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Communication Arts and Sciences

Title of your research project.

“The Most Beautiful Thing in the World:” A Rhetorical Analysis of Relational Dialectics and Friendship in the Musical Kinky Boots

Description of research. Please provide a few sentences that explain the question and the methods employed in this research project.

In this article, we examine Kinky Boots, a musical that won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 2013 and continues to win over audiences with its positive message about acceptance, as a rhetorical text through William K. Rawlins’ theoretical construct of relational dialectics regarding friendship. Through rhetorical criticism as a research method, we apply Rawlins’ concepts of political and personal friendships, as well as the dialectics of affection and instrumentality, expressiveness and protectiveness, judgment and acceptance, and the ideal and the real to examine notable relationships between characters in the musical. Specifically, we examine the relationships between Charlie and Nicola, Charlie and Lola, and Don and Lola. Through this analysis, we suggest that when participants in the musical’s relationships fail to negotiate dialectic tensions, their relationships can resultantly cease to exist. We also note that the balance of relational dialectics appears to be conducive to healthy relationships. We posit that Kinky Boots provides theatre-goers with life lessons regarding relational dialectics that they can apply to their own real-life relationships, and that Kinky Boots may serve as an effective teaching tool for undergraduate students learning about relational dialectics.

Did this project include Penn State students as researchers?

Yes

If yes to the above question, please state where it was published.

This article is co-authored with former Penn State student Adam Moyer. We published in in the Communication and Theatre Association of Minnesota Journal - <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/ctamj/vol44/iss1/8/>

What problem do you address with your research?

How theatre-goers can learn how to manage tensions in relationships by watching the characters in Kinky Boots.