

SPECTRUM

The opinions found in Spectrum are not necessarily the views of The Brunswickan. People interested in writing for Spectrum must submit at least three (3) type-written articles of no more than 500 words each to the Brunswickan.

Images and stereotypes

A few evenings ago, I was watching television with a male friend. During a commercial break, I went to the kitchen to get a glass of water. As I left the kitchen, I found my-self walking towards a wall covered in a collage of last years *Sports Illustrated* swim suit models. After my initial sensation of shock and horror upon the realization that some women actually look like this, followed by a sudden pang of jealousy, I simply shrugged my shoulders and continued my journey back to the living room. The display was not very disturbing, nor was it terribly unusual. On a daily basis, we are confronted with similar images through media, music, and literature. Our minds are filled with stereotypes of how people are supposed to look. We see the images and aspire to obtain that perfect look. But how attainable is this ideal?

Image-making and stereotyping are serious social concerns. Who is to blame for creating such beasts? Who is the enemy? Is it that tall, blond, voluptuous sex goddess? Is it the men who worship these sex goddesses? (sometimes I wonder if men kowtow these pin-up calendars as one might the golden cow) Perhaps we as women are the worst enemy for internalizing these images, and striving to meet the standards of the ideal woman.

Men, through historically male-dominated institutions, such as art, literature, and music, can be blamed for initially creating stereotypical images. However, all people, both men and women, have suffered from trying to live up to the images created many centuries ago. Everyone realizes that these images are fabricated notions of an ideal. Yet, for some reason, we have conceptualized these fabrications as realities. We still expect people to somehow match the image. Moreso, we value and respect those that do. An aesthetically beautiful, slender woman is envied by her female peers and adored by her male associates. Likewise, a strong, ambitious male is admired by all of those around him. Although these qualities are positive attributes for any person to possess, are we not shallow to believe that an individual is a better person for having such qualities?

The pressure that people experience trying to live up to an image that confronts them daily at every magazine stand, in every newspaper, and on every television program, is enormous. The most frustrating part is that people actually make the attempt. We have all heard the phrases that

"beauty is only skin deep" or the "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," but for some reason these sayings don't ring true. What we are left with is this abundant urge to match an ideal or even worse, the feeling of insecurity and self-consciousness for failing to do so. There must be a better way to exist in life than by constantly striving to mirror a superficial look or quality. I often think that if the amount of time and energy that women put into improving their look by diets, tanning sessions, and aerobics classes (or worse yet, the amount of time and energy spent in fits of envy for those women who have achieved "perfection") were put into productive measures such as reading, learning another language,

or volunteering for a charity organization, the world would be a much better and mentally healthier place.

When it comes down to the final analysis, we all know what is truly important in life. It isn't having a 36" 24" 36" figure or Popeye muscles. On the contrary, it is being an open-minded, informed, tolerant, and kind person. If we realize this, why do we continue to oggle Elle MacPherson and Rachel Hunter in their strings? Why do we stop dead in our tracks at the grocery store to drool over Mel Gibson's hot existence? By doing this are we feeding the notion of the ideal image of men and women? Yes, of course we are, and we are all guilty of the crime. I don't know

Mom, what's a dyke?

Children seem to be the major long-term issue that straights are concerned with when they hear a woman is gay. She gets questions like "Will you have children?" or "What will you do about your children?" But the more interesting questions are asked behind her back "Don't you find she's too fond of those little girls?"

I read a reprint of a R.E.A.L. Women (the ultra-conservative anti-feminist women's group) newsletter. Among other bits of nonsense about a lesbian conspiracy in the feminist movement, was the warning that lesbians, because we can't reproduce ourselves, are actively recruiting young girls to keep ourselves repopulated.

This foolishness doesn't usually bother me, but I've heard it several times since, used as a reason for ostracizing lesbians from families, and firing them from helping professions.

The perceived exploitation of hapless children is part of the irrational fear we call homophobia, yet for many straights, even normally reasonable ones, the image of the homosexual child molester is impossible to shake.

Part of their problem is born in their own dark imaginations. Because they know little or nothing about homosexuality, straights who are confronted with it ask themselves a million questions and make up their own answers in the absence of information. These answers may seem very logical despite how absurd they sometimes get. A case in point is my ex-roommate at Dalhousie U. Her train of thought went something like this:

"Tris is gay...she likes women...she wants to have sex with women...dirty books and porn films portray women having sex with women...sex with women is kinky...kinky sex isn't normal, it's sick...sick sex fiends abuse children...Tris is a sick sex fiend who..." You can see why I moved out.

This woman was convinced she'd eventually read about my arrest for sexually abusing children. The sad part of this is that she wasn't being malicious. She genuinely cared about me. The reason for her departure from reality when faced with my lesbianism is the incredible lack of information and a whopping pile of misinformation whose credibility depends on the rarity of known facts.

Looking at history and the wonders of women in love, I see that the media has only recently begun covering lesbian topics, and even now the depictions are heavy on the negative and almost mute on the positive.

To paraphrase Rita Mae Brown: If all I heard about heterosexuals had to do with prostitution, incest cases, pornography peddlers, wife battery and the divorce rate, I wouldn't let my child anywhere near them.

If it's a matter of education, then perhaps with time a lot of the concerns straights have regarding lesbians and children can be eased. Of course it is not so simple at all. Education does nothing to someone whose mind is directed by moral convictions based on traditions that started out oppressive.

There are some people who are intent on separating a mother from her child because she is gay. Their

The Wimmin's Room

how one overcomes these stereotypes that have been ingrained in us since birth. However, I do know that the pressures of such stereotypes are quite overwhelming and very unnecessary. Furthermore, I believe that these fabrications have a greater importance in society than they are usually accredited. The next time that you stare at someone and claim that they are beautiful, be aware of what it is that you are actually implying. You are see-

ing one part (a fairly insignificant part) of a person, measuring it to the fashionable ideal, and gaging an opinion. Perhaps we don't realize what kind of impact such an opinion has on us. So ask yourself, would I rather meet a typically "beautiful" person, or would I rather acquaint myself with someone not as stereotypically appealing? Your response may be quite enlightening.

The Black Triangle by Tristis Bhaird

reasons are more than the belief that lesbianism would drive a woman to sexually abuse her children. They don't want the child raised by someone so far outside the traditional family unit. They worry about how those poor darlings will cope with the stigma their mother has branded them with.

I have noted that the people who are so concerned about the vulnerability of these youngsters are the same people whose bigotry causes the most trouble.

If children are raised in a loving home, where understanding and tolerance are taught, where pride and honesty are shown to overpower the intolerance around them, they will grow up strong and self-confident.

Basically, whether a woman raises her children well has nothing to do with her orientation. Closet

stress and traditionalist-moral-squad fighting might hinder their quality of life, though.

I haven't decided on children yet, but if I do become a mom it will be because I believe I can do it. In the mean time I value greatly my relationship with my niece and nephew. I am relieved that my brother didn't let his fears get in the way of common sense. By seeing me as a welcomed member, and not some shamed disowned skeleton in the family closet, they are going to have a broader understanding of what love is and the many ways it can form families.

On a much lighter note: FLAG will be holding a Mardi Gras on February 29 at 10: PM to 1:30 AM at the Centre Communautaire de Ste. Anne, 315 Priestman. Now this sounds like a great time. Way to go Fredericton!

NOTICE OF ELECTIONS

Nominations are invited for the election of student representatives as follows:

BOARD OF GOVERNORS: (Graduate or Undergraduate Students)

Two seats -- terms ending 30 June 1993

FREDERICTON SENATE: (Undergraduate Students)

Five seats -- terms ending 30 June 1993

One seat -- term ending 30 June 1994

ELECTION DATES: 17, 18, & 19 MARCH 1992

NOMINATIONS CLOSE: Wednesday, 26 February 1992, at 4:30 p.m.

ELIGIBILITY AND PROCEDURES: Inquire at offices of Student Union, SUB, or University Secretary, Room 110, Old Arts Building.

Roger Ploude
University Secretary