The Glass Closet: In and Out in Hollywood and Washington

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The Glass Closet: In and Out in Hollywood and Washington

“The Glass Closet” panel discussion covered various LGBT topics in Hollywood with the two most controversial being Out magazine’s “50 Most Powerful Gay Men and Women in America” cover where models held the headshots of Jodie Foster and Anderson Cooper, and The Hollywood Reporter’s outing of Merv Griffin in death. Neither Foster nor Cooper have ever come out of the closet nor claim to be gay. While the LGBT media have been vocal about discussing such topics, the mainstream press seems to be afraid to touch this subject.

“The ethics of outing is a hot topic in journalism, both in Hollywood and Washington,” said Martin Kaplan, the director of the Norman Lear Center, which studies the impact of entertainment on society. “This panel is an ideal group to examine the borderline between privacy and reporting.”
Participants

Howard Bragman
Howard Bragman founded BNC, the largest entertainment PR firm in the US in 1989 and sold it to IPG in 2003. In 2005 Bragman began Fifteen Minutes and in less than three years, it has become one of the industry’s most respected boutique PR firms with clients in crisis communications, celebrity representation, corporate entertainment, consumer branding, GLBT issues, cause related work and special events.

Wilson Cruz
Wilson Cruz, an openly gay actor for more than ten years, continues to work as a strong advocate for the LGBT community. Beginning his career as a star on the critically-acclaimed and now cult classic *My So-Called Life*, Cruz embodies what it is to be an “out” actor right out of the gate.

David Ehrenstein
David Ehrenstein is a renowned film critic who focuses on homosexuality in cinema. He began his successful writing career in 1965 with an interview with Andy Warhol which was published in *Film Culture* magazine in 1966. Ehrenstein has also written for *The San Francisco Examiner, Rolling Stone, Cahiers du Cinema, Daily Variety* and *The Advocate*.

Greg Hernandez
Greg Hernandez has covered the entertainment industry for the Daily News since 2001. He’s considered a bit odd by some for his obsession with box office numbers, has been known to camp out near the kitchen at premieres for first crack at the hors d’oeurves, and Greg’s never seen a red carpet he didn’t want to stroll down.

Larry Gross
Larry Gross is a professor of communication and directs the School of Communication at the USC Annenberg School. He is a widely published scholar specializing in media and culture, art and communication, visual communications and media portrayals of minorities, including a book he published in 1993 called, *Contested Closets: The Politics and Ethics of Outing*. Gross also teaches gay imagery in media.

Martin Kaplan
Martin Kaplan, director of the Norman Lear Center, also holds the Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment, Media, and Society at the USC Annenberg School for Communication. He was chief speechwriter to Vice President Walter F. Mondale and is a regular commentator on NPR’s *All Things Considered* and on CBS *Morning News*. His articles have appeared in publications including *The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, Time, U.S. News & World Report, The American Scholar, The Woodrow Wilson Quarterly* and *The New Republic*.

Shana Krochmal
Shana Krochmal is a writer living in Los Angeles, she is currently producing a short film. * Potential is based on Shana’s script about a fortysomething rock chick struggling to write a song with a seductive pop princess. She is a well-known blogger and writes for *Popnography*, which is Out.com’s daily pop culture blog.

Karen Ocamb
Karen Ocamb, an award-winning journalist with more than 30 years in the business, is currently the news editor for *IN Los Angeles* magazine, which is a regional LGBT publication. Ocamb started her career in New York in television news working along side Dan Rather and Bob Schieffer and eventually evolving as a producer covering the’84 Olympics for CBS affiliates.

Ray Richmond
Ray Richmond is a globally syndicated critic and entertainment/media columnist best known for his years with *The Hollywood Reporter* and work as a talent coordinator and segment producer for *The Merv Griffin Show*. 
Marty Kaplan: Welcome, everyone. I’m Marty Kaplan. I’m the director of the Norman Lear Center. If you don’t know the Lear Center, it studies the impact of entertainment on society and the impact of society on entertainment. And by entertainment, we don’t only mean what a Wall Street analyst would mean about the entertainment sector of the economy conventionally; we also mean all those realms in which the art of grabbing and holding attention has become the center of that domain. And so, for example, we study entertainment as an umbrella for the news and journalism business, for politics, for education, for religion – all the ways in which marketing, branding, advertising and audience-gathering and attention-focusing are key elements, the Lear Center studies. I welcome you to visit our website at Learcenter.org.

Our event today was launched when two things beautifully came together. First, Larry Gross, the director of our School of Communication, said to me that he was about to do some research on the topic of what he called the “glass closet,” which also, it turned out, was a cover, a headline in Out magazine. He was interested in doing primary research and interviews and so on. I was fascinated to hear that. And then second, almost immediately thereafter, Howard Bragman, who is a publicist extraordinaire – would that be all right –?

Howard Bragman: That’s what my publicist says. Yes.

Marty Kaplan: – here in Los Angeles – he founded a firm bearing his name and he now runs a new firm, bearing Andy Warhol’s famous words, Fifteen Minutes – Howard said that he was really interested in an article that Ray Richmond wrote in the Hollywood Reporter and online, about the death of Merv Griffin, and in particular, about the reaction that followed from it in the media about then the broader question of outing, the ethics of outing, of the glass closet in Hollywood. And then the next day or so, suddenly all of America knew a new and now immortal phrase, “wide stance.”

So it struck me that this topic was relevant on both coasts and it would be a terrific opportunity to put together a dream panel. And that is what Howard has done, and so I’m going to now turn it over to him. Please welcome all of our guests.

Howard Bragman: Thank you for all coming. We’re going to out a lot of people to make it interesting for you and have a lot to talk about. I have to
say, I’m really happy to be here. Marty and I have been talking a long time about a panel that’s newsworthy and timely and is going to be controversial and baby, we got it. It’s true: we do have a dream panel. That’s really cool. I’m going to introduce them and say a little and then I’m going to let them talk about themselves, because then I’ll forget something important.

Shana Krochmal used to work at GLAAD and now she is a journalist and a blogger and works with Out magazine, who did the “Glass Closet” issue. What else would you like them to know?

Shana Krochmal: I started off as a journalist. This is kind of my return to it. I get to write about this subject every day, because I write Popnography, which is Out.com’s daily pop culture blog.

Howard Bragman: Popnography?

Shana Krochmal: Popnography, yes. You can find it at Out.com. The nice thing is I get to write about these kinds of things on a daily basis. I run a collection of denials, who’s denied they’re gay. I actually try to save that for once a week, because it’s really depressing otherwise, how many there can be in any given week. Then I get to help contribute to the magazine and contribute to this issue, among other things, pull back and sort of take this longer lens vision of what does it mean to say you’re gay or not say you’re gay and how’d everyone know you were gay anyway. That’s what I do for Out.

Howard Bragman: Great. I’m going to go across the way. We’ll go back and forth, don’t worry. Greg Hernandez, who writes for the Daily News and also has a blog on gay issues and really respects me for representing Isaiah Washington.

Greg Hernandez: Did you read it? You read that?

Howard Bragman: You think I don’t Google myself?

Greg Hernandez: I covered entertainment for several years for the Daily News and kept sort of sneaking in some gay coverage, the GLAAD Awards and all that kind of stuff. And then one year after OutFest I thought, I’m going to blog during OutFest and after it was over, well I’m going to keep blogging about, you know, entertainment, kind of through a queer eye, my queer eye. And it’s gotten so popular, they’ve now asked me to do a mainstream blog that I start this week for Hollywood Joe. And some of the Out in Hollywood readers are kind of upset. They think I’m selling out. But they’re both going to continue.

Howard Bragman: A lot of people think I sell out. You just get over it. Trust me.
Greg Hernandez: Selling out is underrated.

Howard Bragman: I know. My old friend, Karen Ocamb, who is a Jack Russell lover and a longtime journalist, who has consistently covered the gay scene in Los Angeles – for how many years?


Howard Bragman: For a number of different publications.

Karen Ocamb: I’m now the news editor for In Los Angeles magazine, which has become essentially the newspaper or newsmagazine of record for Los Angeles County and the Los Angeles area. On this topic, I have to decide all the time whether to publicize. For instance, the blogs were all over this Out cover and issue and I had to decide whether or not to even post a picture of it on our news site. The same thing about Merv Griffin’s death. Any number of –

[Cell phone rings.]

Karen Ocamb: – that was him.

Wilson Cruz: It’s my agent. “Don’t talk about being gay.”

Howard Bragman: I’m going to go on to Ray Richmond, so we can get through the introductions, since we have limited time. Ray is another long-time –

Ray Richmond: Rabble-rouser.


Ray Richmond: First time caller.


Ray Richmond: My name’s Ray and I’m a closeted heterosexual. No, that’s interesting. Merv has a way of calling, even from beyond the grave. I sparked, I guess, a lot of this outrage. I worked at Hollywood Reporter writ-
ing a column called *The Post* which is now published every Friday. It formerly was published every Tuesday. Unfortunately, the first Friday it was published turned out to be the day of the man’s funeral. Which truly was not purposeful. It was accidental. But I would be disingenuous if I said I was crushed by the fact that it did run that day.

I’m a TV critic for the paper as well. I also maintain a blog that has nothing to do with my purported gay agenda – it’s the first time I ever had a gay agenda, but I’m happy to have one – called *Past Deadline*, that runs on *The Hollywood Reporter* website. And I’ve been a journalist, I guess since before the beginning of time and it’s the first time I’ve ever gotten myself involved in something like this and I’m happy to finally do it. I feel like – speaking of closeted – I’m a closeted social issues crusader.

Howard Bragman: I like that. To my right, I’m sure you recognize the amazing actor, Wilson Cruz, who has been in all your favorite shows over the years and will be in another if that call from his agent goes through and the audition goes well. Also, he’s a longtime community activist, and an out actor, which is pretty darned rare in town. We think a lot of people are coming out, but there’s probably less than 25 in the acting community – more in music, certainly, but in acting. And?

Wilson Cruz: That covers it. Yes, I’ve been an openly gay actor for 19 years now and I’m now [mock mumble] 12. I’ve been an openly gay actor for 13 years now, since the beginning of my career. And I know everyone who’s gay in town. Actually, it’s how I make most of my money.

Howard Bragman: And many of them, you don’t know they’re gay and they’re not even that sure themselves. But when you see Wilson without his shirt, it turns people, it just does that.

And we have Larry Gross, who heads the Communication Department here at the Annenberg School. And?

Larry Gross: Well, I wrote a book about outing in the early ‘90s, about what I guess I would now call Outing 1.0. Actually the story starts at the beginning of the 20th century, but it really starts again in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s and then kind of died down and picked up again. So we’re now in Outing 2.0.

I think the reference is appropriate, because I think the big change in the last period has been the Internet, which has changed the rules of the game. But I also think the condition of gay people in America has changed in a way that makes the issues different than they were even 15 years ago. So as an academic, as a scholar and someone who studies media and culture, this is a really important topic for us to be looking at and talking about.
Howard Bragman: Absolutely. And finally, to my left is my old friend, David Ehrenstein. David is, what – African American, Jewish and gay, so he’s got a lot of minority groups going on.

David Ehrenstein: And I was raised a Roman Catholic.

Howard Bragman: See. You’re beloved on all counts.

David Ehrenstein: I’m one-stop multicultural shopping.

Howard Bragman: David was a frequent lecturer when I taught here. I was the easiest. Too bad I’m gone for you guys who are still here. Professor Easy.

David Ehrenstein: He brought Mila Kunis to class, can you imagine?

Howard Bragman: I brought Monica Lewinsky. Come on. David and I developed the first draft of what’s on my website, the 3.0 version of the 10 Commandments of PR, and he’s an author and –?

David Ehrenstein: And? Still an author and I’m writing a lot. This week I’ve been writing for the LA Times online in their Opinion column. I’m involved in a thing called “Dust-Up,” in which they take people from two opposing perspectives – in this case, me versus Andrew Breitbart, who puts together the Drudge Report blog and also Arianna Huffington, jointly. And we’re talking about Hollywood and the war. So, gay issues have come up! As they do anytime you’re going to talk about show business now or anytime you’re going to talk about celebrity now. It is the bell that not only cannot be un-rung; it continues to ring loudly at the drop of a hat.

Howard Bragman: Great. Let me just tell you the ground rules. We’re going to go about 25 minutes now with our panelists. I’m going to ask questions. Some I will direct to people, some are going to be open. Hit your buzzer. And then we’re going to have 15-20 minutes for you guys, because I’m sure there’s lots of questions. And I’m just going to start.

And anybody can go into this, but the first thing I want to ask is, is not discussing a gay person’s life, à la Merv Griffin, homophobic? If being gay is equal to being straight, we do not hesitate to talk about a heterosexual actor’s dating or marriage and we do not call their publicist and ask them if we’re allowed to do that. And yet in the gay world, there are different rules. Isn’t that innately homophobic?

Ray Richmond: I certainly believe that was the case, which is why I wrote a column after the man died. I also felt like I had a certain qualification to
do so, having worked for him in the mid-’80s on his talk show, at which point it was common knowledge among the staff that he was gay. This was not a discussed thing. It was simply a known fact. And I, silly me, thought that, well, all of America must know this. It seems to be the worst-kept secret imaginable that this man is in the closet, ha ha.

So I wrote my column “Merv Griffin Was Gay,” the week that he died and then followed it up. Why should that be such a shameful gargantuan thing to say? It turned out it was a shameful gargantuan thing to say. I got horrifically hateful emails from people, “How dare you out this man?” Well, number one, he’s dead. He doesn’t have a sex life anymore –

Howard Bragman: And he doesn’t have a right to privacy. Once you die, you cannot be libeled or slandered.

Ray Richmond: I could not believe the outrage. I got a lot of support as well, but the outrage –

Howard Bragman: Can you go through the series of events: it was published, taken off Reuters and –

Ray Richmond: It was published. I’ll start with, I’m still astonished that this actually ran in a Hollywood trade paper. We are not in the habit of outing people. That was not my intent going in. I wondered if the discussion itself could be done without it becoming scandalous, in 2007. The answer was, no.

So I wrote this and sent it to one of the editors and said, “You know, hey, this is going to be kind of a big deal. You may want to run it up the flagpole.” And she said, “Why?” And I thought, oh my God, I’m in. I couldn’t believe it. And then basically, all of the big people who could have been the stoppers of this column were on vacation that week. It was the perfect form of events. It’s 4:30-5:00, 5:30-6:00 the afternoon before, I’m like, holy sh--, this thing is actually going to run. I couldn’t believe it.

As soon as it ran, bingo, that morning I got six phone messages before 9:00. “Hi, this is” – oh my God, his lawyers are calling. He’s dead. His lawyers are calling. They’re pulling ads, they’re threatening. I’m like, okay, good, bring it on. But then the editors said, no, no, this isn’t good. So they pulled the piece off the website, 10:30 a.m.
Howard Bragman: After it’s in 30,000 printed copies.

Ray Richmond: I thought, am I missing something? I don’t think we can un-ring this bell. It’s already published. The paper said, well, we’re pulling it anyway. And I said this is about the most retarded thing I’ve ever heard. If you want to stab me in the back and throw me to wolves over there, perfect way to do it. This is insane. We’re going to be the laughing stock of Columbia Journalism Review, Editor & Publisher, you name it.

So, an hour and a half later they restored it. I was told it wasn’t my begging and pleading. They finally decided, well, they’ve already pulled the ad and we can’t talk them out of it, so let’s put it back up. Strictly a business decision.

So anyway, it goes back up and I’m checking around the blogosphere and suddenly I’ve turned into seemingly an icon of the gay blogosphere. And I thought, in 2007, how can this be such a big deal? Why can’t we look at this as another semi-mundane detail of the man’s life? Why is it perceived as having smeared his reputation and his good name to say he was gay, if indeed being gay is just another orientation and we’re all so liberated?

Howard Bragman: Is there anybody on our panel who thinks he did something horrible?

Shana Krochmal: No.

Howard Bragman: Is there anybody in the audience who thinks he did something horrible?

Ray Richmond: Aw, come on, somebody has to.

Howard Bragman: Come on, somebody has to think Ray’s horrible or he doesn’t feel good about himself.

Karen Ocamb: But maybe for a different reason than you. I had to think about it in terms of who is saying it, who’s slept with him, who has evidence if you will.

Howard Bragman: He’s a sensitive lover, Karen, okay? That’s all I can say.
Karen Ocamb: Well, not according to the lawsuits. So, it was actually because of the lawsuits and because of allegations of sexual harassment, etc., that that then made it news for me. It wasn't simply because he was gay and being outing. So, I did report on it, but I think I was judicious about it and I had a journalistic reason to write about it.

Howard Bragman: Did his death affect that? The fact that he was dead and couldn’t sue anybody?

Karen Ocamb: I’m sure it did from my publisher. But that was not my concern.

David Ehrenstein: Well, actually, that also came up in the fact that both the New York Times and the Washington Post, in their obituaries referred to the lawsuits, which are facts and are part of the story, and therefore, a legitimate part of the story whether you’re going to go into all the details.

Karen Ocamb: And I did that for attributions.

David Ehrenstein: Right. But an interesting thing you talk about is bringing up do we know who slept with him or what it was like. The overall problem is that heterosexuality is seen as a self-evident truth and gayness is seen as somehow obscure, that has to be proved or something. Like it’s impossible for me to say that Gore Vidal is gay, because I haven’t actually slept with him. You know?

Karen Ocamb: But David, it’s still criminal in some people’s minds.

David Ehrenstein: Well, I can’t deal with – there are all sorts of things that are criminal in some people’s minds. When you get to that level, then we’re not going to be able to say anything about anything. I think a good deal of judiciousness is involved in that simply saying somebody is gay is not a story. That doesn’t mean anything. There has to be a reason why this is coming into the mix, is being brought up, is being dealt with. And certainly when it’s part of the story of a particular person and who they are and what they have done, then you’re just going to have to get down to brass tacks. But this would have to do with everything else. We don’t have to mention that somebody has a wife and children either, although that seems to be sort of automatic.

Howard Bragman: Let me go to Greg.

Greg Hernandez: They’re in the public eye. I sent Ray a note, actually, because I was really horrified that the Reporter pulled it down, especially because I was look-
ing at the print edition on my desk. Either own it or don’t. You signed off on it, so that’s it, it’s out there.

Also I think it depends on how discreet the person is. If they’re a closet case, that’s their business. If they want to stay a closet case, fine. But if they’re a closet case who allegedly sexually harasses people and is sort of open with their life, then they’re going to be vulnerable to it. I’m not going to write about it. I’m going to let somebody else do it.

Howard Bragman: What is the standard? I worked with The Advocate years ago, when they outed Pete Williams, the Assistant Secretary of Defense. It was the only time I’ve been involved in outing someone. I knew people that had killed themselves because the military kicked them out because they were gay, and this was a gay man who was going to gay bars in Washington. Was that acceptable?

Greg Hernandez: I think there’s a different standard – and I feel a little differently – when a politician, who’s anti-gay, very much out there, we know they’re self-loathing, is doing all this harm to the gay community and not being very discreet with their private or personal life. I think they’re fair game.

Larry Gross: The Pete Williams case is a little different than that, although it was the first case that clearly met all of the journalistic standards, basically of hypocrisy. But to be fair, Pete Williams was not a politician, he was a public figure, he was the Deputy Secretary of Defense for most of –

Ray Richmond: He was publicly defending that policy.

Larry Gross: He was the face of the Pentagon Defense Secretary, Dick Cheney, lest we forget, at the time. And in fact, that whole controversy served the purpose of embarrassing the Pentagon on this issue during the first Gulf War. Dick Cheney said, “That is something of an old chestnut.” Of course he didn’t have to talk about Mary at that point, yet.

Ray Richmond: – Speaking of old chestnuts.

Larry Gross: There are two important issues about Pete Williams here, maybe three. The first is, he was a public figure. He was engaged or supporting an anti-gay policy publicly. Second, and very important, he was living a private gay life, as you say, in gay bars, living in gay circles, living a life enabled by a gay community that he was not participating in. He was not paying his dues, if you like, to the movement that had created the possibility of his living that life. He was able to live a relatively free life on the assump-
tion that everybody would be discreet about it and that’s when that broke. But he was taking advantage of it. And by the way, Pete Williams didn’t exactly suffer, you know. The moment he –

**Howard Bragman:** No, he should have sent me a thank you note, I thought.

**Larry Gross:** – the moment he left the DOD he was hired by NBC as their justice correspondent. You can see him all the time on the news, still closeted, still a glass closet, if you like.

**David Ehrenstein:** He’s in the NLGJA by now. He’s out.

**Larry Gross:** Well, he’s out, but not, you know, not much choice there.

**David Ehrenstein:** No, but the other thing you usually mention, too, is the fact that his particular job at the DOD at that time was actually protected.

**Larry Gross:** Yes, by civil service.

**David Ehrenstein:** By civil service. He had civil service protection to help engineer non-protection for a whole bunch of other people. And also what was revealed at the first NLGJA convention in terms of his fabulous gay life, he and his then-boyfriend had a summer share in the Pines with Andrew Sullivan and his then-boyfriend.

**Howard Bragman:** Andrew attacked me and others for outing him as fascists and McCarthian. Later on, he had a somewhat different line, but none the less at that point he was very defensive.

**Greg Hernandez:** He was just congratulated by Chris Matthews on the air Saturday night for his marriage.

**Ray Richmond:** Oh, Chris Mathews loves Andrew!

**Howard Bragman:** Off topic. Shana?

**Shana Krochmal:** I was just going to say two things. One, Larry, what you were saying about the sense of paying your dues or obligations, because looking at Anderson and Jodie and whether or not they should be on the cover –

**Howard Bragman:** Where I was going next, so thank you.

**Shana Krochmal:** Okay. One of the things that I think played a big part in that decision was that here were two people who had managed to do incredibly well for themselves career-wise, who were legitimately major power players in their respec-
tive fields. And one of the ways they were able to get and hold on to that powerful position was by creating the kind of double-sided appeal, where their gay fans knew they were gay. It was the worst kept secret. Everyone, you know, knew.

Howard Bragman: Was that purposely done, do you think?

Shana Krochmal: No, I don’t necessarily think it was done purposely. What I want to say is that these are people whose gay fans recognize them as being part of our community. And whether or not they’re condemned for not coming out more, we seem to mostly claim them as our own. And the straight fans are able to continue this kind of denial about the fact that these figures are in fact queer.

Howard Bragman: Do you think anybody believes Jodie Foster is straight?

Shana Krochmal: Yes, I do, Howard. I think the power of humans to deny –

Howard Bragman: I’d like to meet them. They’re stupid.

Shana Krochmal: People think Anderson Cooper is straight! The number of letters that Out got from outraged female fans of Anderson who said, how dare you say this? When Clay Aiken got outed, people were talking about suing him for fraud, because they felt that they had been denied their worship of this male hero.

Howard Bragman: I was quoted in that article.

Shana Krochmal: Yes.

Howard Bragman: And people asked me, how could you be quoted in that article? I said you don’t really get a choice of the cover. I was not happy, because I’ve seen Jodie Foster at Commitment to Life and other events to benefit the gay and AIDS community. I’ve seen Anderson Cooper cover those very issues on TV and I didn’t feel they met the criteria. Is there anybody who supported them being on the cover? Greg, you oppose?

Greg Hernandez: I didn’t like it.

Howard Bragman: You supported that cover?

Larry Gross: Absolutely.

Howard Bragman: Because?
Larry Gross: Because the presumption that this is a stigma that has to be hidden is part of what maintains the stigma. I don’t think either Anderson Cooper or Jodie Foster are at any risk here in terms of their careers. Nobody has been outing, either 15-years-ago or presently, vulnerable private citizens.

Karen Ocamb: Well, I disagree.

Greg Hernandez: Whose decision is it though? Whose decision is it?

Howard Bragman: These are people who choose to live very public lives, to be paid obscene amounts of money. There are certain costs there. There are certain bargains you make. Nobody has to be a public figure or celebrity on the cover of magazines.

Wilson Cruz: But I don’t know that Jodie Foster is necessarily living a very public life. I mean, she’s an actress, yes, and she does make her money in the public realm, but she’s not necessarily putting any part of her private life on display.

Howard Bragman: She does cryptic interviews.

Shana Krochmal: Yes, talking about her kids extensively, talking about her family life. And I mean, I’d feel perfectly comfortable with a celebrity who does not want to talk about their personal life. Don’t talk about it. My experience is that most of the time they say they don’t want to talk about it and then they keep talking about it.

Howard Bragman: After negotiating the arrangement as to what questions you can’t ask.

Shana Krochmal: Right. And I think to me, the thing that –

David Ehrenstein: Your thing is that you can’t have it both ways?

Shana Krochmal: I still think you can have it both ways.

Howard Bragman: So a celebrity who’s gay and doesn’t want to talk about their life should not do interviews?

Shana Krochmal: No. I think they should. If they say they’re not going to talk about their personal life, they should not talk about their personal life. And I think we see people like Jodie and Anderson, who say, I’m not going to talk about my
personal life, unless that means I can’t talk about my kids or I can’t talk about my brother committing suicide, or I can’t talk about my mom. Which is fine.

The reason I come down on the side of something like this cover being okay – and I didn’t personally make the decision to put them on the cover; I contributed to this, I fully support it and I struggle with this on the blog every day – is I don’t believe in this wink-wink, nudge-nudge journalism. I think it’s elitist and I think it undervalues the American audience’s ability to think critically about people.

I think for us to sit around and say we could make a list of 100 people in Hollywood who we know, through friends of friends or people we slept with or people who we know –

Howard Bragman: Or because we’ve actually slept with them –

Shana Krochmal: Right, exactly. And then every time they come up in our various publications, we can leave these little breadcrumbs, like whispering about what their preferences are, what they like or who they hang out with, right? As if the only way it’s okay to talk about them being gay is if the readers are using the same dictionary that we are, if they can translate Ted Casablanca, then it’s okay for them to know this person is gay.

Why is that true? Why isn’t it okay for someone who isn’t as hooked into entertainment culture, who just lives in Ohio and likes to hear what their favorite celebrities do on the weekend, why does that person have to be protected from the truth that these people are gay?

Greg Hernandez: Go back to the original statement of what the rules are in the interview. I don’t think they should have to talk about anything they don’t want to talk about. They can just say, “I don’t talk about that. I don’t answer that question.” I mean, if there’s all this other stuff out there, all this other proof and we want to ask, hey, lots of people are asking about your partner – if they don’t want to answer it, they don’t have to answer it.

I think especially as gay journalists, we have a different kind of thing. We went through the process of coming out. And we all wanted it to be our decision, if somebody at school had yanked us out. Yes, I know they’re in the public eye, but they haven’t lost all rights as a human. I think especially as a gay blogger, I have a little more compassion. I wouldn’t do what Perez Hilton does. Because I know it’s a very personal thing.
Howard Bragman: Can you put Wentworth Miller on the cover by the same rule?

Shana Krochmal: I wouldn’t.

Howard Bragman: You wouldn’t? Why does Wentworth Miller get a pass when they don’t?

Shana Krochmal: I think he is nowhere near as powerful a figure in Hollywood.

Howard Bragman: What’s the measure? He’s on a hit show, they’re not.

Larry Gross: Maybe next month he will be. I think it’s important to put this in a somewhat larger historical or social context. For nearly a century, show business in this country, particularly Hollywood, has been selling the lives of celebrities and movie stars as their primary product. One could make the case that the movies are less important than selling the private lives. And they’ve been doing it through the celebrity media that go along.

And most of the people here – I’m in the academic world, I’m objective – most of the people here make their living as part of that industry. They’re selling it. You can’t have it both ways; say, I make my money by selling facts, facts about people’s lives, but now I’m going to draw the line.

The only justification for drawing the line of which facts you’re going to sell and which you won’t is that it’s shameful. And you continually send the message that we draw the line here because it’s shameful, as opposed to all the other – I mean, look at Britney, look at Mel Gibson, look at Lindsay Lohan, look at everybody whose lives get dished out without that constraint.

Wilson Cruz: At the same time, when you out someone who isn’t willing or capable to be out themselves, then you’re putting them in a position to actually be speaking from a place of shame. I don’t think as a community we necessarily want these people out there answering questions which will be posted now that they’re outed.

Larry Gross: I actually agree with you. I think if you ask me, which wasn’t the question, what should the strategy be here, collectively, I think the strategy needs to be to attack the institutions that enforce the closet. Which is why the project I’m interested in doing is not to talk about the glass closet, but about the closet keepers.

Wilson Cruz: The ones that keep them in the closet.
Larry Gross: Yes, the handlers, the agents, the managers who say, “my investment is threatened if you come out, so I’m going to lock you in the closet to protect my investment.”

Karen Ocamb: So who was protecting Merv Griffin at the time?

Larry Gross: That’s simply a matter of history.

Karen Ocamb: At the time when he had an opportunity to talk to his close friends Ronald and Nancy Reagan about AIDS – this is one of the main reasons Michelangelo Signorile outed Malcolm Forbes, if you remember.

Howard Bragman: Posthumously.

Wilson Cruz: Now we’re talking about the issue of hypocrisy and that’s a whole other thing.

David Ehrenstein: You’re talking about people in the public eye and you’re also talking about Hollywood’s response to AIDS, which has to do with a lot of people.

Howard Bragman: Greg, let me ask you a question. My niece is an actress. In the magazines last year they said she’s dating Matthew Perry and she went ballistic: “This is none of their business. I’ve never talked about this.”

Wilson Cruz: Is she dating Matthew Perry?

Howard Bragman: Is that criteria different because she’s straight and somebody’s gay? If you know Merv Griffin’s gay and you choose not to write about it or you know another actor is gay –you were talking about Merv Griffin’s relationship with Eva Gabor and that’s what you –

Greg Hernandez: I don’t do that. I don’t do that crap. I try and write what I know to be true.

Howard Bragman: But if an actor is dating another male actor, is that not fair game if a guy is dating a guy? Is that a different standard than if a female actor is dating a guy?

Greg Hernandez: If they’re out in public and they’re photographed together and a lot of people see it and they’re not that discreet, I think it’s fair game.

Wilson Cruz: Yes, but your niece wasn’t going to lose her career because she was dating Matthew Perry.
Howard Bragman: On the contrary.

Wilson Cruz: If anything, it was going to help her. This man, these two men might –

Howard Bragman: They’re just friends.

Wilson Cruz: Their careers are at stake, according to their managers and their agents and their publicist.

Ray Richmond: Look, Merv Griffin was never going to lose his career. I’m not sure how I feel about the outing on the cover. But I didn’t feel like – and this will sound horribly naïve – I didn’t feel like I was outing Merv. This was not an outing situation.

Howard Bragman: In your circles it wasn’t a secret.

Ray Richmond: Well, even if I knew it wasn’t. Even if I knew no one in America didn’t know it, I did it because I wanted to see, can we talk about this?

Howard Bragman: I think you were absolutely right.

Ray Richmond: I was using him almost as the peg for a discussion.

Howard Bragman: And as Karen indicated, the first round of outing was started by Mike Signorile, outing Malcolm Forbes after he died.

Greg Hernandez: And a number of other people.

Howard Bragman: Well, he’s done various other peek-a-boo things. That’s history. And journalism often calls itself the first draft of history.

David Ehrenstein: But let’s go back further, because one of the things that I brought up in my book, Open Secret, is the fact –

Howard Bragman: On Amazon.

David Ehrenstein: – Open Secret: Gay Hollywood 1928 to 2000, was the fact that I knew Rock Hudson was gay before I knew that I was.

Larry Gross: And did he know you were gay before you knew?

David Ehrenstein: No, alas, we never met. But stuff is out there for anybody who watches Hollywood, who follows Hollywood. And when I’m talking about Rock Hudson, I’m talking about the ’50s, way in the past. And the fact of Rock Hudson’s
gayness was out there in the general air when he got married to his agent/manager’s secretary.

**Greg Hernandez:** Was she a lesbian?

**David Ehrenstein:** Yes, she was.

[Audience laughs.]

**David Ehrenstein:** Everybody laughed. Everybody laughed. There we go. Okay.

**Howard Bragman:** All right, let me change the topic slightly here. Larry, you talked about the Internet. You know, we used to call what I do, crisis control. Now I call it crisis manager, because control is the great myth of the new millennium in PR. The wall between public and private doesn’t exist. You have a lot of bloggers, Perez Hilton and others –

**Greg Hernandez:** Never heard of them.

**Howard Bragman:** – who will write things and they have no journalistic education, no journalistic standards, and they’re judgment-proof legally. They have their boxer shorts and their laptop. How do we combat this? Is this okay? Do we just have to accept them as real journalists? How do you guys feel? Larry, I want to start with you, because you brought up the Internet as the huge factor.

**Larry Gross:** Well, the Internet is a huge factor, because it changes the power dynamics. It takes the gatekeepers out of the picture. The editors, the publishers can’t stop it anymore. The pattern in outing used to be, in the early era, that nobody respectable, no respectable paper wanted to be first, but everybody wanted to be second. They wanted somebody to take the step to break the news and then they could cover it as news that somebody else was reporting.

**Howard Bragman:** Interesting. On the Merv Griffin thing, *Editor & Publisher*, as I recall, is probably the only mainstream publication that covered it.

**Ray Richmond:** Nobody wanted to be second either.

**Larry Gross:** No. That’s because they were afraid of the lawyers.

**Shana Krochmal:** With the *Glass Closet* issue, I was surprised and everyone was surprised how much the story got picked up. The cover got picked up. Even though there were other people named inside the story, they didn’t get mentioned, but the cover got picked up and reported on extensively, both in the mainstream media –

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**GROSS**
**Howard Bragman:** Great cover!

**Shana Krochmal:** — Thank you — and in intermediate media. To answer your question, Howard — and this may be kind of old school — I think maybe we can derive more complex questions in a fair manner using print media standards. Because one of the things people don’t know about this piece is that it spent a month with the lawyers. This went through many lawyers. Countless lawyers.

**Ray Richmond:** Shocking.

**Howard Bragman:** And my quotes still made it?

**Shana Krochmal:** Yes.

**Larry Gross:** That’s why there was so little news in it.

**Shana Krochmal:** This went through our in-house lawyers, it went through outside counsel to get additional opinion and there was a lot of fighting and pushback from the editorial side to say, no, we are going to leave those names in it, we are going to talk about these people. And part of it was saying here’s five people who worked with Anderson Cooper at ABC who met his boyfriend. Part of it was about that, even if that wasn’t a part of the reported story.

I think there’s still this way that the power of print — I mean, a blog isn’t going to commission a photo like this. A blog isn’t going to vet in the same legal way. But print outlets or other kinds of outlets that are willing to invest in that, provide really powerful fodder for the conversation to be continued online. And I would like to see more of that from other publications. I was impressed that *Entertainment Weekly* asked Jodie Foster about the cover.

**Howard Bragman:** And her response was “What cover?”

**Larry Gross:** The response was it was the one with the popsicle sticks.

**Shana Krochmal:** Yes, the one with the popsicles. That’s the one with the popsicle sticks. And then she said no, I haven’t —

**David Ehrenstein:** They wouldn’t have asked as of five-years-ago. They wouldn’t have asked.

**Shana Krochmal:** Right. I was shocked that people actually used this in their —

**Howard Bragman:** Yes, well, Pat Kingsley is retiring, who’s she going to frighten now?
Shana Krochmal: Yes. Anyway, that was it.

Howard Bragman: I want to open it up a little, because I’m sure you guys have questions in the audience and you can ask any specific person. You can throw it up and raise your hands, don’t be shy here. Uncle Marty.

Marty Kaplan: You, Larry, talked about the people who kept the closet locked, the managers and agents and publicists. I want to ask Wilson and then others to talk about that aspect of the business.

Wilson Cruz: Well, I think it’s gotten worse, to be honest with you. I think now that we’ve had more people who are out, I think we’ve actually seen more managers and agents be less willing to allow their actors and actresses to come out.

But in the end, it is the actor or actresses’ choice. It’s in their hands. For me, it was a very personal decision. And there were people saying to me, you know, this is not a wise idea and this is probably not going to be the best thing for your career. And who’s to say that it is or isn’t?

But for me it was a personal choice. I needed it. I needed to do it for my own sanity. I know a number of people who you know, who want to come out and want to live a normal life and are incapable of it. They’re afraid of losing their agents and they feel like they’ll be dropped. It’s not an easy time to shop around for agencies these days, when they’re all kind of becoming – they’re all joining hands.

Marty Kaplan: How do you feel it has impacted your career?

Wilson Cruz: I think that I’m probably happier in my work, now than if I had stayed in the closet. I don’t know if I would have worked more. I know that I continue to work and that I’ve been continually working for 13 years and I don’t know a lot of actors who can say that. So, I’m thrilled with that prospect.

Karen Ocamb: But you’re good, too, so –

Wilson Cruz: I know.

Larry Gross: What do you tell other actors that ask you?

Wilson Cruz: I tell –
Larry Gross: Like when you and hmm-hmm are in bed and after you’ve –

Wilson Cruz: Yes, he’s good. He’s my favorite. Well, I get asked this question a lot. I tell them to make sure that they’re doing it for themselves, for very personal reasons: because they want to live a normal lifestyle with their partner. You can’t do it because you want to be a hero to other people, because that feeling is going to go away after six months, after being on the cover of *Out* and you’re going to be really happy and proud of yourself, but then you’re going to be left with whatever’s left. And you have to do it for you and the people you love.

Howard Bragman: So if I’m a publicist and I have a client who’s in the closet and I know that to be the case, and I just don’t talk about their personal life, am I doing a bad thing to the community? Do they not have that right?

Wilson Cruz: Now we’re getting to my views. I personally don’t feel like I have a right to anybody else’s information if they don’t want me to have it. I really don’t. Unless they are going around being hypocrites and working against the best interest of our community, when in fact they are, you know, smoking penis. You know?

Howard Bragman: How vivid!

Shana Krochmal: If you had a closeted client who didn’t actually proactively say to you, I’m gay and I don’t want to deal with that, is that something you would bring up with them?

Howard Bragman: You know, generally not. Everybody thinks Pat Kingsley and Jodie Foster have these big long philosophical conversations –

Wilson Cruz: I thought you were going to say something else.

Howard Bragman: I think Jodie’s got better taste than that, okay? But I don’t think that happens unless there’s an incident or a moment. I sort of respect my clients’ privacy. And you know from how their public life has been handled in a lot of cases. And you know when they come in, sometimes a younger actor will say well, yes, I know I’m gay, but I really don’t want to press it. And it’s hard for me to say, oh, it’s going to help your career.

Everybody I’ve taken out has been happy and I think Wilson hit the big thing. It’s about happiness versus money. Do you know how much you’d make? I don’t know. Has an “A-list” movie star ever come out? No, not really.

Wilson Cruz: I’ve said this to people and put it on my MySpace and blog: You have
to make decisions about your life and your career considering what you’re willing to risk in both of those realms. It’s a very personal decision and only you have the answer to that.

Karen Ocamb: I’m sorry, but I have a Howard Bragman story, actually –

Howard Bragman: Are there pictures on the Internet, too? Probably.

Karen Ocamb: You’ll remember this. When I was first starting in gay journalism, which was ’88–’89, Howard was representing sort of a coalition. It was Steve Shulte and some prominent gay porno star who had gotten together to do something about AIDS. So, I went to this event –

Howard Bragman: The Gay Video magazine.

Karen Ocamb: Yes. And everybody was oohing and ahhing over this gay porno star and dah, dah, dah. So I –

Wilson Cruz: Was it lost on you?

Karen Ocamb: Yes! So I thought, well, I should get a quote or do a little interview. So I took him to another room and on the way there he grabbed this bag of potato chips, ripped it open and plunged his hand in and he spilled potato chips all over the place. I looked at him and I said, “You’re straight!” His face dropped. He’s said, “How did you know, how could you tell?” I said, “I don’t know many gay men who eat potato chips, let alone like that.” I got my quotes, etc. And then I called Howard at home and I said – do you remember this? – Howard, the guy’s straight!

Howard Bragman: You in’ed the guy. Yes, I remember that.

David Ehrenstein: He’s given so much to the community.

Karen Ocamb: So this is now the lede of my story and Howard said, “Oh no, that’s not the lead! The lead is dah, dah, dah.” So for Howard, I moved it down a couple of graphs and didn’t make it the lede.

Howard Bragman: And Elizabeth Montgomery was 57 when she died, too, okay?

Karen Ocamb: Well, in terms of your question about the gatekeepers: Sometimes you do sort of compromise. I never thought I would compromise for a straight gay porno star.

Howard Bragman: I remember you called me and said, “He’s straight,” and I said, “I have visual evidence to the contrary.”
Howard Bragman: And taken so much from the community.

Unidentified Audience Member: So Larry, what would you say to Howard if you were a gatekeeper –

Larry Gross: I’ll have a private conversation with Howard. I want to talk to him about this. But I think there are two separate decisions: Wilson is describing the decision made by a young actor, which is certainly most personal and complicated, because they are a victim of a system which only allows certain things.

The enforcers of the system are the agents, the managers, the studio executives, the people who say, you know, I’ve got a choice between all of these actors, why would I go with the one where there’s a risk?

Howard Bragman: Casting is a red flag issue in Hollywood. They look for reasons not to cast you. He’s not popular internationally, he’s not –

Larry Gross: So you can think of it as a mark-off chain with all these points you go down and anything that adds to the risk, that’s it. Like a real estate agent said to me recently, when in doubt, paint it beige. Just reduce the chance that anybody won’t like something by making it as bland as possible.

If you go back 40 or 50 years, that was what kept people from being known to be Jewish or Polish or Russian or anything not mainstream. John Garfield, who started out as Julius Garfinkel – his name had to be changed – was marketed, relative to your point, in the Jewish press as the Golden Boychick, which we knew was Jewish, but they didn’t know.

Shana Krochmal: There’s a lot of Jewish stars from the ‘50s and ‘60s like that.

Larry Gross: Absolutely. It’s that kind of double standard enforced by the system and which I think is morally corrupt and culpable.

Howard Bragman: I want to get a couple more questions here.

Unidentified Audience Member: There’s another part of the gatekeeping and that’s what scripts get made? I recently published a book, Two Spirits: A Story of Life With the Navajo, in which there’s a gay love story. And I got a call from a Hollywood agent who said, there’s this producer who’s really interested in this and he likes the Navajo part, but he doesn’t want to do a gay movie. That’s what he said. He doesn’t want to do a gay movie. Would I change the characters to eliminate this same-sex love story? And, you know, visions of Vito Russo’s spirit were going in my head and I thought: here I am listening to this in 2007, to the precise things he was talking about 40 years ago. It hasn’t gotten any better.

David Ehrenstein: It’s weird. There’s still a lot of generalized fear. You can take
the box office receipts from *Brokeback Mountain* and wave them in front of people and they all say, oh yes, they went to see that one, but will they see another one? They’ll make up some sort of excuse. But those are dull, uninteresting minds who you wouldn’t want to work with anyway. They wouldn’t know what to do with the damned film once it was finished.

But there are a lot of other things involved, including the perception that it’s better for your career if you stay in the closet, Kevin Spacey, which isn’t true all the time. In spite of your two Academy Awards.

**Wilson Cruz:** It’s not new. And even in the industry, where some of the people who are even less willing to allow people to come out or cast people – gay people in straight roles or what have you – are actually gay themselves. They’re the most fearful.

**Howard Bragman:** And they know more who’s gay.

**Wilson Cruz:** Yes, and their fear is, I don’t want to be the guy who says we should cast this gay actor, because they’re going to think the only reason why I think that is because I’m gay, and I’m going to lose my job.

**Howard Bragman:** I think I’ve taken more actors and athletes out than any other publicist in history. And I saw a change this year when I took John Amaechi, the basketball player out, and Tim Hardaway made his homophobic comment. And I saw a change with T.R. Knight and Neil Patrick Harris. Two changes. One, it used to be the gay athlete who was stigmatized. This time, the stigmatized one was the homophobic athlete. And two, it used to be Tom Hanks can play gay and win an Academy Award, but we wouldn’t buy a gay guy playing straight. That’s just not going to be. And yet...we have two actors on hit shows, T.R. and Neil –

**Wilson Cruz:** Who are Emmy-nominated.

**Howard Bragman:** – who have changed that. Did we change the world a little?

**Shana Krochmal:** Howard, I think what I really appreciate about you and the advice you give about coming out is you are really an exception among publicists – among gay publicists even – for saying to your clients coming out is a good thing. If that’s what you want to do when you’re ready –

**Howard Bragman:** If they’re ready! I would not let somebody who wasn’t ready.

**Shana Krochmal:** For a piece I wrote for this issue, I talked to a lot of
agency managers, and Wilson, you were so right. The ones who were gay were the most uptight about this question. I don’t know if that’s going to change generationally, if the guys and girls in their 20s working their way through the agencies now –

Wilson Cruz: I think they will.

Shana Krochmal: – who have always been out in their career.

Howard Bragman: It’s so generational. We grew up on Leave it to Beaver, My Three Sons, and these kids come home and watch Queer Eye for the Straight Guy and Will and Grace in syndication. It’s got to be different.

Wilson Cruz: And My So-Called Life.

Howard Bragman: My So-Called Straight Life.

Shana Krochmal: And the gatekeepers continue to struggle with their own issues. I feel like a lot of the response we got to this issue was really personal. It was from these other opinion leaders or whatever, and it was about people’s own issues around coming out and their own sort of residual feelings of, well, I wouldn’t have wanted to go through that. And, of course, no one’s saying you should have gone through that. That’s not what we’re talking about.

Howard Bragman: You’re not Jodie or Anderson.

Shana Krochmal: That’s a different conversation. Until we can figure out how to separate those things a little bit, we’re always going to be waiting for that person to be the first second, instead of the first first.

Howard Bragman: You know what’s going to happen? Somebody is either going to be outed in some scenario or somebody is going to be young and he becomes an actor and becomes a superstar and he’s never been in the closet.

Wilson Cruz: I’m working on it.

Larry Gross: What’s going to happen is that Jackie Robinson moment here: an A-list actor who comes out, survives and thrives. And in all of these things, I mean, Will and Grace was another example. All of these things, the one that happens and succeeds stiffens the backbone, you know, just a little more.
Howard Bragman: But *Will and Grace* was the ultimate hypocrisy, where one of the actors, who shall remain unnamed –

Larry Gross: I believe he said once he’s really rich and famous, then he’ll tell everybody.

Karen Ocamb: Why is it OK for Ellen and Rosie O’Donnell, for instance?

Ray Richmond: Women have different standards.

Howard Bragman: Every straight porn movie I’ve ever seen, which is not that many, has two women going at it.

David Ehrenstein: But there’s a difference there, too, because Ellen is absolutely universally adored and Rosie is controversial. There is a real divide between Ellen and Rosie.

Howard Bragman: Ellen was controversial when she came out.

Larry Gross: Ellen’s made it clear from the beginning that she is completely a-political. She has comforted everybody by the sense “I’m not going to talk about it.”

Ray Richmond: She did have Hillary Clinton on.

Larry Gross: No, but Ellen is different. The interesting key to the Ellen story, I think, is that Ellen had been out for a long time. Ellen Morgan came out and announced it immediately. So that Ellen’s bravery was actually Ellen Morgan’s bravery. Ellen DeGeneres took decades to finally come out, carefully orchestrated by Ellen Morgan. So the character got all the incredible accolades, but then she was right behind it. She was making – I mean, Anne Heche was more political about it than –

Wilson Cruz: She went all the way around!

David Ehrenstein: In terms of acting trajectories, short of Wilson taking over the entire world, which we know he’s about to, everybody should keep an eye on John Barrowman, who may be the really big openly gay star we’ve all been searching for. He’s gorgeous; he’s on this incredibly popular sci-fi show; he sings Sondheim. What more do you want?

Wilson Cruz: But even he, in the beginning of his career, felt pressured to
[Crandere] and he never actually made an announcement. He just kind of assumed everybody knew.

**David Ehrenstein:** And now he got married.

**Howard Bragman:** That was Lily Tomlin and David Geffen. Marty’s up here, he’s going to –

**Marty Kaplan:** I have two things to say. One is that just as “wide stance” is something that made it into current language, “I took out” – a phrase I heard from Howard Bragman that I never heard before – is so colloquial and enigmatic and precise, that I think we’ve coined something new for the language, unless it’s been around for a long time.

The second thing I want to say is that Howard Bragman and this panel are a terrific combo and please join me in thanking all of them for this discussion.

*[Audience applauds.]*