an implicit standard.

Media representations also operate through invisibility. Some family configurations remain underrepresented, rarely named or portrayed in stereotypical ways (Luther, Clark, & Lepre, 2024): same-sex-parent families, transnational families, families with disabled members, poor families, foster families, adoptive families, complex blended families, queer families, community-based households, and forms of elective co-parenting. Media absence is no less significant than stereotypical representation, since what is not shown risks not being recognised as socially thinkable. The scarcity of plural images reduces the available symbolic repertoire, producing a tacit hierarchy between fully represented family belongings and marginal or invisible ones.

At the same time, media can also perform a transformative function. Audiovisual and digital narratives, when constructed with attention to complexity, can contribute to legitimising family plurality, making previously marginalised experiences visible, deconstructing stereotypes, and proposing more inclusive relational models. The issue, therefore, does not lie in media representation as such, but in the quality, recurrence, and interpretive framing of the images produced. Representing a same-sex-parent, blended, or migrant family is not in itself sufficient if that representation is built exclusively around conflict, lack, deviance, or exceptionality. A pedagogically generative representation should instead show plural families in their ordinariness, complexity, and ambivalence, avoiding both pathologisation and idealisation (Benshoff & Griffin, 2021).

From a pedagogical perspective, the role of media in shaping family representations calls for critical education in the reading of images and narratives. The key question should not concern only "which families" appear in media, but also how they are represented, which roles are assigned to family members, which conflicts are made visible, which solutions are proposed, which subjects remain at the margins, and which models are implicitly presented as desirable (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Building on this theoretical framework, the present study addresses the following research questions:

- **RQ1.** In which contexts do university students encounter references to family diversity?
- **RQ2.** Which agents of socialisation do students perceive as most influential in shaping their idea of family?
- **RQ3. At a descriptive level, how do reported exposure to media and digital environments and their perceived influence on students' own idea of family differ?**

4. Methodology

Given the limited body of research on the contexts in which university students encounter family diversity and on the influence they attribute to different agents of socialisation, the present contribution focuses on students at the University of Salento, specifically within the Department of Human and Social Sciences in Lecce, Italy. Although the broader research project also collected information on the recognition of specific family configurations, the analyses reported here are restricted to two dimensions: (a) frequency of exposure to references to family diversity across different contexts and (b) perceived influence of selected socialisation agents on participants' own idea of family. Accordingly, the title, research questions, results, discussion, and conclusions are aligned with these two dimensions.

4.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional design. It was carried out within the framework of a scientific collaboration between the University of Salento, Italy, and the University of Granada, Spain. The aim of this contribution was to describe the contexts in which university students report encountering references to family diversity and the influence they perceive different agents of socialisation to have had on their own idea of family. The study is descriptive and does not test causal effects of media, university, family, peers, or other contexts on family representations.

4.2. Participants

The sample consisted of 395 university students enrolled at the University of Salento. Participants were selected through non-probability convenience sampling, based on accessibility and voluntary participation. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 63 years (M = 29.71). The sample was predominantly composed of women (89.1%), followed by men (10.1%) and a small proportion of students who identified as non-binary (0.8%) (Table 1).

Regarding disciplinary background, the sample was predominantly composed of students with a humanities and social sciences educational background (n = 339, 85.8%), followed by the medical and health sciences area (n = 41, 10.4%), the economic and legal area (n = 8, 2.0%), and the technical and scientific (STEM) area (n = 7, 1.8%).

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (N = 395)

Variable	**n**	**%**
Gender		
Women	352	89.1
Men	40	10.1
Non-binary	3	0.8
Age		
Range	19–63 years	
Mean (M)	29.71	

4.3. Instrument

Data were collected through an Italian translation and adaptation of the *Questionnaire for Future Teachers on Family Diversity* developed by Caurcel, Urdiales, and Crisol (2020), whose structure and application are documented by Urdiales Bermúdez, Caurcel Cara, and Crisol Moya (2021). The original questionnaire comprises four sections. The 2021 publication describes, among the

sections used in that study, a family-typology section presenting 19 possible family configurations with dichotomous Yes/No responses, and a training section using 4-point Likert-type items to examine perceived preparation and resources for addressing family diversity.

In the Italian adaptation, the questionnaire was intentionally administered to university students from different disciplinary areas rather than exclusively to students enrolled in teacher education programmes. This choice reflected the broader aim of exploring how future professionals from educational, social, health, and human sciences backgrounds may approach and interpret family diversity in their prospective professional practice. Depending on their academic pathways, participants may enter professions such as education, teaching, social work, nursing, sociology, and other fields in which interaction with individuals, children, and families is a relevant component of professional practice. Accordingly, the expression “future teachers” is retained only when referring to the original title and target population of the Spanish instrument, whereas the present study more broadly concerns university students as future professionals who may encounter increasingly diverse family configurations in their work.

In the broader Italian adaptation, the section on recognition of family configurations was administered, but those results are not reported in the present contribution. For the analyses presented here, the questionnaire included two additional sets of items on socialisation contexts. Frequency of exposure to references to family diversity was assessed across eight contexts: primary education, secondary education, university, family, peer group, television, films/television series/streaming platforms, and social media. Responses were recorded on a five-level frequency scale (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Very often), with an additional “Do not reply” category. Perceived influence on participants’ own idea of family was assessed for six agents or contexts: university,

family, peer group, television, films/television series/streaming platforms, and social media. Responses were recorded on a five-level influence scale (None, Little, Moderate, A lot, Very much), again with a “Do not reply” category. Exposure and perceived influence are therefore conceptually distinct dimensions and were analysed separately.

The Spanish-language questionnaire was translated into Italian for the present study through a process of linguistic and cultural adaptation carried out with the support of the publisher and its linguistically qualified staff, as well as with the active involvement of the authors of the original Spanish instrument, who also possessed competence in Italian. This collaborative process enabled the translated version to be reviewed for semantic equivalence, terminological accuracy, and consistency with the original meaning of the items, while ensuring its appropriateness for the Italian academic and cultural context. Because the present article reports item-level descriptive results and does not construct or interpret composite scores, no reliability coefficients or factor-structure analyses were calculated for these items.

4.4. Procedure

Data collection took place between March and April 2026 through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Before completing the questionnaire, all participants provided electronic informed consent. The consent form stated that participation was voluntary and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, in accordance with ethical principles for research involving human participants.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the competent Ethics Committee of the University of Granada, in accordance with the institutional procedures and

ethical standards applicable to research involving human participants. All participants provided electronic informed consent prior to participation.

4.5. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 30.0. Descriptive analyses were conducted separately for the two dimensions reported in this contribution. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each exposure item and for each perceived-influence item; the two response scales were not combined or treated as equivalent measures. Percentages in Tables 2 and 3 were calculated using the full sample (N = 395) as the denominator and include the “Do not reply” category, i.e item non-response / intentional non-response. Because the present contribution does not report the recognition of specific family configurations, no analyses of those items are included here.

5. Results

5.1. Exposure to Family Diversity across Different Socialisation Contexts

One of the aims of the study was to explore the contexts in which university students encounter family diversity. The results show that exposure to family diversity is not evenly distributed across the different agents of socialisation considered.

Media and digital environments emerged as the contexts in which family diversity was most visible. Social media represented the context with the highest frequency of exposure: 62.3% of students reported encountering such content “often” or “very often”. Similarly, films, television series, and streaming platforms played a prominent role, with 56.0% of participants reporting high levels of exposure.

Television also appeared to be a relevant context, although with slightly lower intensity, as 47.8% of participants reported encountering references to family diversity "often" or "very often". By contrast, educational contexts showed a more moderate presence of this topic. While university appeared to be a relatively significant space for addressing family diversity, with 45.9% of students selecting "often" or "very often", primary education was the context in which students most frequently reported never having encountered this topic, with 27.8% selecting "never".

Regarding more immediate socialisation environments, family and peer groups showed intermediate frequencies of reported exposure. These values describe how often participants reported encountering references to family diversity in those contexts; they should not be interpreted as evidence of the influence exerted by family or peers on participants' family conceptions.

Table 2. Frequency with which students encounter references to family diversity in different contexts (%)[2]

Context	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Do not reply
Primary education	27.8	24.8	23.8	12.7	6.6	4.3
Secondary education	16.2	22.3	29.9	19.5	8.4	3.7
University	10.9	12.9	27.6	25.6	20.3	2.7
Family	18.5	20.5	26.3	20.8	11.9	2.0
Peer group	10.4	18.5	28.6	23.8	17.2	1.5
Television	6.1	14.4	30.1	28.1	19.7	1.6
Films/series/streaming platforms	6.1	12.4	24.1	28.9	27.1	1.4
Social media	4.8	11.4	19.7	29.4	32.9	1.8

[2] Percentages are calculated using the full sample (N = 395) as the denominator and sum to 100% across response categories, including "Do not reply", it was an explicit response option offered to participants

Overall, as shown in Table 2, media and digital platforms were the contexts with the highest reported frequency of exposure to references to family diversity. This finding concerns visibility and contact frequency only; it does not, by itself, demonstrate a normalising effect of media or an effect on students' family representations.

5.2. Influence of Socialisation Agents on the Construction of the Idea of Family

Beyond the frequency with which students encounter references to family diversity in different contexts, the questionnaire also explored the perceived influence of several agents of socialisation on the construction of students' own idea of family. The results reveal clear differences across the contexts analysed.

As shown in Table 3, the family emerged as the main agent of socialisation in shaping family representations. More than six out of ten students (60.3%) reported that their family environment had influenced "a lot" or "very much" the construction of their idea of family, whereas only 2.3% stated that it had exerted no influence.

The peer group ranked second in terms of perceived influence. Almost four out of ten participants (38.2%) attributed a high level of influence to friends, selecting "a lot" or "very much", while 40.8% considered this influence to be moderate.

By contrast, university showed a considerably lower level of perceived influence. Although 29.4% of students reported a moderate influence, only 19.3% stated that university had contributed "a lot" or "very much" to the construction of their idea of family. Conversely, almost one in five students (18.2%) reported that university had exerted no influence.

Regarding media, the results show a differentiated pattern. Films, television series, and streaming platforms represented the medium with the highest perceived influence, with more than half of the students (56.2%) reporting at least a moderate influence. Television and social media also contributed to the construction of family imaginaries, although with lower intensity, with responses mostly indicating low or moderate influence.

Taken together, the perceived-influence items show a different pattern from the exposure items. Participants attributed the strongest influence on their own idea of family to family experience and peer relationships, whereas university and media were generally rated as less influential. These responses reflect participants' self-reported perceptions and should not be interpreted as direct measures of the actual effects of these agents.

Table 3: Perceived influence of different agents of socialisation on the construction of the idea of family (%)[3]

Context	None	Little	Moderate	A lot	Very much	Do not reply
University	18.2	31.4	29.4	12.7	6.6	1.7
Family	2.3	11.9	24.8	31.9	28.4	0.7
Peer group	4.3	15.7	40.8	27.1	11.1	1.0
Television	14.2	35.9	30.9	13.4	3.5	2.1
Films/series/streaming platforms	11.4	30.1	37.2	14.2	4.8	2.3
Social media	15.7	34.4	31.6	11.6	4.8	1.9

6. Discussion

[3] Percentages are calculated using the full sample (N = 395) as the denominator and sum to 100% across response categories, including "Do not reply"; it was an explicit response option offered to participants.

Rather than analysing the recognition or evaluation of particular family configurations, the present contribution provides descriptive evidence on how exposure and perceived influence are distributed across socialisation contexts.

A first relevant finding concerns patterns of exposure. Students reported the highest frequency of exposure to family diversity through social media and audiovisual/streaming platforms, while family and peer contexts showed intermediate frequencies. These results document where references to family diversity are encountered; they do not provide evidence of a general "openness" towards different family configurations.

One of the most relevant descriptive contributions of the study lies in distinguishing exposure to family diversity from the perceived influence of different agents of socialisation. Because exposure and perceived influence were measured by different questions and response scales, percentages across the two dimensions should not be read as directly equivalent measures. At the descriptive level, media and digital platforms showed high reported exposure, whereas family and peers showed higher perceived influence.

This contrast may be interpreted as suggesting that media and digital environments provide visibility to plural family experiences without necessarily being perceived by participants as the main agents shaping their own idea of family. Any possible "normalising" role of media should therefore be understood as a theoretical interpretation or pedagogical hypothesis, not as an effect directly demonstrated by these data.

From the perspective of social representations, it is possible to hypothesise that media exposure broadens the range of symbolic references available in the public sphere, while family and peer experiences remain more salient in participants' self-reported meaning-making. The present cross-sectional design, however, does not

measure changes in symbolic repertoire or cultural familiarity over time and cannot establish such effects.

The relatively modest perceived influence attributed to university invites pedagogical reflection, but it should not be interpreted as direct evidence of a deficiency in university curricula. Rather, it raises a question for higher education: whether and how family diversity is intentionally addressed across different degree programmes. This issue is particularly relevant in programmes preparing teachers, educators, and other professionals who may work with children and families.

Overall, participants' responses are compatible with a multi-context view of socialisation, in which family, peers, educational settings, and media occupy different positions depending on whether one considers exposure or perceived influence. Given the descriptive and cross-sectional design, this should be treated as an interpretive framework rather than a causal conclusion.

The results are also consistent with considering family imaginaries as potentially shaped by multiple relational and cultural contexts. Media may contribute to the public visibility of certain family configurations, but this study does not directly measure whether exposure broadens students' symbolic repertoires or increases familiarity with specific family forms.

Consequently, exposure to diverse family representations can be considered a possible condition for expanding available symbolic references, but this remains a pedagogical interpretation to be tested in future research. The present data more directly show that participants reported greater perceived influence from family and peers than from media or university.

7. Conclusions

This study contributes to the literature on family diversity in higher education by distinguishing two dimensions that should not be conflated: reported exposure to references to family diversity and the influence that students perceive different agents of socialisation to have had on their own idea of family.

The data reported in this contribution do not support conclusions about students' general openness towards family diversity, differential familiarity with specific family configurations, or the consolidation of more inclusive conceptions of family, because those outcomes are not analysed here. What the results show is that reported exposure is highest in social media and audiovisual/streaming contexts, whereas family experience and peer relationships are perceived as more influential in shaping participants' own idea of family.

One of the main contributions of this research is to show that exposure to family diversity and perceived influence are distinct processes assessed through different questions and response scales. The descriptive contrast suggests a possible visibility role for media and digital environments, but it does not demonstrate media normalisation, expansion of symbolic repertoires, or causal influence on family representations.

From this perspective, the findings are consistent with a dynamic, multi-context interpretation of family imaginaries, in which different socialisation agents may have different roles. This interpretation should nevertheless remain explicitly non-causal, given the cross-sectional and self-report nature of the study.

The pedagogical implications of these findings concern higher education more generally. Universities may provide opportunities for critical reflection on family diversity and on representations circulating in media and digital culture; this may be especially relevant in degree programmes preparing teachers, educators, and

other professionals who work with children and families. However, the present study did not directly assess curriculum quality or training gaps, so these points should be understood as pedagogical implications and directions for further inquiry rather than as deficits empirically demonstrated by the data.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, its cross-sectional and descriptive design makes it possible to identify perceptions and representations at a specific point in time, but does not allow causal relationships to be established between exposure to family diversity and the construction of family imaginaries.

Second, the study is based on university students' self-reported perceptions. As a result, the findings reflect the influence that participants attribute to different agents of socialisation, but do not directly measure the actual effects of these agents on the formation of family representations.

Furthermore, the sample was drawn from a single university institution. This suggests that the findings should be interpreted with caution and limits their generalisability to other sociocultural contexts. Future studies could extend the research by including samples from different universities and countries, thereby enabling comparative analyses of how cultural contexts influence the construction of family imaginaries.

The degree-programme composition of the sample should also be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Future studies could compare exposure and perceived influence across disciplinary and professional pathways.

Another relevant direction for future research would be to complement quantitative data with qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups. Such approaches would allow for a deeper understanding of the processes through which students attribute meaning to different family configurations.

Finally, the findings highlight the need for specific research on the content of family representations in media, audiovisual platforms, and social networks. Integrating content analysis with the study of students' perceptions would make it possible to understand more precisely the relationship between media visibility, socialisation processes, and the construction of family imaginaries.

> *In a society characterised by the growing plurality of forms of cohabitation and by the expansion of digital environments as spaces of socialisation, understanding how family imaginaries are constructed represents an essential challenge for educational research and teacher education. Rather than identifying which agent is most influential, the findings invite us to understand the construction of family imaginaries as a relational and dynamic process in which personal experience, social interaction, and media culture are constantly intertwined.*

Family diversity, therefore, cannot be understood solely in terms of its visibility, but must also be examined through the social and cultural processes that give it meaning.

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