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'Improper Conduct': an anti-Castro documentary

By ERNEST LEOGRANDE

★ ★ ½★

IMPROPER CONDUCT. Directed by Nestor Almendros and Oriol Jimenez Leal. At Cinema Studio. Running time: 1 hour, 57 minutes. No rating.

"Improper Conduct" is an anti-Castro documentary that uses as its peg the mistreatment and suppression of homosexuals in Cuba, although the movie actually is about any nonconformist in that country, anyone whose activities might provoke retaliation for running counter to government policy.

The movie has met some criticism for being limited and dated in its views. Its critics say that the Cuban situation has alleviated and that what the movie describes now is history. For anyone without a firsthand, unrestricted view of Cuba today, corroboration of this argument has to be taken on some degree of faith, just as the movie itself asks to be taken.

As it stands, "Improper Conduct" can be viewed as a general description of what can happen in any situation where conformity is dictated as a way of preserving order. The title refers to what speakers in the movie say is a Cuban term created to justify the arrest of those who violated standards of propriety by having hair too long, wearing clothes considered flamboyant or favoring non-Cuban pop music. Even being a writer, they say, could make a person suspect because it's not a "manly" occupation and, in some cases, speakers claim, people actually were taken into custody on trumped-up charges because someone wanted their living quarters. (Anybody familiar with New York City's housing shortage will find this accusation not too hard to believe.)