



PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS  
Melissa Shepherd coordinates the Trans Advocacy Group at Basic Rights Oregon

effective ally and a list of local resources leave participants with a "way to keep talking to each other when we're gone," says Shepherd.

Janice Schaefer, a panel member who identifies as a lesbian, male-to-female, pre-operative transsexual, adds: "Each person speaks for themselves. Gender has been seen as a continuum—one end male and one end female. It's very binary. I believe all of us [in TAG] recognize that gender is a lot bigger than that. It may be a sphere. Gender is infinite.

"My view of BRO and TAG," Schaefer continues, "is that we try to recognize that, more and more, there may be almost as many definitions of 'trans' as there are people."

### A glossary of terms

To give an idea of the various definitions that Schaefer is talking about, *Just Out* has compiled a brief suggested glossary. The distinctions between the terms are not meant to include or exclude any individual or to tread on the complexity of anyone's experience or identity. These terms are meant as a baseline for the purposes of this article, not as an authoritative list.

**Cross-dresser:** A person who sometimes employs the clothing and aesthetics of a gender other than one they typically present in their daily lives.

**Gender:** The set of social, aesthetic and behavioral expectations imposed upon an individual based on the perception of that individual's sex. Though gender identity is discussed as a specific aspect of personal identity, it cannot be separated from an individual's race, class or historical moment.

**Genderqueer:** Used to describe identities that transgress boundaries of gender identification as well as sexual identification. This term is growing in popularity as it is understood to be less rigidly defined than either "transgender" or "transsexual," in much the same way that "queer" can be used to encompass gay, lesbian and bisexual.

**Gender variance:** Gender behavior and/or presentation that varies from traditionally defined "masculinity" in males and "femininity" in females.

**Intersex:** A person whose biological and/or genetic structure at birth does not correspond with conventional concepts of male/female anatomy. This term is often preferred to the dated term "hermaphrodite."

**Sex:** A person's sex is determined by the presence of sex organs (vagina/uterus, penis/testicles) and post-puberty by secondary sex characteristics such as breasts or body hair. Traditionally, a person's sex has been confined to the binary categories of male or female.

**Trans:** Often used as an umbrella term for gender variance that does not fit neatly into other categories. This term is employed by transsexuals, transgender folks and gender-



Christa-Margaret Nelson is the operations manager at p:ear. She facilitates the Trans Youth Group at the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center.

queer folks. Commonly, the loose political movement around gender freedom is called the trans movement.

**Transgender:** A person who moves across gender boundaries without altering their physical body. This movement can involve innumerable means of expression including dress, behavior and language.

**Transsexual:** A person who has altered or intends to alter his or her physical body—through hormone treatments and/or surgeries—in order to create a physical presentation that more closely matches his or her internal sexual and gender identification (MTF: male-to-female transsexual, FTM: female-to-male transsexual).

### Teaching T to the GLBs

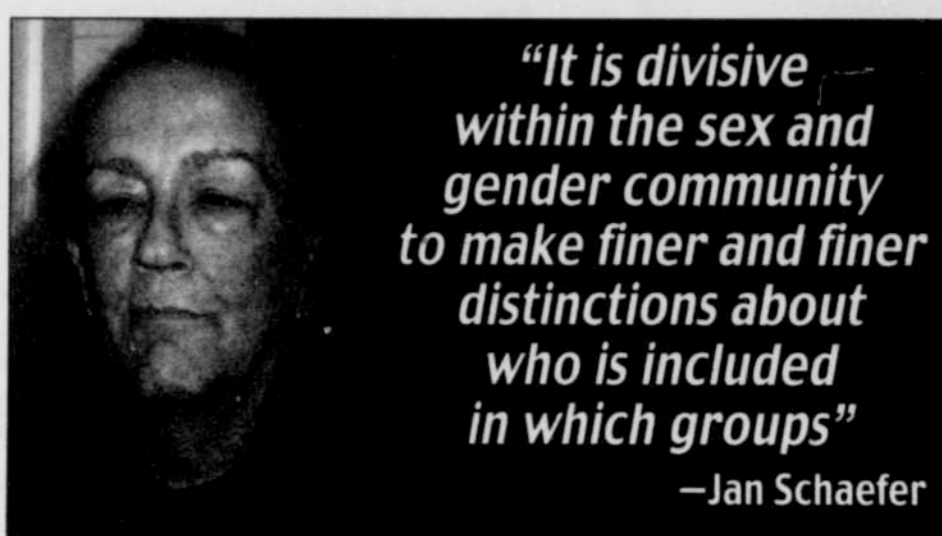
Shepherd says unique challenges arise when educating other queers on issues of trans identities.

"Gay and lesbian people... understand that they're supposed to have a connection to trans people, but many times they don't know why, or don't internalize it," she says. "Liberal attitudes that are catching up with sexual orientation are not catching up with gender identity. Generations of effort by trans folks are being left out, and trans folks are still behind [other] queer folks in regard to legislation and public perception."

Sexual minorities have traditionally organized around sexual orientation and in so doing have perhaps unintentionally reinforced binary notions about sex and gender. In some ways, the assertion that gender and sexuality are distinct and separate from one another has set the stage to exclude transgender and transsexual people from the queer community.

Historically speaking, gender variant people have often been the queer community's most visible and accessible members. The butch/femme dynamic that dominated lesbian culture throughout the early 20th century banked upon the gender separation of behaviors and aesthetics as cues about sexual roles. Women courted and coupled based on the butch/femme scheme, which offered a recognizable albeit limited version of gender presentation.

Drag performance—which highlights gender's performative nature—was popularized as enter-



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—Jan Schaefer

tainment in the United States during the 1920s. Drag has long been a nexus of pride and celebration within gay circles. In fact, drag queens led the rebellion at Stonewall in 1969 that began the modern movement for queer rights.

Though butch lesbians and drag queens of the mid-1900s would not have called themselves transgender, their experience points to the importance of gender variance in gay and lesbian history. Schaefer, 67, says she has watched trans identities and notions of gender change over time. She sees the shared interests between the gay, lesbian and bi communities and the trans community and is aware of the misconceptions that hamper coalitions between the two.

"Gender is a cultural thing," says Schaefer. "We have expectations of men and women's behavior. If you don't meet those expectations in your looks or your behavior, it doesn't matter how you see yourself. You are going to have difficulties. That is not about sexuality, it's about gender. Many people in the queer community don't recognize that."

Schaefer believes it is precisely the common experience of social exclusion around sexualized identities that makes cooperation between trans and nontrans queers important.

"It is divisive within the sex and gender community to make finer and finer distinctions about who is included in which groups," she says. "I believe that coalition building is the kind of work we need to be doing—recognizing multiple oppressions."

Schaefer and other trans people also note that it is essential to recognize that these identity components are very often present in the same people. In the way that a person may be a woman and also queer, another person may be trans and also queer.

Schaefer's experience with TAG has given her the opportunity to interact at length with young genderqueers who she has come to admire.

"Young people are much more out and

Continued on Page 29

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