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## The Show Stranger Things: Friendship & Relationships Between The Characters

Stranger Things has become one of the most popular television shows on the planet with its mind-blowing science fiction-horror storyline. The plot of the show revolves around a young girl named Eleven (Milly Bobby Brown) who has supernatural abilities. At the beginning of the show, Eleven escapes from a laboratory where she was being studied and travels to a small town named Hawkins. This is where a young boy named Will Byers (Noah Schnapp) is abducted by a creature from the Upside Down. The Upside Down is what Mike Wheeler (Finn Wolfhard) describes as, 'a dimension that is a dark reflection, or echo, of our world. It is a place of decay and death, a plane out of phase, a place with monsters. It is right next to you and you don't even see it' (Duffer). Because of Eleven's supernatural abilities, she is the only one who can help him escape. Throughout all of the science fiction nature that Stranger Things focuses on, a consistent theme throughout the show is the friendship that forms between the characters. With the hardships the characters endure, the strengths in the friendships grow as well. Through the many tough situations, Stranger Things teaches us what it means to be a friend with lessons about bromance, care, and sacrifice. Both charming and terrifying, the show has a great deal to say about the true meaning of friendship.

The show Stranger Things models true friendship by showing the bromances that form between the young middle school boys Mike Wheeler, Dustin Henderson (Gaten Matarazzo), and Lucas Sinclair (Caleb McLaughlin). A bromance is defined as an intimate relationship between men (DeAngelis). According to Michael DeAngelis, the author of *The Bromance*, he compares the buddy film to bromances using six different components. Number six is, "6) the death of at least one of the protagonists, required in order to preclude any possibility that the relationship will be "consummated"" (DeAngelis 8). The same point applies to Stranger Things. In season one, the boys have already established a surface level friendship with each other by being "Dungeon and Dragons" partners. Yet with the loss of their friend Will, the boys' friendships grow deeper than just playing board games in the basement. Together they face this hardship of the disappearance of Will and learn how to lean on each other on a more intimate level. DeAngelis also states one of the components of friendship is, a "marginalization" of female characters. Female marginalization is shown after Eleven steers the three boys away from where Will, which is ultimately to protect them. All three boys lose faith in Eleven. Yet, when Mike tries to stick up for Eleven, Lucas gets angry and leaves the group. The boys disowned Eleven and only trusted the boys (Duffer). The bro code, "bros before hoes", is seen clearly in this situation to keep the bromance. This also shows the marginalization in female characters where how men can express their feelings on intimate levels. These components of bromances are seen clearly through the boys in Stranger Things.

Also, bromances are intimate in ways society deems socially unacceptable. Michael DeAngelis describes how male on male relationships are different than female on female relationships. Explaining, it's ok for women to have an intimate relationship where they argue, gossip, and complement each other. But society tells us men are not supposed to act this way with other men. This intimacy in the boys' relationships is brought out in Season 3 Episode 3 as Mike and Lucas got girlfriends which turned Will and Dustin jealous. Will yells at Mike about him and Lucas spending too much time with their girlfriends (Duffer). This is him showing his vulnerable

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side to his friend. Vulnerability creates the intimacy bromances need. With the traumatic experience the boys have endured, their relationships with one another have developed into bromances where they can be intimate with one another.

The show also displays genuine qualities of friendship through Mike and Eleven that Joan Tronto describes in her book, *An Ethics of Care*. As soon as the two met they formed a connection. Eleven had very little contact with people except for the people who studied her in the lab. Yet even with Eleven's little social abilities, Mike and her formed a bond. They both found vulnerabilities in one another and learn to take care of each other. Joan Tronto states the four elements of care are attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. These four elements are seen throughout their relationship. An element that applies the most to the two's friendship is "attentiveness". Tronto describes attentiveness by being able to recognize there is a need to be cared about. Further describing, "simply recognizing the needs of those around us, is a difficult task, and indeed a moral achievement" (Tronto 127). Mike found it his duty to give Eleven a home in his basement and keep her safe from the lab workers. While Eleven kept the boys safe from the Upside Down (Duffer). Their unspoken friendship shows the element of attentiveness and is heartwarming to see their understanding of care.

Finally, friends sacrifice for one another. Nearly every character in the show displays tremendous sacrifice. We see sacrifice through Mike jumping off the cliff to save Dustin from bullies and through Sheriff Hopper's (David Harbour) character development by shedding his old persona to becoming caring and helps find Will. But of course, the most striking example comes at the end of season one episode eight, when Eleven sacrifices herself to destroy the Demogorgon and protect her new friends (D. Today in our culture, it is easy to put our lives and needs in the way of others. But to put your needs last for your friends is a beautiful quality of friendship. The characters in *Stranger Things* demonstrate Joan Tronto's element of responsiveness. Responsiveness "signals an important moral problem within care: by its nature, care is concerned with conditions of vulnerability and inequality" (Tronto 134). She further explains responsiveness is caring for someone's vulnerabilities. The way many of the characters in *Stranger Things* found it their duty to help each other out shows the element of responsiveness.

The show *Stranger Things* exhibits many qualities of friendship that can be seen in other writings. The show reveals qualities about bromances, care, and sacrifice through the difficulties the characters faced. *Stranger Things* gave a closer look into the depths of bromances and what they really mean. While at the same time displaying Joan Tronto's elements of care. With the relationships that grew between the characters on the show, we can closer analyze the true meaning of friendship.