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Gay Pride Day
Sunday, June 17, 2007
4:00pm & 7:00pm
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Co-directed by Jan Haaken & Wendy Kohn
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The Last Word

Let's end this confusion once and for all

Portland Pride is our annual excuse to come out and play, showing the world what it means to be a member of the community.

But as we celebrate the weekend together as one, isn't it sad that we can't agree on what to call this community?

Back in the day, we were lumped together as "homosexuals," which the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation calls "a word whose clinical history and pejorative connotations are routinely exploited by anti-gay extremists to suggest that lesbians and gay men are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered." Zap.

Next up was "gay," which served as an umbrella term until "lesbian," "bisexual," "transgender," "transsexual," "queer," "questioning," "intersex" and many other groups demanded attention. This led to where we are today, with a slew of unpleasant options that seem to satisfy nobody.

The ever-growing alphabet soup of "GLBT TQQI" is a mouthful, and it doesn't translate to the general population—precisely the folks we need to reach. "Queer" is my preferred term because it's short and all-inclusive, but it often offends an older segment of, um, queers. "Sexual minorities community," meanwhile, sounds like one of those retro euphemisms like "height challenged."

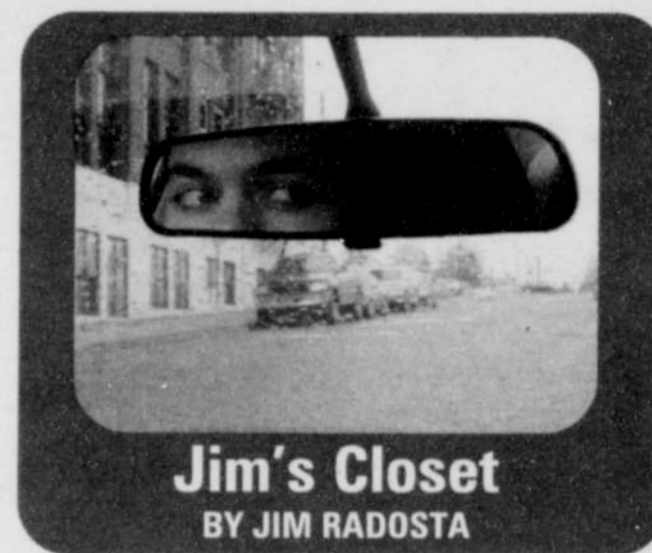
Portland's fledgling community center is dealing with the conundrum, too. It announced June 4 that, after much deliberation, it has officially settled on a name: "The answer, we've found, is to use the most unique letter in the alphabet, Q, and let people define it as they see fit: questioning, queer, quick, quirky. There isn't a name that succinctly encompasses our community. And we all define differently. Our language doesn't offer a word, but allowing ourselves to claim it ourselves, well, that's a little different. And a lot more empowering."

Well said. But I couldn't help wondering if we could create a new word that would encompass all of the aforementioned folks, along with a few other identities that deserve recognition: "allies," "gender-queer," "same gender loving" (a term popular among African-American men), "two-spirited" (a term for gender-variant Native Americans) and "men who have sex with men" (a term widely used in STD prevention circles), plus let's throw in "unstraight," "effeminate" and "omnisexual" individuals, just to make sure we've covered everyone.

That leaves us with GLBTTQIAGSGLT MSMUEO. Ever the puzzle hound, I decided to eliminate all of the duplicate letters and rearrange the order until I came up with something catchy. Ergo, I propose that we come together henceforth as the **BIG TOE QUALMS** community. Well, at least the self-loathing foot fetishists might dig it.

Now that we've negotiated a name for our clan, we need a word for our long-term relationships. Of course, that term should be "marriage," but it comes with so much baggage.

The thrilling Massachusetts-based film *Saving Marriage*, a crowd favorite at the recently wrapped QDOC festival, features laughable comments from straight bigots who are willing to let same-sex couples have all of the rights of marriage, but not



the word itself. Massachusetts Family Institute president Kris Mineau even confesses that sharing the word with homos will diminish his stature as a husband and father. (If one word can destroy a family, they must be holding on by a thread to begin with.)

Here in Oregon, we were all set to support the compromise of "civil unions," because voters banned same-sex marriage in 2004. But in April, House Bill 2007 was switched to "domestic partnerships" based on the fear that we need a more voter-friendly term in case our enemies gather enough signatures for a referendum next year.

"People are familiar with the term. They know what it means," said lesbian state Rep. Tina Kotek, D-Portland, who urged the House Committee on Elections, Ethics and Rules to make the change.

Willamette Week columnist Byron Beck was outraged and named Kotek as "Rogue of the Week," writing, "They succumbed to poll-driven pressure to change language in HB 2007 that, in our minds, was just fine the way it was."

The other side of the aisle wasn't pleased, either. State Rep. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, sniffed, "You can call butter spinach, but it is still, in my opinion, marriage by another name."

Me? If it'll get the Bible bangers off our backs, let's just mash up "gay marriage" and henceforth refer to it as **garriage**. Anyone?

Finally, wouldn't it be great if we could figure out the right word for our significant others? It would save so much headache.

You could use "partner," but that often gets mistaken for a relationship that's strictly business. You could use "lover," but that often gets mistaken for an illicit affair. Many prefer "spouse," and some even are staking claim to the hetero labels "husband" or "wife."

I encountered the dilemma directly a few years ago at a David Sedaris reading. During the Q & A, I asked the humorist if he and his "partner" were planning on getting hitched under France's civil union law. He gently corrected me that Hugh Hamrick is his "boyfriend," adding that he was mad at *The New York Times* for using the P word against his wishes.

Later when Sedaris was chatting with fans lined up for the book signing, I apologized to him for my verbal gaffe. Without missing a beat, he scrawled on the title page: "To Jim: Partner indeed. The word is **cocksucker**." **10**

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.

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