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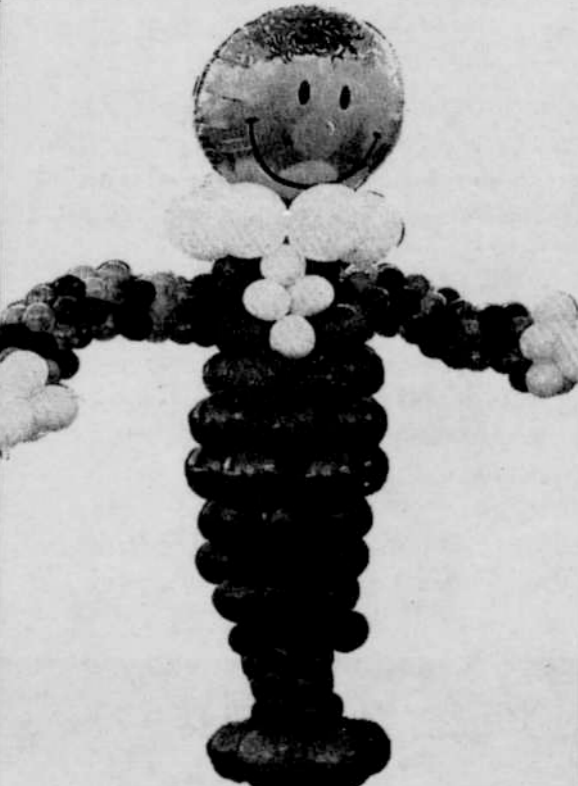
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## Speak Out

### Sweet charity?

TO THE EDITOR:

The Salvation Army's recent decision to rescind health coverage to domestic partners of its employees is bad enough, but the reason behind it is even worse. The group made the change only two weeks after it decided to offer the benefits, caving in to pressure from anti-gay religious organizations that used appallingly disrespectful and homophobic language in their appeal.

For example, the American Family Association urged its members to call the Salvation Army and "express your shock that they would extend health benefits to the sex partners of its homosexual employees and thus support unbiblical changes in family structure rather than upholding the New Testament definition of family." Additional pressure from Focus on the Family and Concerned Women for America proved too much for the group.

Of course, your memory doesn't need to be too long to remember the Salvation Army just tried

cutting a deal with the Bush administration to endorse the faith-based initiative on the condition that it could continue to discriminate against sexual minorities. It's time we began to recognize that this group is more than a charity—it's an organization dedicated to pushing a political agenda that uses religion to justify discrimination.

For those who need further proof, consider this statement made by the Salvation Army in reversing its decision: "We deeply regret the perception that the Commissioners' Conference surrendered any biblical principles in making the original decision.... I assure you, again, that the Salvation Army has not changed its position on marriage and the family, homosexuality or other position statements, nor have we changed any of our basic doctrines or moral positions.... We will not sign any government contract or any other funding contracts that contain domestic partner benefit requirements."

Our community should be outraged that while religious conservatives are calling for "national unity," there is no pretense that this unity includes all of us. In this time of national crisis, they have

## Just Asking

*Today's youth have reclaimed the epithet "queer" as a badge of distinction. How does it make you feel when Just Out uses the term? Proud or pained?*

The adoption of the word "queer" within the past decade by elements of the community's self-appointed cultural elite is a severe slap in the face to the generations of both men and women who struggled for decades to banish the term from polite discourse in favor of "gay" and "lesbian." We thus have negated this part of our history.

"Queer" obviously has not been "reclaimed" (a more accurate term would be "claimed") because it is still a vicious, nasty epithet when used by straights. You wouldn't want to turn on the television news and hear Dan Rather say, "More than 1,000 queers marched in San Francisco today," would you? Of course not. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation would be all over him and CBS for such an outrageous affront, and rightly so.

The word has a cold, ugly sound and an even uglier history. It's worse even than "faggot," which at least has to its dubious credit the fact that gay men long have used it among themselves (albeit in an ironic, gallows-humor fashion that originated during a time of great repression).

Such is not the case for "queer," which is why it never can be "reclaimed"—to reclaim something means to take it back from someone else who has appropriated it wrongfully. "Queer" was never a gay-friendly word, so the very idea of "reclaiming" it is absurd.

I always have suspected that the use of "queer" as an identity marker by members of the community is an expression of self-loathing (quite common to sexual minority youth, alas). My dictionary defines "queer" as "differing from what is expected or normal." Now, if you use this word to describe yourself or the community, what are you saying? That you, and we, are not normal, not fully human?

Don't misunderstand me: You have an unalienable right to describe yourself with whatever words you wish, and I will defend your right to do so. But you do not have the right to impose your nomenclature presumptively upon an entire community, as *Just Out* and so many other ostensibly gay and lesbian cultural spokespeople (who would have considered such an idea unspeakably abhorrent a mere 15 years

ago) have done. If you do, you inevitably will leave some of us out in the cold.

As a proud gay man, I never will accept that I am "queer." I urge you not to, either.

DANIEL L. STEINER  
Portland

...

I believe that using a word that previously had been used to inflict pain among the people in our community as a source of strength is honorable. When we take away the words used as swords against us, the less we will need the armor and shields of the past. While they always can find something to use against us, we always can grow stronger from it.

NICHOLAS CHURCH  
Portland

# QUEER

...

Use of the word "queer" seems to be a generation thing—kind of goes along with tattoos, piercings and Doc Martens. I am happy to see "queer" youth establish an identity different from their elders, much the same way generations have been doing for centuries. It makes me smile and gives me an opportunity to reminisce about the things I did to separate myself from my elders: listening to rock 'n' roll, wearing tight pants, haircut in a DA and using the language of my peers.

My only request is that these same queer youth who are so outspoken about what they want to be called respect my use of the term "lesbian" to describe myself. When these youth hear the word, you almost can see them shudder. I suppose their intolerance of a term that I find fits me is understandable.

Ah, youth. When they are 60, they will get

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