

✓ GAYS

Queer &

proud of it



But not all agree about using the word

By TOM LONG
Sentinel staff writer

EARL JACKSON JR. is gay. Magdalena Zschokke is lesbian.

They're both queer.

Over the past few years the word "queer," once commonly used to insult people attracted to members of their same sex, has been taken up as a rallying cry by a younger generation of gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Instead of ducking the word, they have embraced it, and are using the term as an umbrella

beneath which all sexual minorities can stand.

"The word 'queer' really has a lot to do with a new sense of gay nationalism," said Jackson, an assistant professor of literature at UC Santa

Cruz's Kresge College. "It's a means of empowerment that we take one of the words that we

"We don't want to be your next door neighbors, we don't want the freedom not just to be hassled. We want a whole lot more," said Schaller. "There's nothing disrespectful in that; it's just we're moving further."

There are some pragmatic aspects to the term.

"To say we're queer is not only a lot easier, but also takes a lot less space on a T-shirt than gay-lesbian-bisexual," said Marc Rappaport, a member of the activist group Queer Nation. "It's also a lot easier to rhyme with."

'It's sort of a catch phrase for the new wave of the gay movement that doesn't want to be the establishment.'

— Merrie Schaller,
Lesbian Gay Community Center

MANY OUTSIDE the gay-lesbian-bisexual commu-

For gays like Earl Jackson Jr., left, and lesbians like Magdalena Zschokke, the word 'queer' serves as an umbrella for sexual minorities; for others, it's an uncomfortable word.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

nationalism," said Jackson, an assistant professor of literature at UC Santa Cruz's Kresge College. "It's a means of empowerment that we take one of the words that was used to degrade us and give it value."

"I think it fills the need to describe a community that sees itself as more than just lesbians and gay men," said Linda Hooper, who edits a newsletter for the Lesbian Gay Community Center. "It describes the broader minority sexual community."

"It's sort of a catch phrase for the new wave of the gay movement that doesn't want to be the establishment," said Merrie Schaller, a board member of the center.

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MANY OUTSIDE the gay-lesbian-bisexual community first became aware of the integration of the word 'queer' through headlines generated by Queer Nation. Queer Nation, according to Rappaport, was formed a few years back in New York City when more radical members of ACT-UP, a group battling for rights for people with AIDS, wanted to expand their activism beyond the AIDS front. Since then, members have taken to staging events that can outrage heterosexuals — such as a kiss-in at the Capitola Mall last year.

Please see 'QUEER' — D2

'Gay, dyke, breeder' — what do they really mean?

By TOM LONG
Sentinel staff writer

JUST BECAUSE one person refers to another as "queer" doesn't mean you should.

It's all a matter of context, of course; one person's term of endearment may be another's insult. And often the person on the receiving end of the term isn't sure of the speaker's intent.

The following is a glossary of terms commonly used to describe people in the gay-lesbian-bisexual community, along with comments from people within the local community. As with all things sexual-political, handle with care.

● **Gay** — Used primarily to describe homosexual men, although sometimes used to refer to homosexual women.

- **Lesbian** — A homosexual woman.
- **Bisexual** — A person sexually attracted to people of both genders.
- **Queer** — An umbrella term gaining in popularity to describe all sexual minorities.

● **Dykes** — A word for lesbians that is often used with affection within the community but which is commonly an insult coming from outside the community.

"Dyke is a word that we use affectionately for each other," said Linda Hooper, editor of the newsletter at the Lesbian Gay Community Center. "(But) if I overhear someone in a bar say this place is getting full of dykes and fags, I get offended."

● **Bull Dyke** — A lesbian who dresses and acts in ways traditionally associated with macho behavior. Most people interviewed considered the term out-of-date

and insulting.

"I don't know anybody who would call somebody a bull dyke and mean it affectionately," said Merrie Schaller, a board member of LGCC.

● **Butch/Femme** — A continuum of styles adopted by lesbians ranging from traditional feminine to traditional masculine.

"In some ways it's a game in how we present ourselves to the world," said Schaller. "I think it has little meaning. It has nothing to do with what you do in bed."

"Always it's a matter of degree," said Hooper. "The important thing is 'butch' and 'fem' have nothing to do with what you do in bed and it's about women only, and not about men at all. It's not about one being more mannish than the other. It might seem like that, but it's not like

that at all."

● **Fag** — This term — along with fairy, fruit and queer — is used commonly among gay men and lesbians in descriptions of one another, but should be used with extreme caution by those outside the community.

"It's never OK for people to use those terms if they're using them to target people," said Marc Rappaport of Queer Nation. "Very rarely is it OK for a white person to call a black person a nigger. Within the community it's fine; outside the community it generally needs to be questioned — is this person trying to oppress me? Is this person viewing it as an insult?"

● **Breeder** — A term used to describe heterosexuals, almost always derogatory. "I use it when I'm real mad," said Earl Jackson, a gay assistant professor at UC

Santa Cruz. "I don't think that counter-marginalizing the heterosexual community is in anybody's interest."

According to Hooper, the insult is past its prime. "It's kind of an old-fashioned word that gay men used," she said.

● **Queen** — "Typically used for a more effeminate gay man," according to Rappaport. A drag queen would usually be an effeminate man who dresses in traditional women's clothing.

● **Transvestites** — People who regularly or occasionally prefer wearing clothing socially assigned to the opposite gender. According to research, the majority of male transvestites are heterosexual.

● **Transsexuals** — People whose gender identities are different from their biological gender traits: "men trapped in women's bodies" or vice-versa.

Queer

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The word "queer" just seemed to fit the activist group's attitude, according to Rappaport.

"'Homosexual Nation' — I don't think that holds a lot of weight," he said.

Local writer and sociologist Wendy Chapkis agrees. "The word 'queer' demands a very angry reply," she said. "It's not about being polite and getting mainstream society to let you assimilate. It's a word that only a strong political movement could use."

But many who now call themselves "queer" still question the tactics of Queer Nation. Jackson said that while he admires Queer Nation's "exuberance," he is concerned that radical actions may not stimulate thought and consideration, but rather only destructive reactions.

And many gays, lesbians and bisexuals find themselves offended by the adoption of a term that caused them pain for years.

"People who are older and who've experienced probably the most derogatory experiences with the word 'queer' are the ones who have the hardest time seeing it in a positive light," said Patrick Meyers, a local psychotherapist who is gay. "Younger people find it easier to adopt it and give it a new meaning."

John Laird, director of the Santa Cruz AIDS Project and a former mayor of Santa Cruz, said, "I come from a time when (queer) had a very negative connotation and it's just very difficult for me to live with it in a positive sense."

"Of course, my parents resented the Beatles; everybody

resents what comes up in the next generation," Laird said.

Mindy Storch, a volunteer at the Lesbian Gay Community Center in Santa Cruz, said, "I'm uncomfortable in using it in a universal application because I know that it does offend many of the people to whom it applies."

"It has a more activist edge and not all of us are activists," she said.

"Personally I prefer the use of the word 'lavender' to mean anyone involved in the community," Storch said. "I haven't heard anybody offended by it."

"I would hope this issue wouldn't split us," said Storch. "I think there are strong personal feelings on both ends and most of the people are in the middle and don't even care

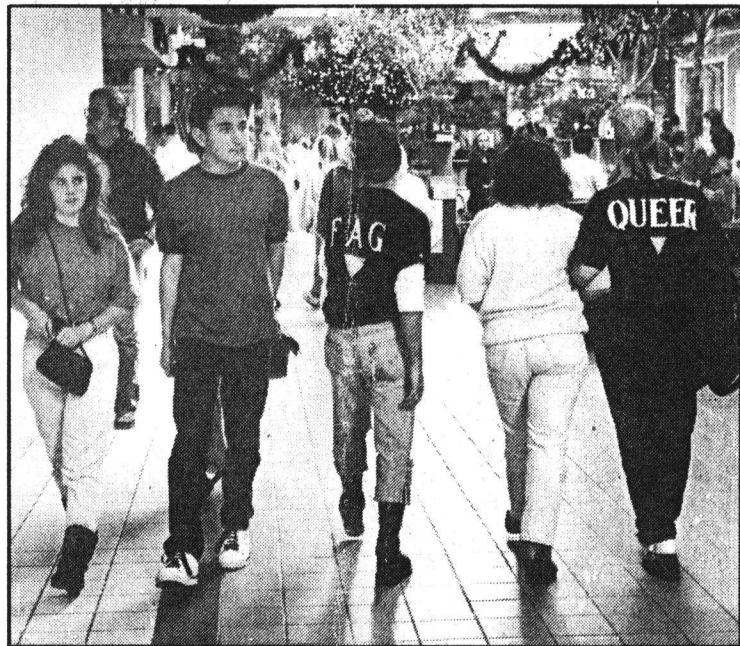
"It's great hot tub conversation, though," she said.

THE NEW meaning of "queer" is gathering momentum, according to Jackson. When he went to lecture at Harvard two years ago and included the term in the title of his talk, Jackson was criticized, he said, for using a word offensive to gays.

"It's quite regional," said Jackson. "I think the (San Francisco) Bay area is where it's really taken hold."

Still, when he went back to lecture at Harvard again last year, Jackson said, the term was being commonly used throughout the gay-lesbian-bisexual community.

He believes the adoption of "queer" as a description of the gay-lesbian-bisexual community goes beyond the surface in-your-face emotional impact of the word.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

T-shirts carried the message at the Capitola Mall 'queer-in' last November.

"Queer really has a meaning, it's in the English language," said Jackson. "It highlights the advantages of being marginalist. We are in a position where we can look at the dominant culture from another angle. One of the things we can provide heterosexuals with is the idea that heterosexual is one orientation among others."

For those who have embraced the term, it is seen as the future of the movement. It is bound to offend some people, they know. For that matter, it is supposed to offend some people.

"Even the word 'lesbian' already puts off some people," said Zschokke. "Any grouping

of outlaw status will offend somebody who is trying to be accepted in the mainstream heterosexual life.

"They'll never let us blend in anyway," said Zschokke. "Besides, whatever there is to be blended into isn't that attractive."

Chapkis observed, "If you look at the history of the word gay, there were huge discussions of whether the word was offensive. 'Queer' is the '90s version of gay, which was a '70s word."

"It's more offensive, it has a harder edge to it," she said. "But the '90s have a harder edge to them."