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Speak Out

Unwelcome mat

TO THE EDITOR:
Every once in a while, some story or other compels me to read *Just Out*. I should know better. "Breaking the Binary Barrier" broke no new ground [Dec. 5]. It's a missed opportunity to write something truly new and meaningful, but it's no worse than what we've come to expect.

Another story boldly proclaims you've found someone actually thinking in new ways—in this case about trans identity ["Start the Ball Rolling"]. Ho-hum. While new to nontrans people, the thinking itself is not new. What's newsworthy? Why, it's a nontrans person that's doing the thinking. Am I being unfair when I wish *Just Out* would have recognized trans people for doing the true groundbreaking work years ago?

So, by the time I'd read all this, I was feeling this issue was a waste of paper. Because I'd turned right to the articles, I hadn't realized that you'd gone out of your way to be vicious. Your "Just Asking" question was what? If you're gay or lesbian, would you date a bisexual person?

What, not interested in knowing whether bi people would be willing to date prejudiced gays and lesbians?

Please. After a halfhearted attempt to throw the bi community a bone, you invite nonbi people to stereotype us while locking us out of the conversation. Well, at least we can enjoy the holidays—as long as we obey "gay and lesbian boundaries, of course," as your editorial insists ["Happier Holidays"]. Does that include a limit on who I date for the next three weeks? Oops, and probably no one should date me, since I'm a tranny and thus might fall outside your gay and lesbian boundaries.

If you think that community forums are only for "gays and lesbians" and that you should set the boundaries for everyone reading your magazine, why don't you just state on your cover: *Just Out*, the IN publication for the GAY & LESBIAN population.

It's easier on our emotions if we know from the beginning that we're not welcome.

DIANA COURVANT
Portland

Making amends

TO THE EDITOR:
In the article "Take Cover" in the Dec. 5 *Just Out*, I read yet another misunderstanding of what the Constitution actually is: It is a not a set of laws, but rather a framework within which laws must conform.

When Andrew Sullivan says the Federal Marriage Amendment, "should it pass, raises a very real legal question of whether churches that perform same-sex marriages would be violating the Constitution," he's completely off base. The only ones who can violate the Constitution are governmental lawmaking entities.

If the proposed amendment passed, the only constitutional question would be if someone tried to create a law banning churches from performing and/or recognizing same-sex marriages, which would conflict with the First Amendment's separation of church and state. Aside from that, it

transitions

**Bob Ross,
1934-2003**

Bob Ross, publisher of the weekly *Bay Area Reporter* in San Francisco, died of complications from diabetes Dec. 10. He was 69.

Ross was born April 2, 1934, in New York City. He moved to San Francisco in 1956 after being discharged from the Navy.

A pioneering gay journalist as well as an

would only invalidate legal recognition of same-sex unions, which is the status quo in many areas anyhow (though hopefully not for much longer).

Likewise, Dave Ressler is slightly off when he says, "In a church, you get the sacred marriage with the civil marriage thrown in" ["Just Asking"]. In fact, they are separate things as I understand it: The civil marriage isn't done until the parties have signed the legal documents (though I think some of the verbiage in the ceremony is required by the civil marriage as well).

ALAN BATIE
Portland

Study baseless

TO THE EDITOR:
In the article titled "Sexual Identity Hard-Wired by Genetics," Reuters reported Oct. 20 that one's sexual or gender identity is "wired into the genes," citing the new research by UCLA geneticist Eric Vilain and colleagues.

According to Vilain, the findings would suggest that "sexual identity is rooted in every person's biology before birth" and that this knowledge may be used to ensure that intersex babies are assigned the correct gender. "If physicians could predict the gender of newborns with ambiguous genitalia at birth, we would make less mistakes in gender assignment," Vilain said. However, none of this is actually established or discussed in the actual research paper this news report is based on.

The actual research published in *Molecular Brain Research* is titled "Sexually Dimorphic Gene Expression in Mouse Brain Precedes Gonadal Differentiation," and this title summarizes the entire paper accurately: This study shows that female and male mice develop different brain structure even before their gonads are formed. The significance of this study is that sex differences in the brain have been traditionally said to be caused by the different levels of hormones produced by the gonads—testes for males, ovaries for females. Vilain et al. observed sex differences in the brain prior to the formation of sexually specific gonads, which suggests that there are other mechanisms that cause brain sex differences than hormones.

Interesting discovery, but how does that show that gender identity is "hard-wired"? The paper does not address this question at all, but it would be ridiculous to claim to have discovered the nature of gender identity in a study using mice, because mice do not report their gender identity to researchers like human subjects do. And besides, is research from the mice sexuality really generalizable to the human population?

Vilain's application of his "findings" to the intersex controversy is also ethically questionable. If there were really a way to predict a child's gender accurately, would that justify surgically mutilating the child to fit into her or his "true gender"? Intersex activists are seeking to end shame, secrecy and traumatic medical treatments that are not necessary, safe nor effective—not an end to "mistakes" of assigning the "wrong" gender.

Besides, the methodology Vilain used for studying the brain structure of a mice involves cracking its head and grinding brain—not an

influential activist, Ross' support for accurately and powerfully covering the San Francisco sexual minorities community was often reflected in the paper. Of particular note was the Aug. 13, 1998, issue in which the *B.A.R.* had no AIDS-related obituaries to print for the first time since the start of the epidemic. The banner front-page headline that week read simply: "No obits."

Ross is survived by many friends and family members. A memorial service will be held in January at Herbst Theatre.