

SPECTRUM

Pride, by J. a Deeper Love...

Our Families, Part 2

**Note: the names of people have been changed to protect their privacy. Strict confidentiality has been assured.*

Last week, I spoke of the family-homosexual/bisexual person relationship, and the possible beliefs that may lead to familial acceptance/rejection. Two prior beliefs, the religious belief and the "same-sex-orientation-as-mental-illness" belief provided some background information on why parents react a certain way to their child's revelation that he/she is gay, lesbian or bisexual.

A third belief is that the parents have somehow failed in their ability to raise a child. This is tied in with a psychological/biological perception. Parents often blame themselves for raising a child who is gay, lesbian or bisexual. Somehow, if they had not been so distant, or if they had spent more time with them, things would have been okay. Other times, they blame themselves for not protecting their children from "those types of people", while some begin to wonder whether some gene inherited from one or both parents might have contributed to the "problem" (this can also lead to parents blaming each other for conceiving a homosexual/bisexual child). Studies have shown that this is not the case. How children are raised does not determine their sexual orientation. It will however determine whether they decide to come out or not. The homosexual or bisexual individual will either stay in the closet and deny their sexual orientation, be secretive and hide their sexual orientation from their parents, or accept their sexual orientation and come out to their parents. Neither will other people cause someone to "suddenly become gay, lesbian or bisexual". Other homosexual and bisexuals who have accepted themselves for who they are, and are comfortable with their sexuality, provide a positive example to those who have not yet come out. In the case of biology-based beliefs, the studies on a genetic basis for same-sex orientation is still new, and the results from these studies are inconclusive. The validity and reliability of the research needs to be considered, as well as the implications for this particular hypothesis. *E's parents thought that his being gay was due to the home that he was raised in. "If only I hadn't done..." were some of the opening statements that were made when E came out to his mother and father. Gradually, however, E's parents met other parents who had homosexual and bisexual sons and daughters, and who had come to accept and support their children (the organization is called P-FLAG - Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays). This eventually led to a much improved home situation, as well as public support of homosexuals and bisexuals across the country. *P told her parents that she was bisexual. Her mother was shocked, while her father was a little confused. Over time, the issue of "what did we do wrong?" crept up now and then, but eventually her parents hesitantly came to accept P's sexuality. Tension still arises at times during visits home.

A final belief stems from an extension of the parents' roles as protector and guardian. The guardian/protector belief is due to the nature of current social views of homosexuality and bisexuality. There is still some opposition to same-sex orientation that sometimes results in verbal, psychological, emotional and/or physical abuse in all areas of society. Parents under this belief system are not so much rejecting their child, but are afraid for them and their safety. They see and hear the negative responses of the world around them, in terms of same-sex orientation, and seek to protect their gay, lesbian or bisexual child from the negativism. More often than not, parents will actively inter-

rogate their child to make sure that they know what they are really getting into when they come out. Most parents then proceed to worry constantly about the activities that their child is doing, whether it be a night out with friends, a date, attending a Pride parade, or just taking a walk. The guardian/protector belief is difficult to deal with, due to the fact that there is still plenty of homophobia and misperceptions concerning homosexuality and bisexuality, in the world today. *C came out to his mother in a frank and open way. Since both people got along well, his mother accepted her son's orientation quite well. However, she asked him questions and gave some suggestions that rather surprised C. They were honest and candid perceptions of real life situations that were reflected in her suggestions about his safety, and to not disclose his sexual orientation to certain individuals; for instance his father. *B came out to his family gradually and one at a

time. The first few times were difficult, but a gradual acceptance was reached. Yet his parents were concerned with what other people would think, and this has caused some amount of worry. Yet, the family remains supportive of B and chose to accept him for who he is.

It should be noted that all of the belief systems discussed in this issue and last week's issue, often do not occur separately. Sometimes two or more systems occur, such as a guardian/protector-religious-self-blame belief. Also, these beliefs can be extended to other family members, with a few minor changes. For example, brothers and sisters can take a religious stance against their homosexual/bisexual sibling, think that their gay, lesbian or bisexual sibling is "mentally ill", or be protective of them (especially if the sibling is younger). The only difference is in the self-blame belief system, wherein siblings who are confronted by a homosexual/bisexual brother or sister, react based on two factors. If the brother/sister's prior perceptions were positive ones, then conflict with negative perceptions of same-sex orientations arises. If the perceptions were negative to begin with, then coming out to them may add to their negative impressions.

What then, can be done when faced with coming out to your family? First, make sure that you are ready to come out to them.

Understand that this is a big step in the coming out process, and that no one is pressuring you to do anything. Take time to assess the situation; after all you know your family best and some people come out early in the process, while others have not yet disclosed this information to their family. Second, make sure that you have a social support network already, just in case the worse happens. This can be close friends, a close relative, or some other person with whom you are comfortable with, who knows and accepts you nonetheless. Third, decide on how much you are willing to talk about, don't hint that you are homosexual or bisexual. Fourth, prepare yourself mentally, for many possibilities, by imagining what may happen. Fifth, choose an appropriate time and place to come out to your family. A quiet, unhurried time period is best; a period in which there are no immediate concerns, or people are too busy with their lives. As for the place, choose a private area, which may or may not be neutral, depending on the level of comfortability that you feel. Also, consider the schedules and worries that your family has; if someone just got fired, or is feeling blue, don't disclose your sexual orientation until the problem has been taken care of. Sixth, decide which members of the family you will initially tell; all of them, one at a time, a select group? Finally, listen to your

family's responses; their acceptance or rejection may not be the final say in this matter. They are, after all, dealing with some eye-opening news, be patient, and remember that this is not a war in which it's you against them. Your tone of voice, expressions, body language can tell a lot about what you are saying more than words, and keep on talking about it after you come out to them. One final thing. Should your family completely reject you, learn to let go. If their minds have been made up, and they will not listen to you, nor accept/tolerate/understand you, then don't try to change them. Cope with their decision and continue on with your life. Yes, it will hurt, but you will continue hurting yourself and possibly your family should you persist in changing their attitudes concerning you.

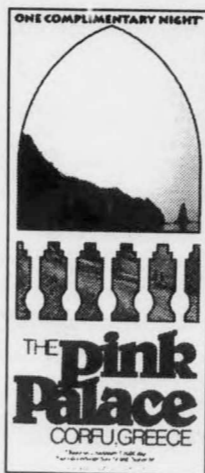
The information in this issue, can be found in books and articles in your local library, counselling services, sexual reproduction organization or local chapter of any gay/lesbian/bisexual organization. Should problems arise, which you think may not be possible to solve on your own, don't hesitate to seek counselling for yourself and/or your family. Talking it over with a counsellor who understands the situation, may help in bridging the gap between you and your family, or help you cope with their rejection.

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