VIII:

TACTICAL GUIDE TO OUTING

Tactical aspects of outing include ethical considerations and practical techniques. Dilemmas confront the outer. Criticism of irresponsibility or inhumanity are bound to be directed against such journalists or activists.

Income and Career of Outee

The character and circumstances of the outee matter. Outing is not likely to cause financial distress to an individual living on unearned income, or in a safely tenured position. But if someone is liable to be fired and even blacklisted so that he can never again work in his trade or profession, then outing might be cruel and destructive. If the outee is an entertainer dependent upon fans, or dependent upon sales or business from customers, or a professional dependent upon clients, he or she could suffer drastic loss of income. This is undoubtedly one reason why so very few, and those only in certain categories, have ever dared to come out, at least to more than friends, families, and other intimates. The homophobic public would cease to patronize them, they fear--probably correctly--and consequently they would suffer economic ruin and failed careers. Some of the young and poor, it is true, little incline to sympathy for the rich and elderly. They would
not feel sorry, they say, if a person making $1,000,000 beforehand would be making $100,000 after being outed. Also, if a person who had been in the closet for a number of years had accumulated a fortune of, say, several million dollars, the typical outer would hardly worry about the outee's financial security.

Likewise, a singer or actor, who had made his or her career as a sex object, like Rock Hudson, would, when outed, at the very least have difficulty maintaining his or her persona and would undoubtedly have to play a different role if he or she were able to continue as a star. One can imagine the harassment that an outed athlete would have to endure. Few politicians when outed would be able to win reelection, as Studds and Frank did in what is probably rightly considered the most liberal state in the nation. Never has an open queer national been appointed to a high position in the federal or state bureaucracy. Bureaucrats rightly fear for their careers if they came out or were outed. Although diminishing prejudice and increasing protection are now reducing such risks, they still effectively deter most.

**Place of Residence**

In the same way, the outee's social environment and location must be considered. A closet case living in a small town in the South largely inhabited by fundamentalists might be assaulted and even murdered. On the other hand, the resident of a sophisticated suburb or, better still, or of a gay ghetto would have far less to fear from his neighbors. Anonymity often sufficiently protects from vindictive homophobes.
Certain suburbs try to prevent gay and lesbian couples from buying houses or even renting them within their jurisdictions. Condominium associations' and cooperatives' assent is necessary for the residents to buy there or at least to stay comfortably. Fellow tenants can harass gay dwellers out of an apartment building and landlords are often more homophobic still. The outee can therefore often lose not only his job but his dwelling, even if he lives with parents, spouse, or children. One has therefore to consider the consequences for an outee, depending on the section of the country, the size and attitude of the city or town, the nature of the neighborhood, and even of the building in which he or she resides because ejection will often be the result today.

Nature of Sexual Life

The real facts of the sexual life of the subject—and the degree of detail about it which the outing contains—must also be weighed. The mere fact that someone is "homosexual," due allowance being made for the paranoid fantasies and absurd stereotypes that still flourish on this topic, may tell very little about him or her. On the other hand, an exposé complete with photographs of the outee in all too compromising positions could have the effect of making him the butt of endless ridicule and abuse. Then too, should a distinction be drawn between an individual in a stable monogamous relationship and one who seeks only casual sex in bathhouses and movie theaters or one-time partners along lonely roads in the dead of night? What about pederasts and pedophiles or
sado-masochists and pimps or prostitutes? Mohr thought that the orientation should be public, acts private, but orientation is ultimately private and unprovable.

The hearings on the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, apart from making the United States a laughing stock, have raised the issue of the quantum and nature of evidence needed to validate an outing. The uncorroborated testimony of an accomplice can always be vigorously denied, so that it becomes a question of Who is telling the truth? And if the full details of an subject's sex life must be made public to confirm an outing, what will they do to his reputation and legal standing or to his partners or his own social life? The authorities might prosecute and if he indulged in sordid forms of sexual gratification, associates might insult and abuse him. Such an outee would scarcely be able to use his influence on behalf of the queer nation, or to be a role model. Hence there are constraints on outing.

Larry Gross asked (1991, p. 384): "What constitutes proof of someone's sexual identity (especially when evidence is likely to have been suppressed or destroyed), and what ethical considerations should influence the decision to reveal a person's previously hidden homosexuality? Are historians the 'outers' of the past, or are outers the historians of the present?" Perhaps the criterion of potential targets is that while they engage in homosexual activity, they have refused to acknowledge their citizenship in Queer Nation. So far from having a positive identity and sense of
belonging to the movement, they are indifferent and often hostile to its demands and aspirations. This discrepancy between action and belief, between behavior and identity, justifies our determination to expose their double lives.

The hypocrisy and exploitation of boys by pedophile priests may justify their outing, but because they will hardly provide role models or shatter stereotypes, such outings should be left to police or other authorities. Queer nationals as such have no motive for outing them, unless we plan a full-scale attack on the church. Groups like the North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) have argued for inclusion of pedophiles in the "gay community" with little success. Even pederasts have become a marginal category of homosexuals in modern industrialized societies. Those who prefer adolescents under the age of consent pose a problem somewhat like that of the pedophiles. Strictly speaking, they are "homosexual" but socially have little interaction with the "gay" community. Holland lowered the age of consent to 12 in 1990, virtually removing the stigma of criminality from the pederast. In Spain and Portugal it is 12 for both male and female homosexuality, in Italy it is 14 for both, while in the United Kingdom it is 21 for male homosexuals and 16 for lesbians. On the other hand, only since 1911, even in American jurisdictions, was the age of consent to heterosexual acts raised from 11 or 14 and a differential created between heterosexual and homosexual ages of consent in those jurisdictions that beginning in 1961 repealed sodomy laws.
What about a "good" boy-lover, one who, in the positive image propagated by J. Z. Eglinton in *Greek Love* (1964), is truly concerned with the best interests and the intellectual and moral growth of his boy? A New York welfare officer said that her agency often looks the other way when a stable relationship is established between an older man and a boy, understood as in his teens, since this is probably better for the boy than either returning to an abusive family or becoming a street hustler--usually the only other options. If the boy-lover falls into one of the categories judged suitable for outing--an individual who is in some way harming us--then he should be outed. But what about the consequences to the boy? Should a pederast's boy be stigmatized for the rest of his days? And, whatever his shortcomings, what about the fate of the boy-lover himself?

Even the staunchest advocates of outing today concede that in Nazi Germany or in McCarthyite America the practice would have so endangered the outee as to fall out of consideration. Yet Kurt Hiller outed living members of the National Socialist hierarchy in his obituary of Magnus Hirschfeld in the German weekly *Wahrheit* in Prague in 1935! But is this not the case with boy-lovers in the United States even today? In jail, stigmatized as "short eyes", they might be mutilated or even killed. During the Boston Boise scandal, the lesbian state representative Elaine Noble even advocated a "hot line" by which callers could denounce pederasts and pedophiles to the police. But this move separating the good from the bad reflects an internal problem of the Queer Nation: the
wish of some androphile homosexuals and gynecophile lesbians to condemn intergenerational relationships in order to win the approval of "respectable" society. There is no unanimity on where the line between the good and the bad should be drawn and who should draw it. In any case, many consider pedophiles, that is, those attracted to pre-pubescent children, no more gay than they consider those who engage in sex with animals or corpses homosexual or heterosexual. Pedophiles in turn do not think of themselves as part of the "gay subculture" and make little or no contact with it.

Individuals engaging in extreme forms of sado-masochistic practice form another special category, but not as small as most assume. Outing would certainly stigmatize them and might even subject them to police investigations and to extra-legal recriminations and violence. Yet unlike the pedophiles they usually identify with the gay community and frequent its bars and social centers.

**Intimates, Family, and Friends**

The family circumstances of the subject must be evaluated with the aim of sparing needless suffering to those who are personally without blame. A man with a wife, children, and a façade of respectability should not be outed unless his behavior is so treacherous to the queer nation as to warrant the likely penalty. On the other hand, a subject living alone, with no family or dependants, is less likely to drag others down in his personal exposure. Conventional media attention will often send family members not trained to face the limelight into a state of shock
(McBride 1992, p. 19). But what if the revelation is precisely that the family's flesh and blood is "one of those" hated, subhuman "perverts"? If such an individual's family members would be stunned and abashed, should their feelings, however homophobic, be considered? The case of Oliver Sipple (related in Chapter IV) is a classic example. Is it right to expose close associates who would almost certainly be doomed to anguish, contumely, ostracism, even the ruin of their careers? What if the deceased had been the life partner of a U. S. Army general or of a Catholic bishop? Activists might well deem the effects on lovers or ex-lovers to be a more important consideration than family members, especially homophobic ones.

Recent publications indicate that the problems of parents voluntarily coming out to their children are now being addressed. Heterosexuals do not realize how many homosexually oriented individuals have had children. If the parent controls the coming out process, the potential for emotional distress can be reduced. If outing occurs through circumstances beyond the elder's control it may unnecessarily stress the child. At school the child may be subjected to ridicule or even violence by peers who learn that the parent is a "lezzie" or a "fag." Separated and divorced spouses may try to take the child away from the queer parent on grounds that he or she is "morally unfit," as evidenced by the trauma that the child is undergoing.

Is it fair then to out parents whose children do not yet know of, or do not yet fully understand, their mother's or father's
sexual orientation? This move would make the "innocent suffer with the guilty." On the other hand, is it fair to exempt parents from outing? If a parent, should Pete Williams have been let off the hook? What should the decision be if the marriage and family form the façade erected by a particularly self-hating and vicious closet case—a pillar of the church and of political conservatism?

**Fame or Evil Reputation**

Another matter to be judged is the existing fame or reputation of the individual. Activists should not out a notorious criminal or mass murderer as they would a famed medical missionary or celebrated inventor. Then there are ambivalent cases, such as that of Roger Casement, the Irish patriot whose treason to England long cast a shadow over his life's work. A very real case in point is prominent figures in the National Socialist regime. While émigrés, particularly certain Jewish ones, claimed that the hypervirility of the Nazis and even their sadomasochism was owing to their homosexuality or, in psychoanalytical terms "latent" homosexuality, a viewpoint later popularized in Luchino Visconti's film *The Damned*, apologists generally preferred to deny that homosexuality was widespread among Nazi leaders after the purge of Roehm and his associates on the night of June 30, 1934. Massimo Consoli has reversed this tendency by dwelling at length on the homosexuality of the early followers of the NSDAP. One gay scholar, Richard Dey, for years has with others collected data computerized into what he dubs the *Encyclopedia Homophilica*. Recent publicity about Deputy Führer
Rudolf Hess' homosexuality has led him to conclude that the tragically unsuccessful plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944 carried out by Colonel Count von Stauffenberg was master-minded by Admiral Canaris and backed by a network of other conspirators, like them rightist homosexuals (one outed by Hiller in Wahrheit in 1935) who were trying to save Germany from destruction. It seems best for scholars in general to admit the facts and publicize the homosexuality of all those who have earned their fame, whether they deem them good or bad, Nazis or Mafiosi, "politically correct" or not, heroes or traitors. It would be as untruthful to try to claim that all queer nationals were models of propriety as that they were all fiends of one sort or another. No one would be convinced. Over the years clergy, police, and the medical establishment have in any case concentrated on outing unworthy or simply unfortunate homosexuals, and our task is to out the admirable, successful ones. Now let us turn from the nature and character of the outee to those of the outer.

Motives of Outer

As is abundantly clear from what has been said above, outing stems from a complex of motives. Neither in Germany after 1897 nor in the United States since Stonewall did those who already enjoyed wealthy, powerful and famous feel any need to sacrifice their own prestige for their less privileged ilk. It was the silence that answered such appeals that led to the demand for the outing of "closet cases in high places." One may conclude that it is the pressure of middle-class, activist Queer Nationals on the
prestigious but closeted ones that underlies this political ultimatum.

Early in this century a few realized that if everyone with homosexual feelings or activities were suddenly to become visible, the long-standing taboo would collapse overnight because the prejudices and falsehoods that maintain it would be refuted at one stroke. Outing is thus a selective spotlighting of those who have the potential for ending the pariah status of the community—in fact converting it into a prestigious one. It implicitly overrides the convention born of helplessness that members of the clandestine subculture or underground community should not betray one another.

The character of the outer merits scrutiny. The motive should be solely to advance the cause, not envy, ressentiment, or personal vindictiveness. Should one engage in a practice the merits of which sharply divide our community and which may lead to bitter recriminations, not just from those outed but from movement leaders who consider the tactic indefensible? An editor or journalist may profit enormously from the audience gained by outing someone in a scandal-provoking fashion, but does such an act necessarily benefit the cause? OutWeek's outings did not keep it solvent. The long-term resonances and aftereffects of the outing have to be taken into consideration, if the practice is to be a responsible tactic. Circumstances are now vastly different from what they were forty years ago, when Senator McCarthy launched his demagogic campaign against "sex perverts in government." An argument can even be made that progressive social evolution requires that outing
be widely practiced, since the elite persist in refusing to come out even now when prejudice has abated and so many punitive laws have been repealed. Nevertheless, perhaps each case should be considered individually on its own merits. If outings by activists resulted in suicide, as outing by police or other authorities so often did in the past, they could hardly be considered propitious. But then, who is to decide? If everyone is free to out everyone else, as is now the case, the media will decide what to publicize. They cannot be forced to headline even the most important cases. At its most elementary level, outing is an aspect of gossip. And gossip is a practice of which homosexuals have been as fond as any other group—perhaps more so. Unless the media can be muzzled, which does not seem likely, there is little way to stop the tabloids and late-night television from picking up and spreading it. And this publicity, as we have recently seen in several prominent heterosexual cases, then "authorizes" the respectable media to mention the allegations in the guise of "reporting the news." The story imparts the information that so-and-so has been discussed in such-and-such a way in another, perhaps less fastidious organ of the media. In the long run, of course, the remedy is to make sexual orientation no more critical than whether one is left-handed or right-handed. But this utopia is not visible on the immediate horizon. In 1893 Otto de Joux had posed as a precondition for coming out en masse an "international Uranide amnesty" (Joux, p. 244). But as John Alan Lee concluded 84 years later, society, "having given homosexuals masks to wear, is not
about to agree readily to their abandonment by those who, at whatever personal cost, decline to wear their masks any longer" (1977, p. 76).

Historical and social conditions supply a framework which needs be taken into account in applying these arguments. It must be acknowledged, however, that yet other aspects reflect the truism that each of us is "human, all too human"--that is to say, moved by irrational factors rooted in psychological quirks. Let us begin by examining some irrational factors that promote outing and then turn to those that inhibit it. First is exhibitionism. Many people crave the limelight, but their modest station in life does not afford them the notoriety that they seek. Even if personally unremarkable, they may be able to attract attention by loudly proclaiming the secrets of others. And they may feel the additional satisfaction of having done something meritorious. In the old days the exhibitionist outer could smugly claim that he had helped to rid society of a "moral pest." Today the queer national outer congratulates himself for having deflated hypocrisy or curbed the malice of some self-hating closet case in public office.

Another factor, regrettably enough, is spitefulness. Deny it though we will, many of us sadly retain homophobic residues in our mentality. But what if this factor--anti-queer gayness--is absent? There may, as we have seen above, still be good reasons for outing. But there may also be petty motives. By revealing the secret failings of another, whom you dislike, or merely envy, you place an obstacle in his path, and remind him also of his limitations.
Although such self-contempt was much more common formerly, it is sad that the likes of
Quentin Crisp really do believe that straight people are better than we, so that to "reduce"
someone to our status is to demean the person.

Yet another factor is the desire to be "more radical than thou" evidenced by some members of
Queer Nation and by grandstanding writers in the gay press. Since the policy of letting people
remain in the closet is interpreted as conservative, it is possible to "gain points" or one up by
advocating outing en masse. In this way the radical outer shows how "advanced" he is by
comparison with the timid stick-in-the-mud types, who--in his view
--only want to get by through protecting the assimilationist and appeasing the oppressor. There
are probably other dubious motives that make a certain sense for the outer but not necessarily for
anyone else. But the general point is made.

Andrew Miller, news editor of OutWeek, found it appalling that so many of his colleagues were
tripping over each other to justify the longest media coverup ever, hiding the homosexuality of
the rich and famous. He also voiced the envy that he, as an openly gay journalist, felt for
closeted journalists in well-paying high-level jobs that will be forever denied him. This personal
confession betrays one of the motives for outing: the envy that the separatist involuntarily feels
for the assimilationist, the one who magically passes through the barriers that are invisible--but
for him, real and impenetrable. This conflict may not last. For the marginalized, open individual
puts his pampered colleagues on
notice that their defenses are not impregnable.

Now let us examine the opposite side of the coin: irrational factors that work to inhibit outing. Many closet cases intensely fear the possible consequences of being outed. They respond with empathy when another is outed, since the event triggers these fears--even though they may be groundless. In this way excessive fear of one's own outing contributes to an overall dread of the process. A more general theme is the desire to "let sleeping dogs lie." It is felt that society already must cope with too much inner conflict over the "gay issue;" one should not add more fuel to the fire. Besides, outing is not "nice"--Miss Manners would not recommend it.

Finally, just as in the opposite situation, self-contempt may play a role. Since some feel that to be queer is a disgrace, society had better be as little reminded of such loathsome intruders as possible. The fewer out the less reason, they hope, society will have for inflicting its justly merited sanctions on those that it can track down. It is back into the woodwork for everyone!

Needless to say, the authors do not believe that we belong in the woodwork--or any other place of concealment (or confinement). But only when our civilization has been so profoundly transformed that the shame of love for one's own sex is banished forever will all and sundry be exempt from such curious perversions of the truth.

*Libel and Slander*
The outer should possess sufficient information to support his revelations if need be in a court of law (without revealing more details to the media than they demand to cooperate). He should not publicize any trivial gossip that comes his way. He should carefully examine the reliability of his informants and the intrinsic probability that they possess correct data on the most intimate aspects of the subject's life. Merely having espied the subject in a gay bar or even at a gay resort is not enough.

Some even hope for the dawn of a toleration such that the statement that someone is gay will no longer constitute grounds for a libel action, because the imputation will no longer stigmatize in the minds of well-informed, right-thinking people. Just a few decades ago, one could sue if falsely called a Jew by another individual, but by 1950 an American court held that this attribute was no longer sufficient grounds for libel because society had renounced most of its prejudices against Jews. When courts recognize that it is no longer slander or libel to call a person gay, they will have confirmed that the reasonable majority is no longer homophobic. How far off is that day? Signorile is quoted as optimistic: "The only way to get acceptance of homosexuality is to show people the image of gay sex, to let them see as many of us as possible. On some warped level, the tabloids do breed acceptance. After five years of this, it won't be a story anymore" (Hartman, 1990).

Of course, to call someone a ------ queer or a dirty c--ks----r, just as to call one a ------ kike in a tough bar can
be illegal under the "fighting words" doctrine because it might provoke civil disorder. Such an utterance might be construed depending on tone, volume, and other circumstances as a provocation rather than as slander, even if true. But the ultimate defense against a charge of slander or libel is truth, not intent, for the intent of the slanderer or libeler is assumed to be malicious. Civil slander entails monetary compensation carefully measured with respect to loss of employment, business, and the like--not mental pain, anguish, or loss of social acceptability. Criminal libel can result in fine or imprisonment. But criminal cases, which must involve criminal intent, are rare and seldom pursued unless one party is trying to harass another so as to quiet him down or drive him out of town or into an asylum or suicide. Of course, alongside such a criminal prosecution, a civil suit can also seek monetary compensation. Incidentally, it is no bar to conviction if the defendant alleges that he was quoting a third party, but it may mitigate his guilt and lessen the award against him. Finally, a prompt and full apology if possible, published within a week or two where the original appeared, is likely to mitigate the offense.

Publicity

Publicizing outing is a problem because media often try to suppress or ignore the inconvenient revelation. A story carried in the gay press is as often as not blacked out by the establishment media. Restrictions on publicity curb or nullify outings. But the multiplication and circulation growth of gay periodicals has been
enormous since 1969. If only The Advocate, Fag Rag, and Gay Community News (which just ceased publication) have been circulated since the early 1970s, every major city now has at least one gay paper.

In the last few decades, the major newspapers that cover national and international happenings have shrunk from nearly twenty to a mere five. The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Boston Globe, and Chicago Tribune have usually ignored comings out and outings whether they occurred in gay newspapers or viva voce. In fact, most have not yet used the expression, almost as if it were taboo. Of course, such papers have also refused to repeat or investigate stories that the National Enquirer, the Star, and other supermarket tabloids broke. The weeklies Time, which even introduced the concept of "outing" to the general public early in 1990, and Newsweek have been more forthright.

Now the danger from public figures suing for libel is generally past. As yet editors have apparently not been able or willing to comprehend that outing has become in many instances political--not one opponent trying to crush another, but a valid movement tactic and therefore clearly relevant and not in bad taste. They are not obliged to publish exactly who did what to whom and how often though the sex play between a pair of queers might not be as routine as between a man and a woman. Still, do the details really matter, such as who was active or passive and what orifices of the body were involved?
But until we have regular columnists—as African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, women, Jews, and others have—our viewpoint will be scanted in mainstream publications and outing will remain a difficult, prolonged, and only partially effective procedure. The respectable newspapers squeezed juicy details out of the Barney Frank and Gerry Studds cases without going into the physical details, as well as from the straight ones of Wilbur Mills and Gary Hart—though not the trial for rape of William Kennedy Smith. Why should they not at least trail outings by activists? Were the Forbes and Williams exposés less newsworthy? The straight press apparently cannot grasp the altruistic motives or appreciate the significant purposes of the new outings. At the very least its editors are insensitive and unsupportive. Perhaps their lack of cooperation is more from ignorance of the theory, which one of the principal aims of this book is to explain and justify.

It might be argued that the straight media suppress outings because their decision-makers think them desired by the gay leadership. In fact, most of the gay leaders themselves have opposed outing except perhaps in extreme cases where they saw hypocrites repeatedly using their positions of influence to oppress fellow homosexuals or to deny us our rights. The gay press, too, has often decided not to publicize outings.

Outers can circumvent the blackout imposed by the establishment media in several ways: 1) printing and hanging leaflets or posters with information about closet cases (illegal
solely if placed without permission on others' property), 2) spray painting slogans on walls or pavements, 3) defacing existing (publicity, campaign) posters of the outee, and 4) defacing existing billboards. However, all four tactics are limited to small geographical areas and often face systematic efforts to remove and obliterate the messages in a matter of days or even hours.

**Council on Outing**

The authors suggest a Council on Outing that would process applications, review information, and evaluate the case, and give the object of the intended outing time to reply or to mend his sinful ways by coming out or at least to stop his homophobic words and deeds. Such a body might gain a modicum of control over the flow of compromising data and be a partial safeguard against outings inspired by personal animosity or the failure of an attempt at blackmail. Its endorsement might also induce the press to take up the story. So far gay leaders have done its best to keep the closet doors closed for politicians with whom they frequently deal.

"Ripple effects" of the kind adumbrated above need to be considered. But just saying that they need to be considered poses a complex question. It is one thing to do so in the abstract, within the covers of this book; another, to undertake such a procedure in real life. What about gay classicists known to the authors who persist in writing about ancient Greece and Rome as if pederasty had never existed there, or English or history professors who never mention the subject? Are they homophobic fellow
travelers who deserve to be outed? Assuming legitimate discord as to whether such a person should be outed, what body would be competent to deliberate the matter? This raises the question of the possibility of "gay courts" to decide a transgressor's fate. Have some queer nationals the right to adopt such procedures to judge others? And if so, why and what sort of credentials should they have?

A "Council on Outing" might be composed of successfulouters such as Petrelis and Signorile, editors of movement periodicals that have not taken a stand against outing, scholars, lawyers, journalists, politicians, and other queer rights activists. Such a committee, if carefully composed, could lend weight to outings and facilitate their gaining credence.

Of course, the formation of such a body would not infringe the rights or obligations of individuals or other groups to do their own outings. Certain outings will always be primarily a local concern. Others might be organized and carried out within a certain profession or business by their own peers or coworkers. They might even out them in professional organizations or the Gay and Lesbian Newsletters of the MLA, AHA, APA, and others. Of course more than one council could be constituted for geographical areas or for professions.

Each university might form a local group for outings, each business, for example Macy's, which has been discussed by Queer Nation, even each church. Our youth is not only impatient, especially because of AIDS, but also self-confidently free of the
fear and timidity ingrained in their elders by the all-pervasive homophobia of pre-Stonewall America. Our aim would be to reinforce these brave young outers, who have largely run up against a blank wall.

Nevertheless, the organization of a central committee to support crucial outings would almost certainly overcome media resistance. With so many gay celebrities reluctant to leave the closet, so many prelates, military officers, capitalists, and bureaucrats and administrators, the movement seems to a large degree thwarted from its goal of proving that many of the most prestigious members of America's political and cultural elites are secret citizens of our largely still pariah nation. One might quibble whether sports and entertainment figures merit outing as urgently, especially as they seem to have somewhat more recourse at law than politicians.

No one could be naive enough to imagine that the formation of such a self-appointed, self-perpetuating committee or council, perhaps would not cause enormous controversy and dissent. But the overarching importance of its goal would make certain individuals volunteer even in the face of the severest risk of personal attack and abuse. It must be supposed that such a council or councils could convince some of the mainstream media not only of the credibility of the outings but of their desirability. Claiming for ourselves and proclaiming to the public the names of closeted members of the elite would, however, help our cause, even if there were some grief and even a few minor setbacks caused thereby. The
failure of ensconced, comfortably prestigious queer nationals to come out to help their less
fortunate and often still sensibly oppressed and impoverished brethren may not indeed be
treason, if there be no Queer Nation for them to betray, but it is hardly a socially responsible or
even in many cases morally unreprehensible conduct. If the council reached a decision to out
someone, it should probably notify him or her—even of its decision to study a case, so that the
party involved could have time to come out, to prepare himself or herself for outing, or to try to
persuade the council that he or she should not be outing.

If some might complain that such a self-appointed tribunal was interfering with rights of privacy,
with careers, with marriages, with long-time partnerships, one could reply that cowardice,
selfishness, and greed should not be rewarded by a cloak of invisibility while many are dying of
AIDS and others suffering ostracism, persecution, and financial loss because they are out of the
closet. Bentham's collectivist principle of the greatest good for the greatest number must be
weighed against the individualistic notion of privacy and other rights when one decides what is
ethical.

Just as no one can (or should) stop outings by individuals or local groups, certainly no one can
stop outings by police or other authorities, or heterosexuals of all sorts in every walk of life. No
closeted queer is safe from such outings, especially unofficial and often devastating ones by
gossip and innuendo. The very act of his remaining in the closet not only makes him invisible in
the
ranks of our cause, even unable to appear at our rallies but makes him liable to fear and blackmail or pressure of one variety or another. Arguably, outing such persons may be for their own good (at least in many cases). What, for example, did Pete Williams lose by beingouted? He is in fact now in a much stronger position than before and is possibly happier and more secure. It would be wonderful to hear from Pete himself just how he feels about it.

Most activists will denounce the idea of such a council and anyone who volunteers to serve on it. But even the leaders of major gay organizations cannot suppress outing, however much they may deplore it. They should, if they think about it carefully, prefer that a committee having the best credentials be selected from those willing to volunteer. Thus outings would be more carefully planned, coordinated, or better documented than they might be if left to random actions.

Institutionalization of outing might prove more purposeful than the current anarchy, where only a few have heroically succeeded against overwhelming odds. The authors do not as of this writing know anyone who has been hurt by being outed by an activist!

The main rational opposition to outing (other than apodictic pronunciamientos for privacy over and against all social responsibility and intellectual honesty) can come only from the belief that the rich and famous will come out voluntarily and in time! By now, however, that pious hope, so dear to the hearts of activists in the early seventies as well as in Wilhelmine Germany, has been bitterly frustrated. Only the naive still cherish such an
illusion. The growing disenchantment, which had already begun before the onset of the plague, diminished what glamor gayness had gained after Stonewall and makes especially HIV-positives unwilling to wait longer. It is highly significant that the newest phase of outing began a little more than two years after the founding of ACT UP on March 12, 1987.

It is immoral for the privileged few to hide their gayness while so many others suffer and die. If they do not find the courage to come out, they must be outed—and the sooner the better!** Outing Lesbians**

With women more than ever in the spotlight, activists have outed the politicians Barbara Mikulski, Liz Holtzman, and Evelyn Murphy. The tennis stars Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova, both outed in palimony suits, come more readily to mind, along with Jodie Foster, Chastity Bono, and Madonna. Before 1940 police and other authorities hardly outed lesbians at all—far less frequently than gay men. Afterwards lesbians became much more visible, partly because of the military and the freedom and opportunities they had obtained during wartime to take jobs normally reserved for men and to congregate together when millions of men were away on military duty. It was prostitutes and at times cross-dressers rather than typical lesbians whom the police harassed. Traditionally, women were far less outed because the worst charge that could be brought against them was adultery, cuckolding their husbands, and casting the shadow of illegitimacy on their children. In a lesbian relationship neither of these two eventualities was possible.
Havelock Ellis pointed out as late as 1927 that society still regarded the single mother as virtually a criminal. The "scarlet letter" retained its vivid hue. A pregnancy or child "out of wedlock" outed the poor woman as "unchaste," dooming her in many cases to marginality with few if any prospects of marriage. The adulteress, the single mother, and the prostitute bore the brunt of society's intolerance in the sexual realm. The lesbian ran a poor fourth because her sexual failings eluded interaction with men. Although the male was at least half responsible for their sins, society hypocritically stigmatized the female half of the guilty pair. The lesbian activity of the single or married woman, by contrast, could have no reproductive consequences and directly infringed the rights of no male, except when it led to alienation of affection. When women did not generally play a public role, the only reason for outing them was their private "misconduct." Excluded from public life, women's sexual behavior was enough to justify stigmatizing them—in part because any heterosexual union entailed the possibility of conception and thus of illegitimacy or bastardy. On the other hand, a boy's or man's heterosexual adventures were usually tolerated and even tacitly encouraged as a sign of masculinity or red-bloodedness. When he entered the public arena his sexual life was exposed to scorn and vituperation by his individual or institutional enemies for political reasons. On the other hand, homosexual behavior even by a man in private life could have serious consequences: think of how difficult it must be to be
a child or adolescent up as a queer in the American South (Sears, 1991). On the other hand, Sears does not mention a single case of a lesbianouted there.

**Outing and the Clergy**

Religious denominations are a problem unto themselves. One of the central paradoxes of history is how many who loved their own sex served churches that formally rejected them and defamed their sexual orientation. Some doubtless felt a calling which stemmed from their innermost selves and could not renounce it, even if Christianity unreservedly condemned homosexual expression and glorified lifelong abstinence; others in churches that demanded celibacy may have wished to escape pressures to marry. Doomed to lead a double life within their religious communities, they found solace only in the awareness that many of their fellow religious shared their sinful proclivities. If we out many of them, can institutional Christianity do without these personnel, or must it tolerate their mode of sexual gratification as a "necessary evil"? Can theologians admit that they have been wrong for the past 1900 years, as they repudiated their fulminations against witches during the Enlightenment and against Jews after Hitler, without shaking the pillars of the institution they profess to guide? These are painful questions, and the outing of prominent clerics and lay leaders will demand answers to them. Clergy, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim, continue serving institutions that denounce homosexuality and formally prohibit active homosexuals from serving in their ranks.
Even those who do not preach against homosexuality, even if they fail or refuse personally to endorse their institution's homophobic utterances or policies, may nevertheless be outed in the way Pentagon officials should be. Outing them would show their superiors, fellows, and congregations that people whom they believed to be straight are gay. Richard Sipe, a priest turned psychologist, projected from his sample of 1,500 priests interviewed between 1960 and 1985 that 20% of the 57,000 Catholic priests in the United States are homosexual and that half of them are sexually active (*Newsweek*, February 23, 1987). Many, even some Roman Catholic sources, conjecture that up to 40% or maybe 50% of their priests, monks, and nuns, in the United States at least, are oriented toward their own sex and may often engage in sacrilegious acts. If they, or the large number of ministers or rabbis oriented toward their own sex were outed, these religious groups could scarcely maintain the homophobic stance which their hypocrisy currently allows. We are truly everywhere, but until this fact is acknowledged, it is unlikely that we shall gain full acceptance rather than grudging toleration. Hence outing the clergy, whose mean hypocrisy is inordinately blatant and galling, is a special need.

So far the only clergy outed are those accused of child molestation, charges which are rapidly increasing in number and in the vindictiveness of the accusers or those caught in the net. Not one cleric has yet been outed on ideological grounds. Even the arch-hypocrite Francis Cardinal Spellman managed to escape outing.
while he was alive. The outing of a living American cardinal might be as beneficial to the Queer Nation as the outing of a Supreme Court Justice and it can scarcely be believed that there are none.

**In the Wake of Forbes' Outing**

Two months after the initial bombshell, the *OutWeek* of May 16, 1990 was captioned SMASHING THE CLOSET, THE PROS AND CONS OF OUTING. An introductory comment by Signorile was headed "Outing Seizes America!" It began: "Not too long ago, some of us at *OutWeek* decided that we could no longer participate in helping rich and famous gays . . . stay in the closet. We felt an obligation to tell the truth. "In one such case--that of Malcolm Forbes--all of the editors of *OutWeek* decided that we would frankly discuss his homosexuality in the magazine. That cover story hit the stands three weeks after the famous multimillionaire died and sent shock waves throughout the media.

"Telling such truths is now called 'outing,' named, of course, by heterosexuals. . . . It's a term that suggests something negative; something active, aggressive and evil. And it makes a silly metaphor seem only more real. Lest we forget, there is no closet, no door, no hinges. There are just individuals who've told a lot of people that they're queer [The new term had "arrived"], and individuals who've told fewer people that they're queer."

The magazine denied having an official position on "outing," and even its editors professed widely divergent views. Hunter Madsen, coauthor of *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* (1990), wrote that the San
Francisco gay novelist Armistead Maupin had posed the question: If he possessed a big, thick computer list naming every gay person in America, would he be willing to publish that list for the heterosexual world to see? Despite positive urges of his conscience, he replied: No, he simply could not publish the "homo-files."

This hypothetical question raises some issues of fact. Madsen's chief objection to outing was that "being flushed into the open before one is ready--before one has overcome shame and guilt, before one has constructed a solid personal alternative to society's mores--can crush a person. . . . And, of course, when you take upon yourself to force others out of the closet you may wreak havoc in unintended ways. . . . Your highhanded intervention might expose them to real hardships and discrimination that they should have had a chance to weigh for themselves."

Victoria A. Brownsworth, a former editor of Philadelphia Gay News, described her experience as a featured speaker at the Gay Pride Week celebration at Haverford and Bryn Mawr colleges. She told the students that she no longer had patience for anyone in the closet. "Every gay man . . . who 'passes' (and tries to) oppresses me further and reaps the benefits of my activism while hiding the strength of our numbers from the people to whom those numbers would make a difference. . . . What are we really talking about? We're talking about exposing the collaborationists." When a student asked if outing did not represent a threat to the privacy of the individual, she answered that "in one sense it does . . . yet if we
look at the history of oppression, the most virulent backlash has been directed toward those
groups who were able to 'pass' as members of the majority group--like the majority of Jews in
Germany in the final days of the Weimar Republic." As a woman, Brownsworth perceived that
patriarchal old boy network ensured "closet rights" for the rich and famous by enlisting male
journalists as junior members (Beery et al. 1990, pp. 48-49).

Thus the issues raised by Brownsworth far exceed the limits of "outing." She questioned the
legitimacy of an assimilationist policy that seeks to minimize the differences between the in-
group and the out-group, but in so doing challenges a basic assumption of American life. The
social politics of the United States have always been assimilationist. While immigrant groups
were allowed their own community life and their own organizations and media, the fundamental
premise was always that the second generation would be raised with the new land as its horizon,
speaking the English language, and steeped in American values and traditions. The demand for
"multiculturalism" that underlies the position taken by Brownsworth marks a failure of
assimilation and a threat to the continued viability of that policy. To be sure, we are not and
have never been a religious or ethnic group distinct from all others, rather, like women, they cut
across all conventional lines of religious and ethnic identity. Our separatism must always be
imperfect separatism, since homosexual males, like lesbian separatists, cannot attain state power.
A Queer Nation in the geographical sense of an independent state would, to put it
bluntly, have a rather gloomy demographic future, unless it functioned as an asylum for the persecuted queer offspring of "breeders." The most that we can hope to achieve is a social space that we can call our own within the territory of the state on which we reside. Ours is a nation without a state!

**Variety of Opinions Within OutWeek and Elsewhere**

After outing Forbes, Rotello offered his own considerations. He saw the outing debate as a reappraisal of basic assumptions about the movement, as a declaration that powerful closeted homosexuals, and by extension, all of us, have an inherent obligation to our community (or nation). Such an assertion presupposes we constitute a genuine, inescapable minority into which we are born or compelled by personality to join, from which we derive advantages and disadvantages, and to which we owe inherent allegiance. "Such an unexpected definition of gayness is being bitterly resisted by both straights who fear and loathe the concept of gays as a legitimate minority, and by gays who are unprepared for the implications of such a redefinition."

Lindsy Van Gelder, a lesbian free-lance writer, mentioned (1990) that the heterosexual editor of a small southern newspaper told her that he would never run a profile of someone in a happy, committed gay relationship. This was part of his editorial mission to protect vulnerable teenage readers from finding gay life "too appealing." This is but one facet of how the media defame us and our supporters. It is not a matter of invasion of privacy. By and large, public figures and their families effectively have none: in
1973-74, when the media were staging a coup d'état against Richard Nixon (ever since far less analyzed than the one against John F. Kennedy), they exposed details of his private life that in past generations—if recorded at all—would have lain in manuscripts sealed until seventy-five years after the author's death. But, Van Gelder adds, the rules should be the same for gay celebrities.

However, the journalist should proceed from the recognition that we now form a Queer Nation, even if it remains in social and legal limbo. But it is a nation with a public image and political interests of its own. A companion ethical problem to "outing" is "inning"—keeping gay people in the closet even when they have no desire to be there. The classic example is the refusal of many newspaper obituaries to name surviving lovers—"life partners." Van Gelder mentioned that most reporters would not write a story about a lesbian hunting for her life partner presumed buried under debris in the 1989 Bay Area earthquake.

Behind much of the confusion is the belief that homosexuality is such a "marked" characteristic—so suspect, so bizarre, and so overwhelming—that any mention of it automatically makes it the focus of the story. The neutralization of the stigma is therefore a precondition for journalistic objectivity.

Conclusion

Outing represents a pressure brought by the visible and vocal portion of the Queer Nation on the invisible, silent, prestigious minority, as it were a demand that the elite of our community recognize their allegiance and act to further the collective
interests of our nation to which--by birth, socialization, or choice--they belong. This practice stems from the growth of a political consciousness that sees all of us as sharing a common fate and as responsible for one another. If it succeeds, it will magnify our symbolic presence at the upper levels of society and make the public aware of how many prominent individuals prefer tabooed sexual pleasures. But at the same time it can engender a sense of the rift within society caused by sexual orientation and perhaps recriminations against a community that is still feared and shunned by traditionalists.

The members of the 50+ generation would still have to face peer pressure of such intensity that voluntary "coming out" would be exceedingly difficult. For the young activists who boldly take to the streets in ACT UP and Queer Nation the intolerance of the pre-Stonewall era is ancient history. They embody a self-assurance and a self-confidence that no previous generation, crushed as it was by all-pervasive homophobia, could have felt. And so they can demand, perhaps oblivious of the trauma and anguish that their elders suffered in their own teens and twenties, that the older, rich-and-famous cohort cotton to the new standard of behavior.

As intolerance diminishes through the irreversible passing of generations and increased insight into homosexuality, the need for concealment and deception will correspondingly lessen. The hypocrisy in sexual matters that has poisoned Western civilization for centuries will ebb. The burden of secrecy and falsehood will then more easily be discarded, and the truth will rather be
welcomed. In turn the anxiety felt by many heterosexuals uncertain of the sexual identity of others will abate, just because a frank admission will be almost a matter of courtesy in dealings with friends and acquaintances. Of course, there have always been heterosexuals who subtly intimated to their gay associates that they knew of their orientation but preferred not to have it mentioned--but in this new era the unease and pain associated with such knowledge will be minimized.

Candor about sexual orientation may have broader effects. Social psychologists have investigated a phenomenon called disclosure. In daily life, one observes that some individuals will freely convey personal information--about their job, spouse, political views, and the like--while others will remain guarded. The closeted by definition are reluctant to discuss their sexuality or anything related to it, such as home arrangements, vacation plans, and the like. In this way they develop an overall pattern of self-censorship, denying others any bits of information which may be assembled to uncover the secret pattern of their lives. Once homosexuality is out in the open, this motive for hiding knowledge about oneself will disappear. No longer fearful of disclosure, homosexuals will bond more easily with other self-revealing individuals.

Outing, like coming out, is part of the process whereby the homosexual culture or subculture, driven underground by religious intolerance, is regaining or asserting its public identity and image. This process now seems irreversible. The AIDS crisis could
not stop it; instead it served to strengthen our resolve to resume our forward march and to assert our nationalism. This is not to say that vestigial attitudes toward the "crime against nature" will not make this process a protracted and painful one. The task presents a supreme and exciting challenge: it is not for everyone. It is courageous for individuals to risk personal advantage to further the interests of the erotic minority to which they belong. Others guilty of injuring their own kind or even actively persecuting them should be unmasked as hypocrites. But outing must, in the last analysis, be seen in the context of the cowardice and hypocrisy forced upon us by our fanatical persecutors. The ending of obligatory heterosexuality is essential for the resolution of this dilemma. Homosexual behavior is entitled to the same respect and privacy as heterosexual, no more and no less. The German Romantic poet August von Platen wrote in 1823: "Those who feast on virtue leave to us the sin alone." This heterosexual claim to a monopoly on virtue must be dislodged. This dislodgement is the precondition for freedom of conscience in the sexual sphere and the emancipation of those who love their own sex from this last major relic of the Middle Ages.

As Charley Shively said at the Gay Pride Rally in Boston on June 9, 1990, the greatest obstacle confronting the gay movement is the dogma of obligatory heterosexuality imposed upon homosexuals in Western civilization by the religious intolerance of the late Middle Ages. Whatever its source, nothing positive or beneficial to society rests upon the ideology of obligatory heterosexuality.
Once it is abandoned, the question of outing will cease, as no stigma will attach to departures from the norm. Everyone will be free to sound the depths of his or her sexual orientation and to act upon it, even to declare it or boast of it. While the citizen's right to privacy in sexual matters--despite the Supreme Court--should be recognized and honored by the state (even if only as a legal fiction), the principle that one should be forthright about one's sexual feelings should prevail in society. Obligatory heterosexuality is as useless to America as the Berlin Wall was to Germany, and tearing down the artificial barriers that separate American queer nationals from their fellow-citizens, even while recognizing their dual citizenship, will at long last end the post-medieval anachronism of conformity and unanimity in sexual life. It will relegate the need for outing to the dustbin of history.


