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COM 304-03: Mass Media and Society

Stranger Things 2

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II. Introduction

The media text I will be analyzing in depth throughout this paper will be an episode of the new hit Netflix Original Series: *Stranger Things 2* titled *Chapter 9: The Gate* which debuted on October 27, 2017. *Chapter 9: The Gate* is the ninth episode and also the season finale so it was action packed and kept the audience on the edge of their seats the whole hour. This episode has multiple instances where messages of feminism and “girl power” are present which was not as present at the time of the show because it is based in the early 1980’s in Indiana.

Throughout this paper I will be constructing a feminist analysis of this episode of *Stranger Things 2*. There are a few parts of this episode where I will be using multiple categories of the SEARCH acronym in this analysis because the SEARCH acronym “foregrounds social issues and social differences.” (O’Shaughnessy, p. 36) The letters I will be using from the SEARCH acronym are S(*sex, sexual orientation, gender*), E(*environment*), A(*age*), and R (*Race, Religion*). This paper will discuss the influence of girl power and female heros, an environment that shows what life was like during the 1980’s, the audience that this show is appealing to which surprisingly became all ages, and the race aspect has to do with racial tensions and biracial relationships.

III. Description of Media Text

A. Commercial History

“Stranger Things” is a Netflix Original Series created by the Duffer Brothers, twins Matt and Ross, and first premiered on July 15, 2016. The show’s setting takes place in the small fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana in the early 1980’s. The first season consisted of just eight episodes but it was enough to get approved for a second season just over a month after it aired on August 31, 2016. The first season was a hit, the Stranger Things cast had fans of all ages obsessing over them and the show. The show even received 18 Emmy nominations last year and is one of the most popular Netflix Original shows to be released. According to [Forbes](#), “70 percent of viewers who watched up to the second episode finished the first season” and that “8.2 million people watched the first season of *Stranger Things* within the first 16 days of its premiere.”

With the rise of technology and a list of never-ending media platforms being created, Netflix had been struggling to keep its edge on the competition with other streaming platforms such as Hulu, HBOGo, Showtime, etc. However according to Forbes, “*Stranger Things* is crucial for Netflix’s success.” It is clear that Netflix's goal was to increase their viewership through hit Original Series like Stranger Things, and they hype for Stranger Things 2 matched that of the first season. With the fan base growing, it was obvious that Netflix had to add to the show, which has already gotten approved for a third and fourth season.

Stranger Things is a show based around these four young seventh grade boys from Hawkins, Indiana back in 1983 (first season). These four friends are displayed as “nerds” and play a game called “Dungeons and Dragons” all the time in their friends basement. The four

boys are Mike Wheeler, Will Byers, Dustin Henderson, and Lucas Sinclair. In the first episode of Season one, Will Byers is riding his bike home from playing “Dungeons and Dragons” at Mike’s house when he attempts to hide from a scary shadow figure but he is abducted. During the time Will is missing, his friend group takes it upon themselves to find their missing best friend which is when they stumble across the other main character in the forest, Eleven. This is when we are introduced to Eleven who is in the middle of the woods in a hospital gown and a shaved head, the boys then decide to hide her and keep her in Mike’s basement. Throughout the season the new team of four, help out Joyce Byers (Will’s mother) and Hawkins Police Chief Jim Hopper to find Will. There is a lot of “supernatural” events that occur throughout the season, and the boys find out Eleven has powers and was a runaway experiment from the Hawkins Laboratory. By the end of season one, they finally save their friend Will but it ends with some suspense which hinted at the fact that there would be a second season.

Stranger Things 2 takes place a year after the first season, the time period is the fall of 1984 in Hawkins, Indiana. The once quiet town is still affected by the Upside Down and the secrets that were hidden by the Hawkins Laboratory. There is a new girl added to the group of friends who went by “MADMAX” at first but her real name is Max Mayfield who is new to Hawkins from California. Will Byers is still trying to return to his regular life after being announced dead and came back to life, he was even known as “zombie boy” at school. He continuously has episodes/flashbacks to the Upside Down and a new creature he calls the “shadow monster” Eleven is kept in hiding from the boys by Hawkins Police Chief Jim Hopper, for her safety and the safety of the boys from the government. Will ends up being taken over by a “virus” which is the work of the shadow monster inhabiting his body. The season is based

around saving Will again and making the town peaceful once again. Throughout the season we see a lot more development into the characters and friendships.

B. Description of Text

The episode I am analyzing is the season finale of *Stranger Things 2* titled *Chapter 9: The Gate*. The episode starts off with the suspense the audience waited all season 2 for, Eleven reuniting with Mike and the gang. To ruin the reunion, Mike finds out Hopper was hiding Eleven the whole time from them just to make sure everyone was safe. The touching reunion is brought to a pause while they all brainstorm a plan to end this once and for all. The mission is to close the gate that Eleven had once created to the Upside Down and save Will but the complication with it was they might lose Will in the process because he is a host and the “virus”(shadow monster) has taken over his body. So to do so, the gang has to make Will’s body “uninhabitable” by burning the “virus” out of him. While Joyce (Will’s mother), Nancy (Mike’s sister), and Jonathan (Will’s older brother) take Will’s body over to Hoppers cabin, Hopper and Eleven head over to the Hawkins Lab to close the gate. The gang (Mike, Max, Lucas, and Dustin) feel like they are of no use and want to help, but their babysitter Steve (Nancy’s ex-boyfriend) said they are “on the bench” and need to not worry about it. The kids end up getting their way and set out on a mission to cause a decoy to make sure Eleven’s mission is easier and less deadly. Joyce ends up being right and was able to burn the shadow monster out of her son and make him normal again. So it was up to Eleven to close the gate to the Upside Down. It takes her to use all of her powers she could tap into to close the gate before the shadow monster escaped and wreaked havoc on the world. The show then fasts forward to a month later and we see the Hawkins Laboratory getting shut down and blamed for the death of Barbara Holland (Nancy’s Friend) who was killed by a

Demogorgon back in the first season. The kids then all get dressed up to attend the “Snowball Dance of ‘84”. The end of the episode ends with suspense like the first one did, it showed a glimpse into the Upside Down and showed the shadow monster that the gang thought they got rid of. It was a hint that the show was not ending, and that there would be a season 3.

This episode we see the main characters develop even more before the end of the season. Max, who we are introduced to at the beginning of this season, originally was just an angry tomboy who was good at video games and enjoyed to skateboard. As the season went on we learned that there was more to this mysterious girl and realize why she acts the way she does. She was not very fond of the gang (Dustin, Will, Mike, and Lucas) at first because they were spying on her and she called them creeps. The boys then asked if she wanted to go trick-or-treating with them and that began the friendship. By the end of the season we see that Max enjoys living in Hawkins, although at first she dreaded the fact that she had to move away from California.

The final episode of this season was more intense and action packed than the previous eight episodes. Although most of them are suspenseful and have action, the season finale had to end with a bang and it did. I didn't just chose this episode because it is the last one of Stranger Things 2, but because there was so much girl power presented throughout this episode that it was hard not to analyze.

C. Figure



This image was the final of four posters that Netflix released before the premiere of season 2 of *Stranger Things*. Source of image: *Stranger Things Wiki* (http://strangerthings.wikia.com/wiki/Stranger_Things/Season_2)

D. Rationale: Why This Text?

There are a few reasons why I chose to analyze *Stranger Things 2 Chapter 9: The Gate* as my text. Throughout this episode I have enough evidence to discuss four categories from the SEARCH acronym and to use feminist analysis as my approach because it displays a great amount of “girl power” which has nowadays become a mainstream catchphrase. As we learned throughout the course this semester and from “*Growing Up With Girl Power*” that women and young girls are in an ongoing battle for equality and fighting the stereotypes that it always has to be a man in power. I was curious to see how much girl power was present throughout this episode, and how the heroine in this show are presented. I will be using the S (sex, sexual orientation, gender), E (environment), A (age), and R (race, religion) categories from the SEARCH acronym to analyze this episode.

I was intrigued by the fact that out of the four main female characters in *Stranger Things 2* all played a role in saving not only the town of Hawkins and Will Byers, but the whole world. The girl heros are all different ages and can be influential to any age of females, to know that even doing the smallest thing can make a beneficial change. This was also based back in the 1980’s where racism was still a thing and it was also displayed throughout this episode. The environment created for the show displayed the 80’s well and made handful of references to relevant things during that time period. As well as the age of the audience was hugely impacted by the growing success of the show.

IV. Analysis of Media Text

This episode of *Stranger Things 2* titled *Chapter 9: The Gate* displayed a great deal of scenes that can be analyzed by the SEARCH acronym. The S in the SEARCH acronym stands for sex, sexual orientation, and gender. As stated in our textbook *Media and Society*, “men have more social power and control than women, and there is still discrimination against women.” (O’Shaughnessy, p. 36) Which was not displayed in this episode, although the cast and main characters are made up of mostly males, it is the females that are portrayed as the heroes. Not only was having girls as main characters empowering for young women, their actions and heroics are what are most influential and an example of “girl power” in media.

The first instance of girl power is the opening scene to the episode, where Eleven just got done killing the “demo-dogs” and saving the other main characters that were stuck inside Will’s house. Eleven is a great example of girl power because she was not only a main character in *Stranger Things 2* but also was a main character in the first season. She is the only person on the show that has “super powers” in which she can make objects and people move with just her mind. When Eleven taps into her powers, her nose begins to bleed due to the stress it causes. Eleven also is the biggest hero in the show at the end of the day because the first season ended with her destroying the monster known as the “Demogorgon”. She kept her heroic streak up by completing the mission they were on: to close the gate to the Upside Down, which she opened before. Eleven then uses all her powers to close the gates to the Upside Down before the shadow monster can escape and wreak havoc on the world. Her character can be influential to the younger female audience because they see a girl in power and being the strongest out of a group

of four guys. It displays a message that guys aren't always the heroes, girls can be heroes too and stronger than guys.

The second example of girl power we see is when the newest character to the gang Max stands up to her angry and abusive older brother once and for all. Max's step brother, Billy, is portrayed as the bad guy all throughout the season and treats Max poorly. We come to find out the reason Billy acts the way he does is because of his abusive father, who is furious that Billy doesn't know where Max is when he was supposed to be babysitting her. Billy then goes on a mission house to house of the friends to find his sister. Once Billy arrives to Will's house he finds her there and begins to fight Steve, who is watching after Lucas, Dustin, Max, and Mike. The tension between Steve and Billy was building up all season for this moment, for them to finally fight each other. Steve was winning the fight until Billy smashed a glass plate off Steve's head knocking him down. Billy then proceeds to continuously punch the unconscious Steve until Max finally stands up to her step brother. Max grabbed a syringe filled with a liquid that would knock someone out, so basically a tranquilizer, and stabbed it into her older brothers neck. Max saving the day and probably Steve's life was an example of girl power and sticking up against the man. Max then grabs a baseball bat that is wrapped in barbed wire and yells at her brother "from here on out, you leave me and my friends alone. Do you understand?" Billy laughs at his little sister as he is slowly passing out from the sedation, and Max had enough of not having a voice against her brother so she slammed the baseball bat in between his legs and just barely missed Billy's private area but did so as a warning shot that she was not messing around. For a 13 year old girl to step up against her 17 year old brother was a prime example of girl power and how women no longer want to be brushed off as someone who has no voice or any power.

Another example of girl power presented throughout this episode was with Joyce Byers (Will's mother). She was on a mission to save her son from the Upside Down from the second time, the first time being in season one of Stranger Things. This time Joyce brought her "possessed" son to Hoppers cabin in the woods and attempted to heat the "virus" (shadow monster) out of her son so that when Eleven closes the gate to the Upside Down it won't kill Will because he is a host. Joyce proceeds to grab multiple heat radiators and place them near Will's tied down body as well as start a fire in the fire place to raise the temperature of the room. Jonathan, Joyce's other son, didn't believe her plan was working and was convinced that she was just hurting Will even more. However, as Jonathan was complaining Will's neck began having huge black veins appear as smoke began to whirl out his mouth. Joyce turned the heat up and the shadow monster finally exited her son and left. This is not only an example of girl power, but also a mother's intuition is always right. It showed that most times no one knows someone better than their own mother.

The last example of girl power was in the last few minutes of the season. After Eleven closed the gate and Joyce saved Will, the show fast forwards a month. It then shows the Hawkins Laboratory getting shut down thanks to Nancy, who is another main character and Mike's older sister. Nancy finally got justice for her friend Barbara who died in the first season. For Nancy to give the information to the public she had to water it down because no one would believe the events that went down inside that lab. The information she ended up releasing proved that a gas leak from the toxic experiments they held at the Hawkins Lab caused Barbara to die but it really was a monster (Demogorgon) that had killed her. Nancy sticking up to the government run lab

was a great example of girl power because although her actions had nothing to do with violence, she did what she felt and knew was right to attain justice for her late friend and the family.

The environment (E of the SEARCH acronym) created throughout *Stranger Things* was well done in the sense that it was believable that the setting was during the 1980's in a small town here in America. From the clothing, to the houses and furniture, and even the references were excellent in painting a picture of a 80's setting. This show is filled with "retro" movie references and even included "included" parallels to films such as *Stand By Me*, *Aliens*, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Ghostbusters*, *E.T.*, and many more. (According to [IMDB](#)) The style of the hair of most of the males were ones you don't really see as much these days, especially the hair spray covered slicked back hair that Dustin copied from his friend Steve. There even was a school dance at the end of the episode that showed an old school dance that happened in a gym with punch and teachers as chaperones. The environment was also displayed through the choice of music.

The R category of the SEARCH acronym stands for race and religion, but for this episode it is being analyzed via race. The setting of the show is in the 1980's and there is still some racial tension, as there is today. Lucas, one of the four main characters, is a young African American male while all his friends are white. We do not see any hint at racism until Max's older brother Billy comes into the show. In an earlier episode Billy told Max that he did not want her hanging around people like Lucas, which was a hint at him telling her not to hangout with black people. In the episode I am analyzing, *Chapter 9: The Gate*, Billy finds his sister Max hanging out with Lucas again. Billy proceeds to walk over to Lucas and pick him up then pin him against the wall telling him that he doesn't want him to hang out with his sister anymore. This is when the fight

between Steve and Billy began because Steve came to rescue Lucas. There was not much other than this incident that had to do with race or racism. However at the dance in one of the final scenes of the episode, Lucas and Max kiss which displays a biracial relationship that can develop in future seasons.

The last category of the SEARCH acronym I will be using is the “A” which stand for age. The intended audience was for a younger following because the show is rated TV-14 and the main characters are all 12 and 13 year olds. However due to the unexpected success the show received, there is a much bigger audience than they intended. According to Forbes, “although the company does not disclose any data about their consistent viewership, Symphony Advanced Media estimates that the first season garnered about 14 million adult viewers.” ([Forbes](#)) Stranger Things is being referred to as a pop culture “phenomenon” and one of Netflix’s biggest hit shows. The show won five Emmy awards out of their 17 Emmy nominations:

- Outstanding Casting for a Drama Series
- Outstanding Original Main Title Theme Music
- Outstanding Sound Editing For A Series
- Outstanding Main Title Design
- Outstanding Single-Camera Picture Editing For A Drama Series.

The success of this show made the intended audience widen, not just age wise but locations as well. Stranger Things has reached international success and is dubbed in different languages on Netflix for different countries. According to a Wired article, Stranger Things first went viral in Canada and then “gradually spread to find enthusiasts around the world.” Then goes on to state

the in just one month “Netflix users in 190 countries watched Stranger Things, and viewers in 70 of those nations became devoted fans.”

V. Conclusion

Stranger Things 2 *Chapter 9: The Gate* is an example of how girl power is presented in modern-day television shows as well as how a show can become an international phenomenon and surpass the expected audience. This television show illustrated that girls, too, have power and can play main character roles as well as the role of the hero. The female heroes in this show are all different ages: Eleven (13), Joyce (Late 30's), Max (13), and Nancy (17). So not only was having girls as main characters empowering for young women, their actions and heroics are what are most influential and an example of “girl power” in media. The setting of the show is in the 1980's, where women were still fighting for equality and were deemed less “superior” to men and were discriminated against. If the people who watched Stranger Things, or readers of my analysis can understand how important it is that the heroes in this episode were all females then I got my point across. Growing up with sisters, I realized how important it is for them to feel comfortable, to feel accepted, to be appreciated, and to be empowered. So in conclusion, this episode of Stranger Things 2 is jam packed with prime evidence of girl power.

VI. Works Cited

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