

mainstream media always focus on the more colorful bands of the queer spectrum and so promote stereotypes of gay men as either John Wayne Gacys or dithering irresponsible nellies and thereby strike fear of gay men into the heartland.

But these conservative assimilationists simply don't understand how stereotypes work in society. Keeping leather pants and feather boas out of the parades will do nothing to reduce stereotyping. For stereotypes are not inductions from skewed samples—generalizations that can be corrected and made scientific simply by randomizing the cases examined. Stereotypes are social creations that centrally serve to define and maintain a culture's conception of itself. Thus, stereotypes of gay men as sissies, nellies and limp-wristed queens prop up still-powerful sex-role expectations in the United States, while the stereotypes of gay men as sex-crazed maniacs, and especially as child molesters, serve to give the traditional family a false sheen of innocence. These stereotypes preach that the problems of the "American" family must be external rather than internal to it.

to be dignified without having dignity. Dignity is not buying into the other guy's values just because he's in power. Dignity is asserting that one's own values are worthy of consideration on a par with any other, including those of the dominant culture.

And don't be mistaken: Bigots cannot be appeased by denying queer experience. Indeed, they have capitalized on low-key sexual minority political campaigns and queer invisibility by claiming that there really is not much, if any, anti-gay discrimination in the U.S. anyway and, therefore, legal protections for sexual minorities are not needed. Low-key, faceless, queer-less campaigns simply play right into this rationalization, so popular now with neo-conservatives, who want to avoid sounding patently prejudicial.

So, for the sake of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender dignity and values, mainstream folk out there need to see real, live, breathing, justifiably angry queer people saying, "How dare you presume." Low-key campaigns simply leave the discussion of our issues to the opposition, who have been very clever at framing the debates and whose sound-



Dykes on bikes at the San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade

Because stereotypes are the products of a culture's vision of itself rather than of science gone bad, they are sustained by cultural means, say, by jokes and slang, that make no pretense of scientific accuracy and continue to be transmitted quite independently of "the facts." The only way to change social reality here is to get it to face moral reality, which includes dykes on bikes and snap queens in the bubbly, booming good of our commitment to the blessings of liberty.

To clean up parades in hopes of immediate political expedience is to deny queer experience and culture, and to sacrifice it to and for the values of others—

bites have an automatic grip on the still massive repository of cultural prejudices: "No Special Rights," "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." The world needs to see just how special we are, and needs to see Adam and Steve, perhaps bolstered by the possibility and protection of a lesbian and gay parade, holding hands and smooching publicly in order to show that, yes, they too are married in the eyes of God and their community.

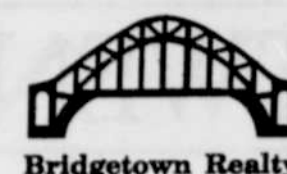
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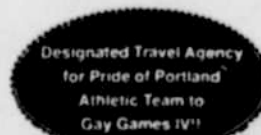
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