



**The role of Social Support in Conquering Mental Struggles
Semiological Study of the Stranger Things Series**

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Abstract:

This study outlines the personality of Max Mayfield from “Stranger Things” season 4, highlighting her psychological state and analyzing whether she has typical or atypical personality through some specific scenes from the fourth episode. Max lived in a state of psychological confusion due to her crucial and cruel family conditions, hence a change in personality accrued. Through a semiological study we mirror the hidden meaning into and out of the body language, camera movements, colors, music, her conflicting feelings and inner struggle. In addition to her friends who were considered a focal point by means of giving her emotional support and get through this unstable mental state, representing human values and the importance of having company. This analysis illuminates how visual and narrative details contribute in demonstrating the change of personality from confusion and loss of self to psychological balance.

Keywords: Stranger things; overthinking; typical; atypical personality; semiological study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Whenever we see a person or talk to him we immediately have a first impression about him, sometimes it comes to be a good impression and other times comes out to be a negative one, and right after that we decide to say that this person is typical and the other one is not. However, the meaning of a typical personality differs and that's what makes it complicated to know what are the characteristics and standards of a normal personality. First, we need to know the meaning of the personality. Mohamed Atiyah Ibrashi (1897-1981, an Egyptian thinker and philosopher) describes it as a set of attributes and self-advantages which distinguish a person from the others, or it is the set of mental, moral, physical and volitional traits that crowns a human being (Ibrashi, 1944, p. 9). Let's say that personality is a bunch of psychological traits that differs a person from the other, it also includes emotional, intellectual and social patterns, and from this stand point understanding typical and atypical personality is crucial for it helps understanding normal behavior patterns and identifying psychological disorders as well.

Moving to the standards of personality judgment, starting with the normal personality which is characterized by stability and the ability of adapting with life variations and psychological stress, besides having wholesome social relationships and taking rational decisions, and the abnormal personality which meant in general anomie or deviating from the standards, is characterized with thinking disorder, Emotions and behaviors that leads to hardships of dealing with daily life and social relationships.

In this article we'll analyze the personality of **Max Mayfield** a character from the Netflix series **Stranger Things** which seems to have an unstable personality due to several reasons that we will mention later on this article, and justify why this character is unstable and what makes it abnormal, through that we'll find out when we can say that this person is typical or atypical. Moreover, we'll discuss how **Max Mayfield** overcame this mental state through a semiotic study since the series holds a lot of symbolizations.

Methodological framework:

Method:

The word method goes back to the origin of the Greek word μέθοδος, methodos and it means research, observation or knowledge, and its genuine etymological meaning indicates the way or the method that leads to a precise purpose through the obstacles (Badawi, 1977, p. 3). it's also considered as the basic structure of the scientific research while it ensures the logical sequence and the and the organized process of the study, thus it leads to flawless and accurate scientific results. Hence, we used the descriptive method in order to obtain the results that answers and explains the research issue, this method's used for studying the ongoing phenomena in terms of



its characteristics, forms and relationships, besides the factors affecting this and that means that the descriptive method studies the phenomena and events present (Bro, 2014, p. 66).

Moreover, the nature and specificity of the study imposes the semiological approach to analyze the scenes of the series and the means of persuasion it contains.

And the semiological method according to **Roland Barthes** (1915/1930, a French literary, theorist, philosopher and semiotician) is the science of signs, based on the earlier work of Ferdinand de Saussure and aimed to uncover the underlying systems and rules that govern how signs function in various forms of communication, and a tool for analyzing and comprehending the complex ways in which signs operate within culture, revealing the underlying systems of meaning that shape our perceptions and interpretations of the world, he also describes it as form of careful research of the deep levels of visual and linguistic messages, besides the researcher's commitment to neutrality towards the message and paying attention to the psychological, social and cultural aspects that will help reinforce the analysis (Kadri, 2012, p. 8).

Sample:

We relied on the purposive sample to deeply analyze the character of Max Mayfield, understanding her development, psychological traits, and role within the series Stranger things, and precisely from the fourth episode of the fourth season.

Data gathering tools:

Regarding to the tool of gathering data in this study we depended on scientific observation on choosing the scenes related to the study, in addition to the semiological analysis tools including denotation and connotation, and textual semiotics for a formal and implicit reading of the chosen audiovisual work.

2. Applied framework:

2.1 Series datasheet:

Series title	season	Number of episodes	Episode duration	Network	language	Country of origin
Stranger things (Brothers, 2016)	04	09	1h3 min to 1h38	Netflix	English	United states
Director	The Duffer Brothers, Shawn Levy, Nimrod Antal					
producer	The Duffer Brothers					

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Genre	Science fiction, horror, mystery, drama.
synopsis	American science fiction series centers around the residents of a fiction town named Hawkins, Indiana where a young boy vanishes and a hostile alternate dimension known as the upside down after a nearby human experimentation facility opens a gate between earth and this world

3. The denotation :

The shot	Timing	Scene content	Shot type	Lighting and colors	Clothes and decor	sound
01	From 25 min/ 32min	Max is attending her classes at school, looking lost, distracted and uneasy showing signs of emotional distress, she start to experience intense headaches and hears the ominous ticking of a clock that is a recurring signifier of Vecna's impending attack, as the symptoms intensifies she starts reconnecting them with the past strange occurrences in Hawkins and the mystique death of the other victims and that's when she realizes that she might be the next target, she has flashbacks of everything that seemed suspicious	Point of view shot (POV). Close-up shot. Medium shot.	Dim and moody lightning. Harsh lightning on Max's face. Spotlighting. Flickering lights. Cool colors. Red highlights. Cold blue tone. Red tints.	The clock	Ominous tick-tock. Echo effect. Classroom sounds. Heartbeat.



		and happened to her and starts to link it with the other victims, right after the realization she starts hearing the clock chimes and follow what she heard till she finds and get shocked and then she hears Vecna uttering her name in a scary tone.				
02	From 58:05/ 01:02:00	Max goes to visit her brother's grave at the cemetery, located in a quiet and somber place, the weather is gloomy contributing a melancholic atmosphere. The gravestone is clearly inscribed with Billy's name and date marking his death, she's dressed in casual appropriate with the setting and reflecting her personal style, typically consisted of jeans and a shirt, she holds a handwritten letter addressed to her	Longue shot	Natural Light, The scene is during daytime. Gray, green	Gravestone, Natural surroundings	Max reading the letter, nature sound, calm music



		<p>sibling Billy who passes away, she starts reading the letter of farewell she wrote to him with a steady voice but filled with emotions, expressing her feelings of regret toward him. For, the idea of her not saving him from death forms a heavy burden on her and controls her. The scene is tranquil with only natural ambient sounds like the rustling leaves and distant bird chirping emphasizing the isolation and introspective nature of the moment.</p>				
03	From 01 :08:49 /01:14:00	<p>Max was in the cemetery and it turned all red, finding herself in Vecna’s lair, a dark and twisted place has an atmosphere of a nightmare, heightening her anxiety and fear.</p>	Tracking shot	High contrast lighting spotlighting Red and blue	Chains and restrains. Debris and rubble. Clock. Door (portal). Fog and mist.	Kate Bush’s song Running Up that Hill Accompanied with words



		Vecna appears menacing and bringing her up her fear, traumas and regrets to weaken her resolve, the dialogue between them gets intense with him trying to break her psychologically before psychological confrontation begins. Moreover, we see max running from Vecna going towards her friends without looking behind her until she is safe from Vecna.				
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The connotation:

The first scene commence when Max is at school attending her classes wearing her 80’s styled, casual, practical clothes that reflects he everyday school attire, and all of a sudden she starts to feel a headache and her nose starts bleeding, the producer used the close-up shot of Max’s face to capture her expressions of fear, and confusion. So the classroom setting is basically a symbol is safety, learning and routine but due to her psychological conditions she doesn’t feel the classroom vibe and she transforms into a space of horror and supernatural intrusion, and that’s typically all happening inside her head through her way of thinking, and that means that she does not think in an intact way. Making the classroom which is actually a safe place for normal people seem otherwise justifies that she no longer belongs anywhere and no place is safe for her. After that she looks around the classroom in ambiguity, trying to comprehend what is happening to her and her breathing becomes heavy and her fear is tangible, and that’s when the lighting start to change from dim and moody, with natural light but somewhat dim and muted giving a somber and tense atmosphere, to fluctuating lighting and that’s when her symptoms augment and the lighting shifts subtly. The symptoms including headaches and nosebleeds and auditory hallucinations does not only designate Vecna’s influence but also symbolizes her internal psychological distress reflecting themes of adolescent trauma and the feeling of being lonely during a vulnerable period of life.

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Max starts to realize and link the previous symptoms her classmates had, and they were Vecna's first victims, that's when she knew that she's next. She leaves the classroom and follows the clock sound she heard; a tracking shot was used in this sequence following Mayfield's movements in order to maintain the tension of the moment. The clock starts ticking louder creating a sense of a nigh doom she walks in dark hall with dimmed light till she's cornered, she sees the clock on the wall and the ticking gets louder, afterwards a silence moment takes place and Vecna starts calling Max's name in a scary voice and that's when she gets petrified. The ticking clock sound is a powerful symbol of time running out, nigh doom, and the inevitability of fate resonating with viewers as a metaphor for real life anxieties about mortality and the uncompromising pressure of time. Moreover, the clock is also known to be a symbol of time and mortality imposing timepieces that emphasize the inevitability of mortality, they can also serve as reminders to make the most of time we have and to appreciate the moments we are given, besides punctuality an discipline, for the clocks are known for their precious timekeeping and regular chiming, thus they can symbolize the importance of punctuality, discipline, and routine in our lives, reminding us to manage our time wisely, stay organized and seize the time (Assistant, 2024). The dimmed and cool lighting, muted colors are used to create an atmosphere of eeriness and isolation, highlighting her sense of being trapped and alone in her experience, were in the other hand, red highlights punctuate moments of elevated threat and emotional intensity. Concerning the sounds, it gets tense and suspenseful aligning the audience's emotional state with Max's trying to magnify feelings of fear and anxiety. All together, these elements create a multi layered experience that point up themes of vulnerability and inescapability of time, beside the manifestation of internal fears and the demolition of safe places, making the viewer feel togetherness and sympathize deeply with the character, and engaging them in a wide ranging observation of fear, trauma, and survival. The sounds added in the scene has an important role on immersing the viewers in Max's psychological state and expatiating her trepidation and the supernatural menace posed by Vecna. The combination of ambient noises, internal sounds, distorted voices, and a tense musical score creates a rich auditory landscape that enhances the overall impact of the scene.

The second scene where Max goes to the cemetery in the morning when there's natural light symbolizing a sense of peace and serenity suggesting a quiet atmosphere that contrasts with the chaos Max feels inside, she sits to read the letter of Farwell to her deceased brother Billy saying what she feels about what happened to him and the way they lived together without appreciated the moment of peace they had this scene serves the grief and regret she has and writing the letter and reading it symbolizes her attempt to process and cope with the profound loss she feel, it's also a cathartic moment for her. For, it allows her to express her feelings of sorrow she suppressed and highlights the therapeutic nature of confronting one's emotion's head on in addition to that they depended in this scene on adding nature sounds which is very soothing for human's mental health, besides relaxing the audience and letting them feel the characters feelings as well. It has another



meaning and it's her trying to accept and confront the fact that her brother is no longer alive and can't come back, and it can be an act of stepping toward healing even if it's painful. It also means that despite the complexities of their relationship she still loves her brother, this scene shows the importance of sharing love with your loved ones and expressing it before it is too late.

What she wrote and uttered clarifies that she has feelings of guilt and regret over not being able to help her sibling or do more to prevent his fate and she kept on blaming herself.

The letter itself symbolizes communication beyond death and the importance of it, it also represents Max's attempt to reach out to Billy and maintain a connection with him even after passing away. The flowers she put in his grave symbolize love and act of honoring Billy's memory.

Overall the scene shows the regret and sorrow the character feels, and the love she has for her brother evoking empathy on the audience and allowing him to feel what Max feels by adding sounds like the nature sounds and calm music that was playing in the background, the lighting as well plays an important role on affecting the audience by letting him feel peaceful while watching the scene in the morning daylight as a sign of hope and peace in addition to remind them to seize the moment they have their loved ones by their side before they're gone.

The third scene where max entered Vecna's lair a space where everything there is red and destructed showing oppressive and dark environment filled with twisted structures and eerie shadows. The lair symbolizes the perversion of nature and the overwhelming presence evil which is the negative thoughts she has in her mind, it sets a tone of fear and danger, reflecting her psychological state as she enters the nightmarish realm. Seeing Max entering the realm means that she's ready to face her fear and negative feelings, highlighting the enormity of the challenge she faces all alone, hence the used the color red to make the scene more frightening and symbolizing danger, after that Vecna appears with his body covered in dark tendrils and menacing Maxing by his presence, a tension music was playing in the background to make the scene more frightful to create an agitating atmosphere and touch the audience's emotions by making him feel scared or excited and focused on what's happening. Vecna was representing the embodiment of fear and evil, for his appearance from the shadows signifies the threat and darkness Max must confront and the red lighting underscored the threat he poses and the aggressive nature of the confrontation. Thereafter, Vecna talks with Maw about her past bringing up her traumas and regrets attempting to break her spirit but she responds with defiance. Then, he raises his hand and Max was lifted into the air and physical struggle by him symbolizes her battle against overwhelming fear and the feeling of being trapped in the past and haunted by negative thoughts, beside the chaotic environment reflecting the inner turmoil she experiences.

Subsequently she gets a quick flashback of her memories with her brother and the moments of

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trauma and mourning are intercut with the current fight while shown in sepia or faded tone contrasting with the dark lair the scenery serve to deepen her emotional struggle highlighting the grief and guilt she still carries, they underscore the personal stakes of the battle with herself and her need to overcome these past traumas. At that moment, her friends in the real world tried to reach their friend by calling her by her name and playing her favorite song, Running up that hill by Kate Bush, it hold the character's emotions as well, and whenever Maxine hears the song she remembers all of her past memories and moments she had with her loved ones especially her friends and recalls the value of the time she spent with them. Moreover, Vecna represents the negative thoughts and over-thinking and feeds from the limbic system, the hemisphere of the brain, and it plays an important role in regulating emotions, memory, and behavior (Dow, 2022)In addition to that, it's responsible for regulating the emotional and behavioral responses, besides its essential role in forming and storing emotional memories. The whole scene symbolizes the power of support and connection. Even though they are physically distant, their efforts provide Max with emotional power and hope highlighting the theme of friendship. Concerning the music, it represents a beacon of hope and a reminder of the emotional bonds that give max strength. It shifts the tone from despair to resistance, and that even appears on the audience's reaction it changes from being stressed and worried about the character, to being excited for her resistance and winning against her negative emotions and past traumas, denoting the positive influence of having friends and her determination to fight back. After that she breaks free from Vecna's grip and falls to the ground breathing heavily and that signifies her ability of overcoming the psychological and emotional barriers imposed by Vecna, it also represents her inner strength and resilience, a turning point in the battle.

The scene where Vecna shows signs of weakness and retreats into the shadows snarling in pain and anger and the environment around them begins to stabilize, it denotes a temporary victory for max and the power of resilience, it indicates that even the darkest forces can be challenged and pushed back as well. In the end Max Mayfield is pulled back into the real world through her friends help and efforts, she collapses to the ground weary but alive though and surrounded by her concerned and caring friends. The aftermath of the scene emphasizes the themes of resilience, support, and ongoing struggle, it also shows that while the battle was won, the war is still ongoing and the strength of their bond will be crucial in the future.



4. CONCLUSION

The fight scene between Max Mayfield and Vecna in Season 4 of Stranger Things is a stunning representation of the series' core themes, blending powerful visuals and audio to create an emotional story. This scene brilliantly captures the essence of fear, resilience, and the power of friendship.

The world of Vecna, with its dark and twisted atmosphere, serves as a visual metaphor for Max's internal and external conflicts. The oppressive environment, filled with strange structures and deep shadows, reflects Max's psychological turmoil as she confronts her deepest fears. Red lighting emphasizes the immediate danger posed by Vecna, symbolizing aggression and spite, while occasional blue hues represent hope and the influence of Max's friends.

Max's entry into that world, with her determined and fearful demeanor, highlights her courage and the enormity of the challenge she faces. Vecna's menacing appearance from the shadows highlights the lurking threat and embodiment of evil she must confront. This confrontation between them symbolizes the struggle between good and evil, with Max embodying hope and resilience while Vecna represents darkness and fear.

Their mutual dialogue is a psychological battle. Vecna's taunts are designed to exploit Max's weaknesses, bringing up her past traumas to break her spirit. Max's defiant responses, despite her fear, show her determination and inner strength. This exchange highlights the psychological warfare inherent in their encounter, as Max fights not only for her survival but also to reclaim her sense of self.

Vecna's telekinetic attack which lifts Max into the air and restrains her with an invisible force visually represents her physical and psychological struggle. The chaotic environment, with flying debris and collapsing structures, reflects the turmoil she is experiencing. This moment underscores her feeling of being trapped and the overwhelming power of her fears, paving the way for her breakthrough.

Scattered flashbacks to Max's memories with her brother Billy and moments of shock deepen the emotional stakes. These flashbacks highlight unresolved grief and guilt, providing context for her current struggle. The contrast between the sepia-toned flashbacks and the dark bunker underscores the psychological and emotional divide Max must bridge.

Meanwhile, the efforts of Max's friends in the real world symbolize the inexhaustible power of friendship and support. Their frantic attempts to save her by playing her favorite song and calling out to her confirm that emotional bonds provide strength, even in the darkest of times. This cut emphasizes that Max, although physically isolated, was never alone in spirit.

The introduction of "Running Up That Hill" by Kate Bush where musical intervention is pivotal. The song's haunting and exhilarating melody serves as a lifeline for Max, symbolizing hope and resistance. It changes the tone of the scene, representing the positive influence of her friends and her determination to fight, underscoring the idea that even in despair, there is the

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possibility of redemption.

Thanks to the music and memories of her friends, Max's ability to break free from Vecna's grip signifies her triumph over her fears. This moment of liberation is a turning point, where she shows her inner strength and resilience. Her subsequent counterattack, which hits Vecna with debris, symbolizes her reclaiming her agency and refusing to be a passive victim. The lighting shift to a mixture of blue and red during this confrontation highlights the ongoing struggle between hope and danger.

Vecna's retreat into the shadows, roaring in pain and rage, symbolizes a temporary victory for Max and the power of resilience. It suggests that even the darkest forces can be challenged and repelled. Max's escape through the dilapidated environment represents her determination to return to safety, driven by the support and love of her friends. A dilapidated hideout indicates a weakening grip of fear and darkness.

Finally, Max's return to the real world, set back by the efforts of her friends, symbolizes her triumph over her fears and the importance of support systems in overcoming personal battles. The warmer color palette of the real world contrasts with the dark hideout, suggesting safety and the positive impact of friendship. The aftermath, as Max's friends help her get back on her feet, shows their relief and determination, emphasizing that while this battle has been won, the larger war against Vecna still continues.

In short, this fight scene is a masterful combination of visual, audio, and thematic elements that sums up the essence of "Stranger Things." It reinforces the series' core themes of the struggle between good and evil, the transformative power of friendship, and the importance of inner strength and resilience. Through Max's journey, the scene shows that hope and support can bring success.



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