

"You Change the World When You Change Your Mind:" Social Judgment Theory in the Musical *Kinky Boots*

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This project applies Sherif and Hovland's (1961) social judgment theory to the musical Kinky Boots through a rhetorical analysis of the script and a recorded performance of the London West End Production. Specifically, I analyze how Latitudes of Rejection, Latitudes of Noncommitment, and Latitudes of Acceptance are illustrated in Kinky Boots by observing how the characters react to Lola's appearance, Charlie's decision regarding the future of the shoe factory, and decisions on the Milan fashion show. By observing how ideas are placed into an individuals' latitudes, I found that audience members can observe their own reactions, along with other people's reactions, when introduced to new ideas such as career choices and identities and gender performances. I suggest that audience members can learn life lessons such as overcoming prejudice through watching Kinky Boots.

Introduction

Kinky Boots, a musical that blends the worlds of a shoe factory owner and an entertainer, portrays the benefits of people altering their perspectives towards those different from them. This musical, written by Harvey Fierstein with music and lyrics written by Cyndi Lauper, was originally based off a 2005 movie with the same name (Blistein, 2018). This musical had its first preview on March 3, 2013, opened on April 4, 2013 at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre, and recently closed on April 7, 2019 (The Broadway League, n.d.). The show ran for 2,507 performances and became the 25th-longest-running Broadway show in history (Blistein, 2018). *Kinky Boots* grossed \$297 million from its Broadway performances alone (Blistein, 2018). In addition to the Broadway performances, the musical has been performed in England, Germany, Korea, Canada, Australia and Japan (Blistein, 2018). The musical has received six Tony awards: Best Musical, Best Original Score for The Theatre, Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical, Best Choreography, Best Orchestrations, and Best Sound Design of a Musical (The Broadway League, n.d.).

This musical has also received positive reviews from critics. Adam Feldman (2013) of *Time Out* notes that "the musical holds up for the same reason Price & Son's products do: solid craftsmanship and care. Lauper is a musical-theater natural, combining bright, infectious melodies with simple but effective lyrics. As each act progresses, the energy rises palpably, boosted by a heart-strong cast" (para. 2). Chris Jones (2018) of the *Chicago Tribune* describes *Kinky Boots* as "both an idealized escape and a kind of fascinating, even a calming, reflection of the massive social change occurring on both sides of the Atlantic" (para. 11).

The story of *Kinky Boots* focuses on Charlie, who inherits his father's shoe factory after his father passes away. Charlie lacks a passion for this business and the factory is going bankrupt. He must make the decision whether to stay in London with his fiancée and start a new life or return to Northern England and take over the business. Charlie chooses the latter in order to continue his father's legacy. Because of the bankruptcy, Charlie needs to reinvent the business with a new product. Assisting with this is Lola, a drag performer who meets Charlie accidentally when he tries defending her against hooligans outside of a pub. After breaking a heel, Lola complains that her drag boots are cheaply made but very expensive. She mentions the challenge of finding shoes that are durable enough for dancing. Charlie then realizes an untapped footwear market: cross-dressers who need durable and reliable footwear. Charlie gets the idea to create boots for cross-dressing men with the help of Lola. Lola makes an appearance at the factory, where she is harassed by multiple workers for being a cross-dresser. Charlie and Lola realize they have more in common than they thought, as they both are unsuccessfully trying to live up to their fathers' expectations.

Don, a factory worker, judges Lola for the attire she wears at the factory. Lola tells Don that he is jealous that she receives more attention from the female employees than he does. The pair argue over what it means to be a real man, which eventually leads to Don challenging Lola to a boxing match. The fight ends with Lola allowing Don to win to prevent him from feeling disrespected when he returns to work at the factory. However, she challenges Don to accept people for who they are.

After production begins, Charlie realizes he doesn't have enough money to travel to Milan for a fashion show to display the company's new boots. Lola suggests using her "Angels" (fellow drag queens) as models rather than paying for professional models. After fighting with both Nicola and Lola, Charlie is left alone in the factory, frustrated with himself. Don convinces the other employees to go back to work and accepts Charlie and Lola for who they are. Finally, they receive enough money for Milan, but Lola refuses to go after her fight with Charlie. In Milan, Charlie prepares himself to model the boots, but before he goes out, Lola and her Angels arrive and take over. The remaining workers model the boots, accepting one another for who they are. Lola not only helps Charlie with his business, but also in becoming the man he needs to be. Through their teamwork, they discover they are more similar than they thought.

I chose to study *Kinky Boots* as the messages and issues mentioned in the storyline are important for audience members to learn. The primary message of the musical is acceptance; accepting yourself and accepting others for who they are as individuals. The plot illustrates a need for society to adapt and alter their viewpoints on people they perceive as different. In Lola's story, she faces challenges in being her true self to those she loves, her father, and those she interacts with daily. The key lesson here is that people should accept others for who they are rather than maintaining their preconceived prejudices. Through this rhetorical analysis, I apply Sherif and Hovland's (1961) social judgment theory to the musical *Kinky Boots*. I apply the concepts of this theory to the musical, and study how we take a position on an idea based off our current attitudes. Through examining the characters and how they interpret situations, ideas, and concepts, I notice how and when they adopt changes into their own latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and non-commitment. By observing character relationships in the musical, audience members are provided with insights about important life lessons, such as overcoming prejudices and accepting others for who they are. These life lessons, which connect with social judgment theory, also apply to viewers' everyday lives which is important as we observe how people react to new situations, concepts, and ideas.

Social Judgment Theory

Social judgment theory was established by Muzafer Sherif and Carl I. Hovland (1961) in *Social Judgment: Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Communication and Attitude Change*. The main premise behind social judgment theory is that an individual considers new ideas, compares these new ideas to his/her/their current point of view, and determines where these ideas are placed on his/her/their attitude scale (O'Keefe, 1990). This is a subconscious process that frequently happens throughout our daily lives as we are constantly exposed to new ideas. Sherif and Hovland (1961) state that "a person's attitude on an issue may well influence the way he appraises relevant behavior and events" (p. 4). A listener determines how an issue or idea agrees or disagrees with his/her/their attitude and judges how he/she/they feels based on that. A person's position is based on his/her/their most preferred position, judgment on various alternatives, and level of ego-involvement with the issue ("Social Judgment Theory," n.d.). Sherif and Hovland (1961) describe an example of a baseball game where the umpire declares a player on the favored team as "out," which results in boos from the crowd. The fans immediately boo the umpire for ruling against their team even though they haven't looked to see if the umpire was correct in this ruling. This portrays how some individuals choose to pass judgments and act on them. Sherif and Hovland (1961) further explain attitude in the following terms:

An attitude toward an object, person, group or social issue is not directly observable but is inferred from a persistent and characteristic mode of reaction to that stimulus or stimulus class. The object of attitude is placed in a category or class favorable or unfavorable in some degree, high or low in some degree, acceptable or unacceptable in some degree in the individual's scheme of things. One essential aspect of the attitudinal reaction is a categorization process, whether or not the individual is aware that he is passing a judgment. (p. 5)

This process includes placing these judgments into different latitudes or categories. According to Sherif and Hovland (1961), there is a process in which an individual solicits an expression of his/her/their attitude toward an issue, person or group, places that issue within a framework, and assigns it to a category (p. 5). Individuals place items (statements, objects, groups) into categories based on personal preference. These categories are known as latitudes under acceptance-rejection (Sherif & Hovland, 1961, p. 7). Latitudes of acceptance are when an individual finds an idea reasonable, latitudes of rejection are when an idea is unreasonable, and latitudes of non-commitment are when a person neither accepts nor rejects the idea (Sherif and Hovland, 1961, p. 7). One's attitude determines the outcome of the judgmental processes and effects. According to O'Keefe (1990), "persuasion occurs at end of the process where individual[s] understand a message, comparing [it] with [their] current position on that issue, depending upon position of anchor point, latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment with level of ego-involvement" (p. 4). Sherif and Hovland (1961) go into further detail about the discrimination task and judgment process that occurs as individuals consider new ideas. They state:

The discrimination task which requires the individual with a strong attitude on an issue to choose one of two objectionable statements as more favorable than the other, the subject's reactions to such a task and toward the experimenter by subjecting him to it may be more significant psychologically than the choice itself. The judgment of items related to an attitude involves placement in terms of the individual's reference scale, but it becomes placement in which the degree of acceptance or rejection is significant. (pp. 10-11)

Individuals react to new ideas in a variety of ways depending on their personal attitudes. In the storyline of *Kinky Boots*, the characters are facing a multitude of new ideas such as their beliefs of cross-dressers and the fate of their factory. Based on their personal attitudes toward the ideas, they act accordingly to either reject, accept, or feel non-committed to a reaction.

A number of scholars have applied social judgment theory to their research studies. Robert Wigton (1996) applies social judgment theory to the study of medical judgments. Wigton (1996) states that:

Medical judgments characteristically involve decision making under uncertainty with inevitable error and an abundance of fallible cues. In medicine, as in other areas, SJT research has found wide variation among decision makers in their judgments and in the weighting of clinical information. (p. 175)

He concludes that this theory provides physicians with insight on decisions and allows the medical research community to have these tools for studying judgments within their practices (Wigton, 1996).

Smith et al. (2002) apply this theory when studying the decisions involved when treating depression. Their research "aimed to assess the extent to which clinical guidelines influence the treatment decisions of GPs involved in the management of depression as well as to determine the amount of agreement or disagreement among individual GPs" (Smith et al., 2002, p. 60). One of their findings concluded that "the overall utilization of the cues in the GPs' decision strategies differed from guideline recommendations. However, both the guideline experts and the GPs placed importance on the 'duration of symptoms' cue" (Smith et al., 2002, p. 60).

Another finding had to do with agreement in antidepressant prescriptions. They reported that: One participant said they were 100% certain that the guidelines indicated an antidepressant for this patient whereas another expert thought the patient definitely should not be prescribed antidepressants. If the guidelines were hard and fast rules that were clearly explained then the guideline expert's responses should be yes or no decisions. (Smith et al., 2002, p. 57)

This theory is useful to notice "the uncertainties embedded in the environment that decision makers face and does not assume they are fully informed" (Smith et al., 2002, p. 51). By applying social judgment theory, we can observe how the participants place their opinions regarding the antidepressants into different latitudes. Also, social judgment theory "allows identification of levels of agreement or disagreement among

clinicians as well as tracing the source of any disagreement, by the analysis of individual decision strategies” (Smith et al., 2002, p. 52). Through the use of this theory, they are able to identify those participants that place the usage of these antidepressants into their latitudes of acceptance or rejection and allow them to justify their decision process. By providing insight on how a decision is made, clinicians can weigh the information used in making decisions (Smith et al., 2002, p. 52).

Thompson et al. (2005) apply this theory when studying “nurses’ use of clinical information when diagnosing hypovolemic shock in a series of simulated cases presented via computer” (p. 68). Social judgment theory is applicable to “establish the relative contribution to judgment of differing levels of information (Thompson et al., 2005, p. 73). Their study observes the changes in informational usage before and after receiving a lecture. One of their findings is that “nurses’ information use is not linear and the utility for decision judgment derived from clinical information is not distributed equally” (Thompson et al., 2005, p. 68). Thompson et al., (2005) contend that:

Social judgment approaches have utility as tools for evaluating educational interventions. Many evaluations of educational interventions simply focus on changes in knowledge rather than practice. Whilst SJT does not directly observe changes in practice it does evaluate changes in real judgments and choices. (p. 75)

They also state that “conjoint and social judgment analytic approaches are a potentially valuable way of planning and evaluating educational interventions for nurses” (Thompson et al., 2005, p. 76).

Asemah and Nwammuo (2017) observe the implications of social judgment theory and persuasive advertising campaigns. As advertising is a powerful tool to promote and encourage consumers to purchase a good or service, social judgment theory can be applied since “the effect of a persuasive message on a particular issue depends on the way that the receiver evaluates the position of the message” (Asemah & Nwammuo, 2017, p. 75). Asemah and Nwammuo (2017) believe understanding social judgment theory is vital for companies as it allows for companies to spend money on advertising campaigns more effectively (p. 75). Asemah and Nwammuo (2017) state that “formative research should be conducted to determine the audience’s latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment for the particular social norms that will form the content of the messages with which the audience will be saturated” (p. 80). They argue that:

Messages that fall within the latitude of non-commitment should result in perception and behavior change, whereas messages that fall in the latitude of acceptance are less likely to be accepted due to assimilation effects. Messages in the latitude of rejection should not result in perception or behavior change due to contrast effects. (Asemah & Nwammuo, 2017, p. 80)

Asemah & Nwammuo (2017) suggest that “social judgment helps the consumers to interpret the advertising campaign and decide whether to act positively or negatively” (p. 81).

Upon reviewing literature, it is clear that social judgment is a pervasive phenomenon that impacts how humans interact with one another to negotiate their sense of value, whether that value be positively or negatively interpreted. By applying social judgment theory to the musical *Kinky Boots*, I will examine how the characters react to different ideas throughout the musical. When different ideas, characters, or situations appear, the characters’ reactions can be classified into different latitudes. Some fall under the latitude of acceptance and others under the latitude of rejection. My analysis includes examples of how a character may react to a new idea, such as turning the shoe factory into making boots for cross-dressers. I hope that this paper will add to this body of literature by showing how a mid-20th century communication theory can be applied to a contemporary text with lessons for 21st century audiences. While this production is based on a true story, the lessons to be learned from it are relevant for all audiences in the process of understanding the importance of acceptance.

Analysis

In *Kinky Boots*, characters are presented with new ideas and concepts throughout the musical, which allows for audience members to observe how characters react to these ideas. Through the application of Muzafer Sherif and Carl I. Hovland’s (1961) social judgment theory, I observe how career expectations,

social identities, and gender performances in *Kinky Boots* are placed into the characters' latitudes of acceptance, latitudes of noncommitment, or latitudes of rejection.

Charlie's father, Mr. Price, is not enthused by Charlie's decision to leave the factory and go to London. He places this idea within his latitude of rejection as he would rather have him be working with him. Mr. Price states, "your life, your future is right here in this factory. You belong here" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 8). The musical centers around the shoe factory that Charlie inherited, Charlie's decision concerning what to do with it, and what Charlie does to keep it running in order to have the employees retain their jobs. At first, Charlie wanted to close the factory when their current buyer cancelled the contract that they had with Price & Sons. The employees reacted negatively to this decision. For instance, Don placed this idea into his latitude of rejection, stating, "do what you like, but you can't fire me" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 27). Lauren, another employee tells Charlie to change the product to make something that appeals to more buyers. She also places Charlie's idea of closing the factory idea into her latitude of rejection, as she would rather change the product than see the factory close. However, Charlie's fiancée, Nicola, would prefer for the factory to close because this would enable her and Charlie to begin their life together in London. She tells Charlie, "we may have been born in a small factory town, but we sure as hell don't have to die there" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 8). I believe Nicola is placing this idea into her latitude of acceptance, which is when an individual finds an idea reasonable (Sherif and Hovland, 1961, p. 7). Nicola wants Charlie to pursue a life with her rather than continue his father's dream of maintaining a successful shoe factory.

Through texts such as *Kinky Boots* it is suggested that audiences can observe how people form their points of view through the tensions they encounter within their lives, such as living by others' desires or their own desire. When individuals live through their own desires, they acknowledge how others place ideas, situations, and concepts into their own latitudes by being able to observe more points of view. If the individual is living through others' desires, they are more likely to conform to others' latitudes and reasonings rather being individualistic in making decisions. This is seen throughout *Kinky Boots* when Charlie is trying to decide the fate of the shoe company as his fiancée wishes for a closure of the factory whereas the workers believe he should continue to manage the factory. Charlie feels the need to make his decision based off of the others' opinions rather than his own. Another character that struggles with these tensions is Lola, a character who is not widely accepted by society, as she contradicts the societal norms. Lola struggles with the idea of altering who she is to please others, including her father, or to continue pursuing a career as a drag performer which is her own desire. Based on the tensions each character faces, their points of view regarding certain matters or ideas may vary.

In the beginning of the musical, as well as towards the end, Charlie shows interest in becoming a real estate agent instead of running a shoe factory, and Nicola would like to start the business with him. At the beginning, Charlie is willing to begin a life in London with his fiancée, even if that means leaving his father's shoe factory to do it. According to Sherif and Hovland (1961), when "one solicits an expression of an individual's attitude toward some social issue, person, or group, one typically finds that the process involves placement of the issue in a framework and assignment to a category" (p. 5). It appears that at first, Charlie places the idea of becoming a real estate agent into his latitude of non-commitment. Latitudes of non-commitment are when a person neither accepts nor rejects the idea (Sherif and Hovland, 1961, p. 7). Charlie seems willing to leave for London with Nicola for the purpose of beginning a life with her and planning their wedding, but he seems less enthused about becoming a real estate agent. However, later in the musical, Charlie is seen in the shoe factory producing his new line of "Kinky Boots" when Nicola makes an appearance with a real estate agent, Richard Bailey, who is willing to sell the property. Nicola and Richard Bailey begin with a proposition to turn the factory into condominiums. Nicola tells Charlie, "the deal Richard's put together will rid you of the factory, settle your family's debts and insure our future with a career-defining opportunity. We even get a model flat, rent free, while we're selling" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 56). At this point in the musical, Charlie places this idea of selling the factory and beginning a career in real estate into his latitude of rejection. He wants to continue with the factory as he has faith in what they are currently producing.

This newfound faith stems from a new friend he encounters named Lola. When Charlie first meets Lola, she complains to him that the boots she wears for drag performances do not support her in the way that they should. Shoe factories are not producing boots for crossdressers that allow the heel to hold up their weight without it breaking. Charlie offers to fix Lola's broken heel, which gives him an idea a few days later. He discovers that the under-served niche market he was looking for is "properly built-to-last women's boots for women who are men" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 32). At first, the factory workers were skeptical about producing flashy boots. The shoe factory was previously producing very bland, conservative shoes that were made for rich people and would last them a lifetime. This new idea would be geared toward a completely different demographic. Lola is excited for this idea; she accepts this concept because of the benefits of the product for herself, her Angels, and other drag performers. When Lola presents sketches of these boots, several employees compliment her ideas, which places them into their latitudes of acceptance. Charlie commits to this idea; he states, "I'm willing to gamble the fate of this whole enterprise on you as a designer" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 42). At first, Lola rejects this idea, mentioning how she doesn't even know how to make a shoe, let alone design one. Once she places this into her latitude of rejection, Charlie tries to convince her to accept the idea. Charlie tells Lola he sees her passion for shoes and convinces her that she will wonder for the rest of her life what would have happened if she had taken this opportunity. Because of Charlie's argument, Lola changes her mind and places the idea of becoming a designer in her latitude of acceptance. This then leads to Lola becoming a designer, creating sketches of boots for her and her Angels to wear.

This example illustrates how other people's logical and emotional arguments can convince others to adjust their latitudes of acceptance and rejection to consider new ideas. In this scenario, Charlie persuades Lola to become a designer by logically stating that she if she refuses to try, she will always regret not having taken the opportunity. Audience members may observe how their decisions are influenced by the people around them and the ideas that they place into their own latitudes. When we adjust our latitudes upon being influenced by another, we may learn about these new ideas in a different way than expected.

Since her first appearance in the factory, Lola had received negative comments regarding her appearance. One day, Lola decides to dress in male clothing, but this only results in more negativity from her male coworkers. Leading the group of negative commenters is Don, who always had a problem with the way Lola dressed. At one point, he comments, "you could try dressing like a bloke, for starters" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 63). He places Lola's appearance in his latitude of rejection since the beginning of the musical. Don challenges Lola to be a real man and fight with him in a boxing match. Lola accepts the challenge, as she had a boxing background, and almost wins the match. Lola decides to allow Don to win the boxing match which surprises Don. She allowed him to win to prevent him from feeling disrespected by the other factory workers. Lola then challenges Don to accept others for who they are which results in Don placing Lola's appearance in his latitude of acceptance.

Lola confides in Charlie, admitting that her father had always been unhappy with her desire to be a performer. For Lola's father, performance as a career choice was always in his latitude of rejection as it went against his ideals of a son, which ultimately resulted in the rejection of his son. Lola mentions how her father wanted to train her to become a boxer in order to pursue the champion's belt that he was never able to obtain. Lola states, "when I appeared for a fight in a white cocktail dress... he disowned me. Refused to see me, even when he came down with lung cancer" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 51). Lola's father placed the idea of Lola cross-dressing in his extreme latitude of rejection; not only did he disagree with it, but he completely took Lola out of his life because of it. This is an example of how the rejection of an idea can lead to rejection of a certain individual or individuals. For example, individuals who are LGBTQ+ are sometimes rejected from their family or friends' lives if these friends or family are highly conservative or religious. Some individuals place the idea of people being LGBTQ+ into their own latitudes of rejection, which results in those individuals also being rejected.

In the second act of the musical, Charlie, Lola, and the factory workers plan for the boots to be showcased at a fashion show in Milan. Unfortunately, there are not sufficient funds for the trip. The original plan was to hire Italian models to wear the boots and for hair and makeup staff to prepare them for the

runway. Lola presents the idea of using her Angels instead for the fashion show to cut back on the costs of the trip because her Angels not only outperform the models but also do their own hair and makeup. Charlie immediately rejects this idea, not willing to gamble his family's business on using Lola and her Angels for the show. He comes after Lola saying, "I don't know which is more daft; what you're saying or what you're wearing" (Fierstein & Lauper, 2013, p. 79). At first, Charlie places the idea of using Lola and her Angels into his latitude of rejection because he believed it was too much of a risk for Milan, where purchasers at the fashion show expected to see professional models. While his original plan falls through and Charlie is the only model showcasing the footwear, he is relieved once Lola and her Angels arrive in Milan to showcase the new line of "Kinky Boots." The crowd loved the performance given by Lola and her angels which made Charlie confident in the show. Thus, Charlie then placed the idea of Lola and her Angels into his latitude of acceptance.

By applying social judgment theory to *Kinky Boots*, I am able to observe how certain characters react to different ideas regarding individuals' career choices, identities and gender performances, especially once they encounter contrasts to their perspectives on these ideas. Some are seen reacting in extremely negative ways while others are indifferent to or gladly accept new ideas. I now discuss ways for interpreting these differences and how they impact individuals' social judgments and experiences.

Discussion

By applying Sherif and Hovland's (1961) social judgment theory to the musical *Kinky Boots*, I analyzed how characters react to new concepts and ideas, including the future of the shoe factory, producing a new style of shoe, and interactions with drag performers. *Kinky Boots* has a conflict-driven storyline, as some characters in the musical indirectly show hostility towards each other. For example, a portion of the musical included Don's negativity to Lola, which was resolved once they had a boxing match and learned to accept each other. Other examples included characters' reactions to Lola's appearance, Charlie's decision to keep the factory running, and Charlie's decisions regarding the Milan fashion show. By observing how ideas are placed in individuals' latitudes of acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection, audience members can introspectively observe how they themselves, as well as others around them, may react when confronted with new ideas and situations. When audience members observe how the characters in *Kinky Boots* react to certain ideas, they may feel an understanding for how they themselves make decisions based off of similar matters. The development of Don's attitude towards Lola and cross-dressers may influence audience members to look past the appearance and focus on the person and accept them for who they are. Musicals such as *Kinky Boots* allow for an understanding of different perspectives when it comes to a certain idea or situation.

Social judgment theory is applicable in our everyday lives and can help us examine how people react to new situations, concepts, or ideas. For example, imagine that an individual is employed at a company that wants to upgrade their technology, which requires getting rid of traditional ways of completing tasks. Some employees may feel this upgrade is needed to become more efficient, thus placing the company's decision in their latitudes of acceptance. Others may be repelled by this idea, as it takes away the tradition of the company, and place the company's decision in their latitudes of rejection. Those who feel indifferent place the decision in their latitudes of non-commitment. While every individual is entitled to their own beliefs and opinions, at times it is beneficial to align everyone's latitudes for the greater good. By discussing which option is of best interest for the company, some individuals may feel inclined to alter their latitude as they see other perspectives. Oftentimes, individuals make their decisions with key findings and information lacking. Upon learning more about the situation, they may see their latitude has changed. This theory can be applied to real life, as we often subconsciously place new ideas into these latitudes.

In his book *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke (1967) states how proverbs are used for consolation or vengeance. Proverbs can also describe reoccurring situations. Burke (1967) states how they are used for social relationships and are "recurring so frequently that they 'must have a word for it'" (p. 293). Burke (1967) suggests that "art forms like 'tragedy' or 'comedy' or 'satire' would be treated as *equipment for living*, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes" (p. 304). The lessons audience members learn through the relationships in *Kinky Boots* are

applicable to their everyday lives. Through viewing *Kinky Boots*, audience members learn the value of challenging stereotypes and pursuing passions. *Kinky Boots*, as well as other musicals and popular culture texts, can serve as “equipment for living” by providing audiences with life lessons through its story. At first, people may remain with their latitude of choice until they observe other people changing their perspectives and latitudes. This could be because when it comes to new ideas, those who are quick to make a choice of latitude may feel pressure or negativity from others. However, once other people make the decision to change their latitude, others may be inclined to follow.

This paper explores how social judgment theory established by Sherif and Hovland (1961) can be applied to the musical *Kinky Boots*, allowing the audience to observe how we evaluate new ideas and compare them with our current attitudes. This musical allows audience members to observe the relationships and choices of the two main characters, Charlie and Lola. Additionally, the evolving relationship between Charlie and Lola provides more ways for audience members to feel connected with them if they are able to identify with the characters or how they react to situations. Audience members are also able to see the relationship between Lola and Don, which provides important lessons about overcoming prejudices, such as when one individual had a certain idea, the other would be opposed to it or would place it into his/her latitude of rejection. However, once their relationship changed and they accepted each other, they placed each other’s ideas into their own latitudes of acceptance. When an individual places another into their latitude of rejection, they proceed to place any idea they make into their latitude of rejection without understanding the situation. Through connection with others and forming trust, individuals are more willing to place their ideas into their latitude of acceptance as they believe in the relationships formed. By using musical theatre as “equipment for living,” we can learn life lessons about relationships and interactions with others.

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