

Reaction paper

Psychology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It Gets Better” and the Changing Identities in Teen Youths A recent article in the New York Times entitled “Coming Out – Gay Teens in Their Own Words” discusses the issues surrounding coming out for young teens, and the ways they face their own identity politics. It is a strongly emotive article, which describes in great detail the challenges that youth go through when defining their own identities and sexualities. These youth struggle to define their sexuality in relation to other aspects of their identities. One youth, for instance, talks about wishing that they could move past their identity as a queer individual, or even that their queerness was left out of their identities. One Christian student declared that she wishes people would see her as someone who “loves god” rather than someone who was gay – they could deal with their sexuality, but did not want it to define who they were (Kramer, 2011). Reading these youths talk, in their own words, about the challenges in their life made me feel a combination of sadness and pride for the struggles that these youths had to overcome, but their amazing ability to overcome them.

The youth’s changing attitudes about identity demonstrates something becoming increasingly apparent in the studies of queer youth – that their identities are shifting in new ways, and are becoming less defined by other sources. Though this trend continues, a recent article in The Journal of Youth and Adolescence, counters and argues that the vast majority of youths continue to define themselves by traditional monikers such as “gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual” (Stephen 2010). Though their argument is mostly valid, there remain several serious problems with the interpretation of their data.

The conclusion they reach is that the self-definitions of sexual identity that have been used for the past several decades remain useful to teens, and

that today's teens are not, in fact, " post gay" (Russel 2010). They base this conclusion, however, on the evidence that seventy percent of teens continue to identify with the terms gay, lesbian and bisexual, which stands to reason that thirty percent of teens identify with " post gay" and the term resonates and creates meaning in their lives. While " post gay" is clearly not a dominant term being used by queer youths they seem to be increasingly engaged in creating new terms (or ambiguities) for themselves and we can consider that " post gay" while not predominantly used is at least on the radar of many queer youth while defining themselves and their identities. And the fact is that 71% of people identify with these older identifications, but that means that 39% of people do not, and instead identify with some other form of queer identity when describing the sexuality (Russel). With this high of numbers, while the majority of people still use older identity definitions, a massive number are not, which means within the gay community a growing number of people would identify as post-gay, or at least have an understanding of post-gay ideas (Russel). Though the vast majority of queer people still tend to identify with traditional self-definitions, this is far from universally the case, and more research is needed to see if trends are continuing in either direction.

Works Cited

- Russel, S (2010). " Are Teen's Post Gay? Contemporary Adolescent's Sexual Identity Labels." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.
- Kramer, T (2011). " Coming Out, Gay Teenagers in Their Own Words" *New York Times*.