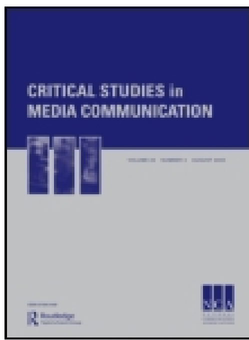

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Queer Teenagers and the Mediation of Utopian Catastrophe

Jeffrey A. Bennett

Recent cover stories about queer teenagers mark a noticeable shift in the discourse surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) publics. Contemporary media reports have repositioned the multifarious identities of queer teens as sites of unease for contemporary queer politics. Employing a framework that emphasizes the dialogical relationship among the tropes of utopia and apocalypse to scrutinize media coverage, this analysis explores the anxieties and possibilities generated by queer teens. Young queers are simultaneously understood as both political separatists from earlier movements, as well as disinterested assimilationists. The thematics of sexual fluidity and neoliberal individualism are highlights of this discourse, each being carefully tempered by the cultural force of assimilation.

Keywords: Queer Teens; Utopia; Apocalypse; Assimilation; Fluidity

For the last three decades lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) publics have been represented by two widely recognized symbols. The first is a flag that stitches together the colors of the rainbow on a common cloth to represent the multifarious identities of LGBT people. Designed by drag queen and U.S. army veteran Gilbert Baker, the rainbow flag was originally sewn for the 1978 Gay Freedom Day Parade in San Francisco. While the original flag had eight stripes, including ones that were hot pink and turquoise (to represent sex and art, respectively), the more widely circulated icon has been simplified to six principal colors, mainly because of the commercial scarcity of fabric hues such as hot pink in the late 1970s. Ever present on t-shirts, bumper stickers, mouse pads, folders, jewelry, and candles, the rainbow colors have come to symbolize unity in diversity. Even with its commodification, the flag continues to serve as a ubiquitous emblem for LGBT communities. On the flag no colors are erased, each is given equal space, and all are bonded by the imagined

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commonality of their purpose. Baker—the proverbial Betsy Ross of the movement—specifically created the flag as a banner for queer publics (*Let Them Talk, 2006*). A poll conducted by the *Advocate* highlights the legacy of the rainbow flag, finding that 88% of respondents felt it most represented "the LGBT experience" (Vary, 2006, p. 102).

The second symbol often associated with LGBT publics does not have such a gleeful past. Appropriated from the Nazi death and work camps, the pink triangle was first utilized to mark gay men in the Holocaust over a half-century ago (Heger, 1980). Contemporary rights movements have embraced the triangle to signify the systemic brutality motivating factions that long for a world free of LGBT people. Commonly remembered in tandem with grassroots organizations such as ACT-UP, the pink triangle warns that institutions imbued with heterosexism and hatred of the other are always on stand-by, eager to injure and discipline those who do not to conform to rigid sexual and gender norms. The obtrusive hot pink lost in the rainbow flag sears in the triangle. Its accusation of femininity is its audacious dogma. The common slogan "silence equals death" coupled with the triangle offers an unsettling starting point for discussing the value and acceptability of queer lives. This is not the idealism of the flag; it is a warning of impending doom. Baker himself said he developed the rainbow flag, in part, as a more optimistic alternative to the pink triangle (*Let Them Talk, 2006*). The triangle's confrontational semiotics might suggest why it did not fare as well in the *Advocate's* poll. It came in second place with only 63% of respondents committing to its centrality as a part of the LGBT experience (Vary, 2006, p. 102).

While each of these symbols is widely recognized by people within and outside LGBT communities, achieved public visibility at roughly the same time in American history, and have maintained an impressive amount of cultural capital, the two symbols articulate disparate trajectories for LGBT movements. The rainbow flag is utopian expressionism at its best: all people gathered under a single flag that allows the affirmation of identities without erasing any of them. The pink triangle, on the other hand, is an apocalyptic warning for an endangered minority. In contrast with the flag, the triangle projects a dire impetus to choose sides and act accordingly. The flag exalts pride within community; the triangle beckons vigilance against heterosexism. The flag connotes the cheerful variability of life; the triangle contends silence will bury you. The flag celebrates the ways in which we are marked; the triangle simply reminds you that you are.

The rainbow flag and the pink triangle accentuate the dialogical relationship among the tropes of utopia and apocalypse in representations of LGBT movements.[1] In its most basic form, utopian discourse seeks to transcend present political conditions and foretells a future free from social ills and cultural constraint. Like the rainbow flag, utopian visions yearn for a polis that celebrates harmony, equity, and thoughtful deliberation. Apocalyptic discourse, conversely, cautions that calamity is imminent. While rhetorically inflected readings of apocalypse generally understand the hierarchical and chaotic nature of preordained disaster as leading to a better hereafter, contemporary appropriations of the concept focus on the grim repercussions awaiting humanity. The *civil* or *secular* enactments of apocalyptic discourses by movements underscore the failure of imagined communal goals as

thwarting utopic completion in the future. Environmental and disarmament movements, for example, rarely invoke apocalyptic visions to underscore optimism. The tropes of utopia and apocalypse are widely employed in the discourses constituting social movements and often these rhetorical forms are inexorably intertwined.

Social movements have proven to be an especially rich source of utopian and apocalyptic discourses, as their rhetoric provokes new visions of "the people" to be realized.[2] The generative possibilities that ensue from movements are highly tenuous, requiring prospects of reward and consequence. Alberto Melucci (1989) has suggested that the "great collective processes, such as the emergence of new social or cultural patterns, provide a channel for expressing . . . moral utopianism, which otherwise would survive only in marginal enclaves" (p. 82). Cultural change allows for a reimagination of publics and a prognosis of the world as it could be, not as it is. The purity of such visions is significant, as they simultaneously allow for the continued striving toward political and cultural goals and assure these goals will never be fulfilled. Utopias, for example, create aspirations of purity impossible to fulfill, but the implementation of that desired perfection obliges a reiteration of group practices that renews identification for those seeking change. However, the history of social movements also makes clear that groups almost always succumb to the compromising forces of hegemony, inviting dissolution of utopian promise into irreparable demise.

Especially compelling are those occasions where the tropes of utopia and apocalypse seemingly converge, blurring the discursive space of movement projections. Assimilation, for instance, often signifies the achievement of movement goals, but can just as easily eviscerate the generative antagonisms that have underwritten the constitutive foundations of non-normative communities. Looking at those instances where the tropes of utopia and apocalypse are rendered indistinct offers an opportunity for scrutinizing how meanings are produced for those inside and outside movements, and the ideological principles guiding public transcripts. The radical indeterminacy and intelligibility inherent in words and images shape the reception and understanding people bring to concepts, such as movements, and their placement in our schemas of the social world. This essay focuses on one such embodiment, where utopia and apocalypse collide to generate novel meanings: Public representations of queer teenagers elucidate the convergence of utopian visions with apocalyptic realizations to resignify meaning for LGBT politics.

The discursive mediation of LGBT lives has had a profound impact on the arc of cultural prospects and the ability of queer citizens to be public. However, one of the most discursively contested bodies in recent years—that of the queer teenager—remains notably understudied.[3] While texts such as Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004; an apocalyptic title if ever there were one) are critical of the recurrent figure of "the child" in narratives that situate the reproductive impulses of heteronormative cultures against queer lives, such works also underestimate the extent to which the bodies of youth and adolescents are appropriated to represent movement rhetorics and popular cultural texts chronicling the promise of sexual diversity. Recent cover

stories about queer youth in periodicals such as *Time*, *The Advocate*, *Newsweek*, *The New Republic*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, along with reports in newspapers including the *LA Times* and *USA Today* mark a noticeable shift in the rhetoric surrounding queer youth.[4] Queer teens are simultaneously understood as both political separatists from earlier LGBT movements, as well as disinterested assimilationists.

Examining popular press representations of teens over the last decade, this analysis explores the cultural politics at play in mediated portrayals of this queer demographic.[5] Queer teenagers being able to live free of discrimination and fear is an endpoint long pursued by LGBT people. However, that utopian fantasy pronounces an apocalyptic realization: the achievement of this goal marks an irreversible change for traditional LGBT politics. Cultural strides have empowered young queers to articulate their identities in ways that diverge from conventional political goals, crafting public representations of perplexing itinerant citizens. These narratives recreate a familiar script that reveals the ongoing gravity of assimilation as a powerful force in framing public discourses about LGBT movements.

Reiterations of Utopian and Apocalyptic Discourse

Utopian longings haunt the narrative landscape of American culture. From unattainable visions of "the American Dream" to the fantastic promises of globalization, utopian rhetorics materialize consistently in Western political thought. Pointing to the expression, "one nation under God," Lauren Berlant (1991) has suggested that U.S. culture uniquely exploits its utopian discourses by carefully mediating "the contradiction between the 'nowhere' of utopia and the 'everywhere' of the nation dissolved by the American recasting of the 'political' into the terms of providential identity" (p. 31). Just as light is omnipresent in the metaphors of religious histories, utopia is ubiquitous in American vernacular, being simultaneously present and fleeting. The promise derived from utopian appeals comports nicely with American pursuits of unattainable, but profoundly hopeful, dreams. These prognostications offer a catalyst for rhetorics emphasizing a divine mission, reassuring true believers that rewards for their sacrifices are imminent (Savran, 1994, p. 31).

Translated from its origins, the term "utopia" literally means "no place" (the "topos" in "utopia" being recognizable to rhetorical scholars).[6] The eschewing of place may appear spatial in nature, but is best personified as temporal. Utopian discourse helps escort those facing insurmountable goals into hopeful positions of future accomplishment. In the words of Seyla Benhabib (1986), utopia "envisages a radical break between present and future, and sees the future as ushering in a radically new principle of human togetherness and subjectivity" (p. 114). Aspiring to escape the bonds of ideology, these visions construct the social world as situationally transcendent, empowering people to resist barriers established by the status quo (Treichler, 1999, p. 154). The temporal nature of utopian discourse—situating change firmly in the future—often has drawn the scrutiny of critics who want a more immediate revolution and distrust utopia's capacity for nostalgia.[7]

As a mode of critique, however, utopian discourses hold the potential for generating frames that combat the depressing realities of everyday life. Kenneth Burke (1941/1973) believed that utopian visions could productively challenge authoritarian rule, subtly acting as "strategies for criticizing the status quo with immunity" (p. 231). So long as the imaginative possibilities of abstraction are not wholly compromised by the mechanisms of hegemonic social forces, utopias can be a fruitful starting point for reimagining the stifling cadence of the commonplace. As such, utopia is not most efficiently formulated as a telos, but a discursive tactic reserved for instigating changes in meaning at particular moments in time.

Imagining a future free from the depressing realities of social life is not exclusive to utopian thought. Indeed, in diverse religious and secular spheres, a cataclysmic chain of events signaling the demise of a former order commonly precedes the achievement of a state of perfection. The actualization of utopia is frequently made possible by an apocalyptic rapture. This relationship, which frequents American political discourse, situates the fragility of liberty and freedom against progressive notions of hope and exploration.[8] The constitutive affinity of utopia and apocalypse is underscored by their shared emphasis on futuristic projections of identity and cultural achievement. Like utopian rhetoric, apocalyptic discourse is a symbolic remedy to rhetorically constructed ills and is accomplished by a discursive positioning of temporality (O'Leary, 1994, p. 14). Apocalyptic rhetoric energizes a sense of control over meaning, even if this clout is figuratively fashioned in a manner that is not politically or culturally practical (Brummett, 1991, p. 91).

Although characteristically imagined in regards to religious groups, fragments of utopia and apocalypse surface in diffuse aspects of American social movements. The appropriation of this rhetoric by LGBT publics is perhaps best understood as secular, or civil, apocalyptic discourse. That is, apocalyptic rhetoric may be exemplified by formal characteristics born in religious genres, but realized today in more pragmatic and historically contingent forms. Barry Brummett (1991) explains, "the changes portended by secular apocalyptic are rarely or never as absolute as are the changes of religious apocalypse" (p. 44). Fragmented and formally displaced, tropological appropriations of apocalypse underscore the malaise of traditional laws and the breakdown of social orders (p. 86).

Speaking directly to the politics of American social movements, Robyn Wiegman (2000) has theorized apocalypse as "a set of worries that currently shape the political imaginary" (p. 807). Left politics have been infiltrated by the nostalgia of 1960s identity movements, because they are consistently positioned as having lost the "utopian generation of a future tense" (p. 805). In its place, some movements have advanced an apocalyptic vision driven by a fear of future failures rather than a sense of loss. The apocalyptic highlights a temporal disorientation, where the present both fails to bring the past to "utopic completion" and represents the collapse of projected goals (p. 807). From a meaning-making perspective, these frames stress the collapse of long-standing group practices and the failure to inaugurate new modes of realizing collective aspirations.

Queer Trajectories of Futuristic Discourses

While utopian and apocalyptic tropes are evident in an array of social movement discourses, they have been especially pronounced in queer rhetorics. Even a cursory survey of LGBT histories illuminates a tradition of employing these rhetorical forms. The enormous obstacles confronting movements in their inception necessitate inspired visions for people who need desperately to believe that change is possible. The diverse factions that compose LGBT communities add to this need for shared identifications. The often shaky relationship among lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people (not to mention in-fighting among these groups) have cemented the necessity of utopian visions in the political realm. Projections of hope during times of duress provide one avenue for thinking through the discursive possibilities available to those who recognize themselves in the throes of LGBT politics.

As with any movement, early gay and lesbian liberation politics are often nostalgically remembered as sites of utopian desires. Lisa Duggan (1992) argues the pioneers of gay liberation created utopian visions in their explanations of gender and sexuality. She writes, "Drawing on the more constructionist versions of psychoanalytic theories of sexuality, visionaries planted a utopia in which everyone was potentially polymorphously sexual with everyone else" (p. 20). Contra studies that position early rights crusaders as "essentialist," the beginning years of sexual liberation discourse often stressed fluidity and the breakdown of ontological categories.[9]

Even seemingly radical queer organizations embraced utopian devices. Groups such as ACT-UP and Queer Nation were partially dependent on utopian visions, even when their politics seemed more outwardly confrontational. Berlant and Freeman (1993) note that Queer Nation shifted "between a utopian politics of identity, difference, dispersion, and specificity and a pluralist agenda, in the liberal sense, that imagines a 'gorgeous mosaic' of difference without a model of conflict" (p. 197). Writing about the dawn of ACT-UP, Michael Warner (2002) asserts that "queer politics did not arise simply in response to those conservative policies in the executive branch. The utopian appeal of queer politics from the beginning far exceeded its ability to overcome a blockage in national administrative policy" (p. 216). Even when not using such words explicitly, the pull of utopia is prominent in several queer histories. Writing of ACT-UP, Cathy Cohen (1997) reflects, "In each project individuals from numerous identities—heterosexual, gay, poor, wealthy, white, black, Latino—came together to challenge dominant constructions of who should be allowed and who deserved care. No particular identity exclusively determined the shared political commitments of these activists" (p. 460).[10] Similarly, Susan Stryker (1998) advocated for a more public transgender movement that would enable a "utopian point of inclusive diversity" (p. 152). Repeatedly, factions and organizations have been, and continue to be, poised as utopian projects of hope.

Importantly, these tropes are not simply contained to academic histories. They surface consistently in the currents of LGBT thought. A striking example can be found in a recent report about the documentary "Tearoom" published by the queer

newspaper *The Southern Voice* (Lee, 2008). In the queer community, tearooms were public spaces (usually bathrooms) frequented by men who had sex with other men. The term "tearoom" is generally associated with times prior to the cultural visibility of contemporary LGBT movements. Indeed, these years are often remembered in tandem with histories emphasizing sexual stigma reinforced by medicine, psychiatry, the law, and religion. The film focuses on a tearoom in Mansfield, OH, which the story refers to as "dreary" and "imprisoning." But the documentary's creator also commented that the sexual acts that transpired among the largely closeted men "had a utopian aspect" because the tearooms allowed for practices that defied not only gender and sexual mores, but also racial hierarchies (p. 23). The potential of these spaces was rife with generative possibilities. While shame is a component of this rhetoric, so too is the excitement brought about by acts standing outside the imagined sexual norms of the day.

To be certain, the necessity of utopian discourse is unmistakable in queer rhetorics.[11] Suzanna Walters (2001), for example, reflects on a televisual fantasy in which she spends an evening watching gay and lesbian themed programming on the networks that offer more than the typical tokenism or assimilative overtures usually found on the small screen. For her, "imagining a cultural field radically different is a must for marginalized groups as utopian fantasizing" (p. 127). José Esteban Muñoz (1999) also centralizes the vitality of utopianism, asserting that such visions are essential for the contemplation of possibility. He argues, although "utopianism has become the bad object of much contemporary political thinking, we nonetheless need to hold on to and even risk utopianism if we are to engage in the labor of making a queerworld" (p. 25). The evidence presented here underscores the extent to which utopian discourse has evolved as a major force in public rhetoric about sexual politics.[12]

The recurring emphasis on "becoming" underscores that there is no final resting point to these aspirations; remaining open to utopian possibility is arduous and there will certainly be failures. Recognizing that particular goals will never be reached and that non-progressive forces will consistently work against queer world-making projects, it is not surprising that the secular appropriation of apocalypse is persistent in LGBT discourses. Apocalypse rhetorics are reoccurring in narratives stressing assimilation, commodification, gay marriage, and the devastation of HIV/AIDS (Amico, 2005; Long, 2005; Warner, 1999). The pull of apocalyptic rhetoric is strong in discourses emphasizing the decline of gay neighborhoods, pride parades, and queer cinema (Brown, 2007; Harris, 1999). The rhetoric of apocalypse is pronounced in early queer pamphlets and Larry Kramer's newest tome. Perpetually we worry if *Will and Grace* are too straight, Ellen too domestic, and gaydar too accessible to the rest of the world (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Skerski, 2007; Bennett, 2006).

Just as the trope of utopia perpetually materializes in LGBT rhetorics, so too has the figure of apocalypse. Returning to ACT-UP, Long notes the group's provocative art and graphics "attempt to assess the tactical and strategic instrumentality of apocalyptic discourse in particular cases" to arouse rage and action (2005, p. 18).

Peter Dickinson (1995) takes the relationship between AIDS and apocalypse as a starting point, contending, "the problem with abstract theorizing about AIDS is that it frequently lacks a subject, a body, a corpus, a corpse. This would seem to be even more the case when theorizing AIDS as apocalypse" (p. 219). Of course, numerous scholars have resisted the positing of queers *as* apocalypse (Edelman, 2004, p. 18; Sedgwick, 1990, p. 127). The Lesbian Avengers appropriated the term in early pamphlets advertising their movement, attempting to reverse the term's stigma. They asserted: "It's time for a fierce lesbian movement and that's *you*; the role model, the vision, the desire. WE NEED YOU. Because: we're not waiting for the rapture. We are the apocalypse. We'll be your dream and their nightmare" (Long, 2005, p. 125).

The recent convergence of these tropological forms in the media indicates a curious shift in meaning for LGBT politics. Increasingly, the blurring of utopian and apocalyptic rhetoric functions as a sign of transformation in the queer world. Take, for instance, the cover of the *New Republic* on October 24, 2005. The headline accompanying gay conservative commentator Andrew Sullivan's essay ominously reads "The End of Gay Culture." But the visual proof used to reinforce this blunt proclamation is aesthetically serene, not fiery and destructive. The cover features a picture of two white men, presumably gay, in athletic attire walking toward the reader, looking down at a young boy. The child, who is also white, is carrying a basketball and has a yellow sweater wrapped around his waist with a blue baseball cap on his head. The boy is flanked by the men and each them have a hand on the boy's back. The bond of their kinship is fortified with a natural setting of what appears to be a field in the background on a bright sunny day. The cover looks oddly reminiscent of a catalogue photo for a retailer such as J. Crew. Consistent with the history of the media, that representation is both white and male. The photo is a visual depiction of a gay nuclear family that is, the headline reminds us, gradually destroying queer culture. Of all the options available to the editors, their choice of this traditionally affirming shot is captivating. This marker of assimilation suggests the "end of gay culture," as if that phrase—"gay culture"—was monolithic.

While the individual deployment of utopia and apocalypse are striking in their own right, the blurring of the conceptual space between the two concepts presents a novel perspective for exploring queer rhetorics. The AIDS Memorial Quilt, for example, strongly suggests a blurring of apocalyptic and utopian forms. It is a marker of fatalistic endings, but also affectively hopeful in its performative execution (Jones, 2000). Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* offers another striking example. Basing the play on the writing of Walter Benjamin, Kushner explains, "Benjamin's sense of utopianism is also so profoundly apocalyptic: a teleology, but not a guarantee, or a guarantee that Utopia will be as fraught and infected with history" (Savran, 1994, p. 26). If we accept that these tropes remediate meaning in a world where crises in identity frequently bubble, it is telling that this play came to fruition when AIDS, not to mention LGBT rights, was fighting to enter the consciousness of public culture. However, in a seemingly post-AIDS world with shifting social politics, the tropes have become wedded to a more youthful embodiment. Teenagers who now see Kushner's art as history, not urgency, have materialized as a new site of struggle. Using this

blurred sense of being as a critical heuristic for representations of LGBT movements, I now turn my attention to queer teenagers.

Queer Teens and the Reconstitution of the Future

In the opening paragraph of her influential text *Tendencies* (1993), Eve Sedgwick poetically observed:

> I think everyone who does gay and lesbian studies is haunted by the suicides of adolescents. To us, the hard statistics come easily: that queer teenagers are two to three times likelier to attempt suicide, and accomplish it than others; that up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be gay or lesbian; that a third of lesbian and gay teenagers say they have attempted suicide; that minority queer adolescents are at even more extreme risk. (p. 1)

Years after these words were penned, gay and lesbian youth continue to suffer from drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, and suicide in disproportionate numbers to their heterosexual peers.[13] The increased visibility of LGBT people in the media, in local and national politics, and in the everyday lives of many Americans, has not wholly alleviated the stigma felt by teens who do not conform to rigid sexual and gender norms.

Despite these hardships, the world inhabited by queer adolescents is undeniably different from the one in which LGBT adults came of age. Today there are openly gay movie stars, television characters, politicians, and comic book heroes. There are magazines, websites, and chatrooms devoted entirely to queer youth. Additionally, the number of gay–straight alliances (GSAs) in high schools has soared. In 1997 there were about 100 GSAs nationally, but as of fall 2009 there were over 4,000 in American high schools and 120 in junior highs (Cloud, 2005, p. 44; Denizet-Lewis, 2009, p. 36). *Time* magazine noted that the average age for "coming out" is now right before or after high school graduation, significantly younger than the post-college rates of the 1980s and 1990s. Other studies now put the average age of coming out as young as 13 (*Advocate.com*, 2006).

The space created by these discursive growing pains is noteworthy. On the one hand, queer teens continue to combat ongoing instances of overt violence and discrimination. On the other, they are living in a time of unprecedented openness and support. Reflecting on this cultural shift, Sullivan (2005) has noted that this new generation, which has reaped the benefits of decades of struggle, knows little about the sexual revolution of the 1970s, the historical import of AIDS, or the political catalyst created by the epidemic. While young gays and lesbians have always been a source of anxiety for American culture, drawing explicit attention to the nature versus nurture debate, several recent publications represent this unease as having infiltrated LGBT communities. This suspicious claim is compelling not because it offers an absolute truth, but because of its public reimagining of queer politics. The assorted identities of queer teens as sites of apprehension are no longer reserved for heteronormative publics according to these reports, but also for queer counter-publics challenging sexual mores. Some scholars observe that many teens are opting

out of traditional movement activities and that absence worries LGBT leaders. Michael Glatze, editor of *Young Gay America Magazine* asserts "I don't think the gay movement understands the extent to which the next generation just wants to be normal kids" (Cloud, 2005, p. 51). This supposed desire to be "normal" has caught the ire of some LGBT activists. One journalist argued that it is hard not to "feel appalled that these kids don't have a full appreciation for the hard, long, life-and-death battles waged while they were still grooving on *Tiny Toon Adventures*" (Vary, 2006, p. 100).

In a telling moment, activist Urvashi Vaid captured the tension produced by moment accomplishments when commenting on the relationship between traditional movement goals and LGBT youth. Vaid laments that LGBT teens are "not necessarily engaging in conversations with people who make them uncomfortable, or trying to go door-knocking to contest a ballot initiative, because it's all fine and good to look at the glass as being half full" (Vary, 2006, p. 98). But, a conflicted Vaid then admits, "Well, you know, there's a part of me that feels like I achieved something if people can be blasé about their homosexuality. I take a great deal of pride in that, in a perverse kind of way." In Vaid's statement one recognizes that the collective accomplishments of LGBT people may have inevitably, though certainly not purposefully, initiated the demise of a former order. The idea of a world without clearly defined categorical goals has dissipated, but with potentially promising results.

In the rhetoric surrounding LGBT teens the tropological dyad is represented in multiple ways, but two themes are predominant. First, the expanded set of identifications for teens (including bi, trans, queer, genderqueer, polyamorous, and flexible) plays off of the utopian fantasy of sexual fluidity that threatens static categories necessary for identity politics. Second, a rights-based model, sometimes correlated to assimilation, is marked as inherently non-progressive. Teens are seen as productive citizens only when they fit conventional representations of nostalgically rendered queer politics. These frames, while seemingly complementary, are in some ways paradoxical. The first imagines adolescents as radical separatists, the second as disinterested assimilationists.

Fluid Identities: Utopian Achievement, or Ontological Death?

Utopias are not merely fantastic discursive irrationalities. The genealogy of utopian rhetoric has displayed a tendency to conform to the realities of an era and exist within the realm of the possible in a political culture (Kumar, 2008, p. 8). The limits and opportunities set forth by these frames are embedded in narratives structuring queer rhetorics and the constitution of public representations. In one version of the public narrative about queer teenagers, youth have embraced the sexual fluidity imagined by early proponents of liberation politics. In so doing, they have taken the unexpected step of breaking with LGBT identifications. According to these accounts, younger people believe that older members of the community are out of touch with contemporary times, while LGBT adults view their counterparts as "radical" (Russell & Bohan, 2005; Hajek & Giles, 2002; Pecchioni & Croghan, 2002).

The divorcing of identity from traditional labels is one of the most pronounced sources of anxiety in public narratives about queer adolescents. This is consistent with other movement histories emphasizing the dissolution of identity. Wiegman (2000) writes, the "proliferation of identities generates political fragmentation" guiding the narrative that drives discourses stressing an "apocalyptic end" (p. 808). Breaking with more widely recognized labels, young people may now identify as bisexual, trans, queer, fluid, or are openly experimenting, and do not want to be labeled "gay." For example, Cornell professor Ritch Savin-Williams, one of the most prominent researchers of LGBTQ teen identity, recounts a conversation with a teen who said he only fell in love with guys, but was not gay (Cloud, 2005, p. 51). Being gay, according to this young man, was equivalent to being "leftist" and "radical." Therapist Suzanne Iasenza has likewise reported that young lesbians are distancing themselves from traditional identity markers and they are less likely to associate feminist issues with their sexuality. Iasenza remarks, "You're not likely to find them saying they're lesbian as a statement against patriarchy or because they don't like the way men take over their bodies or their lives" (DeAnglis, 2002). One cover story asserted that being bisexual has become a ubiquitous identity among junior high school students (Denizet-Lewis, 2009). Such dispersed rhetoric has worried some who ponder, "If decidedly cohesive antigay forces are stronger than ever precisely because we have come so far, how can we fight back if we can't even agree on a word that describes who we are?" (Vary, 2006, p. 102). Here the fantasy of a unified front underscores potential harms while the polymorphous qualities of queer youth invite dissolution. Although there is no proof offered for the positive effects of operating under a single name, the implication of fragmentation inherently suggests demise.

At times there is an unusual mix of sexual fluidity and seemingly non-progressive politics accented in this rhetoric. Take, for example, the daughter of conservative politician Alan Keyes, who is featured in *Time* magazine. At the time of publication, Maya Marcel-Keys was 20 years old and "identifies herself as queer (not lesbian), pro-life and 'anarchist'; and attends Mass whenever she can spare the time" (Cloud, 2005, p. 47). Clearly this is not the typically imagined sexual politics of queer counter-publics. This standpoint, mixing the rejection of lesbian identity with religion and a political philosophy popularly associated with youth culture is nothing short of nomadic when contemplating it against more traditional representations of social movement activity.

Fluidity is positioned as both a marker of youth and a source of concern for the emotional wellbeing of teenagers. As the *New York Times Magazine* put it:

> All of this fluidity, confusion and experimentation can be understandably disorienting for parents and educators. Is an eighth grader who says he's gay just experimenting? Could he change his mind in a week, as 13-year-olds routinely do with other identities—skater, prep, goth, jock—they try on for a while and then shed for another? And if sexuality is so fluid, should he really box himself in with a gay identity? (2009, p. 41)

What is striking about this query is that fluidity is not inherent problematic for the teens themselves. While the author clearly connects fluidity to "confusion and

experimentation" (fluidity does not necessarily begin or end with either), it is the ontological identification with a "gay identity" that is seen as most troubling for parents.

The anxieties of gender and sexuality fluidity are reflected most prominently in *Newsweek's* (2008) cover story on Larry King, a 15-year-old junior high student who was murdered at school by a classmate. King apparently had a crush on the assailant, who responded by shooting the youth in the back of the head during history class. The cover story is perhaps most unsettling because of the way King's complicated identity is used to explain away the murder. King self-identified as gay, but also expressed the desire for a sex-change and asked to be called Leticia (the name put on the class paper being written during the murder). King's gender identity is horribly mismanaged by the editors of *Newsweek*, who employ the headline, "A tale of bullying, sexual identity, and the limits of tolerance" on the cover. The phrase, "the limits of tolerance" was printed for a now famous 1993 *Newsweek* cover headline that read "Lesbians: Coming out strong; what are the limits of tolerance?" Fifteen years after that unfortunate publication, readers are again confronted with the question not solely because of King's sexuality, as the headline suggests, but also because of the victim's gender identity and age. Disturbingly, however, the murder is tied directly to "tolerating" King's identity.

The reporter covering the story asserted King "was a troubled child who flaunted his sexuality and wielded it like a weapon" (Setoodeh, 2008, p. 42). Rather than be intimidated in places such as the locker room, King reportedly told boys "you look hot" to resist their bullying in the traditionally oppressive space. According to *Newsweek*, King would approach other young men and contend, "I know you want me." King is portrayed as an unsettling figure, largely because of the disquieting gender performances initiated by the teen's seemingly transgressive embodiment. King wore make-up, stiletto heels, and women's clothing to school. This teen used fluidity to fight back—leading the magazine not to pursue *why* King tactically retorted to survive, but to ponder "the limits of tolerance" prompted by sexual and gender fluidity. Without any sense of irony, the story portrays the victim as a harasser, even as it simultaneously conveys reports about a smoke bomb being thrown into the King home, death threats made against the teen's life, and numerous instances of unabashed violence.

King's lack of identification, according to the story, produced problems for both the school and at least one self-identified LGBT citizen. In the defense's words, it was "a lesbian vice principle with a political agenda" that was at the root of the killing, not the cultural sphere that told a young man murder was the answer to dealing with difference (Setoodeh, 2008, p. 43). Despite providing no evidence that the school official was doing nothing more than supporting a child in search of an identity by applying the law and promoting acceptance, the reporter wrote, "it's impossible to know what role—if any—she played in the events leading to [King's] death" (p. 44). Here the projection of a space free from discrimination quickly morphed into the most unsettling and depressing of outcomes: Utopian aspirations initiated the unthinkable.[14]

Disciplinary action against queer teens that embrace fluidity is generally imagined to materialize in sinister forms. There has been a sharp increase in religious right attempts to convince queer youth that sexual fluidity is a phase that will eventually give way to heterosexual desires. As Cloud (2005) notes, "Because kids often see their sexuality as riverine and murky—multiple studies have found most teens with same-sex attractions have had sex with both boys and girls—conservatives hope their 'ex-gay' message will keep some of those kids from embracing a gay identity" (p. 45). Peter Sprigg, of the conservative Family Research Council, confirmed this agenda, telling *USA Today* that "young people have no business committing to a sexual identity until they're adults" (Elias, 2007, p. 1A). These factions are not just aiming their message at teens, but warning parents that children as young as the age of five can show signs of "gender confusion," and necessitate therapy. This is no small campaign. The reparative therapy organization Exodus International spends about a quarter of its one million dollar budget targeting questioning youth.

Conservative groups play a central role in a public discourse where the eschewing of identities exalts an apocalyptic atmosphere. Time and again, non-identifying teens surface in the public narrative as sites of future promise, but they are also potential prey to religious ills. However, the close association between queer teens and evangelicals serves another ideological function. The opposition between conservative groups and queer youth subtly recreates traditional discourses of movement politics. Cindy Patton (1993) has noted that queer movements and conservative factions necessitate one another to keep their causes relevant and the public representations in these features keep this rhetoric circulating. The public reporting reproduces a common narrative and locates the body of the teen at the center of this struggle, often without understanding the ways teens obscure the binary.[15] While their separatism complicates stable identity categories, the schism between religion and queer youth is often falsely concocted to reinvent a cultural narrative familiar to consumers who lack the information necessary to nuance the wide range of identifications between queers of all ages and religions.

A Rights-based Subject

The move away from overt LGBT identifications toward a more fluid conception of identity is complicated by public discourses that continually situate queer youth in a rights-based politics. Whereas the deflecting of identifications appears separatist in nature, the rights-based model tempers this isolation with assimilative tendencies that stress familiar scripts of heteronormative worlds and LGBT activism. In this narrative, queer teens are not marginalized in the ways they used to be, in large part because of available media representations and the marketing directed at them. There is, in this telling of the story, a fine line between that which is radically separate and that which feeds into cultural impulses of individualism and assimilation. So powerful is this draw, some contend that "what encompasses gay culture itself will expand into such a diverse set of subcultures that 'gayness' alone will cease to tell you

very much about any individual" (Sullivan, 2005, p. 16). Queer youth are both a niche market and couched in a universal notion of human rights.

Without question, the rights-based model has generated a tidal wave of cultural changes. Especially for younger Americans, rights-based discourses fit comfortably into ideological scripts of fairness and equality. Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) founder Kevin Jennings, highlighted this direction, remarking "We're gonna win ... because of what's happening in high schools right now ... This is the generation that gets it" (Cloud, 2005, p. 45). The seeming common sense implied in Jennings' confident assertion draws attention to the public transcripts of American equality invoked in this discourse. As Sullivan notes:

> in their most formative years, their self-consciousness is utterly different than that of their gay elders. That's why it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between gay and straight teens today—or even young gay and straight adults. Less psychologically wounded, more self-confident, less isolated, young gay kids look and sound increasingly like young straight kids. (p. 19)

In this rhetoric, teen empowerment is different from pre-AIDS generations. Their understanding of sexual identity and its relationship to politics is less inflected with the critical desperation of people literally fighting for their lives. This rendering of queer kids who are comfortable in their skins and not emotionally distraught in forms that mirror their predecessors suggests movement toward assimilation and a dilapidation of LGBT categories. The rights-based consciousness adopted by queer youth as depicted in the media is reflected in the traditional relational and sexual scripts that they sometimes embrace. Relationally, today's teens will always have examples of legally sanctioned same-sex marriages and the benefits that accompany this institutional matrix, the ultimate in assimilation woes for many activists. Some queer teens are even embracing Christian virginity pledges.[16] The utopian promise of equality is ubiquitous in this discourse and teens are used to highlight both the success of past movement goals and their potential future failures.

Even when not drawing explicit attention to rights-based discourses, public narratives often reinforce visions of neoliberal equality by paralleling queer teens with utopian visions of past social movements. The *Advocate* has long focused on the role of youth in movement politics. Its "person of the year" for 2005 was Kerry Pacer, a lesbian teenager from Cleveland, GA, who attempted to start a GSA in her rural southern hometown, only to have the school district prohibit all non-curricular clubs from meeting on campus. The rhetoric is a familiar one—placing activism in the deep South, in the schools, and in the context of a national movement.

The *Advocate* has also offered particular attention to the Equality Riders, a group of students who travel across the country visiting conservative colleges such as Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, Regent University in Virginia Beach, and West Point. At Liberty, 24 of the students were arrested for their protests. According to the report, the Equality Riders were inspired by the Freedom Riders of the 1960s and have drawn accolades from the likes of Representative John Lewis, himself a Civil Rights era Freedom Rider (Kennedy, 2006, p. 48). Placing the teens in this particular narrative is

compelling, as its historical parallel is well before the Civil Rights' movement phased into a legal paradigm of activism that arguably stunted other forms of progressive activity. These narratives construct the history of the movement in a fixed and coherent manner, contributing to what Christopher Castiglia (2000) has called "counternostalgia" about the shape of LGBT subjectivities and collectivities. The ascription of analogies from the 1960s frequently underscores assimilative political initiatives that inhibit non-normative identifications.

The rights-based model need not be separated from narratives of sexual fluidity. In the King story, for example, challenges to gender norms are situated in a language that emphasizes equality and law. The story stresses the "right" to wear make-up and dresses to school. Like Matthew Shepard, King is couched in a rhetoric of progress and the pains that accompany movement growth. According to the *Newsweek* story, an email circulated by the school district before the murder noted as "long as it does not cause classroom disruptions" King's "rights" must be protected (Setoodeh, 2008, p. 45). Sadly, the boundary crossing constituted by gender and sexual non-conformity is always already positioned as chaotic, disrupting the rights-based model and presented as "the limits of tolerance."

The assimilation of queer teens, in either heteronormative culture or homonormative activist scripts, at first glance suggests contrasting identifications. The former articulates a culmination of movement activities that provide the opportunity for identities free of traditional queer politics. The change is seen as a natural progression of movement consequences. The later nostalgically envisions teens in stories familiar to media consumers. Both narratives, however, suggest a new temporality for queer publics. Although there has never been (and never will be) unanimous cohesion in LGBT politics, teens are portrayed in the accounts as utopian agents with untold opportunity to bring movement aspirations to fruition. When they do not, they are frequently situated as signs of decline. This supposed dilapidation of movement goals, however, is most preoccupied with the structuring force of assimilation and its imagined role in LGBT politics.

No Future?

Dissecting the utopian and apocalyptic fragments of LGBT rhetoric provides countless opportunities for understanding movement practices. The anxieties represented in the coverage of queer teens suggest an ideological undertow that continues to guide epistemological conceptions of the LGBT movement. Teens represent a coming of age for meanings that have steadily stabilized over time in the cultural composition of movement discourses. At the heart of these tensions is the ever-present force of assimilation. As a structuring feature of LGBT life, assimilation acts an antagonistic conceptual tentativeness, requiring attention and retort, but at great risk. Both sexual fluidity and the rights-based model draw attention to the need to self-identify and survive, but each is firmly grounded in the movement of teens between two worlds—one that is imaged to be "gay," the other "straight." Teens blur that line, underscoring the potential for boundary crossing.

The association between assimilation, projections of the future, and teen identity was captured in a report by the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS), who likened the queer generation gap to that of immigrant families. The IGLSS explains, "Just as immigrant parents can learn about their adopted culture through the youth who are immersed in it, LGBT adults might learn about new LGBT cultures from youth" (Russell & Bohan, 2005, p. 6). It is important to reflect on this metaphor, which not only links queer adults and youth to one another as a familial unit, but also to nationalistic discourses articulated with the American dream and acculturation. It problematically positions older generations of LGBT people as foreigners in a culture they cultivated. Nonetheless, the report found teens exhibit an "uncommon awareness of their own and others' internalized homophobia, and were able to deal with it in a fashion that some older people, long hampered by it, might not easily achieve" (Russsell & Bohan, 2005, p. 4).

The stasis points created by queer teens need not be negative. The ways teens occupy conceptual categories related to assimilation both stabilize and destabilize the static forms of identity that have long plagued people who feel pre-determined categories never quite capture who they imagine themselves to be. To be sure, no words ever capture such subjectivities, but the expanded menu of identifications produced by queer adolescents might formulate new modes of thinking about sexuality previously dispelled, stigmatized, or marginalized. As Kaila Kuban and Chris Grinnell (2008) write, queer youth are not facing the same struggles as LGBT adults, nor do they necessarily have it easier than their counterparts. "In reality," they write, "the diverse contexts in which queer youth are growing up are neither better nor worse, but fundamentally *different* and as such demand careful attention and understanding" (p. 85).

The new identifications forged by queer teens need not signal the demise of LGBT culture. In one of the more compelling anecdotes about the LGBT generation gap, the *LA Times* (Hayasaki, 2007) reported on young queers of color who frequently commuted from New Jersey to New York's Greenwich Village to be accepted for who they are in a traditionally queer space. Unfortunately, older white gay men who have lived in the neighborhood for decades claimed the teens were rude, violent, and dangerous to others around them. One remarked that the teens don't "treat us with the respect we deserve" (Hayasaki, 2007, p. A1). Alas, the story quickly places the teens in the space of queer history with one man, gay rights activist Bob Kohler who has lived in the West Village for 60 years, coming to their aid. The *LA Times* reported, "the discrimination young people face in the West Village is no different from decades ago when gays could not hold hands in public." The account is perhaps most interesting because it cannot help but place these kids—who have particular needs and face specific discriminations-within in the narrative confines of the queer community. While the story appears at first glance to highlight the unseemliness of fragmentation, the narrative is recuperated with utopian nostalgia. Kohler, we are reminded, "participated in the Stonewall protests, watched his neighbors die from AIDS, and refused to move when the neighborhood became straighter and wealthier." These kids are but another brick in that historical wall and readers are offered narrative fidelity

with traditional frames for understanding queer subjects. The kids may be loud (a racial stereotype if ever there was one), but insist that they want merely to be accepted. Still, this particular story is forceful because the teens resist simple hegemonic assimilation, even as they push for an acceptance of their presence.

Keeping to form with Wiegman's assertion that apocalyptic rhetorics come into being because of their relationship to utopian nostalgia, there is in this rhetoric a desire to return to a time that was simultaneously better and worse for some in the LGBT community. So while Sullivan bemoans that "there is no single gay identity anymore, let alone a single look or style or culture," this monolithic identity never existed to start (2000, p. 16). But fear not. Despite longings for the past and the lamenting of sexual fluidity, it would appear that "gay" is here, at least for now. Recently, the *Advocate* featured the question "Is gay over?" on its cover. The verdict from over 3,700 readers was "no" by a landslide (Vary, 2006, p. 100). Only 6% said "yes."

Although teens are the focus of this essay, there are many presuppositions about the static nature of the adult queer community in these reports. Not surprisingly, the blanket comparisons between the movements of yesterday and today invite assumptions about contemporary queer identities. For example, Glatze asserted that "Today so many kids who are gay, they don't like Cher. They aren't part of the whole subculture" (Cloud, 2005, p. 51). There have long been LGBT people who do not worship divas at the altar of popular culture. The binary developed between young and old, however, creates a narrative conflict well suited to the needs of newspapers and magazines. The conflicts produced between agents of various ages and sexualities is simply good business. Here consumer culture encourages the divorcing of identity from community, providing in its space modalities for reimaging identity at every turn, an ongoing obsession that Zygmunt Bauman (2007) labels "serial births." This sometimes comes at the expense of asserting that all queer culture is suspiciously vacuous. The *Time* essay notes that there is something "empty" about gay culture. One man commented, "I'm not attracted to the gay lifestyle, toward gay people—I've never felt a kinship with them . . . There's a certain superficiality in gay attachments—musicals, fashion . . . I do think it's a happier life being straight" (Cloud, 2005, p. 51). The superficialities found in various heterosexual cultures and the problems they incur, remain invisible.

The "end of gay culture" may be near, but how close we are is anyone's guess. Susan Sontag (1989) once quipped that apocalypse "is now a long-running serial: not 'Apocalypse Now' but 'Apocalypse From Now On.' Apocalypse has become an event that is happening and not happening. It may be that some of the most feared events . . . have already happened. But we don't know it yet, because the standards have changed" (p. 176). This "catastrophe in slow motion" may be conspicuous to those who recognize its signs in queer communities, but the outcome of this gradual dissolve is highly speculative. Sullivan bemoans that it is "hard not to feel some sadness at the end of a rich, distinct culture built by pioneers who braved greater ostracism than today's generation will ever fully understand. But, if there is a real choice between a culture built on oppression and a culture built on freedom, the decision is an easy one" (Sullivan, 2005, p. 21). The ideographic employment of

freedom tells us the "choice" here is not a choice at all, but an eminent transformation that cannot be reversed.

The instability prompted by queer youth offer countless possibilities for reimagining a world free of past constraint, even if histories situate and guide their present subjugation. The regeneration of queer politics is contingent on the evolving desires and prospects of agonistically motivated publics. But we cannot presume to know what the future holds until we create the discursive space for those aspirations to materialize. Perhaps Oscar Wilde put it best: "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail."

Notes

[1] A trope is typically understood as a recurring figure on which an argument "turns." Nietzsche famously used tropes to explore language and the ways its empty signifiers materialize realities. Invoking Cicero, Nietzsche (1989) argued that tropes are like clothing: they were born of human necessity and deficiency and later positioned as decoration (p. 51). As such, all words are tropes because "language never expresses something completely but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent to it [language]" (p. 23).

[2] These tropes are pronounced not only in religious discourse, but feminist movements (Keller, 2004; Mellor, 1982; Jones and Goodin, 1990; Schönpflug, 2008), environmental movements (Gottlieb, 1993/2005; Kassman, 1997; Jennaway, 2008; Callenbach, 1975), economic movements (Webb, 2000; van den Berg, 2003; Hodgson, 1995; Jameson, 2005), and disarmament movements (Nehring, 2004; Wojcik, 1999).

[3] One notable exception is Mary Gray's *Out in the Country* (2009).

[4] In this paper I usually refer to "queer" youth, as opposed to LGBT youth. As the essay will demonstrate, some teens are now actively not identifying with *any* of the traditional identity markers, making "queer" the most encompassing phrase.

[5] This paper privileges cover stories that offer structured coherence to the thematic narratives surrounding queer teens over the last decade. Staying close to the emergent themes, a search of EBSCO and Lexis/Nexus databases was used to employ additional evidence. Because of its popular circulation (not to mention inclusion with other popular sources in the databases), *The Advocate* was included as a mainstream publication.

[6] Utopia is a pun of two words, *ou-topos* ("no place") and *eu-topos* ("good place"). See Neuman, 2008, p. 96.

[7] While some assert that utopian rhetoric dissolves political action, others argue that utopian projections manufacture hope. Some lament the passing of utopian visions, saying the disregard of utopian rhetoric signals an aversion to universals. Jacoby (1999) asserts if "not murderous, utopianism seems unfashionable, impractical and pointless. Its sources in imagination and hope have withered" (p. 179). Others, such as Jameson (1979), warn that utopian longings sometimes materialize in problematic forms. For example, they have the potential to create nostalgic longings for a falsely idealized past in the imagined solidarity of resented ethnic groups in the present.

[8] For more on apocalyptic rhetoric see Darsey, 1997.

[9] To avoid participating in what Christopher Castiglia (2000) calls "counteramnesia," other movement histories are useful for a more complete reading. See especially: D'Emilio, 1983; Shilts, 1978; Clendinen and Nagourney, 1999.

[10] There are conflicting histories about the cohesiveness and membership composition of organizations like ACT-UP. I am not interested in determining the "correct" history so much as I am the rhetorical fantasy created using utopian imagery. For accounts that run counter to Cohen's see Gamson (1989, pp. 354–356); Cvetkovich (2003, pp. 156–204).

[11] Of course, utopias are sometimes used to imagine a world free of LGBT people. See Sedgwick (1990, p. 128).

[12] Proponents of unified movements accuse defenders of queer theory of reiterating utopian ideals of liberal individualism. Seidman (1993) pondered "is it possible that underlying the refusal to name the subject ... is a utopian wish for a full, intact, organic experience of self and other?" (p. 133). Dana Cloud (2000) writes that queer theory "poses utopian experiments in intimate fulfillment—akin to the 1950s suburban family ideal—in lieu of a collective, political struggle" (p. 72).

[13] LAMBDA estimates that a U.S. teen takes his/her own life every five hours because of his/her sexuality, approximately 40% of homeless teens self-identify as gay or lesbian, and that 25% of gay and lesbian youth have drug and alcohol problems. A GLSEN survey found that "LGBT students are three times as likely as non-LGBT students to say that they do not feel safe in school (22% v. 7%) and 90% of LGBT students (v. 62% of non-LGBT students) have been harassed or assaulted during the past year." About 57% of those harassed never report incidents to school officials.

[14] To drive home Larry's impending fate, the killer was articulated with none other than Adolf Hitler, with whom he supposedly had a fascination (Setoodeh, 2008, p. 44).

[15] One exception to this narrative was Sullivan who observed that even "in evangelical circles, gay kids willing to acknowledge and struggle publicly with their own homosexuality represented a new form of openness" (p. 18).

[16] While generations of gay men and lesbians have celebrated sexual liberation as a symbol of non-conformity, some young people are subscribing to more heteronormative approaches to relationships. Amico (2005) notes that the "notion of virginity fits neatly into young gay lives at a time when political and moral agendas promote abstinence for straight people and offer no support at all for gay sex acts ... By buying into the language of virginity, gay youths are allowing the straight majority to limit their options and diminish their integrity" (p. 36). This is especially perplexing when contemplating the notion of virginity in relation to queer sex.

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