

Providing a buffer to the heterosexual world, the sexist, rigidly conservative aspects of that world "out there" is a concern as the child grows. Lesbian parents when able appear to opt for alternative schools, using the public school system as a last resort. In alternative schools, many lifestyles, religions, races are represented. A child with lesbian or gay parents is no more different or strange than the rest. Single parents, mixed race parents, children of welfare mothers, children of the liberal wealthy all intermingle. Parents seek to create as safe and secure an environment as possible where their children can grow and experiment.

This is not to say there are no problems. Having "two mommies" can be a source either of pride or derision for a child. Or the lesbian or gay parent of a child discovers "sibling rivalry" rising between child and lover. And children do eventually discover they are somehow different. Parents prepare them for this perhaps by prefacing things with "most people" do such and so. In an unstable environment "differences" might cause difficulties but they can also become a source of strength. Children, particularly in high school, it seems, applaud their individualism: "Yeah, I'm weird. I'm always weird." Some children have generalized the differences and said, "Oh, yeah, that happens to everybody." Others consult with only a favored few and, to avoid conflict, admonish their parents "not to tell anybody."

And the children are successful or not. In third grade, they're up on stage with the rest of the children doing a song and dance routine. In middle school they're off to camp. In high school they're dating. At 18, off to college, a job, babies of their own.

Some of us, regardless of our own sexual preference, have children who are adamantly heterosexual. According to mainstream society, we've done a good job; we've disproved the myth that we recruit or create "homosexuals." But as parents, we pray our children will avoid some pitfalls of heterosexuality. We pray the girls won't pick young men who are beaters; but there are no guarantees. We pray our boys will skip lightly through that macho stuff; but again there are no guarantees. We encourage our girls to be strong, our boys to allow the softer side. Encourage, we can. But it remains their choice.

Some of our children have become lesbians or gay. One tries to avoid the temptation to live through them. These times we

live in now are so different. The role playing is reduced as a matter of choice. The societal mores aren't quite so stringent. The difficulties don't appear so insurmountable — in part, because of us.

"We've learned from our parents, older lesbians and gay men who serve as our mentors now. We can read books; we can see their lives. We have something to go on, they didn't. And that really makes it easier for us."

And there's divorce.

When you begin parenting as a couple it's assumed there will be two of you to raise a child, to counsel together, share the praise and the discipline. But sometimes that family circle must be broken, and for those determined to co-parent that can prove especially difficult. One couple who broke up continue to live within blocks of one another and the child they raise together spends time at each place with each parent. To maintain connections in the face of dis-connecting requires great strength and commitment. They are determined to continue to revolve around their child, and that necessitates many sacrifices. Separating, moving out of state is not a possibility in the foreseeable future; lovers must be understanding. As parents, they have major responsibilities still, to the child, to each other. Their way of dealing with divorce feels very different to them, not the usual heterosexual reaction.

"I think that our co-parenting after our breakup and the commitment we have to the child, and the way we've worked through it, is a lot because we're two women. I don't know all that many women couples that have done it or could do it, but I think it even more unlikely with a man and a woman."

"We never forget the responsibility of bringing up a child. It's not like giving over half your paycheck. It's more like giving over half your life. It's your time and energy and caring and relating."

And so, regarding parenting, we've come full circle: Decision-making responsibility for the children; dissolution. And advice by lesbian parents to those who are considering it?

"I would say don't do it if you think you're going to add something to your life, because you're not. Not for a long time. You're gonna replace everything else."

"And [become parents] only if you're willing to commit your whole self to it for a period of time. But for me, to have a baby was the best thing I ever did in my life."

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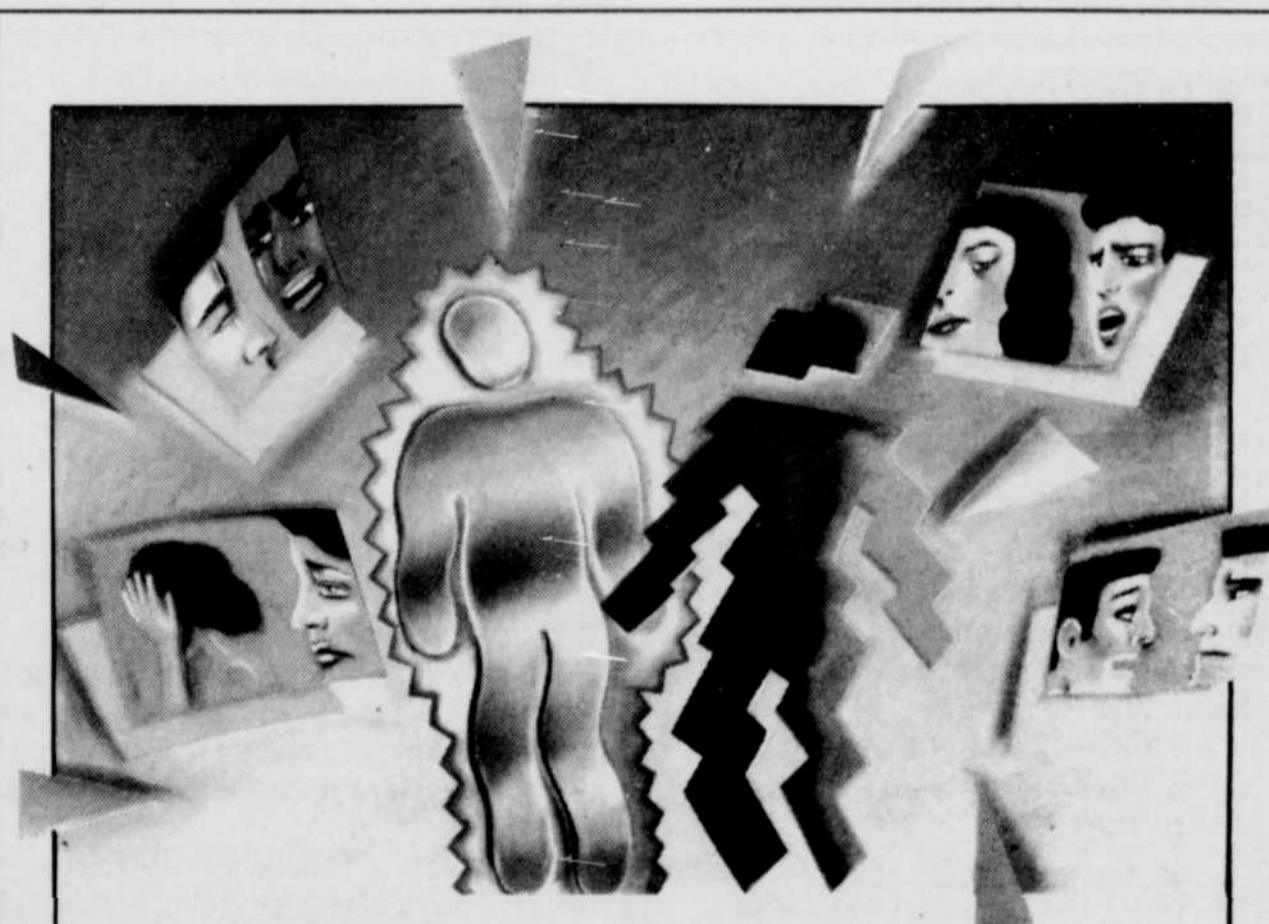
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