

## Plato's Shadow

The relationship of adult male homosexuality to boylove.

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### Abstract:

Unlike reproductive heterosexuality and boy/older male mentoring relationships with a sexual component, adult male homosexuality lacks a genuine history and contributes nothing of obvious value to society. It is therefore justifiable to inquire why adult male homosexuality suddenly became so visible in the last half century. This paper proposes that adult male homosexuality is in reality a longitudinally displaced and substitutionary form of sexually expressed boy/older male relationships, a metamorphosis generated by the extreme societal repression and demonization of boy/older male relationships.

This essay is not an attack on the “gay” community, nor is it in any sense a condemnation of sexual practices between adult males. Neither bigoted politicians, religious radicals, nor other homophobes will find any support herein for their campaigns of hate and hysteria against gays. What is to be investigated are the underlying principles of homosexual practices and their source and derivation.

Up until the middle of the twentieth century, overt and active homosexuality was relatively unheard of throughout most of the world. There were a few instances here and there, but it was only in the late 1950s and 1960s that homosexuality as anything of significance suddenly appeared. But since that time, some aspect of gay culture – the latest being gay “marriage” – has been constantly in the news. The true size of the “gay community” is nearly impossible to estimate with any degree of accuracy, but there are enough energetic activists to at least give the impression that large numbers of practicing homosexual males exist in the nation and in the world. Another difficult question is if the gay movement has passed its peak, if the number of new “converts” is decreasing, and if the movement itself is beginning to wane. Gay activists will assert that the movement is alive and growing, but a recent unsuccessful attempt to gather empirical data resulted in only a few respondents, and found a preponderance of older people.

If male homosexuality is, as is claimed by gay activists, a separate and widespread sexual orientation, how did it go from almost complete obscurity to social prominence in the few short decades since World War II? Or to put the question another way, if this is a sexual orientation that evolved with the human race, why and how has it apparently been almost totally invisible until the last half century? Where has it been hiding? If we apply only the smallest estimate of the percentage of males who are claimed to be homosexual to national or world populations, the numbers run into the tens of millions. Even under the most repressive of religious and cultural regimes, it would seem impossible that these multitudes could exist nearly completely unnoticed in generation after generation, century after century.

There are books and web sites devoted to subjects such as “Gay Men ... who Enriched the World” (Cowan, 1966) and “Gay American History” (Katz, 1976). But in actuality, the general

historical record has relatively little to say on the subject of adult male homosexuality, and the vast majority of proposed examples turn out to have been relationships between a prepubescent or adolescent boy and an adult male, not two adult males. Conversely, however, history does abound in sexually expressed relationships between adolescent and younger boys with older males; there are numerous well documented examples from classical Greece (Percy, 1996) through Wilfred Owen (Hibberd, 1986), and right up to modern times (Davidson, 1988), just to mention a few.

When considering the gay experience, one must understand that there are an infinite number of variables, and that only the widest of generalizations are possible. The passing, “one-nighter” gay sexual encounter is not the focus of this discussion, but rather relationships that at least have the potential for some measure of permanence. One issue is that of “equality,” i.e., is this to be a relationship of equals, or is there to be, at least to some degree, a “dominant” partner and a “submissive” one in a relationship that is essentially unequal, but nevertheless acceptable to both parties, but more importantly to the one who accepts the submissive role.

While most sexually expressed relationships by nature are not egalitarian, they can still be complementary and workable. Each partner assumes a distinct function, plays a particular part, and these hopefully complement one another. But even within this paradigm, there can be extremes varying from near egalitarianism to almost total dominance of one partner by the other. The extent to which each partner understands and accepts his role is important, as is whether the more dominant expresses his power benignly or arrogantly.

Heterosexuality has the obvious purpose and end of the reproduction which is necessary for the continuance of the human race. But the fact that adult male homosexuality does not seem to address a generalized social need or purpose is one more reason to inquire into the explosion of gay visibility in the last half century. Is it possible that the capacity for adult male homosexuality has been present for all of recorded history, but until recently rarely has been expressed? This seems highly unlikely, for the two major sexual options – heterosexuality and boy/older male pedosexuality – have been visible to a greater or lesser degree in all cultures and societies throughout all of recorded history.

One hypothesis is that adult male homosexuality is in reality sublimated and longitudinally displaced male pedosexuality, or “boylove,” wherein one party assumes the role of “loved boy” and the other that of “mentor/lover.” Such essentially nonegalitarian and vicarious – one wag has called it “fossilized” – boylove would provide each of the parties with a proxy for the bonding type of sexually expressed relationship they either wanted in their boyhood and failed to realize, or would like to have in the present but are denied by current legal restrictions. These hidden motivations might not even be recognized, and/or might be denied or repressed. In this light, is it possible that adult male homosexuality is only Plato’s shadow, and sexually expressed boy/older male love is the true substance behind that shadow?

In evolution, physical or sociobiological changes in an organism are instituted by chance mutations; however, the ways these changes are expressed in that individual, or “phenotype,” are also affected by environment. For a physical or sociobiological trait to persist in the overall population, or “genotype,” it should have advantages which increase the likelihood of the bearers

to successfully reproduce, i.e., it must be “adaptive” to be “selected.” At the very least, such a trait must not be disadvantageous when it comes to reproduction.

Male homosexuality, whether one holds that it is a genetic or sociobiological trait, has no such reproductive advantages. In fact, since it is a physical impossibility for two males to reproduce, this trait would be strongly “selected against,” and should be eliminated from the gene pool in short order. Male homosexuality then, while it is held by some to be a legitimate orientation which provides emotional and sensory benefits to its practitioners, would largely seem, like the proverbial mule, to be “without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity” in an evolutionary sense.

Of course, it is also possible that some extremely recessive gene for homosexuality exists that only rarely shows up in an individual. There has been some discussion in scientific circles about physiological differences in “gay brains” and of the possibility of there being one or more “gay genes.” But this would indicate that, regardless of repression or persecution, there should be a reasonably stable percentage of homosexuals in the adult male population over the millennia. However, historical evidence that this has been the case does not seem to exist, with the exponential expansion apparently having taken place in only the last half century.

It could also be posited that adult gay males and gay couples somehow contribute in ways that allow their society to survive and be more successful, even though they consume resources while producing no offspring. But no such contributions, such as the mentoring function of sexually expressed boy/older male relationships, are apparent; what could a gay individual or couple do for the basic needs of a culture that could not be done equally well by one or more heterosexual males or heterosexual couples? Some note that gays tend to be overly represented in theater and other performing arts, but could this not simply indicate that gays have a propensity for “pretending,” just as their supposed homosexuality may well be a pretense?

Conversely, however, an evolutionary case can be hypothesized that the tendency for boys to be sexually attracted to older males is adaptive (Feierman, 1990). In prehistoric times it is likely that many children, due to violence, disease, poor nutrition, and life spans that were considerably shorter than what we have considered “normal” for the past couple of centuries, found themselves without adequately functioning parents or other adults who would be willing to take on the burden of looking after and feeding a not yet productive child. A boy in this situation who was bright, attractive, and sexually androphilic (Vanggaard, 1969) would have a higher probability of connecting with an older male whose sexuality included a pedosexual component, and who would protect, provide for, and teach the boy the skills necessary for survival. Studies have identified such secondary boy-attracted pedosexual tendencies in 20 to 30% of self-identified heterosexual adult males (e.g. Freund, 1970), and these tendencies would not be selected against so long as the bearers were primarily heterosexual, and only secondarily pedosexual. There is no reason to believe that these percentages were not similar in prehistoric times, and in the absence of our modern day taboos, such beneficial boy/older male relationships could develop unimpeded. This boy’s juvenile androphilic sexuality would typically be supplanted by heterosexuality as he matured, he would then pass on his genes, and thus both of these traits would be maintained in the gene pool.

If such sexually expressed boy/older male relationships were not stigmatized through human prehistory, as hypothesized in the preceding paragraph and as evidenced by their acceptance in ancient history (Percy, 1996) and more recent cross cultural studies (Ford & Beach, 1951), and if such boys and older males suffered little or no loss in reproductive potential, the continuing presence of these traits in the human genotype can be understood. Only when cultural and religious disapproval, criminalization, and demonization had forced such consensual relationships underground would there have been cause for the development of a sublimated and longitudinally displaced form of this “boylove,” which may be the source of what we know today as adult male homosexuality. Older males would have a better ability to keep the sexual aspects of their substitutional relationship out of sight, which, coupled with the invisibility of most of the remaining sexually expressed boy/older male relationships, would have created the illusion that boylove was rare and adult male homosexuality was nearly nonexistent. It was only in the sexual revolutions of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that what may well be nothing more than a vicarious form of boylove exploded upon human consciousness, and the “gay liberation” movement was born.

Nevertheless, as far as gay life style and gay aspirations for civil recognition are concerned, the awareness and acceptance of this origin should not be a problem. No matter the degree of rationalization or outright delusion one may assign to frustrated “boylovers” or unfulfilled “loved boys” who view themselves as “homosexuals,” there is no excuse for denying these people the right to live whatever lifestyle they choose, so long as it has no real – as opposed to culturally imagined – negative effect on other people.

Likewise, however, there is no acceptable rationale for continuing the disproved myth that consensual sexually expressed boyhood relationships with older males are intrinsically harmful, or that such relationships will or are intended to cause homosexuality as an adult. Would it not be a reasonable hypothesis that if the present hysteria about sexually expressed boyhood relationships with older males did not exist, there would be far fewer frustrated boylovers and unfulfilled loved boys, and the incidence of supposed adult male homosexuality would decrease significantly?

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