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From Reality to the Screen:

The Representation of Homophobic Bullying in 'Glee'

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the role that the American television show *Glee* played when representing the issue of homophobic bullying. From 2010 onwards an awareness to solve the problem has risen, and the consequent need to reform the school systems. Focusing on the three most significant episodes when considering the LGBT youth's visibility in television, an attention will be given to aspects such as heterosexism or homophobia as some of the main sources for this controversy to keep occurring. This dissertation will question if *Glee* has been relevant in causing the awareness of the said problem grow among its audience.

KEYWORDS: heterosexism, LGBT, homophobic bullying, *Glee*

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INTRODUCTION

On March 20 of this year, American television witnessed the finale of what has been one of the most popular musical comedy-drama series in the past few years. This is the case of *Glee*, a television show centered around a group of outcasts who join the glee club of their high school located in Lima, Ohio in order to “find strength, acceptance and, ultimately, their voice, while working to pursue dreams of their own” (IMDb 2015). It was a show which was notably successful at the beginning of its existence. Just by observing the ratings one can see that, for example, the second season had an average audience of 10,112 million (TV By The Numbers 2015). *Glee* has been classified as a transmedia product, due to the fact that this FOX Network series was not purely based on television streaming, but it was also present in other types of media such as albums, a concert tour, a reality show called *The Glee Project*, and a wide apparition in several social media platforms as Facebook or Twitter among others (Marwick, Gray and Ananny 2013, 1).

Aside from its media success, *Glee* was a show praised for its inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) characters. As the reporter Louis Peitzman clearly states on a recent online article celebrating the show's queerness, “those who have stuck around are witnessing something genuinely transgressive for major network primetime television. It’d be challenging to think of another network series that has celebrated the beauty of difference better” (BuzzFeed 2015). Regarding its positive insertion of LGBT characters, the show received the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Comedy Series twice (in 2010 and 2011). This award ceremony is held yearly by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation in order to honor several media forms for their representation of the LGBT community; which is in fact the main mission the organization has been working on since its birth in 1985 (GLAAD 2015). It is important to mention here that the visibility of the LGBT community and its rights in the United States “gained momentum” with the New York City's Stonewall Inn riot in June 28, 1969 (Ashby 2006, 413). It was a historical event which marked the beginning of the international gay movement (Armstrong and Cragge 2006, 724).

Despite the fact that this movement started more than forty years ago, the visibility of LGBT characters in American television is still limited, although “there has been a noticeable shift toward an acceptance of gay male characters” (Crothers 2013, 50) in recent years. It is considered that *Glee* was one of the first television shows in the United States that focused on LGBT youth, “an often underrepresented group in media today” (Human Rights Campaign 2014).

Even though the show achieved originality by representing the sexual minority youth, the FOX Network hit was also the target of criticism for its use of stereotypes in some characters, especially in the case of Kurt Hummel. He falls within the cliched representation of a homosexual young man, someone who portrays a flamboyant attitude, has a deep interest in fashion and his voice is high-pitched. Regarding this portrayal, critics have pointed out that “the LGBT community has more diversity than these old, tired tropes” (Huqueriza 2012) *Glee* seems not to abandon when portraying sexual minority characters.

Taking into consideration the popularity that the show possessed, it is unquestionable that the plot lines reached a considerable number of viewers, mostly teenagers. The public was influenced, in one way or another, by how *Glee* made reference to the different concerns American teenagers undergo in their high school years. The most relevant for this dissertation is the one of homophobic bullying which is “a gender-specific type of bullying that is based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity” (UNESCO 2012, 12). An issue that was principally explored during the second season from Kurt's point of view, and also later examined in the third season with David Karofsky who is actually “a closeted gay football player” (Marwick, Gray and Annany 2013, 10).

This type of harassment contrasts heavily with the other much more softened bullying incidents the rest of the glee club members experience since the attacks do not depend on the victims' sexual orientation and/or gender identity, but rather on their physical appearance or social conduct. Moreover, these are portrayed humorously, while the homophobic incidents have a much more serious tone. This difference then proves the importance that *Glee* gave to anti-gay bullying as being one of the most recurrent and problematic matters that take place nowadays in American high schools regarding sexual minority students.

Considering this, the aim of this dissertation is to prove that the representation of homophobic bullying in the American TV show *Glee* serves as a reflection of a real issue that torments a great number of LGBT high school students in the United States.

Several reports have demonstrated that sexual minority students are more prone to suffer physical harassment in schools than their heterosexual peers. Moreover, the adverse outcomes from bullying are specially felt by these students. When comparing the health outcomes felt by both GLBT and heterosexual students, the rates were higher in the former group. Some of the outcomes are related to self esteem, mental or physical health (Gruber and Fineran 2008, 7-8). In another study, when Ohio students were asked to indicate what were the most common reasons why someone could be bullied for, the second (with 18%) was sexual orientation. As it is suggested, “LGBT students [...] may be teased or ridiculed

because their looks and appearance do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes.” (Kosciw, Diaz, Fischer and Stojanovic 2005, 21-22)

Regarding methodology, a close analysis of three *Glee* episodes will be executed. Two of them belonging to the second season (2010-2011) and the other to the third (2011-2012). What is going to be especially evaluated is the construction of the two relevant homosexual characters (Kurt and David), their bullying incidents and both the emotional and mental consequences from these, and lastly a discussion will be exposed regarding the locations in which the two characters are set.

The objectives of this paper will be focused on demonstrating if *Glee* manages to portray homophobic bullying as an issue that torments a vast number of sexual minority students in United States. Moreover, the relevance of the different construction in Kurt and David will be questioned. Moreover, a discussion with reports dealing with the difference between the bullying felt by LGBT and heterosexual pupils will be carried out. And finally, it will be indicated if the setting of *Glee* plays any significant role.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHARACTERS

Focusing now on the characters that are relevant for the representation of homophobic bullying in *Glee*, it is essential to first discuss each of them separately in terms of their masculinity, social behavior and sexual orientation. Considering male stereotypes, there are two gender roles that dominate in American audiovisual culture: “men are either (1) strong and assertive or (2) wimpy and effeminate – even implicitly or explicitly homosexual” (Crothers 2013, 50). In *Glee*, this is clearly the case for the characters of David and Kurt respectively.

The first one to be analyzed is David, a member of the William McKinley High School football team. A fact that again coincides with Crothers' explanation when he explains that “those males who are seen to have appropriately 'male' values tend to be in positions of authority or athletes” (2013, 50). Sport is considered to be a site for the reproduction and production of the “traditional masculinity” (Richardson and Robinson 2008, 65). But something that stands out and it is likely a sign of David's closeted hidden reality is when the professor Crothers states that these masculine figures “are defined by their endless pursuit of sexual conquests” (2013, 50). Before his coming out, the football jock is never seen or, neither it is mentioned that he is emotionally or sexually involved with someone. In order to deny his homosexuality, David acquires a behavior regarded as expected from being a man,

that of “instrumental’ – that is, aggressive, competitive, rational” (Buchbinder 1998, 30). This makes reference to his physical strength emphasized by being part of the football team which only proves that “the idea of masculinity has been -and is still- intricately connected with men's physical strength” (Carrasco 2006, 28). Moreover, his tough and dominant behavior or also his direct yet rude language to other students, especially Kurt whom he despises, are clear examples of his male performativity. This specific representation of a man as being powerful and courageous is an ideal adopted by many cultures, but especially explored in the United States through the screen (Carrasco 2006, 28). It is relevant to mention that David is very often seen wearing the William McKinley High School football team jacket, as a way to imply his powerful hierarchical position within the high school society and also his clothing acts as another mask beneath where his homosexuality hides hoping to never be revealed. The reason behind his choosing this type of behavior in order to enhance his masculinity is due to the influence of patriarchy, as Buchbinder suggests when writing that “men who conform [...] to the dictates of the discourse of patriarchal masculinity thus seem essentially masculine and therefore apparently heterosexual” (1998, 131). David then develops images of his masculinity and identifies himself based on a masculine gender role (O'Leary, Kesler Unger and Strudler Wallston 1985, 36). Buchbinder further explores the topic when he mentions the term 'straight acting', by declaring that “performing the heterosexual [...] then may become a strategy whereby the homosexual can 'pass' undetected, and hence unpunished, in the culture. It requires the individual to use gestural and verbal sign system [...] appropriate to heterosexual masculinity” (1998, 132).

Just by watching the episode “Never Been Kissed” from the second season, David's first appearance proves his patriarchal and dominant masculine behavior in the act of pushing Kurt against the lockers in the hallway, without saying anything and for no specific reason (Murphy, Brennan and Falchuk 2011, 2.6, 4' 27”-4' 50”). Clearly imposing a dominance over Kurt, who is left shocked and vulnerable. His dominant role is closely related to the term heterosexism, which is the “prejudice and antagonism shown by heterosexual persons towards homosexuals; discrimination against homosexuals”; a definition first written in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1979 (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004, 68). The ideology behind heterosexism is that heterosexuality is the only norm, precisely opposed to homosexuality. This concept is a magnificent tool for David to secure his masculine performance, therefore also his heterosexuality, by physically harassing his outed homosexual peer.

It is essential to mention that David is a recurring character in *Glee*, for that reason he does not get as much screen time compared to Kurt. Therefore, the task of analyzing him is

far more limited. However, his relevance is undeniable when considering the representation of homosexuality in the show as it does transgress a bit further from the expected stereotypical representation of a young homosexual character on television.

In contrast with David, we have one of the main characters of the show. He is Kurt, who falls within the hackneyed representation of “the fashion conscious gay male” (Talbot and Millan 2010, 7). Even though *Glee* defends the fact that one should celebrate being different from the mainstream society,

one cannot forget that stereotypes by definition can never fully capture the complexity of these real individuals. The dilemma arises because usually these shorthand caricatures are the only characters seen on television, representing the community as a whole, so members of the viewing public who have yet to have any meaningful connections with gays and lesbians (including gay and lesbian adolescents) receive a dangerously incomplete view of gay and lesbian communities. (Evans 2007, 3)

In this matter, Kurt partially damages the LGBT community by projecting the conventional representation of a gay man as effeminate, considered to be a distorted image of what a man is not and should not be (Buchbinder 1998, 127). This image is certainly not close to the reality generally speaking, but we need to remind ourselves that we are dealing with a piece of fiction, and that therefore stereotypes are expected.

Related to his effeminate masculinity, *Glee* challenges several times the code conventions of masculine and feminine gender roles with Kurt as the main device. An example of this, and probably the most significant one, takes place in the first season. As a way to decide who wins the main role in the performance of the musical *Wicked*, Kurt and Rachel Berry have a “diva-off” in one of the glee club sessions where they perform the track “Defying Gravity”. In this scene “the show’s editors splice the video and audio by panning behind the audience so that Kurt and Rachel merge as one throughout the number, thus blurring the difference between a female and male voice” (Talbot and Millman 2010, 13). This gives a perfect vision of *Glee*’s intention to break with the code conventions of a feminine voice, by proving that it can be perfectly achieved by a man. Going beyond that, owning a high-pitched voice enhances Kurt’s effeminate masculinity. By being effeminate, this causes Kurt “not be part of a dominant masculinity” (Richardson and Robinson 2008, 63), consequently in a lower hierarchical position when compared to David.

Despite the negative criticism *Glee* received due to its use of stereotypes, the character has also been appreciated in the media as it is certain that “there's a sense of liberation, happiness and honesty to quick-witted Kurt that has warmed the hearts of millions.” (Cullen 2011). Moreover, his homosexuality threatens “patriarchal discourses of gender and sexuality which female homosexuality evidently does not” (Buchbinder 1998, 129). This is portrayed in Kurt's personality in terms of his high-pitched voice which resembles that of a female or also in his delicacy and sensibility, both “social meanings, values, norms and expectations associated with 'being a girl'”. Here it can be stated that gender is therefore “culturally determined” (Richardson and Robinson 2008, 9).

What is remarkable here is that, as *Glee* had a large audience both in the United States and other Western countries, plenty of teenagers were exposed to a young, brave, homosexual character in prime-time television. Stereotyped or not, the inclusion of the LGBT community in successful media products such as *Glee* helps sexual minority youth to self-identify with themselves. It also permits the heterosexual audience to see the diversity of the gay community (Evans 2007, 13). This is relevant when talking about the FOX network hit as it not only contains these two male homosexual characters, but it also portrays a female homosexual couple as one of the main plots in the whole show. Moreover, during the last seasons two transgender characters were introduced. This fact only boosts the importance *Glee* had when considering the representation of LGBT youth in contemporary American television.

Despite the differences in the construction of David and Kurt regarding their sexual orientation among other matters, they are both equal in the fact that they perform their masculine gender. This argument leads to mention Judith Butler, an important theorist in Gender Studies, who stated that gender performativity is “a matter of constituting who one is on the basis of what one performs” (Butler 1993, 34). Gender is not an identity already established the day one is born, but rather is constructed “through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1998, 519) which imply “a kind of impersonation that passes for real.” (Richardson and Robinson 2008, 11). Both David and Kurt perform their gender, although in clearly different ways as it has been aforementioned. To summarize, David is evidently inspired by the patriarchal hegemonic discourse of masculinity, and Kurt challenges this discourse with an effeminate masculinity enhanced by his sexual orientation and “feminine” social behavior.

HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING INCIDENTS

Throughout the show, the majority of the glee club members of McKingley suffer bullying at some point. As it has been aforementioned, even though these harassments are supposed to be an obstacle for the characters to express themselves freely, it is unquestionable that the anti-gay bullying has had more relevance and controversy.

The homophobic bullying plot line with Kurt as the victim started in the second season. It is not a coincidence that a few months before the airing of the episodes dealing with such issue, several suicide incidents by American teenagers took place due to anti-gay bullying. In September of 2010, four gay high school students committed suicide after being severely bullied for their sexual orientation. The most controversial incident was the one of eighteen-year-old Tyler Clementi, a high school graduate from New Jersey who committed suicide after a video of him having a sexual encounter with a male partner was posted online. Due to the social pressure, Clementi took the heartbreaking decision of jumping off the George Washington Bridge in New York. (Pilkington 2010). In his honor, the Tyler Clementi Foundation was created by his family which nowadays promotes safe and inclusive environments for LGBT youth (The Tyler Clementi Foundation 2014). The other three incidents involved younger students (thirteen and fifteen-year-olds) who also decided to quit their lives (James 2010).

Partly influenced by these unpleasant events, the producer Ryan Murphy decided to include a homophobic bullying story in *Glee*. As he declared in an interview that year,

right when we finished writing this, that's when there were these front-page stories about teen suicides from bullying, so it took on an extra, added significance. It really did ignite the cast and the crew to do their best and push themselves with the story (Itzkoff 2010)

As Murphy further declares, the bullying incidents Kurt suffers are far more relevant than the others because since "he got in glee club, he became more himself and his confidence started to grow" (Itzkoff 2010). Such confidence becomes majorly lessened by David as he makes Kurt feel miserable because he does not fall within the heterosexual hegemonic discourse, related to the term heteronormativity. In fact, "the pressure on boys to conform to traditional notions of masculinity is great and the risk of being perceived as gay is an effective threat in policing the boundaries of acceptable behavior" (Meyer 2010, 107).

The first relevant incident that it is going to be analyzed is found in the episode “Never Been Kissed” from the second season. It is important to take into account that Kurt has already been suffering some minor physical harassments in the previous episodes but this incident is particularly interesting since it is the first time that Kurt faces his aggressor. The questioned scene commences with David throwing Kurt's phone in the floor and pushing him against the lockers, as he has been previously doing in other episodes (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.6, 28' 57''-29' 05'').

This action connects with David's portrayal of the patriarchal system as a sign that men “daily operate under the assumption that they must show other men that they succeed where others fail, professionally, personally, sexually. Given such conditions (and conditioning), it is hardly surprising that men prove anxious to enact their manliness at every turn” (Buchbinder 1998, 133). The audience can certainly perceive the football player's anxiety in portraying the powerful patriarchal figure and imposing his power over the weak, homosexual one in the numerous assaults he commits to Kurt as a way to hide his homosexuality.

Projecting a powerful patriarchal role is closely related to the fact that “men have to prove themselves every day to other men. The penalties for not doing so are considerable. These include [...] the withholding from him entirely of the power that goes with being male in our culture” (Buchbinder 1998, 44). This last penalty is what Kurt endures for not fitting in the heteronormative system.

In this particular scene, the gay student seems to respond passively to the harassment, but after a brief moment of vulnerability, he runs after David to the boys' locker room while screaming “Hey!” as a way to start imposing power. Then the audience is exposed to a tense dialogue between the two characters, in which Kurt is first seen speaking heatedly and defending himself with authoritative messages such as “You're going to hit me? Do it! [...] Hit me, because it's not going to change who I am”. Then, a moment absolutely unexpected for the audience takes place when David kisses Kurt passionately (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.6, 29' 06''-29' 48''). This event blurs several boundaries between them.

First of all, it is revealed that David is also homosexual, or at least he feels attraction to Kurt. Therefore, his previous heterosexual patriarchal figure is completely destroyed. This causes him be furious with himself when he punches one of the lockers with tears in his eyes. It is in this instant that David shows his emotional vulnerability for the first time as a sign of his evident powerlessness. Kurt is now the dominant figure projected in the act of pushing the

football player away when he tries to lean again for a second kiss (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.6, 29' 49"-30' 04"). Both heteronormativity and patriarchy are broken by David in this intimate moment. The boundaries regarding practice of gender seem to be blurred regarding David's sexual orientation. By having exhibited his physical strength and belonging to a football team, his heterosexuality had not been questioned before. In contrast, the perception the audience has of him at this moment is completely the opposite. This is an example of how *Glee* breaks the code conventions of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal gender roles while focusing on homophobic bullying.

The other homophobic bullying incident to be studied occurs in the third season. In the episode "On My Way", David appears in a different high school. It seems he transferred to avoid the gay rumors in McKinley. First, it is significant to acknowledge that David is not wearing any type of football team uniform, even though he is still playing this sport. It could be taken as a symbol that he is coming in terms with his sexuality, and he is not constructing an abusive patriarchal figure anymore.

The audience can see David in the boys' locker room where he witnesses a spray-painting of the word "FAG" in a bright pink color on his locker. This happens while the football team members stare at him. Simultaneously, Blaine Anderson (Kurt's boyfriend) sings the track "Cough Syrup" by the band Young The Giant. This is an important element in the scene as the record contains lines such as "I'm losing my mind [...], losing control" (Hashemian and Young the Giant 2012), as a way to express the emotional breakdown David is experiencing as well as his mental health being severely disturbed. David runs away from the locker room with a deep feeling of embarrassment and frustration now that his sexual identity has been revealed. The audience discovers that David is also a victim of cyberbullying when he sees the online messages students from his high school have written about him in a social media platform with sentences such as "Go back in the closet!". David cries inconsolably alone in his bedroom, a clear image of his present vulnerability. Things take a serious turn when it is shown that David attempts to commit suicide (Murphy, Falchuk and 20th Century Fox Television 2011, 3.14, 5' 04"-8' 03").

Despite how extreme this scene may seem considering the adolescent target audience, there are several studies which demonstrate that sexual minority students are actually at a tremendous risk of suffering severe health outcomes from bullying, one of them being suicide (Meyer 2010, 5). In addition, it is not far from reality regarding those LGBT high school students in United States who are anti-gay bullying victims as it has been revealed that "compared to heterosexual youth, LGBT youth were 2-6 times more likely to attempt suicide

and made up more than 30 % of the total number of teen suicides” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2014, 140).

SETTING

Apart from mentioning the differences in the construction of Kurt and David, and the relevant bullying incidents each of them suffers, it is essential to examine the locations in which the two characters are set. First of all, there is McKingley High School which is the main space in *Glee*. This education center is seen particularly negative by Kurt, since it is where he is continuously harassed. It is evident that he goes through a depression as a result of the stress of dealing with his “GLBT identity in a social environment that expects gender conformity” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2014, 139). This gender expectation is clearly shown in David, as he is the one who projects heterosexism towards Kurt as the football player expects that heterosexual is the only available sexual orientation (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004, 68), as well due to the fact that Kurt's masculinity can be questioned for its evident effeminacy.

As a result of the continuous assaults, Kurt visits Dalton Academy as a possible center to transfer to in the episode “Never Been Kissed”. The place is an all-male private school whose choral group the Warblers are admired by all alumni. This is clearly put in contrast with McKingley's New Directions, who are constantly mocked and ignored by the rest of the students. To make the location even more idyllic from Kurt's point of view, the character Blaine is introduced. He is an attractive, confident guy who is also homosexual. At one point, the two young students come physically close by holding hands (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.6, 12' 08”), causing this to be the first time Kurt is lovingly shown with someone of the same sex; and the audience gets to see his smile again. Blaine is seen as an exit from all the sufferings Kurt is going through back in McKingley.

He later discovers the extremely relevant fact that Dalton Academy enforces a zero-tolerance bullying policy. As one of the students explains, in that school “everybody gets treated the same, no matter what they are. It's pretty simple”. Kurt's reaction to this statement is significant as he is left both shocked and surprised, close to have an emotional breakdown due to the ease of how Dalton students are treated equally regardless of their sexual orientation (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.6, 18' 20”-18' 32”). A completely contrasted situation with McKingley High which does not apply the same policy, and in which the bullying incidents keep happening. This situation only causes the high school to be perceived even more negative regarding the safety of its sexual minority

students. Dalton Academy is clearly presented here as an utopia.

In reality, most American schools have “generic” policies to secure their students' safety. The problem is that school systems “do not enumerate sexual orientation or gender identity/expression as protected categories or specify the various types of behaviors that are unacceptable” (Kosciw et al. 2012, 53). A fact which only increases the possibilities of an unsafe environment for the LGBT students.

Following this, Kurt admits to Blaine that he is the only outed gay person in McKingley High and that he is suffering harassment from David, whom he describes as a “neanderthal who's made it his mission to make my life a living hell” (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.6, 18' 48”-19' 03”). The emotional and mental instability in Kurt at this point is undeniable. The idealization of the private institution is even more enhanced when Blaine reveals that he was also a victim of homophobic bullying at his old school, and that his personal situation improved drastically when he decided to transfer to Dalton (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.6, 19' 10”-19' 39”).

As a result of this visit, just two episodes later, Kurt announces to his friends at New Directions that he is going to transfer to Dalton Academy. Despite the fact that everyone offers him protection against David, Kurt states that “the only thing that can really protect me is what they have at Dalton, a zero tolerance, no bullying policy. It's enforced” (Murphy, Brennan and 20th Century Fox Television 2010, 2.8, 40' 30”-41' 20”). Here the audience can see a clear negative criticism from the writers of *Glee* towards those American high schools which do not enforce bullying policies, and in where there is a hostile school climate. The projection of Kurt's depression is a reflection of the actual psychological consequence sexual minority students endure due to higher levels of victimization when compared to their heterosexual peers. It has also been demonstrated that apart from being more prone to depression, sexual minority students can also experience a lowering of their self-esteem (Kosciw et al. 2012, 44).

Another negatively projected education center in *Glee* is the one where David is set in the episode “On My Way” during the third season. The equality between him and Kurt is enhanced in this specific context, as they both see the educational space where they are negative due to the fact that both are victims of heterosexism and homophobia. As a result of having his homosexuality revealed, David starts experiencing physical harassment and cyberbullying from his high school peers. Here *Glee* reflects the issue that LGBT students undergo when being out in their school, as this makes them be “more explicit targets for victimization, and many LGBT students may feel that they cannot publicly acknowledge or

embrace their LGBT identity as a result” (Kosciw et al. 2012, 42). It is significant to point out here that in the previous episodes, David is seen in a gay nightclub with Kurt and Blaine, where he can feel safe expressing his sexual orientation. In contrast, in that high school he keeps projecting the same heterosexual hegemonic discourse he did in McKingley. But this time without being heterosexist or homophobic.

The two aforementioned spaces are public, where the exposure is more considerable and therefore the chances for physical harassment to appear are higher. In contrast with these two public spaces, there is one private space that needs to be taken into account which is David's bedroom. This is the location where he experiences cyberbullying by reading the harassing online messages his colleagues have posted about him. All of them being extremely homophobic, even including profanity. Due to the peer pressure, he decides to commit suicide in the private space of his bedroom (Murphy, Falchuk and 20th Century Fox Television 2011, 3.14, 6' 15"-8' 03"). This location allows David to show his genuine feelings of misery for the first time, which are deeply contrasted with his brute dominance in the first two seasons. Thanks to the fact that he is in a private space, his true self is uncovered.

It can be discussed that the reason behind his decision to commit suicide is due to the fact that David is the target of harassment both at school and at home which are the main spaces he frequents. Therefore, the elimination of his agonies is more challenging than in the case of Kurt, as David does not even feel safe in his own bedroom because that is where cyberbullying takes force. Due to recent electronic advances, cyberbullying has emerged as a new form of harassment (Smith et al. 2007, 376), and just as in physical bullying, LGBT students in the United States are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than their heterosexual peers (Hinduja and Patchin 2011, 2). Even if the representation of suicide in *Glee* may seem extremist, is not far from reality. It has been discovered that “youth who are bullied, or who bully others, are at an elevated risk for suicidal thoughts, attempts, and completed suicides” (Hinduja and Patchin 2010, 1). In addition, as it has been aforementioned, just in one month during 2010 there were four gay high school students who quit their lives after having been bullied.

It is clear to affirm than in both characters' experiences with homophobic bullying, the space plays a crucial role. In this matter, *Glee's* aim is to denounce the absence of policies to protect the American queer youth in their high schools. It is true that there are codes against the discrimination based on one's sexual orientation or gender identity, but there are conservative schools which curriculum is purely “heterosexual-based abstinence-only sex education”. While, on the other hand, there are local schools trying to promote diversity

education and the creation of safer climates (Meyer 2010, 85). More concretely, it is relevant to notice that McKingley High is located in Lima, Ohio. This Midwest state is one of the territories in the United States where individuals who undergo discrimination for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity do not benefit from legal protection. (American Civil Liberties Union 2015). Even though there is still a lot to be done to achieve LGBT rights in Ohio, the state is now considered to “be allowed pending appeals and further action” regarding same-sex marriage (The Washington Post 2015).

CONCLUSION

Considering what it has been analyzed in this paper, it can be defended that *Glee* reflects about the current situation regarding those American sexual minority students who experience homophobic bullying in their daily lives. Here it is essential to introduce the term dialoguism. This label is manifested when a connection between a media text and real events is established. The dialoguism is evident in several forms when considering *Glee* and anti-gay bullying in the United States, which prove how relevant has been the existence of the FOX network hit in respect to the necessary reform in high schools to secure the well-being of the American LGBT youth.

First of all, *Glee's* homophobic bullying plot line in its second season coincided with a series of dramatic events that took place in September of 2010 concerning male gay students which all ended in suicide. These disturbing episodes caused American schools to start considering taking action against homophobic bullying. As it was proved in 2009 by GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) in a survey with more than 7,000 students, “only 18 percent said their schools had a comprehensive program addressing anti-gay bullying” (Huffington Post 2010). If one compares these results with the ones from 2013, it can be noticed that the situation has improved humbly. As GLSEN states, “more LGBT students reported having an anti-bullying/harassment policy at their school in 2013 than in all prior survey years, including a modest increase in the percentage of students reporting that their school had a comprehensive policy” (2014, 24).

Due to the growing awareness of the urgency to protect gay students from homophobic bullying, the It Gets Better Project was born in September of 2010. It is a website in which “young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender can see how love and happiness can be a reality in their future” (It Gets Better Project 2015) through the viewing of encouraging videos. The nonprofit organization has since then received more than 50,000

videos, some of them featuring recognized personalities such as the president Barack Obama. Other celebrities that decided to contribute were the actors Chris Colfer and Max Adler, who play the characters of Kurt and David in *Glee* respectively. It is important to highlight at this point that their videos were published around the time the episodes with the homophobic bullying story line were being aired on television, just making the dialoguism between *Glee* and anti-gay bullying even more emphasized.

Both actors, along with the cast of the show, have also shown their support for another organization called the Trevor Project. This nonprofit's mission is centered around ending suicide among LGBT youth. One of its major forces of action is their 24/7 phone service (The Trevor Project 2015). Another relevant example of dialoguism to be highlighted at this point, is the fact that during the episode of "On My Way", the one in which David tries to commit suicide, in one of the commercial breaks it featured a PSA for The Trevor Project. A few days later, it was announced in the press that the organization received a record number of traffic. The co-founder Peggy Rajscky declared that the number of calls they received that night tripled the average, finishing with the statement "There's the power of network TV." (Stack 2012)

Concluding with all these relationships between *Glee* and the awareness of preventing homophobic bullying in United States, it is essential to mention that in January of 2011 Chris Colfer took advantage of the fact of winning a Golden Globe for its role in *Glee* to expose the issue in his winning speech by announcing

Most importantly, to all the amazing kids that watch our show and the kids that our show celebrates, who are constantly told 'no' by the people in their environments, by bullies at school that they can't be who they are or have what they want because of who they are. Well, screw that, kids. (The Hollywood Reporter 2011)

Considering all these correlations, it is unquestionable the importance *Glee* had when representing homophobic bullying in its second and third seasons with the characters of Kurt and David. The show not only projected the severe psychological outcomes sexual minority youth undergo, but also expressed the necessity to enforce policies in schools regarding the protection of students against harassment purely based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. *Glee* serves as a magnificent tool to increase the awareness among its teenager audience of this issue which torments a considerable number of students in the United States.

In spite of the fact that the FOX network's hit resorts to stereotypes when portraying Kurt, it is appealing to note that the character breaks the code conventions of the female-male binary opposition. Regarding David, his evolution from a hegemonic masculinity that is purely heterosexist to becoming his true self is highly relevant. Moreover, the addition of cyberbullying and suicide has an undoubted importance when considering the relation with reality. As GLSEN defends, "it is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create safer and more inclusive schools for LGBT students" (2014, 123). This argument is clearly emphasized in *Glee* which acts as a lesson that television can provoke in its audience an awareness to create safer environments for the vulnerable sexual minority. It is irrefutable that the action of erasing homophobic bullying from American high schools is improbable considering the present absenteeism of said policies, but television series such as *Glee* contribute to spread the visibility of the urgent need to secure the current LGBT youth's welfare in the United States.

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