Glee and New Directions for Social Change

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Glee **and New Directions for Social Change**

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Glee and New Directions for Social Change

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(Brian)

To Darlene: You have been in my corner cheering me on for many years, and I am so grateful that you taught me how to believe in myself. I continue to be amazed by your love. To think, you "made" me watch that first episode of *Glee* after you binge watched the first season during a weekend of paperwork. You knew what a treasure trove the show was and helped me make the right decision to become a huge Gleek!

Dan: It was your wisdom that led to this collaboration. Having seen you use this show as a tool to teach student leaders about the importance of making people *matter* rather than marginalizing them inspired me very deeply. I am so glad that our paths crossed. I am honored to call you my friend and brother.

(Dan)

To my children, Riley and Carter, who are way too young right now to comprehend the contents of this book: Your laughter and love bring purpose to me every day. It is my hope that the society you grow up in has taken notes from what this book has set the stage for, and that you continue to grow up inquisitive and challenging social norms in order to live in a better world. To my family: Thank you for all of your support, love, encouragement and crazy. To my fraternity: Thank you for showing me how to be a fraternity man through our values of Truth, Temperance and Tolerance. To the Loyola Marymount University SLD staff and Ignatian Leadership Institute: Thank you for giving me the tools to comprehend and articulate the need for positive social change. To the CAMPUSPEAK family: Thank you for training me on the hard conversations and providing me the opportunities to travel the country to challenge and broaden the minds of students.

To my co-conspirator Brian: Your passion for pop culture, willingness to have the hard conversations and encouragement to put our ideas in a book are an inspiration to me. Please keep doing what you do.

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INTRODUCTION

Changing the World through a TV Series (Dan's Story)

The Journey

I remember when *Glee* premiered right after the Super Bowl, and I must admit I was skeptical at first, but I knew this series was going to be something special as soon as Finn and Rachel belted the Journey hit "Don't Stop Believin'". I loved the dynamic the show created between the 'in crowd' and the 'outcasts', mostly because it brought me back to my days in high school when I wanted nothing more than to fit it with the cool kids, or at least my construct of what cool kids were at the time. *Glee* took on the hard issues in a way that blended pop culture and music with social justice issues that sometimes go unnoticed, or seen and no one cares or confronts the issue.

Fast-forward to the end of season one, specifically the episode "Theatricality" (S1:E20). As someone who works in higher education and teaches courses on the concepts of change and social justice, this was the pièce de résistance. I was literally in tears during Burt Hummel's diatribe on the microaggressions Finn Hudson was saying to Kurt, Burt's gay son. From this point on, I was hooked. I firmly believed in *Glee's* ability to facilitate controversial conversations during primetime, and I became confident in the show's platform to illustrate positive social change.

"Loser Like Me"

After conversations with several other *Gleeks* who work in higher education, I began to see how there is a bit of Sue and Schue in each of us. We all have the potential to make others "matter" or to push them to the margins. Sue's humor and delivery of her crass remarks and telling everyone "that's the way Sue sees it" seem to make it OK to say what she thinks, with no concern of repercussions. Sue marginalizes others in an effort to make herself and those she cares about appear to matter. On the other hand Mr. Schue cares for everyone, almost taking remarks personally and defending those Sue offends. He wants to make sure his students know they matter. By endorsing self-worth in his students, Schue empowers his students to use their voices to stand up for what they believe in and stand up for each other. The dynamic of mattering and marginality plays itself out in countless interpersonal relationships and organizations – which made me think, how do effective groups function? How do effective leaders lead? Do they include? Or seclude? Do they build others up by investing in them? Or do they break others down in an effort to create in their own image? These are the persistent questions of mattering versus marginality.

Mr. Schue always did his best to ensure that people felt like they mattered in glee club. He always took others' opinions into account and dealt with difficult personalities, especially Coach Sue. Mr. Schuester made it his job to make sure every voice mattered, so that no voice was the only voice of the glee club. Coach Sue on the other hand belittled others and made sure her group of cheerleaders, the Cheerios, kept the standard high school status quo of "popular" and "unpopular." The social caste hierarchy of high school would not be challenged under Sue Sylvester's tenure, until a jock took a leap of faith and joined the glee club. From there the rest, as they say, is history.

All of this led me to believe that how you treat people is paramount to your success as a leader, and helping people see their own potential is one of the most important aspects. Sometimes it happens from having hard conversations with those we care about, or confronting someone when they make a mistake, or taking initiative to help someone in need. How we include or seclude is how we are perceived as a leader, and as a person.

Think back to season one when Kurt was being teased and bullied by the athletes, which was pretty often. Finn, who was quarterback of the team and leader of the glee club, did nothing. When Kurt's dad found out, he was angry with Finn for not standing up for Kurt when he needed him most. Later in the episode Kurt was being bullied in the halls again by a couple of athletes, when all of a sudden Finn comes out, dressed head to toe in a make-shift red shower curtain Lady Gaga outfit, telling them to knock it off and not hurt Kurt. Karofsky and Azimio laughed and mocked Finn, calling him a freak; but that didn't phase him. The other members of the glee club stood with Finn, all dressed in their Gaga and KISS costumes. Mr. Schue sees this and congratulates the team on being so close with each other (S1:E20).

Finn had the capacity to affect change and stand for those being marginalized. Finn risked his status as a popular kid to show others that everyone matters. As a leader, you may not have to dress up in red latex like Lady Gaga to make your point, but you will have to stand up for what is right and serve others. In the end, will you marginalize or make people matter?

"Don't Stop Believin'"

This project is the result of an initial presentation that Brian and I developed for an undergraduate leadership conference. Our first session, "Gleedership: Are You a Sue or a Schue?" was standing room only, and we knew we had something special, a topic something that people were attracted to and wanted to talk about. Several months later Brian and I saw each other again at a pop culture and diversity training workshop, where we both mentioned how fun the session was; and then we began to entertain *what if* scenarios. *What if* we turned this conference workshop into something more? *What if* there are others that also share our passion for pop culture and its ability to address social change and societal issues? *What if* there were other academics that also believed in *Glee*'s ability to affect social change and would be

interested in collaborating on an article? *What if* it was more than just an article? Thus the idea for this text was born. It is our hope that, much like the show itself, this book not only continues conversations on creating directions for social change, but sparks new ones as well.

ESSAYS IN THIS BOOK

In the fall of 2009, the Fox network took a bold step in their primetime lineup. Borrowing from the success of reality music performance shows like its own *American Idol,* the network introduced us to the students at McKinley High School, a fictional high school in Lima, OH, and home to the glee club known as the New Directions. The group is made up of freaks and geeks who draw wrath and ire for being "different." The cool kids, i.e., the jocks and cheerleaders, are hell bent on making life difficult for the kids in glee club. Yet, because of the determination of Mr. Will Schuester, the glee club advisor, along with a few great songs, *Glee* has brought a new tone of inclusion to modern television and direct parallels can be seen between the experiences of the McKinley High show choir members and what is happening in contemporary society. *Glee* has shown the importance of examining the intersections of pop culture and social issues.

Written to be accessible and useful for college students and popular culture scholars alike, this multi-authored text features chapters written by scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Authors were asked to provide critical analyses of the show, its characters, and/or its overall usefulness as a commentary on social issues. The show's content regularly deals with such social issues as bullying, sexuality, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and family relations—topics that readily promote critical exploration. The editors of this manuscript take seriously the idea that popular entertainment is a cultural phenomenon and a way to understand social issues in America and, therefore, this text invites readers to examine the intersections between media, society, and the individual.

Perhaps atypical for a text of this nature, this collection of essays opens with a narrative of an experimental research report designed to test how the music and narrative of the show impacts viewers' attitudes and beliefs. Overall, results showed that *Glee* narratives which display uplifting stories about individuals who are stigmatized for being overweight/obese or pregnant teenagers/teen mothers, with or without music performance segments, positively predicted feelings of elevation. Additionally, feelings of elevation significantly predict increased positive attitudes toward the stigmatized group featured and behavioral intentions to help the stigmatized group. The results of this study set the framework for examination of this musical television show's treatment of contemporary social issues.

Over its five seasons, *Glee* has depicted various forms of bullying including social ostracism, cyber-bullying, physical threats and violence, and the terrible psychological cost for offenders, victims, and bystanders. More than any other issue, in its earlier

seasons, the producers and writers of *Glee* addressed the topic of bullying. The glee club members were regularly taunted and socially outcast. They were targeted for numerous reasons by the popular kids: sexuality, weight, race, clothing styles, and more. In the first and second seasons, New Directions members were physically assaulted and beaten up and lived in constant fear of having icy beverages thrown in their faces. In Chapter 2, the author reports on a content analysis of social media comments made by fans of the show regarding the show's treatment of "slushie facials". Chapter 3 addresses major and minor characters who served as bystanders to these social acts of aggression. This chapter examines what role Glee characters' multiple identities play in their actions as bystanders. These performances of multiple identities and as bystanders can serve as important cues in a culture struggling to understand the new face of bullying.

For a while in popular media, the buzz surrounding *Glee* focused on its bold portrayals of gay and lesbian characters and issues. The show was both panned and celebrated for giving characters like Kurt, Blaine, and Santana such important places in the show. The next several essays focus attention of how the writers and actors turned national conversation regarding matters of sexual orientation. Chapter 4 explores how the show can be pivotal in the social identity development of teens in high school. It speaks to the heteronormative opposition, in this case, the bullies Azimio and Karofsky, and the institutionalized system of power as represented by Principal Figgins, and how they continually plague the Glee club member's attempts to represent their identity through theatrical representation. However, this dogged determination to normalize the Glee club members only spurs them on, in order to create new systems of fluid and multi-dimensional identities, as evidenced by Tina and Finn's transformations throughout the episodes. These new systems of identity forged by the glee club students stands in stark contrast to the fixed stagnant normative ideas of identity that Butler criticizes in her argument concerning identity politics. Arguing both support for and criticism of the show's portrayals of gay characters and relationships, Chapter 5 challenges Kurt and Blaine's desires to get married following heteronormative relationship models. The author argues that the current nature of the television series' sexual politics has undermined its original message of diversity and exceptionality regarding gay teen sexual identities to encourage social normalization. Where the show once promoted expressions of gay sexual identities outside of dominant social structures, the series' current focus privileges establishing gay teen narratives situated in homonormative aspirations. Through a close analysis of characters' Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson's relationship, both throughout the show and in larger socio-historical contexts of marriage equality, it is argued that *Glee* has abandoned its message of social awareness and change to reinforce a need for public recognition and acceptance through assimilation into heteronormative institutions.

Perhaps in contrast to the previous essay, Chapter 6 reflects on how, as a medium, *Glee* allows gay male youth the opportunity to see their own needs and desires reflected—most often by Kurt and Blaine. This chapter argues that Kurt's and

Blaine's relationship provides gay youth with a different sexual script, one that is outside of the non-committal, frequent sexual experiences norm typically portrayed in media. Instead, the complexities of mature gay relationships are displayed, encouraging consciousness of self, commitment, and congruence, which are all hallmarks of social change.

Situated at the intersections of representations of gender and sexual orientation, the seventh essay examines representations of femininity of four diverse characters from *Glee*: Sue Sylvester, Coach Beiste, Santana Lopez, and Wade "Unique" Adams. While *Glee* has often privileged gay male sensibility and aesthetics and glorified culturally normative feminine aesthetics and heterosexual relationships, these four characters offer new and different possibilities for the performances of femininity on primetime television. Using queer and feminist theories, the author reads these four characters as challenging traditional feminine aesthetics and relational styles. Feminine characters that defy traditional heterosexist logics of femininity and heterosexuality are rare, but when these diverse performances are embodied by television personalities and consumed by a mass audience, these alternative representations of femininity disrupt sexist and heterosexist media systems that attempt to limit women's expressions. The diverse representations of femininity do the work of social justice by providing alternative models for feminine performances, imbued with agency and possibility. In some ways, the subject of identity is problematized and "solved" within the space of a particular episode.

In the essay "*Glee* and 'Born This Way': Therapeutic and Postracial Rhetoric", the author investigates how media has shifted to proclaim the beauty of difference and the need for individuals to embrace their supposed flaws including Lady Gaga's anthemic "Born This Way" wherein she proclaims that everyone – "black, white, beige, Chola descent" – is beautiful in their own way. Easily the most popular of the texts borne from this period, Gaga's approach is reflective of a shift to personal empowerment over an engagement with structural issues and ushers in what is functionally the "born this way" moment wherein personal empowerment is seen as *the* corrective to intolerance. Through an analysis of the episode's visual and verbal rhetorics, the author explores three keys ways in which *Glee* depoliticizes issues of race: a) making all oppressions equal, b) engaging in therapeutic talk that places the racialized on the therapy couch, and c) presence through absence. The essay suggests *Glee*'s approach serves to mask inequality in the status quo to argue that we are all one and the same and thus foreclose social change. The next chapter continues the discussion of problematic identity development. This chapter is concerned less with questions of such quality and more with the complexities of queer representation it has potentialized. The aim is to engage the contentious issue of LGBTQ representation on *Glee* by identifying moments in which the show has exhibited self-awareness of the representational problematics, specifically by focusing on the character of Kurt Hummel and the non-assimilable queerness he comes to represent.

   Chapter 10 examines the show's discourse around issues of ability/disability. The show's portrayal of disability parallels recurring patterns of problematic representations in popular media that are articulated to audiences under the guise of diversity and progressiveness. Informed by disability studies, this essay offers a critical analysis that seeks to uncover the discursive mechanisms by which the disabled body is re-enforced, contested, and potentially re-imagined in new directions for social change

   The content of the show often is reflective of real-life beyond the screen. Because of tragedies such as school shootings and even the death of one of its own stars, McKinley High School students have had to come to terms with the fleeting nature of mortality. In the next several chapters, the authors examine the students' search for meaning in life and death. Chapter 11 examines two such episodes where death is the main subject. In the episode "Grilled Cheesus" all of the New Directioners are struggling to discover what they believe and find meaning in the scary tragedy of Burt Hummel's heart attack. All of the students, teachers, and staff--including Sue Sylvester--journey through a significant spiritual quest asking meaningful questions and sorting through beliefs and the challenging concepts of faith. In the episode "The Quarterback" the entire cast pays tribute to the incomprehensible loss of Finn Hudson and again the search for meaning continues in the face of life-altering heartbreak. This chapter walks through the characters own questions of how to move forward while celebrating the life of one who inspired you as a critical component of spiritual formation and the search for meaning. Through the stages of grief the search for meaning begins with the simple yet complicated question: *Why?*

   Chapter 12, titled "On ~~My~~ Our Way: Gay Suicidal Logics and Queer Survival" digs into season three's fourteenth episode, "On My Way," wherein Dave Korofsky attempts to kill himself after being outed as gay and seemingly bullied, has cultural implications that exceed merely garnering social awareness of gay teen suicide. Rather, this chapter argues the episode works to reify a long established history of "gay suicidal logic," wherein mainstream discourse has work to make gay suicide a narrative convention that makes sense. While "On My Way" falls short of directly challenging several long-established narrative patterns that operate to naturalize gay teen suicide, the show sets forth a complicating and complex discourse of queer kinship; how different lives are constructed as grievable, how specific sexual relations are privileged, and to whom we, as an audience, are asked to identify with as "our" own—one of "us." The rash of school shootings in American high schools became fodder for the show's producers and in Chapter 13, the episode "Shooting Star" of *Glee* highlights the unfortunate reality of school shootings, but not in a manner that attempted to explain why shootings happen, nor how to prevent them, but rather from a perspective of using inclusiveness and community as a means to bring people together. Viewers witnessed many examples of how individuals create inclusiveness and communities, and ultimately places where individuals feel like they are cared about as members of the group. This feeling of membership creates a bond of love, and when faced with a challenging situation, the member feels

secure knowing that there is a support system for them. Too often in today's society, individuals go without being recognized by others, or are not included in a group or community, leaving that person to feel alone in the world, and unsure of how to react when faced with adversity. Perhaps one of the most important episodes in its latest seasons, Chapter 14 takes a look at the "Swan Song" of actor Cory Monteith, whose death is a devastating loss for the actors, writers, and producers as well as the series itself. In the episode, titled "The Quarterback," *Glee* offers its characters and viewers the means to memorialize Finn by celebrating his life in and through song. This can be considered *Glee*'s most difficult and rewarding performance—providing an outlet for grief that could otherwise leave the characters and viewers in stasis, unable to move on. *Glee*'s convincing performance is in its proposal of a new approach to grief-work, a means for addressing and combatting loss. In "The Quarterback," *Glee* introduces the possibilities of grief-work, performed in the dynamic combination of song, dance, and speech acts.

The final chapters help to round out understanding about the role of the show in helping audiences to understand social justice more broadly. Most of these conversations focus on race, gender, sexual orientation and religion. What about the experiences of those who may be overweight as a matter of inclusion? The essay, "Defying Gravity: Are *Glee*'s Fat-Bottomed Girls Helping Us Rise Above Fat Stereotypes?" posits that while a diverse cast is *de rigueur* nowadays, overweight women are still routinely passed up for leading roles and asked to reprise a handful of supporting roles, which, even at their best, are one-dimensional, tired depictions that do little to change the public's perception of fat women. In the midst of a grim sea of sameness, the hit series *Glee* appeared to offer a beacon of hope. Perhaps it was the island-of-misfit-toys feel of the show or the creative team's willingness to take on controversial issues that made it seem like fertile ground to begin to problematize the archetypal portrayal of overweight women. Characters like Lauren Zizes and Mercedes Jones hinted at a promise to eschew the stereotypes and maybe serve up a fresh alternative to the clichéd identities to which heavy women are circumscribed on the screen. The question is: Did they deliver?

The final essay brings our original concept of mattering versus marginality full circle. Our first conversation about this show centered on the disparate methods employed by the main adult leaders, Mr. Schuester and Miss Sylvester. It is very clear that the show values the roles of teachers, parents, and other adults in the shaping of young minds. In the concluding chapter, the author challenges the representation of the guidance counselor, Miss Pillsbury, in the ways she supports students' learning about social justice. Miss Pillsbury is one of the most lovable characters on Glee. Her cluelessness as a high school guidance counselor offers much comic relief to counter some of the more serious topics taken on by the show's writers. Unfortunately, this is the one aspect of the show that does some of the greatest disservice to *Glee's* mostly millennial generation audience. The role of a guidance counselor is key in assisting students in their educational journey, especially as it pertains to advocating for social justice. This article presents some suggestions to *Glee* writers on how they

could further strengthen its advocacy for a just and equal society by adopting a more reciprocal and transformational leadership style for Miss Pillsbury.

Like the show itself, the essays in this book invite fans of the show and even casual viewers to question important societal issues. Following the lives of these characters, we are challenged to care about the human beings—not the categories to which they may belong—who are often within arms' reach of us at any given moment. At the core, this show offers viewers an opportunity to look within themselves, question beliefs and behaviors, and ultimately decide to make a positive difference in the lives of others. That is the goal of social change.

GLEEK OUT!

SECTION 1

THE FRAMEWORK

DREW SHADE, KEUNYEONG KIM, EUN-HWA JUNG &
MARY BETH OLIVER

1. USING THE "NEW DIRECTIONS" TO MOVE MEDIA VIEWERS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTIONS

Examining the Effects of Glee *Narratives on Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions towards Stigmatized Groups*

Great concern exists about the marginalization of stigmatized groups in the United States (Link & Phelan, 2013). Stigma involves the severe social disapproval of a person based solely on possession of unique features or characteristics that set them apart from others in society (Goffman, 1990). Numerous negative outcomes are associated with stigma, including stereotyping, neglect, devalued social identity, discrimination, and prejudice (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). According to Allport (1954), prejudice can be defined simply as "thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant" (p. 6). This definition includes the two essential components needed to understand the concept. Those components are a judgment that is unfounded (otherwise known as a belief), and the tone or feeling associated with that judgment (or an attitude). When people act out on their prejudicial attitudes and beliefs, the results can include discrimination, avoidance, physical attacks, and even extermination (Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Ford, 2013).

Although negative media depictions of stigmatized groups can serve to exacerbate or create social stigma, new research has shown that, in some cases, media have the ability to reduce negative perceptions (Gapinski, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2006; Teachman, Gapinski, Brownell, Rawlins, & Jeyaram, 2003) and improve attitudes toward stigmatized groups (Ramasubramanian, 2007; Swift et al., 2013). To expand this line of inquiry into the context of entertainment television that deals with a range of social issues, the musical-dramedy program *Glee* was selected as the focus of our research, as it is consistently viewed as a "progressive turn in television representation" (Meyer & Wood, 2013, p. 446). Specifically, we conducted a social scientific experiment to investigate whether narratives from *Glee*, that feature the struggles of stigmatized characters paired with musical performance, have the ability to improve attitudes toward stigmatized groups through feelings of elevation. Elevation is defined as "a warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they see unexpected acts of human goodness, kindness, and compassion. [that] makes a person want to help others and to become a better person himself or herself" (Haidt, 2000, p. 1-2). Since elevation is an emotional state (Haidt, 2000), we reasoned

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that musical performance may be able to raise levels of elevation due to increased *emotional understanding*, or accurate comprehension of the emotions that are intended to be communicated (Juslin, 2000; Juslin & Laukka, 2003), thus resulting in more pronounced effects.

This study extends and contributes to prior media effects research and scholarly understanding of the impact of *Glee* in at least two ways. First, given that media psychology has only recently begin to explore the emotional response of elevation (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012), this study extends this line of research by analyzing the influence of elevation on attitudes and behavioral intentions toward stigmatized groups in the context of *Glee* narratives. Second, the effects of music and musical performance, especially in terms of the vocal expression of emotion, are vastly understudied (Scherer, 1995). Consequently, this study was conducted to help fill this gap in understanding and to investigate the impact of *Glee* given its widespread reach to a large audience (Wood & Baughman, 2012).

THE EFFECTS OF ELEVATION AND MUSIC ON ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

Elevation has been characterized as a meaningful affective state that is a response to seeing exemplary acts of virtue or moral good and that often result in heightened altruistic motivations. Elevation is also characterized by mixed affect, similar to feelings of bittersweet emotions, in which a person experiences both happiness and sadness at the same time (Haidt, 2003). Additionally, elevated individuals typically also report experiencing physical responses, including warm or "tingling feelings" in their chest, after watching media content containing depiction of humanity and its better nature (Haidt, Algoe, Meijer, & Tam, 2002). Media studies have found that consuming meaningful media that depict moral virtues (e.g., kindness and compassion) stimulates feelings of elevation signified by mixed affectation and physical reactions, as well as heightened motivations to exemplify the moral virtues by being better people or helping others (Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012).

Because elevation is conceptualized as an emotional state (Haidt, 2000), prior research (Juslin, 2000; Juslin & Laukka, 2003) implies that music and musical performance may be able to raise levels of elevation due to increased emotional understanding as noted previously (Juslin & Laukka, 2003). This reasoning is based on the idea that music often does more than just *express* emotions; music also *produces* emotions (Scherer & Zentner, 2001). Music is an important part of almost any media viewing experience, and some scholars argue that music may be the most efficient way of expressing emotions via media (Kalinak, 2010). Within the context of television, music contributes to the establishment of a general mood, which allows for a viewing experience that involves emotions that are both deep and sincere (Cohen, 2001). Music often serves several functions in this televisual context, including: (1) directing attention to the most important features on the screen; (2) inducing mood; (3) communicating meaning and furthering the narrative;

(4) causing the viewer to become integrated within the program through memory recall; and (5) heightening the sense of absorption into or reality of the program by "augmenting arousal and increasing attention" (Cohen, 2001, p. 259).

Several studies have shown that musical performance has a strong influence on emotional expression and can communicate emotions such as sadness, fear, anger and happiness (see Juslin, 2000; Juslin & Laukka, 2003). A review of 41 studies on musical performance found that there is often great accuracy in terms of the emotions that the communicator intended to relay and what emotional understanding took place on behalf of the receiver (Juslin & Laukka, 2003). To ascertain the impact of musical performance and emotional understanding, Gotell, Brown, and Ekman (2007) looked at the impact of singing and background music on dementia patients' emotions and moods. Gotell et al. (2007) found that singing enhanced positive emotions, sincerity, and intimacy in caregiver-patient interactions. Based on the research reviewed here and the desired aims of this study, we proposed the following hypothesis regarding the relationship between uplifting stories and the musical performances featured in *Glee* narratives:

> **H1:** *Glee* narratives featuring the struggles of stigmatized characters will be more effective at inducing feelings of elevation when the content is presented with a musical performance as opposed to no musical performance.

Positive emotions, such as empathy, have been found to influence attitudes toward stigmatized groups in a favorable manner (Teachman et al., 2003). Similarly, prior research has shown that feelings of elevation are associated with changes in attitudes toward others (Haidt et al., 2002). As such, we proposed our second hypothesis:

> **H2:** Feelings of elevation elicited from *Glee* narratives will lead to favorable attitudes toward the featured stigmatized groups.

Previous research has shown that feelings of elevation have the potential to motivate people to perform positive behaviors in general (Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012), and toward stigmatized or oppressed groups in particular. For example, Freeman, Aquino, and McFerranm (2009) reported that feelings of elevation served to mitigate the negative effects of social dominance on White's contributions to a charitable organization assisting African Americans. With this research we mind, we proposed the following hypothesis:

> **H3:** Feelings of elevation elicited from *Glee* narratives will result in positive behavioral intentions toward the featured stigmatized groups.

While the previous hypothesis proposed that feelings of elevation will lead to specific behavioral intentions, the final hypothesis examined whether favorable attitudes, as opposed to elevation alone, would lead to specific behavioral intentions. Batson et al. (1997) reported positive associations between favorable attitudes toward a stigmatized group and intentions to behave in a way that was beneficial for that group (Batson et al., 1997). Likewise, Oliver, Dillard, Bae, and Tamul (2012) found

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that favorable attitudes toward stigmatized groups elicited by narrative-formatted news stories led to heightened prosocial behavioral intentions toward the group as well as to actual behaviors such seeking more information about them (Oliver, Dillard, et al., 2012). Based on these results, we proposed our final hypothesis:

H4: Favorable attitudes toward stigmatized groups will be positively associated with intentions to perform behaviors that are beneficial to those groups.

METHOD

Study Design and Participants

The present study employed an experimental design using six video clips that featured three versions of different *Glee* content (story with a musical performance, story only, or a control condition) and two different types of stigmatized groups (the overweight/obese or pregnant teenagers/teen mothers). The sample included a total of 270 undergraduate students, which were 61.1% female and 77.4% White/Caucasian. The average age of participants was 19.76 ($SD = 2.17$), with a range of 18 to 30 years. Participants were recruited by offering extra credit for participation, and the study was conducted online. After completion of the informed consent form, the participants were asked a series of questions regarding their demographics and general media habits. Subsequently, they were shown one of the six video clips based on the study design. After watching the video, participants answered questions pertaining to their media experiences, including feelings of elevation, explicit attitudes, and behavioral intentions tied to their reactions to the clip they had just viewed.

Experimental Conditions

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three *Glee* narrative conditions that depicted one of the two stigmatized groups featured in the study. Participants in the story-with-musical-performance condition viewed a four-minute uplifting clip from *Glee*, which depicted a character's struggles as part of a stigmatized group, followed by a three-minute musical number where the character sings with the school glee club, "The New Directions," about their situation. Those in the story-only condition saw only the four-minute uplifting clip, and those in the control condition saw a brief recap of an episode of *Glee* with no uplifting content or musical number. We chose to compare two different stigmatized groups in order to test whether the *Glee* narratives, particularly when paired with a musical performance, might have a similar effect for each stigmatized groups. Feelings of elevation should function well in relation to these uplifting narratives, as they feature acts of moral beauty (Haidt, 2000) where characters are shown helping others deal with their struggles as

part of a stigmatized group. The narrative-congruent musical numbers allow for a continuation of elevation felt as they involve a group of friends rallying around and building up a specific character as they sing together.

Stimulus Material

Because this research was interested in studying stigmatized groups per se rather than any specific group or issue associated with stigmatization, two different stigmatized groups were examined in this research: (1) the overweight and obese and (2) pregnant teenagers and teen mothers. For the first group, weight bias (or anti-fat bias) involves widely held perceptions that the overweight and obese possess a range of negative personality characteristics including laziness or lack of willpower and flaws in "competence, attractiveness, and even morality" (Schwartz, Vartanian, Nosek, & Brownell, 2006, p. 440). For the second group, negative perceptions of pregnant teenagers and teen mothers include the idea that these individuals are lazy, a burden on the nation's economy, likely failures in schooling and social settings, and even the personification of a societal problem (Kaplan, 1997; Kelly, 1997; Lesko, 1995). Each condition focused on one of two characters and their struggles as part of a stigmatized group: either an overweight young woman (Mercedes played by Amber Riley) or a pregnant teenager (Quinn played by Dianna Agron).

In the overweight/obese narrative clip, taken from the episode "Home" (S1:E16) (Falchuk & Barclay, 2010), Mercedes had previously joined the cheerleading squad, and in this narrative, was asked by her coach (Sue Sylvester played by Jane Lynch) to lose 10 pounds. Mercedes had been overweight for a long time, but had always been very comfortable with who she was. However, when pressured by Sue and her teammates, her status as part of a stigmatized group started to take its toll. The story clip ends with her emotionally discussing her situation with another student in the glee club. In the story/musical-performance condition, participants watched as Mercedes began singing "Beautiful" (Perry, 2002) and was then joined by members of the glee club and other students in attendance at a high school assembly.

In the pregnant teenagers/teen mothers narrative clip, taken from the episode "Throwdown" (S1:E7) (Falchuk & Murphy, 2009), Quinn had known that she was pregnant and was having difficulty dealing with the idea that people were going to start finding out. The members of the glee club also knew about Quinn's pregnancy and had chosen to keep her secret. Throughout the clip, Quinn struggled to maintain her status as the most popular girl in school by hiding the truth and doing her best to avoid being part of a stigmatized group. Toward the end of the clip, more and more people learned the truth and had negative reactions to the news. The story clip ends with one student posting the news on his blog and Quinn crying as she realizes everyone knew. In the story/musical-performance condition, participants watched as Quinn sang "Keep Holding On" (Lavigne & Gottwald, 2006) with the rest of the glee club.

Measures

Elevation. To assess feelings of elevation experienced during exposure, the participants responded to a number of closed-ended affect items. Responses were gathered on scales from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). The affective reaction items included in the measure were: uplifted, tearful, compassionate, inspired, hopeful, elevated, moved, tender, and meaningful (Oliver, 2008; Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012; Cronbach's alpha = .96).

Favorable attitudes. The 7-item measure of attitudes was adapted from Batson et al. (1997) and included the following items tailored for the specific stigmatized group condition (overweight or obese people/pregnant teenagers and teen mothers): "For most [stigmatized group], their problems are usually all their own fault", "When [stigmatized group] have problems, they are usually ones that these people could have avoided", "How much do you personally care about the plight of [stigmatized group]?", "Our society does not do enough to help [stigmatized group]", "Compared with other social problems we face today (e.g., education, homelessness, energy conservation), how would you rate the importance of helping [stigmatized group]?", "Our society should do more to protect the welfare of [stigmatized group]", and "In general, what are your feelings toward [stigmatized group]?" Responses were gathered on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), Cronbach's alpha = .77.

Behavioral intentions toward stigmatized groups. A measure of behavioral intentions was constructed based on a modified version of a scale produced by Peng, Lee, and Heeter (2008). The instructions asked the participants to rate how willing they would be to engage in different types of behavior to assist the stigmatized group depicted in the clip they viewed. The 4-item measure included the following items: "Donate money to help fund crucial awareness and advocacy programs needed to assist [stigmatized group]", "Sign a petition to build the political pressure needed to assist [stigmatized group]", "Discuss with family or friends the issues facing [stigmatized group]", and "Forward the link of a news story to friends to disseminate the message about the issues facing [stigmatized group]. Responses were gathered on a scale from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*) Cronbach's alpha = .85.

RESULTS

Our first hypothesis (**H1**) predicted that uplifting media content featuring stigmatized groups would be more effective at eliciting feelings of elevation when paired with a musical number. A statistical test using a one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons revealed significant differences in feeling of elevation among the participants in the three conditions: story with musical performance, story only, and control group, $F(2, 263) = 32.56, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. The findings indicated that

the participants in the control conditions who viewed only a brief recap of an episode of *Glee* experienced less elevation ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.28$) than those who viewed a story with a musical performance ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.41$) or those who viewed a story only ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.32$). However, contrary to predictions, the results of the post-hoc test indicated that there was no difference in the levels of elevation between those viewing a story with a musical performance and those viewing a story only ($p = .23$), suggesting that the story alone was effective at eliciting elevation. In order to report this finding, both the story/musical performance and story-only conditions were entered as separate predictors in the predicted model as comparison of each condition to the control condition.

A path analysis was employed to test our remaining hypotheses. Several indicators were used to assess the overall fit of the research model: chi-square ($\chi2$), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the comparative fit index (CFI) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The initially hypothesized model (see Figure 1) produced a poor fit: $\chi^2 (7) = 11.76$, $p < .05$, CFI $= .973$, RMSEA $= .121$, 90% CI: .031 to .144. An examination of the regression weights and modification indices suggested that exposure to the story with a musical performance had a direct effect on behavioral intentions toward stigmatized groups. Consequently, a path from the story/musical-performance condition to behavioral intentions was added to the final model (see Figure 2).

The final model evidenced support for many of the hypothesized relationships and was a good representation of the data: $\chi^2 (3) = 6.69$, $p < .001$, CFI $= .987$, and RMSEA $= .068$, 90% CI: .000 to .139. As our second hypothesis (**H2)** predicted, those who felt elevated by viewing *Glee* showed a greater tendency to form favorable attitudes toward the stigmatized group featured in a video clip ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$). In addition, feelings of elevation were significantly associated with heightened behavioral intentions for helping the stigmatized groups ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), thereby supporting our third hypothesis (**H3)**. Finally, consistent with our last hypothesis (**H4)**, those who showed favorable attitudes toward the stigmatized groups also showed greater levels of intentions to help those in the stigmatized group ($\beta = .60$, $p < .001$).
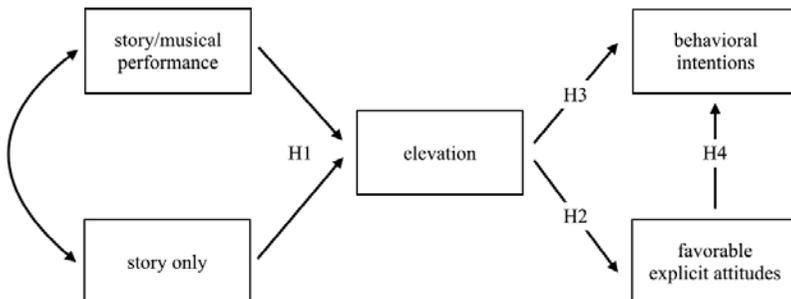

Figure 1. Initial Hypothesized Model
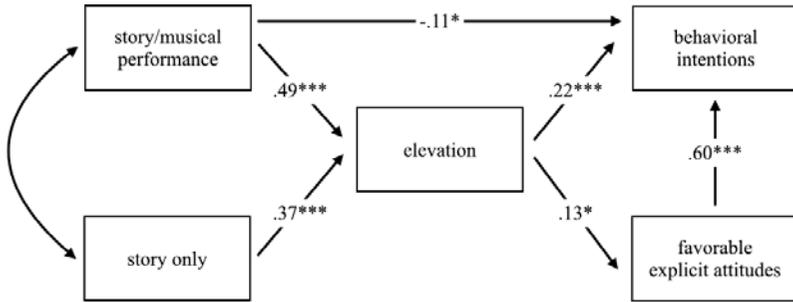
Figure 2. Final Model
$^{*}p < .05.\ ^{**}p < .01.\ ^{***}p < .001$

Interestingly, the additional direct path leading from the story/musical performance condition to behavioral intentions was negative (β = -.11, p < .05), indicating that viewing a story with a musical performance was negatively associated with intentions to help the stigmatized group. However, this negative path in the model reflects an instance of suppression. In other words, heightened favorable behavioral intentions toward the stigmatized groups can be formed only when the musical performance successfully elicit feelings of elevation — a interpretation that we will consider further in the discussion.

Follow-up analyses were conducted on this model to assess any possible indirect effects in the final model. These analyses employed bootstrapping procedures using 2000 bootstrap samples and a bias-corrected confidence interval of 95%. These analyses showed that both the story-only (β = .05, p < .05) and the story/musical-performance conditions (β = .06, p < .05) were indirectly related to more favorable attitudes toward stigmatized groups via heightened levels of elevation. Likewise, heightened levels of elevation were indirectly associated with behavioral intentions toward people in stigmatized groups via favorable attitudes (β = .08, p < .05). Finally, significant total indirect effects were revealed for both the story-only (β = .11, p < .001) and the story/musical performance conditions (β = .15, p < .001) on behavioral intentions.

Two final tests used multiple-group analysis to test the invariance of the findings across different groupings, including stigmatization type and gender. The first analysis examined potential differences in the model as a function of stigmatization type: obesity or teen pregnancy. The analysis revealed no significant differences between the two groups, indicating that the final model was similar for both stigmatization types. Given prior research reporting gender differences in empathy (and particularly with self-report measures, e.g., Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983), a second multiple-group analysis examined structural invariance for male and female participants. The analysis reflected no significant differences for gender, showing that the model operated in the same way for males and females.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Findings from this study provided evidence that uplifting *Glee* narratives featuring characters that are stigmatized for being overweight/obese or pregnant teenagers/ teen mothers, positively predicted feelings of elevation, with or without musical performance segments. Although both the story/musical-performance and the story-only conditions significantly predicted feelings of elevation compared to the control condition, the story/musical-performance condition was not significantly better at predicting elevation when compared to the story only condition (though the means were in the predicted direction). As such, regardless of the presence of a musical performance, these narratives were able to result in feelings of elevation for the participants included in the study. Additionally, feelings of elevation were consistent for both male and female participants and were also consistent for both stigmatized groups featured.

Consistent with the findings in previous research (Oliver, Dillard, et al., 2012; Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012), elevation significantly predicted increased favorable attitudes toward the stigmatized group featured in the narrative and behavioral intentions to help those featured stigmatized groups. Evidence for these relationships showed that the feelings elicited by viewing *Glee* narratives resulted in both favorable attitudes toward and intentions to help the stigmatized groups, meaning that in this context, watching *Glee* can lead to several positive and prosocial effects. In addition, favorable attitudes toward stigmatized groups were also found to be a predictor of behavioral intention, showing that both feelings of elevation and favorable attitudes predicted by elevation led to behavioral intentions. This result highlights the argument that attitudes can be strong predictors of behavioral intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Additionally, our analysis revealed several indirect effects between variables. First, the relationships between the *Glee* narratives and favorable attitudes toward the stigmatized groups were mediated by feelings of elevation, meaning that exposure to the *Glee* elicited elevation, and that this elevation, in turn, predicted favorable attitudes. Second, in addition to directly predicting behavioral intentions, feelings of elevation also indirectly predicted behavioral intentions via favorable explicit attitudes (Oliver, Dillard, et al., 2012). This indirect effect indicates that elevated feelings can lead to favorable attitudes, which in turn predict intentions to help, and that elevated feelings alone can also predict intentions to help.

Interestingly, however, the result also demonstrated a suppression effect, manifest in the negative effect of watching the story/musical-performance on behavioral intentions. This suppression effect indicated that only those who were successfully elevated by viewing the musical performance showed increased behavioral intentions toward the stigmatized groups. When the musical performance condition failed to create feelings of elevation among the participants, they reported decreased behavioral intentions to help those in the featured stigmatized groups. The findings of this study indicate that *Glee* producers should seek to carefully select the musical

performances for these narratives. If the desire is to have a positive impact on the viewing audience, this careful selection should be executed in order to maintain the narratives' ability to reduce negative attitudes, via feelings of elevation, toward the featured stigmatized groups.

Finally, the relationship between the *Glee* narratives and behavioral intentions were mediated by feelings of elevation. This finding may reflect the idea that feeling elevated increases prosocial behavior, generosity, engagement, or simply a desire to increase others' well being, irrespective of attitudes about the target group. The results are consistent with prior research showing that feelings of empathy and compassion increase altruistic desire to improve the welfare of others and to help people in need (Batson, 1991; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). Overall, what was evident from this study is that viewing stigmatized group narratives from *Glee* has a range of positive and prosocial effects on the audience.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

As with any social scientific experiment, there are limitations that deserve our consideration. However, these limitations often point to significant and likely fruitful possibilities for future research. First, although undergraduate students are often employed in mass media research, this practice may compromise the ability to generalize, or apply the findings, to other people, and especially other age groups. The age of the participants in this study is important to consider, as previous research has shown that college students are more open to attitude change at this stage of their life than at other later stages (Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991). In the future, it may prove interesting to include a more diverse sample of participants in a similar study while testing for age differences, especially since we know that as a person grows older, their attitudes tend to stabilize and they are less open to change (Alwin & Scott, 1996).

The second limitation is based on the use of the specific, selected narratives from the program and the popular music employed as stimulus material. Since *Glee* is a "popular-music-meets-show-choir-meets-prime-time-television-series" (Wood & Baughman, 2012, p. 330), the reason for selection was clear, as other options were limited. However, using an existing program in a experiment like this likely meant that most of the participants were at least somewhat familiar with the program and possessed some preconceived notions about the series, even if they were not regular viewers. Notwithstanding, *Glee* does lend itself well to research on stigmatized groups, as the struggles of those characters have often been depicted in program storylines including those with mental illness, racial or ethnic groups, and so on. Consequently, future research should seek to include different stigmatized groups as the existing content from *Glee* allows. Additionally, the popular music featured in the story/musical performance condition may have also resulted in an additional concern regarding familiarity and enjoyment. As the songs used in the stimulus need

to be story-congruent, further work in this area may consider the use of different music types, including instrumental or original songs.

The final limitation to discuss concerns the use of self-report measures employed in the questionnaire. In terms of self-report measures, it is widely known by social scientists that measures of this kind are not foolproof or entirely accurate as study participants may choose to not be completely honest for a number of reasons. In this study, the questions asked the participants about their attitudes toward stigmatized groups. These types of questions often run the risk of being susceptible to problems of social desirability, in which participants answer in ways to make themselves look good rather than to indicate their actual attitudes.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study provided an interesting look at the impact of *Glee* narratives and the concept of elevation with its effect on attitudes and behavioral intentions toward stigmatized groups. The findings indicate that both *Glee* narrative conditions resulted in strong feelings of elevation (when compared to the control group), and that elevation lead to favorable attitudes toward the stigmatized groups featured, which in turn resulted in behavioral intentions to help those groups. Evidence of this kind is optimistic about the future of media content, and especially in contrast to studies dealing with stereotype and negative attitude formation toward stigmatized groups. Due to the impact of *Glee* and based on the results gathered in this study, there is a strong need to continue this line of research in terms of the positive effects of *Glee* and similar types of media entertainment that elicit feelings of elevation, that feature musical performances, and that lead to improved attitudes and behavioral intentions toward stigmatized groups. We began this chapter by noting that the existence and effect of social stigma is undeniable. In fact, stigmatization is a process that must be addressed and dealt with on a daily basis. What better way to deliver positive and prosocial messages to large numbers of people than through entertainment media content like *Glee* that is inspiring and uplifting?

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SECTION 2
BULLYING

KIMBERLEY WALSH

2. A GLEEK PERSPECTIVE ON SLUSHIE FACIALS

Fan Forum Posts about Portrayals of Bullying on Glee

The news has been abuzz with coverage of teen bullying, as well as tragic bullying-related suicides (coined "bullycides"), for several years. This media attention escalated in January 2010, when 15-year-old Phoebe Prince took her own life as a result of relentless torment from her peers (Melnick, 2010), and continues with the recent story of 15-year-old Bart Palosz, who shot himself in August 2013 after enduring years of physical and verbal harassment at school (Hussey & Leland, 2013). Concurrently, the common perception of bullying as a "rite of passage" or "kids being kids" has shifted. As evidenced by proposed federal cyberbullying laws, more than one hundred state-level bills addressing bullying, the naming of October as "National Bullying Awareness Month," and White House conferences dedicated to anti-bullying measures, the phenomenon of teen bullying is now understood as a major social issue (Calmes, 2011; U. S. Department of Education, 2011; Strickland, 2010).

Likely reacting to the news media's emphasis on teen bullying, entertainment television creators have followed suit, highlighting the issue of bullying through story arcs, special episodes, and public service announcements starring popular actors – seemingly in an effort to raise awareness of the pervasiveness and serious consequences of bullying. Unsurprisingly, teen-oriented television is one genre that has featured bullying in these ways. With their focus on teen characters, perspectives, and issues, sizable reach among young viewers, and tendency to take place in a school setting, teen-oriented shows have the potential to be a primary source of information (particularly about school-related issues) for teens (Ross, 2008a).

As reflected by the portmanteau of "glee" and "geek" used to describe fans of the series, as well as the "loser" hand gesture that forms the "L" in the series' logo, *Glee* is at its core, a show "about high school social outcasts finding redemption in a glee club" (Braxton, 2010, para. 1). Therefore, the series provides a unique platform for frequent portrayals of bullying involving victims (main characters) with whom "gleeks" likely identify and sympathize. Indeed, *Glee* creators have frequently and consistently tackled the topic of bullying on the show, with multiple story arcs focused on bullying (e.g., Kurt being targeted for his sexuality and Rory, a foreign exchange student, being targeted as an outsider) and recurring plot events, such as

"slushie facials,"[1] that illustrate the ubiquity of bullying in the lives of the main characters.

Considering that programs such as *Glee* have the opportunity to provide young viewers with messages about bullying, it is important to understand the possible implications of these messages. Contributing to this understanding, decades of media effects research have pointed to the potential harmful effects of exposure to media aggression (see Anderson & Huesmann, 2003; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963; Berkowitz, 1964; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Moreover, studies have shown that exposure to media portrayals of types of aggression commonly involved in bullying (physical, verbal, and social) can promote and reinforce aggressive tendencies, reactions, and cognitive responses among adolescent and young-adult viewers (Chory-Assad, 2004; Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2004; Slater, Swaim, & Anderson, 2003). More specifically, studies have revealed that certain contextual elements of aggressive portrayals (e.g., rewarded violence or violence performed by the "good guy"), also referred to as "high-risk factors," increase the likelihood of negative media effects (Smith et al., 1998). Coincidentally, a growing body of research has begun to investigate the context of portrayals of social aggression and bullying within teen-targeted media (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008; Walsh, 2012).

While such effects-focused research is useful in providing an overview of bullying-related television content and its potential implications, it does not acknowledge the potential benefits of prosocial bullying narratives that raise awareness of bullying as an issue, suggest potential remedies or appropriate responses to bullying, and in turn, promote social change. Nor does it fully capture how young viewers are actively interpreting, reworking, and responding to these messages within their natural, multimedia environments. Regarding contemporary television studies, Gray (2008) proposed, "If we wish to study a program's effects, its power, its viewers' identification with it… we must always be prepared to update our understanding of it by examining its various reproductions, interpretations, uses, and forms" (p. 101).

The notion of the boundlessness of media texts is particularly relevant to teens' media worlds. While television remains their preferred media choice, teen consumers are increasingly integrating their television viewing experiences with their online activity, which tends to revolve around entertainment and communication (Nielsen Company, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2009a, 2009b). In fact, based on a consumer survey about television viewing and Internet activities, Ross (2008a) concluded that the "Millennial way of watching" television involves practices such as discussing the show with friends, writing about it in an online journal, and chatting about it in online forums (p. 140). Based on these trends, a teen television text can no longer be understood in isolation, as it is often consumed within a vast network of texts, intertexts, and intra-texts that are available at the click of a button. While it is impossible examine all of the texts within this ever-expanding network, the current study explores one source of these messages—online fan forums.

While seemingly underused in the media research literature, discourse produced in online fan communities can provide valuable insight into fans' reception of media

content, as well as the types of intertexts these fans create through their discussions (Jenkins, 2006a). Tapping into this fruitful resource, this chapter is an exploratory analysis of fan responses to depictions of bullying on *Glee* as described in posts to the Glee Forum, a fan community dedicated to the series. Responding to prior effects-oriented research and providing the groundwork for future research, it aims to provide insight into how fans are receiving, responding to, and reworking messages about bullying as portrayed on teen television.

ISSUES IN THE LITERATURE

Complicating the process of audience reception studies, numerous scholars have emphasized how the evolving media landscape has altered practices of media consumption and more specifically, practices of fandom (e.g., Jenkins, 2006a; Hills, 2002). Consequently, they have called for new approaches in the media studies field that account for these changes (e.g., Booth, 2010; Gray, 2008). Additionally, an abundance of scholarship has emphasized that TV texts are not consumed in isolation, but within a network of multiple intertexts, some of which include fan discourse (e.g., Brooker, 2004; Ross, 2008b). This work emphasizes that in addition to providing a glimpse of how fans are interpreting portrayals of bullying on TV, an analysis of fan forum discussions will also provide a sample of the fan-produced messages that contribute to the larger intertextual network surrounding a TV text. The following review will address these issues in the literature, particularly as they pertain to online fan practices, the convergence of traditional media content and online fandom, and the analysis of online fan communities and the texts they produce/circulate.

FANDOM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Complicating the process of reception studies, research has shown that the Internet has transformed, and in some ways, intensified the practices of television fans. Theorists have emphasized how new media technologies give viewers more channels through which to communicate, providing a digital "water cooler" where viewers can share reactions to media content (Jenkins, 2006a). Along these lines, digital technologies have transformed fandom into a more mainstream phenomenon, allowing "regular" consumers to engage in participatory culture and encouraging online fandom surrounding a wider variety of shows—outside the realm of traditional "cult TV" (Brooker, 2004; Hills, 2004; Jenkins, 2006b; Ross, 2008b). This transition of fandom from marginalized toward mainstream suggests that analyzing the discourse within online fan communities may in fact provide a glimpse of how some "average" fans are responding to television content.

Scholars have also discussed how the Internet has changed fan practices in terms of both time and space. Hills (2002), for example, used the phrase "just in time fandom" to describe how fans can now respond immediately to live television

content (p. 78-79). The literature also emphasizes how the Internet has opened lines of communication among fans from diverse locations and walks of life, who would not normally interact. As Jenkins (2006b) explained, this has led to online discussions in which the participants have divergent "taken-for-granted interpretive and evaluative norms," and thus, remarkably different responses to content (p. 142). In light of these trends, an analysis of fan forum posts has the potential to reveal immediate, natural responses to television content from fans representing a variety of locations and perspectives.

Two other richly theorized elements of fandom are the intertextuality it produces or circulates and the relationships it fosters between audiences and creators. Recently, theorists have discussed how the new media landscape has changed these aspects of fan culture. For instance, Jenkins (2006a) described how cultural, economic, and technological changes have brought us to an age of "media convergence," in which "fans of a popular television series may sample dialogue, summarize episodes, debate subtexts, create original fan fiction, record their own soundtracks, make their own movies—and distribute all of this worldwide via the Internet" (p. 16). Other scholars have focused on how the products of this participatory culture function as supplementary texts (or intertexts) that extend the television viewing experience. Brooker (2004), for example, used the term "overflow" to describe how "the text of the TV show is no longer limited to the television medium" (p. 569). Expanding on this, Gray (2008) noted that media researchers are finding it increasingly difficult to "pin down exactly what and where the program [they] are studying is" and "are likely to find it only reflected off the audiences who consume it, and off its various instances of overflow" (p. 100-101).

Adding yet another level of complexity to this conception of a network of meanings and interactions surrounding TV texts, Ross (2008b) incorporated the reciprocal relationships between audiences and industry and referred to the resulting web of connections as "aesthetics of multiplicity" (p. 22). She described how the relationships between viewers and TV creators are constantly shifting; viewers may consume, discuss, critique, or remix texts (and intertexts), and creators may respond directly or indirectly within episodes, or through invitations encouraging viewers to continue their participation, engagement and extension of the text (Ross, 2008b). According to Ross, as these interactions and texts continue to multiply, "the 'text' proper of the TV series becomes inextricable from the text of the Internet site" (p. 22).

Constructs such as convergence, overflow, and aesthetics of multiplicity demonstrate why television content should not be studied as an isolated text, but rather as one text within an extensive intertextual network. These theoretical frameworks also highlight the increasing relevance and pervasiveness of online fandom, particularly as it relates to television. Taken as a whole, they point to the value of analyzing online fan discourse alongside television texts.

STUDIES OF ONLINE FANDOM

Trends across Fan Communities

Complementing the ongoing theorization of online fandom, researchers have conducted in-depth research focused on online fan groups and activities related to specific television series in order to gain a more detailed understanding of their function, structure, content, and members. Such studies have revealed how online fan communities function in distinctive ways, based on (1) the content or theme of the show/genre on which they focus and (2) the characteristics, needs, and motivations of their members.

Jenkins (2006b), for instance, observed that the primary objective of members of a *Twin Peaks* Usenet discussion group was to use collective intelligence to "crack codes" – a goal tied to the series' classification as a mystery show. He also found that many female fans in the group were interested in discussing characters' evolving relationships – a practice related to the needs of a community subgroup. Similarly, in his extensive ethnography of the Bronze, the official online community of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Ali (2009) found that the community promoted a postmodern perspective and encouraged critical discussions that questioned accepted norms – two themes that reflected the standpoint taken by the *Buffy* series. Additionally, he concluded that the appeal of the community was that it brought together people who identified with marginalization, filling a need specific to community members. Along the same lines, Baym's (1999) ethnography of a soap opera Usenet newsgroup revealed that much of what happened within the community (e.g., interpretive practices and sharing of personal experiences) "stem[med] from the distinctive features of soap operas, in particular their reflection of socioemotional life, focus on female protagonists, and multiplicity of characters and interpretations" (p. 210).

Based on the aforementioned findings, it seems likely that communities dedicated to teen television programs share distinct practices related to both the genre of "teen TV" and the members of the group (which in many communities, are likely to be teens). These practices may facilitate discourse about how television content relates to viewers' personal lives. Such discussions surrounding bullying portrayals could reveal important insights about the way viewers are responding to and interpreting these messages.

STUDIES OF TEEN ONLINE FANDOM

Of even greater relevance to the current study, several scholars have explored the online fandom surrounding the teen drama genre that emerged in the 1990s. Murray (2000), for example, studied the online discussions of a small group of female teen *My So-Called Life* fans, "who consistently and emotionally voiced the importance of the text's proximity to their own lives in their online writing" (p. 222). She concluded

that because of these communal fan practices, "*MSCL* and its narrative trajectories became not simply entertainment, an education on social issues, or fantasy fulfillment…but rather an investment in an individual and communal understanding of teenage girl identity" (Murray, 2000, p. 222).

More recently, Gillan (2008) drew similar conclusions in her study of online fan responses to *Veronica Mars*, observing that beyond the industry-driven chatter surrounding purses and shoes, the female fans were "poaching" (in the words of Jenkins [1992]) the text in their own unique ways and making emotional connections with one another. She determined that *Veronica Mars* forums "functioned as springboards for discussions among fans about their negotiation of a host of identity issues, often in relation to adolescence, peer pressure, cultural norms, and gender expectations or stereotypes" (p. 191).

Making similar observations about the online fandom surrounding the series, *Degrassi: The Next Generation (DTNG),* Ross (2008b) explained how the novel multimedia strategy of the N network (now Teen Nick) and *DTNG's* focus on diverse, multicultural perspectives resulted in the frequent and involved online participation of young viewers. She described how *DTNG* fans could "be found online…mirroring the exchange of perspectives that occurs within the series as they offer their own opinions'' (Ross, 2008b, p. 68). Notably, Ross described how online discussions about plot events often triggered more general conversations and questions about sensitive topics such as pregnancy, drug use, gay sexuality, and STDs.

By revealing how teens utilize fan communities as a forum to discuss sensitive topics and identity-related issues, studies from Murray (2000), Gillan (2008), and Ross (2008b) underline the potential for bullying portrayals to elicit fan discourse about their personal experiences, expectations, struggles, and identities as they connect to bullying.

FAN POSTS AS INSTANCES OF OVERFLOW AND RECEPTION

As reviewed above, recent theoretical developments point to the need for new approaches to television studies that account for the extensive intertextual network in which television texts are consumed. Responding to this call, this chapter examines online fan discourse as an important instance of "overflow" that, when read by fans alongside television content, provides messages to young media consumers.

Additionally, recent studies of online fandom suggest that teen fans often use fan forums as a place to share their interpretations of characters' experiences with "teen issues," and in the process of doing so, negotiate their sense of identity. Therefore, as a means of complementing the growing body of research that examines media portrayals of bullying and their effects on teen viewers, this analysis will examine fan discourse within the Glee Forum as a representation of potential audience interpretations of bullying portrayals on *Glee*.

A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF GLEE FORUM POSTS

Unsurprisingly, along with its popularity,[2] critical acclaim, and accolades, the *Glee* series has acquired a sizeable and well-known fan following comprised of "gleeks." This textual analysis of fan responses to bullying portrayals focuses on just one of many *Glee* fan communities, the Glee Forum. The analysis was limited to one fan community due to the fact that by focusing on fan *discourse* rather than fan *practices*, this research breaks new ground in the field of online fandom. The Glee Forum was chosen due to its substantial membership of approximately 39,000 fans, as well as the fact that its threads are organized by episode (which facilitated the identification of posts about bullying). Additionally, judging by the language and culture within the community, the Glee Forum seems to attract younger *Glee* fans. Based on a discussion with *The O. C.* executive producer, Josh Schwartz, Ross (2008a) distinguished between teen and adult message board cultures. According to Schwartz, "younger people are more enthusiastic," while older viewers "are more like wanna-be TV critics…wanna-be 'if this was me, I would do so much better'" (as quoted in Ross, 2008a, p. 145). The Glee Forum appears to be the former type of culture, as fan comments tend to be more enthusiastic (e.g., "I LOVE Kurt" or "Santana is so mean!") than critical in nature.

This textual analysis focuses on a total of 294 Glee Forum posts, randomly selected from a pool of posts that satisfied two requirements: mentioning the word (s) "bully," "bullies," "bullying," or "bullied," and appearing within discussions specifically focused on 16 episodes containing bullying-related plots. (See Appendix for plot descriptions.) As this study was performed in conjunction with a content analysis of bullying on teen television (Walsh, 2012), these episodes had been previously viewed by the author and coded as containing bullying. (Of note, episode air dates ranged from January 2010-January 2011, as the sample from which they were chosen aimed to capture the period of time following the dramatic increase in news coverage of bullying and ending when coding began.[3])

The aforementioned parameters were chosen in order to hone in on relevant bullying-related discourse and guarantee that the researcher, having watched the episodes, understood the context of the fans' conversations. Because the website's "advanced search" function limited results to 200 posts, a unique search was performed within each of the 16 discussions dedicated to episodes studied in the content analysis. When the discussion of a given episode contained more than 200 posts about bullying, the results were sorted by "most viewed" in order to include the posts read by most forum members. As a means of increasing the range of discussion topics, 20 posts about each episode were randomly selected for inclusion in the final sample. In the case that there were less than 20 bullying-related posts for a given episode, all bullying-related posts from that episode were included in the sample. This process resulted in 294 posts (20 posts from 12 of the different episodes, 16 posts from 2 of the episodes, 15 posts from 1 of the episodes, and 7 posts from the remaining episode).

Once the sample was finalized, the researcher utilized a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to capture trends that appeared across fan posts. Each post was open coded (by sentence) as a means of formulating tentative themes and sub-themes across the posts. Once these tentative themes were formed, the researcher used the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss) to compare the emerging themes with those identified in additional entries.[4] After themes were finalized, exemplars were chosen to represent trends within each theme. These exemplars (identified by pseudonyms) are reported below. Notably, themes and sub-themes were not mutually exclusive; a sentence or post could fall into multiple themes and sub-themes.

GLEEK RESPONSES TO BULLYING PORTRAYALS

The goal of this textual analysis was to identify trends across Glee Forum posts as examples of fans responses to bullying portrayals *and* as intertexts read by other forum members. The analysis revealed four major themes across the sample posts: contextual elements of bullying portrayals, lessons taught by victim and third party characters, categorizations of bullying, and feelings about *Glee* characters involved in bullying.

THE CONTEXT OF BULLYING

The most prevalent theme across the Glee Forum sample, represented within 84 posts, was the mention of the context of bullying as portrayed on *Glee*. Posts falling into this theme contained at least one reference to a contextual element of bullying, including whether bullying was done for good reason, whether it was comical, whether it was punished or rewarded, whether it resulted in significant harm, and whether the characters involved were popular or unpopular. The three most commonly referenced elements are discussed below.

Is Bullying Ever Justified?

The most prominent sub-theme across the sample, appearing in 29 Glee Forum posts, was that forum members tended to discuss the reasons why characters on *Glee* bullied others. When the *Glee* writers provided sufficient context for viewers to understand the reasoning behind bullies' actions, forum members sometimes sympathized with bully characters. For example, *MadHatter* justified students' bullying of the character, Rachel, posting, "They tend to 'ostracize and bully' her because she does the same to them. She degrades them, a lot."

In contrast, other forum members asserted that even when the reason behind bullying is clear, there is no excuse for bullying behavior. For instance, *Clowny* commented on the explanation that Karofsky (the main bully of Kurt) bullies because of his inner struggle with his sexuality (an explanation representative of a

meta-theme of sexual identity prevalent within the forum), "I think most criminals are probably tortured on the inside. It doesn't give anyone a free pass to commit crimes."

Several forum members seemed to excuse bullying depending on the situation. Often times, the distinction between justified and unjustified bullying was based on whether it was provoked by victim characters. For example, *All4kurt* explained that "the big difference" between bullying targeted at Puck (a jock in glee club) and Kurt (a gay member of glee club) was that Puck "was the one who instigated it," while Kurt was "targeted…for reasons he couldn't control."

In sum, it appears that while Glee Forum members do not always agree on whether acts of bullying are justified or deserved by victims, they often pay attention to the likely motivations behind bullies' actions.

Bullying Is No Joke

Representing another sub-theme across the sample, 27 posts mentioned the presence or absence of humor in bullying portrayals. More specifically, fans tended to criticize *Glee* for showing bullying in a humorous way. For instance, *LovinGlee* wrote, "They can't joke about [bullying] anymore." In line with this dislike of humorous bullying depictions, several fans expressed contentment when *Glee* showed bullying in a more serious light.

Providing a contrast to the forum members who encouraged serious bullying portrayals, a few fans conveyed their approval of comical bullying depictions. For instance, referring to Rachel's bullying of a new student named Sunshine, *thekid* wrote, "Rachel's hilarious and poor Sunshine looked so adorably clueless. hahaha." Also supporting the notion that it is acceptable for some bullying to be depicted in a comedic manner, several posts stressed that humorous bullying depictions are acceptable because *Glee* is a comedic show that is not intended to be taken too seriously.

Overall, whether they approve or disapprove of it, it appears that Glee Forum members notice when bullying is portrayed as humorous. Importantly, it seems common for fans to focus on the potential implications of humorous portrayals.

No Free Passes

Also falling under the theme of contextual elements of bullying portrayals, 17 posts within the sample referenced punishments or rewards received by bully characters on *Glee.* More specifically, several forum members expressed aggravation about bullies being rewarded or unpunished for their behavior. For instance, *Azuri* wrote, "Karofsky cannot go unpunished for everything he's done, and I hope the writers recognize that giving him a free pass will completely erase and overlook the pain he did to his victim (s)."

Additionally, multiple posts mentioned how if bullying portrayed on *Glee* had taken place in the real world, it would have been punished. A post from *Kurtmaniac* exemplified this, stating, "I remember at my school there were serious punishments for bullying…yet here the staff doesn't even care." This post is representative of another meta-theme present across all major themes: the comparison between *Glee* bullying and personal experiences with bullying.

In sum, fans posting in the Glee Forum appear to have strong feelings about whether bully behavior is portrayed as rewarded or punished. It seems common for fans to go beyond describing the punishment (or lack thereof) received by bully characters and criticize unrealistic bullying portrayals.

Implications of Gleeks' References to the Context of Bullying

Intriguingly, the aforementioned sub-themes related to the context of bullying on *Glee* correspond with some of the "high-risk" contextual elements of media aggression studied in the media effects literature (see Smith et al., 1998). The prevalence of references to these elements of context suggest that fans often pay attention to and think about whether bullying is portrayed as justified, humorous, rewarded/unpunished, or harmless, or whether it is performed or targeted at popular/unpopular characters. As such, future research should examine if and how fans' active consideration of these factors alters the effect of fictional bullying portrayals on their attitudes and behaviors.

Notably, it was common for fans to criticize high-risk bullying portrayals on *Glee* and appreciate more responsible depictions of bullying. With only a few exceptions, Glee Forum members who mentioned contextual elements of bullying appeared to think critically about their implications; they argued that bullies should be punished and problematized humorous bullying depictions. However, fan responses were more divided regarding the idea of "justified bullying." Although fans frequently asserted that there is *never* an excuse to bully others, several forum members expressed sympathy for bullies or argued that some victims brought bullying on themselves (i.e., "deserved it"). The relative lack of criticism regarding this topic underlines the importance of studying media portrayals of the reasons behind bullying behavior.

In addition to providing insight into potential fan responses to contextual elements of bullying portrayals, the posts related to this theme also represent potential intertexts that complement television messages about bullying. As demonstrated by the aforementioned quotes, these posts promoted both potentially harmful and potentially helpful messages about bullying. The sample contained a significant amount of commentary criticizing high-risk bullying portrayals, which responded to or offset the few comments that demonstrated support for high-risk portrayals. Moreover, posts written by fans who had personal experience with bullying added an important critical element to the forum discourse.

LEARNING HOW TO RESPOND TO BULLYING

A second major theme across the Glee Forum posts, represented within 54 posts, was the idea that *Glee* characters, as potential role models, provide viewers with messages about how to respond to bullying.

When to Step In

The most prevalent sub-theme falling under the "learning from characters" theme was the topic of third party characters' responses to bullying. Forty-one posts focused on the reactions of bystander characters and/or mentioned the messages these characters were sending to young viewers. Nineteen of these posts specifically referred to the actions of teen characters (as role models), celebrating when they intervened and complaining when they did not. (The other posts focused on the fact that teachers at the fictional McKinley High consistently "turned a blind eye" to bullying, with some criticizing those portrayals and others defending them as realistic.)

Some forum members argued that it was not realistic for the writers to have characters' friends ignore the bullying they experienced, while others contended that it was realistic for high school students not to stand up for classmates. For instance, in another post touching on the meta-theme of personal experiences with bullying, *BritGurl* commented, "I'm just saying I think it's realistic for HS kids to not really stand up for others…*especially* if the one doing the bullying is a close friend. I saw it in cliques all over the school. But maybe that was just my experience."

When to Back Down

Another common forum topic, mentioned in 14 posts in the sample, was the way victim characters responded to bullying and/or the messages these characters were sending to viewers. For instance, responding to a post suggesting that Kurt should date his former bully, *the traveler* asserted, "Bullying is serious…Dating the bully undermines that and gives a horrible message."

Other forum members debated about whether Kurt should have stood up to the bully, Karofsky. These debates tended to spark broader discussions about what real-world victims should do when they are bullied. In one such discussion, *martie* drew from his personal experience:

I get shoved, pushed and tripped in school every day…but teachers won't do anything but talk unless you actually get hurt…and there are no witnesses cuz [sic] nobody wants to be next…so if you are the only gay kid in school…then you are alone. I am glad Kurt is gonna [sic] stand up for himself…but we are not all that brave and still got [sic] some years to survive in hell school.

Of note, *martie's* post exemplifies multiple meta-themes that appeared across the sample, including the struggles of sexual minorities in high school and the interpretation of bullying shown on *Glee* through the lens of personal experience.

Combined, the aforementioned trends suggest that members of the Glee Forum think critically about the examples set by victim and third party characters on *Glee*, and in some cases, reflect on the potential messages these characters send to the audience ¾ especially young viewers who find themselves in similar positions to these characters.

Implications of Gleeks' Acknowledgment of Characters as Role Models

The tendency for forum members to comment on the possibility of young viewers learning lessons from victim and third party characters indicates that many fans understand the potential for *Glee* characters to be role models and for *Glee* storylines to be a teaching platform. It was common for fans to criticize the creators of *Glee* for sending unrealistic or harmful messages (or applaud them for sending realistic and helpful messages) through their writing of particular characters. Notably, these fans seemed to be demanding more responsible bullying portrayals on presumably, one of their favorite shows. Considering the literature highlighting the increasingly reciprocal web of relationships between audiences and creators contributing to "aesthetics of multiplicity" (Ross, 2008b), future research should investigate to what extent teen television producers are responsive to such demands.

When interpreted as intertexts complementing television content, posts related to the second theme consistently contained analytical and potentially helpful messages for young *Glee* fans. In the majority of posts, Glee Forum members not only provided commentary and criticism about the responsibility of *Glee* writers to promote positive messages through their bullying storylines, but also pointed out the ways that bullying depictions represented or misrepresented bullying in the real world. Perhaps, by sharing their critical thinking process with other forum members, the authors of these posts inspired or taught their own lessons to other fans.

CATEGORIZING BULLYING

A third major theme across the Glee Forum posts, appearing in 50 responses, was the categorization of bullying behavior. Forum members tended to classify the bullying on *Glee*, whether it was in terms of type or form of bullying (e.g., physical vs. verbal or slushie facial vs. insult) or the motivations contributing to bullying (general bullying of unpopular kids vs. anti-gay bullying). Glee Forum members referred to categories of bullying for various reasons: to emphasize that all bullying is wrong, to argue that some acts of bullying are worse than others, or to suggest that different types of bullying (e.g., verbal or social) should be portrayed more often on *Glee*.

Types and Forms of Bullying

Falling under the more general theme of categorizing bullying, a sub-theme appearing within 33 posts was the categorization of bullying according to type or form. In

some cases, these posts emphasized how all types of bullying are serious and have negative effects. A post from *MishyMish* exemplified this trend. She wrote, "Most girls who are bullied in high school are bullied psychologically, not physically like guys are, but that's no reason to trivialize it. People have killed themselves from being bullied psychologically." Notably, the tragic "bullycide" trend was commonly used as evidence for why non-physical bullying should be taken just as seriously as physical bullying.

While some fans stressed that all types of bullying are important and harmful (and should be represented), some Glee Forum members referred to different forms of bullying in order to emphasize the notion that not all forms of bullying are equally severe or harmful. For example, *Scribbles*, responding to a previous post, asked, "You do know that a slushie to the face isn't as bad as a death threat and harassment, right?" It was also common for Glee Forum members to discuss how some forms of bullying were portrayed as humorous while others were not and debate about whether that was acceptable. *Pinky*, for instance, argued that it is sensible for some forms of bullying to be treated in a comedic way, posting, "I think it'd be kind of stupid to turn the whole slushie thing into a serious bullying storyline. It's always been one of the humorous parts of glee." (Of note, many of these posts were also coded as contributing to the "humor" sub-theme within the "contextual elements" theme).

In sum, these trends indicate that *Glee* fans pay attention to the differences between different types and forms of bullying. Fans seem to have mixed opinions regarding whether it is a positive thing for television writers to treat some acts of bullying as more severe or serious than others.

Anti-gay Bullying vs. "Regular" Bullying

Pointing to another sub-theme within the sample, 25 posts categorized bullying according to the motivation behind it. Typically, a distinction was made between bullying motivated by hatred or discrimination toward homosexual characters (i.e., anti-gay bullying) and other bullying portrayed on the show (i.e., "regular bullying"). (Many of the posts falling into this sub-theme represented the meta-theme of sexual identity struggles prevalent across the sample.) In some cases, forum members took issue with how *Glee* writers treated anti-gay bullying as more serious and less acceptable than other bullying or how fans in the forum seemed to care more about anti-gay bullying than other bullying. Summing up this stance, *ceedee* wrote, "In glee world, bullying is only serious if you're gay." Notably, one post defended *Glee*'s emphasis on anti-gay bullying. *SklyLark62* affirmed, "In our culture, no matter how bad bullying is for anyone, those individuals who are questioning their sexual identity are bullied the hardest."

Overall, these trends suggest that whether or not they believe that there are major differences between anti-gay bullying and "regular" bullying, Glee Forum members pay attention to how writers portray bullying differently and to how fans react to bullying differently depending on the motivation behind the bullying.

Implications of Gleeks' Categorization of Bullying

The theme of fans categorizing bullying based on form, type, or motivation suggests that viewers notice different bullying categories (or think about them when they are not portrayed), as opposed to understanding bullying as one, coherent phenomenon. This tendency to distinguish between bullying categories underlines the importance of future research focused not only on patterns across bullying media portrayals, but also on patterns across portrayals of different types of bullying.

Notably, trends within this theme indicate that not all fans accept *Glee*'s portrayals of bullying. Conversely, many Glee Forum members expressed critical attitudes toward the portrayal of different bullying categories. Several fans even referred to the recent "bullycides" in the news in order to argue for the importance of portraying all bullying as serious. Therefore, this theme supports the notion that viewers (including even the most fervent fans) may reject the messages put forth through fictional bullying portrayals.

Furthermore, as intertexts, the posts related to the categorization theme contained both potentially harmful and potentially helpful messages about different categories of bullying. Examples of potentially harmful posts were those that approved of "funny" bullying portrayals and emphasized that some acts of bullying should be taken less seriously than others. Such posts could possibly promote the idea that bullying can be harmless and entertaining. On the other hand, the posts that criticized humorous bullying portrayals, demanded that all bullying be portrayed as harmful and serious, and emphasized the dangers of real-world bullying could possibly serve to counteract and disrupt the more harmful messages promoted by the show or by other fans in the forum.

FEELINGS TOWARD BULLY AND VICTIM CHARACTERS

A final theme across the sample posts, appearing in 39 posts, was that forum members tended to express their feelings and attitudes about *Glee* characters who were bullies, victims, or third parties to bullying. In some cases, the likability of characters appeared to influence fans' reactions to bullying (e.g., "I like him, so I feel bad that he was bullied."). In other cases, characters' participation in or reaction to bullying appeared to affect fans' opinions of those characters (e.g., "He did not stand up the victim, so I don't like him."). Examples showcasing the former trend are discussed below.

Favoritism Affecting Reactions to Bullying

The most prevalent sub-theme falling under the "expressing feelings toward characters" theme, appearing in 23 posts, was that fans' affinity for particular characters appeared to influence their reactions to the bullying in which those characters were involved. More specifically, fans tended to sympathize with their favorite characters, regardless of their role (e.g., victim or bully) in bullying.

Exemplifying fan' expressions of sympathy for bullies, *slushiefacial* came to the defense of bully, Karofsky: "So, in short, I disapprove of Karofsky, but at the same time I feel sorry for him, and I can understand why he's being so mean. And I think he is really cute. he's got gorgeous eyes." In terms of victim characters, *KatieK*'s "love" for the Rory character (a student from Ireland bullied for being an outsider) seemed to contribute to her sympathy for him. She posted, "I loved…Rory! He's so cute, and sweet…I felt bad when everyone was bullying him/rejecting him."

Interestingly, several posts directly referred to the trend in television fandom when fans unfairly favor the behavior of their favorite characters or familiar characters. *Azn99*, for instance, commented:

This is the problem in this fandom, no one knows how to tell the difference between right and wrong behavior unless it's something happening to their favorite character, they don't even know how to tell right from wrong when it's their own favorite character's actions.

This trend, observed by both the researcher and Glee Forum members themselves suggests that some fans tend to sympathize with familiar and likable characters (or their "favorite" character), regardless of their role in bullying activity.

Implications of Gleeks' Feelings toward Characters

Glee Forum members' tendency to express their feelings and opinions of characters involved in bullying reveals how passionate *Glee* fans are about the characters on the show. More specifically, the trend that characters' participation in or reaction to bullying behavior had an apparent effect on fans' feelings toward those characters suggests that fans are so emotionally invested in the *Glee* characters, that they react strongly when the characters do something with which they agree or disagree.

Although it was common for characters' behavior to influence fans' emotional reactions to those characters, in even more instances, fans' apparent emotional investment in characters worked in the opposite direction: their strong feelings about characters affected their reaction to those characters' participation in or reaction to bullying behavior. The most common example of this effect was when fans expressed sympathy toward a bully or victim character. On one hand, sympathy toward victim characters seemed to have a positive outcome, causing fans to become upset about bullying behavior. On the other hand, sympathy toward bully characters was more often associated with fans providing justification for bullying or minimizing its severity.

Overall, the trends pointing to *Glee* fans' identification with and emotional attachment to specific characters highlight the importance of studying how these feelings influence viewers' responses to bullying portrayals. Future research, grounded in theories related to identification with fictional characters (Oatley & Gholamain, 1997), wishful identification and parasocial interaction with television characters (Hoffner, 1996), and empathy (e.g., Zillmann, 1991) could reveal the potential implications of character favoritism as it relates to bullying portrayals.

Moreover, like intertexts surrounding the other themes, posts related to this final theme posed both potentially harmful and potentially helpful messages about bullying. The quality of the messages varied depending on how a forum member reacted to a character's involvement in bullying, and with which character (the bully or victim) a forum member's sympathy lied. Importantly, several posts criticized fans who unfairly favored the behavior of familiar characters or their favorite characters. These posts emphasized the positive message that bullying is wrong no matter who the bully or victim happens to be.

DISCUSSION: *GLEE*'S ROLE IN PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE

As one of the first analyses to examine fan forum posts as both intertexts and examples of audience reception, this exploratory study of 294 Glee Forum posts referencing bullies or bullying behavior highlights the value of fan communities as sources of relevant and insightful data. The results suggest that the combination of digital technology, enthusiastic young fans, and teen TV programs highlighting diverse perspectives on key "teen issues" has created a perfect storm that makes online fandom a popular outlet for teens to express their reactions to and interpretations of television content. Specific to the data presented here, the results highlight the role of *Glee* as a potential agent of social change, particularly change related to the increasingly prevalent and concerning social issue of teen bullying.

The analysis revealed four major themes: contextual elements of bullying (motives, humor, punishments, consequences, and character social status), messages sent to viewers through characters' bullying-related behaviors, categories of bullying activity (based on type/form or motivation), and feelings about *Glee* characters involved in bullying. As representations of audience responses, the four themes across the sample highlighted how some *Glee* fans think critically about bullying portrayals and their potential impact on young viewers. The "contextual element" theme demonstrated that fans notice, discuss, and sometimes criticize high-risk bullying portrayals on *Glee*. This trend highlights *Glee*'s potential for engaging fans' critical thinking about bullying and its consequences. The "learning how to respond" theme pointed to fans' acknowledgement of *Glee* as a teaching platform (and its characters as potential role models) and desire for *Glee* creators to use this platform responsibly. This pattern underlines the possibility that through its bullying-focused narratives, *Glee* can demonstrate to Gleeks of all ages the various ways to take an active stance against bullying through everyday behaviors. The "categorizing bullying" theme observed in the sample revealed that fans understand bullying as falling into different categories. This trend highlights the value of *Glee* storylines in raising awareness of the various facets and outcomes (ranging from anti-gay discrimination to emotional torment) of all forms of bullying (relational, physical, and verbal). Importantly, all three of the aforementioned themes showed that *Glee* fans are not always accepting of the way bullying is portrayed on the show.

On the other hand, the "feelings toward characters" theme indicated that while *Glee* fans may be particularly observant and critical about the show, they are also exceptionally invested in the characters. Fans appear to react strongly when characters engage in certain bullying-related behaviors and seem to defend the behavior of their favorite characters, no matter which role they play in the bullying. These trends suggest that *Glee* writers should be cautious about portraying "fan favorites" as bullies and about making bully characters attractive to audience members, as such representations could inadvertently promote the acceptance of bullying-related behaviors.

In addition to representing potential audience responses to bullying portrayals, the themes observed within the sample highlight potential intertexts contributing to the "overflow" (Brooker, 2004), "convergence" (Jenkins, 2006a) and "aesthetics of multiplicity" (Ross, 2008b) surrounding television content in the digital age. In other words, the aforementioned themes not only reflect some common attitudes within *Glee* fandom, but also represent messages about bullying to which young forum members could be exposed. While not all of these messages were necessarily accurate or beneficial for young *Glee* fans, some of the critical messages (particularly those from fans who compared *Glee* storylines to real-world experiences) demonstrated the possibility for fan forums to indirectly simulate experiences of co-viewing or parental mediation of television viewing. Notably, research has shown that co-viewing and mediation can influence children's attitudes toward television violence (e.g., Corder-Bolz & O'Bryant, 1978).

At the very least, the variety of messages provided in the forum created a springboard for discussion, debate, and critical thinking about teen bullying both on *Glee* and in the real world. The nature of these messages varied across and within themes. The sample included posts that both criticized and supported high-risk depictions of bullying, posts that argued for and against framing certain categories of bullying as more serious than others, and posts that defended and rebuked bullying behavior (depending on the characters involved). Considering the contradictory intertextual messages provided in forum posts, future research should involve a more comprehensive study that identifies which messages about bullying are predominant across fan discourse.

This analysis provides insight into the multitude of potential audience interpretations of and responses to media depictions of teen bullying. While the observed reception trends may not represent responses specific to teen audiences or be generalizable to other teen television shows, they suggest that contextual factors (particularly consequences, punishments, humor, and motivations) and identification with characters likely play a role in viewers' interpretations of bullying depictions. While existing media theories suggest how these contextual elements and individual differences might alter the effects that bullying portrayals have on young viewers, it is vital to test these specific relationships empirically. For instance, future studies should examine how viewers' identification with bully and victim characters influences their reactions to bullying depictions as well as the impact of humorous bullying portrayals on viewer attitudes toward bullying. Additionally, related to

the tendency for Glee Forum fans to relate storylines to personal experiences with bullying, future research should examine whether direct experience with bullying moderates the effects of exposure to media bullying. In addition to revealing the aforementioned insights, as an examination of a sample of intertexts connected to TV portrayals, this textual analysis highlights the range of bullying-related messages to which teen television fans are likely exposed, as well as their potential benefits and risks. Thus, it lays the groundwork for future research on various instances of television "overflow" and young viewers' responses to these texts.

Inarguably, bullying is an extremely serious, harmful, and prevalent real-world phenomenon that too often leads to tragic consequences. At a time when parents, school administrators, policymakers, and advocacy groups are desperately searching for ways to stop bullying, a close examination of the messages about bullying promulgated by the media world—an environment in which children and teens are increasingly immersed, working through their evolving identities and searching for support—is long overdue. With its focus on *Glee* – a show that has arguably led the charge in its attempt to relate prosocial messages about bullying—this study emphasizes the potential of media messages to promote anti-bullying attitudes and behaviors, and in turn, reinforces the increasing need for television creators to portray bullying in a responsible manner that promotes positive social change among viewers.

NOTES

[1] Slushie facial" is a trope popularized on *Glee* that describes what occurs when someone douses an unassuming student in the face with an ice-cold slushie beverage.
[2] *Glee* reached an average of 9.77 millions viewers and was the fourth most popular show among teen viewers (age 12–17) during its first season (2009–2010) (Andreeva, 2010; FOX, 2010).
[3] A Lexis-Nexis search of U. S. newspaper articles with "bullying" in the headline or lead paragraph revealed that coverage dated January 2010 through June 2010 increased 31% compared to the prior 6 months and continued to increase dramatically up to the time of coding.
[4] This coding process is similar to that used by Baym (1999) in her analysis of the discourse within a soap opera fan community.

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APPENDIX

Summary of Major Bullying Plots in Glee Episodes

Episode Title/Number	Bullying Events
Hell-O (S1:E14)	The football players throw slushies at glee club members, Rachel, Kurt, and Mercedes. Santana and Brittany spread rumors about Rachel and talk behind her back. Finn hears them and tells them that they should stop.
Laryngitis (S1:E18)	Puck, a jock and new glee club member, grabs and threatens Jacob, a nerdy journalist for the school paper, in an attempt to reestablish his popularity and credibility as a bully. Mercedes sees this and decides that she does not want to get involved with Puck.
Theatricality (S1:E20)	The football players shove, insult, and threaten glee club members, Finn, Tina, and Kurt for wearing their Lady Gaga-inspired costumes. When the football players target Kurt again, Finn (backed by the rest of the glee club) comes to his defense.
Audition (S2:E1)	The football players tease and throw a slushie at glee club member, Kurt. Threatened by Sunshine, a new girl auditioning for glee club, Rachel pays to have her slushied and gives her the wrong address for auditions (sending her to a crack house). Fellow glee club members, Mercedes and Kurt express their disapproval of Rachel's selfish behavior.
Britney/Brittany (S2:E2)	Finn's former football teammates shove, insult, and threaten him for getting kicked off the team because of glee club. Artie, Finn's fellow glee club member, steps in and tells the bullies that it was his fault.

(*Continued*)

Summary of Major Bullying Plots in Glee Episodes (Continued)

Episode Title/Number	Bullying Events
Never Been Kissed (S2:E6)	Football player, Dave Karofsky repeatedly shoves, insults, and threatens glee club member, Kurt about his homosexuality. The bullying culminates when Kurt confronts Karofsky and insists that he is not going to change. Karofsky suddenly kisses Kurt, and it is revealed that he is struggling with his own sexual identity and taking out his frustration on Kurt.
The Substitute (S2:E7)	Football player, Karofsky threatens to kill glee club member, Kurt if he tells anyone about their kiss.
Furt (S2:E8)	Football player, Karofsky taunts glee club members, Finn and Kurt as they are practicing a dance.
Special Education (S2:E9)	Cheerleader and glee club member, Santana mocks and insults fellow glee club member, Rachel about the fact that she slept with Rachel's current boyfriend (and fellow glee club member), Finn.
A Very Glee Christmas (S2:E10)	A flashback shows glee club members, Tina, Mike, and Mercedes being slushied by football players.
The Sue Sylvester Shuffle (S2:E11)	Football player, Karofsky repeatedly shoves, insults, and mocks his teammate, Finn about being in the glee club. Glee club member, Artie gets slushied by the football players.
A Night of Neglect (S2:E17)	Football player, Karofsky insults glee club member, Kurt and his love interest, Blaine about their homosexuality. Cheerleader and glee club member, Santana jumps in to defend the two boys.
Born this Way (S2:E18)	As football player, Karofsky apologizes to the glee club for all of the bullying he has done, a series of flashbacks shows Karofsky and his teammates throwing slushies at glee club members, Rachel, Kurt, Finn, Sam, Artie, Mercedes, Tina, and Mike.
The Purple Piano Project (S3:E1)	A flashback shows football player and glee club member, Finn being slushied by hockey players.
Pot O' Gold (S3:E4)	Rory, an Irish student who just arrived at McKinley High School, is repeatedly shoved and insulted by hockey players, as well as threatened by cheerleader and glee club member, Santana.
Mash-Off (S3:E6)	After a dodgeball game, cheerleader and glee club member, Santana violently throws a ball at Rory, a new student and recent addition to the glee club, giving him a bloody nose. In the hallway, Santana insults Finn (football player and fellow glee club member) about his weight and singing abilities. In response, Finn calls her a coward and suggests that she come out of the closet, essentially "outing" her in front of other students.

KELLY P. DILLON

3. I'LL STAND BY YOU

Glee *Characters' Multiple Identities and Bystander*
Intervention on Bullying

Over its five seasons, *Glee* has depicted various forms of bullying including social ostracism, cyber-bullying, physical threats and violence, and the terrible psychological cost for offenders, victims, and bystanders. In each of these instances, major characters served as bullies, victims, and bystanders to these social acts of aggression. This chapter will examine what role *Glee* characters' multiple identities play in their actions, and how social identities normalize bullying as purposeful and accepted. The portrayal of bullying on this popular show is important for many reasons. First, its wide audience has a window into the modern high school, its social caste system, and how social organization is maintained, sometimes at great costs. Many viewers, especially parents, may not have any exposure to bullying in today's schools were it not for that which is depicted on *Glee*. Second, viewers may learn how to react and respond to bullying by watching characters' reactions as active participants or bystanders. Finally, the strict adherence to social identity stereotypes and tropes can lead to a cultivation effect, leading viewers to believe bullying exists in the narrow parameters witnessed on *Glee*.

DEFINING BULLYING

Bullying may seem like one of those behaviors easily recognized when one sees it. However, in order for actions to be truly considered bullying, they must meet three criteria (Olweus, 1978). First, the actions must be repetitive. A single instance of being insulted or left out of a conversation or event does not constitute bullying. However, repeated instances of destruction of property, derogatory graffiti, and physical assault are clearly bullying. Second, the actions must be construed or felt as harmful. Siblings joshing each other, testing the boundaries of socially acceptable banter does not meet the threshold of bullying. When it is clear the victim feels the cold, sticky sting of the slushy, as many a New Directions member has experienced, it is considered bullying. Finally, there must be a power imbalance between the bully and his or her victim. This power imbalance can be one of physical strength or appearance (e.g., Kurt vs. Karofsky), financial status (e.g., Kitty vs. Marley), supervisory (e.g., Sue vs. Cheerios), or social status (e.g., Quinn vs. Rachel).

Bullying can either create or perpetuate this power imbalance. In the 21st century, no adolescent or adult can avoid being caught in any cyber-corner. Over 90% of 12-17 year olds access the Internet daily, and 80% use this access specifically for socializing and communicating with their peers (Pew Research Center, 2011). Access to the Internet, endless technological opportunities to record or forward any media, and an increasing reliance on social networking for communication have created a perfect environment for cyberbullies.

Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying is also repetitive, harmful, and perpetuates a power imbalance. However, it includes a fourth criterion. The behaviors are all transmitted online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Cyberbullying can take place between friends, strangers, in an anonymous setting, or in a setting where everyone's names or profiles are visible. Individuals can be cyberbullied through email, text messages, online message or comment boards, video games, and social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The cyberbullying trend has kept pace with technology on *Glee,* from the early days of MySpace to the current trends of Facebook and Twitter.

The Effects: Bullying has found to have lasting effects, well into adulthood. Many victims of bullying develop anxiety and other psychiatric disorders (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013), are at a heightened risk of becoming bullies themselves (van der Wal, deWitt, & Hirasing, 2003), and are more likely to attempt and complete suicide (Baldry & Winkel, 2003). Many *Glee* characters have demonstrated these at-risk behaviors, including perpetuating the bully-victim-bully cycle, attempts of suicide, eating disorders, and leaving their school for a more accepting learning environment.

The Players: Besides the major players in bullying, the bully and the victim, there are often other witnesses called bystanders. Bystanders actually have tremendous power in bullying and cyber-bullying situations, though they may not always recognize, embrace, or use it. Bystanders are not always the strongest, biggest, person around to stand up to a bully. Sometimes it only takes a connection to the bully, victim, or perhaps both, to diffuse the situation. Besides examining how characters in *Glee* evolve into bullies and victims, this chapter will also examine the power of bystanders who intervene or choose to walk on.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES & BULLYING

Whether we are aware of it or not, we each have multiple identities. These social identities are beyond the simple groups we are born into: male or female, American or Canadian, white or black. When one chooses to identify with and be a part of a social group that we may or may not have explicit membership in (Hogg, 1992), we are claiming that social identity. For example, Finn's struggles with his multiple identities are readily apparent in the first few seasons of *Glee*. He is framed in the pilot episode as the handsome, popular, quarterback of the unlucky McKinley High School Titans. While many believe this was the social role Finn was born to play, the social identity of jock is one he chose. Finn's membership in New Directions, and

subsequent label of an outcast "gleek," is also a chosen identity. These conflicting social identities, and the other identities *Glee* characters try to manage, are key to many of the bullying and bystander intervention scenes in the show.

Keeping out-group members from permeating social groups can be important for the survival of the group, especially when membership is by choice rather than birthright. However, using violence or aggression in order to draw invisible boundaries, though common, is destructive to both out and in group members. Researchers have found bullying to be accepted by adolescents when it is directed at someone who is outside of their social group (Ojala & Nesdale, 2010). Bullying has been found to be a preferred tactic for adolescents seeking to increase their own social standing. As a Native American proverb reads, "Some men try to be tall by cutting off the heads of other," and bullying is especially efficient in the social environment of high school.

Social identities play an important role in the vicious bullying cycles seen on *Glee*. In the very first opening scene of the pilot (S1:E1), bullying is portrayed as a behavior necessary to maintain the unofficial social caste system at McKinley High. Finn, Puck, and other jocks appear to be going through the motions, pausing for a short second to allow Kurt to remove his designer jacket before tossing him into the trash as Will nonchalantly walks by even greeting the group with a chipper, "Good Morning!" In this episode, Coach Sue Sylvester describes the caste system to Will explaining, "if you really care about these kids you'll leave well enough alone. Children like to know where they stand. So let your little kids have their little club. But don't pretend any of them are something they're not!" (S1:E1).

Other teachers in the school confirm and implicitly approve of the student body's strict adherence to status strata and identities. Coach Tanaka warns Will of the group mentality and pressures of high school as a "herd." He tells Will, "The student body – the second one tries to rise above, be different? The herd pulls him back again" (S1:E1). Bullying, as a behavior, appears to be used as a deterrant for students in considering an attempt at straddling more than one social status level or identity. When students defy this system, it is used as a strategy to communicate to others to dare not make the same mistake. For example, in the episode "Laryngitis" in season 1, Puck begins a tirade of bullying random students in the hallway upon regaining his popularity among McKinley's popular elite. After robbing one "nerd" of his lunch money and tossing another into a dumpster, Puck declares "order is being restored one by one!" (S1:E18).

In real life high schools and playgrounds, individuals in specific social groups or identities are at a higher risk of being bullied. Youth who identify as LGBTQ are at a high risk of feeling unsafe at school due to bullying and negative attitudes towards their identification (Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009). Researchers have found lower levels of respect for specific social groups is directly related to bullying and the bullies are usually the most popular students (Langdon & Preble, 2008). Though teachers report educators play a key role in preventing bullying (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012), many fall unwittingly into the role of bully, victim,

or bystander (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). *Glee* embraces these realities of the every day high school and forces its viewers to acknowledge their existence in McKinley High. One by one, social identities are used as the illustration of torment and redemption in Lima, Ohio.

Throughout *Glee*, characters' popularity ebbs and flows dependent mainly on who they are affiliated with. Two members who this is most readily apparent are Puck and Quinn. When Puck is a football player or dating a Cheerio (member of the cheerleading squad of McKinley High), his social status is high. When he is a member of New Directions or dating a plus-sized girl like Lauren Zizes, his social standing is quite low. When Quinn is dating the quarterback and captain of the cheerleading squad, her social standing is at its highest. When she is merely a member of the Glee club and post-partum, she blends into the background. Only when Quinn joins the "skanks," a rough group of girls who appear not to care about anything, does she feel the same type of social power she had when she was a Cheerio. Affiliation with other individuals through the expression of shared social identities is a form of image management. The jockeying of proximity to or attempts to distance from certain individuals are clear examples of what psychologists call "basking in the reflected glory," or BIRGing. In general, bullying is used on *Glee* as a means to leverage either their rising status, diminish their victims', or distance from lowly groups and individuals.

Ain't No Man of Mine. In Season 1's episode "Laryngitis," (S1:E18) we find Puck a broken bro. Mercedes, however, has newfound social power since she has joined the Cheerios squad, causing her social stock to rise considerably. Puck finds an opportunity in Mercedes to influence his own situation. Once Mercedes relents and agrees to date Puck, his assumption about his power as a fear-inducing bully is realized.

As he walks down the hall, previous victims, namely Jacob Ben Israel, who just a week ago had no problem looking him in the eye, now tremble with fear (S1:E18). Confused, Puck tosses Jacob against the lockers inquiring. Jacob attempts to appease Puckerman offering his lunch money and any other trinkets in return for safety. "The tweetisphere says you're dating Mercedes Jones. She's one of the most popular girls in school. Your cool-o-meter is off the charts which means most of us are terrified of you. The guys you throw in the dumpster actually transferred today out of fear of retaliation." The mere presence of Puck in Mercedes' orbit changed his stature for all to understand and abide by.

Mercedes, on the other hand, recognizes the power her uniform, a physical representation of her social identity of cheerleader, has. She finds Puck in the parking lot near the dumpster, watching a line of students wait to be tossed in by two football players under Puck's direction. "You don't need to like it," Puck tells Mercedes, "but you need to accept it. We're part of the system now. We're at the top of the heap!" Instead of intervening directly, she walks away in disappointment. She does not want to be a part of any system that exists to torment others, the way she used to be tormented. "It was fun I guess," she tells Sue when quitting the Cheerios, "but when

I put that uniform on I didn't feel like myself." Mercedes is determined to be who she is, and rejects the powerful social identity that is associated with bullying others. She may not intervene directly, but she recognizes when to stand up and step out of the bright light of glory that shines misery on others.

Sexuality

Glee has been a leader in confronting the issues lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered, or questioning (LBGTQ) students have had to endure in high school. A 2011 school climate study showed 63.5% of students felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, over 80% reported being verbally harassed and nearly 20% report being physically harassed or assaulted. (Kosciw, et al., 2012). Individuals who identify as LBGTQ report skipping classes or school because of this harassment and negative school climate (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & Durant, 1998). This fear of intimidation, harassment, and assault leads to greater likelihood of failing or dropping out. Kurt himself vocalizes these concerns. "Fear," he says, "that's the worst…I feel like I'm in a horror movie where this creature follows me around and terrifies me and there's nothing that I can do about it." (S2:E8). Too often, students who identify as LBGTQ are at higher risks of self-harm including attempted or completed suicide, caused in large part by bullying and ostracism (Haas et al., 2011).

Throughout its five seasons, sexuality and sexual orientation has been a recurring theme on *Glee*. Sex has been used as a weapon, a determination of relationship status, and a natural topic of angst among the teen characters. Parents reactions to their children's sexuality is also represented in *Glee*. Quinn's father rejects her when she announces her pregnancy, kicking her out of his home. Burt fully embraces Kurt's identity as an outed gay teen, and even struggles with how to discuss safe sex with his son. Santana's grandmother disowns her for her "selfish decision" to share her secret. Karofsky's father reacts with love while his wife wishes to cure David when he finally comes out to them. Viewers watch these conversations on the television, but so many see the same discussions unfold in their own kitchens and bedrooms. *Glee* portrays the spectrum of reactions to teen sexuality in a realistic, honest manner.

Sexual orientation and the discovery of one's orientation has been a struggle for many main characters, a basis for ostracism, an argument for diversity in New Directions, and a tool of heinous bullying. Most of the bullying Kurt received was due to his openness about his sexual orientation and refusal to hide it. Unique is hailed as the first transgendered character appearing on network television not used as a comedic prop. Santana, though popular and willing to stand up to her bullies, has had her own share of bullying and public shaming because of her bisexuality. It is clear throughout the narrative arcs of each season, were these characters *not* gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or questionning, they would not have been bullied in the ways they were.

Kurt & Karofsky.   Kurt Hummel and David Karofsky have a tangled history on *Glee*, culminating in a three season story arc. At first, Karofsky appears to be the typical jock bully, shoving and throwing slushies into Glee Club members faces almost daily. As his character is deveeloped, the audience learns it's Karofsky's own rejection of his sexual orientation that contributes to his bullying. Once Karofsky publically admits his feelings for Kurt, he himself is bullied and cyberbullied, leading him to attempt suicide. This narrative illustrates the very real struggles young men and women endure when trying to find themselves in an environment hostile to anything different from the norm.

Karofsky's violence escalates throughout Season 1. At first, he is introduced to the audience as a simple bully in a letterman jacket. He slushies most of the members of Glee club, challenges the quarterback's membership on both sides of the popularity spectrum, and generally makes Kurt's life miserable for no specific reason. He and his wingman Azimio make desparging remarks about Finn, Kurt, and the rest of the Glee Club as "gay" or "homo." These slurs appear as mere insults rather than any actual commentary on Kurt's orientation. It does, however, lend toward a larger pattern of behavior positioning "gay" as being abnormal, worthy of ridicule, and permissible to be used as an insult.

In Season 2, Karofsky appears emboldened by the lack of intervention and takes his physical assaults on Kurt to another level. He no longer needs Azimio by his side to torment Kurt, and does so in full view of dozens of other students and some teachers. In "Never Been Kissed" (S2:E6), Karofsky slaps Kurt's phone from his hands and shoves him clear across the hallway into a row of lockers as stunned students look on. Kurt, finally having enough, follows Karofsky into the locker room. He challenges Karofsky, nose to nose, demanding to know the basis for his hate for Kurt. With fists cocked, Karofsky warns Kurt not to push too hard, but Kurt continues. "Hit me because it's not going to change who I am," Kurt challenges. "You are nothing more than a scared, little boy who cannot handle how extraordinarily ordinary you are!" At that moment, Karofsky forcefully kisses a shocked Kurt who shoves him away from a second kiss. Karofsky runs from the locker room, very upset leaving Kurt speechless. Later, Blaine visits Kurt at McKinley and the two try to confront Karofsky about the kiss and the apparent source of his rage. Karofsky is afraid others will hear what happened and ratchets up his assaults on both Blaine and Kurt.

Karofsky confronts Kurt in "The Substitute" (S2:E7) in a particularly menacing manner. He demands Kurt's silence in what he calls Kurt's kissing of Karofsky. Kurt corrects Karofsky and assures him no one other than Blaine knows. Karofsky threatens Kurt's life if he breathes a word of their encounter to anyone else. Kurt, shaken, is convinced of Karofsky's threat. In the next episode, Kurt keeps the secret of the origins of the threat, but Karofsky is finally expelled by Principal Sue. His expulsion is overturned by the school board, leaving Kurt no choice but to leave McKinley High for Dalton Academy where their zero tolerance bullying policy is actually enforced. The solution of the victim fleeing the bully is a scene too often

played in real life. In fact, one in ten students drop out of school because of bullying (Olweus, 1993). Kurt is fortunate his family has the financial means to send him to private school. Other students, many who may watch *Glee* each week, don't have the same opportunity.

In subsequent episodes, Kurt returns to McKinley due to a supposedly contrite Karofsky helping form an anti-bullying club. After Karofsky escorts Kurt to his next class, Kurt points out that no one has harassed, bullied, or made his sexuality a big deal since his return. He tries to convince the still-closeted Karofsky that the environment may not be ripe for complete acceptance, but perhaps well enough for indifference. Kurt tells him, "I could just hate you when you were bullying me, but now all I see is your pain." It's Kurt's complete and unconditional support for Karfosky being true to who he is that leads to Karofsky's finally honest apology and contrition. The humanizing of Karofsky for the audience begins in this episode. It's easy for researchers, teachers, legislators, and victims to identify bullies by only their aggressive behavior. However, each bully is someone's child, perhaps scared and reacting to something they are struggling with themselves. Perhaps the only way they have ever known to express their fear is through intimidation or violence. *Glee* viewers see a side of the bully otherwise hidden.

Prom Queen. Kurt's easy welcome back comes to a crashing halt when the bullying due to his homosexuality plays on a much larger stage. At the Junior Prom (S2:E20), Principal Figgins announces David Karofsky as Prom King. At first, it appears his rehabilitation through Bullywhips is complete and the student body has recrowned him as a popular student, though this time through his kindness and protection rather than intimidation and brute, physical strength. The joyous nature of the announcement is short lived when Figgins announces Kurt as Prom Queen. Kurt flees from the gymnasium, filled with silent, stunned students. Blaine tries to comfort him calling it a "stupid joke." Kurt, incensed and hurt cries, "All that hate, they were just afraid to say it out loud. So they did it by secret ballot." Kurt had hoped prom would be about "redemption," and is determined to be true to his identity. Kurt returns to the gym to be coronated, to "show them that it doesn't matter if they are yelling at me, or whispering behind my back, that they can't touch me."

Instead of standing up to the public attempt to humiliate Kurt, Principal Figgins coronates Kurt as the Prom Queen. "Eat your heart out Kate Middleton," smiles Kurt in front of his entire class, which then erupts in applause. Kurt's bravery in the face of such consorted hate is noble. He shows how uncomfortable it is to stand up against the majority. He is conflicted with both wanting to run from this discomfort but also use it to make a point. He has been acutely aware for some time that being McKinley High School's only openly gay student forces him to be an activist of sorts. He uses this power to try to mentor Karofsky in coming out. Kurt gently urges Karofsky at various points to make his statement and claim his true identity. Even at prom, when the student body appears to be poised to be overall accepting, Karofsky cannot bring himself to come out. With the knowledge of Karofsky's true feelings,

the audience is lead to feel sympathy for him, understanding the source of his rage and bullying towards Kurt.

SUICIDE AND BULLYING

Kurt and Karofsky's tumultuous bully-victim comes to an end in Season 3. By now, Karofsky has transferred from McKinley for fear the rumors of his sexuality had run too deep. In the Valentine's Day episode, he surprises Kurt at Breadsticks with a Gorilla-gram, complete with chocolates. Karofsky admits Kurt was the object of his self-hatred because he found it so easy to be who he truly was: out and proud. Many bullies are victims themselves, or perceive if they were true to themselves they would fall prey to the same hate and vitriol they force on others (Geffner, Loring, & Young, 2001). Victim status does not give anyone the right to harass, bully, intimidate, or assault another person. However, understanding the battles we all face can be a powerful equalizer in our reactions and preventions.

Leaving Breadsticks, Karofsky recognizes a fellow football player from his new school. The next day, he finds the word "FAG" spray painted on his locker in the locker room, surounded by the entire football team (S3:E14). The shoe is on the proverbial other foot when Karofsky's own football team begins to bully him for being gay. He looks around for support, but all he finds are bystanders ready and willing to join in on the bullying. Everything he had feared was suddenly true and there was nothing he could do to change it. He heads home, relieved to be in the safe confines of his room.

Like many other bullying victims, Karofsky learns the cyber-attacks and cyber-bullies know no boundaries or limits. Karofsky logs onto Facebook to see friends telling him to "go back in the closet" or calling him a "@!*$ faggot!" Each post is more hateful than the previous post, with more and more people commenting or liking them. As painful as it is for the audience to watch, if statistics are accurate, 1 in 5 viewers experienced the same thing that day. Almost 14% report having mean or hurtful comments made about them online and 13% report rumors being spread. Non-heterosexual adolescents report a rate of 17% being cyberbullied compared to 7% of heterosexual adolescents being cyberbullied (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013b). Viewers may be torn between feeling empathy for Karofsky or schaedenfraude, the pleasure of seeing him experience the same type of harassment he exposed Kurt to.

One can understand Karofsky's silence in his suffering, perhaps knowing if he were to complain or report such bullying, someone may say he deserved it. Bully-victims are actually the largest population on the spectrum. Bullies are found to have higher levels of depression and anxiety (Seals & Young, 2003) and if they in turn are victimized may internalize that harm and remain silent sufferers. Karofsky may not feel entirely comfortable telling his parents what he is going through. Given Santana's grandmother's reaction, or the general reaction of most everyone to the news, it's no wonder Karofsky chooses to suffer in silence.

Karofsky's suffering at the hands of bullies and cyberbullies culminates in his suicide attempt. The audience watches him struggle with the decision while Blaine sings "Cough Syrup." He carefully lays out his best suit, making sure no wrinkles or creases exist. Karofsky sobs into his suit gripping his belt, his soon-to-be noose, while Blaine sings the chorus, "If I could find a way to see this straight I'd run away to some fortune that I should have found by now" (S3:E14). Karofsky feels the only way he can be free and straight with himself is through suicide. The audience, however, understands this is a terrible, final resort since there are people ready and willing to accept Karofsky for who he is ready to be at McKinley High School[1]. According to the CDC, suicide is the third leading cause of death for teens, and over 14% of high school students have considered it with nearly half that number attempting it (CDC, 2014). Given *Glee's* general audience, more viewers have probably felt these same heart-wrenching emotions, as either a victim or friend.

The audience is given a precious peek into the havoc and grief suicide attempts can bring. Teen and youth suicide is an under-discussed topic. In the post-event scenes, Principal Figgins mentions how suicides and suicide attempts can cause a string of copycats. *Glee*'s portrayal of this very real, raw emotional reaction to bullying and self-harm is groundbreaking. We see Karofsky's father finding him in the nick of time, howling for help and assistance over his unconscious son. His suicide attempt brings a moment of reflection for the adults and students at McKinley High School. The teachers and coaches recognize how hard they were on Karofsky, though Figgins defends their actions saying, "It wasn't our job to know" the depth of his pain and self-hatred. Emma Pillsbury, the guidance counselor challenges him, stating something they are all thinking: "Then whose job was it?" The portrayal of the confusion, guilt, and discomfort all those around an individual who attempts or completes suicide is raw.

The students, those who were the subject of Karofsky's fists and those who stood helplessly and watched him, are conflicted with how to process his suicide attempt. Finn is angry at the selfishness of his act. Kurt feels responsible for rejecting Karofsky and ignoring his nine phone calls that afternoon. Even Sebastian, the coniving diva from the Warblers, is contrite in his treatment towards Karofsky. The remainder of the episode is consumed by the uncomfortable conversations necessary to uncover the ugly truth about suicide. That it's more common than anyone would like to admit. That there are clear warning signs if anyone cares to notice what others are feeling. That even people as secure as Will Schuester at some point contemplated an easy and permanent out for one lousy discretion. "Everyone has something that might take them up to the edge," that makes them want to jump and end it all.

While in the hospital recovering, Kurt visits Karofsky and helps him imagine his future. We flashforward ten years where Karofsky is a successful sports agent, married to his handsome partner with a young son. Karofsky seems genuinely happy envisioning a future, one that appeared so dark just three days prior. Karofsky does not appear on *Glee* again, but his character's impact is permanent. Through his three season run, the audience is witness to a variety of outcomes, and not all picture

perfect. For most LGBTQ youth who are bullied every day, who consider or attempt suicide as a means to end the torment, and for those who endure in order to live the lives they were meant to, it's a pretty real picture.

Adults Behaving Badly

Experts disagree if adults can be bullied, though the behaviors may meet the same criteria amongst adults as it would adolescents: repetitive, intentional, power imbalance. In *Glee*, the teachers and adult characters are just as likely to participate, initiate, and be bystanders to bullying behavior. The representation of adults behaving badly on *Glee* is an important realism to portray to viewers. The audience understands that bullying and its effects are not limited to the confines of the high school walls or its students. Adult viewers may recognize some of the tactics used by Sue, Will, and other adults to bully their peers. The audience, however, can also see the effects of adult bullying on the victim, and how bystanders can intervene when lines are crossed.

Operation Mean Girl.   Season 2 brings a new character to McKinley High School, Coach Beiste, a female football coach from Missouri. Her introduction to Sue and Will is complicated since Principal Figgins has cut the Glee and Cheerleading clubs' budgets to help support the football team (S2:E1). Will and Sue do not take kindly to the news, and join forces to make Coach Beiste miserable. The two look on as a dozen pizzas are delivered to the locker room just after Coach announces the entire team must try-out in order to suit up for the Titans. Most of the football team giggles and smirks at the prank, save for Finn. Will recognizes this stunt is cruel, but still finds some joy in the situation. Sue explains, "This kind of abuse and teasing will bring back all those childhood memories and she'll be shaken to her core. She'll be humiliated, devastated, and have no choice but to quit her job." Even as a leader of the New Directions, which embraces and celebrates diversity and differences, Will agrees and offers a fistbump to Sue for a job well done. Clearly, adults can adjust their own morals and standards when an important social identity is threatened.

Later in the same episode, Will and Sue's bullying takes on a new form in social ostracism. Social ostracism is when individuals are left out or rejected by others. It has been found to be an especially efficient form of bullying amongst adolescents and adults (Williams, Forgas, & Von Hippel, 2013), and is also frequently found online (Smith & Williams, 2004; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). When Sue finds her pizza prank did not send Coach Beiste running back to Missouri, she demands Will continue the charade in the teacher's lounge (S2:E1). Sue shooes away two teachers from her table to make it appear the seats are available for the taking. When Coach Beiste approaches Sue to see if she can join her for lunch, Sue rejects Beiste's request claiming the seats are taken by her "ghost friends" who are "hideous, lonely faculty members who met with an early death from good ol' fashioned schoolyard bullying" because they tried to cross Sue. Will, in the background, looks clearly

uncomfortable with Sue's line of arguments, but continues the ruse when Coach Beiste approaches his table. Coach Beiste understands what's going on here, and calls Will out on it. She says, "Everyone told me Sue was the school bully, and you [Will] were really cool. I see they got that last part wrong, huh?"

League of Doom.   Sue Sylvester makes it clear she is not afraid of bullying anyone to satisfy her own twisted reasons and need for power. Besides bullying other teachers and administrators, Sue, in Season 2 (S2:E17), forms a group of other adults with the sole purpose of making Will's life miserable to the point he would want to quit both New Directions and his job as a teacher. She joins three individuals who despise New Directions: Vocal Adrenaline's coach Dustin Goolsby, Will's ex-wife Terri Schuester, and former McKinley High teacher Sandy Ryerson, who lost the Glee Club to Will last season. Sandy is then put in charge of a heckling club, tasked with harassing and bullying New Directions during their rehearsals and concert. In this club are Azimio, Karofsky's wingman in most of his bullying, Becky, Sue's assistant and Cheerio, and Jacob Ben Israel, the school's gossip blogger.

The League of Doom and Heckling Club are important to point out since they are both examples of adult sanctioned bullying. The fact a leader, coach, and tenured teacher is heading both of these endeavours is an important heuristic cue to bystanders in the show and to the audience. The audience sees Kurt and Blaine sitting in the dark, empty auditorium watching the Heckling Club give it their all towards Tina. While shocked, neither do anything to intervene. Afterwards, Tina is visibly upset, crying behind stage. Will urges them all to "buck up" since part of show business is "people being mean." This teasing and bullying is portrayed as not only sanctioned, but also a right of passage, normal if one aims to be a star. Rather than admonishing the bullies to discontinue their rants and taunts, Will sends Quinn to the audience to distribute taffy to keep their mouths busy.

Holly Holliday, Gwyneth Paltrow's recurring guest role as a substitute teacher on *Glee*, attempts to connect with the hecklers, but only through shaming them. Miss Holiday tries to guilt Jacob, Azimio, and Becky for making others feel bad. But then she mixes her messages by describing some of the insults they hurled as "rad" or reminiscing about how she herself tormented Debbie Gibson through letters until Gibson wrote her back with tales of her own turmoil. Holiday's attempts to "turn the jeers into cheers" ultimately fails when the heckling club chooses instead to head home if they're not able to head back into the auditorium for round 2. This subtle lesson can send a message to *Glee* viewers that purposeful bullying, especially sanctioned, or at least minimized, by adults and leaders at the school is permissable. There are no real consequences for the adult, or other student bullying behaviors in this episode. The victims are told to remain resilient even in the face of great negativity and harassment. A proxy leader (Holliday) validates the heckling in between admonishments and in the end there is no real punishment or acknowledgment of their wrong-doings.

Social Identity and Bystander Intervention

In *Glee*, adults and teens are bystanders with different identities wielding different types of power. Sometimes, teachers actually intervene, as Will does after seeing Kurt visibly upset after an encounter with Karofsky in "Furt" (S2:E8). But instead of intervening, and following Karofsky to call him on his behavior, he brings Kurt to Principal Sue's office. Sue challenges Kurt, telling him "high school is a dry run for the rest of your life. It's rough – people can be mean." She recalls her own struggles with bullying, especially having to come to the defense of her sister who has Down Syndrome. She claimed it was difficult but it "made her stronger." Adult dismissals of bullying, especially verbal harassment or cyber-bullying, can put a chill on future reporting. If terrified students are met with a "whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger" attitude from adults who have the power to stop the bullying, they could be less likely to report future incidents, regardless of violence.

The bullying cycle, where victims in turn become bullies themselves, is manifested in these short scenes. Attempts to reclaim social power lead even the most tender victim to rely on tried-and-true tactics like bullying. Bystanders take note of this awkward dance and adjust their behavior during and after witnessing bullying accordingly. For example, Sam, the new transfer student from sunny California, witnesses Coach Beiste's meltdown and her expulsion of Finn from the team and locker room. When Finn returns (S2:E1) to inquire why Sam didn't try out for New Directions, Sam explains how he understood McKinley High's social environment. "After what Coach Beiste did to you…do you know how everybody talks about you Glee guys?" When Finn tries to protest, and tell Sam that those whispers don't mean a whole lot, Sam interjects. "I'm the new guy. I'm already on the outside looking in. I don't want to start three touchdowns behind." The bystander Sam sizes up the social situation succinctly and perfectly. Coach Beiste is bullied by the existing teachers for being different, and is subsequently ostracized. In return, Coach Beiste robs Finn of the only social power he has as a member of the football team. Determined not to be a victim himself, Sam neither stands up or steps in to the spotlight. In almost a cruel twist of fate, Sam claims the most powerful social status possible: quarterback.

Lima Losers.   Characters in *Glee* struggle with negotiating their multiple social identities when they are faced with various incidents of bullying. Sometimes, the bystander identifies with both the victim and the bully. Throughout his character's time on Glee, Finn encounters situations as this anguished bystander often. One example of this push-pull is in the very first episode of Season 1 (S1:E1). Finn informs Puck he has quit New Directions in hopes it would alleviate the torment from the rest of the football team. In this conversation, Puck brings Finn to a row of portable toilets behind the football stadium's bleachers while twelve other football players look on. Puck reveals the "wheelchair kid" is in a locked toilet, ready to be flipped. Finn appears genuinely torn, furrowing his brow, looking around as if there

is an answer to his predicament. He yearns to be accepted again by the football team, where he was a leader and revered. But he also understands how dangerous such a stunt can be for Artie, as well as the absolute cruelty involved. After appearing to weigh the options, Finn decides to intervene and remove Artie from the toilet.

Puck and the other football players are clearly displeased with Finn's actions, yelling, "What the hell, dude!? I can't believe you're helping out this loser!" Puck's outrage draws clear boundaries between his group, the popular, able, football players and the lesser, disabled, loser with two wheels. Finn uses this opportunity to blur those group boundaries. "Don't you get it man?" he asks Puck. "We're all losers. Everyone in this school! Hell, everyone in this town…I'm not afraid of being called a loser because I accept that's what I am." Finn accepts his role in a lower social status group not because he's in New Directions, but because of where he, and all the others in the town, come from. By identifying anyone from Lima or McKinley High as a social identity in and of itself, Finn equalizes the situation, stripping the need for bullying in order to maintain some sort of status structure. If everyone's at the bottom, there's no need to push anyone lower.

The Freak Hive.   In the show's first nod to Lady Gaga, the episode "Theatricality" demonstrates Finn's continued struggle with his various social identities and the decisions they force him to make. At the end of the episode (S1:E20), Karofsky and Azimio, the two football thugs who have made it their mission to terrorize Kurt and his New Directions friends, once again corner Kurt. With their fists cocked and Kurt cowering, Finn appears in head-to-toe Gaga, a red pleather dress fashioned from a shower curtain, mask, and heels. Finn has clearly chosen to embrace his *Glee* identity, complete with a costume. As Karofsky and Azimio taunt Finn for both his choice of dress and intervention, the remainder of the Glee club arrives to support Finn in his intervention. In their entire Gaga splendor, Azimio surmises they have "disturbed the freak hive" where "the worker freaks are trying to defend the queen freak [Kurt]." Rachel laments she's tired of being called a freak, and the others nod their heads in agreement. Finn declares, "We are freaks. We shouldn't have to hide it. We're all in this together." At first blush, it could appear Finn is describing the experience of all the New Directions members. But as the episode closes with Mr. Schuster attempting to claim the bigger lesson, the viewer can draw another conclusion. When in high school, or in any large transitory environment, the group collectively is in it together. New Directions is made up of jocks, nerds, cheerleaders, able, disabled, minority, and majority groups. Freaks alike, they are a social group of its own and in it together.

New World Order.   The social strata of high school are often built on quicksand – ever changing and never stable. From episode to episode, main players in *Glee* find this quicksand hard to navigate. Quinn, queen bee of the Cheerios, finds this navigation especially difficult when she is forced to stand by her man, Finn, as Karofsky continues to push buttons and boundaries. In "Mash-Up" (S1:E8),

Karofsky teases Tina, Mercedes, and Rachel with a slushy, which eventually finds its way on Finn's face. While Finn fights back, Quinn challenges Karofsky's assertion their Glee membership has dragged their social status below even the hockey team. She yells, "Screw you Karofsky! You and your Neanderthal puck heads are nothing." Mid-intervention Karofsky stops her and lays out the new reality. "You two don't have the juice anymore. Welcome to the new world order," he says as he laughs, walking away. Quinn's attempt to interject in the bullying by using her own social identity as popular cheerleader is struck down as a legitimate tactic. In front of nearly a dozen onlookers, Karofsky establishes the hierarchy, and therefore his own power as bully, and Quinn's powerlessness as a bystander.

Not under my roof.   One of the most emotional scenes in *Glee*'s first season is the confrontation between Burt, Kurt's dad, and Finn. It's also an amazing example of how bystanders can use common social identities to connect with bullies. Burt Hummel has been open about his struggle as a single father of a homosexual son in the conservative town of Lima, Ohio. He admits to Kurt he doesn't always know what to say, or do, since they're both on their own to figure out how to survive. Burt's character is dressed and played by actor Mike O'Malley as the average American Joe. Burt wears a worn baseball cap and plaid shirts, owns an auto repair shop, and drinks the average beer while watching his Cleveland Browns' games. Burt's common man appearance is often contrasted to Kurt's desire for haute coutre, culture, and flair for the dramatic. They are truly the odd couple but forever close as father and son, bonded in that love.

Burt and Finn's mom, Carole, decide to move in together, forcing Finn and Kurt to share a bedroom. Finn, already feeling tremendous pressure from the rest of the football team for his participation in New Directions, or as Puck calls it "homo explosion," is uncomfortable. Kurt, on the other hand, is ecstatic and instaneously begins devising a plan to help Finn feel more comfortable. It's clear to Finn that Kurt has a crush on him, only confirming all the homophobic fears he has tried to ignore. When Kurt unveils the redecoration of their joint bedroom, Finn loses his cool. Throughout this episode, every encounter Finn has with either bullies or Glee Club members builds to the crescendo of an overreaction to his new surroundings.

In his anger and frustration, Finn calls Kurt's lamp and blanket "faggy" (S1:E20). Kurt is visibly upset by Finn's reaction to the room and choice of words. Burt enters the basement mid-rant and yells at Finn. While Burt challenges Finn on his choice of words for Kurt, or even Becky, he attempts to connect with him on a level Finn would understand. Burt uses his previous experience as a football player to connect to Finn as quarterback, "You think I didn't use that word when I was your age? Some kid gets clocked in practice we tell him to stop being such a fag, to shake it off. We meant it exactly the way YOU meant it."

If bullying is a tool of social power, yielded in order for the bully to elevate their own status above that of the victim, bystanders can flip that power on itself. The majority of jocks in *Glee* view LGBTQ individuals as beneath them, that as

heterosexuals they have the social power. Burt, as a bystander, taps into that social identity to dispel and redistribute the heteronormative power. We see that Burt is not intervening as Kurt's dad, but rather as his common membership in a group Finn values, helping Finn hear him. The audience can imagine these words being spoken not just to Finn, but to each jock who derogated anything different or cultural as homosexual.

Manimal.   As Karofsky's reign of terror over Kurt comes to its height, Rachel attempts to rally the men of the Glee club to his defense. She is shocked to find Finn unwilling to plan to intervene. Finn explains that if he interferes with Karofsky, it could have consequences on the football field. "Karofsky is a right guard," explains Finn, "and if he gets pissed at me I'll get tackled more than Jay Cutler, which means we'll lose, which means Coach Beiste will make Sam the quarterback." (S2:E8, 13:52). Finn is much more concerned with losing his social identity of quarterback and leader of the popular jocks than he is the physical safety of his soon-to-be step-brother Kurt. "I want to but I can't," says Finn dejectedly. This scene is an incredibly important and real representation of the difficulty bystanders to bullying face every day. Social identities may play more important of a role in bystander intervention than self-efficacy or physical ability. The audience is a witness to the ramifications of non-intervention for both the bystander and victim. Others are disappointed by Finn's preemptive decision to not intervene based on a threat to his popularity. Yet the audience has also seen how intervention causes the bullies to set their sights on the bystander instead of the victim. Multiple individuals give up their personal safety and ambitions in order to defend Kurt and intervene in Karofsky's bullying. Finn's insistence in not getting involved for fear of losing his own social identity as a leader is framed as cowardly and not indicative of a leader.

Bullywhips and beards.   Throughout Season 2, Karofsky is in constant fear that Kurt is going to inform others of his true orientation. At every moment possible, Karofsky physically threatens Kurt and Blaine into silence. At one point, Santana witnesses this intimidation and figures things out. In order to keep her own secret at bay, Santana strikes a deal with Karofsky to be each others' beards. As Santana explains, "it's when a gay man and woman date each other to hide the fact that they're gay" (S2:E18). The two decide to embrace a socially acceptable identity while hiding their true identity to claim social power and status.

Santana and Karofsky form a new club called the Bullywhips, who will be "like guardian angels" in McKinley. The club, however, is just a ruse for Santana to engender support for her bid for prom queen and Karofsky to keep his secret hidden. The farce of the McKinley anti-bullying club could be considered a metaphor for the assumed efficacy of most anti-bullying attempts in high schools. In reaction to high profile suicides where cyber-bullying is often cited as a mitigating factor, many states pass laws like Jared's Law in Idaho or the Jessica Logann Act in Ohio (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). As of 2010, nearly every state had either legislation or

policy against bullying, yet hardly any carried funding for enforcement, training, or both (Stopbullying.gov). The audience watching *Glee* knows the Bullywhips are in name only, and Kurt's harassment has ended mainly, as Burt Hummel points out, because his main harasser has stopped (Karofsky). What happens, then, when Karofsky is true to his real identity and role at school?

CONCLUSION

When *Glee* first aired, its opening scenes were frought with examples of the bullying adolescents endure daily in America's high schools. Whether it's slushies, swirlies, dumpster dumps, cyberbullying, or being left out of the in crowd, *Glee*'s characters were perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. But in these dramatic scenes, the audience got a glimpse into the effects of bullying, including the torment bullies themselves may go through. Difficult topics like unwilling bystanders and suicide have been dealt with head on. The bully pulpit Ryan Murphy has in *Glee* is part of the fabric of popular culture. Conversations can be started between children and parents based on the topics covered each week. Bullies may recognize some of their own behavior on the small screen and finally realize their consequences. Bystanders are given a first person account of how inaction can harm others. While not perfect, *Glee* is comprehensive in its portrayal of bullying. The topic is not solved in a 30-minute episode, complete with a laugh track or PSA. Instead, bullying is woven in the narrative and character arcs that make the show unique. *Glee's* audience can recognize the authenticity of these portrayals, and therefore proceed to make its statements more powerful.

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