



TURNING CONCEPTIONS OF FAMILY 'UPSIDE DOWN': NON-FAMILIAL FAMILIES PROVIDE SOCIAL SUPPORT AND COMMUNAL COPING AS A FORM OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN *STRANGER THINGS*

By Sophia Pellar

# Context

*Stranger Things* was created by the Duffer brothers in 2016. The show revolves around the town of Hawkins, Indiana, where strange events begin to occur involving disappearances of humans and creatures coming from a lab. *Stranger Things* depicts a group of kids, teenagers, and adults who are all connected, as friends or family, and involved in different plot lines. Their stories eventually intersect, and they work together to save the town.

# Research Question



How and why non-familial families come together to act as a family, especially during times when communal coping and social support is needed

Why this is significant to learn about and how it can help people



# Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the sense of belonging and social support in relational communication among members of non-familial groups who form families in the Netflix original series, *Stranger Things*. Specifically, this study analyzes the youth in the show and how they form non-familial families.



# Rationals

*Stranger Things* is unique because it shows how friends can also form families of their own and not discussed much in scholarly writing

Also worth looking at because of its popularity among various age groups and international success

Adds to previous scholarship regarding non-biological families and how they can still be families

# Literature Review

Social support is a form of support from people frequently and consistently available

Impacts the ability of effective coping in a group

Different forms exist including emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal (Glanz)

Communal coping is a form of social support

Still requires a social network of people to be present and available in order to cope as a group

Communal coping has positive outcomes

Can help the physical and mental well-being of individuals and groups (Afifi 70)



# Literature Review (cont.)

Fictive kinship recreates characteristics that make up family through love, sharing of resources, familial responsibilities for all members, and trust and closeness that continues over time (Nelson 262).

Voluntary kin typically form in a specific context, time period, life stage (Braithwaite et al. 401).

Non-familial families are essential to healthy and fulfilling lives of voluntary kin because they provide social support to people who are not receiving it



# Method

## Self Reflexivity:

Knowledge

Many years of experience

Unique perspective

Target audience

Interest

## Data Collection:

Selection of scenes from researching pop culture articles that align with specific keywords

## Method of Data Collection:

Key word search

Thematize data

Grounded approach

Categories/themes are put together to make a story from the data





Finding #1: Shared Time



## Finding #2: Support



## Finding #3: Sacrifice





## Finding #4: Identity

# Conclusions

## Major Conclusion:

Family by choice

Communal coping and social support strengthens relationship as a group

Shared time, support, sacrifice, and identity are most used tools by the kids as a way to maintain strong bonds

## Implications:

Research has potential to help kids who do not have families or who are looking for other sources of support

## Limitations:

Only so much knowledge available to me

Homogeneous (i.e., middle class, white) and privileged background

## Recommendations:

More diverse researchers

Look into more themes

Review previous related I.S. projects

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