Single-Parenting Portrayal: The Discursive Construction of Solo Moms "by Choice" in Entertainment Media.

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The cultural discourse surrounding single women raising children post-divorce or through sperm donation hastened in the latter 20th century, notably in the 1970s, paralleling societal shifts towards recognizing diverse family structures and empowering women's reproductive autonomy. Influenced by the feminist movement, legal changes like divorce legalization, and reproductive technology advancements, society increasingly accepted non-traditional family formations. Social media became a platform for individuals to share experiences and discuss these topics. This research deals with intentional motherhood, focusing on representations of single mothers "by choice" in entertainment media, particularly examining Katherine in the British series *The Duchess.* Using qualitative data from the show's first two episodes, a Conversation Critical Discourse Analysis framework investigates dialogue nuances regarding Katherine's decision to have another child via sperm donation, highlighting power dynamics in discourse. The analysis reveals three significant issues: a woman's autonomy in reproductive decisions, societal influence on unconventional choices, and gender dynamics. By integrating Conversation Analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis, this study provides insights into televisual discourse's broader societal and power dynamics, offering a valuable tool for examining sitcom dialogue.

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1.1. Single mother "by choice" and the media portrayal

As early as the 1960s, the landscape of television reflects a commitment to showcasing the complexity and diversity of family life, contributing to a more inclusive and representative media environment (Douglas 2003). Including single moms in TV series is part of a broader trend towards acknowledging and celebrating the variety of family structures in society (Gupta and Sharma 2020; Silbergleid 2002; Rabinovitz 1989). Since then, the concept of parenthood has undergone a profound transformation, challenging traditional norms and expanding our understanding of what constitutes a family. The conventional image of the nuclear family has given way to diverse family structures, each uniquely shaped by love, commitment, and shared experiences (Bengtson 2001). At the forefront of this evolution are families embracing non-conventional parenthood, where the traditional roles of mothers and fathers are redefined, and the concept of family is broadened to include a rich tapestry of relationships (Balirano and Hughes 2023; Allen and Mendez 2018; Lehr 1999).

This change in fundamental beliefs is especially noticeable in the increasing acknowledgment and support of non-traditional forms of parenting, wherein individuals and couples embrace the journey of raising children beyond conventional norms (Beck-Gernsheim and Camiller 2002). Whether through surrogacy, adoption, same-sex partnerships, or single parenthood by choice, these families challenge societal norms, offering a fresh perspective on the various facets of non-conventional parenthood and contributing to the broader conversation about the evolving nature of family life (Mintz and Kellogg 1989), promoting inclusivity, understanding, and respect for the myriad ways in which love and commitment manifest themselves in the beautiful mosaic of non-conventional parenthood (Bianchi 2011; Amato 2010; Cherlin 2010; Beck-Gernsheim *et al.*, 2002; Mintz and Kellogg 1989).

Contemporary portrayals increasingly highlight single mothers' resilience, strength, and diverse experiences, challenging outdated stereotypes and acknowledging the multifaceted nature of their lives. This shift is particularly evident in the emergence of the "single mother by choice" (SMC) phenomenon (Morrissette 2008; Hertz 2006), where mothers decide to have a child, distinguishing themselves from mothers who became single due to break-ups or unplanned pregnancies (Hayford and Guzzo 2015)[1].

The intentional nature of motherhood for women who identify as "choice moms" highlights a contrast with broader trends observed among unmarried mothers and nonmarital births (Holmes 2018). Research indicates that extramarital pregnancies often face socio-economic disadvantages, and the concept of the "choice mom" is considered relatively rare (Rowlingson and McKay 2005). The analyses of the National Survey of Family Growth carried out in 1988, 1995, 2002 and 2006-2010, focusing on

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[1] The concept of single mothers "by choice" first emerged in 1981 when a psychotherapist Jane Mattes, herself a SMC, founded an organization to offer support and resources to women embracing single motherhood. It gained prominence in the early 2000s with Rosanna Hertz's qualitative study of single mothers (2006) and Mikki Morrissette's book "Choosing Single Motherhood: The Thinking Woman's Guide" (2008) challenging traditional narratives surrounding unplanned pregnancies or post-divorce single motherhood. The visibility of solo moms "by choice" continued to rise with documentaries, movies, TV shows, and successful reality programs focusing on their experiences, and this aligns with the growing ease of becoming a SMC, facilitated by the proliferation of sperm banks and fertility clinics since the 1970s.

trends in first births to Single Mothers by Choice (SMC)[2], shows that there are few "single mothers by choice" and even fewer women match the age and the education profile (35 or older with at least a bachelor's degree) often portrayed by the media and Single Mothers by Choice (SMC) support organizations (Hayford and Guzzo 2015, 72). The persistence of the SMC image could be attributed to the prevalence of SMCs in the social networks of journalists and media professionals, who, being university-educated and wishing to delay family formation, may well generalize from their own experiences. The portrayal of the SMC archetype is implicitly contrasted with other stereotypes of unmarried mothers, such as reckless teens with unplanned pregnancies and "welfare mothers" (Wall 2007; Bissell 2000). These portrayals frame childbearing as an individual decision, potentially diverting attention from social changes or economic constraints. The focus on affluent, older single mothers by choice in media narratives, according to Hayford and Guzzo (2015) may, at best, ignore and, at worst, disparage other single parents. The figure of the SMC further detracts attention from the high numbers of single mothers, often not by choice, among the disadvantaged, which is linked to structural social and economic conditions.

As a popular television genre, sitcoms have significantly shaped cultural perceptions of family dynamics through their portrayal of various family structures, relationships, and interactions. The image of single mothers as protagonists navigating the challenges of raising children independently began to gain prominence in sitcoms during the late 20th century (Russell and Stern 2006).

Media depictions have often framed single mothers within narrow stereotypes, emphasizing struggle, victimhood, or ordinary judgment: they have frequently been portrayed as victims of circumstances, facing insurmountable challenges without a partner, and such narratives have often emphasized struggle and hardship, reinforcing societal biases against single motherhood (Valiquette-Tessier *et al.* 2019). Once relegated to marginalized roles or depicted within the context of tragedy, single motherhood has gradually shifted in narrative focus and complexity. Single mothers, ranging from Lucille Ball's *The Lucy Show* (1962) to more contemporary figures, such as Lorelai Gilmore from *Gilmore Girls*, Katherine's character in *The Duchess* or Penelope Alvarez's in *One Day at a Time*, depict single mothers as resilient, resourceful, and capable individuals. Indeed, The Lucy Show played a role in challenging norms by featuring a widow and a divorced character as central figures in a primetime sitcom even if, to minimize perceived risks, the network opted to make Lucy Carmichael a widow instead of a divorcee (Fernandez 2011).

As societal perspectives on family dynamics have evolved, media representations have become more diverse and nuanced. While there has been an increased effort to diversify representations of single parenthood in sitcoms, the archetype of the single mom remains a prevalent and influential portrayal, contributing to both the normalization and positive representation of single motherhood in popular culture (McRobbie 2004).

The choice to analyze the portrayal of the single mom in entertainment media stems from the profound impact that such representations can have on societal perceptions and attitudes. In recent decades, the traditional family structure has evolved, and the figure

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[2] Definition of SMC based on the concept of birthmothers who are neither cohabiting nor married and opt for an intended conception.

of the single mother has become increasingly prevalent in both fictional and reality-based media (Rutter, William and Risman 2009).

This analysis seeks to explore how the media frames and depicts single mothers, examining the nuances of their portrayal, challenges, and triumphs. In order to support this argument, the research focuses on the theoretical principles of CCDA and then shows how they can be applied in the televisual media. There are two research questions addressed in this paper:

1. What types of adjacency pairs appear in the conversation to construct a discursive strategy of non-conventional parenthood?

2. How do the adjacency pairs depict the alternative family through the conversations?

Media, including television shows, films, and online platforms often function as a mirror reflecting and shaping cultural norms. By focusing on the media representation of single mothers, this study explores how specific conversational patterns contribute to the portrayal and understanding of non-traditional forms of parenthood and it aims to unravel the complexities surrounding this role, shedding light on the diverse narratives, and contributing to a broader understanding of the evolving landscape of family dynamics. Ultimately, this exploration is rooted in the recognition that media has the power not only to mirror societal attitudes but also to influence perceptions and contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced discourse surrounding single motherhood (Layne 2015).

1.2. Theoretical Background

The sitcom

The theoretical background of sitcom conversation is deeply rooted in comedic and dramatic traditions, drawing on various communication theories to create engaging and humorous dialogue. One considerable influence is incongruity theory, which suggests that humor arises from the unexpected and contradictory elements of a situation. The literature on humor and laughter, as well as on media studies, is vast and interdisciplinary. However, few studies investigate the interactional dynamics of television sitcoms beyond the jokes they contain (Bubel and Spitz 2006).

Sitcoms often capitalize on incongruities in conversations, using misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and unexpected twists to generate comedic moments (Mills 2009). Additionally, incongruity extends to the characters themselves, as sitcoms frequently feature quirky personalities placed in everyday situations, leading to amusing interactions (Russell and Stern 2006). Social exchange theory also plays a role, as characters engage in witty banter and playful teasing, reflecting the give-and-take dynamics of real-life conversations. Furthermore, scriptwriters draw from the principles of timing and pacing, utilizing comedic timing to enhance the impact of punchlines and one-liners. Overall, the theoretical foundation of conversation in sitcoms intertwines psychological, sociological, and comedic principles to create a unique and entertaining viewing experience.

The representation of single mothers by choice in sitcoms is a noteworthy and evolving aspect of television storytelling (Rabinovitz 1989). Over the years, sitcoms

have been extensively studied for their various aspects, including their influence, relevance, and portrayal of stereotypes and have played a role in reflecting and, in some cases, challenging societal norms surrounding family structures (Rockler 2006). However, this paper contributes to the literature by examining how the portrayal of single mothers by choice introduces a narrative that diverges from traditional family dynamics and explores the complexities, joys, and challenges of this unconventional path to parenthood. By presenting nuanced and relatable characters who actively choose to become mothers without a partner, sitcoms contribute to dispelling societal misconceptions and broadening perspectives on diverse family formation (Mills 2009).

Conversation Critical Discourse Analysis and Adjacency Pair Patterns

The role of language in expressing thoughts and ideas is highlighted by some scholars (Rabiah 2018; Sirbu 2015; Halliday 2014) as a communication tool categorized into two primary forms: spoken and written. People extensively utilize spoken language to interact and communicate with others in everyday life. Communication is a fundamental means through which individuals engage with their surroundings and establish connections with one another. The spoken form of language, in particular, is crucial in facilitating interpersonal communication and fostering interaction in various social contexts (Alsaawi 2019; Sindoni 2012; Halliday 2001; Yule 1989).

Indeed, in daily life, communication takes on various patterns, and one prominent form is conversation or oral communication (Pridham 2013). As social beings, humans rely on conversation as a primary means of interacting with others (Shotter 1993). Individuals exchange information, express thoughts and feelings, and maintain social connections through conversation. The dynamic nature of conversation allows for real-time interaction, enabling people to engage in dialogue, negotiate meaning, and build relationships. It is a fundamental component of human socialization and is vital in daily communication (Halliday 1971).

Conversations have a structured and organized nature and examining the spoken expressions of participants provides insights into how meaning is constructed, how turns are taken, and how participants contribute to the overall flow of discourse (Wiemann and Knapp 2017). The context and stage of a conversation are crucial in determining the function of an utterance within a particular pair part: for example, an utterance can serve as a greeting, a summons, or a response to a summons, such as answering the telephone ("Hello" − "Hello"). Similarly, expressions like "Thanks" can respond to various situations, including statements of congratulations, compliments, or offers. Moreover, a pair of utterances may fulfil multiple roles in a conversation, adding complexity to the dynamics of communication (Paltridge and Burton 2000, 88).

By closely examining the structure and content of utterances, researchers and linguists can uncover patterns, social norms, and the implicit rules that govern conversational interactions. This analysis is fundamental to fields like Conversation Analysis (CA) and helps to unravel the intricacies of human communication (Paltridge 2022; 2000). Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's work (1974) in conversation analysis has highlighted the complex ways participants spontaneously construct and manage meaning in collaborative interaction. The idea that speech is shaped to meet the anticipated needs of others reflects the dynamic and cooperative nature of conversational exchanges, aligning with the broader understanding of how participants in a conversation actively contribute to the organization and flow of discourse. In essence,

speakers are tuned in to the expectations and preferences of their conversational partners, and they adjust their speech in real-time to facilitate effective communication. This speech shaping can involve various aspects, including the choice of words, tone of voice, pace, and pauses. These adjustments aim to enhance mutual understanding, acknowledge social norms, and maintain the smooth progression of the conversation.

The analysis of conversational utterances can be effectively conducted by examining adjacency pairs, a critical component of the CA approach (Siahaan 2019). The concept of adjacency pairs, developed predominantly by Schegloff and Sacks (1973), refers to a specific structure in a conversation where a related or expected response from one participant follows the previous participant's utterance. The structure of an adjacency pair involves two sequential and interdependent turns, often revealing the organization and normative expectations within a conversation. According to Richards and Schmidt, as cited in Paltridge (2000, 87), adjacency pairs are sequences of utterances involving two successive speakers, where the second utterance is identified as an expected follow-up related to the first one (Richards and Schmidt 2013). This aligns with Yule's (1996) perspective, which emphasizes that adjacency pairs are conversation units and consist of an automatic sequence between two parts produced by two speakers.

Heritage, as mentioned in Wooffitt (2005), provides a comprehensive definition of the term adjacency pair as a sequence of two utterances that are adjacent to each other in the conversation: the adjacency pair has a specific order, with one utterance serving as the "first pair part" (FPP) and the other as the "second pair part" (SPP). Heritage's definition captures the essential characteristics of adjacency pairs and functions, highlighting their role in structuring and organizing conversational interactions (Heritage and Atkinson 1984). This concept, fundamental to understanding the systematic nature of language use in dialogue, is also included in Isgianto's research on "The Adjacency Pairs Analysis On 'Six Minutes English' Conversation Script of BBC Learning English: A Study of Discourse Analysis" (2016), which investigates the application of adjacency pairs in the context of conversations within the "Six Minutes English" program from BBC Learning English. According to Isgianto, adjacency pairs in conversation create clear meanings in social interactions: the structure and pattern of these pairs contribute to conveying specific meanings and minimizing misunderstandings between participants. Ermawati *et al.*'s research on "An Analysis of Adjacency Pairs as Seen in Oprah Winfrey's Talk Show" (2016) appears to be another interesting study focusing on the patterns of adjacency pairs in the context of Oprah Winfrey's talk show. The results of this research reveal the existence of two types of adjacency pair patterns in the conversation. This suggests that there might be identifiable structures or sequences in the manner in which Oprah Winfrey and her guests interact through speech.

Although adjacency pairs, rooted in the work of conversation analysts, are sequential speech units where one utterance expects a specific response, sitcoms adeptly utilize several types of adjacency pairs in the discourse to elicit humor and advance the narrative. For instance, the classic setup and punchline structure often follow the adjacency pair pattern, where a character's statement serves as the setup, prompting another character to deliver the comedic punchline. Interruptive pairs, where characters talk over each other or abruptly change the topic, are also common in sitcoms, adding an element of surprise and chaos to the dialogue. Moreover, repair sequences, where characters correct each other's misunderstandings, contribute to the humor and reinforce the intricacies of social interaction.

In investigating the types of adjacency pairs to be found in sitcoms, what this study aims to do is show the benefits of applying a Conversational Critical Discourse Analysis (CCDA) framework to televisual discourse. While research in literary and cultural studies, as well as in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), has previously utilized such data samples, strict conversation analysis (CA) has been hesitant to incorporate this type of talk into its investigation (Raymond 2013, 203). This reluctance stems from CA's preference for naturally produced, unedited data, aiming to better understand how humans interact in real life (Heritage and Atkinson 1984). Utilizing scripted, edited, or otherwise "un-naturalistic" or invented data poses a challenge as the result may not accurately represent actual human social interaction. The benefits can be traced in the manner of structured nature of conversational exchanges within this genre of television that aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of discourse by simultaneously examining both the micro-level features of talk-in-interaction and the macro-level socio-political dynamics embedded within language use. Combining the principles and methodologies of Conversational Analysis (CA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) into a unified framework, one gains insights into the deliberate crafting of dialogue to engage audiences in the discursive construction of non-conventional parenthood.

1.3. Research methodology

Assuming that adjacency pairs refer to automatic sequences of two utterances produced by two speakers in a conversation, where the second utterance is related to the first one as an expected follow-up (Paltridge, 2014), these pairs represent a structured aspect of conversation where one utterance typically elicits a predictable response from the other speaker (Pardede/Manurung, 2021). In essence, the response given by the second speaker is a spontaneous reaction to what the previous speaker has said, and it is expected to be coherent with the preceding utterance. However, in practice, conversations may not always proceed smoothly, leading to misunderstandings or inappropriate responses between participants.

The linguistic expression of televisual discourse, comprised of scripted dialogues delivered in front of a camera, sets it apart as a distinct form of communication, alongside its multimodal nature. Some scholars, such as Emmison (1993) and Schegloff (1988), have contested the suitability of Conversation Analysis (CA) for analyzing spoken interaction in films and TV series due to its scripted and non-spontaneous nature. Many Conversation Analysis (CA) studies have expanded beyond the data restrictions imposed by original CA scholars, suggesting that CA can be applied to cinematic discourse for analyzing film dialogues (Chepinchikj and Thompson 2016). However, there are few studies employing CA in this context as a tool for analyzing non-spontaneous, scripted speech. Some examples of CA studies analyzing script-based talk include Bubel's (2006) examination of friendship construction in "Sex and the City," Stokoe's (2008) exploration of humor in "Friends," and Raymond's (2013) discussion of gender and sexual stereotypes in animated sitcoms like "Family Guy" and "American Dad!". Bubel's study combines CA with discourse analysis and membership categorization analysis to explore friendship construction in "Sex and the City," while Stokoe argues that violations to preference organization in adjacency pairs and interruptions in turn-taking structure are intentionally used for comedic effect, and Raymond utilizes CA to highlight gendered discourse in animated sitcoms.

Based on these studies, this paper wants to reinforce the concept that CA theory can and should be utilized as a research method in linguistic contexts beyond natural conversations. Despite televisual conversations being pre-scripted and therefore not entirely "natural" or spontaneous, the actual performance of these dialogues often adheres to the rules and norms of everyday conversations. In sitcoms, for example, actors may also improvise or alter scripted utterances during performance (Braínne 2010) and this flexibility allows them to adapt to the moment and sometimes enhance the comedic or dramatic effect of the scene. The organization of conversation focuses on the turn-taking process in which two or more participants manage the exchange of speaking turns (Fairclough 1989). Each turn is composed of turn constructional units (TCUs), which can range from individual words to complete sentences, and what constitutes a TCU is determined by the context of the conversation (Liddicoat 2021).

In this study, the data were selected to explore how turns are taken. Responses are generated between the participants in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the discursive construction of single parenthood is constructed and conveyed in this specific conversational context.

The case study is the British sitcom *The Duchess*, which premiered on Netflix on 11 September 2020 and was cancelled after one season on 29 April 2021. The series of 6 twenty-minute episodes has been selected because the straightforward and unfiltered female "leading role" is of particular interest in that it attempts to narrate, with raw simplicity, the experiences of Katherine, a woman who does not hesitate to speak her mind, especially when provoked, and is willing to do anything to achieve her goal of having a child in an unconventional way.

To ensure focused and efficient analysis, the study is limited to examining a feature of talk-in-interaction organization, such as the adjacency pairs in a restricted number of dialogues throughout the sitcom. The data analysis specifically concentrates on the utterances of two speakers during pivotal stretches of conversation, avoiding unnecessary overlap in the research process. The study utilizes the theory of adjacency pairs proposed by Paltridge (2000), who recognizes 11 types of adjacency pairs, such as Requesting – Agreement, Assessment – Agreement, Question – Answer, Compliment – Acceptance, Leave – Taking, Complaint – Apology, Greeting – Greeting, Warning – Acknowledgement, Blame – Denial, Threat – Counter-Thread and Offer – Acceptance and it provides a comprehensive analysis of a number of dialogues, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the communicative dynamics between the interlocutors.

Using a qualitative method, the corpus, collected and analyzed through the transcript of some characters' communicative behavior, will be used in order to analyze the first pair part (FPP) of an adjacency pair followed by the second pair part (SPP) for inferring that there are underlying societal norms, stereotypes, and attitudes towards single motherhood.

The adoption of a conversation analysis (CA) based approach does not aim to draw conclusions about how real humans interact in daily life, as is traditionally done in CA. Instead, these examples are viewed as illustrating society's interpretation and indexing of socio-interactional practices of various groups and individuals, put on display in television shows. Whether or not these programs accurately depict how individuals engage in naturalistic conversation in reality, they still present a representation – albeit rehearsed and acted-out – that is received and interpreted by viewers.

1.4. Research design and data analysis

The research design, based on a qualitative descriptive method, is justified by the nature of this study. The characteristics of qualitative research align with the end goals of the investigation of televised conversation when exploring the discursive construction of single motherhood and moving beyond the traditional definition. By focusing on in-depth observation and analysis of the characteristics of individual units (in this case, adjacency pairs), qualitative research allows for a rich exploration of the multifaceted phenomena within spoken discourse. The absence of a need for predefined hypotheses, as stated by Isaac and Michael (1987), is suitable for the research, where the primary objective is to understand and describe the types of adjacency pairs present in the conversations.

The primary data source is the video of the sitcom *The Duchess* featuring the conversation between Katherine and the other participants in the sitcom. The six episodes touch on the challenges of split families, forming new relationships, and the often messy and under-represented process of pregnancy planning as a single woman, as seen through the direct conversations between Katherine and the doctor, Katherine and her boyfriend, and Katherine with her ex-partner. However, understanding the nuances of communication dynamics within a sitcom requires considering not only the words exchanged but also the broader context in which those conversations take place, including the external and internal settings and the roles of the characters involved. The following steps were followed when collecting the data:

- Searching for the sitcom on Netflix
- Watching the episodes to verify alignment with the study
- Transcribing the conversation
- Verifying the data through video matching
- Selecting the relevant utterances for analysis
- Classifying data based on adjacency pair criteria
- Analyzing and discussing the data
- Drawing up the final observations

Outlining the steps for data analysis serves to demonstrate a systematic and thorough approach to extracting meaningful insights from the various conversations between Katherine and her interlocutors. The interactions from the first two episodes were collected because they encapsulate the pivotal moments leading to Katherine's decision. Since the transcription was not available, English subtitles were used to construct an orthographic transcription, rendering the content of the characters' utterances. These transcriptions of four interactions totaling 1165 words constitute the corpus. While the entire series of *The Duchess* is only partially represented in the corpus, the episodes primarily draw upon the characterization of the discursive construction of solo mom that was established in the first two episodes. Nonetheless, the study was conducted by watching and re-watching the interactions of each episode, and representative interactions of the first two were transcribed, including them in the corpus to incorporate discursive construction developments.

The corpus consists of four conversations of varying length, ranging from ten up to forty turns, and takes place at the fertility clinic, at the restaurant, in the street, and on the boat, so that all of them are face-to-face. In all cases, non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and the woman's body posture were also transcribed, especially if they replace a verbal turn. The corpus includes conversations between Katherine and the doctor, Katherine and her boyfriend, and Katherine and her ex-partner. All the talks are dyadic interactions except at the restaurant where the conversation between Katherine and Evan is interrupted by the waiter. These participants have specific character relationships, with Katherine being the central person in this network who has closer relationships with Evan and Shep than the doctor.

The transcription conventions follow Dressler and Kreuz (2000),[3] Chafe (1994)[4] and are outlined in the text. Transcribing the conversation into a written form was a fundamental step in order to provide a text-based representation of the spoken dialogue, allowing for a detailed and close examination of the language used. After checking the transcription against the actual video content, choosing specific parts of the conversation that reflect adjacency pairs focuses the analysis on key instances, allowing for a more targeted and efficient study. The systematic classification of data according to the criteria for adjacency pairs is the next step in organizing and categorizing the information. This sets the groundwork for a structured analysis.

The analysis draws conclusions based on the discussed data by collating the findings and providing a coherent interpretation of the types of adjacency pairs in order to reveal how these male characters are negotiated in the discursive construction of single motherhood.

1.5. Findings and discussion

The sitcom *The Duchess* stands as a captivating portrayal of contemporary life, navigating the complexities of relationships, family dynamics, and societal expectations. Aired in 2008, this sitcom rapidly gained acclaim for its witty humor, relatable characters, and a nuanced exploration of unconventional themes. Set in London, the series follows the lives of its central characters, each bringing a unique perspective to the narrative. The main characters are Katherine, an upper-middle-class mother, Shep, her ex-partner, Evan, her current boyfriend, Olive, Katherine's daughter, Bev, Katherine's best friend and Cheryl, Shep's fiancée. The core of the plotlines is formed by their interactions and relationships.

One of the distinguishing features of *The Duchess* is the fact that it tackles unconventional topics with a blend of humor and sincerity. From unconventional career

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[3] Dressler and Kreuz (2000) proposed guidelines for transcribing oral discourse, offering a systematic approach to capture the nuances of spoken language. Their methodology emphasized the importance of accurately representing various aspects of speech, including intonation, pauses, overlaps, and non-verbal cues. A model transcription system is based on a set of 6 design principles: specificity, universality, consensus, transparency, parsimony, conventionality.

[4] Chafe's transcription symbols are commonly used in discourse analysis to represent various aspects of spoken language. These symbols allow researchers to transcribe spoken language in a detailed and systematic manner, capturing aspects such as pauses, intonation patterns, overlapping speech, and phonetic features.

choices to atypical family structures, the series fearlessly investigates the nuances of modern living. This approach makes it an ideal subject for the present analysis, where the discursive construction surrounding the unconventional idea of becoming pregnant without being in a stable relationship is explored.

As we embark on the analysis of a carefully selected sample, the first two episodes from *The Duchess*, the commitment of the series to authenticity, humor, and pushing societal boundaries is evident. The characters' interactions, nuanced dialogues, and unique story arcs provide a rich backdrop for the discursive elements that contribute to the unconventional themes explored within the series.

The identification of 8 specific types of adjacency pairs within the episodes from the sitcom, namely "Question – Answer", "Assessment – Agreement/Disagreement", "Threat – Counter-Thread", "Offer – Acceptance/Refusal", "Greeting – Greeting", "Complaint – Apology", "Warning – Acknowledgement", "Blame – Denial" suggests a focused and clear classification of the conversational exchanges that support the discursive construction of the figure of a single mom "by choice".

The types of adjacency pairs found in the sample are chronologically presented in the following excerpt, which reports a meaningful extract from the original conversation. Some parts were omitted because they are not relevant for identifying patterns, trends, or shifts in conversational dynamics as they naturally occur.

The storyline of *The Duchess* revolves around Katherine Ryan, a character known for her chaotic lifestyle, bluntness, narcissism, and commitment issues. As a single mother to Olive, shared with her ex-boyfriend Shep, Katherine decides to explore options for having a second child. Unwilling to commit to her current boyfriend Evan, as she considers him a last resort, for Olive's ninth birthday, Katherine takes her on a trip to a fertility clinic to seek out a sperm donor:

> Episode 1: At the fertility clinic
> *Extract conversation 1 (Question-Answer)*
> Doctor: Right. How old are you now?
> Katherine: Thirty-three
> […]
> Doctor: […] What's your reason for wanting a child this way?
> Katherine: Well, my entire family are dead. To me. So, when Olive was born, I was alone, but now we have each other for support and we both agree that we're ready for this next step.
> […]
> *Extract conversation 2 (Assessment-Disagreement/ Threat-Counter-Threat)*
> Doctor: Okay (exhales) So… your test results show that if you're serious about growing your family, Olive is wise to be in a hurry.
> […]
> Doctor: Egg production slows down dramatically for women approaching their mid -30s. Your best chance of conceiving is to do it now.
> Katherine: Doctor, I'm only 33 and "it" looks about 16, (she gestures downwards) so trust me, I have plenty of time.
> Doctor: Trust me, you don't. We have donors in their late teens and early 20s.
> Katherine: -EW
> Doctor: They're match fit … for a geriatric pregnancy.
> Katherine: What did you just call me? [scoffing] Olive, we're leaving.
> […]
> (The Dutchess 2008, Ep. 1)

In the above conversation, Katherine and her daughter are at the fertility clinic where the doctor initiates the conversational exchange by asking Katherine about her age and about the reason she wants a child with a donor. Katherine, in turn, provides a direct answer to the question, giving the information requested and a clarification that the doctor had probably never thought about previously; in fact, he visibly exhales and looks at the woman. The participants take turns, and this exchange illustrates the typical structure of a "question-answer" adjacency pair, where a relevant response follows a question. Subsequently, the doctor assesses the availability of donors in their late teens and early 20s, implying that they are suitable for Katherine's situation. However, Katherine strongly disagrees with the doctor's assessment, expressing her discontent by questioning what was said and deciding to leave the clinic with Olive. This latter sequence illustrates the dynamics of an "Assessment – Disagreement" adjacency pair, where one statement is met with a clear expression of disagreement from the other party. Moreover, in this exchange, the doctor delivers information that could be perceived as a threat to Katherine's perceived abundance of time for having a child (*Egg production slows down dramatically for women approaching their mid-30s. Your best chance of conceiving is to do it now [...] Trust me, you don't. We have donors in their late teens and early 20s*). In response, Katherine issues a counter-threat by expressing her displeasure at the Doctor's comment and deciding to leave (*Doctor, I'm only 33 and "it" looks about 16, so trust me, I have plenty of time [...] What did you just call me? [scoffing] Olive, we're leaving*). The tension and assertiveness in the conversation exemplify the threat-counter-thread pattern within adjacency pairs.

When her initial plan proves unsuccessful, Katherine considers reaching out to her ex-partner, Shep. She holds the belief that their past relationship resulted in the creation of a perfect child, Olive. There are two pivotal moments in the storyline that center around the decision to pursue the pregnancy with the assistance of Shep as a donor, when Katherine is at the restaurant with her boyfriend Evan and when Evan meets Shep.

Here, the conversation between Katherine, Evan and at a certain point the waiter, provides insight into a new form of relationship and single-parenting.

> Episode 1: At the restaurant
> *Extract conversation 3 (Offer-Acceptance/ Greeting-Greeting)*
> Waiter: Another bottle?
> Evan: Oh, yes, please, man. It was the Argentinian Malbec.
> Waiter: You having a good night?
> Katherine: Yeah
> Waiter: A much-needed break from the little one?
> Evan: Yeah
> *Extract conversation 4 (Complaint-Apology)*
> Katherine: Why would you agree with him? I don't need a break from Olive. I like her.
> Evan: Hey, I was just saying it's nice to be having this time, -just the two of us occasionally.
> Katherine: Every weekend is not occasionally. It's too long to be away from your own kid.
> Evan: She's with her dad. I…I thought this was cool?
> Katherine: I wish she never went over there.
> Evan: Then why do you let him see her?
> Katherine: Because he's her dad, and love don't cost a thing.

Evan: J. Lo. You're right, it's always J. Lo. Look… I'm sorry, can …Can we start again?

Katherine: I just feel like I should be using this time to sleep.

Evan: Katherine, I didn't mean to offend you.

Extract Conversation 5 (Warning-Acknowledgement)

Katherine: Sorry. I've had a lot on my mind. Um…[sighs] I've been meaning to tell you …

Evan: Yeah?

Katherine: [sighs] I'm ready to have another baby.

Evan: Uh… Okay. This is a big step. This is bigger than what I thought you wanted, but… You know what? [bangs table] Fuck it. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. I'm in. I'm in, 100%. When do you want to start trying?

Katherine: Soon

Extract Conversation 6 (Offer-Refusal)

Evan: Truth is, Katherine, uh, we're on exactly the same page. How about this? How about we start with me moving in? I've actually already got some boxes packed. […] That's out of the question. I'm very responsible in that sense. Am I talking too much? Should I back up? I'll do whatever it takes, -is what I'm trying to…

Katherine: um…

Evan: …say. Okay

Katherine: no

Evan: no, okay.

Extract Conversation 7 (Warning-Acknowledgement)

Katherine: I need to do this with a sperm donor. It's the safest way for me.

Evan: Sperm don- -

Waiter: Here we are.

Evan: Can you give us a minute? (the waiter goes away). [laughs] God, I thought you were being serious for a minute there.

Katherine: I'm not joking.

Evan: (laughs) Yeah, right. You have a donor baby so that it's all yours and you keep me at a safe distance, so nothing changes for you. SILENCE (she looks at him) Oh, fuck me, you mean it.

Katherine: well, I feel really badly about it, though.

Evan: Don't you love me?

Katherine: I do love you. That's the problem. I hate Shep.

Extract Conversation 8 (Blame-Denial)

Evan: You were a 23-year-old girl who got pregnant by a lunatic in a boy band. – You didn't love him.

Katherine: But I thought I did.

Evan: Well, I'm not Shep. I'm not gonna end up in rehab and lose record deals, because I don't have a record deal. I have a medical degree.

Katherine: I know you're not Shep but you could hurt me way worse. I just want us to keep dating. I…I'm not breaking up with you.

Evan: Oh, you're not?...That's …Ah, well, thank you very much.

Extract Conversation 9 (Warning-Acknowledgement)

Katherine: Well, I don't wanna lose you! Equally, I don't wanna be trapped with you. Do you understand?

Evan: [exasperated] Fuck me […]

Evan: Mate, can you fuck off? (waiter goes away) SILENCE How about I just take you straight home?

[…]

(The Dutchess 2008, Ep. 1)

Here, Evan is taken aback by Katherine's decision, and he is entirely unaware of her decision regarding having a child through sperm donation. The dialogue at the restaurant portrays a mix of humor, tension, and serious discussion about relationships and parenting, creating a dynamic and engaging interaction between the participants. The examples show the variety of adjacency pairs present in the conversation, such as "Offer – Acceptance", Greeting – Greeting", "Complaint – Apology", "Offer – Refusal", "Warning – Acknowledgement", "Blame – Denial", demonstrating the interplay between different conversational elements.

The next pivotal conversation is at the end of Episode 1. It is characterized by humor and sarcasm with a mix of seriousness and playfulness and concludes with Katherine and her ex-partner discussing her non-conventional plan to exploit him as a sperm donor.

> Episode 1: In front of Olive's school
> *Extract Conversation 10 (Assessment-Agreement/Greeting-Greeting)*
> Katherine: … I need to talk to you.
> Shep: If this is about that meat for the dogs, I didn't know it was stolen. I heard about that venison heist over my police scanner, same as everyone else.
> Katherine: No, I assumed it was stolen.
> Shep: Grocery stores are giant corporate tax thieves, anyway, putting small butchers out of business. I haven't set foot inside a Starbucks, any Starbucks, since they first opened.
> Katherine: Yeah, 'cause you're a rebel who's smarter than everybody else. I got that. Listen! I am going to have another baby.
> Shep: Yeah. I can tell. You look like shit. It was either that or leukemia. Could have both.
> Katherine: No, I am not pregnant, you GI Joe crackhead. I am going to have another baby, with a sperm donor.
> Shep: (laughs) You're gonna stick some pathetic random loser's spunk up yourself?
> Katherine: (laughs sarcastically) Yeah, yours.
> Shep: – what do you mean mine?
> Katherine: Well, I've been thinking for some time that, even though you are, by far, the worst human being that I have ever met and I wish you a lifetime of pain and misery… we somehow made the best kid. And she needs a sibling.
> Shep: (tuts and sighs) (scoffs) I knew this would happen.
> Katherine: You knew what would happen?
> Shep: You want to get back on my dick.
> Katherine: Christ, no! I've been to a fertility clinic. We would do it there.
> Shep: (inhales) Hmm. Yeah, I'm gonna have expenses.
> Katherine: You've dedicated your entire life to being a wanker, you might as well start getting paid for it. Fine.
> Shep: It's an interesting proposition, Kit.
> Katherine: So, is that a yes?
> Shep: I'm gonna need some time to talk it over with my legal team.
> Katherine: Great. Okay.
> Shep: (sighs). They love me. Even when they hate me, they love me. (scoffs).
> (The Dutchess 2008, Ep. 1)

The adjacency pairs in this final part of episode 1 demonstrate a communicative sequence in which one participant makes a statement or proposal, and the other responds

with questions, requests, or reactions, contributing to the flow and progression of the dialogue.

Another dialogue within the selected sample involves Katherine discussing the possibility of Shep becoming a donor while she is aboard his boat and seeking insights into his willingness and suitability for such a role. In the following extract, the conversation highlights how the adjacency pairs illustrate the complexity of the dialogue between Katherine and Shep, marked by disagreement, negotiations, and attempts at humor.

Episode 2: At Shep's boat
Extract Conversation (Greeting-Greeting / Assessment-Refusal)
Katherine: Hey.
Shep: Take a seat, please. Don't touch anything. (Opens a beer and slurps while Katherine groans). For my own legal protection, I've been advised to record this conversation.
Katherine: Advised by whom? A talking serpent?
Shep: You're very manipulative and it's the best way to protect my assets.
Katherine: (laughs) Oh yeah you got me. This whole "let's have another baby" thing isn't because Olive needs a sibling and I desperately want my perineum re-torn. It's so I can trick you out of half your nothing.
Shep: I've been advised.
Katherine: In a fucking fever dream.
Shep: (inhales) (recorder clicks) – Tuesday evening, legacy agreement, meeting one. Subjects on the agenda: Name, Religion, conception style, stud fee, hypnobirth.
Katherine: Hypnobirth? You weren't even at Olive's birth. You went to motocross in Bucharest.
Shep: And whose fault was that?
Katherine: Mine? Obama's? Amazon's? One of your top three enemies.
Shep: Petition A. If it's a boy, he is to be called Ethos.
Katherine: You're not naming the baby. Not after your suggestions for Olive's name. […]
Shep: Petition B. Stud fee. Ten grand
Katherine: Shep!
Shep: I never wanted kids in the first place. I love the one we've got but she's cost me a lot.
Katherine: Cost a lot what? Precious hours you've could've spent smoking hash on a dinghy? […]
Shep: Petition C. The baby is to be conceived naturally.
Katherine: No! No. I've got a perfectly qualified reproductive endocrinologist - -
Shep: Whoa, whoa, whoa. Let me stop you there. No fucking way. I do not trust Western medicine. (*Katherine stands up and moves around*). Doctors are a bunch of sick freaks playing God with pseudo-science. That's an absolute deal-breaker. […]
Shep: Yeah, you're bluffin'. These are my requirements, kid, and I ain't backing down. Think it over. I'll have a hard copy biked to your house. […]
(The Dutchess 2008, Ep. 2)

In this highly amusing conversation between Katherine and her ex-boyfriend, he lays down his terms through a grudge-fueled role play. This conversation can be

categorized into "Assessment – Disagreement" adjacency pairs where one participant states their own requirements and the other challenges or rejects them.

From the sample, it can be seen that there are different adjacency pair patterns present in the conversation, reflecting the natural flow of dialogue and interaction between the participants. It is clear from the investigation that the conversations between Katherine and the participants involved in her project to enlarge her family featured a total of 15 adjacency pair patterns. The following table (Table 1) summarizes the findings of the research:

Episode	Conversation	Context	Types of adjacencies
Episode 1	Extract 1	At fertility clinic	Question-Answer
Episode 1	Extract 2	At fertility clinic	Assessment- Disagreement/ Threat-Counter-Thread
Episode 1	Extract 3	At the restaurant	Offer-Acceptance/ Greeting-Greeting
Episode 1	Extract 4	At the restaurant	Complaint-Apology
Episode 1	Extract 5	At the restaurant	Warning-Acknowledgement
Episode 1	Extract 6	At the restaurant	Offer-Refusal
Episode 1	Extract 7	At the restaurant	Warning-Acknowledgement
Episode 1	Extract 8	At the restaurant	Blame-Denial
Episode 1	Extract 9	At the restaurant	Warning-Acknowledgement
Episode 1	Extract 10	In front of Olive's school	Assessment-Agreement/ Greeting-Greeting
Episode 2	Extract 11	At Shep's boat	Greeting-Greeting/ Assessment-Disagreement

Table 1. Types of adjacency pairs in the conversation

Among these patterns, a significant majority, specifically 9 out of the 15, revolved around the structure of "Assessment – Agreement/Disagreement", "Greeting – Greeting" and "Warning – Acknowledgement" (Table 2).

Types of adjacencies	Occurrence	Percentage
Question-Answer	1	6%
Assessment- Agreement/Disagreement	3	20%
Threat-Counter-Thread	1	7%
Offer-Acceptance/Refusal	2	13%
Greeting-Greeting	3	20%
Complaint-Apology	1	7%
Warning-Acknowledgement	3	20%
Blame-Denial	1	7%
Total	15	

Table 2 The number of occurrences

The occurrences and percentages of various types of adjacencies within the corpus show a prominent trend of adjacency pairs in the conversations analyzed: one participant's statement often triggers a response from the other, involving either agreement or disagreement ("Assessment – Agreement/Disagreement"), a greeting from one participant that is reciprocated by a greeting from the other party ("Greeting – Greeting") and the interaction between participants involving a warning being issued, followed by acknowledgment from the recipient (Figure 1).
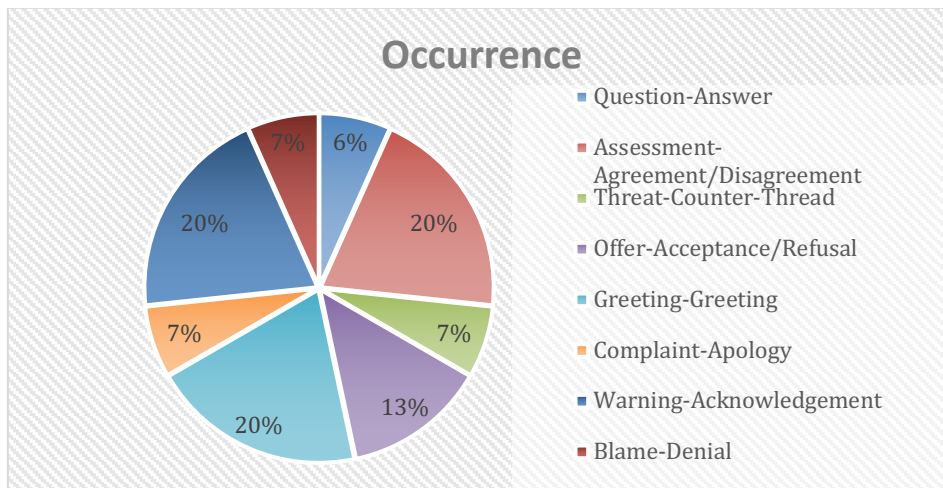
Figure 1 Percentage of each occurrence

6% for question-answer and 7% for threat-counter-thread, complaint-apology, and blame-denial seem to suggest low frequencies despite the occurrence of these specific patterns. There could be several reasons for this, for instance small sample size, specific contextual importance, focused analysis on specific types of adjacency pairs or unique conversation dynamics. In this context, however, the data may not be problematic because they align with the primary object of the study, which concerns the discursive construction that reveals the unconventional manner of becoming pregnant.

The adjacency pair patterns reveal the characters' attitudes, conflicts, and negotiations surrounding having a child through non-traditional means and they provide insights into how participants engage in a back-and-forth interaction that explores societal norms, personal beliefs, and the dynamics of relationships in parenthood.

1.6. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the use of an inclusive approach of discourse analysis to examine a corpus on an interactional level whose structure is organized into turns-at-talk. This approach aligns with Robin Lakoff's (2001) idea for an interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis which, including multiple analytical perspectives, allows for the exploration of multiple meanings and ensures consideration of both large abstract entities, such as speech events and situations, and smaller entities, such as words, phrases, and turns. This approach bridges the gap between microanalysis, which focuses solely on data without considering larger context, and macroanalysis, which is disconnected from empirical, language-focused work.

Data analysis shows a number of specific pivotal segments of discourse that are exemplificative of Katherine's decision to embark upon an unconventional journey towards pregnancy. There are a number of both verbal and non-verbal features, such as adjacency pairs, gaps and overlaps, that have been found to occur in natural conversations (Schegloff 2007) and these are used as purposeful interactional devices (Berliner 1999) of the discourse that holds decisive weight in Katherine's decision-making process to embrace non-conventional parenthood.

Adjacency pairs are a fundamental aspect of conversational interaction, always interconnected and present. They encompass various types with distinct responses in conversations and aid in discerning the genuine intentions behind the utterances rendered by the speakers. The analysis reveals that conversations occurring in the sitcom predominantly consist of the activity of giving an assessment, issuing a warning or cautionary statement, and offering a contrasting viewpoint or acknowledging the validity or importance of the warning. The first speaker assumes the role of an information provider, aiming to provide truthful answers to satisfy the inquiries of the second speaker. Conversely, the second speaker acts as an information seeker, seeking information and confirmation by posing questions.

A noteworthy observation from the analysis is the emergence of adjacency pairs that occasionally portray a discriminatory image of motherhood, particularly in the context of Katherine's choice to give a sibling to her daughter (see *extract conversation 7, extract conversation 8, extract conversation 10*). These moments in the discourse shed light on societal norms and expectations, showing how even conversations around unconventional parenthood can inadvertently reinforce stereotypical views. This recognition prompts a critical reflection on the broader societal narratives and biases that individuals navigating non-traditional paths to parenthood may encounter.

The research presented in this paper concentrates exclusively on the diegetic level of cinematic discourse, particularly the speech within televisual dialogues. This encompasses both verbal and non-verbal aspects of spoken interaction, such as prosodic features including intonation, volume, and pauses. While acknowledging that examining solely one feature of talk-in-interaction provides a limited understanding of cinematic discourse, integrating all their associated elements would necessitate a wider study beyond the scope of a single article.

Based on the results, however, the sitcom under examination introduces a fresh perspective on unconventional parenthood, offering a glimpse into the evolving landscape of family dynamics. While the narrative unfolds with humor and wit, it is essential to recognize that, even in the modern era, the representation of non-conventional families continues to grapple with challenges and often falls prey to negative stereotypes. Societal attitudes toward non-conventional families are slow to evolve, and the sitcom's portrayal, while being progressive, might inadvertently reinforce existing biases. The persistence of negative representations can hinder societal acceptance and perpetuate misconceptions about unconventional family structures. It is crucial to acknowledge that different forms of media, including sitcoms, play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, and responsible storytelling is imperative for fostering inclusivity and dismantling stereotypes.

In essence, this study underscores the significance of examining discourse as a powerful tool in the construction of narratives around unconventional parenthood. By unveiling the nuances of communication dynamics, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges, biases, and societal expectations that individuals like Katherine may navigate in their unique journeys to redefining the concept of family. By challenging stereotypes and presenting diverse family narratives authentically, the genre of sitcoms and other media can contribute to a more inclusive societal mindset, fostering acceptance and understanding of the evolving tapestry of parenthood and family life.

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