No Rose Without a Thorn:
Adolescent Popularity, Loneliness, and Mental Health in Musical Theatre

An analysis of social issues for adolescents in *Be More Chill* and *Heathers*

BA Thesis American Studies
Wouter Peer
S4669509
w.peer@student.ru.nl

ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher who will receive this document: Dr. Nancy Mykoff

Title of document: No Rose Without a Thorn: Popularity, Loneliness, and Mental Health in
Musical Theatre

Name of course: BA Thesis

Date of submission: 3-7-2020

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has neither
committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed
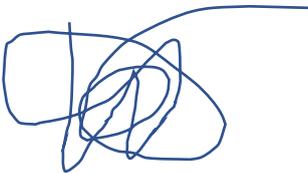
Name of student: Wouter Peer

Student number: S4669509

Abstract and Key Words

Musical theater has a long history of addressing social issues. Interestingly, a new trend emerged during the 2010s in which musicals were targeted at younger audiences. The musicals *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* are prime examples of such musicals, especially because of their significantly large fanbases. The messages of the musicals thus seem to resonate with the audiences. This thesis provides a close read of *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* and analyzes what they say about high school structures and the social issues adolescents cope with in contemporary society. By looking at themes of (gendered) popularity, loneliness, and mental health, this thesis examines what musical theater attributes to the discussion of adolescent wellbeing. It concludes that the musicals incorporate issues that specifically affect adolescents as a result of a deliberate younger target audience. Adolescent issues are the central themes of the musicals, making them the center of attention that they have not been in the past.

Keywords: Musical Theater · *Be More Chill* · *Heathers* · Popularity · Conformity ·
Adolescence · Identity · High School · Loneliness · Mental Health · Suicide

Contents

Introduction

Theater provides insight into society, as cultural products serve as mirrors to what is happening in society. Cultural theorists Chris Barker and Emma Jane state that culture could be analyzed as just a reflection of social constructions in society (Barker and Jane 10). While a cultural product will often enforce the existing constructions, they are also tools of critique. Culture could be summarized as the exchange of discourses of representation, with the majority dominating the minority, but the minority addressing issues with the ideals of the majority (Barker and Jane 42).

Musical theater has a long history of addressing social issues. During the years of social unrest in the 1960s the "issue-driven musical" emerged, in which the issue took center stage next to the plot. This does not mean that social issues were not addressed before the 1960s. *West Side Story*, for example, placed the classic story of Romeo and Juliet in contemporary America with an emphasis on the tension between white and Latino America.

What changed in the 1960s was that the social issue became so central to the story that it became inseparable from it. Not only were the stories and characters built around a theme or an issue, but the issue became an integral part of the story. This influenced the musical world heavily, because from that point on then musicals served as a central medium for starting a discussion at times when certain issues became too big to ignore, during the aids crisis for example (Jones 237). Not only were musicals a form of entertainment, but they were also set out to convince people to take a stand against important problems.

An interesting phenomenon that occurred in the world of American musicals a few years ago is the emergence of the adolescent high school unpopular to popular genre that gained quite some attention. These musicals deal with issues like popularity, peer pressure, and mental health in high school, addressing what it is like to be an adolescent in the peer system. Musicals set in high school are not new, with shows like *Grease* and *Hairspray* having been a success in the past, but in these musicals, the central theme was never adolescence but something else. Racism was a major theme in *Hairspray*, for example, and while this is relevant to adolescents as well, it also resonates with older audiences.

In the late 20th century the general audience of musical theater shifted to an older demographic due to higher prices, making musicals something for a wealthier elite (Jones 3). Something had to change for Broadway to keep attracting younger audiences. Inspired by the raging success of Disney's *High School Musical* in 2006 and the tv series *Glee* that aired from 2009 to 2015, Broadway attempted to copy their successes to make musicals popular again for

young people. Especially the success of 2015's *Dear Evan Hansen* inspired Broadway writers to attempt aiming their stories at the adolescents themselves, but the trend was already present before that.

Two musicals that came to existence during this trend are 2019's *Be More Chill* by Joe Iconis and 2014's *Heathers* by Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy. Both musicals have a similar high school setting in which the protagonist outcast tries to climb up the social ladder of popularity, having to cope with its advantages and disadvantages, whatever they may be. The focus on young people that these musicals have speaks to social constructions of adolescence, so an analysis of the two might provide some insights.

Be More Chill and *Heathers* are directly aimed at young people, addressing social issues that directly affect them. In a review of *Be More Chill*, *The Post* journalist Riley Runnels says that "almost every seat in the audience was occupied by a teenager, and half of the teenagers were wearing the show's merchandise as if it were a concert or a sporting event" (Runnells). This is, thus, a clear break from the aging general Broadway audience. This did not only have consequences on ticket sales but also in the kind of stories that were performed on stage. For one of the first times, adolescent issues were addressed on stage as the central theme of a story.

Social media can have a tremendous influence on theatrical success. As a result of the younger audience, *Be More Chill* and *Heathers*' online life almost surpasses their (Off-) Broadway life. *Be More Chill* received mixed reviews when it was performed in New Jersey, and it was thus dismissed as a possible candidate for Broadway. Quite a big fanbase for it emerged online, however, and only then it was reconsidered and saved by the online community. It became a Broadway hit in 2019 as a result. *Heathers*, however, did not have a Broadway run, which makes its online success even more significant. After a run in Los Angeles and an Off-Broadway run, it did not make it to Broadway. The cast recording was put online, though, and a rather high-quality illegal recording went around YouTube. As a result, the show gained immense online popularity. Afterward, it had quite a successful run in London and it is expected to go to Broadway soon. The fact that these musicals do so well with the audience, means that the messages resonate with them. As a result, an analysis of these messages should provide insight into adolescent life.

By focusing on *Be More Chill* and *Heathers*, this thesis argues that musical theater aimed directly at young people provides valuable insights on social constructions experienced by adolescents in high school. It draws from Jones and Taylor and their theories of issue-driven, integrated musicals. This theoretical approach reveals the struggles of adolescence by

spotlighting central and shared social issues. They include (gendered) popularity, social pressure, loneliness, mental health, and suicide as a result.

Most generally, the following analysis speaks to the ways that contemporary musical theater performed on Broadway provides a clear insight into power, inclusion, and exclusion in young adulthood. Firstly, this paper will lay a foundation of theories of cultural studies, musical theatre, high school popularity, and adolescent mental health in a brief literary review. Afterward, a close reading of the musicals will be combined with an analysis of popularity in chapter 1, and loneliness and mental health in chapter 2. Then, the conclusion will bring it all together and provide an answer to the research question: How do the popular teenage outcast stories in *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* give insight to social issues of students in the high school peer system?

Literary Review

This thesis' basis lies within works of cultural studies with culture as a discourse of representation between the majority and several minorities. A discussion about the culture as a hegemonic structure cannot be held without including Marxist theories of ideology. Even though cultural studies is not necessarily a Marxist domain, it has engaged with Marxist ideas of ideology as a dominant structure of social consciousness based in societal politics and economics, creating a hegemonic structure of inclusion and exclusion as a result. Post-Marxist Theodor Adorno argued that culture was the agent of the dominant ideology, creating comfort and ease for those under it (Witkin 5). In this sense, culture is a passive entity, following the dominant ideology.

More recently, however, cultural studies academics have based themselves around the theories of ideology and hegemony as a battleground by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argued for a different approach to culture and ideology. He argued that the relationship between culture and hegemony is not only top-down, thus hegemony influencing culture, but also bottom-up. In this sense, popular culture is a battleground of ideological struggle (Barker and Jane 75-78). Culture can affect and change the dominant ideology as well. This is a central concept of cultural studies, making it not only culturally, but socially relevant.

Musical theater, being a form of popular culture, has the ability to challenge the dominant ideology as well, and they thus have social relevance. Academic research on musical theater and its effect on the cultural and social discourse is scarce. The most detailed research on musicals as a social entity is *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* by the late theater historian and critic John Bush Jones. He argues that musicals have additional value next to escapism and entertainment, but "a more subtle interchange: that between social and political values and their expression on the musical stage" (Jones 1). Important to note is the fact that a musical is often "integrated," meaning that all things that happen on stage are connected to the plot. Everything from song, to lighting, to costumes, to décor supports the central theme of the musical accordingly "musicals can address contemporary social and political issues without sacrificing entertainment value" (Jones 10-11). Musicals thus are political entities as much as forms of entertainment.

Most of the works that were written about musical theater focus on its ability to involve audiences with the emotional sensations performed on the stage. Professor of the

Department of the Performing Arts at the University of Winchester Millie Taylor argues that there is something inherent in musical that no other cultural product has that "allow them to engage and possibly manipulate the emotional attachment of their audiences and so achieve their enormous popularity" (11-12). Furthermore, Taylor argues that musicals benefit from a multiplicity of artificiality and immersion: "Audiences move between awareness of characters and performers, narrative and theatricality, revealing and reveling in the frame of performance" (Taylor 168). Thus, the audience experiencing live musical theater is simultaneously immersed in the plot, with empathy or animosity for the characters as a result, but they are also made aware of their presence in reality and never lose touch with the artificiality of what is happening on stage. Contrary to film, immersion in musical theater is not complete, you see the décor change on stage and the actors perform live. This results in extra emotional layers that cannot be achieved otherwise.

Musical theater focuses sharply on the staging of contemporary social issues that engage with audiences. *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* are targeted to a younger audience who struggle with these issues directly, and subsequently they specifically go into structures of inclusion and exclusion caused by pressures of social status in high school. The most comprehensive work engaging directly with the pressures accompanied by the ideals of popularity is the book *Popularity in the Peer System*, a collection of essays by psychologists and educational scientists. The book provides a qualitative analysis of all facets of popularity, showing the problems of the pressure for status in high school for outcasts and popular people alike, often resulting in lower academic performance and a deteriorating mental health (Cilessen et al. ix-xii).

Sociologists Shauna Pomerantz and Rebecca Raby affirm the idea that the focus on popularity in high school is detrimental to adolescent's academic performance and mental health, but they add that the ideals of popularity are clearly gendered. The expectations for boys and girls are different, and this has different effects (Pomerantz and Raby 63). Expectations of popular femininity result in a judgmental mean girl culture; not only are girls excluded, but they are actively reminded and verbally bullied if they are anything else than normal, according to sociologist Majella McSharry (67). Meanwhile, popular masculinity results in a general laxness, causing a lot of boys to underachieve (Pomerantz and Raby 82-83). Since the gender of both musicals' protagonists differs, these gendered structures might shine through in their stories.

In the worst case, high school culture can lead to mental health issues. Psychologists Westefeld et al. argue that, unfortunately, teenage depression and suicide are very prevalent in American society. This not only due to the social pressure that is caused by high school social structure, but also due to the ignorance of adults (572). Field et al. add that there are more factors at play, like the relationship that the child has with the parent, showing that suicide is an intricate problem that is a result of more than one factor (494). Most literature, like Wodarski et al.'s, is focused on suicide prevention, but an analysis of suicide and mental health in culture is lacking, even though it is an issue that occurs rather often in popular cultural products.

Chapter 1: Popularity in High School

The stories about popularity in high school in *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* trace the transformation from social outcast to popular person. It is clear then, that popularity should serve as one of the main themes. *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* explore this subject and, interestingly, do this in quite similar ways. This chapter will look at the way that *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* engage with the subject of popularity.

The musicals essentially provide an answer to the question 'Should I conform to the ideal of popularity for my status to improve?' in the form of a story, and as a result, the protagonists and antagonists represent individuality and conformity, respectively. In this sense, an analysis of how the antagonists interact with and influence the protagonists provides some interesting insights into the dilemma of popularity versus individuality. Moreover, *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* attempt to show popularity not only as a benefit but also as a burden. Lastly, popularity is a gendered concept, and as such an analysis of the differences between masculine and feminine popularity cannot be left out.

Popularity: An Ideal of Conformity

The struggle of conformity versus individuality is something that a lot of young people in high school have to cope with according to psychologist B. Bradford Brown. Historically, conformity has especially been an issue for individuals with a higher status because to achieve such high status you have to conform (Bradford Brown 175). Sociologist Majella McSharry argues that "youths who fall too far either side of the ideal image come to be haunted by their deviation from it" (67). This implies that there is a standard you have to live up to for adolescents in high school. This standard, or ideal, defines popularity.

For such a regularly used word, popularity is a rather vague concept. According to Canadian psychologist William Bukowski, this is exactly why it is such an important and effective concept. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, being popular means being commonly liked or well suited for the general public, which is rather empty in and of itself ("Popularity"). The vagueness of the word means that the concept can be filled in according to the need of its popular peers (Bukowski 8). Popularity is thus an ideal constructed by the peers and for the peers. Psychologist Marlene Sandstrom takes this idea of popularity being constructed by the peers themselves a step further by arguing that popular people themselves use this to their advantage by influencing their peers with ideals of their choosing (Sandstrom 219-221). In this sense, popularity can be compared with a wealthy person who uses his

monetary power to keep others poor. Popularity is defined by exclusion to enforce your own inclusion.

This idea of popularity as an ideal is affirmed by sociologists Shauna Pomerantz and Rebecca Raby. In their book *Smart Girls: Success, School, and the Myth of Post-Feminism*, they analyze the current balance between popularity and performance supported by secondary sources and the stories of 36 American high school students of different backgrounds of class, race, and region. One of their main findings is that being popular entails that you have to adhere to a certain standard. If you do not, you are deemed an outcast or a loner, something that the majority of students fear (Pomerantz and Raby 62). As a result, conformity is often favored over individuality.

This is a big issue according to Pomerantz and Raby because conforming to the ideals of popularity could undermine a student's academic success. They explain that in order to be judged as sociable, high school students feel the need to downplay their smartness because "academically strong students were in danger of being seen as caring too much about school, and it was assumed that this meant that they did not have the time, energy, or skills to invest in a social life" (Pomerantz and Raby 62). Thus, the ideals of popularity are harmful to the students' performance in high school.

Popularity as an ideal you have to conform to is something that comes into play in *Be More Chill* and *Heathers*. In both shows the antagonists embody conformity. They feel that there is no room for individuality. The protagonists struggle with this idea because they want to be popular, but they do not want to give up their individuality and downplay their abilities.

In *Be More Chill* the antagonist is the SQUIP, the computer that the protagonist Jeremy implants in his brain that tells him how to be cool. The way that the SQUIP convinces Jeremy to do whatever it takes to achieve his goals is interesting and quite similar to the antagonists in *Heathers*. The SQUIP promotes conformity to achieve the ideal of popularity. The SQUIP repeatedly sings: "Oh, everything about you is so terrible. Oh, everything about you makes me want to die, which at some point Jeremy even has to repeat. Jeremy should stop trying to be an individual; his only concern should be to conform" (*Be More Chill* 0.36.26-0.36.39).

Popularity dictates that you have to conform and *Be More Chill* affirms this. It opposes, though, that this is the only way you can be happy in high school, which is addressed in its closing song *Voices in My Head*. Jeremy sings: "I still have voices in my head, but the loudest one is mine" (*Be More Chill* 2.09.35-2.09.40). Jeremy will always have a voice in his head telling him that his individual self is not enough, but now he has realized that the most

important one is the one saying that he is good enough. Jeremy changed his mindset from the idea that he needs to conform to the ideal of popularity to be happy because being his authentic self makes him happy as well.

The antagonists in *Heathers* are the popular girls: the eponymous Heathers. The Heathers are like gods to everyone in high school. They are introduced in the opening scene taking place in the school's cafeteria by a Gregorian-like chant and the ensemble positions itself into a double row holding their trays to the middle forming a hedge, honoring the heathers as they walk in by turning around to make space for them. The Heathers walk slowly, almost ethereally, as the ensemble sings "Ah, Heather, Heather, and Heather. I love Heather, Heather, and Heather" (*Heathers* 0.03.58-0.04.32). Their power over the rest of the school is immediately clear. Everyone is in awe of them.

The Heathers are the ultimate symbol of conformity, and as such, they are at the pinnacle of popularity. Not only do they promote fitting in to the protagonist Veronica, but they have also lost their own individuality completely. Their names are the same, their costumes are the same, they finish each other's sentences and dance in sync in the song *Candy Store*. They even get referred to by the adults as one entity "the Heathers". At the same time, the Heathers determine the norms of judgment and conformity in high school as well, as Sandstrom suggested. Their excessive behavior is the norm and being nice and friendly is something of the past.

Just like the SQUIP, the Heathers diminish Veronica's need for individuality. The Heathers mock Veronica's old life and her friendship with the gullible Martha Dunnstock as childlike, which they repeat in *Candy Store*: "'Course if you don't care, fine, go braid her hair, maybe Sesame Street is on. Or forget that creep and get in my Jeep. Let's go tear up someone's lawn" (*Heathers* 0.12.38-0.12.50). Although less extreme than the SQUIP's message, the Heathers essentially mean the same: you need to climb up the ladder of which you are at the very bottom. Constantly, popularity is conveyed as the most important goal in adolescent life.

Heathers condemns conformity to achieve popularity as well. At the end of the play, the realization that Veronica is beautiful, even though she does not conform to the standards of popularity, is what makes Veronica happy with her current situation. In *Seventeen (reprise)*, the musical's closing song, Veronica sings: "We're all damaged, we're all frightened, we're all freaks but that's alright" (*Heathers* 1.52.57-1.53.02). Where in the beginning Veronica worried about what made her different, she now realizes that everyone is unique.

Both *Heathers* and *Be More Chill* go against the idea that the pursuit of popularity is the only thing that matters in high school. The protagonists' realizations that their fear of becoming an outsider is superficial is what resolves the story, and so it should for every high school student. Popularity does not necessarily bring you happiness, that is what the musicals try to say. In the end, Individuality trumps conformity.

Popularity as a Double-Edged Sword

As a result of social pressure that adolescents feel in high school, appearance is one of the top priorities in their life. In their interviews with adolescents, Pomerantz and Raby found that especially girls choose "pretty over smart" (68). How they present themselves is more important than what is inside. This is a standard to uphold, so there is quite a lot of pressure on the shoulders of someone popular not to fail this standard.

Psychologists David Schwartz and Andrea Hopmeyer Gorman assert that past analyses of popularity in high school mostly concluded that high status in high school has a positive effect on the rest of a high school student's life. However, there are negative outcomes as well. Popularity does not only grant opportunities but there are also risks (Schwartz and Hopmeyer Gorman 246). Being popular means there is a certain pressure on you to perform: "Popular students at any school are likely to experience considerable pressure to be attractive, cool, and highly visible among their peers" (Schwartz and Hopmeyer Gorman 246). So, popularity is like a rose: It looks pretty and attractive from a distance, but it has dangerous thorns that can hurt you when you get too close.

Performance pressure as a result of high status in high school is a central theme to both *Be More Chill* and *Heathers*. Not only do these musicals give an insight to the outcast experience, but the popular characters get their fair share of attention as well. Through the protagonists' stories, we get an insight into how popularity is experienced by an outsider, but the most interesting insights come from the side characters who were already popular, because an exploration of these characters results in an understanding of the burden that popularity can be.

One of the ways the musicals showcase the negative consequences of popularity is by giving depth to some characters of whom you would not expect they had such emotions in the first place because they wear their popularity as armor. The clearest example in *Be More Chill* is the song *Sync Up*, in which the SQUIP analyzes Jeremy's peers and explains why they act as they do. As Jeremy walks past popular girl Chloe, the SQUIP explains: "That one is obsessed with status because she is scared of losing it". Jeremy responds with: "Come on,

Chloe isn't scared of anything", after which the SQUIP says: "Everyone is scared of something, Jeremy" (*Be More Chill* 0.46.51-0.47.00).

In *Heathers*, Veronica mentions at the beginning of the musical that the three Heathers are "solid Teflon, never bothered, never harassed". She believes in the myth of popular people being invulnerable. During the musical Veronica realizes the opposite, though, and the epiphany occurs when Heather McNamara shares her feelings after the death of Heather Chandler in the song *Lifeboat*: "If I say the wrong thing or I wear the wrong outfit they'll throw me right over the side" (*Heathers* 1.27.58-1.28.07). Because of the death of one of her fellow Heathers, Heather McNamara realizes how fragile her position is and what she has given up to be where she is now. She is confronted with her individuality, now that the leader that defined the ideals of conformity is dead. Once again, *Heathers* busts the myth that popularity results in happiness, but this time by showing the fragility of the position.

Both situations show the popular people's fear of falling from their high status. Schwartz and Hopmeyer Gorman warn that as a result, being popular often coexists with "maladaptive behaviors", like substance abuse and irresponsible, unwanted sexual behavior (263). These problems are also addressed by *Be More Chill* and *Heathers,* which both contain a scene at a party at which people drink a lot of alcohol. In *Be More Chill* the teenagers sing: "'Cause a Halloween party's a mad excuse to put your body through mad abuse" (1.12.13-1.12.20). So, popularity is consciously shown as a double-edged sword to prevent teenagers to get into situations like this. They want to convey that popularity and peer pressure can be dangerous.

Another way the musicals showcase the vulnerable side of popular people is that they both include moments of introspection. In these moments all characters enter the stage and share the same concerns. *Be More Chill* emphasizes unity for adolescents of all statuses because they are all unhappy with the person they are. At the end of the first act, all characters enter the stage and sing in canon "I'm tired of being the person that everyone thinks that I am" (1.02.51-1.03.38). This moment humanizes the popular people. It shows that they are not better than anyone else; everyone has the same troubles.

Heathers does this as well, but in a different way than *Be More Chill*. Whereas *Be More Chill* focuses on unity, *Heathers* shows everyone struggling with a different problem. The fact that everyone has problems is central. In the opening song, *Beautiful*, right before the entrance of the godly Heathers, the ensemble shares their concerns by asking why-questions while Veronica is singing a consistent "Why". Some of these questions are "Why won't I fight back?" "Why do I act like such a creep?" and "why won't he date me?". Afterward, they

sing together "Somebody hug me. Somebody fix me. Somebody save me" (*Heathers* 0.03.36-0.03.56). So, while still expressing that each person has problems and does not want to deviate from the norm, *Heathers* emphasizes that everyone suffers, but that might be for different reasons.

      Be More Chill and *Heathers* defy the idea that struggle and suffering are what makes someone different and a reason they should be left out. Bradford Brown argues that one of the main priorities in adolescence is constructing and discerning your identity, and so it is only logical that nearly everyone wrestles with it from time to time (167). People feel different for feeling like they do but *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* reassure that this is only normal. They stand up for the struggling adolescent.

Gendered Popularity

Popularity is inherently gendered. Pomerantz and Raby make a distinction between popular masculinity, which is defined by being athletic, muscular, laid back, and independent, and popular femininity, which is defined by being thin, fashionable, and submissive. There are some similarities between the two as well, like the need to be "hot" and heterosexual (Pomerantz and Raby 63).

      Experts in cultural studies and psychology Emily Roper and Katherine Polasek affirm that the criteria differ between boys and girls. In their analysis of gender and sports in popular culture, they mention that while boys will be lauded for being athletically active, a tough, strong girl will often be ridiculed and left out (Roper and Polasek 159). Victoria Rawlings, a research associate specialized in gender and culture at the University of Sydney, adds that gendered ideals are embedded in school activities at American high schools. Prom, for example, promotes a heteronormative patriarchal structure in which the girl has to wait for a boy to ask her to go with her. If she is not asked, she will become a social pariah. This shows that gendered structures are more ingrained in the life of adolescents than one might think (48). Conformity as a result of popularity is thus structured according to gender. As a result, gender defines the terms of inclusion and exclusion and as such a heteronormative, traditional ideal of gender is promoted by high school social structures.

      Be More Chill and *Heathers*' protagonists should, then, experience different pressures of conformity in their journey to popularity since their gender differs. This is especially clear when looking at Jeremy and Veronica's sexual lives as a result of being popular. In *Be More Chill*, Jeremy is expected to go after the girls actively, while Veronica needs to be submissive and accept what the boys want.

During Jeremy's metamorphosis into a popular person, the SQUIP demands that Jeremy flirt with one of the girls. Moreover, the SQUIP explains that Jeremy needs to "be more chill", which is in accordance with Pomerantz and Raby's characteristic of being laid back (*Be More Chill*). Jeremy is expected to take the leading role in this situation, but to act like he does not care. This is what the norms of male popularity dictate.

Veronica experiences this situation from the other side, as popular girlhood dictates that she needs to accept the sexual advances of the popular boys, but she has to keep her innocence intact as well. During the song *Blue* the popular jocks Kurt and Ram try to have sex with Veronica by flirting with her, trying to dominate her. Veronica wants to get away, but the Heathers who are present as well do not allow her to leave, showing that it is expected of her to stay and be submissive to the dominating popular boys, even though she is already in a relationship. So, this is not only enforced by boys, but also by girls amongst each other. Veronica manages to get away, but afterward, she gets verbally abused for being too sexually active after rumors have spread.

Both situations show the difficulties of the gendered norms of popularity, which often contradict themselves. Educational researchers Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renold argue that a result of these principles of masculine and feminine popularity as a structure of dominance is that girls often position themselves in sexual hierarchies (586). Sexuality becomes the main form of regulation, a scale that needs to be balanced perfectly. A girl being overly sexual is a "slut" but having no sexual needs at all is bad as well. Boys need to be very sexually active, and girls become objects for male satisfaction since their masculinity dictates dominance (Ringrose and Renold 584). *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* provide an insight into this system of gendered popularity that results in sexual hierarchies.

As a result of these gendered norms, bullying takes on different forms for boys and girls as well. To uphold your social status, you have to exclude anyone who does not conform to the ideal, but you also have to live up to the norms of your gender: "Where norms of masculinity call for the performance of toughness and sanction violence, femininity calls upon girls to perform niceness" (Ringrose and Renold 584). The structures of gender thus create two different types of bullies. The core remains the same: actively asserting your inclusion by excluding others, but this takes on different forms according to gendered ideals.

Ringrose and Renold argue that the boy bully is defined by his practical approach. Because of male expectations of toughness boys tend to resort to physical violence or other practices to assert their dominance and express their masculinity. Aggression against girls is never okay though since it would portray the bully as a wife-beater (582). This is visible in *Be*

More Chill, in which Jeremy's bullies are the popular boys. They constantly push and hit Jeremy. One time he is even threatened after one of them wrote an insult on his backpack: "Wash this off, and you are dead" (*Be More Chill* 0.03.56-0.03.59). Here you can see that the norms of masculine popularity result in violent bullying and physical abuse.

Female bullying takes on a quite different form because of their need to remain nice to a certain degree. Per the norms of feminine popularity, girls will most often use verbal abuse and backhanded compliments. To be judged as a bully, however, automatically means you deviate from these norms, and thus it is a very thin line you have to tread on (Ringrose and Renold 586-587). In *Heathers,* Veronica's bullies are the Heathers, and this is exactly how they approach bullying, which is very different from how Jeremy is tormented in *Be More Chill*. As the Heathers discuss how they could incorporate Veronica in their group, Heather Chandler says "for a greasy little nobody, you do have good bone structure" (*Heathers* 0.06.37-0.06.42). This is exactly the sort of backhanded compliment that Ringrose and Renold refer to. While what she is saying sounds nice, it is actually an expression of dominance and status.

Rawlings states that as a result of the passive form that bullying takes on because of the norms of feminine popularity results in female victims of bullying being taken less seriously. Without realizing the gendered structures in high schools, one cannot make a good and well-balanced judgment of the situation, since verbal abuse can have serious consequences, even though it is less visible than physical abuse (Rawlings 279). *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* carefully consider bullying from a gendered perspective, showing the forms it can take. Even though the shows do not incorporate these differences in themselves, they did take gender into account in the way that the bullies act.

In conclusion, *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* go beyond the story of the outcast by providing an in-depth evaluation of popularity. The antagonization of conformity and the humanization of the inherently gendered concept of popularity that occur present a clear critique of current high school structures. The musicals show that for both sides, the popular people and the outcasts, the focus on social status in high school causes more insecurities than necessary. Everyone struggles with identity in adolescence, and both being popular and not being popular complicates this process even more. Moreover, popularity seems to be a difficult scale to balance, especially because of its connection to gendered structures.

Chapter 2: Adolescent Loneliness and Mental Health

In a situation that forces you to constantly have to look at how you come across to others, like being in high school, it makes sense that you feel lonely. Sometimes, however, adolescents feel structurally lonely because of their outcast position. Psychologist Xin Ma found that bullying and exclusion often have detrimental results on one's mental health. It results in low self-esteem, higher stress levels, or depression, which can have repercussions for the rest of your life (Ma 25-26).

Be More Chill and *Heathers* both address the issue of loneliness as a result of being an outcast. The protagonists feel lonely because of their social position, even when they have a friend to fall back upon. Contrary to the protagonists, though, the friends feel fine with their social position. They do not feel alone because they have a friend, but when their friend leaves them, this has serious consequences for their mental health. This chapter will delve into how the *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* engage with issues of loneliness and mental health.

Loneliness Among Friends

Loneliness exists even when you have friends. They are not mutually exclusive. Psychologists Jeffrey Parker and Steven Asher define loneliness by three separate factors: having a friend, friendship quality, and social acceptance. They found that even if one has a good friend, loneliness could still come into play because of a low social acceptance by peers (613). Mijuskovic adds that the fear of loneliness is one of the biggest motivators during adolescence. This fear of the feeling of isolation surpasses every other emotion in adolescent life (Mijuskovic 943). More recently, Pomerantz and Raby found that the biggest fear for high school students often is indeed "being thrust into the position of the outcast or loner" (62). Loneliness is thus a central part of the mindset of someone in high school.

The intricacies of loneliness in high school are explored in *Be More Chill* and *Heathers*. The protagonists of *Be More Chill* and *Heathers*, Jeremy and Veronica respectively, are both outcasts, and they suffer from it. They feel like they do not fit in and this feeling is expressed early on in the story. An interesting similarity between the characters is that they both feel like the current situation is not good enough. Even though they have friends, their outcast position makes them feel alone. They want more and they believe that they can achieve it. This serves as the motivation or the incentive for the protagonists to put the story in motion.

In *Be More Chill* Jeremy expresses his desire for "more" in the opening song *More Than Survive*. Jeremy is familiar with being an outcast and knows it is difficult to change. With a hint of dramatic irony for the audience, he sings: "I'm never gonna be the cool guy. I'm more the one who's left out. Of all the characters at school, I am not the one who the story's about" (*Be More Chill* 0.8.38-0.8.58). In the climax of the song, he sings "Help me to more than survive" (*Be more Chill* 0.09.18-0.09.28). The ensemble supports him by singing a melody in the background and performing a dance with Jeremy in the center. Jeremy wants to be the center of attention for once, with everyone helping him. Instead, he feels alone, like he does not belong.

In *Heathers* Veronica expresses her need for 'more' in a similar way. Just as Jeremy in *Be More Chill*, Veronica has been an outcast for quite some time already. This is made clear in the opening song *Beautiful*. It is also evident in her appearance and experiences. Her clothes are drab, she is the last in line at lunch, and the popular jocks bully her. She expresses her unhappiness with the current situation and how she cannot wait for it to be over: "College will be paradise if I'm not dead by June" (*Heathers* 0.01.00-0.01.05). Although this is a slightly idiomatic expression, Veronica alludes to the possibility that she might not even make it to the end of the year. Her situation is this dire. But then she sings: "But I know, I know life can be beautiful. I pray, I pray for a better way. If we changed back then, we could change again" (0.01.05-0.01.20). Time slows down as she sings it and the light changes to a darker hue with a spotlight on Veronica, emphasizing this moment even more. This song reprises several times throughout the musical, stressing that this is what drives Veronica in this story. Her desire for popularity thus does not only originate from the idea that popularity makes you happier but from a deeply felt loneliness as well. Loneliness can consume you, is what *Heathers* conveys.

Jeremy and Veronica express that they are suffering because of their position as an outcast. Psychologist Gökmen Arslan found that social exclusion is especially detrimental to one's wellbeing during adolescence since positive social bonds are still rather fragile. At the time they are in high school, youths are forming their identity, and as such, they are afraid to become an outsider (Arslan 964-965). So, putting such social pressure on teenagers during adolescence is bad for their wellbeing overall, and the musicals serve as a warning for this.

In both musicals, the protagonists have a best friend. This is what keeps them relatively fine because they have someone who makes them happy and with whom they can share their concerns. This best friend dynamic has an interesting effect on the plot, since these best friends are outcasts at well. They do not join Jeremy and Veronica, though, in elevating

their status, and thus they contrast with the protagonist. During this process, friendship is considered carefully. Jeremy and Veronica have to decide between friendship and popularity. Even though both are seemingly solutions for loneliness, in their eyes only popularity is.

The best friend in *Be More Chill* is Michael Mell. Michael's personality contrasts with Jeremy's. In the opening song *More Than Survive* Michael's verse serves as a fun and relieving interlude. The musical style changes to reggae. This embodies his relaxed and generally happy personality. Michael, in this way, serves as a contrast to Jeremy, reinforcing Jeremy's pessimistic and worrying personality (*Be More Chill* 0.06.00-0.06.32). Michael, in this sense, is a foil to Jeremy, emphasizing Jeremy's personality traits by embodying the exact opposite.

Michael and Jeremy are both outcasts, but they are in it together. In the song, *Two-player Game* Michael and Jeremy express that their friendship is what keeps them afloat in high school. Jeremy shares his desire for "more", but Michael sings reassuringly: "High school is hell, but we navigate it well. That's what we do, we make it a two-player game" (*Be More Chill* 0.25.58-0.26.05). To Michael, it does not matter whether he is a loser or not, as long as he is with Jeremy. In the opening scene, Michael even says happily: "There's never been a better time in history to be a loser" (*Be More Chill* 0.06.56-0.07.00), showing that he is content with the status quo.

In *Heathers,* the best friend is Martha Dunnstock. Martha, like Michael from *Be More Chill*, contrasts the protagonist, Veronica. In the opening song *Beautiful,* she is introduced by Veronica as follows: "She's got a huge heart, but around here that's not enough" (*Heathers* 0.02.33-0.02.37). She is an incredibly kind and nice person, but quite naïve. After Veronica asks Martha why she rented *The Princess Bride* again, Martha answers: "I'm a sucker for a happy ending" (*Heathers* 0.02.50-0.02.52). Martha's view of the world is very simple. As long as there are happy endings, there is hope. For Martha this is enough, she does not want more, but Veronica does.

It is interesting to notice the contrasts between the best friend characters and the protagonists because these characters are there to remind you that a good friend accepting you as a person is better than a lot of friends that only want you to conform. It also depicts how their situation does not necessarily entail that you need to feel lonely and desperate. The best friends are perfectly fine in their situations and thus the protagonists' stories might not have been necessary. It affirms Mijuskovic's theory that your social position can blind you for what you already have. This is a trope that often occurs in high school stories, but a look at the remaining friends is often forgotten, while they are the ones that show what could be.

Mental Health Issues as a Result of Loneliness

The feeling of loneliness in high school sometimes takes a dark turn. The immense social pressure that exists for high school students often results in low self-esteem. Consequently, this sometimes causes them to attempt or commit suicide (Westefeld et al. 32). Even though teenage suicide numbers have been decreasing, the issue is far from solved. In 2017 suicide was the second leading cause of death of Americans aged 15-19 ("Adolescent Health"). There is a gender-based disparity in suicide rates: They are five times as high for male adolescents than females, but girls are three times more likely to attempt suicide ("Key facts about teen suicide"). Other important factors that distinguish the numbers are race, sexuality, and class. Identity and mental health are thus intrinsically linked to one another.

Westefeld et al. argue in "High School Suicide: Knowledge and Opinions of Teachers" that adolescent suicide is caused by multiple factors. The first factor, and the most important one, encompasses the feelings of hopelessness because of self-doubt, depression, and loneliness that cause students to feel like there is no other option (32). Besides, according to Townsend et al., many students do not seek help from their school because of the stigma attached to mental health issues. This, in turn, stems from the ignorance of faculty who are often unaware of the obstacles that their students face (572).

Be More Chill and *Heathers* address this quite extensively. In *Be More Chill* Jeremy's actions cause Michael's mental health to deteriorate. Multiple times throughout the musical it is implied that Michael has more feelings for Jeremy than he lets on. When bullies write "BOYF" on Jeremy's backpack and "RIENDS" on Michael's, he seems rather happy about it instead of shocked or sad. Happy Michael is gone without Jeremy, though. The demise is voiced in the song *Michael in the Bathroom*. During this song, Michael is having a panic attack in the bathroom as he laments how much he is missing Jeremy, who left him to become popular. The happy, carefree tone of Michael in *More Than Survive* has been substituted for a much more depressed one. Michael now sings: "I'm just Michael who you don't know, Michael flying solo, Michael in the bathroom by himself" (*Be More Chill* 1.24.36-1.24.47). Michael's thoughts become increasingly aggressive until he almost shouts "Wish I offed myself instead, wish I was never born" (*Be More Chill* 1.26.11-1.26.15). Michael's story shows that someone's mental health can turn very quickly, and most often it is caused by external reasons.

In *Heathers,* Martha Dunnstock experiences something similar. After losing Veronica as a friend and being bullied in front of the entire school at a party, Martha is completely

alone. Moreover, she discovered that the connection she thought she had with Ram, who she had been in love with since kindergarten, was a lie. After sitting in the background silently for a couple of scenes, indicating her loneliness and disconnect from the others at school, she stands up and starts the song *Kindergarten Boyfriend*. She sings about her love for Ram. It starts comedically, but in the end, it gets increasingly serious. At a certain moment, the song goes silent and she steps onto a platform on the stage. The song continues and Martha starts singing: "I believe that any dream worth having is a dream that should not have to end. So I'll build a dream that I can live in and it's time I'm never waking up" (*Heathers* 1.38.08-1.38.25). At the end of the song, she leaps backward off the platform as she attempts suicide. Veronica cutting off Martha causes her to try to kill herself.

The musicals show how some teenagers might see no other way out of loneliness than suicide. Teenage depression and suicide are real. They consciously put this central problem to modern adolescence at the forefront, leaving something to think about for the audience. In both situations, the musicals present depression as a result of complete loneliness, but they also show that suicidal thoughts are often more intricate than that. The musicals do not only reflect heavily discussed societal issues, but try to instigate a discussion of issues that need more attention.

Psychologists John Wodarski et al. argue that even though the loners are indeed the most at-risk group of adolescents to develop depression with suicide as a result, another important factor is peer involvement, especially the actions of a significant other (6). Martha feels at a loss after Ram finally admitted to not ever loving her, and in Michael's case, Jeremy seems to have admitted that Michael's feelings are not reciprocated. Moreover, both characters are bullied. Psychologists Peter Goldblum et al. describe that bullying is considered to be an important factor in adolescent suicide ideation as well (32). Both musicals engage with suicide as a complicated issue that does not happen for no or little reason. Adolescent suicide is a complicated issue, and the musicals attempt to approach it without simplifying it or shying away from the negative stigma.

Another central cause of adolescent suicide next to internal problems of the adolescents themselves is the lack of knowledge about suicide prevention by adults that results in a delayed or no response to the situation. (Westefeld et al. 33-36). Besides, Psychologists M. S. Gould and R. A. Kramer affirm in "Youth Suicide Prevention" that adults involved with teenagers who are prone to commit suicide, in and out of school, lack knowledge about suicide prevention (21).

The clearest example of this in *Be More Chill* is the character of Jeremy's father. At the beginning of the musical, it seems like Jeremy's father is only there for comic relief. He is a bit goofy, he wears no pants, and he seems like he does not have his life together. Most importantly, he does not seem to have any idea that his son suffers as much as he does. For Jeremy, he is an example of what he should not be: "I don't want dad to be my future! Sad and alone and…" (*Be More Chill* 0.28.07-0.28.14).

Later, in the second act, Jeremy's father finally realizes how much his son has changed during the story, and he expresses his concerns to Jeremy: "I'm worried about you, son. You come and go with this new attitude, with these new clothes. I don't even recognize you anymore. Look, I know things haven't been easy without your mother, but I'm still your buddy, so just tell me what's going on" (*Be More Chill* 1.38.07-1.38.30). Jeremy's father finally realizes something is wrong with his son, but he still does not know that Jeremy was unhappy before.

In research performed among 79 high school seniors, psychologists Field et al. found that among the ones that were classified as depressed a majority had a bad relationship with (one of) their parents. Moreover, if one of the parents expressed feelings of depression as well, there was a higher risk that their child was depressed too (Field et al. 494). This is reflected in the father in *Be More Chill*, showing that parents could take responsibility for their children's mental health. Moreover, it shows how intricate depression and mental health issues can be because there are so many factors that come into play. If adults dealing with adolescents suffering from mental health issues are not able to recognize and resolve these situations, adolescents might feel like no one is there to help them.

In *Heathers*, this is expressed to a bigger extent than in *Be More Chill*. In the song, *Me Inside of Me* Veronica and her boyfriend JD write a fake suicide note to cover up that they murdered Heather Chandler. The adults at the school discuss her suicide and the note they found and the principal says "Heather Chandler is not your everyday suicide" but afterward he is reluctant to cancel classes and organizing a moment to talk about it for the students (*Heathers* 0.46.15-0.46.27). He dismisses suicide and the mental health of his students as something trivial, showing his ignorance painfully clear.

Interestingly, academic interest in adolescent suicide commenced during the 1980s, the era in which *Heathers* takes place and the source material comes from. For the first time, adolescent and adult depression were analyzed as clinically different, and as such attention was called to the subject (Wodarski et al. 14). The adult's treatment of the matter as something trivial could thus be seen as a joke about the sign of the times. It is, however,

striking that adult ignorance about adolescent suicide is still so prevalent. In a 2017 article about the controversial hit series *13 Reasons Why* psychiatrist Guilherme Polanczyk argues that "suicide is still marked with ignorance" (567). So, more likely this sequence in *Heathers* should come as a realization that things have not changed that much as people like to believe.

The adult ignorance of suicide in *Be More Chill* but especially in *Heathers* symbolizes the bigger picture of adolescent depression and suicidal thoughts being ignored as something trivial, something which is just a part of puberty. Pompili et al. found that "Fewer than 50% of adolescent attempters are referred for treatment following an emergency department visit" (9). This just shows how underestimated teenage depression and suicidal thoughts are.

In conclusion, *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* draw attention to loneliness and the consequences it could have on adolescents' mental health. In doing this they give a stage to important issues that adolescents cope with. Awareness of adolescent mental health and teenage suicide is increasing, and by putting them to the forefront of the stories, the musicals attempt to urge for a discussion about them. Because of the pressures that the current high school social structures put on adolescents, they are suffering. Like musicals have done throughout history, *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* address this pressing issue, breaking the silence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is quite clear that *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* have quite a lot of similarities because they focus on contemporary struggles that confront their target audience. *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* give insight into adolescent issues of popularity, outcasts, and loneliness in several ways.

Be More Chill and *Heathers* bring current and pressing social issues that specifically matter to adolescents to the stage and address these issues directly. They go beyond what is seen on the surface and show the difficult and layered problems that lie beneath it. In every aspect of the musical, they emphasize the issues that are there, and they bring it up to discussion. Something needs to be done, and this resonates with the younger audience and their parents.

Be More Chill and *Heathers* give the character of the outcast quite a lot of depth, not only by giving them attention through the protagonist but also by showing what happens when an outcast has no one to fall back upon in the form of the best friend side-characters. The central message of both musicals is that you do not have to be popular or liked by everyone to be happy. You should focus on yourself and your good friends. That is worth more than any form of popularity. This message is enhanced by the antagonists, who represent exactly what the protagonists should not do: conform to the ideal of popularity and lose yourself in it.

The popular characters in the musicals have depth as well. They are not mindless flat characters serving as a foil to the main outcast characters. The motivations for their actions are explored and they are shown to have emotions and character development as well. Popular kids are often thought to be godlike, indestructible, and bulletproof. *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* show them as deeply troubled and insecure people who need status to stay afloat. They also take the concept of gender into account in their deliberations about popularity. The norms of boyhood and girlhood are quite different, and this is incorporated.

As a result of the feelings of loneliness, depression and suicidal thoughts are a huge social issue among adolescents. *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* address this issue directly by putting the initially aloof and happy best friends in a situation where they feel like suicide is one of the only ways out. They show that everyone can have mental health issues, even if they seemed to be so joyful in the past. By showing the intricacy of teenage suicide, the musicals show that the issue is real and cannot be ignored.

So, *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* put these social issues at the forefront, showing specific problems that adolescents have to deal with. These are issues that have largely been ignored in the past, or at least have been considered to be there because it has to. They come to light because of their representation in the musicals. They take a stance and present opportunities, showing young people that this is not how it has to be.

For future research, it might be interesting to look at the audience instead of the musicals themselves. A look at what resonates with the audiences themselves and what does not through a survey, for example, could provide a clearer answer to what exactly the influence is that these musicals have. An analysis of the online fandoms that these musicals have should give some insights as well. Furthermore, one could expand on this analysis of popularity and loneliness as concepts with an analysis of popularity concerning class or race since the intersectionality of these factors are prevalent in musical theater as well.

A lot of adolescents are suffering under the peer system of high schools in America. Social status and popularity are such an important part in the life of a high school student, that it has serious consequences on their performance and mental health. Cultural forms like *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* address this; these issues need to change. Everyone should have the opportunity to do more than survive. Life can be beautiful, so cultural products must take up these issues.

Musicals have been advocates for the weak for a long time, so now it is time to stand up for the young. Musicals addressed to younger audiences have been lacking while musicals have the ability to be very convincing due to the multiplicity of artificiality and immersion, and young people clearly feel an affinity with musical theater. With teenage depression and suicide finally being put on the agenda, musicals can expand on this even further. They can be the ones commencing a change in which popularity and loneliness are dealt with, improving the mental health of so many young people.

Because of the internet, musical theater's reach has increased immensely. The online lives of *Be More Chill* and *Heathers* show what a musical can achieve now it is not only for a richer elite. This might laud in a new era for musical theater, in which it can become a mainstream form of popular entertainment, in which the social issues of which musicals have been advocates for a long time can finally be spread across the enormous audiences they deserve. It seems like musical theater is heading in this direction, with Broadway gamechanger *Hamilton* being made available for streaming on Disney+. Theater can change the world, especially now the world seems to need some changing.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Baranova, Maria. "Will Roland and Cast of Be More Chill." Deadline, 10 Mar. 2019, www.deadline.com/2019/03/be-more-chill-broadway-review-joe-iconis-will-roland-george-salazar-viral-sensation-finally-hits-lyceum-1202572736/. Accessed on 28 Jun. 2020.

Batka, Chad. "Cast of Heathers." Playbill, 22 Mar. 2018, www.playbill.com/article/heathers-writers-laurence-okeefe-and-kevin-murphy-break-down-the-musicals-full-album-track-by-track. Accessed on 28 Jun. 2020.

Be More Chill. By Joe Iconis, directed by Stephen Brackett, 2019, Lyceum Theatre, New York, NY. Performance.

Dear Evan Hansen. By Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, directed by Michael Greif, 2016, Music Box Theatre, New York, NY. Performance.

Grease. By Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, directed by Guy Barile, 1972, Broadhurst Theatre, New York, NY. Performance.

Hairspray. By Marc Shaiman, directed by Jack O'brien, 2002, Neil Simon Theatre, New York, NY. Performance.

Hamilton. By Lin Manuel Miranda, directed by Thomas Kail, 2015, Richard Rogers Theatre, New York, NY. Performance.

Heathers. By Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy, directed by Andy Fickman, 2014, New World Stages, New York, NY. Performance.

Heathers: The Musical. By Bill Kenwright and Paul Taylor-Mills, directed by Andy Fickman, 2018, Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, England. Performance.

High School Musical. Directed by Kenny Ortega, Buena Vista Television, 2006.

West Side Story. By Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, directed by Jerome Robbins, 1959, Winter Garden Theatre, New York, NY. Performance.

Secondary Sources

"Adolescent Health." *CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 3 May 2017,
www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/adolescent-health.htm, Accessed on 20 Jun. 2020.

Arslan G. "School-Based Social Exclusion, Affective Wellbeing, and Mental Health Problems
in Adolescents: A Study of Mediator and Moderator Role of Academic Self-
Regulation." *Child Indicators Research*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2018, pp. 963–980.

Barker, Chris, and Emma A. Jane. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice.* Sage Publications
Ltd, 2016.

Bukowski, William M. "Popularity as a Social Concept: Meanings and Significance."
Popularity in the Peer System, edited by Antonius H. N. Cillessen et al., Guilford
Publications, 2011, pp. 3-24.

Bradford Brown, B. "Popularity in Peer Group Perspective: The Role of Status in Adolescent
Peer Systems." *Popularity in the Peer System*, edited by Antonius H. N.
Cillessen et al., Guilford Publications, 2011, pp.119-218.

Cilessen, Antonius H. N., et al. "Preface" *Popularity in the Peer System*, edited by Antonius
H. N. Cilessen et al., Guilford Publications, 2011, pp. ix-xii.

Field et al. "Adolescent Depression and Risk Factors." *Adolescence*, vol. 36, no. 143, 2001,
pp. 491–498.

Goldblum, Peter, et al. *Youth Suicide and Bullying: Challenges and Strategies for Prevention
and Intervention*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Gould, M. S., and Kramer, R. A. "Youth Suicide Prevention." *Suicide & Life-Threatening
Behavior*, vol. 31, 2001, pp. 6–31.

Jones, John Bush. *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical
Theater*. University Press of New England, 2003.

Ma, Xin. "Who Are the Victims?" *Bullying: Implications for the Classroom.* Elsevier
Academic Press, 2004, pp. 20-35.

McSharry, Majella. *Schooled Bodies?: Negotiating Adolescent Validation Through Press,
Peers and Parents*. Trentham, 2009.

Mijuskovic, Ben. "Loneliness: Counseling Adolescents." *Adolescence*, vol. 21, no. 84, 1986,
pp. 941-950.

Parker, Jeffrey G., and Steven R. Asher. "Friendship and Friendship Quality in Middle
Childhood". *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 4, July 1993, pp. 611–621.

Polanczyk, Guilherme. "Many Reasons to Talk About Suicide." *Revista Da Associação
Médica Brasileira*, vol. 63, no. 7, 2017, pp. 557–558.

Pomerantz, Shauna, and Rebecca Raby. "Fitting In or Fabulously Smart?" *Smart Girls : Success, School, and the Myth of Post-Feminism*. University of California Press, 2017.

Pompili et al. "Attempted Suicide." *Suicide from a global perspective: psychiatric approaches.* Nova Science Publishers, 2012.

"Popular." *Merriam-Webster.com*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/popular. Accessed 25 Jun. 2020.

Rawlings, Victoria. *Gender Regulation, Violence and Social Hierarchies in School.* Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.

Ringrose, Jessica, and Emma Renold. "Normative cruelties and gender deviants: the performative effects of bully discourses for girls and boys in school." *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2010, pp. 573-596.

Roper, Emily, and Katherine Polasek. "Gender, Sport and Popular Culture." *Gender & Pop Culture: a Text-Reader.* Sense Publishers, 2014, pp. 151-174.

Runnells, Riley. "Theater Review: 'Be More Chill' targets a younger audience with sci-fi, high school-centered themes." *The Post*, 26 Aug. 2019, www.thepostathens.com/article/2019/08/be-more-chill-review-broadway, Accessed on 20 Jun. 2020

Sandstrom. "The Power of Popularity: Influence Processes in Childhood and Adolescence." *Popularity in the Peer System*, edited by Antonius H. N. Cillessen et al., Guilford Publications, 2011, pp.219-244.

Schwartz, David, and Andrea Hopmeyer Gorman. "The High Price of High Status: Popularity as a Mechanism of Risk." *Popularity in the Peer System*, edited by Antonius H. N. Cillessen et al., Guilford Publications, 2011, pp. 245-272.

Taylor, Millie. *Musical Theatre, Realism and Entertainment*. Routledge, 2012.

Townsend, Lisa, et al. "The Association of School Climate, Depression Literacy, and Mental Health Stigma among High School Students." *Journal of School Health*, vol. 87, no. 8, 2017, pp. 567–574.

"Trends in Teen Suicide." *Child Trends*, 2019, www.childtrends.org/indicators/suicidal-teens. Accessed 25 Jun. 2020.

Westefeld et al. "High School Suicide: Knowledge and Opinions of Teachers." *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2007, pp. 33-44.

White, Tony. *Working with Suicidal Individuals: A Guide to Providing Understanding, Assessment and Support*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011.

Witkin, Robert W. *Adorno on Popular Culture*. Routledge, 2003.

Wodarski, John S., et al. *Adolescent Depression and Suicide: A Comprehensive Empirical Intervention for Prevention and Treatment*. Charles C Thomas, 2003.