

Essentially, it was the green team vs. the purple team.

The greens sat on the right side of the room, and the purples were on the left. Television cameras surrounded the playing field.

A 25-foot gap divided the two sides. The space was where the battle—or the peacemaking—could have gone on.

But the teams mostly stayed in their chairs. A few got up from their seats and paced around the room.

And a few left the game altogether. "This is out of hand," one of the greens said as he stomped out of the building and into the parking lot.

But this was no game—not even a competition. The sponsor, the Global Process Institute, billed the event as "process work."

The issue was the Oregon Citizens Alliance's Measure 9. Its supporters wore big green buttons; the opposition was adorned with purple ones.

More than 200 people attended the forum Oct. 2 at the Portland Conference Center. The intent was to bring people with opposing views together to listen to one another, build community and possibly even foster understanding.

In videotapes of other forums on sexism and homophobia reviewed by *Just Out*, participants got down on the floor and did their sharing. Individuals might have disagreed with one another, but they got up close and personal.

Members of opposing viewpoints sometimes even hugged each other. A few cried together.

But this is Oregon. The long history of disdain between the sides of this ongoing issue predictably would preclude serious listening—much less hugging and crying.

Measure 9 is the OCA's fourth serious attempt to codify sexual orientation in recent years. Some say these efforts have banded the gay community

PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

Measure 9 forum brings people together but drives some away

by Jonathan Kipp

together; others say they have sucked the energy and spirit from thousands of people.

Both sides were generally toned down at first. In fact, almost half of the two-hour process was relatively benign.

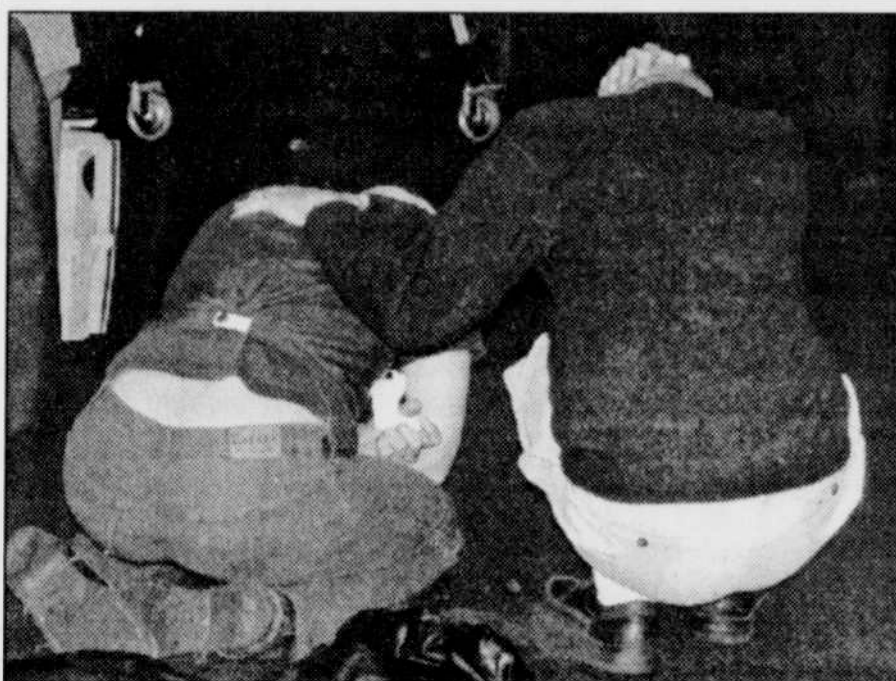
Barry Williams, OCA Lane County director, opened the dialogue. He was polite and avoided discussing religion.

"I'm here because I think this kind of discussion is worthwhile," Williams said. "It is better than name calling."

Jaime Balboa, Basic Rights Oregon executive director, didn't mince words or even attempt to warm up to his opponents. "Measure 9 is dangerous for schools and dangerous for kids," he said.

Balboa said it would put HIV and AIDS education at risk, a consequence OCA supporters now deny. "If you don't believe me, look at their Web page," he said.

The heat got turned up when Cleveland High teacher Jose Salano addressed the crowd. He has been outspoken in the media about his disdain for the Portland Public



The heated exchange becomes too much for one anguished participant to take

Schools sexual orientation policy.

He thinks the district is keeping scientific evidence from students that homosexuality can be changed. "You're not born homosexual!" said Salano, who at one point got so upset he left the forum before being coaxed back by one of the institute's volunteers.

Dick Weller agreed. Holding a homemade "Yes on 9" sign on his lap, he delivered an impassioned oratory about the gay lifestyle he left behind.

Weller distributed copies of his story to the

crowd, offering advice on how others can escape homosexuality. "We don't call it a sexual orientation; we call it a sex choice," he said.

Mitch, a parent of four with his female partner, stood up and told his story. "I'm a human being. I'm bisexual. So what?" he said.

The greens talked of pedophilia, AIDS, God, the Bible—and protecting kids. The purple folks talked of pain, freedom, fairness—and protecting kids.

John Cox said his gay father has AIDS. He scoffs at the idea that homosexuality means you're at the highest risk.

"Orientation has nothing to do with it," exclaimed Cox, an AIDS educator. All kids are at risk now, he told the crowd.

"It's all about homosexual sodomy," said one man, whose arguments were based on the Bible. "Show me where Jesus Christ said that," a woman rebutted.

The "processing" ultimately seemed to be business as usual. But at least one voice was heard more than the others.

Dana, a 12-year-old girl, stole the show when she stood in the front row and told of her experience in school. She had everyone's attention.

"Not once in the past, at school, never have I heard one of my teachers promoting homosexuality," Dana said. "There is no promotion of homosexuality."

If listening—just once—was the goal, the forum was a huge success. **JN**

Bigot Busters and the Youth Collaboration Project are sponsoring a NO ON 9 YOUTH RALLY 1 p.m. Oct. 7 in Salem. Participants will gather at the Peace Plaza near City Hall and march to the Capitol. Call 503-399-8235 or 503-585-2767 or e-mail zchani@hotmail.com for details.

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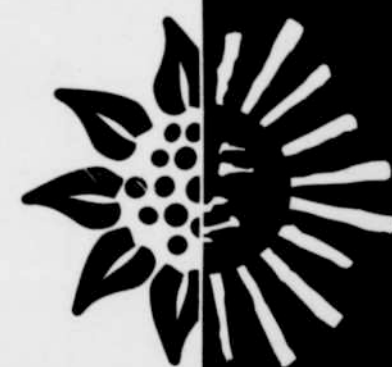
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