

## “Culture of One”: The Revolution of Queer Teen America

Modern queer teenagers of America engage in what I call the “culture of one” because of the adapted gap between the gay liberationist movements (from the 1950s to the nineties) and the current LGBTQ community hybridised into other cultures originally seen as incongruent or antagonist. This new culture promulgates an intense focus on one’s sexual and gender identity over all other ascribed attributes, resulting in the exponential development of new labels, the inappropriate application of social constructs of today onto potential queer people of history, and the neglect of intersectional theory. The effects of this new culture include self-moralising through social media and a paradoxical sensation of isolation under the doctrine (maintained from those early movements) that queer people are everywhere. Contemporary queer teens undergo a revolution that questions what it means to be alone and queer in a completely connected world that finds itself growing more tolerant, even benevolent, towards the community.

The “culture of one” is the name I place onto this phenomenon surrounding queer teens. The name itself is a contradiction in terms; a culture typically includes a homogenous people, diverse customs, and a long documented history. Queer teens of today have inactively made the individual the homogenous group, internalising the diversity in custom. This internalisation leads to the necessity of a new history, the necessity of a new lexicon, but this internalisation also leads to a path of extreme loneliness and insecurity, correlating with the rise in the number of LGBTQ teens diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders. This inexplicable centralisation transforms us all into an Othello (from the eponymous play by William Shakespeare), exceedingly aware that our differences are our identities, fixed on observing our hand in changing the world beyond instead of the precarious influence of that world on our being.

Othello's insecurity made him vulnerable to manipulation, leading to the destruction of his love, his rock, by his own hands. His rock is our biosphere, the wealth and history of LGBTQ culture. The "culture of one" is the modern reaction of queer teens to rapid globalisation and experiencing adolescence within the realm of the internet, this culture a potential tool resting on the precipice between soaring progresses in the lives of queer people and the toiling of overworked and fruitless fields.

The path leading to the ineffective conservation of spent seeds of thought includes not reconciling the gap between synthesised queer history and contemporary queer history (in both physical and personal forms) and preserving the outdated attitude that "we are everywhere," two aspects that the "culture of one" upholds with ease. For many LGBTQ people thirteen to nineteen years old in the United States, their personal perception of queer history begins during state attempts to legalise same-sex marriage or the Supreme Court decision in 2015 that judged the same licit across the country. Any teen interested in accurate earlier history experiences a large, empty space from 1991 to around *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) (the Supreme Court case that ruled laws banning sodomy as unconstitutional and decriminalised homosexuality nationwide). This is not to suggest that important events did not happen during this gap; that span of approximately twelve years saw the passing of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the original Dyke March, and the first unveiling of the transgender flag at a pride event. This break correlates with the end of the vast majority of synthesis in texts about queer history, though. The last edition of Jonathan Ned Katz's documentary history of gays and lesbians in the United States appeared in 1992, and Michael Bronski's *A Queer History of the United States* (copyrighted in 2012) abandons its tale in the early nineties. Even textbooks like *Finding Out* (from 2010) discontinue queer topics after '95. These endeavours developed from the academic movement in the

seventies that strived to enliven the starving field of gay and queer history, Katz and John D'Emilio as some of the founders. This academic movement advocated the idea that “we are everywhere,” that queer people exist throughout history as an indisputable fact. While the documents and pasts collected in response of that awareness fail to manifest in the sensitivities of teenaged LGBTQ people, this principle that “we are everywhere” endures undiminished. The standard was an obligation during the gay liberationist movement in the 1970s because of the movement’s challenged legitimacy in the face of the black and women’s rights movements that occurred concurrently, but now its prolonged maintenance leads to disgrace in the studies and the inappropriate labelling of history. The rapid evolution of progress in that inaccessible decade or so registers as irrelevant in the scope of understanding for queer teens and their history building, fostering the view that acceptance of the community operated as a switch rather than a process. In “Capitalism and Gay Identity” from 1983, D'Emilio links the expansion of capitalism to the expansion of the queer identity, contesting the idea that “we are everywhere” and the careless application of modern social constructs onto the pre-Capitalist past. His concepts did not carry over to contemporary “click-bait” queer history on social media or any factual sources for teens, carrying the “switch” legacy by assessing all people with same-sex desires or gender variability in terms of the modern queer. Teens studying a history they cannot connect to because of the lack of studies from around their own birth dates (1997 to 2003) are more susceptible to looking for bits of trivia rather than a deeper comprehension of the history of their overarching culture. Modern queer history is a list of firsts, feeding the individuality of the “culture of one” and the idea that possibilities are now limitless because the gap saw queer people overcome all assumed hurdles, but it also fosters a culture of “beating the competition” over the quality and meaning of contribution,.

A viewpoint that fails to leave an impression in modern queer teens is intersectional theory, indicative of the extreme emphasis teens put on sexual and gender identities (and therefore their personal individualities) over all other ascribed attributes. Intersectional theory is the theory that the suffering of one people is the suffering of all peoples; the oppression of minority groups interrelates because of their shared status as minority groups. (I describe sexuality and gender identity as ascribed traits (statuses from birth, similar to race or ability) because the opposite, the “achieved trait,” feels incongruent. One cannot “achieve gayness.”) Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw put forth this theory in the mid-eighties, observing the oppression of the dominant culture she experienced because of her status as a person of colour and as a woman. Even before her theory, other cultures displayed aspects of intersectional thought when supporting or discouraging the liberation of queer people in America. Black Panther Huey Newton expressed his support for the gay liberationist movement in the 70s while some feminist groups at the same time excluded lesbians and transgender women from their number (and continued so for decades, *The Vagina Monologues* the most notorious). George Takei, a reference more understood by teens because of his proximity to nerd culture and his public pronouncement of his homosexuality in 2005, experiences more recognition through his sexuality rather than his activism for the Japanese-American community (as he was a child who lived in the Japanese internment camps in America) in the eyes of queer teens. When many high school-level Gay-Straight Alliances and LGBTQ support groups try to discuss microcosmic bullying, they often neglect the variety in races among the people present. The social construct of race is equally as moulding as the social construct of sexuality and gender variance. The link between race, environment, and educational performance is the focus of studies from even the 1870s. The absence of deeper education of some races, especially black and Hispanic people, because of the

preconceptions and the prejudices of educators leads to an antagonist culture that further pushes away the normalisation of queer people into racial and ethnic cultures. Normalisation of queer people is not a guarantee brought by education, but the teaching of James Baldwin's literature or Alexander the Great's same-sex desires in regard to his military campaigns in more "advanced" classes makes the subject unavoidable and approachable. Another ascribed trait disregarded in the LGBTQ community is ability. With many more queer teens and children diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders because of societal stresses and congenital triggers, the lack of synthesis between these two cultures is unnerving. Consolidating the two cultures is necessary in order to face the development of either, yet many teens, queer people, and professionals seem unwilling to explore correlations. One of my friends, a gender variant female, constantly consolidates their gender identity and their autism-spectrum diagnosis because of their activism for both cultures. The lack of general discussion or recognition of the intersectional theory relates to the relationship of queer teens to the community. Contemporary queer teens model their alliance to the LGBTQ community after a misinterpreted alliance reminiscent of the civil rights movement of the sixties (granting more rights to all POCs but "as a blacks-only movement"), upholding the umbrella of queerness ("We are all queer!") without addressing the diversity in those upholding.

One massive part of that upholding (and the reason for the erasure of required identification outside chosen disclosures) is social media, a major existence in the lives of every modern teen anyway. I mentioned oversimplified, "click bait" queer history before, but it is only a reaction to the popularity of queer topics on the internet. The first major queer movement on the internet originates in 1999 with the incredible popularity of *Star Trek*-based fanzines (written works created by fans that dwell on different storylines or alternative, original content based on

the series), many of which involved hypersexual homosexual couplings. This leads to the modern “fanfiction” empire, the outlet of many sexually frustrated LGBTQ teens because of the high prevalence of homosexual sexuality explored in these stories in the context of relevant teen culture. This “fanfiction” culture also maintains the Japanese export genres yaoi and yuri (Japanese comics that celebrate homosexual sexual activity (predominately written for American audiences)) and millennial-focused channels like the CW. Fanfiction is only enjoyable and societally permissible in private company, further retaining the “culture of one.” Also feeding the “culture of one” is the act of consuming these fictions, fulfilling the need of a personal queer history. In fiction, if James Kirk and Spock exude homosexuality, why not Harry Potter, characters from the videogame *Under Tale*, or George Washington? This modern medium of storytelling and modification is the purest form of Charles Shively’s promotion of assuming that people are queer until proven straight (from his essay “George Washington’s Gay Mess: Was the ‘Father of Our Country’ A Queen?”) and the love child of Tony Kushner’s gay fantasias and Terence McNally’s gay retreats (escapism prevalent in his play *Love! Valour! Compassion*). This continuously expanding form of written creativity, the creation of a fictional but utopian queer history, is desperate to couple any two people for the sake of normalising homosexual sexuality in the name of entertainment, as seen by fanfictions like “Jesus and Hitler: A Romance.” This advanced exploration also appears in the oversaturation of the world of labels for sexualities and gender variances on social media sites, primarily Tumblr. Anguished slapdash queer musicians and spoken-word poets post videos daily on YouTube meant to encourage (but work as self-serving), and Facebook is home to thousands of groups designed to support isolated LGBTQ peoples in all stages of the coming out or medical process; Tumblr, though, is the most popular of social media sites for queer teens by far. Much of the content put forth on the site relates to the

lives of LGBTQ teens through popular culture. Amateur queer theorists and posers on Tumblr put forth long and disorientating lists of labels. The original development and reclamation of the labels gay, lesbian, and queer, among else, burst forth from the desire to remove medical implications from the process of self-identity. These new labels spread by Tumblr lead to the total personalisation of LGBTQ identification, bending the constructs to the identity of the person but also overcomplicating the structure, leading to the full customisation of identity (correlating with the rise of advanced, “open world” video games and popular food chains encouraging individualised orders). The labels also alienate the community from the heteronormative community that sustains a lacking structure when it comes to deviations, but while the structure lacks meat on its bones, people do tentatively rework the breadth of this system. The word “transsexual” emerged in 1957 to replace the idea of inversion that failed to respond to modern understandings and marked the beginning of this reprocess. The explosive response to the inevitability of evolving identities from queer teens links directly to social media and the global influences of this cultureless and lawless frontier.

The dynamic changes witnessed in the queer community activated by queer teens are suggestive of the dawn of a new queer revolution. Discord still exists between the queer community and the outside world, but the development of LGBTQ culture into an integral part of teen culture in America is astounding when realising the fact that most aspects of the community continued as counterculture until even the nineties. Drag, once the eager centrepiece of the underbelly of the community, transformed in the nineties from a counterculture to a subculture that evolved from a curiosity into a celebratory symbol present at all pride events. The popularity, even normalisation, of drag allows a rather large group of queer teens (including myself) to don our burlesque attire in public places, including schools. Modern teens live in a time that openly

promotes queerness and gasps at attempts to put down the community. Modern teens live in a completely connected world that blurs the lines between one queer and another, where it is seldom recognisable that being queer in America is completely different from being queer in Russia, China, or Qatar. John D'Emilio linked the development of gay identity in the seventies and early eighties with the rise of capitalism, and I believe this emergent queer revolution links directly with rapid globalisation invigorated by the internet. Modern queer teens may not even need a history to rely upon as we head into this revolution; history was the main staple of the previous movements, and it is pointless to consistently plant the same seeds. Modern queer teens are content with writing their own history, regardless of how much pink ink spills. As it is inappropriate to compare the effectiveness of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X, it is inappropriate to judge the worthiness of this new revolution on the merits of the old. The "culture of one," observed here through the lens of the old, will serve as progenitor to the new plane of thought queer teens of today will produce when those teens become queer adults of tomorrow. From the "culture of one," the community will either resemble the transcendentalist movements of the nineteenth century (turning oneness into a community standard, the forecast of total globalisation) or break apart because of irreconcilable diversity into seven billion glorious pieces of sky.