



## Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

### Gleeful bullying

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I watched in dismay as a high school sophomore had his head dunked in the boy's room toilet by two older students. I cringed as I saw some over-sized jock give a diminutive classmate a major wedgie. Witnessing a geeky student being pelted with a cherry Slurpee frankly brought back painful memories of my own victimization on school days decades ago.

And what did I do in response to viewing all these cruel acts of harassment and bullying? Absolutely nothing. I was too amused and excited...not by the non-random acts of unkindness, but by the singing and dancing that would soon follow. And when it was all over, I anxiously awaited another entertaining episode of *Glee*.

In the aftermath of the Phoebe Prince tragedy, the media has devoted endless coverage to the issue of bullying. Unfortunately, the emphasis has been less on what strategies work in reducing the age-old problem of bullying and the new-age problem of cyberbullying, and more on who is to blame for the death of one poor newbie at South Hadley High.

And if the members of the media weren't so busy finding villains and scapegoats in and around the tiny hamlet in Western Massachusetts, maybe they would see the cultural elements (including programs like *Glee*, *Gossip Girls*, and others) that make bullying and nastiness appear downright fashionable.

I've said it before, and will say it again: the problem will persist in our society so long as we admire bullies (including those in sports and others in politics) and pity pushovers. Now excuse me while I go get caught up on old episodes of *Glee* in preparation for the hotly anticipated new season.