

Cops

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expected to show very specific behaviours, identities, and preferences (Haas and Haas, 1986). Any alteration from this sex-role heterosexual stereotyping meets with, at best, extreme disapproval, even within the Canadian cultural ideal of individual freedom. As a result, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation persists, despite the efforts of many gay activists and associated groups.

At the core of this persistence lies the profound ignorance of the public regarding homosexuality. Although homosexual behaviour has been traced as far back as ancient Greek and Roman times (Karlen, 1980), there is much public misconception about the identities, predispositions, and behaviour of homosexual people. As a result of this deep-rooted and widespread mythology, present society stigmatizes gays and lesbians as morally unworthy.

The individual's acceptance of his or her homosexuality is significantly influenced by this mythology, as adaptation to life as a homosexual is shaped by the community in which one lives. For gays and lesbians living in a heterosexual world, they must battle two combined forces: homophobia, also termed anti-homosexuality, and heterosexism, the belief that heterosexual people are to be regarded as superior to all others purely on the basis of their sexual orientation. These two entities are what constitute the hostility, hatred, discrimination, and fear that pervade the lives of gays and lesbians outside the gay community.

The feelings behind homophobia and heterosexism run deep in present society, and this knowledge must be painful indeed in coming to accept one's homosexuality. As long as homosexuality is seen as "symptomatic of an underlying moral failing and as involving deliberate choice" (Warren, 1980, p. 135), the route toward full recognition of all persons' rights, regardless of sexual orientation, seems far away indeed.

As the label of "homosexual" continues to be a social stigma, the police are upheld as social role models, to be respected and revered for the protection and concern they provide. The police are taken to represent all that is strong and good, loyal and honest, and above all, normal in a law-abiding citizen. The silent but strong public voice and the power of the police have formed an ideal police officer, one that is resistant to any alternative. First came the policewoman; now comes the gay policeman or the lesbian policewoman. Traditional conservatism is being challenged toward creating a new social role model of the police, one that includes a variety of persons.

It is worthwhile to note that many stereotypes of the police are held by the police themselves, and some of these are potentially conflicting with the notions of homosexual persons on the police force. One police officer from the Halifax Police Department who was questioned directly on this issue feels that gays and lesbians have no place in a position of public influence, much less one respon-

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sible for the protection of society. He believes that a police officer must be able to command respect in order to so protect, and that a homosexual person cannot command the respect, or even the attention, of the company at hand (this, he pointed

out, was the problem with female police officers as well). This veteran police officer of twenty years supports that a police officer must be concerned only with the matter at hand, and since "the thoughts of gays and lesbians are pervaded by sex

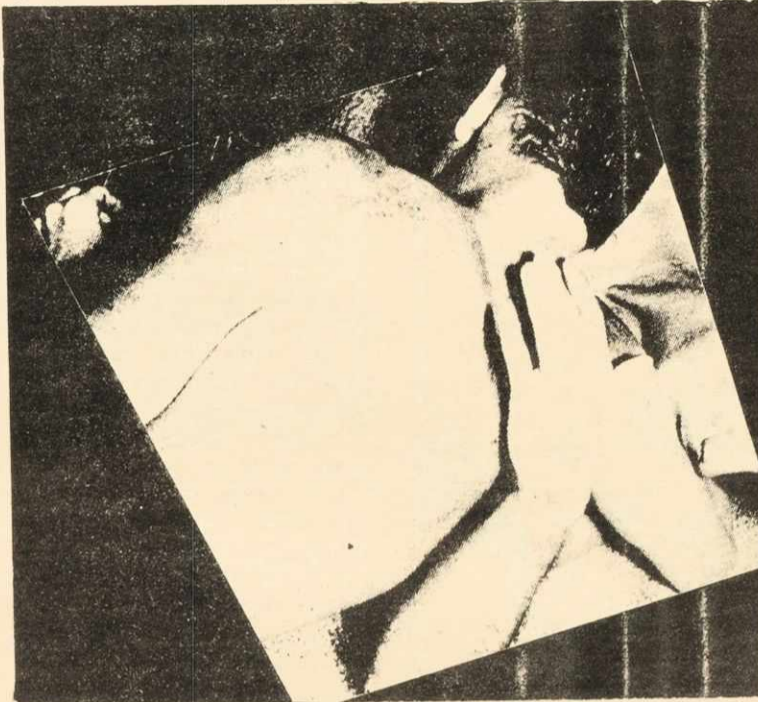


PHOTO: GILBERT PRIOSTE

Parents

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"The reactions my son gets in school are really negative. Only the traditional family model is taught in school, so it's hard to be different," says Karen.

"It's amazing how backward the schools are. They give the kids books that show the father shaving and going off to work and the mother staying in the kitchen."

Many people try to deter gay men and lesbians from being parents because of the alleged effect they'll have on the children's sexuality, an attitude that became clear last fall when a Saskatchewan social services minister announced that gay couples should not be allowed to adopt.

"What bothers judges and lawyers about gay parents is the supposed influence they'll have on the children's sexuality, but studies show that percentage-wise, their kids will turn out to be straight," says Stephen.

Mona Acker says children aren't really affected by their parents' sexuality, quoting research done between 1979 and 1981. The children brought up by lesbian mothers did not exhibit any differences in the psychological make-up or male-female behaviour than those living with a single heterosexual mother or a straight couple.

She notes that most gay people were brought up by heterosexual parents.

The greatest challenge facing gay parents is to teach their children to feel proud of their kind of family when others react negatively.

"The basic on-going problems I face as a lesbian mother are the homophobia and discrimination

Society's reactions to alternative families are usually more harmful to the children than the makeup of the family itself.

"Without negative feedback from the society, children will be quite comfortable with their parents' living arrangements," says Acker. "They'll only think it's a problem if someone tells them it's a problem."

Acker notes that twenty years ago, there was a stigma attached to living in a single-parent family.

"People would pity children for coming from a broken home even when the family was happy and well-adjusted. People told them there was a problem even I get from the rest of society," says Karen.

when there wasn't," she says.

Gay parents stress that honesty and a positive attitude

and sexual gratification", this is impossible. But above all, police officers must be trustworthy, and this police officer believes that one simply cannot trust a homosexual person with the young and impressionable mind of a child.

These stereotypes of the attributes and characteristics of police officers and of homosexual people are extreme and narrow, but are by no means held by all officers on the Halifax Police Force. When asked about their feelings on this issue raised most recently by Mr. Giffin, many did not share the aforementioned officer's conviction that "fags and dykes are scum; they are lowlife". Many were not opposed to a gay or lesbian officer on the police force as a colleague or as a partner. Despite these shocking admissions, however, the officer who is quoted here does believe that Mr. Giffin's remarks did carry the overall support of the Halifax Police Department, and that it will be a long time before homosexual persons will be welcome on any police force.

will do much to make their children feel comfortable with their family life.

"A child's knowledge of and ability to accept alternative lifestyles is greater than we think. It's the way you deal with them that affects them," says Stephen.

Karen has tried to counteract any negative attitudes her son may face by fostering a support network among her lesbian friends that make him accept and care for people regardless of their sexuality.

And for many gay parents, bringing up a child to be accepting and loving is the best they could ask for.

"Tolerance is a real big lesson that kids can learn if they are given an example. If nothing else, I've given my son that," says Karen.

dream poem: Gertrude Stein gives an interview to a woman from the BBC

the world has been too much defined

the experts
the enemy
assume that all things
have fixed properties
can be expressed
in terms of one another

lesbianism in relation to X
lesbianism in relation to Y
they reduce our literature to stock market quotations

the world has been too much mapped
even Chaos
is no longer Chaos
but a game sanctuary

we must create new words
or destroy the old ones

or there shall be nothing left to write in our memory
but a list of ingredients

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