



# Queering Teen Culture: All-American Boys and Same-Sex Desire in Film and Television

*Jeffery P Dennis*

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Why did Fonzie hang around with all those high school boys?

Is the overwhelming boy-meets-girl content of popular teen movies, music, books, and TV just a cover for an undercurrent of same-sex desire? From the 1950s to the present, popular culture has involved teenage boys falling for, longing over, dreaming about, singing to, and fighting over, teenage girls. But *Queering Teen Culture* analyzes more than 200 movies and TV shows to uncover who Frankie Avalon's character was really in love with in those beach movies and why Leif Garrett became a teen idol in the 1970s.

In Top 40 songs, teen magazines, movies, TV soap operas and sitcoms, teenagers are defined by their pubescent “discovery” of the opposite sex, universally and without exception. *Queering Teen Culture* looks beyond the litany to find out when adults became so insistent about teenage sexual desire—and why—and finds evidence of same-sex desire, romantic interactions, and identities that, according to the dominant ideology, do not and cannot exist. This provocative book examines the careers of male performers whose teenage roles made them famous (including Ricky Nelson, Pat Boone, Fabian, and James Darren) and discusses examples of lesbian desire (including *I Love Lucy* and *Laverne and Shirley*).

*Queering Teen Culture* examines:

- *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Leave It to Beaver*: Were Ricky, Bud, and Wally sufficiently straight?
- the juvenile delinquent films of the 1950s: Why weren't the rebel-without-a-cause “bad boys” interested in girls?
- horror, sci-fi, and zombies from outer space: “Body of a boy! Mind of a monster! Soul of an unearthly thing!”
- teen idols—pretty, androgynous, and feminine: No wonder they were rumored to be “funny”
- beach movies: She wants to plan their wedding but he wants to surf, sky-dive and go drag racing with the guys
- Biker-hippies boys of the late 1960s: “I know your scene—don't think I don't!”
- the 1950s nostalgia of the 1970s: Why does Fonzie spend all his time with high school boys?
- teen gore: What makes the psycho-killer angry?
- and much more, including *Gidget*, the Brat Pack, buddy dramas, nerds and “operators,” *Saved by the Bell*, *The Real World*, and the incredible shrinking teenager

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