

= CBS Reports : The Homosexuals =

" The Homosexuals " is a 1967 episode of the documentary television series CBS Reports . The hour @-@ long broadcast featured a discussion of a number of topics related to homosexuality and homosexuals . Mike Wallace anchored the episode , which aired on March 7 , 1967 . Although this was the first network documentary dealing with the topic of homosexuality , it was not the first televised in the United States . That was The Rejected , produced and aired in 1961 on KQED , a public television station in San Francisco .

Three years in the making , The Homosexuals went through two producers and multiple revisions . The episode included interviews with several gay men , psychiatrists , legal experts and cultural critics , interspersed with footage of a gay bar and a police sex sting . The Homosexuals garnered mixed critical response . The network received praise from some quarters and criticism from others for even airing the program .

= = Production = =

The program was initially proposed in 1964 . The first version was produced by William Peters , with production supervised by executive producer Fred W. Friendly . Upon accepting the assignment , Peters began his research by reading books and consulting with experts in the field . Peters suggested that the program focus exclusively on gay men and that he cover lesbians in a second program , and Friendly agreed . Principal filming took place starting in the fall of 1964 and continued through early 1965 . Peters interviewed men in San Francisco , Philadelphia , Charlotte and New York City , accumulating 30 hours of footage . The identities of several of the men were obscured in some fashion , either in shadow or , in one instance , behind a large potted palm tree . Also interviewed were psychiatrist Charles Socarides , who strongly advocated the position that homosexuality is a mental disorder , and fellow psychiatrist Irving Bieber , who shared Socarides ' opinion of homosexuality as pathology . Interspersed with these interview segments was footage , described as being in the cinéma vérité style , of the inside of a gay bar along with shots of hustlers working a street corner and a teenager being arrested in a public sex sting .

After assembling a rough cut , Peters approached Mike Wallace to anchor the hour . Wallace was initially reluctant but after viewing the program enthusiastically agreed . Despite his enthusiasm , Wallace 's commentary disparaged homosexuals .

The average homosexual , if there be such , is promiscuous . He is not interested or capable of a lasting relationship like that of a heterosexual marriage . His sex life , his love life , consists of a series of one ? chance encounters at the clubs and bars he inhabits . And even on the streets of the city ? the pick @-@ up , the one night stand , these are characteristics of the homosexual relationship .

Friendly generally approved of the first version but believed that it was necessary to include information on same @-@ sex sexual practices . When those practices were explained to him , however , he changed his mind . While the documentary was still in production , Friendly was promoted to the presidency of CBS News but left soon after over a disagreement over the network 's coverage of the Vietnam War . He was replaced by Richard S. Salant , who was known for his cost @-@ consciousness , which put the future of the documentary and the CBS Reports series in question .

Salant did try to kill the documentary , but stories about it began appearing in the trade press , putting CBS into a potentially embarrassing situation were it not to air . In mid @-@ 1965 , Salant gave Peters the go @-@ ahead to complete the episode . Peters worked with the New York chapter of the Mattachine Society to secure interviews with two additional gay subjects , Lars Larson and Jack Nichols , both of whom were fully accepting of their sexuality . Nichols later recalled his encounter with Wallace :

[ A ] fter we finished and the camera was turned off , Mike Wallace sat down with me and talked for about half an hour . He said , " You know , you answered all of my questions capably , but I have a feeling that you don 't really believe that homosexuality is as acceptable as you make it sound . " I

asked him why he would say that . " Because , " he said , " in your heart I think you know it 's wrong . " It was infuriating . I told him I thought being gay was just fine , but that in his heart he thought it was wrong .

Peters added more footage of psychiatrists espousing that model along with scenes from the 1965 convention of the East Coast Homophile Organizations . CBS gave final approval to " The Homosexuals " and scheduled it to air in the spring of 1966 .

Salant later pulled the episode from the schedule and assigned producer Harry Morgan to re @-@ edit it . According to Wallace , Salant found the piece sensationalistic ; however , C. A. Tripp , a psychologist who had put CBS in touch with his patient Larson , claimed that Salant felt the piece was pro @-@ homosexuality . Morgan scrapped all but about 10 minutes of Peters ' final cut . CBS felt that the self @-@ accepting gay men made too favorable of an impression , so Morgan edited two of the interviews to make the men seem unhappier . According to Wallace , no sponsor would buy time during the episode because of the taboo nature of the subject matter . Commercial spots were filled by public service announcements for the Peace Corps and the Internal Revenue Service .

= = Overview = =

The first interview subject was a gay man , Lars Larson , who appeared undisguised and who spoke positively about his sexuality . Following his interview , Wallace gave the results of a CBS News poll that found that Americans considered homosexuality more harmful to the United States than adultery , abortion or prostitution , that two @-@ thirds of Americans described their reaction to homosexuality as " disgust , discomfort or fear " and that one in ten described their reaction as " hatred " . Just ten percent believed homosexuality was a crime but the majority still believed it should be criminally sanctioned .

Following the poll , another gay man was interviewed from his psychiatrist 's couch with his face obscured by shadow . He described coming out to his family , saying they treated him " like some wounded animal they were going to send to the vet . " Following this man was another unobscured subject Jack Nichols ( who had taken on the pseudonym " Warren Adkins " for the programme ) , co @-@ founder of the Washington , D.C. branch of the Mattachine Society . He contrasted the comments of the previous subject , saying that he had come out to his family at age 14 and , far from being treated like a sick animal , they treated him with warmth and understanding .

After remarks from Socarides advocating the disease model of homosexuality , Wallace discussed the legal aspects of homosexuality , noting that England was preparing to de @-@ criminalize homosexual acts . Federal judge James Braxton Craven , Jr. from North Carolina advocated a re @-@ evaluation of United States law , commenting , " Is it not time to redraft a criminal statute first enacted in 1533 ? " Following footage of Nichols and Mattachine D.C. co @-@ founder Frank Kameny picketing Independence Hall and the State Department , Kameny , under his real name , advocated a re @-@ examination of federal law that placed a blanket ban on known homosexuals receiving security clearances .

Next , Albert Goldman ( then an English professor at Columbia University ) and author and playwright Gore Vidal debated homosexuality , with an emphasis on the presence of homosexuals in the creative arts . Goldman asserted that homosexuality " is just one of a number of ... things all tending toward the subversion , toward the final erosion , of our cultural values . " Vidal , asserting that homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality , countered by saying " The United States is living out some mad Protestant nineteenth @-@ century dream of human behavior .... I think the so @-@ called breaking of the moral fiber of this country is one of the healthiest things that 's begun to happen . "

Wallace closed with an interview with a gay man , with a wife and two children , who claimed that the narcissism of gay men made it impossible for two men to form a long @-@ term loving relationship . Wrapping up the hour , Wallace concluded :

The dilemma of the homosexual : told by the medical profession he is sick ; by the law that he 's a criminal ; shunned by employers ; rejected by heterosexual society . Incapable of a fulfilling

relationship with a woman , or for that matter with a man . At the center of his life he remains anonymous . A displaced person . An outsider .

Also discussed were religious attitudes toward homosexuality and the Boise homosexuality scandal , a sweeping investigation of a supposed " homosexual underground " in Boise , Idaho in 1955 .

= = Critical reaction = =

Critical response of the time to the program was mixed . The New York Times , The Washington Star , and the Chicago Daily News praised CBS for addressing the subject . George Gent of the Times , however , commented on the anti @-@ gay bias of the show , noting that it would " have been better to give the minority viewpoint that homosexuals are just as normal as anyone else a chance to speak for itself . " The Chicago Tribune titled its review " TV No Spot to Unload Garbage " and attacked CBS for presenting such material to young and impressionable viewers .

More recent critical attention to " The Homosexuals " has also been mixed , trending to the negative . In one corner , anchor Mike Wallace is praised for debunking negative stereotypes about gay men . In the other , Wallace 's commentary is condemned as " a string of gross generalizations and negative stereotypes [ that ] sounds as if it was scripted by Rev. Jerry Falwell . " In noting that approximately 20 % of television viewers in the United States saw the program , LGBT activist Wayne Besen labels the broadcast " the single most destructive hour of antigay propaganda in our nation 's history . " He says that " [ ' The Homosexuals ' ] not only had a devastating effect on public opinion but also was a nuclear bomb dropped on the psyches of gay and lesbian Americans , who , prior to this show , had never been represented as a group on national television . "

= = Participants ' response and personal consequences = =

Lars Larson , the first interview subject , was infuriated after seeing the finished program . He had been led to believe that the episode would present a far more positive picture of American gay life . Larson , whose interview had been altered to make him seem less happy , filed a formal fraud complaint and withdrew his release . " They had some rather nasty , angry anti @-@ gay people on there who were treated as professionals , " he said . " I had no problem with Harry Morgan or Mike Wallace because they were thorough . But obviously others in the decision @-@ making process were truly upset with homosexuality . They saw it as a threat to the human race and were out to kill as best they could . " Jack Nichols was fired from his job as a hotel sales manager the day after the program aired .

For his part , anchor Mike Wallace came to regret his participation in the episode . " I should have known better , " he said in 1992 . Speaking in 1996 , Wallace stated , " That is ? God help us ? what our understanding was of the homosexual lifestyle a mere twenty @-@ five years ago because nobody was out of the closet and because that 's what we heard from doctors ? that 's what Socarides told us , it was a matter of shame . " However , Wallace was at the time of broadcast close friends with noted designer James Amster ( creator of the landmark Amster Yard courtyard in New York City ) and Amster 's male long @-@ term companion , men whom Wallace later described as " a wonderful old married couple " and " [ b ] oth people that [ he ] admired " . Despite this personal knowledge , Wallace relied on the American Psychiatric Association 's categorization of homosexuality as a mental illness rather than his own experience in creating the episode . As recently as 1995 , Wallace told an interviewer that he believed homosexuals could change their orientation if they really wanted to .