

Speak Out

just asking *As Multnomah County acknowledges National LGBT Health Awareness Week, what do you feel is the greatest health risk facing the sexual minorities community? HIV/AIDS? Smoking? Obesity? Compulsive behaviors? Breast cancer? Others?*

I feel the greatest health risk right now is a lack of accurate information about STDs. There's lots of constantly changing, contradictory information about things such as herpes I and II, HPV, syphilis, chlamydia, etc. that are not in all cases as deadly as HIV but are much more easily spread and can compromise one's immune systems so it's easier to compound health problems and be susceptible to things like HIV, pneumonia, mono, PID and so on.

It can be difficult to get clinics to test for, or even talk about, all of these health risks. It can be prohibitively expensive to test for herpes, for example, which the CDC is saying is now at epidemic levels. How are we to stay safe in our dating lives when it is so difficult to get the information we need for safer sex to really be practiced effectively?

SERENA BLOSSOM APPEL
Portland

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This problem is not just an issue of sexual minorities but of all people. There was a time when we paid more attention to health concerns, but with improvements in medicine has come apathy and indifference in the way we handle our lives. I hope the trend changes, but not until awareness returns.

MICHEIL MACCUTCHEON
Dover, N.H.

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As a physician and a member of the gay community, the greatest health risk I see is the misuse of alcohol. Alcohol abuse leads to every health risk mentioned: breast cancer, insulin resistance and obesity, OCD, increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases due to poor choices made while under the influence and, although alcohol use doesn't

lead to smoking, they often go hand in hand.

Historically, gay bars have been a safe place for queers to meet and socialize in the evening. In small and/or conservative towns, bars are often the only place to explore one's sexuality and come out. Many gays and lesbians misuse alcohol while struggling with acceptance of their sexuality, and often later it just becomes a habit.

I see this as a prevalent problem in our community that many don't care to discuss. It is difficult to bring the topic up without being perceived as self-righteous or biased.

I hear stories of gays and lesbians deciding to "cut down" on their drinking to improve their health and find they lack support from friends or lovers. I won't pretend to have any answers, and although I have many suggestions, today I merely want to raise awareness of this issue. Thank you.

MARIANNE MARCHESI
Portland

just weren't choosing to be straight, that all it took was some will power? The truth is you can be fat and fit and thin and unhealthy, but everyone is different and everyone has a different way that works for them.

The fact that Davis felt the need to push her plan—actually, she gave little advice; it was more like a little bragging and some scolding—and try to "save" her readers makes me question her whole publication and where it is coming from. I will choose not to pick up another copy of *Just Out*.

KRISSY DURDEN
Portland

Reality bites

TO THE EDITOR:

As an admitted reality TV junkie, I tuned in to watch *Married by America* with the same anticipation of guilty pleasure that I felt when watching *The Bachelor* and *Joe Millionaire*. But by the end of the first episode, despite my usual irreverence when it comes to popular culture, I was beside myself with anger.

For those who have managed to miss this latest addition to the reality canon, *Married by America* features people who have agreed to allow the viewing audience to select the person they will marry. Unlike other popular dating shows, this series culminates with actual marriages and wedding gifts (including \$100K and a half-million-dollar home).

Now don't get me wrong—I have nothing against arranged marriages. My problem is this: Marrying couples who've never even met is a spectator sport that attracts millions of viewers, when marriage is a privilege that is denied to so many couples who deserve it, just because they are two women or two men.

Same-gender couples are denied the right to marry in every state in this country and in almost every country in the world. We can register as domestic partners in a few municipalities and receive a civil union certificate in Vermont, but these relationships are not recognized outside their place of origin.

As a result, custody of our children and our right to hospital visitation and survivor's rights are in jeopardy or outright denied. Those who will be *Married by America* will instantly receive



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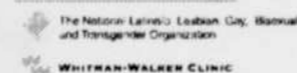
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next issue *As the first bombs fall onto Iraq, what steps will you be taking to show either your protest of, or support for, this war? How do you see the conflict affecting you directly? Respond at www.justout.com. (Don't forget to include your name, city and daytime telephone number.)*

more legal rights than the longest-term gay couples, even those who have raised children together.

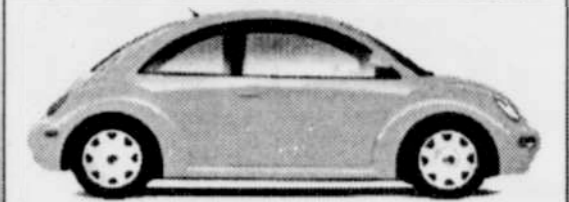
When we point out this injustice, we are told marriage is a sacred institution reserved for a man and a woman. I have been an elected official empowered to perform weddings, and as such, I had the opportunity to get to know many engaged couples.

Most of the couples I met were committed and in love, but others were marrying because they were going to have a baby or for health insurance or even, I suspected more than once, for a green card. I have some funny stories about some of these couples—funny, that is, until you consider that no two men or two women can marry, regardless of the depth of their love or the length of their commitment.

As a *Married by America* viewer, I am entitled to vote for my choice of spouse for the contestants. Instead, I'll vote this way: for the right to marry for any couple who have demonstrated their love and commitment to each other, regardless of their gender. For individuals who

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