



YOURCENAR, MARGUERITE (PSEUDONYM OF MARGUERITE DE CRAYENCOUR; 1903–1987)

Outstanding Belgian-born woman of letters, writing in French. A novelist, short story writer, essayist, poet, playwright, and translator, in 1980 she became the first woman elected to the French Academy. Long a United States resident, in 1982 she was named to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Although not an extremely prolific writer, Yourcenar published books beginning in 1921. As her output was on a consistently high level, she built up a reputation for being an author's author. Well versed in the world of classical antiquity, she was seen as a writer dealing with the universal issues of life and death in a detached, but hardly indifferent light. Translation of many of her works into English helped her win the broader audience she always deserved. Extremely reticent about her private life, Yourcenar was working at the time of her death on her autobiography *The Labyrinth of the World*, of which the first two volumes (about her mother's and father's families) have been published.

Throughout her career, Yourcenar showed much interest in male homosexual behavior. She wrote a significant essay on the poet Constantine Cavafy and the book *Mishima, or the Vision of the Void*. Her most important pre-World War II fictional works, the two short novels *Alexis* (1929) and *Coup de Grâce* (1937), inspired by André Gide's use of the first-person form, deal with homosexual feeling without direct statement of the theme. In the two major novels of her later

years, *The Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951) and *The Abyss* (1968), homosexuality is treated in broader social contexts, the Roman empire and sixteenth-century Europe, respectively. Yourcenar admired Rainer Maria Rilke and Thomas Mann. She translated novels by Henry James and Virginia Woolf into French. Her fictional works were collected in 1982 in a Pléiade edition, signaling literary canonization.

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Peter G. Christensen

YOUTH

Perhaps the most forgotten, invisible minority in the modern industrial world is gay and lesbian teen-age youth. This condition is changing as an increasing number of young people are exploring and expressing sexual identities beyond the heterosexual ones traditionally recognized by society and its agents. Teens are faced, however, with both a hostile and an unbelieving world; they are told "You can't be a homosexual—I won't allow it," which amounts to saying "Society won't allow it."

Historical Patterns. The conceptualization of adolescence as a stage between childhood and adulthood is relatively recent, along with many current beliefs regarding the sexuality of teenagers. Today's parental and pedagogical concern over the development of a homosexual identity by teen-agers could not have arisen when the concept of homosexual identity had not taken root—



a situation that persists in much of the Third World today.

Through much of the world, and during much of Western history, the socially significant role of male youth in cultural patterns of homosexuality is and was as the junior partner in **pederasty**. In cultures which viewed pederasty as an accepted part of life, involvement with adult men was not held to have any lasting effect on the sexuality of the boy concerned; he would be sexually involved with an adult male while a teen-ager, then as an adult would marry and father children, while possibly taking a boy himself during the interval between those two stages. In ancient Greece, for example, it was considered acceptable for a citizen boy to take a receptive, "feminine" role in sex with another male, but once he reached full manhood he was limited to the aggressive "masculine" role.

In a few cultures, all boys were expected to gather some homosexual experience, and it might even be required for the ritual transition to manhood, as with some Melanesian tribes in the Pacific cultural sphere.

Basic Features of the Current Situation. In contrast to many other cultures, Western industrial societies remain permeated with negative attitudes regarding teen-age homosexuality. Yet it is not clear what effect these negative views have on the youth discovering his or her homosexuality. From their later vantage point, few adults can pinpoint exactly when they first became aware of their sexual **orientation**; it seems more of a process than an event, perhaps reflecting the amorphous nature of sexual orientation itself. Accordingly, homosexuality may be present before the ability to reflect and **label** sexual feelings and attractions emerges. This sequence was particularly true in the past, before the concept of homosexuality was widely presented in media accessible to young people, and when youngsters could be very active sexually with others of their sex without ever considering their behav-

ior "homosexual" or themselves "gay" or "lesbian." Even today, one of the characteristic features of homosexual involvement on the part of teen-agers is the lack of information accompanying these activities. Thus, a boy may be experienced with **oral sex** and never suspect the existence of **anal sex**, think that only **transvestites** are homosexuals, that he is the only person in his town who has erotic attraction to other males, that all boys engage in sex with each other, that "**faggots**" are despised but are not connected to anything sexual, and so forth.

In retrospect, many gay and lesbian youths report that they have always felt different and isolated from others without understanding why, but they knew that somehow the difference was important. One gay youth replied, "I always felt different, like I didn't fit in. I thought it was because I read and cared about art."

There is little agreement among investigators as to discrete variables that accurately predict a young person's ultimate sexual orientation or why he or she may feel different from other youths, though the existence of many such variables has been a source of speculation with varying degrees of supporting research evidence. Professionals, parents, and peers often make inferences about an adolescent's sexuality based on certain "suspicious" gender-atypical behaviors, dress, and mannerisms. The prevalence of childhood and adolescent gender-atypical behavior has been documented by a number of investigators; some posit **gender nonconformity** as a causative agent in the development of homosexuality, though this may beg the question: what causes the gender nonconformity? Researchers have suggested that at some level, the child and family know from an early point that the child is sexually "different." This knowledge ultimately affects the child and the family. By incorporating external values, the child learns that homosexuality is wrong, sick, and certainly, undesirable.

By adolescence, the youth with a homosexual identity has learned that she or he is among the most despised members of society and is thus faced with a number of decisions at a time when one may be least able to make the right choices. Should he play it safe and pass as heterosexual, aware of his own deception and of living a lie? Should she compartmentalize her life, separating her sexual self from all other activities and relationships? The answers have usually been provided, theoretically, in various **coming out** models that trace the step-by-step process, usually beginning in adolescence.

Young teens often escape condemnation and criticism for homosexual behavior (although not gender-atypical behavior) because the supposed psychodynamics of their sexuality, according to many psychologists, "allows" a phase of homosexual behavior in early adolescence. Teen-agers are expected to have these developmental detours and to outgrow them with a move to heterosexuality. To some, homosexual adolescents simply do not exist because adulthood must first be attained before a sexual orientation is set.

Explanations for Extent of Homosexual Behavior. Great effort, primarily anecdotal and clinical in nature, has been targeted at explaining the relatively high frequency of homosexual activity among teen-agers. Some argue that sexual experimentation and exploration with same-sex peers occur because their bodies and reactions are more familiar and therefore less threatening than those of their other-sex counterparts; others postulate that reassurance is gained from mutual comparison of size, shape, and sensations associated with changing bodies and sex organs; still others view these "transient homosexual activities" as the product of typical adolescent crushes, hero-worshipping, and intimate same-sex friendships (which does not explain why these crushes and so forth arise). More to the point may be the difficulties attendant upon *heterosexual* activity in the early teens, which range from

surveillance/chaperoning through lack of privacy to the dangers of pregnancy and the fear (for a girl) of "ruining her reputation." One can even speak of an atmosphere of anti-sexuality (in a heterosexual context) enveloping the early teen-ager, who has just become aware of his or her sexuality and is experiencing a strong sexual drive for the first time. Even in North America, where the sexes are less segregated during the teen years than in most of the world, it is difficult for a young teen-age boy to initiate heterosexual intercourse successfully, whereas opportunities for homosexual experimentation are common, if not as frequently exploited. In more restricted societies, where heterosexual intercourse is virtually impossible for an unmarried teen-ager (with the exception of recourse to prostitutes, which few can afford), homosexuality provides his or her only sexual outlet.

Because only some of the teen-agers who have homoerotic impulses ever become gay or lesbian adults, scholarly writers consistently refer to homosexual activities during this period as an aspect of a normal phase leading to adult heterosexual development; there need be no anxiety that they are the harbingers of lifelong homosexuality. Although soothing to concerned and frightened parents, this view may be potentially a source of self-denial if not great anxiety to the youth who is developing a homosexual identity which does not fit these expectations and which is not experienced as a temporary "phase" but rather as a comprehensive and stable sexual orientation tied to the sense of self. Historically and geographically, of course, any sense of self-identity as "homosexual" is culturally conditioned, raising serious questions which relate to but go far beyond this discussion.

Definition and Self-Definition. An additional difficulty is in defining the gay or lesbian youth to himself or herself. This is not an easy issue because at no other time in the course of life is an individual more likely to experience cross-

orientation sexual contact or **bisexuality** and less likely to define the self as a homosexual individual. The problem is one of distinguishing homosexual identity, orientation, and homosexual behavior. Sexual behavior and sexual orientation may be independent for a given youth as she or he engages in many forms of sexual activity, with partners varying in age, sex, and other personal variables, regardless of self-labeled or self-professed sexual identity. Although it is likely that the three will be correlated, this may be more of a future than a present reality.

Some lesbian and gay youths live as homosexual virgins and, (as first documented in America by Alfred Kinsey) some "straight" youths have engaged in extensive and prolonged homosexual behavior. Youths who will later define themselves as "gay" are more likely than others to engage in homosexual behavior as teens and to do so for a longer period of time, but they are also frequent partakers of heterosexual behavior as well.

Awareness of same-sex attraction and arousal for youth usually begins during early adolescence, shortly after pubertal onset, with homosexual experiences delayed anywhere from moments to decades later. Labeling oneself as "homosexual," however, occurs later, during young adulthood in most studies of males and some several years later in studies of lesbians. The delay is usually attributed to antihomosexual discrimination and its effects on the developing adolescent, but it might also relate to the adolescent's lack of involvement in the gay subculture with its emphasis on self-definition along orientational lines.

The Question of Prevalence. Given the complexity of whether one defines homosexuality by reference to behavior or self-label and the fact that many youths experience a diversity of sexual behaviors and an emerging sexual identity over a period of several years, a process which may not be completed until young adulthood, it is difficult to

assess the prevalence of homosexual orientation among youth. Some studies are promising in their attempts to describe the incidence and prevalence of both homosexual activity and identity during adolescence, as well as the relationship between the two, but they are limited by their retrospective nature. Only a few empirical studies have been conducted with gay and lesbian youths as the research participants.

The paucity of research on gay and lesbian youth is both prevalent and appalling. Among the contributing factors are the hesitancy of social scientists to confront the stigmatic, legal, and moral issues involved with studying gay and lesbian minors; the invisibility of gay and lesbian youths to themselves, thus compounding the difficulty of finding them as research participants; and the view of those who define homosexually behaving adolescents as individuals temporarily detained from their destination as heterosexual adults. Given these problems, social scientists either ignore gay and lesbian youth or they rely on adult retrospective data-gathering techniques that make particular and often debatable assumptions concerning the accuracy of recall data. Many studies are limited to gay and lesbian adults; these ignore homosexually active teen-agers who do not grow up to become gay-defined adults.

Similarities and Differences with the General Youth Population. In very important ways gay and lesbian youth are similar to other youth, despite the frequently cited and belabored differences that have been the primary mainstay of social scientists bent on gay-versus-straight dichotomies. If indeed it proves to be the case that sexual orientation produces minimal differences in developmental processes, then there is a need for studies of the homosexual population that focus on generic patterns within a homosexual context to see how these patterns are affected by that context. With this effort social scientists would increase the likelihood of learning about normal develop-

ment in all its manifestations among gay and lesbian youth.

Coming Out. For those who come to consider their homosexuality inevitable and true to their sense of self and who decide to contradict their previous social and assumed sexual identity, there are few sources of assistance. Gay and lesbian organizations have shied away from dealing with them, perhaps because they fear the issue is too controversial (capable of being perceived as a disguised attempt to "recruit" young people) and complex (the social, legal, and economic status of dependent youth), or because they lack the personnel, knowledge, and funds to offer support.

Personnel in youth service agencies, schools, youth organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and religious youth groups have also been notably reluctant to provide support for self-identified lesbian and gay youth. In New York City the Board of Education has provided an alternative school environment where identified gay and lesbian teen-agers can escape harassment (the Harvey Milk School), but this is a notable exception to a general refusal to address these questions. If anything, adult gay men and lesbians, who might be able to provide constructive role models and sympathetic counseling, are systematically excluded from positions that would make them accessible to minors.

Lesbian and gay youths often consider the restrictions which society places on adults' sexual interactions with minors, such as statutory rape (age of consent) and child molestation laws, to be infringements on their own rights and a denial of their own sexuality. They complain that adults are inhibited from showing any affection to youths or from supporting them in their struggles against oppression.

Ritch C. Savin-Williams

The London Survey. The most difficult area for "coming out" youths is parents. A survey of over 400 gay and lesbian teen-age Londoners conducted in 1983 by the London Gay Teenage Group found that, of the 250 teens who had come out to parents, in just over half the cases, parents' initial reaction was either "good," "reasonable," or "indifferent." Over a third of the youths reported negative reactions, with the remainder mixed.

Most (61 percent) of the young lesbians, but a quarter of the gay boys in the survey reported that their first sexual experience was heterosexual. The girls reported their first homosexual experience came on the average at age 16 or 17 (with 32 percent at 15 or under), while 62 percent of the boys reported their first homosexual experience at 15 or under. For the boys, their first homosexual experience was very likely with someone older: half of the boys' first partners were 20 or older; for girls it was 43 percent.

At school, youths found that sex education materials rarely provided any useful information about homosexuality. The London survey indicated that homosexuality was four times more likely to be brought up in Religion class than in Sex Education. Only 5 percent of the London youths said they had found any helpful information on homosexuality in their school library.

Somewhat more than half the survey respondents were known to someone in secondary (high) school as homosexual, and almost all of these reported problems as a result. Boys in particular experienced verbal abuse (25 percent) and beatings (16 percent), girls pressure to conform (15 percent) and ostracism (10 percent); both sexes reported isolation (25 percent) and teasing (13 percent). A little over half of these youths reported they knew someone else in school who was gay.

Youths were more likely to be known as homosexual while in college, with 68 percent reporting such knowledge; two-thirds of these knew another

gay student. Female college students reported more of a sense of isolation (34 percent) than males did (20 percent).

The first person told about the teen's sexuality was usually (55 percent) a friend, followed by siblings (8 percent), mothers (7.5 percent), and lovers (6 percent). The next step in breaking out of the isolation is often to make contact with another homosexual; only 16 percent found this among their friends, with a quarter going to a gay pub or club and 18 percent through a telephone switchboard or the London Gay Teenage Group itself.

Asked to comment on the gay social scene, the London teens tended to criticize the gay pubs and clubs for being too expensive, with too much pressure to drink, and keeping hours too late for them (especially for those still living with parents). In London it is legal for an unaccompanied 16 year old to enter a pub, and the drinking age is 18.

Well over half of the London respondents reported having or having had "a long term homosexual lover"; two-thirds said they were happy with their sex lives, while a third of the unhappy respondents wanted a lover and another third of the unhappiest wanted more of it. Just under 40 percent of the boys reported having had homosexual sex with strangers in public toilets or outdoor cruising areas, often the only means known or accessible to them for meeting sexual partners.

Depression is often a problem for young homosexuals: 19 percent of the London respondents said they had attempted suicide because they were lesbian or gay. Trouble with police over homosexuality was reported by 21 percent of the boys and 9 percent of the girls, usually in the form of general harassment.

Runaways, Castaways, and Prostitutes. Self-identified gay and lesbian teenagers may undergo considerable harassment without being able to make use of adult defensive strategies such as finding a more hospitable work environment, moving to a large city or a heavily gay

neighborhood, finding emotional support in gay social environments (often bars which do not admit minors), having gay roommates or lovers, and the like. For this reason, some gay and lesbian youth run away from home in hopes of finding a less hostile environment in the big city. Still others (11 percent of the London survey) are driven out of their homes by family members unable to deal with homosexuality or cross-gender behavior. While many of these youths eventually return home, having solidified their sense of sexual orientation in the meantime, others become drifters in the big cities. Some of these are able to find jobs or lovers to take them in, but many become involved in prostitution, a trade where youth is much in demand by *ephebophiles* (those interested in the older teens) and "puberphiles" (men interested in boys emerging from puberty) and constitutes nearly all of the supply.

For some gay-identified boys, street hustling seems an attractive endeavor, offering both sexual satisfaction and ready cash as well as entree to many new social worlds. For others, it is simply an occupation for which they are qualified and from which they are not barred by their youth. The lesbian-identified girl, on the other hand, may view prostitution as a distasteful if unavoidable means of earning a living.

Prostitution is also a home town scene of homosexual involvement for many teen-age boys. For some, it is the only means they know or trust for making contact with sexual partners, gay bars being unknown or off-limits owing to age restrictions, and peers ruled out because of fear of exposure.

Many male prostitutes are boys who do not identify themselves as gay, and this activity is justified and rationalized, especially among the sons of the working- and under-class, as an economic rather than an erotic endeavor. This also makes it attractive to boys who are unsure of their sexual orientation but would like to experience sex with other males, and

therefore sometimes becomes a route that eventually leads to a homosexual or bisexual identification.

Organizational Responses. At the 1969 annual convention of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO), the NACHO Youth Committee, under Stephen Donaldson's chairmanship, issued a report denouncing the coalition's member organizations for discriminating against youth, maintaining high minimum age limits for membership, and ignoring issues of strong concern to youth such as age-of-consent laws and prostitution. At that time, only a few of the member groups in the homophile movement would have anything to do with minors: the Student Homophile League, Vanguard (a San Francisco organization of young male street prostitutes), and the Council on Religion and the Homosexual; the convention majority rejected the report.

With the explosion of gay liberation in the 1970s, gay and lesbian groups became somewhat more open to youths, student groups proliferated, and increasing numbers of cities developed independent youth groups. Groups primarily for youth below college age are still, however, comparatively few; only a few high schools are known to have recognized

gay groups. Organizations of this sort have often suffered from lack of support by the adult gay and lesbian communities.

Stephen Donaldson

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