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Representations of Family in Anime Midterm Essay

In the selected anime presented in this course, the concept of “family” is presented in a myriad of ways. Although the conventional definition of “family” typically refers to the relationships between blood relatives, similar bonds can also be made by individuals of no blood relation. Additionally, “family” is not limited to the bonds between parent and child or brother and sister, but can also extend beyond immediate family to encompass a large number of individuals. These three definitions of family can be seen in many of the anime titles selected for this course, such as *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Mobile Suit Gundam 0080: War in the Pocket*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Jormungand*.

The traditional image of family is perhaps best represented in Studio Ghibli's *My Neighbor Totoro*. In this film, the main family consists of two sisters who live with their father while their mother is being treated at a hospital. In this family, the nuances between different types of familial relationships are evident. For example, the relationship between parent and child is very different than the relationship between sisters. Whereas the parent-child relationship sometimes has a bit of distance, such as when the father is away at work or when the children are not fully informed about their mother's illness, the relationship between the sisters is very close, even if they have the occasional argument. Blood relatives can also be seen in Al's family from *Mobile Suit Gundam 0080: War in the Pocket*, created by Fumihiko Takayama. However, Al's family is very different in comparison to Satsuki and Mei's family, in that his parents do not have a warm relationship, he does not have close bonds with either parent, and he is an only child. Even though the families from *My Neighbor Totoro* and *War in the Pocket* are both blood-related, they are still very different.

Familial bonds created by people without blood relation can be described as either “adopted family” or “constructed family.” For example, due to the poor relationships within Al's blood family in *War in the Pocket*, he created new bonds with Bernie and Chris and they become his “siblings” despite the lack of blood relation. Studio Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke* has a very prominent example of an adoptive relationship between the wolf-spirit mother, Moro, and her human daughter, San. Although the adopted San is a different species than her mother and siblings, they still operate as if they were full-blood relatives. In fact, San associated herself with her adoptive wolf family more so than with the other humans. In contrast, Keitaro Takahashi's *Jormungand* is an example of both an adopted and constructed family, in which the main cast forms a family due to their circumstances. In this scenario, the constructed family is made because the various individuals are working together in a rather extreme environment as international arms dealers. It also became an adopted family when Jonah joined the crew and formed a pseudo mother-son bond with their leader Koko. In all

three of these anime, the non-traditional images of family and familial relationships are clear to see, despite none of the characters being related by blood.

Lastly, family-like bonds that extend into the community are represented in both *Princess Mononoke* and *My Neighbor Totoro*. In addition to the other images of family in these two films, a community-like family can also be seen when a large number of people live in close quarters and care about one another. For example, in *Princess Mononoke* the forest creatures come together despite their differences to fight against the humans, while the people in the mining town band together to fight off the invading samurai despite their lack of military training. Even though those groups do not fit the image of a typical family, blood-related or otherwise, they care enough about each other and the place that they live in to form bonds between one another. Similarly, in *My Neighbor Totoro* when Mei goes missing, the entire neighborhood participates in the search and are genuinely concerned about her. Once again, although they are not a true or self-made family, the familial relationships between the villagers is genuine. The “community family” is another representation of family that is seen in anime.

In summary, the image of “family” represented in anime is not limited to the traditional depiction of blood related family members. “Family” is also seen in the various relationships and bonds created by non-related individuals as well, as seen in “adopted,” “constructed,” and “community” families. The anime selections made for this course provide fitting examples for these different types of families. However, perhaps the most interesting aspect of these varying depictions of family, is the fact that more than one type of family can be seen in a single anime. By not being limited to a single family image, the variation between character relationships and connections made between the story and the viewer are innumerable, making anime a truly impressive storytelling platform.

(835 words)