

From 1900 onwards, Couperus wrote classical novels such as *Dionyzos* (1904) and his most gay *De berg van licht* [Mountain of Light] (1905–06), on the androgynous, bisexual Roman emperor **Heliogabalus**. Eastern decadence is shown to corrupt western morals. In the struggle of east and west, of female sensuousness and male rigidity, Couperus favors the sensual perspective. For his interpretation of Heliogabalus, Couperus made use of L.S.A.M. von Römer's work on homosexuality and androgyny. Critics came down hard on this book. For many years Couperus wrote no further novels; he considered writing a pamphlet on the critics' attitudes toward homosexuality, but did not do so. His later novels *De komedianten* (1917), on two Roman boy actors, and *Iskander* (1920), on Alexander the Great, also had strong homoerotic undertones.

Before World War I, Couperus lived mostly in Nice and Italy because of his dislike of the northern European climate. Returning to The Hague in 1914, he became a successful lecturer, although the press considered him too much the dandy. Most of his books sold well, with the exception of *De berg van licht*, which today is considered one of his best.

When Couperus died in 1923, he was probably a virgin, as his decadent successor Gerard Reve maintains.

Couperus was the foremost Dutch novelist of the turn of the century. In 1987, a new critical edition of his complete works began to appear.

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COUPLES

The familiar term "couple" here denotes two persons, not closely related by blood, usually but not always living together, forming an ongoing sexual partnership, whether married or unmarried, heterosexual or homosexual. It serves to

efface the older sharp distinction between fornication and matrimony, thereby fostering a more objective scrutiny of human relationships. Because this conceptual change is recent, serious research in the field is not far advanced; unfounded stereotypes linger, and generalizations based on present knowledge may in time be superseded.

Role Models. Intensely devoted same-sex couples who have been taken as inspirational models include **Gilgamesh** and **Enkidu**, **Damon** and **Pythias**, **Achilles** and **Patroklos**, **David** and **Jonathan**, **Jesus** and the **Beloved Disciple**, **Han Ai-ti** and **Dong Xian**, **Hadrian** and **Antinous**, **Gertrude Stein** and **Alice B. Toklas**, **Christopher Isherwood** and **Donald Bachardy**. The sexuality in several of these relationships remains controversial, though those for whom these couples are models assume there were genital relations. In the legendary and ancient-world cases, the intensity of the loves was not challenged by the stresses of a long life together. The modern role models exemplify durability as well as intensity of same-sex love. Such models reassure lesbians and gay men that long-term relationships are possible, despite the obstacles posed by social arrangements and by social conceptions of homosexual relationships as necessarily transitory due to an essential promiscuity. Less widely known role models are influential in small communities or social circles among more recently formed couples, who look to them for advice and factors which promote durability and amicability. As such they frequently find themselves in leadership positions in the social clique to which they belong.

Pressures Against Coupling. Homophobes and the Roman Catholic Church have regarded homosexual relationships as more serious (sinful, neurotic) than fleeting anonymous sexual encounters, because a relationship entails greater acceptance of homosexuality—"living in sin" rather than distinct "sinful acts." As John De Cecco observed, "That two men

who have sex together can also love each other symbolizes the ultimate detoxification of homosexuality" in homophobic societies.

Because commitment to homosexuality is a greater affront to homophobic opinion than is homosexual behavior (where the transitoriness of individual acts offers reassurance that such liaisons are "unstable"), the kind of social pressure on married couples which urges them to stay together is exerted on gay and lesbian couples to break up. Both institutions (church and state) and social groupings (the natal family) provide positive sanctions for heterosexual relationships while denying legitimation and rewards to same-sex couples. Thus, traditionally religious and socially conservative families may mourn and punish divorces of heterosexually married children, but celebrate and reward the dissolution of lesbian or gay offspring as marking a return to normalcy, or as at least opening the possibility of "growing out of a homosexual phase." Although there are commonalities among all kinds of relationships, gay and lesbian couples must routinely cope with obstacles not generally encountered by those in heterosexual relationships.

Role-Playing. Given the importance of gender as an organizing principle, the assumption in many cultures that a relationship requires replication of distinct gender roles, so that one partner must play the part of the wife (fem) and the other the part of the husband (butch), is rife even among "professional experts" on individual differences, psychiatrists. Although there are instances of such replication, most Western industrialized-world contemporary gay relationships do not conform strictly to traditional "masculine" and "feminine" roles; instead, role flexibility and turn-taking are more common patterns. Only a minority of homosexual couples in this part of the world engage in clearcut butch-fem role-playing. In this sense, traditional heterosexual marriage is not the predominant model or

script for current homosexual couples (Peplau, in De Cecco). Indeed, with a historical change in the functions of the family from economic production to companionship and with feminist challenges to traditional female roles, heterosexual relationships increasingly have come to resemble the companionate dyad of gay relationships, even including experimentation with sexually "open" relationships during the 1970s in North America.

The increased visibility of gay enclaves provided a larger pool of potential passive partners than in earlier eras in which only cross-gender appearance or behavior publicly signalled homosexual availability of a partner willing to be passive. The chances of finding an approximation to one's conception of a desirable partner are better in a larger pool, and, specifically, a preference for butch-butcht relationships was increasingly realized for North American urban gay men. Joseph Harry found that North American gay men who value masculinity in themselves also tend to seek masculine-appearing partners. It is debatable, however, whether the relative size of the potential partner pool is larger today than it was and is in pederastic cultures, non-homophobic cultures, or cultures featuring a heavily skewed gender ratio. He also found that those living in cities with gay communities were more likely to cohabit with their partners and were more interested in emotional intimacy than those living in suburbs and small towns, where the chances of meeting a partner and being able to live together with the approval of neighbors were also less.

Formation of Gay Couples. Although there are reports of enduring same-sex pairs from many locales, there is a dearth of systematic data on homosexual couples even in North American cities, so that it is not possible to estimate whether the age and status disparities of the examples listed above are typical of relationships. Many gay writers assert that homosexual relationships cross racial, class, and

age discrepancies more often than do heterosexual relationships. "Opposites attract" is the predominant folk wisdom—except when "birds of a feather flock together." How often lesbian and gay relationships cross social discrepancies is a question deserving of systematic research.

Currently, what little empirical evidence exists finds choice of long-term partners in homosexual relationships to be based on similarity of social characteristics (homophily) and opportunities for contact (propinquity), just as the choice of heterosexual marriage partners typically but not always is (Laner in De Cecco, Harry). Undoubtedly, racial and cultural differences often enhance sexual attraction. The same differences that initially intrigue and attract may become problematic when an affair becomes a marriage. Long-term gay and lesbian relationships in which there is not the friction between male expectations and female expectations may thrive relatively better than heterosexual relationships with conflicting cultural expectations, but there remains the tendency observed in heterosexuals to marry their "own kind" despite being attracted to and even sexually involved with persons of other classes, races, and/or ethnicities. The attributes of those with whom one wants to have sex and those with whom one would consider settling down (marrying) are often quite distinct for homosexual as for heterosexual men and women. Similarly, the kinds of relationships someone wants and seeks are not necessarily the kinds he or she has.

Statistics on Couple Formation.

Most self-identified lesbians and gay men have some experience of being in a relationship. In their survey of black and white male and female homosexuals in San Francisco during the late 1960s, Bell and Weinberg found 51 percent of white homosexual men, 58 percent of black homosexual men, 72 percent of white homosexual females and 70 percent of black homosexual females saying they were currently in a relationship. As in most surveys, most of

the rest reported having at some time in their lives been in a relationship of some duration.

There were no significant age discrepancies in 5, 10, 10, and 3 percent of the couples, respectively, and differences of more than five years in 51, 40, 35, and 47 percent of the couples. Sixty-four percent of white gay male respondents judged their social position to be the same as their partner's, compared to 39 percent of black males, 56 percent of black lesbians, and 72 percent of white lesbians. Equal income was reported for 3 percent of black homosexual couples, 17 and 18 percent of white female and male couples, although negative effects of income disparity were reported by only two percent of the gay white men, four percent of black gay men and women, and six percent of white lesbians. Blacks in the sample were substantially younger than whites when they began their relationship.

Power in Relationships. In a large-scale survey of contemporary American couples, Blumstein and Schwartz found that couples in which both people felt they were genuine partners with equal control over economic assets were more tranquil. Peplau and Cochran (1982), and De Cecco and Shively (1978) also found decision-making equality the central concern; Harry (1982) found age to predict power in decision-making within gay male relationships, especially among those couples living together, but also suggested that "in gay relationships it is more likely that partners will be more similar to each other in the possession of bases of power than in heterosexual relationships."

Other studies with smaller samples of lesbians and gay men also found perceived equality in making important decisions central to relationships judged successful by those in them. Perceived equality in decision-making is not necessarily lacking in couples who differ substantially in age, status, or income; but the older and/or more affluent partner tends to dominate such relationships. Greater sex-

ual marketability may also be a factor. That is, if one partner is more desirable by conventional standards of beauty, he or she may be able to use this "capital" within relationship decision-making. Yet another complication in predicting power within relationships is "the power of the least interest": the partner least concerned about preserving the relationship can deter opposition to his or her choices by being more willing than the other partner to leave the relationship.

These same factors operate in heterosexual relationships. The person who brings into a relationship the most resources valued by the other partner tends to make decisions when the two disagree. In heterosexual relationships the man typically has the power of higher status and economic resources and often that of the least interest as well. Moreover, in many cultures, including North America, women are raised to support relationships and to be defined by them, while men are socialized to and defined by what they do outside the domestic sphere. Despite recent social changes, North American women continue to defer to partners' career contingencies while men pursue their careers, either ignoring a partner's preferences or jettisoning partners unwilling to go along with their choices. Some of the differences in duration of lesbian and gay male relationships result from such differences in primary socialization.

Stages in Relationships. McWhirter and Mattson (in De Cecco) outlined a natural history of predictable stages of (gay) relationships: blending, nesting, maintaining, collaborating, trusting, and renewal. The stages are labels for recurrent patterns, not causal models of what every relationship must pass through and in what order. Moreover, their model does not take any account of different kinds of love (contrast Lee in the same volume). Despite its limitations, a model of stages does draw attention to the changes with time that affect relationships. In particular, the initial romance and mutual

discovery tend to give way to everyday coexistence and reduced frequency of sex in relationships that endure.

Financial Disparities. The gay white southern California males McWhirter and Mattson studied did not merge money and possessions until the trusting stage, which they estimate as ten or more years into the relationship, after some resolution of questions about individual autonomy have been resolved to both partners' satisfaction. Whether or not it usually takes so long, as relationships endure, lesbian couples and gay male couples (even more so) tend to pool assets. Such pooling reinforces decision-making equality among those making differing economic contributions to the relationship and maintains the stability of the relationship. Very few same-sex couples (five percent) believe that one partner should routinely support the other. Fewer still (Harry reported one percent) do so. Yet, even unequal income in couples both of whose members work is a major source of stress in same-sex couples (but not in male-female ones in which the man has greater income). Male socialization to competitiveness and a tendency to measure success in monetary terms make economic inequality particularly problematic in male-male couples. Blumstein and Schwartz suggest that the egalitarian ideology of two strong women holding their own against each other may become an unconscious solvent of relationships between women of unequal income, propelling the more economically successful partner out of the relationship. Their study reaffirmed the truism that it is difficult to be poor and happy in a consumer society.

Whether or not one can buy happiness, relative wealth generally establishes a balance of power within relationships for gay male couples, as for heterosexual couples (married or not). Monetary comparisons are less predictive of relative power in lesbian couples (in part because large income differences between women are less common). The more affluent part-

ner has more control over the couple's recreational activities for lesbian and gay male couples (this differs from the pattern found in married heterosexual couples, where this is often the domain where the wife makes choices). Because same-sex couples share more activities outside work than do heterosexual couples, this aspect is probably more important to satisfaction within the couple for lesbian and gay men in relationships than for men and women in heterosexual relationships. (Most social life of heterosexual men and women is homosocial in most cultures. To the extent that primary socialization shapes interests differentially depending upon the sex of the child, same sex couples are likely to have more compatible interests than mixed-sex couples.)

Cohabitation. Various studies have found lesbian couples more likely to live together than gay male couples. The extent to which this is a result of temperament, differing levels of social acceptability for unmarried same-sex roommates, or a difference of economic resources is not clear from the available data. Partners who have gay and/or lesbian friends are also more likely to cohabit. Probably integration into gay/lesbian circles cannot be separated from self-acceptance as gay or lesbian, and both individual and social acceptance of homosexuality make living together more conceivable for those who are sexually involved with someone of their own sex.

Sex. Blumstein and Schwartz found that relationships with at least one partner more concerned with the relationship than with his or her career are more likely to endure. They also reported that the relationship-centered partner usually initiated sex, and the more powerful one, who was more likely to be career-oriented and to have relative power due to greater economic success, was more likely to refuse sexual intercourse. The frequency of sex decreased with the duration of all types of relationships, but especially with homosexual ones. Forty-five percent of

married heterosexual couples had sex three times a week or more often, compared to 67 percent of gay male couples, and 33 percent of lesbian couples. For couples who had been together ten or more years the percentages fell to 18 for married couples, 11 for gay male couples, and one percent for lesbian couples.

At least prior to the devastation of AIDS, men in gay couples were relatively casual about extra-marital sex, outside sex often replacing sex between partners without being conceived as a threat to the relationship (*also see* Kurdeck and Smith in De Cecco). In contrast, non-monogamous sex was associated with dissatisfaction and lack of commitment to their relationship by lesbian lovers. Given female socialization against casual sex (socialization based on sex-specific dangers, notably pregnancy), women, including lesbians, tend to have affairs more than the one-time "tricks" with little emotional investment sought by men (gay or not). Affairs represent a greater threat to a relationship than casual encounters, so that lesbian non-monogamy is more serious than male sexual encounters outside relationships. Of course, gay men sometimes had affairs as well as or instead of tricks, and possessiveness is not a monopoly of women. All these differences are statistical, not absolute.

In regard to sexual acts, lesbians, in common with gay men and straight men, are happier both with their sex lives and with their relationships the more they engage in oral sex. Roles in both oral and anal sex raise sensitive issues of dominance and reciprocity in gay couples. Traditionally, anxieties were settled and sexual incompatibilities compensated for outside the relationship. Reciprocity also mutes anxieties about seeming to be "submissive." Blumstein and Schwartz found that "the partner who performs anal sex is no more 'masculine' or powerful than the partner who receives it," but that "for both partners, anal intercourse is associated with being masculine: in couples

where both partners are forceful, outgoing, and aggressive, there is more anal sex."

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Stephen O. Murray

CORVO, BARON
See Rolfe, Frederick.

COWARD, NOEL, SIR
(1899-1973)

British playwright, songwriter, and entertainer. Born at Teddington near London in 1899, Noel Coward made his debut on the stage as Prince Mussel in Lila Field's *The Goldfish* in January 1911. For several years a highly popular boy actor, he began his own career with his first comedy, *I'll Leave It to You* (1920). His succeeding plays were marked by a frivolity and a gift for exploiting the moment to the fullest that catered to the disenchantment, the

lack of concern with meanings and essences, of the interwar generation. *Fallen Angels* and *Easy Virtue* (1925) exploited the public's fascination with sex, scandal, and pseudo-sophistication. His reputation as a playwright rests on *Hay Fever* (1925), *Private Lives* (1930), *Design for Living* (1933), *Hands Across the Sea* (1936), *Blithe Spirit* (1941), and *Present Laughter* (1943). In all these comedies the characters are adults living in the male adolescent's fantasy world where there is no family life to speak of, no children to care for, no commitment except to pleasure. The characters do no real work; and money—in a decade of depression, hunger marches, and then war—is simply taken for granted. Incarnations of vanity and selfishness, they appeal to the audience because their frivolity has a kind of stoic dignity. Written in a few days each, his best plays exhibit the aggressive edge of a performer on the stage of life who as a homosexual had mastered the disguise crucial for survival.

Two less remembered plays, *Cavalcade* (1931) and *This Happy Breed* (1942), appealed to the political chauvinism of the day and were even considered serious patriotic statements about England and her fighting spirit. Many of his plays were subsequently filmed, from *The Queen Was in the Parlour* (1927) to *Tonight at 8:30* (1952).

When, in the 1950s, his plays had lost public favor, he took his message of frivolity to the audience in person as a cabaret performer, mocking the conventions of the theatre with such impish songs as "Why must the show go on?" and "There are bad times just around the corner." Once, when asked how he would be remembered by future generations, Coward shrewdly replied "By my charm."

Coward was homosexual, but his private life was unsensational. Rebecca West wrote of him: "There was impeccable dignity in his sexual life, which was reticent but untainted by pretence." He enjoyed sex as much as anyone, and made no secret of the fact, but a list of his sexual