

Media Watch

The Ins and Outs of "Outing"

Outing (n): 1. A journey or trip undertaken by an individual or group for pleasant purposes, as in a summer picnic. 2. The process by which a gay or lesbian individual has his or her sexual orientation made public, most often against his or her will.

If that second definition isn't included in your dictionary yet, then get out a pen and write it in. "Outing" has become one of the hot topics in the nation's media, both gay and straight, over the past few months.

The philosophy behind outing is that the gay community is adversely affected by prominent homosexuals who either keep the doors to their closets locked from inside or who deceive the world outside into thinking that they are heterosexual. Writers such as Michelangelo Signorile, whose Gossip Watch column in *OutWeek* led to the eventual "outing" of recently deceased Malcolm Forbes, contend that the gay community (as well as society as a whole)

has a right to know who is gay or lesbian, particularly if the person in question has gained some fame or prominence.

Though almost everyone agrees that the gay community could benefit from famous and influential role models, many people feel that outing is akin to an invasion of privacy or harrassment. Even public officials, some would argue, have a right to a private life.

Signorile doesn't buy that argument. In an April article in the *Village Voice*, he wrote, "Just being famous and in the closet hurts all queers. While people around us are dying, respecting the privacy of, say, the designer who marries so he can seem heterosexual and make another \$25 million begins to wear thin."

A quick glance at the supermarket tabloids will give you an idea of who's being "outed" at any given time. Just about every one of them carried a story about

Richard Chamberlain last month, and recently stories about John Travolta have been surfacing.

Who's next? Who knows?! At least there are some strong souls like Michelle Shocked who have the decency to tell us about themselves on their own and not feel ashamed or intimidated by the words "gay" and "lesbian."

With more examples such as hers, perhaps "outing" will only become a temporary addition to the dictionary and people will start to come out of their own free will. Better use a pencil instead of a pen when you write in that definition.

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