

Thank you for writing regarding the review of the movie *Outrage*, which was posted on NPR.org on May 8. I apologize for the length of this response, but we believe it is important to provide you with both an overview of our position, and the details of this situation.

This film presents challenging questions that deserve public attention and discussion. That is one reason we chose to commission a review of the film. And while we are committed to raising provocative issues for the public's consideration, we are equally committed to principles of privacy. For that reason, NPR does not publish or air rumors, allegations, and reports about the private lives of any individual unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

Our [editorial policy](#), which is posted on NPR.org, states, "NPR journalists think carefully about the boundaries between legitimate journalistic pursuit and an individual's right to privacy. We recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need to know can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy."

We neglected to inform the author of the "Outrage" review about this policy when the piece was first commissioned, an oversight we regret. This was an internal NPR protocol lapse with the author, and we apologized for this mistake.

An original draft of the review used names of several politicians who have been "outed," public figures who have been subjects of various reports and rumors that they are gay. Since using names in this way violates our editorial policy, an NPR editor removed the names of several individuals featured in the film prior to the piece's publication. The reviewer was sent the edited text of his review prior to publication, and while he disagreed with our policy, he agreed to the edits. He was given the option to not publish the review, or to publish the review as edited, with full payment in either case. He approved the posting of the piece but requested that his byline be removed, and that a note be added explaining the absence of the byline. This was done.

NPR later removed a comment posted to NPR.org's social media space by the reviewer, with the reviewer's explicit approval, after he agreed that the comment, which included the names edited out of the review, broke NPR's previous agreement with him and ran counter to the NPR policy in question. At that time, NPR offered, again, to take down the review, which he declined.

NPR's policy is intended to respect the law, the privacy of individuals and the ambition of reporting facts, not rumors – a policy that is especially important in a time when there are virtually no prohibitions on information purporting to be reporting or journalism. And we do not circumvent our policy by reporting the allegations of other sources. Our policy involves many "private" matters including mental illness, infidelity, troubled children, physical illness and substance abuse.

Though we have a policy, we do not have a perfect history of enforcing it or meeting all our aspirations. And there are judgment calls, subjective decisions. Some blogs, for example, have cited a conversation that aired on the show “News & Notes” in November 2008 about efforts to “out” a prominent singer and actress. That conversation, while not malicious, nevertheless did not conform to our standards. Critics have also cited a post on our blog “Monkey See” discussing the style, wardrobe and packaging of a contestant on “American Idol.” We don’t believe this was a violation, but others may and we respect that.

A final note: in no way does this policy reflect some kind a judgment or subtle bias about homosexuality. It is a policy about privacy and fairness; it reflects our ambition and we make no claims to have a perfect track record. We support the dialogue that is now underway, and will continue to look for ways to bring these and other issues forward into public discourse.

Sincerely,
Dick Meyer, Executive Editor, NPR News