

Speak Out

munity and we bill it as, say, "a lesbian support group," do not be surprised if people whom some of you don't consider to be lesbians show up. Lesbian dances, same issue. This is why we use the words *trans lesbian*, *nontrans lesbian*, *inclusive* etc. In my opinion and world, if someone lives as a woman and has a woman for a primary partner, she is a lesbian. It's when we get into defining "who is a woman" that makes this whole situation tricky.

I don't personally feel it's my right to say who is a woman and who is not, nor do I use the above words in normal conversation, because I don't have a need to. People's right to identify however they want is at the core of this entire issue.

While LCP is indeed inclusive, this misnomer that LCP is being overrun with men gets used a lot by some who are not and have not been involved with the organization for quite some time. Frankly, I find this to be not only inaccurate, but also inflammatory and it only helps to keep the divisiveness alive.

Who we are right now is a small group of board members and volunteers trying to serve a membership of about 300 folks as well as others in the community. Had there been a real effort made in the past year or so to develop a volunteer base and maintain those relationships, we would be in a much better position to provide services and outreach to the community.

We do a lot with the people who are involved, but it's not enough, and I'm painfully aware of that every day that I don't get to come straight home from work to my girlfriend because I've got one or more meetings to attend that night.

I can identify about seven trans folk who are involved in LCP in any way. Out of that number, they are pretty equally divided between men and women.

Perhaps three of them are members, one of them is a board member, the others are folks who always seem to show up to support LCP when we are doing fund-raisers because they care about the Portland community. There are a few others out there who are not involved at all, I don't really know how many, but I have met some of them. They live in isolation imposed by people who call them traitors or worse. They have no support system or community and they are afraid. The numbers really don't matter. What matters is that they need and deserve to have a place to belong in the community and do work that creates social-political change and understanding. For some of them, there is no "safe space."

Regarding an apology, what I said was that I was uncomfortable making a broad statement of apology and felt it would be more constructive to be specific. How much credence does an apology have coming from someone regarding events that happened before they came on the scene? I did in fact say that I felt there was room for apology on both sides. The more I talk to people, the easier it is for me to narrow down exactly whom the most apologies should come from. Don't hold your breath waiting for this person to take responsibility for their actions. Am I sorry for what has happened? More than you'll ever know.

It's unfortunate that Women in the Woods has become such a key element in all of this. T.K. Mantese chose not to include the comments I made at the meeting that while LCP cannot support WITW because it is not inclusive, we recognize its importance to many people. I personally am not willing to go to war with anyone over the issue, because I understand that there are those who have a need for and have fought for "safe space." It's not my place to define for them what their safe space should be, any more than it's my place to determine who is a woman, and who isn't.

It saddens me to think that there are those in the community who feel there is no point in going forward with talking and listening to each other because LCP doesn't support a noninclusive three-day event. I'm quite sure that we have many more common concerns besides that. Lesbian health care for one, Lon Mabon for another.

To those of you who took the time after a long day of work or political activism to join us at that meeting, thank you, and I'm sorry that it took so long for you to feel listened to.

AMAZON KNIGHTLY
Lesbian Community Project board member
Portland

Let's all make it happen, not just a few

TO THE EDITOR:

In a recent issue of *Just Out*, Inga Sorensen wrote an excellent article about U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, an Oregon Republican, addressing the Human Rights Campaign's Portland Federal Club luncheon ["Mr. Smith Comes Back from Washington," Dec. 3].

I was struck by a line in the piece describing the participants in this event that included the words "nearly all men." Was this important, I questioned myself, was Inga saying that this event was unimportant to women? Or that women chose not to attend?

At first I perceived a connotation of suggested sexism from this statement.

Would an event held by LCP have a description of "mostly all women" attended, or PABA, a very mixed business organization that recently held a dinner, attended by "mostly men"?

I decided to call Inga Sorensen and Marty Davis to ask about this issue, that this statement of fact, as written, can be seen as a slam. Both assured me that it was not. The question that they are raising is where are the women in our community? My question is where are both women and men in our community?

These are very good questions. Certainly in the past there has been dynamic leadership in Oregon, both male and female. Where are they? There certainly are many wonderful leaders of both sexes in our community, but for the population and demographic base here, the percentage of participation is minimal. Many vital organizations limp along with few volunteers. Is everyone else hunkered down at home? With so many of our civil, spiritual and personal rights in constant jeopardy, how can we justify leaving leadership and action to a few, and hope for the best?

Sen. Smith made the comment: "When you're a pioneer for any cause, you get arrows in the back, but they usually don't kill you."

Essentially saying, if we expect progress we need to participate and not live in fear.

As for the luncheon with Sen. Gordon Smith, HRC's Portland Federal Club is made up of about 40 percent women, all of whom were invited, several of whom RSVPed but regretfully could not make the event at the last minute. HRC started 20 years ago, was dominantly male-oriented, but in the past 10 years has made dramatic demographic changes within its national membership (currently 40 percent women of a membership base of 300,000) and staff structure (the staff is now predominately female, with all but three of the leadership positions belonging to women).

Together we work for our collective civil rights. How can we continue to build this shared activism in Oregon?

RON GLANVILLE
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Portland



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