One Day Through Stranger Trauma

Pasqua Ruggiero, GC 295 – Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program
Department of Statistics, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

INTRODUCTION

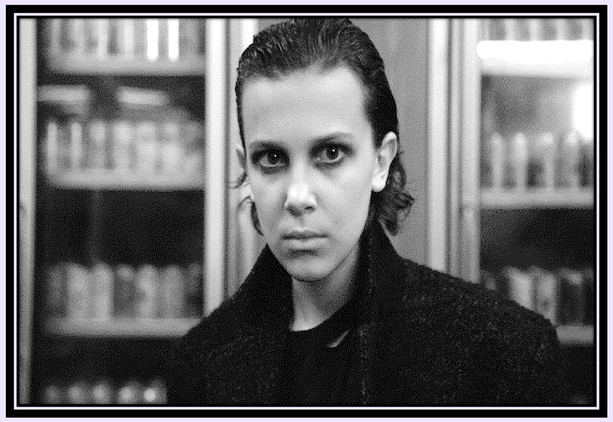
Being a prominent member of online fan groups myself, I have always been particularly interested in attitudes regarding the portrayal of mental illness. I am also invested in the efforts to decrease the stigma surrounding mental illness, in which the media plays a significant role.

AIM

I wanted to delve deeper into the fan communities revolving around mental health themes in various television shows.

RESEACH QUESTION

What are the audience's reactions (on social media) to the portrayal of PTSD in the popular new Netflix television shows *One Day at a Time* (2017) and *Stranger Things* (2016)?



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor, Stephanie Brown, for teaching me the principles of audience reactions research and textual analysis. I would also like to thank the Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program for guiding me through the research process.

METHOD

Sampling criteria: It is important to begin this experiment with the definition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I used the National Institute of Mental Health's criteria for PTSD, which is that PTSD is the result after experiencing a traumatic event and having at least one re-experiencing and avoidance symptom, and at least two arousal and reactivity and cognition and mood symptoms.

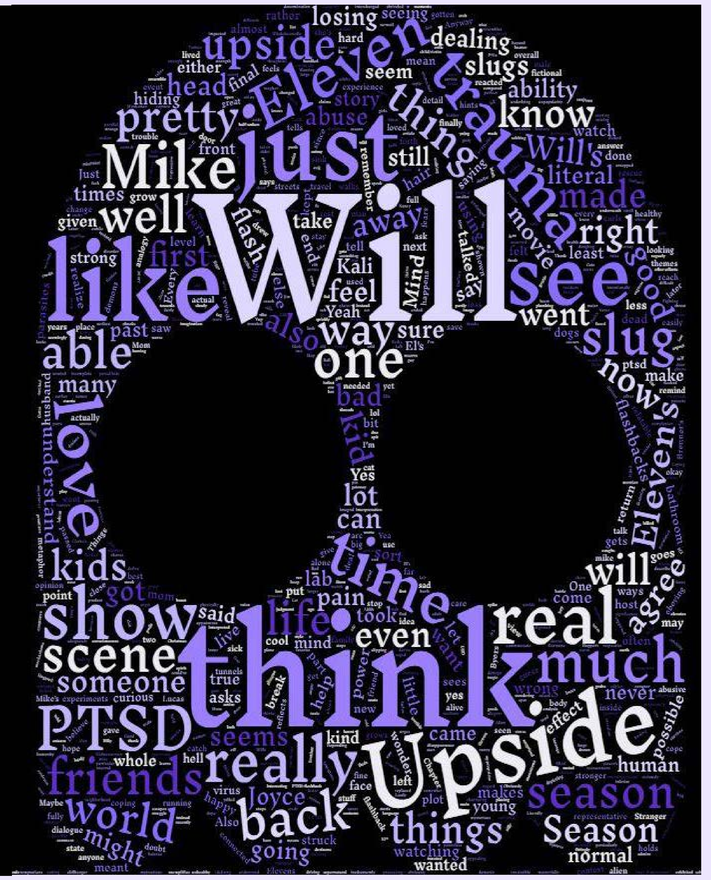
Keywords: I did my search for the various shows by using the show's title along with the words "PTSD", "mental health", and "trauma ", which I found to receive many relevant results. I searched these keywords on four social media platforms: Facebook, Reddit, Twitter and Tumblr. Then, I did a textual analysis on my results and looked for common themes.

I picked to research *Stranger Things* because besides it being my favorite show, it was recent and popular enough to know that it would receive large amounts of input and reactions. *ODAAT* different in terms of character demographics and plot, which I was curious to see if it resulted in differences in the fan attitudes of these two shows.

RESULTS

ONE DAY AT A TIME

STRANGER THINGS



These words bubbles are the results of the Tumblr, Facebook and Reddit searches using my keywords. I did not have a program to convert Twitter posts into a text file. I chose to use Pacman characters because they can be used to symbolize overcoming PTSD.

CONCLUSIONS/FURTHER RESEARCH(*ODAAT*)

- very limited discussion on Penelope' s PTSD, especially on Reddit
- PTSD themes are buried under other themes such as coming out and racisms
- Audience demographics and sitcom format
- larger sample could be taken on other social media platforms
- Expand Facebook posts and look into the comments on those as well.

CONCLUSIONS/FURTHER RESEARCH(*STRANGER THINGS*)

- Large focus on Will' s PTSD (as opposed to Eleven' s)-feminist explanation
- Many posts on PTSD, which could be accounted for by the spread over various social media due to audience and popularity
- Many users were incorrectly characterizing PTSD in the various characters, especially important time to use the definition of PTSD to determine which posts would be used in the sample
- Larger sample could be done on YouTube videos' comments and comments on Facebook posts

TAKEAWAYS

- Overall, positive portrayal of PTSD
- Importance of audience demographic and show format
- Educating public on PTSD

ILLINOIS