

## Donald Webster Cory (1913-1986)

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In a world in which one is rewarded for concealment and submission, it would be difficult to expect the reverse.

Cory and LeRoy (1963, p. 213)

Donald Webster Cory was the pseudonym under which Edward Sagarin wrote about the plight of homosexuals during the 1950s and early 1960s. His 1951 book, *The Homosexual in America*, was important in its day for describing from the inside something of the experience of stigmatization and discrimination homosexuals experienced. Cory participated in the incipient homophile movement and—in work that hid his involvement and bitter feelings of rejection—wrote about the Mattachine Society of New York.

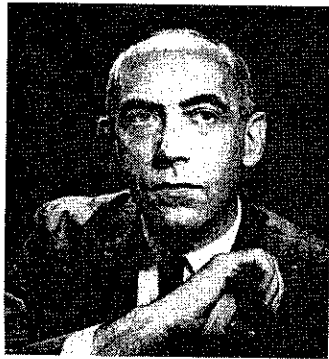


Photo by Sal Terracina

Edward Sagarin was the youngest of eight children of a Russian Jewish immigrant couple. He was born in Schenectady, in upstate New York, on September 18, 1913, with scoliosis (a “humpback”). His mother died in the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918. Edward did not get along well with his stepmother, and broke with his father. He also spent more than a year in France before starting at the City College of New York.

Under the auspices of the National Student League, he was an observer (until asked to leave by the lead defense counsel) at the 1933 “Scottsboro boys” trial, a

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notorious case of young African Americans accused of raping white women that was cause célèbre at the time in left-wing circles.

Under the pseudonym Donald Webster Cory (a variant on the title of André Gide's apology *Corydon*, which in turn is the name of the shepherd in Virgil's second eclogue in love with the handsome boy Alexis) Sagarin reported that since his early adolescence, he had been aware of the "homosexual problem." His first awakening came with the "bewildering attraction" he felt for a young man a few years his senior. He had never before realized that there were men who were attracted to other men and "no one had attempted to seduce . . . or . . . tempt" him. He knew only that he had a drive "of a vague and troublesome character" for another person of the same sex whom he wanted to be near and to embrace. Still, he remained completely ignorant of any facts of homosexuality until a teacher in high school took him aside and, after engaging him in conversation, explained that there were people called "inverts."

He wanted to know more and spent his years of later adolescence and early manhood delving into every volume of literature that he thought might give him enough information to understand why he could not be like others. He was, he reports, deeply ashamed of being abnormal and was aware of the heavy price he would pay if anyone were to discover his secret. Similar to many other homosexuals at that time, he struggled against his homosexuality, sought to discipline himself and to overcome it, punished himself for failures to resist sinful temptations, yet the struggles did nothing to diminish the needs within him (Cory, 1951, p. 11). What did diminish was the length of his relationships with other males:

A friendship of a rewarding character developed when I was sixteen, lasted for two years, but ended, as others were to end later. Then the passions endured only a few months, and then a few weeks, and I was scornful of those who would use the word love to describe such relationships. Homosexual love, I told myself, is a myth. . . . At the age of twenty-five, after determining that I was capable of consummating a marriage, I was wedded to a girl whom I had known since childhood. (Cory, 1951, p. 12)

Esther Gertrude Lipschitz, a fellow student leftist, married Sagarin in 1936. She became a housewife but continued to be politically active. He later reported that she was "the only woman I had ever had erotic feelings towards" (quoted by Duberman, 1997, p. 8; see also Cory, 1951, p. 203). It is unclear whether her "deep understanding" of Sagarin originally included knowledge of his homosexual history and frequently acted-upon desires. I infer that Esther did not know from one of Sagarin's passages: "I resolved

that marriage would be the end of my sins, that I would sever my ties with the homosexual circles and with my dear friends therein, and built what appeared to be the only life that might be fruitful for me" (Cory, 1951, p. 12), and from the representation of the usual pattern Cory (1951, p. 204-205) posited. The coupling was literally fruitful: they had a son, Fred. Nonetheless, Sagarin "was not long in learning that marriage did not reduce the urge for gratification with men. . . I needed my former companionships, but I would not allow myself to admit, even in the silence of the thought process, that I wanted them" (1951, p. 12).

He must have thought about it, however, because he began a long psychoanalysis. As it proceeded, he realized that it "was going to help me overcome my feelings of shame, guilt, remorse, rather than overcome the impulses which brought forward these feelings" (1951, p. 12). In a chapter from *The Homosexual in America* (1951) that was also printed in the journal *Sexology*, he challenged not only the likelihood of "curing" homosexuality but the consideration of it as a disease. Far from hostile to therapy, even psychoanalysis, Cory insisted that the purpose of therapy was not to make a person a heterosexual, but to transform him into a well-integrated and happy invert. That such a goal was impeded by social conditions beyond the control of the therapist or the patient merely meant that it was a problem that extended to all society and thus could not be entirely solved on the analyst's couch. In this respect, it was not unlike the psychological problems that arise from racial discrimination. "Self-acceptance is the basis of the adjustment of the homosexual" (Cory, 1951, p. 178). Advocating conscious sublimation of homosexual urges rather than repression or suppression, he described a continued acting on urges such as his by primarily homosexual men who married women.

The book has a strikingly ambivalent three-page introduction by Albert Ellis, PhD (then chief psychologist for the New Jersey Diagnostic Center and recent author of *The Folklore of Sex*), that "take[s] issue with Mr. Cory's pessimism concerning the possibility of adjusting homosexuals to more heterosexual modes of living" and with the inborn and compulsive natures of homosexuality (Cory, 1951, p. 8). Ellis denied to Martin Duberman (1997, p. 11) that he was close to Sagarin or had ever been his therapist, although Sagarin's views about the pathology of exclusive homosexuality moved closer to Ellis's after publication of *The Homosexual in America*. Ellis claimed that "after their 'few, informal sessions' together, Cory was able to get more pleasure from sex with his wife." Duberman (1997, p. 11) also records Ellis's disbelief in the extended analysis Cory claimed in *The Homosexual in America*, noting that "when I met Cory he was an exceptionally promiscuous gay man."

Having had to drop out of college for lack of money during the 1930s, Sagarin put his fluency in French to use, handling French correspondence for a cosmetics company. He moved into sales and management, acquiring considerable knowledge about the manufacture of perfumes. As an adjunct instructor at Columbia University, he taught a course on the chemistry of perfume, published a book on *The Science and Art of Perfumery* in 1945, followed in 1947 by *Natural Perfume Materials*, a three-volume copiously illustrated collection on the materials and their combinations in *Cosmetics, Science and Technology*, published in 1957 (second edition, 1972-1974) and still in print.

Sagarin (1951, p. 245) considered the epoch-making publication of the Kinsey report on the human male in 1948 and included what he saw as two significant breakthroughs: showing that homosexuality was not rare, and bringing the subject out into open discussion. Sagarin decided that its objectivist survey of sexual outlets needed to be supplemented by "the expression of the opinion [about homosexuality] as seen from within that group," believing "that the majority of homosexuals will be able to identify themselves with the thoughts and experiences related in many sections of" *The Homosexual in America* (Cory, 1951, p. 10).

Although then lacking any professional training in social science research, Sagarin had the assistance of John Horton, who was financially independent and had earned a BA in anthropology at Columbia. Horton suggested that the basis of their friendship "maybe [was] because I had a black lover. Cory had had a number of affairs with black men. He used to boast about the frequency with which he was able to pick men up along the benches at Central Park West in the Seventies" (quoted by Duberman, 1997, p. 9).

In an era in which there were considerable social mobilizations to end discrimination against blacks and Jews, the analogue of a minority group persecuted by the majority would likely have occurred to someone contemplating the situation of American homosexuals even without a preference for black sexual partners. Harry Hay, for example, had independently described homosexuals as a minority group.

What is notably lacking (all the more so in contrast to Hay), especially for someone with a background of political action in support of black civil rights, was any conception of resisting persecution—either the laws or police procedures legitimated by often vague laws. Although *The Homosexual in America* was written during an era in which white liberal support was mobilized for ending exclusion of Jews and Negroes, there were Jewish and black organizations directly involved in challenging laws, social mores, and widespread negative attitudes about them. Cory described a subculture

(with an argot, cruising locales, bars, and patterns of concealment) and pled for less social contempt. Fighting back was far beyond what he conceived.

The book minimizes police depredation and direct application of laws against sodomy and related statutes. In a chapter "World of Law-Abiding Felons," Cory wrote, "There are few homosexuals who are ever arrested or convicted of crimes, and relatively few who are successfully subjected to blackmail" (1951, p. 57). The book completely fails to anticipate the then-coming changes in laws and the protests against police entrapment, raids, etc. Although indignant, he described the situation as impossible to challenge:

The homosexual is, unfortunately, in a position before the law where he cannot effectively fight back. The civil liberties groups show little interest, and their lawyers are loath to engage in such cases. Laws whose unconstitutionality is considered by many to be patent remain unchallenged, because no one dares come forward with courage to issue such a challenge and take the consequences thereof.

The homosexual cannot stand up in court and say: "Your laws are behind the times. I cannot be ashamed of what I have done, but only of those who have pried into my private life and arrested me." Even if he were successful in his day in court, he would be exposing himself to the blows that must fall on those who would drop the mask. (Cory, 1951, p. 62)

Almost immediately, a Mattachine Society founder, Dale Jennings, provided a counterexample by challenging his own arrest; even though he admitted his homosexuality, the jury in June 1952 voted eleven to one not to convict him, after which the district attorney dropped the charge.

Although wrong in his belief that no one could fight back, Sagarin experienced one of the feared consequences of advocacy: he lost his job after his employer found he had authored such a book. He, however, quickly found another position in the cosmetics industry.

*The Homosexual in America* went through seven hardcover printings by 1957, was translated into French and Spanish, and was issued as a mass-market paperback in 1963. It prompted thousands of letters to the author, mostly grateful ones, and revealed to many readers, including Norman Mailer that "homosexuals are people, too." Good businessman that he had become, Sagarin (as Cory) used the correspondence as a mailing list for a gay-themed book-of-the-month club in 1952. From the first issue of *ONE Magazine* in January 1953, through the next three years, Cory was listed as a contributing editor. He wrote several articles pleading for understanding for

internal differences among gays, particularly advocating compassion for effeminate males.

The second Cory book was an anthology of short stories dealing with homosexuality from insider and outsider perspective called *21 Variations on a Theme* (Cory, 1953). Many of the stories focus on repressed or suppressed passions, but several provide glimpses of men or women in relationships and supportive networks. Cory himself had become an activist of sorts, joining the Veterans' Benevolent Association, a New York City group that "sponsored parties, picnics, and discussion, and gave advice to members; it made little effort to conceal its homosexual orientation, except to use an innocent-sounding name" (Sagarin, 1969, p. 84). "It functioned primarily, but not exclusively as a social club for members. It did not publish, it did not proselytize. . . . Former officers state that there were between 75 and 100 regular members but that some of the social functions were attended by 400 or 500" (Sagarin, 1966, p. 65).

By 1955 the league had dissolved. Five former league members and two others (one female) formed a Mattachine Society chapter. It produced a newsletter and had regular public lectures (Sagarin, 1966, p. 82); Cory delivered one in 1957. He became more involved, although he did not become a member until May of 1962.

Mattachine founder Harry Hay completely distrusted Cory. Cory was not well liked even by Curtis Dewees, who "probably got to know him better than anyone else in Mattachine and recalled that "he wasn't much fun to be around," being "thin-skinned, easily offended, aggressive" (quoted by Duberman, 1997, p. 12). Frank Kameny recalls that Cory "exhibited no reticence or negativism whatever about his quite unequivocal and enthusiastic same-sex tendencies, when we went out 'on the town' with some friends, here in Washington" in 1962 (September 4, 2000, e-mail).

Sagarin, at age forty-five, had entered an adult undergraduate program at Brooklyn College in 1958. He and his son Fred both graduated in 1961. He then wrote a master's thesis that was published in 1962 but was rejected by the Brooklyn College sociology department. Ironically, for the respectability-craving new academic, the author photo on the book, *The Anatomy of Dirty Words* (Sagarin, 1962) made his real name known to other Mattachine members, although everyone already knew from *The Homosexual in America* that he was married.

In the early 1960s he visited a young, attractive, and more militant Mattachine member, Barry Sheer (John LeRoy), two or three times a week for sex. Sheer told Duberman (1997, p. 12) that Cory "would give me a little money and have me help him with some of his research and I would let him have sex with me," although unattracted to the older, deformed man with a high-pitched, loud voice. The book that they co-authored, *The Homosexual*

*and His Society* (1963) did not have the same influence as his early work although it is not without interest. The chapter on hustlers does not altogether disguise Cory's considerable familiarity in hiring them. One chapter challenges the conventional wisdom about homosexuals being security risks, closing with a lengthy quotation (without attribution) from Frank Kameny's brief to the Supreme Court (Cory and LeRoy, 1963, p. 147). Another chapter rationalizes the senior author's separation of (homosexual) sex and (marital) love. The book definitely notes that homosexuals had begun to organize and to fight back (pp. 146, 242-250).

Considering that Sagarin was a sociology graduate student when he wrote the book, it is also notable that the early sociological work on homosexuality (which notably lacked Sagarin's own subservience to psychoanalytic assumptions such as those of Albert Ellis) was not cited. Similarly, although there was a chapter on "the better-adjusted" homosexual, it did not mention Evelyn Hooker's research. The only mention of Rorschach testing is in a six-page exposition of a ludicrous study by Albert Ellis that found zero percent of effeminate homosexuals to be highly creative, in contrast to 26 percent of heterosexuals (although Cory and LeRoy did note that patients in therapy are not a typical sample of any population).

Sheer/LeRoy himself abandoned Cory's view that homosexuality was a disturbance that should be treated with compassion and embraced the "Gay Is Good" view proclaimed by Frank Kameny to a 1964 Mattachine Society of New York (MSNY) meeting and adopted by many of its younger, more militant members, as well as by the chapter's president, Julian Hodges.

Sagarin enrolled in the sociology doctoral program at New York University (NYU) in 1961, leaving the cosmetic and perfume business behind. He was a lecturer at Brooklyn College the 1962-1963 academic year, at the Pratt Institute the next year, and at City College the year after that. He became an assistant professor there upon completion of his PhD, and received tenure in 1970.

After the first year of taking classes at NYU, Sagarin became more active in Mattachine New York and made the organization the subject of his doctoral dissertation. He had the cooperation of Mattachine officials to query members (an appendix to his dissertation includes his questionnaire and a cover letter from Mattachine New York's president Hodges, dated January 1965, assuring respondents that "we expect our Society, and the homophile movement as a whole, to benefit from this research.")

It is not clear that his doctoral committee knew how participant an observer he was. Robert Bierstedt, the department chairman, who was a member of Sagarin's doctoral committee, told Martin Duberman (1997, p. 14) that not only did he not know that Sagarin was Cory at the time but did not learn that until a decade after Sagarin's death. Dennis Wrong, however,

wrote me that "I certainly knew that Sagarin was Donald Webster Cory when I went to NYU in 1963. Bierstedt told me so, whatever Duberman may say he said to him some years later. And I'm pretty sure Larry Ross knew too. . . . I spoke to Ed Sagarin on several occasions about his dissertation though I was not on his committee and remember being amused when with a straight face he cited Cory as an authority with, or so I imagined, a certain twinkle in his eye based on his suspicion that I knew of Cory's identity" (August 30, 2000, e-mail). Another of the sociologists not on his committee whom Sagarin acknowledged in his dissertation, John Gagnon, told me that he knew that Sagarin had been Cory, knew that Cory was writing about a political struggle he had lost, and that this colored his views (September 1, 2000, e-mail).

Wrong added that "while I can't positively verify it, as I can in the case of Bob, I'm sure Erwin [Smigel], knowing him well, and his pal Larry Ross, likewise, who were both on Ed's committee, knew he was Cory" and "I doubt very much that knowledge of this fact would have influenced his dissertation committee in the slightest. . . . I remember speaking to him [Duberman] over the phone and denying that we didn't know in the NYU department that Sagarin was Cory. If we had known [at the time of his admission to doctoral studies] we would doubtless have welcomed him even more as a lively if controversial writer who would make an interesting student and write an interesting if possibly controversial dissertation (legalizing homosexuality was very controversial then)" (August 31, 2000, e-mail). Perhaps anachronistically Wrong was claiming that there was nothing to hide, that someone who was a homophile activist would have been welcome in the department.

But more was involved than Sagarin being and citing Cory. Cory was a member of the Mattachine board of directors and was heavily involved in factional politics within the organization, and even ran for president. It is far from the case that his name was simply put up without his knowledge. Although Sagarin's dissertation portrays the backers of Hodges as a clique, "early in 1965 some of them [the old guard] constituted themselves as 'the committee' and began holding strategy sessions . . . and aggressively sought proxies from inactive members of the society for their slate" (D'Emilio, 1981, pp. 166-167). Upon his two-to-one defeat by the younger advocates of a direct action civil rights strategy who did not agree that homosexuality is an inherently pathological, Cory left the organization immediately and permanently.

Frank Kameny suggested that "President of MSNY [was] a position to which I suspect that Cory felt himself entitled almost as a matter of royal succession" and confirmed that Cory "became deeply embittered at his rejection by MSNY and others in the Gay Movement, and his consignment to



the sidelines exactly as I had predicted in my much-quoted letter to him . . . [and] expressed bitterness, of course, in his PhD thesis . . ." (September 4, 2000, e-mail). In the letter, prior to the MSNY election, Kameny had warned Cory "you have become no longer the vigorous Father of the Homophile Movement, to be revered, respected and listened to, but the senile Grandfather of the Homophile Movement, to be humored and tolerated at best; to be ignored and disregarded usually; and to be ridiculed at worst" (quoted by D'Emilio, 1981, p. 167).

There is certainly valuable historical information in Sagarin's dissertation. Yet readers informed about his failed bid for leadership of Mattachine New York, the venom of the campaign, his position on its board of directors, the existence of a faction led by himself, and its mass exodus following his electoral defeat would approach statements such as the following with greater skepticism if they realized the nature of Sagarin's participant observation and instances needing to be separated. "What seems noteworthy in MSNY is the existence of a formal structure that is evaded, despite a Board and against its will, in favor of one man and his personal coterie" (Sagarin, 1966, p. 294). The one man being singled out was the very one who signed the cover letter urging cooperation with Sagarin's research.

Within Mattachine, the "go fast" group consists largely of those who have little to lose, in the way of position, public anonymity, and business; they are also likely to be more youthful, politically more liberal and radical; have lesser ties in New York with Families; are generally aggressive in their social attitudes; and sympathetic to other militant movements, which they seek to imitate. The "go slow" are more moderate, more frequently professional, more aware of the hard road ahead in striving to make progress in a difficult social atmosphere. (Sagarin, 1966, pp. 207-208)

[It] is likely to sink deeper into untenable ideological distortions. . . . The Mattachine Society has little regard for truth. . . . It is part of a movement that participates in blackmail. (p. 405)

There may well be rational kernels and defensible analyses in these and similar statements about factions within MSNY—and, perhaps, even those about "counterfeit love" and "compulsivity," etc.—but the very deliberate concealment of his stake and history in MSNY evaded questions that surely would have been raised about how much of his purportedly "objective analysis" was "sour grapes." Given Sagarin's position that advocacy undercuts objectivity, enhancing his own credibility has to have been one of the conscious motivations for concealing the nature and extent of his MSNY participation in his dissertation, and, subsequently (in oral presentations and writ-

ten work, including a chapter based on his dissertation in his 1969 book *Odd Man In*), from the profession of sociology.

Donald Beckerman, who also entered the NYU doctoral sociology program in 1961, told me that Sagarin continued to be very promiscuous up until his heart attack in a rent-by-the-hour hotel where he had taken a black hustler (this event is further elaborated in Duberman, 1999, pp. 91-92). Beckerman has the impression that Sagarin stopped tricking then, whether from fear of death or fear of the disgrace of dying under such compromising circumstances. Sagarin eventually died in 1986 of another heart attack.

One could say that Donald Webster Cory died in May of 1965 when his bid for the presidency of Mattachine New York went down to resounding defeat. Under the name of Edward Sagarin he soon retaliated in an "objective" analysis that hid his ego involvement and personal bitterness at being passed by conceptually and politically, as well as sexually. In a chapter titled "Dirty Old Men Need Love, Too," Humphreys (1972, p. 116) wrote, possibly thinking of Cory and the younger Mattachines rejecting him in these multiple ways: "If an ideological conflict is at the heart of the struggle between potential helmsmen of the movement, there is a personal dynamic that often intensifies acrimony between the reformers and liberationists. Simply put, the severity of the aging crisis for homosexuals is apt to produce resentment, even bitterness on the part of older leaders" (see also Sagarin, 1966, pp. 321-334).

Cory undoubtedly contributed to consciousness of a kind among homosexuals during the 1950s and early 1960s and inspired some compassion from others for the difficulties homosexuals faced. In that *The Homosexual in America* did not imagine organization and resistance, and that Cory did not join any homophile organization until 1962 (when he was an NYU doctoral student seeking a dissertation topic), the title "father of the homophile movement" seems undeserved. He not only failed to reach the Promised Land of self-acceptance and sociocultural acceptance but refused to look for it, rejected any such goal, and consistently derided those who viewed their homosexuality as nonpathological. Especially in his publications as Edward Sagarin, he held up Alcoholics Anonymous as the proper model of what an "organization of deviants" should be, i.e., "one that preserved the anonymity of participants and focused on suppressing forbidden urges and ending the 'deviant' behavior" (Sagarin, 1969, pp. 97-99, 105-106).

Increasingly Sagarin criticized sociologists and others for "hiding behind" the safety of their wives and children while advocating that lesbians and gay men come out of the closet, yet he himself refused to identify himself as Cory. He died in 1986, alienated and embittered from most of the homosexual community that no longer subscribed to his ideas or would-be leadership, and had no interest in following his proffered advice.

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## Evelyn Gentry Hooker (1907-1996)

Sharon Valente



Evelyn Hooker, nee Gentry, was an instrumental figure in bringing about changes in attitudes about homosexuality in the scientific community and envisioning a future where homosexuality would not be diagnosed as a "severe and pervasive emotional disorder."

She was born in her grandmother's house, which sat next to Buffalo Bill Cody's house, on September 2, 1907, in North Platte, Nebraska, the sixth of nine children. Her mother, who had completed schooling only through the third grade, had traveled to Nebraska in a covered wagon and inspired Evelyn to "get an education—they can't take that away from you." Her parents eked

out an existence as farmers and Evelyn's only exposure to books occurred during her attendance of a series of one-room schoolhouses. She loved to tell of a "sun bonneted child named Evelyn Gentry, being perched on the front seat of a covered wagon, a genuine prairie schooner, moving with her parents and eight siblings from North Platte to their new home in Sterling" (Shneidman, 1998). Sterling, Colorado, boasted of its position as the county seat and had a large high school. As a senior, Evelyn enrolled in the honors program with a course in psychology. She planned to attend a Colorado teachers' college, but the faculty recommended she attend the University of Colorado instead.

In 1924, she became a freshman at the University with a tuition scholarship but no money for board and room; she paid for this by housecleaning. Her entry into psychology was initially opportunistic. After learning that seniors in the psychology department could become paid teaching assistants in quiz sections, she concluded that this kind of teaching seemed far superior to earning her way by housekeeping, and so she became a psychology major. In a course on comparative psychology with Karl Muenzinger, she