

'Improper Conduct' documents persecution in Cuba

By WILLIAM WOLF
Gannett News Service
There have been many accounts of the persecution of dissidents in the Cuba of Fidel Castro.

Now two exiled Cubans prominent in the world of film have made a singing, thought-provoking, and often deeply moving documentary based on the experiences described by fellow exiles.

"Improper Conduct," with an English narration, has been filmed by Nestor Almendros, one of the world's great cinematographers ("Kramer vs. Kramer," "Sophie's Choice"), and Orlando Jimenez Leal, who co-directed the charming, funny film "El

Super," about Cubans living in New York. Both men have been living outside their native country since 1962.

Their film incorporates researched footage, but relies primarily on the interview testimony of those who experienced persecution in Castro's jails or prison camps, or in some way were cruelly treated. The film is passionately one-sided, and the words of those who tell of their plights are meant to be taken as gospel.

What's particularly unusual about "Improper Conduct" is that political persecution is only a fraction of the account. There is heavy concern with Cuba's mistreatment of homosexuals,

who, if the reports are accurate, at various stages of Cuba's revolutionary development have been rounded up and imprisoned.

The film charges that in addition to the usual macho attitudes on the island, the current regime has fostered an extra measure of scorn for homosexuals, especially those who are outwardly effeminate. One witness tells of a widespread program designed to convert gays into heterosexuals. He says they were subjected to reprogramming treatments by being tortured at the sight of photographs of homosexuality but

rewarded if they responded to pictures of nude women.

It didn't take long for some men to outwit their captors. They feigned signs of disgust at their customary inclinations, and "oohed" and "aahed" and acted as macho as they could at the sight of the naked women. There is humor in the way the story is recounted, but the de-meaning persecution comes through poignantly.

Unable to shoot in Cuba, the filmmakers nevertheless include footage of Castro countering the claims of their participants, who rebut his protestations. Also in-

cluded are comments by American novelist and critic Susan Sontag. A good portion of the interviewing has been done in Paris.

The film is lax in not including additional perspective, including the fortress mentality in Cuba that inevitably resulted from the attempted Bay of Pigs invasion to overthrow Castro. But whatever justification Castro might

muster for not letting political opponents get in the position of being able to tumble him, what possible excuse is there for victimizing homosexuals?

Almendros and Leal grab our attention and hold it by enabling us to hear from a broad range of individuals, whether famous or unknown, each of whom can say convincingly, "I was there."

**Busy Bellies
Belly-Grams**

"Shake up" your next



Directors unhappy with contract talks