

DISSERTATION

RECONSIDERING RANDY SHILTS:  
EXAMINING THE REPORTAGE OF AMERICA'S AIDS CHRONICLER

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## ABSTRACT

### RECONSIDERING RANDY SHILTS:

#### EXAMINING THE REPORTAGE OF AMERICA'S AIDS CHRONICLER

The role of openly-gay reporter and author Randy Shilts (1951-1994) is examined related to his use of journalistic practices and places him on a continuum of traditional reporting roles as considered in the context of twentieth century philosophers Walter Lippmann and John Dewey. Reporter functions demonstrated by Shilts are examined, including those dictated by expectations of either strong journalistic influence over society and media consumers, or those more aligned with democratic practices where education and participation emphasize strong roles for society and media consumers. Using a biographical approach including 17 primary source interviews of former colleagues, critics, sources and family/friends, the examination of Shilts's work as both a reporter and noted author is presented as being heavily influenced by his forthcoming attitudes about disclosure of his sexual orientation from the start of his career and his desire to explain or unpack aspects of gay culture, and ultimately the AIDS crisis, to heterosexual audiences. Careful examination of the posthumous critique of Shilts's work – including his construction of Patient Zero – is undertaken. The study concludes that Shilts fully engaged a Lippmann-esque approach embodied in an authoritarian role for journalism that sought to change the world in which it was offered, and did so perhaps most influentially during the earliest days of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in America.

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## INTRODUCTION

As Randy Shilts prepared to wrap up what he had dubbed a year spent as “an AIDS celebrity,” he offered a revealing first-person essay for a March 1989 *Esquire* magazine in which he expressed frustration of coming off the author’s circuit, and returning to his duties as a reporter for *The San Francisco Chronicle*. “The bitter irony is,” he wrote, “my role as an AIDS celebrity just gives me a more elevated promontory from which to watch the world make mistakes in the handling of the AIDS epidemic that I had hoped my work would help to change” (Shilts, 1989-a, p. 124). Sounding bitter and more than a little defeated, Shilts added, “If an internationally acclaimed best seller (*And the Band Played On*) hadn’t done shit to change the world, what good would more newspaper stories do?” (Shilts, 1989-a, p. 133). Shilts’ words provide valuable evidence of his understanding of his role as journalist, author, and writer – as the oft-acknowledged “chronicler of AIDS.” But was Shilts’ own understanding of his role(s) consistent with the history his remarkable career provides?

Some context is valuable. The coverage of HIV and AIDS, spanning a remarkable period that coincided with Shilts’ reporting career, evolved immensely over time. During its earliest days, when Shilts and a small handful of others began reporting on the AIDS pandemic, the disease actually had no name because of its many manifestations resulting from the compromised immune systems of its victims. Over time, the term AIDS was born to reflect Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) that emphasized its communicable and global nature, and replaced more pejorative names earlier adopted, such as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, gay pneumonia, or gay cancer. Shilts was there from the start, his May 3, 1982 inside page 6 article in *The San Francisco Chronicle* exploring an outbreak of exotic and troubling diseases impacting gay men widely acknowledged as the genesis of AIDS media

coverage. It only made sense – during the waning years of the 1970s sexual revolution, Shilts was first to the story (working at that time for *The Advocate*) about the growing tide of sexually-transmitted diseases flowing from newfound sexual freedom and expression.

Bardhan (2001) examined AIDS and HIV coverage via five transnational (but solely western) news services, including the Associated Press, through the 1990s and noted that a shift occurred away from the bio-medical nature of reporting evident in 1980s on AIDS to more emphasis on socioeconomic, public policy and human rights themes. Story themes regarding AIDS prevention and education remained constant in both eras, Bardhan noted. Along with this change in trend or focus of AIDS story, however, was a noteworthy decline in the overall volume of stories produced about AIDS, suggesting as Barnhan noted, “ideation of AIDS as a moral tale has diminished” (p. 283). Further driving this change in reporting on AIDS has been the stabilization of AIDS rates in most of the developed nations of the world who have the means to support research, prevention and treatment for people with AIDS. A comprehensive Kaiser Family Foundation survey of more than 9,000 news stories found shifts in AIDS coverage as well, finding that story topics shifted overall from a 1980s-era emphasis on HIV prevention, education and awareness, to more stories in the 1990s about HIV research, and HIV treatment drug and vaccine development efforts. One persistent, but consistently small, story topic related to social issues connected to HIV and AIDS, such as employment or housing discrimination, or acts of prejudice or violence against people with AIDS (Brodie, et. al, 2004, p. 5).

The implications of a reduction in coverage of AIDS may be dramatically impacting some parts of the world. While acknowledging Netter’s (1992) assertion that the news media does not carry sole responsibility to educate or inform the world about AIDS, “newspapers, magazines, newsletters, television and radio today provide a vital ‘front line’ in the global

struggle against AIDS” (p. 242). Lehrman (2004) declared that “AIDS has dropped off the agenda for most journalists” and noted profound implications of the resulting gaps in coverage, particularly for younger generations and minority cultures who hold on to historical ideas that AIDS affects mostly gay, white males and that “new medicines and prevention strategies have contained it” (p. 24). Lehrman points to 1996 and a large *New York Times Magazine* piece titled “The End of AIDS: The Twilight of an Epidemic” as a turning point in media coverage. She noted that a study by Media Tenor International found that in 2000, the evening newscasts on ABC, CBS and NBC featured just 77 reports on AIDS, or just 0.6 percent of all stories broadcast. The study further found that nearly 60 percent of those stories came as part of coverage of the World AIDS Conference that year in Durban, South Africa. Colby and Cook (1991) suggest difficult ramifications for such diminished coverage:

The media identification and definition of public problems work not only on mass audiences. Policy makers are very attentive to news coverage... The media’s construction of AIDS thus influences not merely how we as individuals will react, but also how we as a society and as a polity will respond (p. 219).

The aforementioned Kaiser Foundation study was undertaken at the end of 2001, on the so-called twentieth anniversary of the start of the AIDS pandemic, and looked at more than 9,000 news stories afforded to HIV and AIDS. The study found that the topic of HIV and AIDS had often shifted between being a story about health, as well as politics, sexuality, religion and business. News coverage of AIDS peaked in the Kaiser study in 1987 at just over 5,000 stories in that year (and declined to just 1,000 AIDS stories in 2002). Interestingly, the Kaiser study noted that news coverage of AIDS peaked six years before the first decline in the number of diagnosed HIV and AIDS cases in the U.S. (and even by 2002, the number of news stories produced about AIDS continued to trail the number of newly diagnosed AIDS cases each year). Perhaps not

surprisingly, major spikes in news coverage of AIDS occurred as specific news events occurred, including disclosures by celebrities such as Rock Hudson, Earvin “Magic” Johnson and Arthur Ashe of their HIV status, as well as the introduction of AZT (azidothymidine), a protease inhibitor used in combination with a large array of other drug treatments proven effective at slowing or diminishing the ongoing effects of compromised immune systems resulting from HIV. The study also found that issues surrounding the closure of gay bathhouses in San Francisco in the period of 1984-85 (an issue heavily covered by Shilts and *The San Francisco Chronicle*) trailed only the return of Johnson to NBA basketball and the introduction of protease inhibitor combo drugs in the volume of stories produced in any one year in the 20-year period study (Brodie, et. al, 2004, p. 3). The Kaiser researchers concluded that

Media coverage of the HIV/AIDS epidemic has, at times, helped shape the policy agenda, while also reflecting current policy discussions, debates and important events. In many cases, the news media have served as an important source of information about the epidemic for the public. In an October 2003 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 72 percent of the U.S. public said that most of the information they get about HIV/AIDS comes from the media (Brodie, et. al, 2004, p. 1).

Further supporting their claim that reporting about HIV and AIDS may impact public and policy maker opinions about the topic, they noted that their own surveys of Americans about the top health priorities in the nation had changed dramatically over the years. In 1987, 68 percent of Americans surveyed by Kaiser identified HIV/AIDS as the nation’s top health issue. By 2002, that rate had dropped to 17 percent, placing HIV and AIDS behind other health-related issues in importance (such as cancer, access to health care and health care costs (Brodie, et. al, 2004, p. 5).

The consideration of overall AIDS coverage in the media serves to further understanding of Shilts’ reporting about AIDS and its possible impact on society and its leaders. Certainly Shilts approached his reporting with a mindset that he was going to be at least somewhat

influential with his gay and straight readers, but also with leaders among medical, scientific, research, governmental and gay activist organizations and entities. His openly professed desire to influence the *timing* of some of his AIDS articles to key days of the week or key events occurring is evidence of this. Further evidence of this is found later in Shilts' career when he times (coincidentally or on purpose) a large amount of stories detailing the struggles of discovered or avowed homosexuals in the military trying to hold on to their military rank and/or employment.

It is instructive to consider Shilts in the context of both the overall coverage of HIV and AIDS in his era, and via the historically identified roles for journalists, particularly those constructed via the ideas of early twentieth century scholars Walter Lippmann and John Dewey. Lippmann suggested journalists occupied roles as part of an elite group of intellectually informed and engaged individuals who help the masses navigate the challenges and complexities of democracy. Dewey, meanwhile, suggested a more participatory role for citizens who benefitted from the role journalism played in advancing ideas and thought, but that journalism more reflected such qualities than constructed them.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of Shilts as journalist and gay icon, and how that played out in his reportage, is a debated subject with an answer as varied as those who are asked. The scholarly commentary on Shilts helps define the assumed or assigned role Shilts occupied as both a mainstream journalist, and as a gay journalist covering issues of importance in the symbiotic worlds of homosexuality and journalism.

### *Review of the Journalistic Role and Function*

A widespread understanding and agreement exists that journalism occupies an important and reciprocal connection to overall society, and that certain societal functions or social purposes of journalism can be identified. Agreement stops, however, on how journalists should practice this important function amidst the demands of a free, democratic society. The argument is a long-standing one and gained an important framework for discussion just under 100 years ago with complimentary ideas expressed by journalist Walter Lippmann via his book, *Public Opinion*, in 1922, and John Dewey via *Experience and Nature* (1925) and *The Public and Its Problems* (1927). At its base, the discussion prompted via the ideas expressed by Lippmann and Dewey create boundaries for examining media and government roles and interaction in American society.

By the time Lippmann put his words to paper, the American democratic “experiment” was approaching its sesquicentennial and had survived a plethora of devastating challenges – most notably a Civil War that challenged the very sustainability of the American democracy. Lippmann suggested that society and democracy had fundamentally changed as the twentieth century opened, particularly as the industrial revolution swept America with all of its inherent

complexities and impacts on the nation's economy, communities, and politics. Lippmann (1922) wrote

My conclusion is that (we) assume in a much more complicated civilization, that somehow mysteriously there exists in the hearts of men a knowledge of the world beyond their reach. I argue that representative government, either in which is ordinarily called politics, or industry, cannot be worked successfully, no matter the basis of education, unless there is an independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions (p. 31).

Lippmann posits that the old-style navigation of mass democracy, it seemed, would no longer serve the citizenry amidst the vast complexity of the new century. Fallows (1996) asserts that Lippmann was expressing a provocative idea, the reality of a “government based on informed consent by a fully participating public was no longer feasible” but that hope could be found in “cultivating a group of well-trained experts” to manage the nation, including its journalism. Fallows (1996, p. 236) wrote that “the newspapers and magazines produced by these experts would lay out conclusions for the public to follow, but no one could expect the public to play more than a passive spectator's role.” Lippmann continued to wrestle with his views on journalistic function, but through his books and opinion columns, he “embodied the idea of the journalist as expert,” Fallows said (p. 237).

Lippmann's ideas would not go unchallenged as education philosopher John Dewey, a generation older than Lippmann, published a variety of articles and books commencing in 1925 that argued that democratic self-government was central to American society and was a fundamental value that could not and should not be abandoned just because of technological advances sweeping the nation. Not surprisingly, because of his strong commitment to education, Dewey asserted that teachers as well as political leaders and journalists held a strict obligation to

proffer democratic ideas of self-rule, a direct rejection of Lippmann's idea that "societal elites" (including those in the media) were needed to navigate modern democracy.

Fallows (1996, p. 248-49) suggests that Dewey's concerns about disengagement from the democratic process by citizens occurred only as a result that "democracy does not function well and citizens feel estranged from public life." Fallows believes that Dewey's ideas hold up better in twenty-first century American society although reporters continue to try and operate (or appear) as experts, or insiders, with knowledge and information regular citizens cannot access and "the media establishment seems to talk at people rather than with or even to them" (p. 250). Dewey's ideas gain importance; it seems, with the highly democratized nature of social media that places the printing press and broadcast capacities into the hands of regular citizens via the world wide web. Dewey's desire to "start with fact" as the basis of even philosophical considerations of society and its issues would seem to align well with Shilts' strong commitment to fact-based reporting and ideas Shilts developed and articulated about how information and facts could "win over" heterosexuals to the idea of equality or liberation for homosexuals (Westbrook, 1991, p. 33). There are divisions to be found, however, between Dewey's philosophy of democracy and the ideations of Shilts. Dewey divided democracy into both a description of a manner of living, but also as a label for the type of government installed in America. This study demonstrates that Shilts' ideas about the strong role government should play in eradicating social inequity (e.g. combatting AIDS among gay and other marginalized populations, and/or allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the armed services) would not be as all-encompassing of the idea of democracy that Dewey was preferring. As Westbrook (1991, p. 319) noted, Dewey viewed democracy strongly in terms of a way of living and that democracy addressed all aspects of human life, including families, school, industry, religion and

all human association – or as Dewey said, an effective mechanism for achieving a more democratic way of life – and not just a means by which to operate a strong government.

Bourdieu (1998, p. 47) suggests that “shared assumptions and beliefs” have provided a certain cultural framework for understanding journalistic practice in society, and that these beliefs are very often central to not only the self-image journalists hold of themselves, but also of how they perform their tasks. Benson and Neveu (1996) added that journalists often positioned themselves along one of two poles, independent purists who are not influenced by political and economic power and dependent practitioners who rely on political and commercial powers.

Kovach and Rosentiel (2001) expanded upon these ideas by identifying a specific logic that reporters employ as part of their self-identified societal role – including mainstream values such as independence from outside influence, value placed on timeliness of news presented, and recognition of a public service role. Based on the posits raised by both Bordieu and Kovach and Rosentiel, Hanitzsch (2011) undertook an ambitious study of more than 1,800 journalists across the world and identified and defined four “professional milieus” for the journalistic societal function, including the populist disseminator, the detached watchdog, the critical change agent, and the opportunist facilitator. Hanitzsch defined the “populist disseminator” role as one sharing a strong orientation toward its audience in that it is desirous to attract the widest number of viewers or readers possible, with the detached reporter role being a secondary consideration. The “detached watchdog” role (the one most often claimed by western journalists) involved reporters engaging a skeptical and critical attitude toward government and business elites and placing themselves in a role to watch or monitor their activities. Although “detached watchdogs” placed high value on political information in order to facilitate political decision making, they were unable or unwilling to identify (or even acknowledge) an advocacy or agenda-setting role for

their work. Critical change agent roles for journalists were less commonly cited, but involved detached watchdogs who emphasized the importance of advocating for social change and influencing political opinion. The opportunistic facilitators among journalists were defined as fixed on the important role journalism can play in society in terms of its advancement of the political and economic goals of society, placing support of official policies and leaders ahead of watchdog functions.

Hanitzsch's definitions are helpful to understanding and reviewing journalistic roles of Shilts (or any other journalist) in that they fit generalized expectations or roles that exist among journalists and others that create certain norms for how journalism functions (Donsbach, 2008; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986; Cohen, 1963). Randall (2007) suggests that

what journalism has done for many years is to facilitate society's discourse, which today is personal, local, regional, national and global and sectional. Each of these spheres has aspects in which citizens have an interest, or in which they are interested in gaining more information. Though journalists might, at times, suffer from a lack of information, shortage of time, conflicts of interest and, sometimes, just plain boneheadedness, what they do – imperfectly, at times – facilitates the discourse (p. 91).

Randall challenges the idea of “whether journalism, as an occupation, should set out to do good. Or should it be – is it actually – an honest attempt to find out and publish no matter what the consequences?” (2007, p. 91).

Tait (2011) moved the argument in an even more interesting direction with her suggestion that journalism plays a conceptual role of “bearing witness” for audiences beyond simply voyeurism that *requires* efforts to impose meaning or clarification on events or topics explored by reporters. Tait asserts that “bearing witness” helps us organize journalistic function into specific roles and responsibilities and notes that “The term ‘bearing witness’ implies that certain events require being borne witness to because they require some form of public response”

(p. 1221) – a helpful analysis when considering Shilts’ often difficult role in explaining and unpacking highly technical medical and scientific information (particularly that related to the human immune system) as well as homosexual sexual practices – neither of which were regular fare for most American newspapers. A further point is that when journalists view their role as one of “bearing witness” (as opposed to simply being a detached voyeur), they enter into the watchdog role and hope to imply and illicit societal reaction and action “beyond a collective shrug” (Tait, 2011, p. 1222). Tait’s analysis is also helpful to understanding why journalists who self-identify as “detached watchdogs” as suggested by Hanitzsch don’t openly or readily identify a companion role of advocacy in their work. Tait said a paradox central to understanding what journalism is and what it does exists because

The normative construction of journalistic objectivity overcomes the problem of the partiality of action by obliging response to none. This makes it difficult to conceive of a journalism that is at once objective, and able to nourish moral response. Objectivity models the position of bystander for audiences: the convention is to appear to be unmoved by what one sees in order to provide an account of it. This patterns factual knowledge as the limit of responsibility (p. 1232).

Tait deems that any discourse on “media witnessing” or “detached watchdog” functions for journalism fall short if we do not move beyond the “normative journalistic position of impartiality” and recognize the inherent conflict presented when someone goes beyond simple reporting to “bearing witness” to events and issues that simply require a level of moralizing discourse and/or perhaps the more comfortable term for reporters: nuanced analysis.

Peters (2001) offers even further value to the consideration of Shilts’ journalistic function by defining that when one “bears witness” to an event or issue, the classification of that role is immediately inclusive of someone who also bears a level of *presence*, *risk* and *trauma* related to the event or issue being discussed. While Tait employed Peters’ work as part of her examination

of journalists covering the human atrocities committed in Darfur, they have application to Shilts' work which was clearly influenced by his *presence* amongst a large population of gay men being devastated by the onset of HIV and AIDS, the *risk* of AIDS that he faced and failed to keep away, and the resulting *trauma* of experiencing his own death. Journalistic function is, by its very nature, able to be both a passive and an active activity, depending upon the approach journalists (or their editors) allow or expect, and sadly, what time and deadlines allow. Peters (2001, p. 713) joins this consideration by noting that the desire for objectivity; for knowledge uncoupled from the body, central to law, science and journalism, cannot overcome the embodiment of active witnessing.

### ***The Shilts Review***

A surprisingly large number of scholars and activists have taken up the issue of Shilts' journalistic function during his career and have come to varying conclusions that range from fan club worship, to critical analysis dungeon hell.

Gay historian and author Daniel Harris (1997) seemed to focus on Shilts' perceived departure from the world of journalism and the co-opting of his work to "kitchifying effects of narrative" (p. 233). He accused Shilts of joining the journalists who "take pride of place as the ultimate AIDS profiteers, in that they exploit the theatrical nature of the epidemic to advance their own professional interests as entertainers" (p. 233). He reviewed Shilts' book *And the Band Played On* and its preceding journalism as "paradoxically far more fictional than fiction" and that Shilts joined the journalists who reported on AIDS

swamped by narrative, by the need to invent scenes, overhear conversations, tap internal monologues, create suspense, devise artful foreshadowing, and evoke menacing atmospheres. The mainstream media found these literary devices so

irresistible that their need to novelize the disease has prevailed irresponsibly over their obligation to document it (p. 233).

Shilts' narrative or storytelling approach mirrored the evolution that occurred throughout journalism as newspapers advanced more and more from expensive, labor-intensive pursuits through the last decades of the nineteenth century when storytelling and longer narrative form became the journalistic standard for decades to follow. Even the rise of so-called "new journalism" or "literary journalism" of the 1960s did not choke off the popular storytelling approach journalists readily adopted, communications historian Lisa M. Parcell concluded (2011). Such traditional and historical context notwithstanding, Harris' critical review of Shilts' work extended to the 1993 HBO small-screen adaptation of Shilts' work (for which Shilts served as an active consultant) because it utilized "Shilts' New Journalistic history, itself a tissue of reconstructed dialogues and internal soliloquies" (p. 233). Harris expressed dismay that his view of common sense – that is, reporting the AIDS story as a "straightforward reportorial document" – was not to be found in the HBO version of Shilts' words.

Shilts' coverage of AIDS – which "deserves praise for its dogged determination" – also reflected an era in which "because of his personal power, Shilts ...influenced (local AIDS) policies more than a reporter should," concluded James Kinsella (1988, p. 467), a research fellow at the Columbia University Gannett Center for Media Studies and former editorial page editor for *The Los Angeles Herald Examiner*. Labeling Shilts a "politicized reporter," he attributed Shilts' role in the 1984 debate on whether to close or highly restrict the gay bathhouses operating in San Francisco (that eventually spread to New York, Los Angeles and other U.S. cities allowing gay bathhouses) as reflective of a longer-term connection to the earliest days of the gay liberation movement in the city, led by a Shilts' hero, slain San Francisco city supervisor Harvey Milk. As

evidence, Kinsella noted that Shilts “lashed out” at gay politicians who opposed the powerful Harvey Milk Democratic Club for denying the seriousness of the AIDS crisis and the role bathhouses were playing in it. Kinsella noted that Shilts had “already been tainted by his ties to the Milk organization – a relationship solidified by writing a book on its founder and by forming friendships with the club’s leadership” (Kinsella, 1988, p. 467).

Ultimately, Kinsella asserts, Shilts’ approach to his reporting on the gay bathhouse issue inappropriately shifted the public health debate about the spread of HIV and AIDS away from changing sexual practices, to one focused on where sexual practices occurred. Kinsella concluded that “The way in which Shilts personally embraced the (bathhouse) story helped not only to define what was important but also to dictate the news” (Kinsella, 1988, p. 468). He concluded that

Shilts and *The San Francisco Chronicle* helped breed a false sense of security for those gay men who had never visited the baths and who would not. For a city that defined the appropriate response to AIDS, the bathhouse controversy was nothing but an embarrassment. And Shilts’ role in that public policy debate should give journalists pause (p. 468).

Douglas Crimp, a University of Rochester art historian and self-appointed radical AIDS activist, took Shilts to task for his creation of the term “AIDSpeak” to describe how people involved in the AIDS epidemic began to speak – including words such as AIDS victims. “Shilts employs these imprecise, callous or moralizing terms just as do *all his fellow mainstream journalists*, without quotation marks, without apology,” Crimp wrote (1996, p. 239, emphasis added). Crimp took the bold step of attributing Shilts’ views to what he believed was a deeply held contempt by Shilts for gay political leaders and AIDS activists, as well internalized homophobia (p. 240). Anger may have been the more obvious basis for Shilts’ positions, as evidenced in his own words for a 1991 commentary piece prepared for *The New York Times* about the plight of Florida

teenager Kimberly Bergalis who was infected with HIV (and eventually died of AIDS) as a result of suspected exposure from her dentist. Shilts took exception that Bergalis's story seemed to "dominate" AIDS coverage for 1991, calling her "an AIDS sufferer" (language that Crimp and others abhorred) and saying her story had

largely become a tale of anger. The Bergalises are angry that their daughter was infected with this horrible virus. I understand that. I'm angry too that I've had to watch half of my friends waste away and die miserable deaths from this disease. What has made the Bergalises anger different is that it has been so poorly informed (Shilts, 1991-1).

Shilts took bitter issue with the young teenager's testimony before Congress lamenting her exposure to AIDS even though she "didn't do anything wrong" and that America needed to "extend to all people dying of AIDS the same compassion Kimberly Bergalis received" (Shilts, 1991-1). Shilts' own book editor, Doris Ober acknowledged Shilts became the ever-increasingly angry man as time went along – not coincidentally aligned with the time period in which Shilts learned of his own HIV-positive status, and later full-blown AIDS diagnosis. "Randy was an angry writer," Ober said. "He was angry with the slowness of humanity to wake up to the truths that were so clear to him. Occasionally in his writing, that anger flared and flared out of control." Ober said she took it as her role to tamp out those flare ups "because they got so wild that they would diminish what he was doing" (Pogash, 1994, p. 6).

Historians Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, III (1994), however, would counter the critical reviews of Shilts, in part, and praised his "brilliant" reporting and analysis on AIDS (and the outing of many previously closeted individuals as a result) via his columns in *The San Francisco Chronicle* and his book, *And the Band Played On*. Johansson and Percy are not breathless Shilts' fans, however, as they carefully questioned Shilts' op-ed piece on Bergalis. They called out Shilts' description of the girl as "innocent" but noted his challenge of her

assertion that “how unfair it was that she had to suffer from AIDS even though ‘she didn’t do anything wrong’” and how her statement once again “separated those who don’t deserve AIDS from those that do” (in Johansson & Percy, 1994, p. 218).

Johansson and Percy suggest a greater review of Shilts’ footprints in both the journalistic culture and the gay culture may be appropriate. Consistent with his penchant for engaging observational commentary of AIDS happening all around him, Shilts also seemed to cast himself as a parade watcher on the issue of whether closeted gays should be “outed.” While acknowledging that closeted gay people were as big or bigger an impediment to gay rights as anti-gay heterosexuals, Shilts’ position on the mid-1990s controversy of “outing” remained fluid. Shilts initially indicated his support of outing in a *New York Times* op-ed piece in which he noted that

the refusal of newspapers to reveal a person’s homosexuality has less to do with ethical considerations of privacy than with an editor’s homophobia. In my experience, many editors really believe that being gay is so distasteful that talk of it should be avoided unless absolutely necessary (Shilts, 1990-a).

Widespread scorn fell upon Shilts just a year later, however, when he reversed his position, calling outing “a dirty business that hurts people” while commenting on the outing of President George H.W. Bush’s Defense Department spokesman Pete Williams (later an NBC News correspondent). At that time, Shilts advised that

before gloating, however, the outers would do well to consider their own intellectual inconsistencies. The two levels of social change that the gay movement seeks are in conflict... It’s doubly hypocritical to seek the right to privacy in courts and then wantonly violate others’ rights to privacy in the gay press (Shilts, 1991-i).

Shilts was squarely in the crosshairs again and standing on the line between his identity as a gay man and a journalist during a 1992 fiery meeting of the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists

Association (NLGJA) when he “accused some journalists from the gay press of engaging in a deadly political conformity that snuffed out diversity of thought and opinion” and “blasted the journalists for peddling in ‘lavender fascism,’ the ‘politics of petulance’ and the ‘journalism of rage’” (Iwata, 1992).

The 1992 NLGJA meeting pitted Shilts against perhaps his most prolific and vitriolic critic, activist and author Michelangelo Signorile (1993) who spared no words in his review of Shilts and his work:

There was an overriding reason why the media took to Shilts at the time. The scandal that propelled his book to fame wasn't the most dangerous one – the fact that the government had willfully neglected the AIDS epidemic – but the most palatable one: how the gay community was also to blame for letting the crisis go on. While the bulk of the (Shilts') book documents the scandalous ways in which the government refused to handle the epidemic, the first wave of press about it focused on the thesis that HIV was spread by the recklessness of one man, a flight attendant named Gaëtan Dugas, whom Shilts dubbed 'Patient Zero.' The media, seizing upon the story, called him the Typhoid Mary of AIDS. (Shilts' farfetched scenario later came under sharp criticism from health experts and others.) The press also focused on the owners of gay bathhouses, whom Shilts charged with reckless behavior. The third aspect of Shilts' book the press initially picked up on was that some gay leaders, initially seeing AIDS as a public-relations problem, tried to downplay the health crisis and stymied efforts to educate and enlighten the gay community (p. 150).

Controversy and criticism attached itself to Shilts until the end of his life, this time when in 1993, just a year before his death from AIDS, Shilts finally openly addressed the irony of having been the man who had written the story and history of AIDS but had kept his own status a secret. He offered a brief explanation of how he dealt (or failed to deal) with the disclosure of his disease that perhaps reveals some of how he approached his life as a gay man elevated to the role of mainstream journalist:

I was very closeted (about having AIDS) at first. I didn't want the news to get out before the book did. I spent four years on *Conduct Unbecoming*, it is my definitive statement on homophobia, and I didn't want all the press (surrounding

the book's publication) to be about me having AIDS. I don't want to become a professional AIDS patient. I'm more valuable to the gay movement as a journalist (Shilts, 1994).

His health quickly deteriorating, Shilts was unable to promote what he considered his "definitive statement of homophobia" contained in his voluminous third and final book, *Conduct Unbecoming* in the manner he had hoped. His illness and death also rendered him unable to begin researching his next book topic: The role of gay men in the Catholic Church and the priesthood. He noted in the award-winning documentary "*Reporter Zero*" that

There is a tendency to put anyone who acknowledges that he is HIV positive into a role as an advocate. That has never been a role I have felt comfortable in, and even now, even though I am open about having AIDS, I am still avoiding being an advocate about it. What I have to offer the world is facts and information about it, and so that's what I want to continue to do. It's very frustrating, because here I am at the pinnacle of my career – I could literally do anything I wanted to in the world of journalism, and you're left with a strange feeling that your life is somehow finished without being completed (Lozano, 2006).

His battle with HIV and AIDS and his explanations notwithstanding, Shilts failed to convert some of his pre- and post-mortem critics who noted that even though Shilts had lived as an openly gay man throughout his rising career as a journalist and author, and "despite Shilts' position as the preeminent historian of the AIDS epidemic and as perhaps the first openly gay reporter in mainstream media," critics continued to chide him for the fact "he remained quiet for several years about being HIV-positive" with Shilts only revealing his status "after his health declined precipitously" (Gallagher, 1995).

More recent critical review of Shilts, including those by scholar Richard McKay, has explored Shilts' role in the advancement of the AIDS narrative from the 1980s forward and declared him "a driven, ambitious, angry and upset journalist" (McKay, 2011).

## METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH APPROACH

Through a mix of primary and secondary sources, this work attempts to explore the issues specific to Shilts' reportage – extending that necessarily into the authorship of his three salient commercial texts – but still focused on his life as a newspaper reporter (including years of freelance writing before landing his final job as a reporter for *The San Francisco Chronicle*). Primary sources were selected and interviewed based on their knowledge and experience with Shilts during both his educational and formative years as a journalist, unto his daily work at the *Chronicle* and as an author. Secondary sources are readily available that offer a wide array of commentary and critical analysis of Shilts work – it seems for every fan and champion of his work, there is an equal number of highly critical observers who challenge the “place” of Shilts' journalism. The author undertook 17 original interviews with key contacts from throughout Shilts' life, including former professors, colleagues, sources and competitors. In addition, the papers and ephemera of Randy Shilts housed in collections in San Francisco at the James C. Hormel Gay & Lesbian Center at the San Francisco Public Library, the GLBT Historical Society of San Francisco, Calif., and Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, San Francisco, Calif. Further, personal transcripts of an in-depth interview conducted with Shilts prior to his death in 1994 were provided by author Eric Marcus, along with family background provided by Shilts' brother, Gary Shilts, and his editorial assistant and assistant, Linda Alband. Further, the author visited the University of Oregon in Eugene, where Shilts completed his bachelor's degree, and undertook extensive examination of microfilm files of stories written by Shilts for the student newspaper there, *The Oregon Daily Emerald*, as well as several years of articles and stories in *The Advocate*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Bay Area Reporter*, and many others. Through examination of both types of sources, the reader gains a broader perspective on which to base

judgment of Shilts' work, and the author gains a solid basis on which to render conclusions about Shilts the journalist in the context of the aforementioned Lippmann-Dewey discourse.

It is imperative to understand that consideration of Shilts' work cannot be divided easily between his work as a newspaper journalist from the time he graduated college until his death, and his work as an accomplished researcher and non-fiction author during the last years of his life. Because much of his newspaper reporting served to inform his subsequent texts, this work considers ideas and issues expressed in both aspects of Shilts' career in order to offer a more comprehensive and accurate examination of his life and work, or, the sociology of his journalism. As the research shows, particularly because Shilts' editors at *The San Francisco Chronicle* were generous in setting the boundaries for Shilts as a reporter *and* author, the mixing of these two important roles is unavoidable to an examination of his life and work. It was not new territory for the now Hearst-owned *Chronicle* or its sister-yet-rival publication *The San Francisco Examiner*, the former having dispatched reporter Mike Weiss to write the definitive book on the George Moscone-Harvey Milk murders, and the latter granting time and space to Tim Reiterman to pen the conclusive text on the Rev. Jim Jones and the People's Temple mass suicide.

This biographical, or semi-biographical approach to Shilts – deceased since 1994 and therefore not someone we can personally interview – is not a new approach, but it is one that has on occasion drawn a significant amount of criticism about telling the story or place of any particular individual or society/culture. Skidelsky (1988) noted in some corners of academia “biography is still not taken entirely seriously as literature, as history, or as a cogent intellectual enterprise” (p. 1). This remains so, it seems, despite ample evidence that this approach accesses many valuable outcomes, including “an entryway to the larger issues of history” because

biography reflects the time and place and the greater social, political and economic factors that were in play in any particular time (Zarnowski, 2003, p. 5)

Denzin (1989) suggests “there are many biographical methods, or ways of writing about a life” and that “each form presents different textural problems and leaves the reader with different messages and understandings” (p. 7). He shares, however, Plummer’s (1983) traditional definition that the “biographical method” is “the studied collection of life documents, or documents of life, which describe turning-point moments in individuals’ lives. These documents will include autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, life stories, personal experience stories, oral histories, and personal histories” (p. 13). In this sense, then, the secondary sources used in this work are replete with such “documentation of life.”

Denzin focused on the problems associated with biography writing since its emergence in the social sciences in the 1920s and ‘30s, but noted a new interest in interpretive approaches to the study of various cultures, biographies and human lives. The idea of examining Shilts in the context of his gay identity, as well as his role as a journalist, fits squarely in Denzin’s (1989) proclamation that interpretive biography allows one to view “societies, cultures and the expressions of human experience ... as social texts, that is as structures of representation that require symbolic statement” (p. 9). He further defined interpretive biography to be “creating literary, narrative, accounts and representations of lived experiences” and as “telling and inscribing stories” of human beings (p. 11). The author acknowledges Shilts’ life and work can be viewed through a variety of prisms, as journalist, as author, as gay leader, as advocate, or as even political figure in the pandemic journey of AIDS in America.

From whatever disposition we approach the biographical method, Denzin’s interpretive channel avoids glossing over lives and experiences via general narrative and instead “the value

of the biographical method lies in its user's ability to capture, probe, and render understandable problematic experience" (p. 69). Shilts' work and life provide many opportunities to meet what Bloor and Wood (2006) defined as "the detailed reconstruction of individual life stories" and note that the method invariably overlaps with other qualitative approaches, such as life histories, narratives and oral histories (p. 24). Ultimately, the value of a biographical methodology in considering Shilts' reportage is that we are able to gain an

understanding of individual lives set within their social contexts by tracing circumstances, choices, constraints and decisions that affect people's lives. The purpose of a biographical study is to gain insights into the everyday experiences of individual lives thereby enabling the researcher to reflect on the wider cultural meanings of society (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 24).

Biography as dissertation practice is gaining acceptance and more frequency. As Reynolds (1998) noted, "a biographical dissertation is primarily a scholarly work, distinguished by its vow to seek and report what is true and committed to the methodologies that reflect the paradigm of its academic discipline" (p. 177). She cautioned, however, that "artistry" in biographical dissertations has yet to reach the page and that a "formulaic list of chapters prevails over creative arrangements, and style seems readily defeated by the unyielding requirements of official manuals and university thesis editors" (p. 183). Despite the caution, however, Reynolds does not discourage the approach celebrating the fact that by writing a biographical dissertation she was "able to enjoy the creative work of the artist and to employ the methodological precision of the scholar" (p. 184).

Bloor and Wood (2006) add that "the biographical method has received relatively little methodological attention, perhaps because it is often subsumed under other methodologies such as in-depth interviewing or ethnography" (p. 25).

When considering a biographical approach to Shilts' life, it is valuable to remember a provocative idea found in Nissen's (1998) declaration that "there is no gay biography" and that "not a single volume that I know of, that I could point to you and say, that is it, that is a gay biography" (p. 275). Little interest exists among historians, literary critics or theorists, Nissen posits, for gay biography because of an "essentialist-constructivist debate" that erupts when gays attempt to write about themselves: "our history is not good form nor good politics" (p. 276). It is not that Nissen believes the gay narrative should not be told. He is convinced of the need to address who gay people are, why the gay story should be told, and what that story is. Nissen noted that biography can serve to

reinscribe the gay presence in history, (offering) a more sophisticated, variegated and specific understanding of the nature of this presence during different periods, and we need to find a way of communicating our knowledge to a larger audience. In a unique manner, the genre of biography can fulfill these three essential functions: it can serve to revise, historicize, and popularize all at once (p. 281).

The gay biography, such as that of Shilts, can be told without regard to authorship – gay or straight can tackle the gay biography, Nissen believes. "Gay biography may best be defined as a way, *a particular approach to biography*" (emphasis added) that will "serve to lessen the 'empirical deprivation' of a field in which there are many abstract theories and sophisticated literary analyses, but very few human beings" (Nissen, 1998, p. 277).

Nissen cautions, however, that the gay biography will "subvert one of biography's grounding assumptions: that a biography should tell the story of a 'whole' life" and that "all biography is necessarily selective" (p. 279) – and by focusing on just the gay aspects of a subject's life will prove challenging for many writers. He echoes James Creech's call that "one function of gay biographical practice can thus be understood as the construction of an apparatus capable of rendering audible what was forcibly silenced" (p. 280-281). This matters in

consideration of Shilts in that he is not solely defined as a gay man – by his own words and those of his supporters and critics – we see repeated examples where Shilts enters as a journalist, with all attempts at constructed objectivity in hand – and his homosexuality is almost always contained in the same context. Shilts himself joked that he would read coverage of his work by other journalists and sometimes come away with the idea that his first name was not “Randy” but “openly gay journalist”.

Regardless, Malcolm (1995) said biography is noteworthy for its role

as the medium through which the remaining secrets of the famous dead are taken from them and dumped out in full view of the world. The biographer at work, indeed, is like the professional burglar, breaking into a house, rifling through the drawers .... The voyeurism and busybody-ism that impel writers and readers of biography alike are obscured by an apparatus of scholarship designed to give the enterprise an appearance of bank-like blandness and solidity (p. 8).

Finally, the researchers’ relationship to their subject is a factor of consideration. There is much to be learned from Shilts’ experience and review of his research and writing invokes tremendous respect for the depth and tenacity of the reportage Shilts reflected. Writing biography, Reed (1998) noted “is an intensely personal experience” (p. 199) and it is also as Wagner-Martin (1994) noted that once a scholar has chosen a subject and dedicated themselves to investigating the life in question, the scholar “does merge in some ways with the subject” (p. 167). Reed called this “merging” a “synergetic marriage, a partnership formed from joint interest and for mutual benefit, collaboration and a combination of minds and hearts” (p. 199). In short, Reed cautions that “I have had company in those dusty archives” and that his subject was often there with him, “looking over my shoulder, illuminating the corners of the past” (p. 199).

## REPORT OF FINDINGS

### *Shilts' Formation as Journalist*

“Gay liberation” was a concept Shilts embraced quickly after hitchhiking away from his conservative Illinois home and began to experience the more accepting (or at least more libertarian) confines of Oregon and California. Shilts understood gay liberation to mean an unqualified belief in the equality of all sexual orientations, including homosexuality. Shilts said,

I was at Portland Community College in Oregon, and for me, coming out was very political. I had gay sexual experiences, as we all did, from Boy Scouts on. For me, there came a moment when I had to understand on a political basis. And it just hit me one day, there's one sentence that explains it all in my mind: 'I am right and society is wrong' (Udesky, 1991, p. 133).

For Shilts, from an early point in his coming out process he became convinced that the “ultimate goal” was “to have our society accept the fact that homosexuality is equal and on par with heterosexuality, that being gay is no more of a defining characteristic for you as a human being than being left-handed” (Marcus, 1989). Shilts still struggled to “out” himself to others – despite deep romantic crushes on other men he knew – as he poured himself into the anti-war and women’s liberation movements of the 1970s:

I fell into the counter-culture in Portland where I lived and was very hippie, but I still couldn't bring myself to come out. It was this taboo and it was violating this taboo that I couldn't make myself do (even though) I had no links to my home, my family, I was very independent. I just couldn't bring myself to do it (Marcus, 1989).

Ring in his ears and mind were the words of his most respected high school teacher, a sociology instructor who was the very first person to ever mention homosexuality in his presence, during a class at Aurora West High School in 1969. His beloved teacher opined that maybe homosexuals weren't immoral but were just sick, ill people. It was a hurtful message that

went directly to Shilts emerging questions about his sexuality as a 17-year-old Illinois high school student.

Shilts can even trace the day he “came out” – May 19, 1972 – just after making a presentation on gays for an anthropology class at Portland Community College. “I told every friend, everybody in my family, that I was gay. And I swore that I’d never live another day of my life in which people didn’t know that I was gay” (Udesky, 1991, p. 134). He credits his growing affiliation with the “counter culture” that ultimately enabled him to feel comfortable with being openly gay (Marcus, 1989). “I only lost one friend,” Shilts said about his coming out, “which was one of those guys I had a crush on who I think had his own closet issues he was dealing with. It was very easy. Everybody was very accepting. I didn’t have any traumas or anything” (Marcus, 1989). Soon after, Shilts transferred to the University of Oregon at Eugene and dove headlong into involvement with the Eugene Gay People’s Alliance, rising to be the club’s president, leading “rap sessions” about gay issues and hosting gay rights speakers on campus.

Once on the University of Oregon campus, Shilts launched a campaign for one of five positions on a student board that determined how to spend about \$1 million in “incidental activity fees” paid each year by UO students. Shilts showed signs of a growing confidence in his own abilities as a gay man and an emerging leader. Described in a candidate profile published in the student newspaper, *The Oregon Daily Emerald*, as a former conservative Midwestern kid who moved west and found liberalism, Shilts acknowledged his past as a charter member of the Young Americans for Freedom organization in his hometown of Aurora, Illinois, and as a 1964 campaign volunteer for Republican Presidential nominee Barry Goldwater. One of his favorite authors as a high school student was Russian-born philosopher and playwright Ayn Rand – “I think that still has a lot of influence on me because I’m still a very strong individualist” Shilts

said as late as 1993 (Gross, 1993). For his student campaign amidst the more progressive limits of the University of Oregon, Shilts offered his fellow students assurances that despite such credentials, he had always opposed the Vietnam War (Callister, 1973, p. 6). The story's author listed Shilts' interest in literature and poetry, and the fact that "he is a homosexual." Shilts clarified, "I am not an avowed or admitted homosexual because those words connote guilt" (Callister, 1973, p. 6), and declared himself only the third openly gay person elected to any "public office" in the United States (based on his previous election to the University of Oregon's student senate). Alongside a photo of Shilts in a wildly patterned shirt, sporting long hair and large eyeglasses, Shilts emphasized his interest in politics was driven less by an interest in serving gay students and more in rooting out what he saw as corruption: "I realized how much dishonesty there was in student government. There was a real need for somebody operating out of his conscience" (Callister, 1973, p. 6).

The campus newspaper, *The Oregon Daily Emerald*, noted that neither Shilts nor his opponent showed up for an endorsement interview, but he won the paper's nod regardless. *Daily Emerald* editors noted

It should be mentioned that Shilts is an impressive candidate. He is an avowed homosexual, chairman of the Gay People's Alliance and a knowledgeable newcomer to ASUO politics....He talks convincingly of bringing some leadership back to student government, and he is more capable than most of providing it (Oregon Daily Emerald, 1973-a, p. 4).

Shilts won election to the five-member student fee board, and was quickly elected its chair after forming a coalition with two other members of the committee - a Latino woman and a black man.

In the weeks that followed, university officials disbanded the school's student senate and ordered new elections for student government. Shilts immediately set upon a new candidacy for

Student Body President under the theme of “Come Out for Shilts.” A student newspaper “campaign profile” of Shilts and his running mate Gloria Gonzalez featured a photo of a long-haired and serious-looking Shilts and started with the news that “A homosexual and a Chicana are running together on an ASUO president-vice president ticket with the idea that people with new backgrounds are the only ones that can provide new leadership that ASUO desperately needs” (Oregon Daily Emerald, 1973-b, p. 1). Shilts said the centerpiece of his campaign was to retain decision-making power about student policies with students and took aim at University of Oregon President Robert Clark: “He wouldn’t have had the balls to offer a 10 percent student participation in a co-governance proposal if we had strong (student) leadership” and that the university’s president showed “absolutely no comprehension of (student) issues” (Oregon Daily Emerald, 1973-b, p. 1). Shilts said that if a “theme” existed for his campaign, it would be that he is not a politician, but that he pledged “aggressive leadership” – “What we plan to do is to confront the administration with student issues” (Oregon Daily Emerald, 1973-b, p. 1). Shilts’ candidacy for Student Body President was apparently so noteworthy the local off-campus newspaper, *The Eugene Register-Guard*, noted his candidacy as an openly gay person (Eugene Register-Guard, 1973, p. 6). Shilts and Gonzalez didn’t win. “I lost, but I did very well considering I had only been on campus for five months, so I became very big in student government,” Shilts said, noting that he used his retained position as chair of the incidental fee committee to direct funds for the first time to the Eugene Gay People’s Alliance (Marcus, 1989). Shilts said his early involvement in student politics revealed a certain naivety that he was longing to shed:

You know, this was one of my big naïve things. I thought that once people realized that I was running to show that gay people can live openly and they don’t have to hide, if I was very assertive about that... I figured once people knew that, everybody would come out. It just made perfect sense to do it, that the only

reason that people hadn't come out was because it hadn't crossed their minds. I was just so disappointed and very surprised when it didn't work out that way (Marcus, 1989).

Despite his election loss, Shilts was back just weeks later with a large editorial piece in the *Daily Emerald* urging passage of House Bill 2930 by the Oregon legislature, a bill that would prohibit housing and employment discrimination against homosexuals. "This is the most important issue facing the legislature this year," Shilts wrote, as he began to dismantle what he said were many "myths and lies" that dominated discussions about gay people (Shilts, 1973, p. 2) He wrote,

Gay people are subject to the most vicious oppression our society can dole out. Gay people are victims of almost universal job, housing and public accommodation discrimination. The University of Oregon still maintains that it has a right to discriminate against gay people. Our oppression, however, is unique with unique demands. Unlike an ethnic minority, a gay person is not visibly discernible; he can hide the fact that he is gay and not suffer the discrimination (Shilts, 1973, p. 2).

Shilts said space did not permit him to address all of the myths of mental illness or immorality related to gay people, but "I can offer myself and members of the Gay People's Alliance to talk to any group at any time about gay issues" and urged heterosexuals to join in an alliance to support the legislation (Shilts, 1973, p. 2).

Politics, however, was beginning to lose its favor with Shilts. He decided after just a year on campus that "the political process is basically corrupt" and frustrating to his goals. Shilts said,

When I get into something, I like to succeed and I realized, gosh, to succeed in politics you always have to compromise your principles. You have to be sort of an asshole. You can't live in a pure idealistic life, you have to be practical. So I realized I didn't want to be in politics, and nobody trusts politicians. Nobody trusts anybody in politics, so I realized that just wasn't going to work for what I wanted to do, and what was more important was furthering this notion of gay people. I thought journalism fit in very much as a way of doing that (Marcus, 1989).

Elaborating on the role journalism could play in furthering his true aspirations related to gay liberation, Shilts said

I figured all you have to do is get the facts out about gay people. That's all you have to do is get the facts out and the facts speak for themselves, which I basically still believe to this day. I was never in advocacy journalism, but basically, I just feel you can put both sides out there and the truth will win out in the end (Marcus, 1989).

In a revealing discourse offered later in his career, Shilts detailed his shift from early political activism in the gay movement to journalism, reflected via his days as a student at the University of Oregon, his coming out process via an earlier community college class, and his early association with gay liberation efforts. "I could see that society's attitude is wrong, and I was just fine," Shilts said (Wills, 1993). The limitations of political activism had become clear to Shilts:

I saw the limits of what you could do with political activism. I sort of came to the conclusion that most people are prejudiced, not because they are mean people, or evil people, but they lack information. By using information, you could do a lot more to advance understanding than by just being polemic and yelling at people in protest.... So I took a journalism class... and it was the lightning strike. I found my calling. I basically stopped taking any other courses but journalism. As soon as I got into journalism, I stopped being an activist. I just felt you can't be agitating for something on one hand and still be a journalist. Your job is to tell both sides of the story (Wills, 1993, p. 49).

Shilts' remarks are revealing in this way – he started off as an activist because he believed society's view of him and other homosexuals was wrong. Activism, however, did not help him defeat society's perspective based in prejudice, and he sought to change that – in this case – via a route engaging journalism. At the same time he sought to draw a line of demarcation between his earlier political life and his later journalistic life – but did so without fully acknowledging the shards of activism that sparked his initial drive toward journalism. Acknowledging the suspicious "acceptance" he found among journalists during his transition, Shilts lamented that

his earliest jobs were only with gay-owned or gay-themed publications. “But I had always wanted to work in the mainstream media because they seemed to be the logical place to get information out,” Shilts said (Wills, 1993). Again, contrasted with the desire to be an objective journalist, Shilts revealed his intent, reflecting his desire to demonstrate his gay activism via the subtly of so-called mainstream journalism:

It was a wonderful time to be a reporter. The whole gay thing was just exploding on Castro Street...It was all unfolding in front of your eyes. And there was excitement too, seeing a lot of gay people like myself, people who are open and who are committed to showing a new way to be alive, that you didn't have to live in fear and trepidation all the time (Wills, 1993, p. 49).

Interestingly, however, whenever the issue of advocacy reporting was raised, Shilts was in similar form as he was with a *New York Times* reporter, proclaiming, “Though I am open about being gay, I do not perceive myself as being an activist of any sort,” he said. “I’m just your basic reporter” (Reinhold, 1987). In an effort to buttress his bona fides as a reporter first, Shilts employed well-known mainstream journalistic terms and values, including his desire for “standard of proof” for certain claims, and pointing out “conflicts of interest” that may exist among sources. As Weir noted,

Shilts’ attitude of high seriousness suffuses everything he writes. That he may at times be hiding behind his scruples is an accusation leveled at many reporters who righteously advocate objective journalism .... Shilts’ level of seriousness and professionalism was rare. He was not going to be contained in the era’s sometimes flip and hesitant gay journalistic ghetto. He has always acted with what his boss at the time, *Advocate* editor-in-chief John Preston calls ‘the security of the successful professional. It’s part of what the straight community responds to in him’ (Weir, 1993, p. 49).

In his first professional journalism job after college at *The Advocate*, Shilts wrote profiles of gay figures that would mirror ones written about him later in his life. His profile of openly gay

journalist and author Arthur Bell for a story published in March 1977 noted that Bell had a problem:

He's a reporter who likes to report. So when backroom bars became the rage of the New York gay scene, he descended into their libidinous depths and told his readers what the backrooms are all about. All this creates a problem because Bell is openly gay.... (causing) gay politicians to turn red and become very unreasonable when they talk about Bell because of the problem of writing about gay life – warts and all. And a lot of gay people simply would rather not have those warts talked about (Shilts, 1977-c, p. 15).

Shilts reported that Bell's weekly column in *The Village Voice* inspired regular letters to the editor. "Straight people think he is too pro-gay; gay people think he isn't pro-gay enough .... All this leaves Bell unimpressed as he maintains that most of the gay political activists 'make me want to puke,'" (Shilts, 1977-c, p. 15).

*Rolling Stone* writer Gary Wills directly queried Shilts about how he avoided becoming an advocate via his journalism, as Bell had attempted to do, and Shilts professed that it never had been much of a problem noting that "I don't think anybody is really objective, and I can't claim to be objective, but I think you can be fair and tell both sides of the story, no matter who you are or what you are writing about" (Wills, 1993). Divulging the lack of objectivity that was inherent, Shilts said

I feel strongly that gay people should be accepted, but I always felt it would be wrong to manipulate information or slant your stories in order to manipulate people. If you just stick to the facts, you are doing the right thing. I never wanted to march. You give up some prerogatives about being an activist when you become a journalist, because it is like public officials – you don't want to create the appearance of impropriety (Wills, 1993, p. 48).

Shilts seemed to be clinging to a naïve notion of truth and facts to support his ideas of objectivity. But as one of Shilts' biggest critics Douglas Crimp later noted, "Truth is never unproblematic, never a simple matter of empirical facts; it is always selective, always a particular

construction, and always exists within a specific context” (Crimp, 2004, p. 124). It appeared, at times, that Shilts held on to his ideas about journalistic objectivity and integrity that he formed early in his career as a young Oregon college student. His high aspirations in the power of what journalism could do had prompted Shilts to switch majors from English to journalism, causing him to stay an extra year at school. He took every journalism class he could get his hands on, volunteered for every mundane story or task available on the student newspaper, *The Oregon Daily Emerald*, and slipped out of student government (Admad, 1974, p. 1). The journalism program at Oregon was in its earliest days when Shilts arrived on campus, patched together with a handful of full-time faculty who had started their careers as part of the English Department, with the addition of professional journalists who came on board as adjunct faculty. One of those was Duncan McDonald who went on to a three-decade career at the University of Oregon. In Duncan’s earliest classes as a college professor were two students who would make important names for themselves in journalism: a bright-eyed eager junior named Randy Shilts who had just switched majors from English to journalism, and a telecommunications major from tiny Ashland, Oregon – eventual *Today Show* co-anchor Ann Curry. McDonald said,

What I remember about Randy is that he certainly had an interesting aura of excitement and interest around him. He was clearly gregarious. I don’t know whether that was forced or not, but at some point, he was so jovial to almost being manic from time to time. As I got to know him a little more over the years, I saw that he could be a very introspective and thoughtful kind of person. He stood out because he was very demonstrative. He was the very first student, the very first man I ever saw, ever wearing clogs. He wore clogs to class. Well, you might say what the hell does that matter, everyone wears clogs. But in the 1970s, he was the only man I knew who wore them then. I don’t know that that was any sort of affectation for him, although I know he really wanted to let people know who he was. He was not going to back down from who he was (D. McDonald, personal communication, September 1, 2011).

Duncan said Shilts demonstrated unusual confidence and security in who he was, including about his sexuality:

I don't think he gave a fat rat's ass about whether anyone thought he was gay or not, or what they thought about it. I think that is part and parcel of anybody, in my view, who is very sensitive and is very creative. He lived out there with a lot of bravado, but in his very private and quiet moments, I know he felt wounded and attacked at times, so for that reason, you could easily see how he might overreact as well (D. McDonald, personal communication, September 1, 2011).

Despite being viewed originally as an “outsider” in the cliquish newsroom of *the Daily Emerald* because of his lack of a journalism pedigree, Shilts eventually was named managing editor of the daily student newspaper. His background as an English major and someone who loved fiction and poetry both served him well *and* posed a challenge, McDonald said:

He clearly had more of a literary flair for his writing than other students. He self-identified and self-selected into fairly specialized reporting very early on. You gotta admire his focus....(but) he also had a very big ego....In the class I taught with him, it was a very introductory class, we taught how important the formulaic structure of a news story is, and how we work to say as much as we can in as few of words as possible. Randy was trying to be quite literary, and quite flowery in his writing. He would get a little opinionated as well. I recall writing on his papers almost every time, ‘Please see me.’ We would chat a bit – my main point with him was that, ‘Randy, you have some really great ideas here, but you are so full of shit that you can't get to the point.’ I wasn't yelling at him or anything like that. I would tell him, ‘You have to find a voice and try to find a quicker way to get to the point. You're not writing for *Texas Monthly* now. Pretend you are with Associated Press and write it like that.’ Well, he would say how much he liked what he had come up with and I would say, ‘I don't care, write it like I said to write it, that's what the assignment was’ (D. McDonald, personal communication, September 1, 2011).

Shilts racked up several awards and top grades in his journalism classes, and began turning his sights on gay topics off campus. During his second senior year at Oregon, he saved up enough money to jump a Greyhound bus for Seattle and interviewed closeted gay professionals from all walks of life about their life experiences. That story, along with an earlier one on the fierce

competition and elaborate hierarchy of the drag show contests in most major cities, won him additional awards, including two from the William Randolph Hearst Foundation in its collegiate writing contests (Oregon Daily Emerald, 1975, p. 4). Controversy was never too far away however, as one of the Hearst awards (the one that came with a \$1,000 cash prize and a personal visit to the Hearst Castle in San Francisco) was revoked after the judges said they made a calculation error in figuring the winners. Shilts suspected the Hearst Foundation was uncomfortable awarding a prize to an openly gay student who had written about gay topics. He believes he also “freaked out” Hearst Foundation officials by leading his fellow college journalists on a late-night romp to a gay bar in San Francisco. Soon after, Shilts learned that the \$1,000 check Hearst officials had given him was being canceled and could not be cashed. His personal files at the San Francisco Public Library indicate Shilts (and some of his professors at the University of Oregon) engaged an aggressive but ultimately futile letter-writing campaign to reinstate his award. McDonald called the Hearst incident

quite scandalous, in my view, not only for the fact that something was withdrawn, but for the discussion of it among the William Randolph Hearst committee, which was generally made up of some very prominent editors, was very, very secretive. It was bullshit. There was no decent explanation ever of why it was removed from him. The only inference you can have is that they said, ‘Oh my God, this guy is writing about gay things!’ (D. McDonald, personal communication, September 1, 2011).

There were other, more promising moments in his upstart reporting career. Shilts got an early taste of the kind of impact his reporting could have when a page one article he wrote for *The Oregon Daily Emerald*, the student newspaper at the University of Oregon, was picked by the Associated Press and distributed statewide. Shilts’ story, detailing how local property tax assessors had engaged in the practice of reporting any incidences of cultivation, propagation or processing of marijuana noted while conducting their assessments of private property for

taxation purposes. Shilts not only uncovered evidence the previous Republican county tax assessor had ordered his staff to report such instances to the police, he also reported the incoming Democratic assessor was going to cease the practice. That the county assessor had acted as an extra set eyes in the “war on weed” in generally accepting Oregon was big news – and Shilts scored an early reporting success (Shilts, 1975-a, p. 1).

Such successes notwithstanding, Shilts was feeling devastated and worried that the cautions about being “so out” about his gay identity from both his journalism professors and fellow journalism students were true, but he wallowed in disappointment for only a short time. Seeing other friends who had graduated working as waiters or in other fields outside journalism and writing, “I decided that I’d never make a penny except through my writing,” Shilts said (Marcus, 1989). He added,

I had this incredible ambition and I was willing to work like fucking crazy through my twenties... My success only came because I was willing to work five times harder than anybody else. What’s unfair about it is that people who are just mediocre... and don’t have that kind of drive can get anywhere because they are straight and don’t have to fight prejudice just to make it. To me it’s noteworthy that I made it as much as I have just because it demonstrates how unfair it is to people, you shouldn’t have to be extraordinary to make it (Marcus, 1989).

McDonald remembers Shilts’ post-graduation plans to try and get to San Francisco as soon as possible. McDonald said, “He had his hopes set pretty high from wanting to go from only some limited collegiate experience to a big daily” and that his experience may not have matched his ambition at that point. But also,

There is no doubt in my mind, as I recall how he conducted himself in those days, I can picture a job interview between him and a white male who is 55-years-old, and here is this interesting young man who appears far more confident that he had any right to be. You know, those things can really work against you. That was part of Randy’s bravado. He was not humble. But was homophobia in play there? Sure (D. McDonald, personal communication, September 1, 2011).

Within weeks of graduating, however, Shilts scored his first byline story in the July 30, 1975 edition of *The Advocate*, as a freelancer contributor. His article, “Sodomy repeal signed by Washington governor” reported on that state’s distinction as the first to eliminate sodomy and adultery from the state’s criminal code – an issue Shilts had advocated himself as part of the Gay People’s Alliance in Eugene, Oregon. Shilts noted that some legislators continued to wrestle with “gay myths,” some of them citing a fear that the repeal would lead to recruitment of young people into illicit sex by adult homosexuals.

For the August 13, 1975 of *The Advocate*, Shilts offered a lengthy report on the push-pull of progressive politics in Oregon - titled “Candy jar politics: The Oregon gay rights story” (p. 10-12). He included praise for a 1973 victory by the Eugene Gay People’s Alliance – of which he was a member – for prohibiting employment discrimination in the city on the basis of sexual orientation. He repeated quotes from an Oregon legislator who said he knew “‘from personal experience’ that homosexuals actively recruit teenagers into their ranks” and then Shilts added inside parentheses his own remark after the legislator’s quote: “One can envision a large poster of a super-fag ominously pointing his finger, saying, ‘I Want You.’”

In the October 22, 1975 issue, Shilts was back with “Future of gay rights? The emerging gay middle class” that looked at efforts of “middle class gays” to integrate themselves into the political power base of Seattle – a new effort that expended energy toward expanding rights, rather than energy toward ensuring the cover of the closet. He noted the active role gays had played in turning back a mayoral recall effort – and noted that mayor had visited “half of the city’s gay bars and discussed the relative merits of cock rings with the owner of a leather shop.” (p. 8-9). This article closely resembled the one he had submitted to the earlier Hearst collegiate writing contest.

“Pitch letters” from Shilts to his editors contained in his files at the San Francisco Public Library provide a good insight into Shilts’ ability to “sell” his stories to his editors. In a memo to *Advocate* editors Robert McQueen and Sasha Gregory-Lewis (dated January 16, 1976), Shilts was making the case for strong treatment for his submitted story on alcoholism in the gay community. He told his editors,

Here’s the gay alcoholism opus. It is by far the longest piece I’ve ever written with its 51 pages – roughly three times longer than the longest journalism piece I’ve done and even longer than my college thesis on King Lear. But enough of the sense of history. Because it’s so long, I expect a few stylistic flaws which may pop up only occasionally in small stories will be much more intrusive here if only because I have so much more copy in which to make them. I’m rather disappointed that I can’t be around to get your initial reaction as I’m sure the feedback would be quite helpful for such future projects. So please, keep some criticisms in mind for when I return. If nothing else, this project has been tremendously helpful in terms of experience and I’m sure that such future investigations will reflect that experience (Shilts, 1976-a)

Shilts’ wasn’t done providing “guidance” on his story and offered “a few comments and suggestions I’d like to make as well as some stylistic quandaries in which I found myself” that seemed to reflect a still undecided level of confidence in his own work:

I’m worried the lead may be too long. It does, however, contain an average night-on-the-town for the run-of-the-mill bar goer (and I say this from plenty of personal experience) – and it is choked full of symptoms of alcoholism .... I’m worried that you may be put off by cavalier and coquettish style in Section III on alcohol. I do, however, feel that this style is justified. First of all, I would commit a grievous overkill on the reader if I told the story of all the vicious things the drug does with a straight face. The humorous style provides a relief of tension from what otherwise is a very grim article. (Sort of the way Alfred Hitchcock puts in a funny scene between two murders) .... I also think that the outline or editor’s note should make a reference to the fact that I’ve won two national awards for my investigative reporting (i.e. the Hearst Investigative Reporting Competition and the St. Bonaventure thing where I won a hard news award for an investigative piece on marijuana busts in Eugene). The fact that I do have credentials in investigative reporting – which after all is my specialty – raises the credibility of the story itself. It’s not like I’m some nerd off the street trying to make a few extra bucks via sensationalism .... with good layout, I’m convinced that this story can reap a lot of good effects on our alcoholism-ridden subculture. I personally stand

behind everything in the story and do not feel that I am exaggerating the problem for the sake of good copy. We should, however, be prepared for a lot of letters. As Smith noted, the denial is pervasive (Shilts, 1976-a).

During the summer of 1976, a former Barry Goldwater stalwart just three presidential elections prior, Shilts won a prime assignment to cover the Democratic National Convention in New York City for *The Advocate*. Shilts coverage took a slice-of-life look at the convention and its day-to-day experiences, particularly through the eyes of four openly gay delegates credentialed for the event, and a larger and more activist group of some 10,000 LGBT Democrats left outside Madison Square Garden to protest the absence of any mention of gay rights or related issues in the Democrat's party platform. Shilts' story lamented the poor location for the "gay caucus" of four to meet, and even the lack of knowledge of the DNC of a gay caucus – one party official brushing off Shilts' inquiries about this being the first Democratic convention to ever recognize a gay caucus – noting that "anybody can meet and call themselves a caucus of the Democratic Party. It's no big deal" (Shilts, 1976-c, p. 7). Shilts noted the '76 Democrats were highly contrasted with the raucous – and losing – groups that gathered in 1968 and '72 amidst crushing Republican victories. As Shilts put it, the Democrats of 1976 that were about to nominate Jimmy Carter of Georgia for president "are as middle-of-the-road as Perry Como" (Shilts, 1976-c, p. 8). Mainstream coverage of gay participation at the '76 Democratic confab was limited to an article on how the DNC planned to promote safety amidst pro-gay and anti-abortion protests aimed at its delegates (Battle, 1976; Rosenbaum, 1976).

The compare/contrast approach employed by Shilts – showing the "conventionality" of the four openly gay DNC delegates contrasted with the loud, sometimes even flamboyant demonstrators outside the arena – was a classic example of the objective style he attempted to employ. The one openly gay candidate Shilts could find, a candidate for a statewide office,

would only participate in the story if a pseudonym was used for his name and his identity kept a secret. Shilts posed the obvious question: Do you plan to come out? “Are you kidding,” the closeted Democrat said. “If I were to come out, that would have to become the main thrust of my politics because that’s all the media would talk about. It would become everybody’s number one consideration and any other issue would get buried” (Shilts, 1976-c, p. 9). Shilts concluded his reporting on his first national political convention, “If the gay convergence on the Big Apple did anything other than raise serious questions about the future of the gay movement, it wasn’t overly obvious in the muggy heat and the sweltering air of the 1976 Democratic convention” (Shilts, 1976-c, p. 9).

In the March 23, 1977 edition, *Advocate* editors announced they had hired Shilts full-time to report on the gay community – “a first for the West coast ” (p. 10). The move to full-time staff member also signaled a shift in Shilts’ reporting for *The Advocate*, moving beyond “showcase” or “profile” stories to ones more focused on analysis, as evidenced in a July 27, 1977 article that examined how the campaign of Florida Orange juice growers’ impresario Anita Bryant against gay rights in Miami-Dade County, Florida had effectively served to motivate gay politicians (Shilts & McQueen, 1977, p. 16). Even his supposed “profile” piece on the emerging gay enclave of the Castro District in San Francisco turned into a thoughtful analysis of whether the area represented new-found political power and strength for gays, or was evidence that gays had been successfully shuffled off to their own ghetto as other marginalized communities had experienced (Shilts, 1977-b, p. 6).

Other stories followed about gay parenting, gay vacations, the fight by an open lesbian to keep her teaching job, foster homes for gay children, gay athletes, on-campus gay groups at America’s colleges, a trend of gays joining the Unification Church, Scientology and Buddhism,

and gay book reviews. For a year-end edition for 1975, the editors asked Shilts and other correspondents for their opinions on the gay rights movement in the U.S. For the Pacific Northwest, Shilts wrote that “with a largely apathetic community and an overall lack of high-powered gay organization, the Northwest merely drifted toward greater political action in 1975. Present portents indicated that no concerted boost is likely in 1976, and it looks like the Northwest will merely continue drifting” (Shilts, 1975-d, p. 6). For a July 1977 article about self-identifying gay teenagers, Shilts said his story was one

about young gay people. It is also a story about violence, ostracism, alienation – and sometimes even suicide. It is a story that needs to be told because increasing numbers of young gay people are coming to grips with their homosexuality at younger ages (Shilts, 1977-e, p. 30).

*The Advocate* assigned Shilts to its “Dispatch” page – described as a roundup of gay news from around the nation. Shilts’ story selections included legislative updates about gay rights battles across the nation, and the Miami-Dade County gay rights fight – dubbed “Orange Armageddon”. Softer, more feature-oriented articles were still on his tableau, including an odd story asking and answering the question – “It always makes sense to hire a gay lawyer, right? Not necessarily, according to some legal workers” (Shilts, 1977-g, p. 10). On the first year anniversary of his full-time status at *The Advocate*, Shilts took the occasion to formally lobby his boss, editor Robert McQueen, for a pay increase. In a December 14, 1977 letter, Shilts said he was hoping to “contribute a little statistical data” to assist McQueen in determining that a raise was in order. He noted that his stories had been front-page features 13 times during his entire tenure with *The Advocate* (including his freelance years before being hired full-time), but that

This is just the tip of the ice berg of my work since so much of my time has been devoted to such unglamorous, but important, staff writing.... But, then, I have always accepted such mundane tasks with alacrity since I’m such a, well, nice guy and a good employee (Shilts, 1977-h).

Shilts added, “All this might sound like idle and somewhat irrelevant boasting, and indeed, I must confess that I am proud of this prolific output, unmatched by any *Advocate* employee save, perhaps, the senior editor” (Shilts, 1977-h). Going a little further, and perhaps understanding his bosses to know his ego by now, Shilts noted his rising “national reputation” for reporting surely was worth an addition to the “grossly inadequate” \$75 per week net pay he currently receiving (sans any health care benefits). Shilts ended his pitch with a couple of minor usage errors,

*If I were a rambunctious type, I would say that such a paycheck is almost an insult -- almost more trouble than its (sic.) worth. Thankfully, however, I’m much to (sic.) charming to be so rambunctious and, knowing that your charm exceeds mine many times fold, I’m sure we can see our way toward an appropriate increase this week (Shilts, 1977-h).*

Outside of *The Advocate*, Shilts’ reporting helped form some of the earliest mainstream journalism on the gay life in Oregon – supplanting earlier coverage of gays that focused on crime and arrests on morals charges. An early freelance article he wrote for *The Willamette Valley Observer* in Eugene, Oregon was typical – a lengthy narrative on the lives of gay men and women in Oregon but still packaged under a headline of “Secret Identity Troubles Homosexuals” and inside jump labels of “Gay Woes” (Shilts, 1975-e, p. 5). The tone of Shilts’ article mirrored the overall struggle for identity being waged by homosexuals across the nation as “an invisible people” (as historians Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney term them) seeking a secure place in society – their ability to tell their secret to the world on their own timing an advantage, and at the same time the secret nature of their lives a disadvantage. Unlike other minority groups in the nation (those based on race or gender), “homosexuals had no physical or cultural markings, no languages or dialects, which could identify them to each other or to anyone else” (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 12). While issues of bias and discrimination are common

among all minority groups struggling for acceptance and equality, “the fundamental feeling, the bias which defined this population to begin with is more subtle, more personal than any other.

*It is sexual*” (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 13, emphasis added). The result was a struggle for homosexuals, such as Shilts and others, to construct their own identity and to do so amidst a rash of countering messages about not only their worth to society, but how their presence may constitute an actual threat to humanity. The earliest gay rights leaders, for example, “had to begin with no positive way to see themselves, no precedent on which to stand” (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 13).

An April 1983 piece for *New York Native* reflects well how Shilts’ writing style had continued to “grow up” as he grew more comfortable in an analysis role that moved beyond general reporting, and reflects the growing authority reflected in his reporting voice that went well beyond his age and years of experience. Writing about San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein’s attempt to win a second outright term in office, Shilts noted Feinstein’s often inconstant relationship with the city’s gay community. Shilts reported that while Feinstein had won praise from gay leaders for appointing many of their number to city boards, commissions and other key positions in her administration, true allegiance from gays eluded her. Shilts retold a story of how Feinstein allegedly had shown disgust and fear when asking one gay leader in a private conversation what a “glory hole” was, and a waffling level of support when telling *Ladies Home Journal* magazine that “the right of an individual to live as he or she chooses can become offensive. The gay community is going to have to face this” (Shilts, 1983, p. 4). As Shilts wrote, “Feinstein’s major liability, in short, is that she’s widely perceived as a prude. This problem never dogged the lusty Mayor George Moscone” and that remaining doubts among gay leaders who continued to question her commitment to their cause hurt Feinstein’s feelings. “Around the

country, Feinstein is viewed as the mayor who coddles gays; in San Francisco, they gather beneath her balcony to swear revenge” (Shilts, 1983, p. 4). Shilts concluded,

Without any doubt, Mayor Feinstein’s 14-year record on gay issues surpasses that of just about any other major politician in the United States. But in a city where gay rights is a *fait accompli*, she inflames passions in part because she has so clearly understood the notion of gay civil rights, yet has stubbornly resisted the broader concept of gay liberation (p. 4).

Shilts’ tenure at *The Advocate* was not without problems. Frequent tension rose between Shilts and David B. Goodstein – *The Advocate*’s savior or Judas depending on whom you ask. It would later break into open defiance on the part of Shilts. Goodstein, who had acquired *The Advocate* seemingly more from a motivation of expanding a hobby that just-might-make-him-money someday, was a Cornell and Columbia University-trained lawyer and Wall Street financial expert. Summarily fired by his buttoned-down financial bosses after he came out as gay, Goodstein took his act to California and acquired the struggling *Advocate* in 1974 for an initial investment of \$300,000 (and another \$700,000 promised to the owners over the next decade) (GLBTQ.com, 2013). By then *The Advocate* was loosely holding on to its claim as the first truly *national* gay publication (founded in 1966), but had fallen into reliance upon advertising from pornographers, gay bathhouses, matchmaking and dating services, cigarette companies, and alcohol distributors to stay afloat. It was published for most of its first decade as a tabloid-sized publication using newsprint rather than glossy magazine paper stock. Goodstein brought his “make money” approach to the publication and it flourished, moving away from a singular focus on news and including more lifestyle oriented stories covering literature, art, travel, celebrities, and other topics. He fired *The Advocate*’s installed staff, and hired at bargain basement prices just-out-of-college upstarts, such as Shilts and others, as regular contributors (The Advocate, 1976, p. 8). Shilts’ move from Oregon where he started as *The Advocate*’s “Northwest Correspondent” to

San Francisco in 1976 was in part prompted by the opportunity the publication presented (L. Alband, personal communication, January 4, 2013). Clendinen and Nagourney (1999, p. 252) reported, Shilts showed up for work “with long, bushy hair and a mustache, and divided his time in Oregon between newspaper work and gay activism” but that “it was clear to the people at *The Advocate* meeting Shilts for the first time, that his driving interest was not really gay liberation, but in proving his (journalism) professors wrong and making it as a mainstream journalist.” Clendinen and Nagourney (1999, p. 252) noted that “Shilts’ first stories were written with the kind of distinctive voice that most journalists don’t display until well into their careers.”

Gay activist Cleve Jones, who was an early precinct volunteer for Harvey Milk’s political campaigns and eventually conceived of the Names Project AIDS Quilt, recalls meeting Randy Shilts in this period on a street corner of the Castro “which is where I held court,” Jones said. “I mean, I was an activist from the minute I got here and spent most of my time, my office was the sidewalk on Castro Street. I’m sure that is where I met him” (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011). Only three years younger than Shilts, and a fellow gay refugee from the Midwest, Jones recalls the two hit it off famously from the start and enjoyed many long conversations about the gay liberation movement beginning during the period when Shilts worked for *The Advocate*. “We became fast friends, and collaborators to some extent, on a few things we were both trying to make happen,” Jones reveals, indicating Shilts held on to some of his advocacy ideas about gay rights even as he moved deeper into serious journalism (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011). Jones remembers frequent trips to the bars on weekends with Shilts, and even a few quarrels and disagreements, though never any romantic attachment between the two. Jones said,

One big quarrel I remember having with him was over a story he did on the gentrification of the Mission District. When I first got here in the 1970s, the

Mission District extended out to what is now called the Castro and was a Latino working class area. There was an aggressive gentrification campaign going on here, and it was really being pushed by the city leaders and corporate leaders, and continues to this day. But, I mean in just my 40 years here, we've seen the removal of almost the entire African-American population from this district. He did a story about how gay people were being used to push Latino families out of the Mission District. Of course there was some truth to that, but again, it was just sort of sensationalized, and he made it seem in his story like all gay people were rich, white people interested in kicking out more people of color. In reality, they were gay renters who were in the forefront to try and stop gentrification and to maintain affordable housing (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

Jones believes "Randy was in very difficult position, and as I think about it, it is so rare now to see a headline that says 'first gay person' to do anything. But back then, those who were out in front and visible took a huge amount of flak from everyone, and it was hard" (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011). Jones said among those who could be critical of Shilts' work (but always behind his back) was Harvey Milk. Until Shilts began researching Milk for the biography he would write about him, Shilts told others he was not aware Milk was not that fond of him. Jones explained that

I think that Harvey had been upset about the same kinds of things with Randy that I had been from time to time. You know, Randy was bending over backwards, he was the first out gay guy working in mainstream media, so he had to constantly, I think in his mind, prove his independence and impartiality. And so, one never knew what Randy's story was going to be like, if one were going to be looking at it from the perspective of its potential impact on the (gay rights) movement and the cause (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

Jones also believes that Shilts' initial "social awkwardness" may have made the more gregarious and confident Milk uncomfortable at times. "But I liked him, Randy was a good friend of mine," Jones said. "We got along very well. I think partly because we were both very young, very visible, but also because we had that connection and our lives were somewhat similar." (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

Soon after Shilts moved to San Francisco to join *The Advocate*'s editorial staff full-time, Goodstein moved the magazine's editorial offices to San Manteo, California, closer to his home, and in an open declaration of Goodstein's desire to decouple the publication from the gay epicenters of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Eventually promoted to "Wire Correspondent" and "National Correspondent," Shilts covered a wide array of news stories about gay life – scraping by on a less-than-full-time salary Goodstein and Co. would pay. As a freelancer, Shilts said he could count on \$600 a month from Goodstein and although it did not fulfill his desire to work in the mainstream media, "I was covering stuff that I liked and it was good training ground" (Marcus, 1989). Shilts also enjoyed the fact that *The Advocate* used almost as much copy as Shilts could produce, but he felt constrained in sending home clips to show his parents that he *had* landed as a journalist. "I was writing for this publication that had all these dirty classified ads in it, and I couldn't send home to my parents a publication that had ads with 'Gay man wants somebody to piss on.' It was so embarrassing," Shilts said (Marcus, 1989).

What stood out in Shilts' memory – and to those who worked with him – was his never-ending ambition to write yet another story. "It was never a question of whether I was going to make it, because I knew I was," he said. "I just worked around the clock and every day of the week, always writing something" (Marcus, 1989). Shilts (and others) had initially gone along with Goodstein's heavy-handed approach to the news that would appear on the pages of his publication. As gay historians have noted, Goodstein aspired to be a national leader of the gay political movement, but remained a contentious figure who won as many enemies as friends. Shilts and others reported that Goodstein had no patience with those who disagreed with him, and understood the power that came with owning the nation's largest, and only gay newsmagazine. As part of yielding that power,

One of Goodstein's first decisions as a publisher was that *The Advocate* would not print the names of people whom he regarded as 'enemies of the movement.' Bruce Voeller was among the banned, mostly because as director of the National Gay Task Force he held the kind of national leadership position that Goodstein coveted. Activist Morris Kight, on the other hand, had challenged Goodstein's control of the Committee for Sexual Law Reform, starting a long-running feud (GLBTQ.com, 2013).

Goodstein appeared quite open about his "love-hate" views on the gay community, telling one interviewer that the "gay ghetto" of San Francisco was easily encapsulated into easy-to-manuever categories: gay men over the age of 30 who have lived in the city at least a decade, were employed professionally, generally closeted, but concerned for the arts; or "Castro clones" who are openly gay as an act of rebellion against their small-town roots and "hang out like teenagers, drinking too much, taking too many drugs, fucking day and night, and infecting each other with diseases"; and finally, "political radicals" who like Jewish ghetto dwellers in the east patronized Castro businesses, and rarely ventured outside the city for any reason (Andriote, 1999, p. 17). As Andriote (1999, p. 18) noted, "Even if Goodstein's observations were accurate, they smacked of economic elitism. And criticism of the rampant promiscuity in the gay ghetto was ironic coming from the publisher of a newspaper supported largely by advertising paid for by bathhouses and other sexual services."

Shilts felt directly the heavy hand of Goodstein over his work and was often painted by sources and other gay activists with the same disdain that seemed to grow for Goodstein with each passing year. Shilts quoted Goodstein as declaring in a newsroom tantrum at *The Advocate* that "I can't stand Harvey Milk" as "his face blushed, his arms waving about his roly-poly figure" and his loud voice "resounding through the partitions of the nation's largest gay paper" (Shilts, 1982-a, p. 140). Shilts said that Goodstein's "penchant for mixing journalism with his idiosyncratic theories of gay activism had earned him the nickname, 'Citizen Goodstein'" and

that Goodstein detested the rise of Harvey Milk, a man he considered a know-nothing camera shop owner and part of the militant gay activists – whom Goodstein termed “offbeat liberation fairies” who trolled the Castro. Goodstein directly attempted – and failed – to manipulate the strong-willed Shilts to his view of journalism when he assigned Shilts to a special expose about activist Morris Kight. Rumored to be a heavy drinker, Shilts said Goodstein sent him out with instructions to buy a six pack of beer for Kight to “loosen him up” for their interview. It was an assignment Shilts never fulfilled (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 252). Shilts determined the information Goodstein provided was not reliable or warranted a story, and smelled like a hatchet job. Although doing an initial interview (sans the beer), Shilts slow-walked producing a story on Kight until Goodstein’s attentions turned elsewhere. Surviving that dust-up, Shilts would not endure the final straw, however, as Goodstein began to immerse himself and everyone around him in what he called “The Advocate Experience” based off the Ehrhard Training Sessions championed by self-help guru Werner Ehrhard. Goodstein’s strategy included mandatory week-end long sessions for his employees to engage in “self-actualization” and “self-realization” workshops promoting personal acceptance and awareness by gay people of themselves that they then could presumably transfer into changing society’s level of acceptance of homosexuality. Ordered to attend a weekend of the “Advocate Experience” and to begin writing about in for *The Advocate*, Shilts attended briefly, was disruptive by quietly ridiculing the presentations, and promptly quit *The Advocate* (along with other notables such as Sarah Gregory-Lewis and Urvashi Vaid) (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 373). He took to the pages of rival publications to ridicule Goodstein and his “Advocate Experience” efforts.

A few years removed from his *Advocate* experience, Shilts said

Goodstein had a narrow view of news. As long as I came up with blockbuster stories that translated into big headlines and splashy art... everything was okay.

But when I pitched a story that might threaten ad revenue or that didn't lend itself to sensational treatment, his eyes glossed over. For me, journalism had to be more than that (Streitmatter, 1995, p. 242).

Goodstein sold *The Advocate* shortly before he died in 1985, but not before its circulation topped more than one million nationwide. In subsequent years with Goodstein a distant memory, Shilts' name returned to the publication as a guest writer. Goodstein's influence over Shilts' perception among gay leaders, however, remained intact for many years. Because Goodstein had closely aligned himself with the more conservative Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club (rival to the more progressive Harvey Milk Democratic Club) in San Francisco politics, many assumed Shilts shared Goodstein's more slow-going approach to gay liberation. And while the Toklas' Democrats adherence to machine and Democratic Party politics was more rigid than that of the upstart Milk Democrats, Shilts seemed to identify with both sides (particularly based on his association with Milk during his days as a San Francisco pol and as the ultimate biographer of the slain gay leader's life) (Shilts, 1982-a).

Nishikawa, et al. (2009, p. 251) found that "minority journalists do not completely conform to mainstream (journalistic) norms and attempt to walk a fine line between being a minority journalist and acting as a professional journalist" and acknowledged that some "journalists struggle with advocacy, some are surreptitious about advocacy, and a few are proud of their roles as advocates." Still others may engage a form of "stealth advocacy," Nishikawa, et al. (2009) found via "subtle strategies" that may influence coverage strategies on the basis of their very presence in a newsroom and by pointing out or suggesting stories or story angles that may illuminate additional cultural differences or nuances.

### *Shilts Moves to ‘Mainstream Journalism’*

Alwood (1996) devoted an entire text to examining the role of gay and lesbian reporters in so-called “straight” news settings at America’s newspapers and TV stations. Not surprisingly, he spent considerable time retracing the career steps of Randy Shilts from his earliest forays into journalism at the University of Oregon to his early and frequent freelance contributions to *The Advocate*. Alwood believes Shilts enjoyed appropriate rise within journalistic ranks via his post-*Advocate* freelance jobs for both KQED-TV and KTVU-TV. George Osterkamp, former news director for KQED and later a producer for CBS’ primetime news program *48 Hours*, recalls an ambitious Shilts determined to get a freelance job for *Newsroom*, KQED’s hour-long news program. The show ran on the Bay Area’s public television station from 1975-80 and was funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation. Paying only \$75 a story, Shilts was successful in getting more than 95 percent of his stories on the air – and always seemed to have a quiver of story ideas at hand, Osterkamp said (G. Osterkamp, personal communication, February 15, 2013). Hiring Shilts to cover primarily the expanding gay community in San Francisco was unusual and gained KQED headlines across the nation via an Associated Press story that called attention to the so-called novelty of hiring an openly gay reporter. The story generated dozens of stories nationwide and may have come from prompting by Shilts himself to convince KQED’s tiny public relations staff to send out a news release. “I’d like to say that we were braver than we were, but with a freelance position, I was not obligating the station to a long-term situation,” Osterkamp said (G. Osterkamp, personal communication, February 15, 2013). For his part, the 25-year-old Shilts told the *Bay Area Reporter* that his hiring was “not really a breakthrough” because

a great many gay men and women work in the media, in print and on the air. It’s just that most of them are in the closet! Most media people don’t talk about us unless it’s in a ‘queer’ joke. It’s rather funny to go through this experience; they (the media) give the impression that they had to go outside of the existing group

of already employed journalists to find someone to say that they are gay and ‘come out’ for the media.... Gay politics, their social and economic activities should be covered with the same professionalism as the activities of the Board of Supervisors and the straight community (Hardman, 1977, p. 6).

An Associated Press version of the “gay reporter is hired” story made special note that Shilts was comfortable going into gay bars or other gay establishments for his story on alcoholism in the gay community, and quoted Shilts as saying that “being openly gay has slowed me down career-wise, but it hasn’t stopped me” (Associated Press, 1977). Shilts said, “What I do is basic beat reporting. My beat is the gay community. I may not get as far in journalism as I would like, but I’m much more relaxed personally” (Associated Press, 1977), emphasizing that the news media frequently report news about homosexuals incorrectly. “The stories are usually distorted to emphasize the bizarre or radical,” he said, emphasizing his belief in his ability to be objective in covering gay stories, or any others (Associated Press, 1977). Shilts’ first story for KQED was a campaign profile of a then-little known camera store owner, Harvey Milk, who was seeking election from District 5 to the San Francisco Board of City Supervisors.

Osterkamp recalls Shilts’ personality as well suited to a TV newsroom:

He was such a charming man, essentially he could disarm most anybody, even 35 years ago when there weren’t many openly gay people active in the media....for the most part, Randy’s charm overcame any sort of resistance there might have been (G. Osterkamp, personal communication, February 15, 2013).

Shilts’ tenacity was also often on display, Osterkamp said, including his ability to work around road blocks he encountered when preparing his stories. Sources within the San Francisco Police Department, for example, were not always cooperative with a gay reporter, but “I think when he ran into someone difficult, he would just go around them to someone else” Osterkamp said (G. Osterkamp, personal communication, February 15, 2013). As a result, although he heard

extemporaneously or after-the-fact that Shilts may have been struggling with a source for information, he never came asking for help. “I think that would have been a sign of defeat for Randy to do so,” Osterkamp said (G. Osterkamp, personal communication, February 15, 2013).

Shilts’ role at KQED did not come without a learning curve – the print-trained reporter knew nothing about shooting and editing film (in the final days of film before the station switched over to Beta tapes) – but learned quickly, Osterkamp said. Highly defined roles between reporters and filmographers/videographers meant that his input had to be limited to suggested shots – not actual shooting or editing film or tape. “His basic challenge was to do an on-air presentation and I would say that at KQED, in those days, we were quite ecumenical in what we would accept as airworthy,” Osterkamp recalls about Shilts’ first efforts. “Randy was certainly not the worst, but I think he might have had trouble in a commercial TV station trying to satisfy the on-air requirements” (G. Osterkamp, personal communication, February 15, 2013). One of his friends and fellow journalists, David Israels, judged that Shilts became a more polished journalist after his time at KQED. “Television was not his *métier*,” Israels said from his observations. He adds,

I always thought that his television reports were not as clear as his writing became in print. When he was doing television he was younger and less experienced. It was a good place to learn, and I mean it was local television after all. There was that difference that I noted. He was always fast; he was an incredibly fast writer. He could handle complex stories quite well (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012).

Eager and willing to accept editing suggestions or other comments on his stories, Shilts never lacked for an authoritative voice in his stories, Osterkamp said, which quickly won him a continuing role as a panelist to discuss stories on the *Newsroom* set with anchor Belva Davis. The “on air analysis role” afforded to Shilts via the *Newsroom* format affirmed Shilts’ growing

consideration as a “journalist as expert,” a concept well-suited to the consideration of Shilts’ career. Although he had always demonstrated an authoritative, even expert voice to his reporting - perhaps born of the false bravado he often displayed, but also born of the unmatched doggedness of his reporting - moving to “reporter as expert” was an easy transition. In his first major reporting roles, for *The Advocate* and later for KQED-TV, Shilts experienced unusual opportunities for a reporter of his length of experience. *The Advocate*, always a publication run on a shoe-string when compared to any other publication that purported to be a national news magazine, needed writers such as Shilts to offer commentary, analysis and interpretation. The issues covered by *The Advocate*, after all, were rarely simple news stories, but were often controversial by their very nature depending on the readers, sources, etc. At KQED, the format of the *Newsroom* show (later renamed *Evening Edition*) again afforded Shilts a role as expert. As his colleague Belva Davis explained, the format of the show allowed Shilts (and other reporters) to come on set as either a set up or backfill stories prepared for that broadcast. Eventually he appeared as part of a mix of reporter and source panels on the show - his presence being the centerpiece of one of the most unusual moments in the show’s history, Davis believes. As Proposition 6 moved forward in California in 1978, Shilts occupied an on-set chair along with Davis and State Senator John Briggs, the ambitious Republican behind the effort to ban openly gay and lesbian individuals from being classroom teachers in California's public schools. In the heated exchanges that followed, Davis recalled Briggs said that gays were showing up almost everywhere - alluding to Shilts. While outing Shilts (and subsequently tipping his role on the show from journalistic expert to gay representative), Briggs created more than a few moments of awkwardness. Davis, who still angers at the confrontational approach Briggs chose to take with

Shilts live on air, noted that Shilts did not ‘bite’ on the remark Briggs made, and the discussion moved forward with Shilts holding on to his role as journalistic expert.

Davis noted that Shilts was never introduced on air as “a gay reporter” (despite the KQED news release upon his hiring). “He was just another reporter,” she said. “He was outed as a gay reporter on one of the live shows that we did with Senator Briggs. We had never brought up the fact that he was gay or that he was there to just do gay stories” (B. Davis, personal communication, February 8, 2013). Davis said the live exchange between Senator Briggs and Shilts was nerve-racking as Briggs began

scorning (Randy’s) questions by declaring he expected as much from ‘a homosexual like you.’ We fumbled our way through the rest of the newscast without addressing the subject again, but the minute we were off the air, Randy, who talked in rapid-fire spurts, uncorked a barrage against Briggs. Most of the rest of us didn’t know quite what was appropriate to say (Davis & Haddock, 2011, p. 205).

Osterkamp said he cannot recall a time when Shilts was overtly political or opinionated in his stories or appearances on the live show, even amidst the heat of the Briggs initiative (officially known as Proposition 6), eventually defeated by California voters on November 7, 1978 by a vote of 3,969,120 to 2,823,293 (or 58 to 42 percent) statewide (California Secretary of State, 1978).

Today, Osterkamp believes he greatly underestimated the challenges and pressures that Shilts faced as a gay reporter:

I think he faced more controversy than I was ever aware of at the time. He had to go back and deal with people in the gay community, many of whom had very strong opinions about how the movement should go, and they saw Randy as either an opportunity or an obstacle to where they thought the movement should go. I think that Randy had to walk a path that was strewn with more landmines than I ever realized (G. Osterkamp, personal communication, February 15, 2013).

One of Shilts' fellow freelancers at KQED was Rita Williams who went on to enjoy nearly four decades of work in local television news in the Bay Area, retiring from KTVU-TV in 2012.

Williams said one of her last stories before retirement took her to San Francisco City Hall, a place that often reminded her of her former colleague Randy Shilts. She said,

When I walk up those big steps in the rotunda of the City Hall, I think of Randy. He really like to parade up and down those steps. I don't get over to City Hall in San Francisco as much as I used to. When I came here 1978, the caliber of politicians who were serving there was quite a bit superior to what we see now, and we covered them quite a bit in those days. It was a real mishmash of political spectrums there in San Francisco, and those days they were all very interesting and smart, and it was just a lot of fun to cover politics over there in those days (R. Williams, personal communication, June 6, 2012).

Wilson, Shilts and Phil Bronstein were the three freelance reporters contributing to the KQED's evening newscast. The set-up involved all three of them pitching their story ideas to the show's producers and hoping for a green light to proceed. Williams believes Shilts' high energy and earnest interest in his stories translated well on television, particularly to a detail-hungry audience of PBS viewers. Williams believes the competition required to get a story on the air was well-suited to the competitive nature of Shilts. Williams described the *Newsroom* as

an idea where all the reporters would come back into the studio with their stories at the end of the day, and we would have an hour-long time slot with no commercials, and then we would quiz each other on the air about our stories. It could be really brutal because we had some really big stalwarts in journalism in California as guests (on the studio panel) who would ask tough questions about your story. They would ask what your sources were or the basis for the assertions in your story, or they'd want to know what were the political implications of what you just reported. You couldn't just report what everybody said; we had to put more into it than that. You couldn't just do a hack job like so many TV reporters try to do today, you really had to know your stuff, and do sort of a mini thesis every night on the air. We did that Monday to Friday, and I started pretty much the same time as Randy did and he and I were kind of competing for positioning of our stories on the show (R. Williams, personal communication, June 6, 2012).

The “competition” between Williams and Shilts was a friendly one – the two quickly becoming friends outside of work as well as at work. She acknowledged, even, that Shilts would share story ideas with her if he already had a story that was “going to air” that particular day or week, and he was too busy to get to it. “I was new to the Bay Area and I didn’t have as many sources at that time as Randy did,” Williams said (R. Williams, personal communication, June 6, 2012). She also credits Shilts with helping her get over her naïve attitudes by taking her to a gay bathhouse to see what they were all about, and by pulling the mask off one of Harvey Milk’s most famous political schemes – the staged nature of Milk “accidentally” stepping in dog feces in Buena Vista Park at the news conference where he announced a new city ordinance requiring citizens to clean up after their pets. Finding enough to write about, however, was usually no problem, particularly in the incredible year of 1978 that saw some of the nation’s biggest stories unfold in San Francisco, both the City Hall assassinations of Moscone and Milk, and the mass suicide of more than 900 members of the People’s Temple (based on San Francisco), all within a one-week period in November 1978.

Shilts’ work for KQED came to an end in 1980 with the demise of the Ford Foundation grant the station had tapped to fund the program. Shilts struggled – not only with his inability to find work and his newfound reliance on the pittance paid by California’s unemployment insurance – but also with a new affection for heavy drinking and daily marijuana use. “I was just so angry” at not being able to get a job, Shilts said. “Unfair is the word that always came up, and I just got drunk all the time. I just drank a lot” (Marcus, 1989).

Despite the onset of heavy drinking in the period of 1980-81, Shilts said he remained hopeful he would find work. He continued to apply for both TV and newspaper jobs, though it was a newspaper job he most coveted. “I was not really meant for TV, my voice is not right,”

Shilts said. “I was a good journalist and because I came from a print background, I did intelligent stories, I wasn’t like a TV guy, but then I couldn’t get a job” (Marcus, 1989). Alwood (1996) reported that Shilts believed that since “gays had become headline news” via the 1978 Briggs initiative and similar ballot initiatives elsewhere in the nation – not to mention the unspeakable violence that had cut down Harvey Milk and George Moscone – that a job for an ambitious gay reporter was surely in the waiting. Dozens of query letters to newspaper editors and TV news directors San Francisco, then Los Angeles, then New York, and even Washington, D.C. media resulted in nothing. Shilts lamented to Alwood (1996),

Nobody believed I was qualified to cover anything except gay stuff. Of course, it was assumed that since I was a homosexual, that’s the only thing I know how to cover. At the same time they didn’t believe I was qualified to cover gay stuff either, because of course I would be shamelessly biased (p. 176).

Shilts told Alwood that a news director at one TV station told him she couldn’t hire a gay person because ratings would fall – audiences didn’t want to see gay people on TV.

Shilts went back to what he knew best, freelancing for both *The Village Voice* and *California Magazine* (his bridges to *The Advocate* long ago burned and no longer available to him). Eventually, the Oakland CBS affiliate, KTVU, hired Shilts to do freelance reporting on the gay community. His work at KTVU, though, came to an end within weeks after he did an interview with a local publication, *Boulevards Magazine* that named him one of their Top 10 eligible gay bachelors in the Bay area. “The news director (at KTVU) saw that and freaked out and told my best friend at the station that the interview was a disaster for my career,” Shilts said. “The news director felt it was one thing to be gay, but you shouldn’t talk about what you wanted in an ideal boyfriend” (Marcus, 1989). His short stint at KTVU did get him some critical notice, winning a local Emmy award nomination for his story about children of Holocaust survivors.

## *Arriving at The Chronicle*

When opportunity came knocking for an even bigger step up in journalism, it is noteworthy Shilts was not the first choice on the list. As the 1980s opened, editors at *The San Francisco Chronicle* could no longer ignore – or deny – that gay people were a major political, economic and social force in the community. As such, editors of the stoic *Chronicle* took a bold step and sought out an openly gay reporter to cover gay-related stories in the city. *Chronicle* city-side reporter Ron Moscowitz, a newsroom veteran and former staff aide to California Governor Edmund G. “Pat” Brown, began quietly covering gay news as early as 1977. By 1980, *Chronicle* editor Jerry Burns wanted a more permanent arrangement, and approached Moscowitz about the job. A recent heart attack and pending early retirement took Moscowitz out of the running, however, and Burns put out word that he was interested in hiring from outside. Randy Shilts’ San Francisco network worked – he got wind of Burns’ interest – and promptly called the editor – and landed the job. His oft-labeled title as “the first openly gay reporter on a major daily newspaper” is actually one needing an asterisk. Given that he had spent three years writing about various gay issues, Moscowitz was actually “the first” among gay journalism pioneers at the *Chronicle*. Burns told a reporter during the height of Shilts’ celebrity following the release of his successful book, *And the Band Played On*, that he hadn’t counted on the iconic figure that Shilts would become. Burns said,

Little did I know I was creating this media star when I hired Randy. I knew he was, in the first place, an outstanding reporter. In the second place, I knew he was one who deeply cared about the community and all the parts that go into it. I also knew he was ambitious and had stars in his eyes, and boy, has that turned out to be true! (Romine, 1987, p. 1E).

“The” story that would define Shilts’ legacy as a journalist and author came in via a tip from his sources in the gay community during his very first days in the *Chronicle* newsroom. A friend

mentioned to Shilts that there was a potential for a new “gay cancer” or serious illness affecting the gay community, but originally agreed to “slow walk” the story as public health sources he knew asked for more time to figure out what was going on. Dr. Marcus Conant, a local dermatologist, was among the local health professionals sounding early signals of a problem as he began to treat more and more gay men showing symptoms of a rare skin cancer, Kaposi’s sarcoma. Conant remembers getting a letter from Shilts on *Chronicle* letterhead that said, “I am interested in what you are working on, please keep me up to date” (though Shilts said later he did not remember sending the letter because of his ongoing struggle with heavy alcohol use in his personal life away from the newsroom) (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Over time, Shilts began to turn more and more of his attention to the emerging story of AIDS, much to the dislike of several gay leaders in the community. Shilts said many of them viewed AIDS, or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID) as it was known in the early days, as a massive public relations problem, and one that was even secondary to ongoing civil rights struggles to overturn housing and employment discrimination, or even persisting sodomy laws in many states that essentially made homosexual sex illegal. Shilts said gay leaders were ill equipped to “let go of civil rights rhetoric in favor of public health rhetoric” and were slow to recognize that the gay rights or gay liberation “movements” were slowly being overtaken by the seriousness of AIDS (Marcus, 1989). Asked outright by some gay leaders to stop writing about GRID (and later AIDS), Shilts said,

I told them I don’t get paid to not write news stories. To me it was so obvious the news value was there. It just made me so mad. Who were these elders of Zion who were going to decide what gay people had a right to know or not? You see, if I had been serving what was then perceived as the political interest of the gay community, I would not have written about AIDS (Marcus, 1989).

Conant recalls his first interactions with Shilts as being abrupt and efficient. Initially Shilts was focused on GRID's most obvious manifestation, embarrassing purple skin lesions showing up among gay men (known as Kaposi's sarcoma). As an openly gay dermatologist, Conant was a natural choice for gay men to seek out for help, and his practice treating KS patients grew quickly. So did tensions about patients being treated in mainstream medical clinics who had some unknown form of a communicable disease. A variety of pressures prompted Conant and others not only to form a foundation to help pay for KS care for uninsured patients and fund research, but they also started work on reviving a local public hospital where patients officially diagnosed with GRID (later AIDS) could be treated without the scorn and fear permeating other medical facilities at the University of California, UCLA and Stanford (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Shilts inquiries to Dr. Conant became more frequent, and more serious, as Shilts reported on efforts to get a specialized clinic and ward started to treat patients with GRID-type maladies. "Over time, we became quite close and I would call him, or he would call me, depending on what was going on, and I was a frequent source for him," Conant said. Conant said Shilts was very committed to having medical and scientific facts correct, so

he would let me hold forth and then he would send me copies of what he was going to write, just before he published it. He was very gracious about that. I cannot recall ever having to make even one suggestion about a change in something that he wrote. He was a damn good reporter... I never had any problems with him at all regarding the accuracy of his writing (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

Conant clarifies, however, that Shilts was not simply acting as a conduit for information. "He could be very challenging at times," Conant said. "He wanted, and I appreciate it, more than an

opinion. He wanted, if not evidence, at least a strong argument for any position you offered” (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

Whether he knew it or not, Shilts’ reporting had impact. His reporting flowed from a workmanlike commitment to checking in with sources on a regular basis, and the results reflect the attention Shilts’ writing had begun to attract. Dr. Arthur J. Ammann, a pediatric AIDS immunologist, attempted to draw down from some of the first state-level funds ever appropriated for AIDS research at the behest of California State Assembly Leader Willie Brown of San Francisco. Ammann said,

We had submitted applications (for the funds), and nothing was happening. The people who were reviewing the applications knew nothing about AIDS. I was very upset. And the money just wasn't coming. Then one day Randy Shilts called and said, ‘How are things going?’ I said, ‘Oh, not so good.’ He said he wanted to talk to me, and that was when the headline came out, ‘UC Researcher Accuses University of Withholding Funding for AIDS Research.’ (The dean) at the University of California at San Francisco got upset. Everyone who put in an application was awarded money except me (Ammann, 1996).

Perhaps no other source interaction Shilts cultivated mystified – and angered – gay activists than his gentlemanly interactions with State Senator John V. Briggs, an arch conservative Republican from Orange County who had visions of one day being Governor of California. After serving a decade the California’s lower house, Briggs won election to the State Senate in 1976 and promptly set about making a name for himself. Always a darling of particularly religious conservatives, Briggs went to Miami, Florida to help the campaign of former beauty queen and recording artist Anita Bryant to overturn that city’s anti-discrimination policy concerning gays. It was there Shilts met Briggs during forays Shilts made into south Florida to cover the Bryant campaign that gained national attention. Back in California, Briggs had ideas of his own regarding the still infant gay rights movement: He wanted to ban openly homosexual men or

women from teaching in the state's public schools. Originally timed to coincide with the June 1978 Republican Primary to help drive up support for Briggs and his fellow Republicans, Briggs failed to get enough signatures to qualify what became known as Proposition 6 until the November 1978 election. "Briggs had been cocky and confident when he confided in Randy Shilts his plan to introduce a voter referendum compelling the removal of homosexual teachers from public schools in California," historians Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney (1999, p. 377) noted. Shilts had quickly gained Briggs' trust as a reporter interested in writing about his efforts – Briggs apparently unaware for many months into their interactions that Shilts was gay. The comfort level Shilts endeared with Briggs helped reveal that the senator's commitment to the anti-gay initiative was a mile wide and an inch thick:

Briggs never tried to hide that the initiative was, at least in part, a means to a different end: higher office. In the course of the campaign there was no better witness to the depth of Briggs' commitment to the anti-gay cause, or lack thereof, than Randy Shilts (Clendenin & Nagourney, 1999, p. 379).

Convinced that Briggs didn't believe his own anti-gay rhetoric – and perhaps calling upon decidedly-Republican roots from his native Aurora, Illinois – Shilts befriended Briggs so much that he shared with *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen an amazing exchange between the two men. Following a speech to what was supposed to be a friendly audience in San Jose, California, Briggs whispered to Shilts, "You know, there were homosexuals in there." Shilts naturally asked the senator how he knew such a thing, and Briggs offered: "You can tell by looking at them" (Clendenin & Nagourney, 1999, p. 379-80). Caen promptly reported on the fact that Briggs needed to look more closely at those covering his campaign in order to know who all the gays were, and Shilts' open secret finally reached Briggs. Later when other reporters would

ask Senator Briggs if he personally knew any homosexuals, the only example he would cite would be Shilts. Of Briggs, Shilts said

I simply knew a different John Briggs – a privately charming fellow who changes dramatically in public debates. I sensed there was a more profound reason why we could smile pleasantly at each other while the senator would recite his anti-gay catechism. Increasingly, I suspected that John Briggs does not really believe what he says about gays. His easy acceptance of a gay reporter was no less surprising than my acceptance of him. Just as Briggs never seemed at all personally threatened by working closely with me, I never felt personally threatened by his rhetoric. Instinctively, for reasons I would not understand until later in the campaign, I never took his protestation against homosexuality seriously (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 380).

An almost apologetic Shilts wrote that Briggs had acted “coldly oblivious to the tragic side-effects his campaign wrought on California gays” but added, he believed Briggs had “acted more out of ignorance than viciousness” (Shilts, 1978-b, p. 8). Shilts reported that “John Briggs, ironically, was more willing to judge me on my journalistic performance than most editors and the stories I wrangled relied heavily on the unparalleled cooperation offered by Briggs and his fundamentalist followers” (Shilts, 1978-b, p. 8). In Shilts’ personal papers housed in the James V. Hormel Center for History at the San Francisco Public Library is a photograph of Shilts and Senator Briggs talking to one another outside his legislative office. The undated photo carries an autograph from Briggs that says, “Randy, Sorry, I would love to, but...”.

Clendinen and Nagourney (1999, p. 380) believe Shilts’ friendliness with Briggs “gave birth to a permanent mistrust of Randy Shilts among many gay activists.” That distrust showed up quickly via a hand-drawn cartoon pasted up on mailboxes, utility poles and poster boards throughout the Castro district in late 1978 under the headline, “The Human Side of Hitler.” The cartoons featured an Adolph Hitler version of Briggs talking with Shilts (identified as ‘Shits’) and the “Shits” character saying, “Oh yes, I got along famously....He’s actually quite charming

when he's off stage. When he's on-stage, we smile pleasantly at each other whenever he calls for the annihilation of gays and Jews." Another wincing blow came in the last panel of the cartoon with the "Shits" character declaring, "Look at it this way, I'm an up-and-coming aggressive journalist who happens to be gay. If I don't suck up to the straight bigots in the straight media, what kind of career am I going to have?" (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 380-81).

Another prominent political figure reported a challenging interaction with an increasingly aggressive Shilts. In 1982, novelist Gore Vidal launched an ultimately unsuccessful campaign for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate in California against term-limited California Governor Jerry Brown. As his campaign got underway Vidal recalled meeting Randy Shilts, then the only openly-gay reporter in the state, who was writing a story on the Senate campaign for *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Vidal said Shilts repeatedly confronted him over the fact that he was not running as an openly gay candidate, although Vidal's sexual orientation was widely known. Vidal took the position that although his sexual orientation was no secret, he did not view it as a topic that was anyone's business – even voters. Each time Shilts was asked to back off his insistence that Vidal make a public statement about his sexuality, Vidal said

he took it a little more badly, and then he took it upon himself to punish me with some unnecessarily, pointedly nasty reportage. I made it my own brief to make sure that Randy understood that his behavior and critique were neither fair, nor professional. Several noisy confrontations occurred between Randy and me to little effect, and his *Chronicle* stories continued to damage the campaign and help, I felt, secure the nomination for Jerry Brown (Vidal, 2007, p. 67).

Another common Shilts source, Paul Monahan O'Malley, a communicable disease investigator for the San Francisco City Clinic, and later a clinical manager for communicable diseases with the San Francisco Department of Public Health, participated in the very first studies of sexually-transmitted diseases among gay men. Focused primarily on growing rate of infection for

Hepatitis B among gay men in the mid- to late-1970s, O'Malley used his background as a STD counselor for the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War to his advantage. O'Malley said he witnessed first-hand the close relationship Shilts developed with Dr. Selma Dritz, an outspoken epidemiologist for the San Francisco Department of Public Health, who would become famous for her chalkboard-drawn "maps" tracking the earliest cases of GRID (which would eventually become known as AIDS) in the city. O'Malley said he believed Shilts "worked" Dritz for information for his stories on AIDS:

There was some concern as to how Randy Shilts knew some of the information he wrote. He was someone who lived here in the (gay) community, and he wasn't like an outsider coming in here; he was very savvy at what he did. I don't think Selma (Dritz) may have realized that he was able to ask questions and put two and two together sometimes, because he was so familiar with what was going on in the community (Monahan O'Malley, 1996).

Through the combined result of Dritz's close relationship with Shilts and her practice of "collecting extremely personal" information about cases she studied in the community, Shilts had an advantage, O'Malley asserts. Further, because "Shilts interviewed a lot of these people himself, the concern was always, 'How did he get confirmation on some of this information?'" Usually, if you're a good reporter, you try to get a second and third confirmation on what somebody is saying," O'Malley said.

It was Dritz who first surfaced the story that one man, an Air Canada flight attendant could present some sort of hideous sexual monster who was infecting his sexual partners with HIV. She recalled to Shilts (and later to Harry Reasoner and the entire nation via *60 Minutes*) her face-to-face confrontation with G etan Dugas to try to get him to stop his sexual practices. Long gone and unable to tell his side of the story, Dritz's version where Dugas openly defied logic and said he didn't care if he was infecting others was left to her word as history. From his

interactions with Dugas, CDC epidemiologist Dr. William Darrow (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013) indicated that Dugas simply could not understand how a person with cancer – as he had been told his Kaposi’s sarcoma was – could be a communicable threat to anyone. Dritz said after she confronted Dugas at her office about changing his sexual behaviors

I never saw him again. It was a pity, because he was apparently an intelligent man, except on this one point. And he was very, very sexually active. He was a presumptive proof that AIDS was something transmissible from an infected person directly to the uninfected person (Dritz, 1993).

Dritz was instrumental in connecting Shilts to another important source, Darrow, a respected epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control for three decades. It was Darrow, through his use of “disease detection” interviews and qualitative research methods who drafted the polemic 1981 “cluster study” that was attempting to determine the basis for an outbreak of Kaposi’s sarcoma among a growing number of gay men, mostly situated in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York (Curran & Jaffee, 2011). A year later, in 1982, Darrow and Dr. David Auerbach undertook another study based in the gay community, this time focused on a hypothesis that the outbreak of KS infections could be related to sexual contact. As part of their study, Darrow and Auerbach investigated 13 of the first 19 KS cases reported in Los Angeles and Orange counties of southern California and found that nine had reported sexual contact with one common person to all 13 of them within five years before their onset of symptoms (Auerbach & Darrow, 1982). Darrow reported no problems in getting the mostly qualitative study published:

Even though it was self-reported data, we had set stringent criteria. We were not going to consider the context of our data to be valid unless we could get another person to validate it. In other words, if Person A named Person B as a sexual partner, then we would go to Person B and asked them who they had had sex

with, and if they did not name Person A, then we could not be certain that there was a relationship between the two. We tried to have very stringent criterion .... Even the most rigorous bench scientist, when we started telling these stories, were quite convinced that they were true, especially our colleagues at the CDC (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013).

The study was later extended to include 90 patients from across the county, representing about three quarters of the reported cases of KS or *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia among gay men alive at the time. The result found that 40 of the 90 patients in 10 U.S. cities were linked by sexual contact with one man, supporting the original theory that sexual transmission may be playing a part in the spread of opportunistic diseases and infections among gay men with suppressed immune systems and buttressing Dritz's suspicions of Dugas as a key player in the onset of infections (Auerbach, Darrow, Jaffe, & Curran, 1984).

Darrow recalls encountering Shilts, however, even before his first-ever studies on the origins of HIV and AIDS were made public. Shilts telephoned him for a 1978 report he was preparing on sexually-transmitted diseases impacting gay men, but only used Darrow's information on background:

He would call me on and off over the years, but I would not describe myself as a major source for him. I'm not a physician; I am kind of unusual because I'm a sociologist, and I come out of social science. At the time I was about the only social scientist at CDC. I was just one of a handful of social scientists throughout this period time. So if Randy wanted to get a different slant on an issue, he would call me (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013).

Darrow said he developed a strong working relationship with Shilts – even to the point of Shilts agreeing to avoid audio recording interviews, even when completing interviews for Shilts' book, *And the Band Played On*. “He would send me the portions of the book where I was quoted, and I had a chance to review them,” Darrow said. “He agreed to do that and he was under no obligation to do so” (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013). A disagreement

arose, however, based on Shilts' insistence on using the names of the men included in Darrow's ground-breaking study. Shilts had used his myriad sources in the gay community and among health professionals to unearth the names of most of the men, the most controversial of course, being Gaëtan Dugas whom Shilts identified as "Patient Zero" (an identification that would be seriously drawn into question by many, including Darrow himself). Darrow said he begged Shilts to use pseudonyms for the men in the study, but said Shilts refused:

Randy made the decision that he had to use the names, he said that this was the only way we were going to affect the (Reagan) administration. He told me that if you're going to have impact on the public, the kind of impact he believed we had to have in order to change things, you had to name names. He was concerned about 'the band playing on,' and that nothing was going to change unless he started to name names, and talking about people in all of their various dimensions. I advised him not to use these names, but he didn't take my advice. And he had no obligation to do as I said. That was his decision (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013).

Journalistic adherence to protecting confidential sources, including those gained via medical or scientific studies, is a well-studied area. Awad (2006) undertook an interesting analysis of how this plays out in journalistic investigations versus other types of social science queries, such as anthropology. Awad noted that while most social sciences must adhere to federal and university-level regulations regarding research involving human subjects, journalists have sometimes moved outside of these restrictions because of their larger adherence to First Amendment protections for a free press. Contrasting how regulations on studies of human subjects "requires the assessment of costs and benefits, the informed consent of informants, and, in general, researchers' protective and responsible attitude towards them" (p. 922), journalists have sometimes foregone such requirements. Journalists, he said, argue "that news is non-generalizable knowledge, (and therefore) journalism exempts itself from this regulation" (p. 922). Beyond inherent conflicts some journalists perceive as arising with the watchdog role of

the press, “the apparent conflict between confidentiality and credibility, and journalists’ reluctance to take responsibility for the consequences of what they publish” raises serious questions about “news professionals’ understanding of truth in terms of facticity and of their job as the transmission of such truths,” Awad concluded (p. 922). The ethical responsibility of violating patient identifications in the various early studies on HIV and AIDS (all occurring in the years before strict patient confidentiality laws were enacted via the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) by Shilts was controversial from the start. Darrow and his CDC colleagues were strict in their adherence to privacy involving the gay men who willingly participated in their studies, including Dugas, but Shilts apparently felt no such restrictions. Through his various sources – many suspected primarily Dritz – Shilts set about finding the men in the ground-breaking CDC studies.

Shilts’ process in identifying the one man found to be at the center of many cases of KS infections is of particular importance. Darrow said his process in writing the cluster studies was based on identifying cases based on where they lived. “In the Los Angeles cluster, I talk about cases LA-1, LA-2, LA-3, and so on,” Darrow said. “This reflected the order in which the cases were reported. But then there was this one out-of-California case, so I called him ‘O’ for ‘outside of California,’ but when everybody saw the ‘O’ they translated that to zero, which became Patient Zero” (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013). Among those who made such a translation was Randy Shilts. “It was a misinterpretation of what I’d shown and what I’d written and it became common folklore, this so-called Patient Zero, that connected cases in Los Angeles, and also connected cases in New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere in the world,” Darrow said (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013). Darrow said Shilts’ interpretation, along with that of others, was “a complete misrepresentation” and implications

that the “O” case was the first case, or an origin of the infections. “He was not being interpreted by us to be the origin,” Darrow declared. “We never meant to say that he was the first case. We never had any evidence that he was the first case” (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013). Darrow is still convinced, however, that “Patient Zero” (named publicly for the first time in Shilts book *And the Band Played On* as an attractive, young French Canadian man) was *among* the very first cases, diagnosed with Kaposi’s sarcoma in Toronto, Canada in May 1979 – two years before any cases reported in the United States. Complicating the likelihood of Dugas’ role as any original patient, however, is the known incubation period for HIV, which can be as long as a decade, meaning that Dugas could have become infected as early as 1969 or 1970 (when Dugas was only 16 or 17 years old). Darrow determined in direct contradiction to Shilts’ conclusion, “I think (Dugas) was easily was among the very first 100 or 200 cases in North America, but never would I argue that he was responsible for every single case” (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013). Despite the conflict of conclusions, Darrow defends Shilts’ conclusion and believes a careful reading of *And the Band Played On* indicates that Shilts viewed Dugas as *representative* of how the AIDS pandemic could have started, but was not solely responsible. “I don’t think Randy Shilts ever intended to deceive anyone,” Darrow said (W. Darrow, personal communication, February 1, 2013).

Dr. Marcus Conant believes Shilts’ intent in using Dugas’ story to tell the larger story of AIDS has been terribly misunderstood. Conant, who personally treated G aetan Dugas on more than one occasion in his dermatology practice, was one of the sources Shilts called repeatedly trying to place a name with a case number – ‘Patient O’. Conant refused to budge on disclosing the name until hours later when Shilts called back and said, “I’ve got it” (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Conant contends Dugas’ was used by Shilts as

a metaphor, for Christ's sake! If Dugas hadn't done it, someone else would have, and probably many others were. The thing about Dugas was that he was French Canadian, so he was going to Paris and to Brussels. AIDS originated in Zaire, in the Congo, and many of the people from there went to those cities for treatment. Paris and Brussels became infected early on. Dugas became infected and he was traveling often between those cities as well as Montreal, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Clearly, he was one of the people responsible for infecting a lot of people. As far as picking up people, and as far as giving people this disease, (Dugas) had no compunction about that. Randy Shilts made a metaphor of him and could personalize the story and I see that as nothing but good journalism. I don't see that as any kind of nefarious plot (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

Back among friends, away from official sources, Shilts' friend Cleve Jones recalls having many conversations with him about the use of the "Patient Zero" concept, and Gäetan Dugas' name for his upcoming book. Jones, like Shilts, had visited with Dritz at the county health department and she wove a very interesting story about what could be causing AIDS among gay men. Jones said,

Dr. Dritz down at the health department had this blackboard in her office that actually showed squares and circles that represented various houses and neighborhoods where people were either getting sick or who had died. This is very, very early on in the process when no one had any sort of information about transmission of this disease, or how long someone would live without symptoms. So we knew almost nothing. She had this map on her blackboard and you'd go in there and see, 'OK, well, here's this house on 18<sup>th</sup> Street where three roommates in the same house have come down with it.' And then we learned that one of the guys who lived in that house dated a guy who lived in another house over on Douglas Street. And then there was somebody else who lived in that house, and so this blackboard had circles with lines connecting them and I think it was really the first epidemiological mapping of what would become the AIDS pandemic. I remember hearing about this flight attendant (Dugas) and he was on that map. So, when Randy started investigating Gäetan as a part of that book, he believed that Gäetan was the guy who brought the virus to our city, and I think most of us believed that too. You know, there was this guy who appeared and people just sort of thought he was very good looking, and people he had sex with got sick (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

Jones said he recalled challenging Shilts about the concept of a "Patient Zero", who by then was deep into his writing for *And the Band Played On*, and raised with him doubts about whether

such an idea held up given new knowledge about the potentially long incubation period for people exposed to HIV before they developed AIDS symptoms. Jones said,

I am quite certain that we had a conversation about that. I think that it made him (Randy) uncomfortable. It was a very interesting story, but I felt that it was unfair.... We quarreled about that, I cannot remember the words of the conversation, but I did raise that with him and he decided to go ahead with it (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

Shilts' reporting on gay-related health issues was not new territory for him – although his stories on the pages of the *Chronicle* were far less detailed and graphic than those he had been able to publish in *The Advocate* less than a decade earlier. In 1976, Shilts did some of his first reporting on topics related to gay sex – one titled simply “VD” in April 1976, and another report called “The Hazards of Sex” in December 1976. *The Advocate* dubbed Shilts' effort “a special report on the potential dangers of a variety of sexual practices” – and included a sidebar on kinky and alternate sexual interests of some gays. The reports Shilts wrote were part of an ongoing commitment to investigative reporting on gay topics that *The Advocate's* aggressive publisher David Goodstein supported, author Rodger Streitmatter (Streitmatter, 1995) noted, adding that Shilts reports on gay STDs were “crucial” in laying the groundwork for understanding the coming AIDS epidemic. In his report on VD, Shilts' research uncovered that federal funding of \$33 million was targeted each year to combat and prevent sexually-transmitted diseases, but only \$160,000 of it was specifically for outreach to gay communities. Shilts said infection rates for gonorrhea and syphilis among gay men were cause for immediate concern (Shilts, 1976-b, p. 4). For the January 12, 1977 issue of *The Advocate*, Shilts returned again to gay sex issues, but this time “the decade's best-kept medical secret: Hepatitis doesn't come from needles.” For additional drama, Shilts offered the hepatitis report as a first person account about his own previous diagnosis of Hepatitis B: “I had fallen victim to the newest venereal disease – hepatitis”

(Shilts, 1977-d, p. 23). Sounding similar alarms that would punctuate his later reporting for the *Chronicle*, Shilts wrote “My experience is hardly unique as viral hepatitis is emerging as one of the most significant health problems among gay men” – referring to it as being in “epidemic proportions” in some urban areas of the U.S. Shilts’ story was accompanied by an editor’s note that clarified that many of the doctors encountered in the reporting of the story had contradicted one another about the facts regarding hepatitis and relied heavily on medical journals and data from government infectious disease officials at the local and federal levels rather than on their own experience or knowledge. In short, many of the doctors treating these earliest victims of AIDS were learning as they went along. He may not have known it – but Shilts had touched on, during this early period in his career, a key thesis around which he would construct his award-winning tome, *And the Band Played On*. Other major themes of his later reporting would also emerge as Shilts wrote that “...hepatitis no longer is a disease restricted to the social fringes of alcoholics, derelicts and drug addicts – if it ever was” and that medical health officials were beginning to coalesce around the idea that it was sexually-transmitted – as the virus is present in saliva, semen, urine and vaginal secretions as well as blood.

“The promiscuity factor in the gay community heightens the problems of sexual transmission among the gay male population,” Shilts wrote – a controversial theme among his gay readers that he would never abandon – adding that “the more people with whom one sleeps, the greater the chances of picking up any number of diseases” (Shilts, 1977-d, p. 24). His words reflected some of the very first words spoken in opposition to the free-for-all sexual expression that personified the earliest days of the gay liberation movement. The movement, in its infancy and driven by new-found freedom for gay men and women, had focused at times, it seems, almost exclusively on sexual freedom with little or no time spent on issues of economic,

political, cultural and social advancement for the LGBT community. Nancy Walker was an early community volunteer for Boston's *Gay Community News* that began its short-lived life as a gay newspaper in the early 1970s. Her viewpoint reflects some of the conflict arising within the gay community about sexual freedom as part of the gay liberation movement. She recalled frequent clashes between gay leaders on all sides about how far sexual freedom should go:

Some of them wanted to be able to fuck in the parks. Well, that's wonderful, but if they did, I wouldn't take my children down there. How far is sexual freedom supposed to go? Are you allowed to have intercourse on the street corner because you feel like doing it? How does that make you different from a dog? ... We have to have a little bit of self-control, a little discipline. I'm sorry, but I'm not interested in sexual freedom. I'm interested in being able to live (Marcus, 2009, p. 206).

Irrespective of the argument about the limits of sexual freedom as part of a gay liberation movement, little notice seemed to be given to gay sex or gay health by media outside of the gay community. *The Village Voice's* Arthur Bell, noted that most mainstream media simply refused to acknowledge sexuality at all among gay people unless it was in the context of criminality or limiting public sex (Shilts, 1977-c).

“Because of the diverse levels of severity with which this disease strikes, hepatitis itself is a public health worker's nightmare,” Shilts wrote (Shilts, 1977-d, p. 25). He warned that those who with “light” cases of hep “are most likely to become chronic carriers of the disease since their body's immunological systems did not mount a major attack on the viruses” (p. 25). Noting the reluctance of some public health officials to cooperate with gay social workers (p. 26), Shilts' text offered some of the first reported suggestions or ideas about gay men changing their sexual practices – noting that oral-anal contact was a primary mode of transmission, and added, “...nothing short of chastity will offer sure-fire prophylactic protection – which is a major part of the problem” noting that it's difficult to tell people not to have sex – and “until science comes

through with vaccines or cures, the only things gay people can do are either to be chaste or to be vulnerable to this ambiguous disease of strange dreams” Shilts concluded.

*The Advocate* returned to gay sex and health on April 10, 1977 – following up with another Shilts story, this one entitled, “A new plague on our house: Gastro-intestinal diseases.” Shilts reported that “Though today they appear to be health problems in New York and San Francisco, sexually-transmitted gastro-intestinal diseases may soon be the next major gay health problem – and startlingly little is known about them” (p. 16). Diseases discussed included amebiasis, amoebic dysentery, salmonellosis, shigellosis, and giardia lamblia. He quoted health officials identifying these particular STDs had moved beyond epidemic and more toward endemic. Shilts reported,

The public health problem posed by the spread of these diseases in the gay community are more complex than even the problems of the standard venereal diseases or the more serious threat of hepatitis.... The diseases in question long have been associated with hygiene, as they primarily are spread through contact with fecal matter in bad water supplies. Their high incidence among the gay population, however, stems from nothing more than the gymnastics of gay sex – i.e., anal sex .... The introduction of these diseases into the gay community, therefore, has transformed what once were hygienic diseases into STDs and created a whole panorama of new gay illnesses (Shilts, 1977-d, p. 16).

Ignorance of gay sex also persisted, Shilts found in reporting about two early VD cases in New York City revealed both men had become infected at a bathhouse. Rather than exploring their sexual activity, public health officials ordered the bathhouse pool drained and a review of food-handling procedures for bathhouse employees. Shilts reported that “many gay health workers, however, are mystified about what can be done to thwart this growing problem.... Little can be done to prevent the disease short of total abstinence from anal sex,” Shilts wrote. Reflecting that his article was appearing in a gay publication and “the rules” allowed more graphic treatment of the subject, Shilts quoted one unnamed doctor as saying, “The more meticulous the personal

hygiene, the less chance of getting them there is. But that's not very good, because if you're going to stick your tongue in somebody's anus, no amount of hygiene will help" (Shilts, 1977-d, p. 16).

### ***Making the Transition to Mainstream Media***

Such graphic treatment of a sensitive story involving gay sex was something Shilts had to set aside, although he made the transition from news magazine writer to newspaper reporter rather seamlessly, it seems. His arrival at the *Chronicle* did not produce headlines or stories as did his hiring a few years earlier at KQED, his addition to the news staff didn't come without some questions. Editor Alan Mutter recalls some of those questions persisted and he and other editors were consistent in their public statements that they saw no conflict of interest, however, in having a gay man report on gay issues, including AIDS, a disease epidemic primarily impacting gay men. "Our medical writer wrote about colds when he had a cold," Mutter said. "The bottom line is professionalism" (Reinhold, 1987).

During his first days at the *Chronicle*, Shilts said he kept a small tablet in his pocket where he planned to record the slights, indifference or open intolerance he expected he might have to face among his journalistic peers. He never wrote anything down, he said. "Everybody went out of their way to be nice and supportive of me, and there had been somebody else in the newsroom before me who was gay, so the editors and reporters were friendly," Shilts said (Marcus, 1989). Originally assigned to cover general assignment stories, including some stories from the gay community, as a new reporter Shilts took whatever an editor sent his way. "That was fine with me, because I didn't want to cover just gay stuff, even though that was part of what I wanted to do," he said (Marcus, 1989).

Shilts eventually moved from general assignment reporter, to assistant city editor, to national correspondent. Embracing his role as assistant city editor allowed him to continue work on his new book, *And the Band Played On*. He said, “the *Chronicle* was a very gentlemanly place, and people went out of the way to be very supportive,” and his fellow journalists seemed to make a special effort to “show that they didn’t care and they weren’t going to be biased, which surprised me” (Alwood, 1996, p. 204), given the paper’s consistently Republican leanings on its editorial and opinion pages. Shilts may not have felt any trepidation from his colleagues, but some existed, according to fellow *Chronicle* reporter Susan Sward. She said “the men in the City Room were nervous” about Shilts’ arrival. “Randy wore wildly flowered ties, he had suspenders, and initially, you could just feel a nervousness when many people in the City Room dealt with him,” Sward said (1994). Sward also revealed that Shilts’ enthusiasm about his stories could create problems:

You weren’t supposed to be excited about things. If you came up to the (city) desk all in a lather about something you were covering, they would look at you like you had some kind of problem. Randy violated that rule and he didn’t care what people said to him about it, he was going to care. And he was going to care about something that very few people understood, and that was the magnitude of AIDS (Lozano, 2006).

Any nervousness or reservations about Shilts’ approach in the newsroom didn’t last long, however, as Sward believed his wide-open personality quickly won over any doubters:

He had an infectious personality... he could laugh at himself. He (also) had an enormous ego.... Was an enormously engaging person, and at the same time, he was a tremendous journalist. Bit by bit, those who were nervous about him came to admire his talent (Sward, 1994).

Wes Haley, who worked 20 years as a newsroom manager and staff assistant for the *Chronicle*, said the first call that would come to his desk almost every weekday morning was from Randy

Shilts – just after 4 a.m. “I was never sure if he was just going to bed, or just getting up,” Haley said, but his daily calls to check in on “what was going on” were like clockwork (W. Haley, personal communication, January 9, 2012). Haley took it upon himself to help keep Shilts organized, he said. “Randy was a slob, but he liked things neat, if that makes any sense,” Haley said, admitting that he frequently organized papers piled on Shilts’ desk as a way of helping. “Randy liked anything that was about Randy,” Haley said. “That’s the thing, Randy loved Randy. If people were paying attention to him and someone was cleaning up his desk, that pleased him just fine” (W. Haley, personal communication, January 9, 2012).

Despite Shilts’ assertion that “not one bad thing happened” to him in the *Chronicle’s* newsroom (Alwood, p. 204), Shilts did relate a short struggle he had in getting one of his very first articles printed about the new “gay cancer” that was to become the AIDS pandemic. Angered that his story about a local support group known as the Shanti Project had languished on an editor’s desk for three weeks (and hearing rumors that the story had been joked about by someone in an editor’s meeting), Shilts went into overdrive. Visiting the *Chronicle’s* morgue and the local library, Shilts constructed a growing stack of articles the paper had run about the widely-reported-but-narrowly-impacting public health issues of Legionnaires’ disease and toxic shock syndrome. Alwood reported the expected confrontation never occurred – Shilts’ article ran and he quickly moved on to his next assignments – each of them increasingly focused on the growing issue of “gay cancer” and its widespread implications (Alwood, p. 234). David Perlman, the *Chronicle’s* venerable science reporter, was truly in the foreground of coverage of this new health threat, reporting as early as June 1981 on a troubling report in the federal government’s *Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report* about an alarming increase in diagnosed cases of a rare form of pneumonia caused by a parasite known as pneumocystis carinii. The report indicated this

sometimes fatal version of pneumonia was showing up among gay men in San Francisco and other major cities, especially Los Angeles and New York. The CDC report indicated that “the fact that these patients were all homosexuals suggests a connection between some aspect of a homosexual lifestyle or disease acquired through sexual contact” (Perlman, 1981, p. 4). The same page of the *Chronicle* that day carried the happy news that the 155-men of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus were about to embark on their first national tour – a group eventually devastated by the ravages of what was to become the AIDS epidemic. Perlman said Shilts indicated an interest in reporting on what was then known as GRID from his first days on the job:

I think he was interested almost as soon as he got here because he already knew that many of his friends in the Castro were coming down with very strange and very rare forms of pneumonia, and what even he himself and his friends would refer to at the time as ‘the gay cancer’ (Perlman, 1994).

Perlman noted that while *he* may have been the first to write about what became known as AIDS in June 1981, Shilts “was the first reporter that I know of who could see that this was not simply going to be a gay disease....He made it noticed here on the *Chronicle* and in the news, and you can remember how hard he fought to get his stories on page one” (Perlman, 1994). Shilts returned to the subject of gay men’s health for a May 13, 1982 story, “The Strange Deadly Diseases That Strike Gay Men” – carried far from page one, inside page six. Using “diseases” as plural represented the perhaps broader focus of the report that would soon give way to more specialized reports that looked beyond the “strange diseases” showing up in gay men, to the underlying cause of why they had become susceptible to diseases previously thought eradicated, or at least rare. As usual, Shilts’ reporting was gripping, telling the story of a 45-year-old San Francisco man identified in the story only as “Jerry” who was slowly being overtaken by purple

spots and lesions on his skin – later diagnosed as Kaposi’s sarcoma – a rare form of skin cancer that had previously impacted mostly elderly Greek men. In the first four months of 1982 alone, 335 men (almost all openly gay men) had been diagnosed across the U.S. with Kaposi’s sarcoma – and 136 of them had died – a death rate far exceeding the earlier scares provided by Legionnaires’ disease and toxic-shock syndrome. The cases of KS among gay men were so common, doctors had begun referring to it colloquially as “gay cancer.”

Shilts reported, “Jerry is a victim of one of a series of baffling diseases hitting primarily gay men with increasing frequency across the country” (Shilts, 1982-b, p. 6). Shilts’ story is one of the first in mainstream press to ever carry the moniker assigned by scientists to the health problems as GRID – or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency diseases. “Scientists have had as much trouble isolating a cause for the outbreak as finding a cure,” Shilts reported. “Put simply, researchers attribute the GRID diseases to a massive breakdown in the victims’ immune system” leaving the otherwise healthy young men unable to fight off natural exposure to cancerous cells, pneumonia parasites, or other invading infections and organisms (Shilts, 1982-b, p. 6). Jerry’s story was not uncommon – Shilts reported 65 Bay Area men were currently diagnosed with GRID-related problems and 19 had died. Shilts added information about the Shanti Project, a community-based support group for gay men suffering GRID, and reported on the heart-breaking story of one gay man who became ill and after having “lapsed into a semi-coma, his relatives tried to strike his lover’s name from the guest list and forbid him from seeing the dying man” (Shilts, 1982-b, p. 6). The article also gave voice to Shilts’ oft-repeated concern that public health and government response to the problem had been slowed by the fact that gay men were the most impacted group in society. Shilts quoted Congressman Henry Waxman, a California Democrat, as declaring that “there is no doubt in my mind that if the same disease had appeared

among Americans of Norwegian descent, or among tennis players, rather than among gay males, the response of both the government and the medical community would have been different” (Shilts, 1982-b, p. 6).

Shilts’ March 23, 1983 article caused a major stir when he wrote an exclusive story about a public health report that estimated one of every 350 single men in San Francisco would likely contract what was to become known as HIV by the end of the year. The report, reportedly leaked to Shilts by a staffer for a local congressman (Alwood, 1996), was startling in its frankness about the already emerging reality of how AIDS would ultimately decimate the San Francisco gay male community. Gay leaders lambasted the report as misleading and as a forerunner to attempt to quarantine and further blame gay men for the emerging health crisis. Of particular concern to gay leaders were concerns raised in the report about gay sexual practices that, for many, centered on the city’s wide-open gay bathhouses where multiple partners could be engaged in a wide array of sexual conduct believed to be suspect for the basis of spreading the virus, with little or no restraint exercised. Gay men, previously suppressed in their sexual expression, had viewed the city’s copious attitude toward gay sex as emancipating and feared bathhouse closures or restrictions would be a troubling step backward.

One of Shilts’ editors in this period, Keith Power, a former assistant editor at *The Chronicle*, offers that in retrospect, “it is difficult to reconstruct those early days of the AIDS plague... to hear the hysteria and see the anger and fear of the unknown in people’s face. The fact that it is difficult is Randy Shilts’ bequest to San Francisco. He made us understand” (Power, 1994, p. D6). Shilts’ posthumous position in Power’s mind, however, was one that had to be earned. Power admitted that Shilts’ journalistic pedigree prior to arriving in the *Chronicle* newsroom provided him “faint qualifications, many of us believed, to be hired to write for our

newspaper.” Quickly, Power said, he was captivated by Shilts’ enthusiasm, energy, and courage. “We did not anticipate the sheer productivity of this young man,” Power noted, revealing that when he would introduce “yet another AIDS story” from Shilts during daily editorial meetings to plan that day’s edition, other editors would groan: “Not another AIDS story!”

Belva Davis, a Shilts colleague from his TV reporting days at KQED, said Shilts had strong opinions about AIDS and its transmission among gay men and openly said so in private, even taking her to a bathhouse in the city so she could see what they were all about. Davis said,

I don’t know of any good reporter who works on a story that doesn’t have an opinion of some sort. If a story is worth doing, they feel strongly about it. It is our job to inform people about the good, the bad, and the ugly. I know that is a horrible cliché but that is what Randy should have been doing. He was making people aware of a real life-threatening danger (B. Davis, personal communication, February 8, 2013).

Shilts’ own words seem to affirm Davis’ position – he told gay historian Eric Marcus in a 1989 interview that

I have a very strong point of view and I think most journalists in general, and particularly in the gay community, don’t have a point of view because they’re too afraid. They don’t have the courage to say, ‘Here’s my analysis of the situation’ (Marcus, 1989).

Shilts said he “felt strongly that if you laid out all the facts that there is obviously one side that is right, but it was my job to do both sides” causing friction with activists and advocates who struggle with independent analysis of issues. Gay leaders often foisted upon Shilts an expectation that he should “articulate the gay point of view” but Shilts insisted, “I don’t see that as my role. I do the gay point of view, but not as *my* point of view... that’s where I think a lot of people are just very naïve” (Marcus, 1989).

Power attributes to Shilts “a campaign” to shut down the city’s bathhouses and his commitment to call attention to the need for gays to move their liberation beyond “reckless” sexual affairs and drug-enhanced lifestyles. Many resisted Shilts’ call for a change to the hard-fought personal freedoms of gays, Power noted, indicating “a shadow” hung over Shilts in the latter years they worked together as the AIDS story grew, and Shilts’ own knowledge of his HIV infection bore on his mind.

Shilts seemingly struggled with how to handle disclosure of his HIV status, an interesting contrast to how he had handled as a younger man the level of openness he expressed about his sexuality. Shilts said privately to friends and publicly that his principal concern was that coverage of his HIV status would overshadow the meaning and impact of his other work. There was no question Shilts’ life had changed dramatically. In his college days, coming out as gay had a smaller, more defined universe of possible reactions. By the time Shilts’ had published *And the Band Played On* he was no longer an anonymous college student – he was a known and respected journalist and emerging “gay celebrity.” While perhaps not quite as dramatic, the fact that the man who had written more and advanced perhaps more knowledge than anyone about HIV and AIDS in fact had AIDS was noteworthy – was news. The juxtaposition of Shilts’ work with his own personal HIV status was one that reporters and their readers would naturally focus upon.

Part of Shilts’ rising status as a journalist was borne out during the release of *And the Band Played On*. One of the nation’s leading newspapers, *The Chicago Tribune* paid Shilts generously to reprint large portions of *And the Band Played On*, and were equally generous in their coverage of his last book *Conduct Unbecoming*. Despite the strong connection mainstream journalism was making with Shilts, it did not stop reporters from asking Shilts whether he had

AIDS. “No, I don’t,” he told *The Chicago Tribune* when they inquired. “That has come up in several interviews. I think it is an irrelevant and smarmy question. It assumes that any gay man has AIDS. But no, I do not have AIDS.” Shilts successfully changed the subject, focusing on his claim that as a gay reporter, he had an advantage that gay leaders could not mislead him about gay sexual practices: “I knew what was going on. And although any good reporter could have gotten the information that I did, I was the only one who cared enough to devote my career to it.” He revisited the issue of his objectivity (and his HIV status) via a large article in his hometown newspaper, *The Aurora News-Beacon* (Bercaw, 1987, p. A1, A8) noted that he knew no Democrats growing up, emphasizing the Republican-dominance of Aurora, Illinois politics. He declared,

Obviously, I’m not a conservative Republican anymore (as in his youth), but I think it’s important to have seen the extreme of the right and left – to realize there are well-intentioned people on both sides of the political spectrum and no one has a monopoly on the truth. As a journalist, you have to have that basic open-mindedness (Bercaw, 1987, p. A8).

Regarding his reporting on AIDS, Shilts sounded a high note by adding,

I believe in moral absolutes. To me, what is morally wrong is not being kind to your fellow man and ignoring situations in which you can help out. Some people may think a gay has no right to say anything about morality. But I don’t think homosexuality is a moral issue (Bercaw, 1987, p. A8).

Again came the “Do you have AIDS question?” – with Shilts saying he not only did not have AIDS, but that he hadn’t taken the anti-body test because he is in good health. He remarked, “Nobody does 400 interviews in two weeks unless you have an awful lot of energy. Not every gay person has AIDS, you know. I’m afraid, though, that too many are going to die of it” (Bercaw, 1987, p. A8).

The AIDS question came up again in a lengthy authors' profile of Shilts for *The Charlotte Observer* in which Shilts summed up his feelings about being tested for AIDS as:

It's one thing for a heterosexual to go for an AIDS test. That person is going for reassurance. It's very scary to go for an AIDS test if you're gay, especially if you are in a high risk group. You have to be prepared to face a death sentence. I am not prepared for that (Romine, 1987, p. 1E).

Shilts' honesty in answering "the AIDS question" is an issue in doubt, even if the question was a highly personal one and one that he was not obligated to answer. If by the time he made some of the statements reported in late 1987 as he toured the nation promoting *And the Band Played On*, Shilts in fact *already knew* his HIV status (based on his later accounts that he learned of his status on the day he turned in the manuscript for the book earlier in 1987). At the time, however, he made no such disclosures about his HIV status. No one challenged how forthcoming – or honest – Shilts was being on the issue of his only HIV status. Beyond his own right to privacy and his prickliness at having to answer "the AIDS question" during interviews where he was the subject of the news story did cause Shilts to perhaps mislead some of his fellow reporters. In an October 1987 article by Robert Reinhold of *the Los Angeles Times*, Shilts said his health was "just fine" and said he had not taken the AIDS antibody test because no medical treatment is available if the test is positive, and because he engages in no sexual activity believed to spread the virus that causes AIDS (Reinhold, 1987). A careful parsing of that passage reveals that at least part of it is a lie (or at least a misinterpretation), as Shilts later openly stated that he learned of his HIV positive status on the day he turned over his *Band* manuscript to his editors at St. Martin's Press (Schmalz, 1993). Further examination of his statement reveals that he spoke in the present tense when describing his sexual activities and whether they placed him at risk of HIV infection – carefully avoiding disclosure or discussion of his past sexual activities which clearly

did place him at risk of HIV infection (including a first-person account of having battled Hepatitis for an early gay health report in *The Advocate*) (Shilts, 1977-d, p. 8-9).

By the time Shilts' third (and final book), *Conduct Unbecoming*, was released and he set about promoting it via media interviews, his HIV status was something he could no longer conceal. *Conduct Unbecoming*, Shilts' chronicle of the fight for inclusion of openly gay women and men in the U.S. armed forces, finally appeared in early 1993, and as publicity interviews were underway for the new book, Shilts learned of his latest HIV-related ailment, Kaposi's sarcoma, and its accompanying skin lesions. "I have to take care of myself," Shilts told Jeffrey Schmalz, a gay writer who had previously disclosed his HIV status to his readers in *The New York Times* and was dispatched to profile Shilts. "Another thing could knock me out. I can't get pneumonia again. I have a good life....(but) I'd be happier if I didn't have to worry about dying" (Schmalz, 1993).

Shilts' original reluctance to disclose his HIV status (despite being a forerunner in being an openly gay person earlier in his life) was hard to avoid in media coverage of *Conduct Unbecoming*. To promote the book, Shilts conducted a series of interviews as he always had, but now those had to be conducted via satellite and telephone, or by hosting reporters in his San Francisco condo. Shilts worked hard promoting the key messages of the book that had won widespread interest as the "gays in the military issue" continued to simmer in Washington. In a story that Shilts would later criticize and openly lament to other reporters, Schmalz's take in *The New York Times* put Shilts' health status front and center for a gravely titled April 22, 1993 piece, "Randy Shilts: Writing Against Time, Valiantly." It was not an unexpected move as Schmalz, who openly disclosed his own HIV status before Shilts did, wrote about related issues for *The Times* prior to his November 1993 death. As a result, it was clear Schmalz was not going

to leave Shilts' status as a sidebar. Schmalz crafted sentences in his report that could have been written about himself as well, noted that "These should be the best of times for Randy Shilts. His new book is hitting stores now....A movie based on his first book ...is about to go into production. An HBO film of his second book...is about to go into production. He has a 23-year-old boyfriend, a 10-acre retreat in the country, even a trusty dog" (Schmalz, 1993). The contrast Schmalz painted included mentioning that Shilts was tied to an oxygen tank in order to breathe, slowly shuffled to answer the door and noted that "One minute he is the old Randy Shilts, a blur of energy and issues and passion....The next, he isn't Randy Shilts at all. He's just another gay man with AIDS, scared and tired," (Schmalz). Schmalz pulled a noteworthy quote from Shilts about his situation: "HIV is certainly character-building. It's made me see all of the shallow things we cling to, like ego and vanity. Of course, I'd rather have a few more T-cells and a little less character" (Schmalz, 1993).

Among those offering commentary on Shilts' HIV status was conservative pundit William F. Buckley, Jr. who unapologetically juxtaposed gay rights marches on Washington and the ongoing debate about gays in the military with a pointed, personal question about Shilts: "Why did Randy Shilts contract AIDS? It has been a long time since we discovered what brings on that terrible disease. That he should have exposed himself suggests an obsessive appetite alien to common sense. Do such appetites argue against totally felicitous relations between gay and non-gay?" (Buckley, 1993, p. A6).

Schmalz took note of the parade of national reporters who came to Shilts' door to seek his views (including Sam Donaldson from ABC News, Larry King from CNN, and Charlie Rose from PBS), and labeled him "a star, treated as a pre-eminent chronicler of gay life and

spokesman on gay issues” (Schmalz, 1993). But his “star” status was not universal, especially so among more progressive members of the gay community. Shilts explained that

If I criticize the gay community, then I’m part of the Establishment. I sold out, rather than just having a different opinion. There’s no room in the gay community for people of different opinion. There’s no room in the gay community for people of good intention having different opinions. Either you have THE opinion, or you’re nothing. Yeah, it bothers me...I hate it. My feelings get hurt (Schmalz, 1993).

After his HIV status became public knowledge, Shilts would occasionally let go small details about how he believed he became infected – “I was probably infected in 1980 or ’81, before anyone knew about AIDS” adding, “I am a recovering alcoholic and didn’t quit drinking until ’84. It happened somewhere in that fog, some forgotten moment” (Auchmutey, 1993, p. B1). Shilts’ lover in the era before Randy quit drinking and smoking marijuana, believes he became infected probably following a raucous holiday party the couple hosted at their high-rise condo on Gough Street. After the party ended, he said Shilts engaged in unprotected sex with a partner, assuming the passive position for intercourse (something he didn’t normally do) (S. Newman, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

Regardless of how and/or when Randy Shilts contracted the virus that causes AIDS, by 1993 the realness and openness of his HIV status and subsequent full-blown AIDS infection was at hand. In August and again in December 1992, he had suffered a major setback after being diagnosed with pneumocystis carinii pneumonia. His December bout was accompanied by a collapsed lung on Christmas Eve 1992 that required hospitalization and heavy sedation – all with the final chapter left to finish on *Conduct Unbecoming*. His lengthy hospital stay played into the growing rumor that Shilts had AIDS, and by February 1993, news was slipping out about Shilts’ declining health. Three years of AZT drug treatments, the only approved treatment for people

with AIDS at the time, had slowed, but not stopped the advance of his disease and he finally made the public disclosure that the man who had chronicled the earliest days of the AIDS pandemic was now one of its victims via a one-page, unsigned letter on *San Francisco Chronicle* letterhead dated February 17, 1993. Shilts said he learned of his HIV status in March 1987 and “the disclosure raised a number of questions. Should I continue to cover AIDS?” Shilts said he told his editors of his situation and “We decided that my health status should not prevent me covering AIDS any more than a reporter with a bad heart should avoid covering cardiology. So I continued writing about AIDS” (Shilts, 1993-b).

Shilts’ bosses at the *Chronicle* assigned staff writer Leah Garchik to interview Shilts about his HIV status for a February 16, 1993 page 2 story titled, “Reporter, Author Randy Shilts Reveals That He Has AIDS” (Garchik, 1993, p. 2). The use of the word “reveals” in the *Chronicle*’s headline reflected the noteworthy nature of the disclosure and was repeated in newspapers across the nation, and on network television news. Garchik reported that Shilts “decided to disclose his condition because he had been besieged by inquiring telephone calls from members of the gay community and the national press. It seems the open secret surrounding his HIV status began to collapse, and Shilts had to make a decision about disclosure. “I want to talk about it myself rather than have somebody else talk,” Shilts told Garchik. Repeating his dramatic version that he learned of his HIV status the day he finished writing *And the Band Played On*, Shilts said he instantly made the decision not to discuss his personal HIV status. He also said editors at the *Chronicle* had agreed with his proposal to move from daily news reporting as a national correspondent to writing a weekly column for the paper’s editorial pages, “AIDS: The Inside Story” because he was preoccupied with coming to terms with having been diagnosed. “I was afraid I couldn’t do any project that lasted longer than a week,” he said,

although he ultimately settled on the idea that it was time to slowly move on from full-time reporting on AIDS and turn his attentions to his new interest (Garchik, 1993; Stanley, 1989). Optimistically, Shilts said in his statement that “I do not plan on giving any further interviews on my health status,” although the subject continued to be raised in every subsequent story written about Shilts (Shilts, 1993-b).

Public discussion of his health status always seemed to irritate Shilts. During an April 1993 appearance on *The Charlie Rose Show*, Shilts’ irritation continued to rise as Rose asked questions about the effectiveness of AZT as a treatment for AIDS, the drug approval process in the U.S., and whether there was a need for an “AIDS czar” to be appointed to address the issue. Shilts’ irritation boiled nearest to the surface when Rose queried him about his own HIV status and asked him why he had waited so long to disclose that he had AIDS? “Well, this interview is one of the reasons why,” Shilts said. “Here I have spent the last four years researching and writing about gays and lesbians in the military and yet here we sit discussing issues related to my own personal health status, which I don’t think is all that interesting” (Sgueglia, 1993). Rose retorted that he had opened the interview with more than 15 minutes of questions about Shilts’ research for *Conduct Unbecoming*. Still annoyed, Shilts replied,

Well, yes, but I was really worried that stuff about me personally would overshadow my work and I consider, I am a professional journalist, not a professional AIDS activist and I don’t want to get pulled into this role of professional AIDS activist (Sgueglia, 1993).

Clearly Shilts was interested in controlling the story about him and despite years as a newspaper journalist who would have resented similar treatment from a source, he wanted to keep particular aspects of his story out of the hands of his interviewers. Returning to his ubiquitous claim that “I

am not an activist and I don't feel comfortable being an activist, I am a journalist" Shilts again reveals the transforming nature he believes his journalism can have:

I think I make my contribution to the world as a journalist. There are plenty of AIDS activists out there, but not so many journalists out there who have been able to do what I have been trying to for the last few years (Sgueglia, 1993).

The subject of Shilts' AIDS diagnosis also came up during another national interview, this one a telephone interview on the critically acclaimed National Public Radio program, *Fresh Air*, hosted by journalist Terry Gross from WHYY in Philadelphia. While spending most of her interview with Shilts examining the key points of his book on gays in the military, Gross did wrap up the interview with a rather direct question: "Randy, you developed AIDS when you were writing this book about gays in the military. I wonder whether having written such an important book about AIDS and whether your diagnosis and condition has affected your outlook and perspectives on the topics that you research?" Shilts said he "unfortunately knew a great deal about AIDS" but had purposefully decided to stop writing about it in 1990

because it was just too stressful. I live in the gay community in San Francisco and so most gay men here are HIV positive....I was dealing with it professionally and then I was dealing with it in my own life, and so it became just too much, so I gave up writing about it. I was starting to get psychosomatic symptoms because of the press (Gross, 1993).

Gross clarified with Shilts by recalling a 1987 interview she conducted with him for the release of his book, *And the Band Played On*, and how she had inquired about his status at that time. She noted that Shilts did not disclose his status at that point. Shilts replied,

Well, heterosexuals don't have a lot of etiquette around that issue because it is intensely private and it is not necessarily something I wanted to discuss on national TV. I could not believe it when people asked me about my HIV status, just like they were asking about whether it was a nice day, as if they had a right to know. It was very strange and my basic answer at that point and up until I

disclosed recently was that the only people who really have a right to know are the people I was going to bed with (Gross, 1993).

Shilts may have had a point – articles supposed to be about the release of *Conduct Unbecoming* invariably were required to make mention of Shilts' struggle with AIDS. But his struggle with AIDS *was* in the forefront of his life in 1993. Shilts was too weak physically recovering from a surgery that glued his lungs back in place to go to interviews with ABC's *Good Morning America*, NBC's *Today Show*, CBS *This Morning*, PBS' *Charlie Rose Show*, CNN's *Larry King Live*, and Ted Koppel's ABC franchise *Nightline*, all of whom agreed to satellite interviews with Shilts from his San Francisco condo rather than having him in-studio. Stories in both *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Boston Globe* both seemed particularly focused on Shilts status, the latter coming under a headline, "Randy Shilts Fights On: As He Exposes Military Hounding of Gays, He Faces the Personal Enemy of AIDS" (Adams, 1993). *Boston Globe* writer Jane Meredith Adams described Shilts' style as "a relentless reporter who weaves his facts into dramatically rendered nonfiction and hammers away at a conclusion" (Adams, 1993) and quoted Shilts as revealing that "I wanted to do a book that would just be a battering ram through the denial that would make straight people understand that homophobia hurts people and affects every aspects of their lives" (Adams, 1993).

Shilts wrote *Conduct Unbecoming*, which included more than 1,000 in-person interviews conducted by him or his associates and collection of more than 15,000 government documents (most obtained via the Freedom of Information Act) from his 10-acre home near the Russian River in Guerneville, California. Shilts admitted during this period he put aside worries about his own health, despite full knowledge of his HIV status and skipped, for example, monthly ventilator treatments to prevent pneumocystis pneumonia. By Christmas 1992, Shilts was

hospitalized with a collapsed lung with those around him questioning whether he would ever leave the hospital.

A sad irony seeped into Shilts' growing understanding of his life during interviews he granted in 1993: "It's very frustrating, because here I am at the pinnacle of my career – I could literally do anything I wanted to in the world of journalism, and you're left with a strange feeling that your life is somehow finished without being completed" (Lozano, 2006).

### ***Understanding 'Randy Being Randy'***

Alan Mutter, a former city editor at the paper, was surprised by Shilts' "big personality" when he joined *The Chronicle*, not yet having learned much about him except from reading the explicit nature and prominent placement of Shilts' articles on AIDS. He soon became convinced Shilts was bound to be a journalistic star. Mutter said,

At first I thought he was quite unlike anyone I had ever known, but then the more that I got to know him, I realized he was a lot like the many other great reporters I have known. I came to admire him enormously and he was a bit more theatrical than the average reporter. But, he was very head down, hard-nosed and hardworking. He was very serious down underneath this veneer of showmanship (A. Mutter, personal communication, January 2, 2012).

Mutter said he had copies of the *Chronicle* mailed to him in Chicago in the weeks before he moved west and found himself "shocked" and "amazed" at the frank nature of the AIDS reporting Shilts and fellow writer David Perlman were doing. He said,

Before I left Chicago the idea of us covering gays at all was almost unthinkable. The idea that a newspaper would write about gay sex was unbelievable. The idea that a newspaper would write about gay sex in gay bathhouses, or gay diseases, was simply out of the question. I remember right before I left Chicago, one of my health reporters came up to me with this idea about a story on an interesting new disease... where gays get this disease that attacks their immune system and kills them. She said there was a mystery about how they get it to begin with and she wanted to write about it. I told her she could write it up, but the story got chopped

to shit and it ran on page 5,000 of the newspaper, a single column story. Meantime at home, on my dining room table where these newspapers with all these big fat, banner headlines about gay bathhouses, gay sex, unprotected gay sex – all these page one stories. I remember sitting there and just gasping at this. Imagine, headlines on the front page about things that people don't talk about! That was the environment that we were in. (A. Mutter, personal communication, January 2, 2012).

Shilts seemed to share the same view about the novelty of what he was able to write about at the *Chronicle*, noting, “It was a matter, always, of breaking barriers of what was permissible to say,” he said. “If you had told me 10 years ago that we were going to have something about anal intercourse in the paper every day, the way we do today, I never would have believed it” (Udesky, 1991, p. 133).

As part of his newfound largesse that a large metropolitan daily newspaper could offer, Shilts joined a group of San Francisco leaders for a special trip to Africa in the fall of 1987 and filed noteworthy stories about how AIDS was impacting communities far across the globe – including an unusually long 2,000 word article published on October 5, 1987 datelined from Rakai, Uganda. In it, Shilts identified central Africa as “ground zero of the AIDS epidemic” and noted that “health officials consider the region’s hot and dusty villages to be at the front line of the international war against the deadly disease” (Shilts, 1987-b, p. A1). Contrasting the fact that AIDS was impacting primarily *heterosexual* individuals in Africa, Shilts declared that “it is here, in the equatorial belt of central Africa, that the disease is believed to have begun. It is here that the AIDS virus has become more entrenched than anywhere else on Earth” (Shilts, 1987-b, p. A1). Shilts assuredness about the starting line for AIDS in Africa not only won him scorn among some social scientists but also among his African hosts. According to Shilts’ former KQED colleague Belva Davis (who was on the trip representing her new bosses at KTVU-TV), the

African hosts were insulted by Shilts' running dialogue that made similar claims while on the ground in Africa. Davis said,

I thought I was going to have to save his life. He had come on this trip to learn about the genesis of AIDS. He was traveling with an all-black group and he was just being Randy, just saying what he thought, and the last thing these people wanted to hear was Randy's thoughts about whether AIDS could or should be traced back to Africa. Their attitude was that this was another example of Americans trying to blame someone else (B. Davis, personal communication, February 8, 2013).

Despite these miscues, Shilts' reporting from Africa was typically detailed and comprehensive, considering not only AIDS in Uganda, but also in Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zaire. He paid particular attention to the "exclusively heterosexual phenomenon" of AIDS in Africa, and the differences inherent in heterosexual transmission of the AIDS virus to the more common form of homosexual transmission of the AIDS virus in America. He concluded that radical changes in sexual lifestyles and cultural morays had helped to stem the transmission in Africa— but had not altogether stopped it. It was a familiar theme for Shilts. Veteran *San Francisco Chronicle* science writer David Perlman said

It was fascinating to think how that here's a member of a community, a participant in the life of that community, and remains a good reporter throughout no matter how conflicted he may have been personally, or felt personally, he never lost his sense of journalistic integrity, which is another quality that isn't always apparent in other people (Perlman, 1994).

Perlman's assessment is not particularly different than the one Shilts offered on himself in his last broadcast interview, with Steve Kroft for CBS' "60 Minutes" in February 1994, telecast one week after his death. It in, Shilts offered a succinct appraisal of his own work – and its intended but virtually unacknowledged advocacy – wherein he cast his writing as a means of saving the lives of gay men:

To be writing about a sexually-transmitted disease and not write about the bathhouse institutions that everyone had sex in every weekend, where lots and lots of people were having lots and lots of sex, would just have been dishonest. Here I was, writing stories about the failure of the Reagan administration, I felt it was my equal responsibility to write about the failure of the gay community as well. When I started writing about the bathhouses; that did not make a lot of people very happy. It was definitely the most painful period of my life, because here I was trying to do something that I felt was trying to save people's lives and I was being called this malicious sellout who would do anything to advance my career over the dead bodies of other gay men (Kroft, 1994).

Andriote (1999) described the battle to close the bathhouses as a challenge to the existing gay establishment "who refused to distinguish between sexual license and gay liberation" (p. 75).

Despite accusations that Shilts and the activists who took up sides against the bathhouses were tools of the heterosexual establishment, the fight wore on. Shilts became a

lightning rod for the wrath of those in the community who considered themselves sacrosanct. Shilts was demonized for daring to question the judgment of some gay people in the pages of a so-called "straight" newspaper, rather than simply caving in to pressure of gay activists to keep it as it were, 'in the family' (Andriote, 1999, p. 77).

Shilts' gained scorn may have been earned scorn. He later admitted that he purposefully timed not only one of his very first AIDS articles to coincide with the start of Gay Pride in San Francisco in 1982, but that he did so regularly, trying to time his articles on AIDS to get placement in a Friday edition of the *Chronicle* in order to reach gay men before they went out for a weekend of anonymous sex in the bathhouses. Andriote quoted Shilts as saying, "I wanted everyone to have the fear of God in them" (Andriote, 1999, p. 78).

Clifford L. Morrison, organizer of the AIDS Ward at San Francisco General Hospital, said he felt pressure from Shilts and others to join in the effort to force closure of the bathhouses (Morrison, 1994, p.111) . "I thought the bathhouses should have been closed," Morrison said. "It was obvious; we had enough information at the time. I essentially agreed with Randy Shilts; I

just didn't agree with his message completely" (p. 111). Morrison said he felt caught between Shilts and one of his primary sources, Dr. Mervyn Silverman, the colorful San Francisco public health officer. "Randy had absolutely no love for Merv Silverman at all," Morrison said. He said Shilts' anger with Silverman was because "Merv barred (Randy) from Grove Street (the administrative offices of the Department of Public Health). Randy couldn't go in there and interview anybody because Randy was constantly attacking Merv" (Morrison, 1994, p. 111-112).

"Randy could be like an old dog with a bone," Morrison said. "He was a fascinating person, but when he was on to something, he wouldn't let go of it. He was a journalist in the true sense of the world" (Morrison, 1994, p. 112) Morrison recalls an "awful confrontation" between Silverman and Shilts at the 1989 International AIDS Conference in Montreal in which "Merv and Randy wound up yelling at each other" (Morrison, 1994, p. 112).

Silverman's concerns with Shilts' approach rose so high that he finally called one of Shilts' editors at the *Chronicle* and angrily suggested that Shilts be taken off the news beat of the AIDS story: "I used to call his editor and say, 'For God's sake, put him on the editorial page,'" Silverman said (Silverman, 1993). Silverman recalls Shilts went so far as to writing him a personal note in an attempt to regain access to health department sources. "He ended up writing me a note saying, 'I'm sorry, you're right, I shouldn't do this, and I promise not to do it again.'" (He was) not promising not to be critical, but promising not to be so biased and one-sided" (Silverman, 1993).

The sharp edges of Shilts' personality may have had a basis in the personal challenges he was facing, primarily with falling into the same alcoholism that had permeated his childhood via his troubled mother. Journalist Pete Hamill wrote a memoir, *A Drinking Life* about how alcohol had seemingly always accompanied his life as a journalist. He told of a rough-and-tumble

childhood surrounded by drunks and the confusing reality they create for the young. Randy Shilts' life had taken a similar path – his alcoholic mother ever present and ever seemingly focusing her wrath on her boys – especially Randy. “Early on I learned there were limits to the myth of the hard drinking reporter,” Hamill (1994, p. 227) wrote in telling a story of being sent home from the newsroom one night when he was too drunk to properly type a single sentence. Randy Shilts had a similar moment – one that only he knew about – when he came back from a dinner break at *The San Francisco Chronicle* lit up from a quick stopover at a local bar, and scared himself into thinking he was placing his career, and even his life, at risk. He promised he'd never do it again. Like Hamill, Shilts “got sober” – though Shilts did his work through a brief in-patient stay at a rehabilitation facility, and via the group he had reported on in the past – Alcoholics Anonymous. His commitment to getting sober, however, didn't come until he took risks that could have endangered his career. In the weeks following the death of his mother, a ton of unresolved issues never broached, growing criticism of his coverage of gay bathhouses, and news of the death of his friend Gary Walsh from AIDS-related complications on February 21, 1984 sent Shilts over the edge on that dinner break, finding solace in six shots of Jack Daniels and then trying to return to work. Shilts said the incident “terrified” him because

I realized that I had worked so hard, and it was a struggle to get to the point where I could be at the *Chronicle*, to be at a major newspaper, and I was just going to throw it away for this cheap high? And that was the last time I had a drink (Kelley, 1989, p. 101).

“Being an alcoholic was a great gift to me,” Shilts told one reporter in 1987. “My own recovery from substance abuse helped me see some of the things that were going on the gay community. People lose their judgment when they are drunk. Recovery has even clarified my writing” (Romine, 1997, p. 1E).

Fellow gay writer, fiction author Daniel Curzon encountered a drunken Randy Shilts once. He described Shilts as “a cherubic, bright eyed... boy reporter” (Curzon, 2004, p. 89), but also recalled him as an arrogant drunk. Shilts declared to Curzon’s face that the cover of Curzon’s latest book was ugly and that he had no respect for authors until his first book, the Milk biography, was published. Curzon said Shilts came across as “a prime example of the young literate but totally unlettered generation” (p. 89). Curzon said Shilts continued to insult him and others on various topics from issues as wide-ranging as astrology to politics. “Somewhere in the conversation Shilts said that he was going to write a ‘bestseller,’ without so much as an ounce of shame. I lost respect for him right then and there. Who the fuck wanted to write a bestseller?” (Curzon, 2004, p. 90). Still perturbed at how Shilts had talked to him, Curzon fired off an angry letter to him via his office at *The Advocate*, later learning that Shilts had posted it as a trophy on his bulletin board. “Clearly the man had skin a foot thick” and that “Shilts seemed about as sensitive as a whore’s clitoris” (Curzon, 2004, p. 91). Curzon’s letter likely privately upset Shilts who admits he struggled with internalizing criticism he received and because of his own belief that his writing showed a lot of sensitivity. “If I became thick-skinned about my writing, I would not be the kind of writer I want to be, the kind of writer who still connects to people on a human level,” Shilts said (Marcus, 1989).

Shilts’ friend, David Israels, a gay journalist, recalls that “he was a pretty heavy drinker, and not a particularly fun drunk” (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012). His involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous was a big, and positive change, Israels believes.

Among the changes Shilts made when he joined AA was to break-up with his long-time lover, Steve Newman. Newman, a weatherman for KRON-TV in the Bay Area, met Shilts in 1981 while Newman was writing a “weather page column” for *The San Francisco Chronicle*. It

wasn't an immediate match. Flush with alcohol, Newman recalls Shilts holding forth at a party about the silliness of local weather forecasts because of the already existing work of the National Weather Service. Newman recalled it was "Randy being Randy" who sometimes enjoyed insulting others without stopping to think about the impact of his words (S. Newman, personal communication, November 30, 2012). Privately, however, the two men hit it off and a sexual relationship soon blossomed into living together in a high-rise condo on Cathedral Hill overlooking the San Francisco Bay. Newman recalls that in private, Shilts would say the *Chronicle* newsroom could be quite stodgy, but that:

Randy always just had a lot of effervescence about anything that he was doing. So I'm sure that took some adjusting on their part at the paper, but when they began to see the quality of reporting that he could do, it was not a continual concern. I know that they could see that when he was truly enthusiastic and committed to a subject or story idea, that he would produce some truly significant reporting (S. Newman, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

Shilts friend and noted gay activist Cleve Jones "took the cure" along with Shilts, both of them transitioning for a time from being buddies who prowled around South of Market Street bars in San Francisco to fellow attendees at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. "He was dealing with alcohol issues that I was sort always peripherally aware of," Jones said, "and then, I remember the change was pretty dramatic after he got into the program. His house, his apartment was always filthy, and suddenly it was all clean and organized. I know the (AA) program was really important to him" (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

"Randy (Shilts) can't be understood without understanding his alcoholism," declared Shilts critic John Preston, a former editor-in-chief of *The Advocate*. Preston believes the 12-step process of sobriety advocated by Alcoholics Anonymous highly influences Shilts' writing and his tendency toward puritanical positions on certain issues – including gay bathhouses that he

helped shutter in 1984 at the height of the AIDS crisis in San Francisco. Preston believes Shilts viewed bathhouse owners as comparable to bar owners who exploit the compulsions of gay men to the detriment of those men. Shilts openly confirmed this view it seems, via a May 1991 interview with *Progressive* magazine as he defended his commitment to writing about HIV transmission in the gay community, despite calls from other gays to back off. On the bathhouse issue in particular, Shilts said,

In my mind, it was always a business issue. Here were greedy businessmen who would kill anybody to make 25 cents. But the gay community did not interpret it as a business issue. It interpreted it as a civil rights issue. My reporting was aggressive, sometimes overly so. There was this perception that I was out to subvert gay-rights and I didn't care about civil liberties and civil rights. To me, the overriding issue was that civil rights wouldn't do us any good if we were all dead from this disease (Udesky, 1991, p. 135).

Shilts' aggressive reporting on the role bathhouses may be playing in the spread of HIV among gay men in San Francisco came as a surprise to some. As Clendinen and Nagourney (1999, p. 500) noted, "Shilts' pride in the Castro was well known, so people had assumed that in print, he would be as much a booster of the Castro as of any of the neighborhood's businesses, civic or political leaders. That assumption was incorrect. Shilts' homosexuality and his allegiance to the Castro complicated his life as a newspaper reporter as the health crisis (of AIDS) unfolded." One of Shilts' editors at the *Chronicle*, Alan Mutter said that Shilts was convinced AIDS was spreading via unprotected sexual contact – "He got involved with this story, covering it in a straight-forward way, and at the same time making sure that the story never went away," Mutter said, adding,

But he got very involved in the proper way that a reporter needs to when the story is this important, and not because he was pushing a particular point of view, but

because he thought this was a very important issue and story (A. Mutter, personal communication, January 2, 2012).

Mutter said it is his belief that good reporters continue “poking around” on stories that are important:

We have seen people win Pulitzer Prizes at the tiniest of tiny newspapers because they saw something that just wasn't kosher and they pursued it. That was the level of engagement that Randy had. It wasn't about taking a point of view about the morality of things, or the seediness of something. It was because he was a great journalist, and he could see that this was a great story. And it was a great story (A. Mutter, personal communication, January 2, 2012).

Mutter believes Shilts was “a great reporter, and he managed to put his finger on one of the biggest stories of the day, AIDS, bathhouses, and he became an expert on the subject” (A. Mutter, personal communication, January 2, 2012).

In the height of the bathhouse battles of 1984, Mutter believes it is important to remember Shilts' enterprise produced one of the only real “news” stories emanating from the upcoming Democratic National Convention in San Francisco. Mutter noted that former Vice President Walter Mondale had sewed up the nomination long before the convention, and the only open question was who he would select as a running mate. Shilts picked up information that the Mondale camp was seriously considering U.S. Representative Geraldine Ferraro of New York. Shilts promptly jumped a plane east and began researching Ferraro's background and as a result positioned the *Chronicle* to break the story of the barrier-breaking Mondale-Ferraro ticket. “Ferraro was not gay, so this was not a gay story at all,” Mutter said. “This was a national political story and Randy got that story for us. I still get chills when I think about it, because we would have looked like fools (with the convention in our city) if we had missed the story. Instead, Randy was spot on the story and we had it” (A. Mutter, personal communication,

January 2, 2012). Shilts had made national headlines with exclusive political coverage before – most notably a 1979 story profiling the behind-bars life of Willie Carter Spann, the bisexual nephew of President Jimmy Carter serving time in California on burglary and drug charges (Shilts, 1979).

Getting sober did not end some of the hard feelings Shilts could still inspire in sources. Two of Shilts' prominent sources in the bathhouse battles of 1984 eventually turned on him publicly. James Curran, a coordinator and researcher on the CDC's AIDS task force, said Shilts misquoted him about his desire to close all bathhouses. Curran told other reporters that Shilts had got it wrong – and that what he had said was that he wouldn't be “disappointed” if the baths were closed, but he was not advocating the federal or local units of government get into the issue of “legislating sexual behavior” (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 500-01). San Francisco City Supervisor Harry Britt (selected to replace the assassinated Harvey Milk) also took issue with Shilts' reporting and use of quotes on the bathhouse issue. “(Randy) wants to shut down the bathhouses, and he tried to get someone to say that,” Britt told a reporter (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 501). Shilts seemed to be feeling the heat. He wrote a first-person account for *Native* magazine in which he declared that “a homosexual McCarthyism has descended on San Francisco's gay community” and that “Even now, the thought police lurk in the sweet summer shadows of these balmy evenings. Hysterical inquisitors stand on the corners of 18<sup>th</sup> and Castro, ready to guillotine heretics from the Truth Faith” (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999, p. 501).

While Shilts' coverage of the bathhouse issue engendered controversy and criticism from those who viewed his coverage as tilted against the sex clubs, he continued to score major stories that won him praise. On June 1, 1984, Shilts broke the story that San Francisco Mayor Dianne

Feinstein had ordered undercover police investigators to go into as many as 14 of the city's bathhouses and report back to her. Shilts quoted Feinstein as saying the probe was "entirely justified" as she was "increasingly alarmed at the politicization" of the bathhouse issue (Shilts, 1984-b, p. 3). "I wanted to be on solid ground – I think the mayor has the right to get the facts about a situation," Shilts quoted Feinstein as saying. He said Feinstein was "impressed" by the degree of high-risk sex that continued to take place according to the police reports she received. "My concern with this has nothing to do with anything I may or may not think about morality," Feinstein said. "It has to do with life versus death" (Shilts, 1984-b, p. 3). To the degree Shilts wanted to move forward with closing the bathhouses, the mayor's comments were helpful to that end, all the while scoring points with some activists who applauded his calling out of city officials for their clandestine investigation of gay sex in the city. Shilts quoted City Supervisor Britt as calling the police inspections "unconscionable" and said the bathhouses were not an issue the police department had any business investigating. But beyond quoting Britt and one other activist, Shilts bulldozed forward into analysis to end his story by noting that Feinstein's actions highlighted a growing rift between her and the city's public health director, Dr. Mervyn Silverman, who had been slow to order the bathhouses closed (as Feinstein favored). Silverman defended his actions to Shilts saying he was seeking the answer that was best for public health, not what was popular. Feinstein lacked the power to fire Silverman because of bureaucratic city rules that officially made him an employee appointed by the city's administrative officer. The mayor again sounded her concerns about keeping bathhouses open and operating during the upcoming Democratic National Convention in the city and cautioned: "People are coming here, get carried away by the nature of the environment and carry (AIDS) back with them when they

go home – they will carry it with them all over the world. This isn't just a local problem” (Shilts, 1984-b, p. 3). Nearly three decades later, Silverman still defends his cautious approach. He said,

My goal was to try and relate to the gay community, not politically, but I was trying to work with them because I knew we can do a lot better by working with them as partners rather than as a policeman. Probably only 10 percent of the gay community regularly went to the bathhouses. No question that the majority of the activities taking place there placed you at risk of HIV, but there was some 90 percent of the gay community was not going there on any regular basis. The last thing that I wanted to do was to put a wedge between the health department and the gay community. The gay community couldn't elect me or hire me or fire me ... but we needed to work together (M. Silverman, personal communication, January 8, 2012).

Silverman's goals notwithstanding, a pending conflict was at hand with Shilts (and others who either openly or secretly wanted the gay bathhouses to close). Silverman said he knew “Randy was passionate and had a really strong feeling about the bathhouses from the get go” and that “I was never one who was ever really thrilled with the bathhouses either” (M. Silverman, personal communication, January 8, 2012). Beyond the open sexual activity occurring in the bathhouses, a variety of public safety issues were present, such as poor lighting, and few if any exits beyond the main entrances to the establishments, Silverman said. In addition, the focus on sexual activity in the bathhouses completely ignored similar activity occurring inside gay adult theatres and bookstores elsewhere in the city. Gay leaders had succeeded in getting bar and bathhouse owners to install additional fire exits, “and I wanted to get that same thing started on AIDS, a sort of community-based drive and there were people who didn't like the bathhouses and would like to see them closed,” Silverman said (M. Silverman, personal communication, January 8, 2012). Few gay leaders were willing to stand with Silverman in the effort, some telling Silverman privately that they supported him, but then backed out of any public disclosure of their support, leaving Silverman twisting in the wind.

Shilts spared few words after-the-fact in what he thought of Silverman's approach,

Political concerns have continued to triumph over the need for public health... (Dr. Silverman) didn't close the bathhouses when he should have because he didn't want to make a decision that would make anybody mad. What's so tragic about his stance is that studies show that at least a third of the gay men who were infected with this virus were infected between late '83 and late '84. In that period, a huge proportion of gay men were still going to the bathhouses. And I'm absolutely convinced that a lot of those infections could have been entirely avoided if those bathhouses had been shut down (Kelley, 1989, p. 94).

Beyond the bathhouses, Silverman and Shilts also clashed over the level and type of public health education being provided about sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV. "Randy complained that we had a lackluster education program, lackluster was the word he had used, but he had not read it yet," Silverman said. Further angering Silverman, Shilts sought out other sources, including two city supervisors, for their views on the "lackluster" program. Silverman had had enough. He said,

What bothered me about that was, while someone might have an opinion, that's fine, but this was supposed to be a news story. I called his editor and said, 'Why don't you put him on the opinion page because he is making and wants to take positions. And that's OK, but when you're reporting, I think it should be as objective as it can be.' It was my feeling that he was not being that objective and in fact, I cut him off from the health department, because I was trying to work through this issue and it was not the easiest thing in the world. There was no precedent (M. Silverman, personal communication, January 8, 2012).

Fellow gay journalist David Israels believes there is no question Shilts abandoned a portion of his objectivity when it came to the bathhouse story. Israels said

I would say he *was* advocating a position those days. This is the most obvious example of where he used his position to advocate a position that can be identified. I think he took the position he did on the bathhouses based on the reporting he had done. I think he used his ability to write stories to function in the role of at least a semi-advocate. He came up against a very strong backlash from a segment of the gay community, but he felt that he was disseminating information that needed to get out there. I think he also had come to a feeling at this point that the bathhouses represented a negative force in the community. I think you could

criticize him on the basis of that, people would say that he was doing this in the guise of reporting instead of as a columnist or commentator. Some people might say, therefore, he violated the journalism craft's admonition that you shouldn't be advancing your own personal opinions. But it's important to remember that his personal opinion was based on hard reporting that he had done on the subject, and he had reached a conclusion (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012).

Israels is one of many who attempt to “qualify” Shilts’ apparent abandonment of objectivity because it was based on a record of research and information that he had gathered through years of reporting about AIDS. Israels added that Shilts “randy” past also undercut some of his credibility among some gay leaders on the bathhouse issue. “I don’t think you can discount that criticism,” Israels said. “He was quite sexually active, he went to the bathhouses and all that, he had multiple partners at one time, and people saw that as hypocritical of him” (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012). But Israels adds, “That argument doesn’t fly when you take into account what we knew before and what we know now. When he was out there being sexually promiscuous or whatever, we didn’t know about the virus” (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012). Shilts’ one-time partner, Steve Newman, confirms that he and Shilts visited gay bathhouses together during their intimate relationship: “We would go out to sex clubs together and we would have a good time, and he enjoyed it,” Newman said. “But there comes a point when that becomes lethal, and it probably really should be highlighted” (S. Newman, personal communication, November 30, 2012). Newman thinks that any criticism that flows to Shilts as a result of his previous patronage of a bathhouse is meaningless. “If you look at what he was reporting, he was emphasizing what medical experts and scientists were saying about what they knew at that time about HIV and AIDS,” Newman said. “He was writing news articles that quoted scientists and experts and making sure people understood that if this were in

fact a communicable disease, or sexually transmitted disease, that people knew about it” (S. Newman, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

Reporting on the growing AIDS problem was complicated, however, for several weeks by Silverman’s order that Shilts be “locked out” or “shut down” from interviewing sources at the county health department. Silverman, who had risen in stature nationally because of his role in combatting AIDS and was serving as chair of the U.S. Conference of Health Officers via the U.S. Conference of Mayors, admits,

I cut him off. He went to (Mayor) Feinstein’s office and complained that ‘Mervyn Silverman won’t meet with me.’ The mayor told him that she didn’t have any power over the health officer, that it was the city manager. In essence, no one really had any power over me and so Randy came back to me and he talked to me. I said to him, ‘Listen, Randy,’ and I called him by his first name because I knew him very well; he lived just two doors down the street from me. ‘Randy, I would love to get all positive press. I am not looking for that, however. I just need a balance; I just want you to cover this in an objective way. If you can do that with some objectivity, then we are going to be OK.’ Well, he sent me a note that really was a mea culpa of ‘I’m sorry, I won’t do that anymore’ because at that time, if he didn’t have access to me, there really wasn’t much in the health field he could cover, or people who would deal with him (M. Silverman, personal communication, January 8, 2012).

Among the health professionals who never cut Shilts off was Dr. Marcus Conant who was treating hundreds of gay men for HIV-related illnesses. Conant had been quick to jump on the side of closing the bathhouses. Interestingly he said he came to that conclusion while riding an older roller coaster at an amusement park in Santa Cruz, California. Conant said,

I was scared shitless and I was sure we were going to fly off the track. My boyfriend said to me, ‘Listen, if it were dangerous, *they* would shut it down.’ And I said, ‘Who is *they*?’ And it’s the same as with the bathhouses. If they are dangerous, *they* would shut them down. Well, some poor kid coming here to San Francisco from Sioux Falls, Iowa would say, ‘Well, I’ve heard about AIDS, but if the bathhouse was dangerous, they would close them down.’ I mean, it wasn’t like there were signs over the doorway that said, ‘Ye who enter, beware, you can catch AIDS in here’ (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

The other incident that prompted Conant's outspoken support of bathhouse closures was an interaction with a patient suffering from AIDS-related illnesses:

I was treating this guy for something on a Friday afternoon and he said, 'You kept me waiting a long time, I wish you would hurry up because I am going to the baths tonight.' I said, 'You're going to the baths tonight?' And he said, 'Sure, I've got it and everybody that goes in there knows that they are at risk of getting it.' I knew then I had to speak out, because people coming in from out of town don't know or think that there is a threat, and people in town think that, you know, 'I've got it, so everyone else deserves to get it.' So, you've got to speak out. You can't just sit back and wait for 'them' to do it because we are the 'them' (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

Conant's account of a patient with AIDS-related problems still patronizing a gay bathhouse was a theme repeated by Shilts in both his newspaper reporting, and prominently so later in *And the Band Played On*.

Most of the bathhouses would eventually close – either caving under new regulations finally imposed by Silverman and the city's health and public safety officials – or collapsing from a lack of business. In either event, the forces that saw the bathhouses as throwing gasoline on the already burning fire of AIDS had won a victory.

On the bathhouse issue, Shilts said

I don't have anything moral against bathhouses. But the baths exist solely for the purpose of promiscuous sexual activity and – when you have a disease which is most certainly transmitted by a single agent – a bathhouse sticks out like a very large erection. You just can't ignore the role it plays. No other newspaper in the United States has more aggressively pursued the bathhouse issue than *The San Francisco Chronicle*. It involved some very aggressive journalism, and I'm quite proud of the fact that I'm an aggressive journalist. Although I hate to admit it, I think Diane Feinstein was right when she said that if AIDS were an epidemic among straight people and an institution like the baths existed, they would have been closed two years ago. Gay activists may be able to bullshit some reporter from *the Los Angeles Times* by telling him that the baths don't play any role in the AIDS epidemic. But they can't bullshit me, because I know what goes on in the bathhouses. I used to go there myself. I even had a job as a towel boy when I was working my way through college (Heymont, 1984, p. 2).

Criticism similar to that which Shilts endured from gay advocates would return years later when he took a position opposed to the practice of “outing” closeted gays. Spurred on by the editors of *Out* magazine and activist journalists such as Michelangelo Signorile, an open war between Shilts and the left erupted again in the early 1990s. Shilts conjoined the practice of outing with the growing crisis of AIDS and that the times were “becoming less congenial for covert homosexuals” but that outing tactics presented a variety of “ethical quandaries” (Shilts, 1990-a). Shilts returned to his commitment to mainstream journalistic values declaring that outing of politicians or celebrities based solely on gossip or rumor had no place in “a legitimate news story” (Shilts, 1990-a). “As a journalist, I cannot imagine any situation in which I would reveal the homosexuality of a living person who was not a public official engaged in voracious hypocrisy,” Shilts said (Shilts, 1990-a). His position corresponded with those of conservative gay columnist Andrew Sullivan of *The New Republic*, with Shilts criticizing ongoing efforts to out closeted gays as akin to a third grader throwing a temper tantrum and declaring, “Do what I want you to do or I’ll tell on you” (Gross, 1992).

Appearing on the *CBS Morning News* opposite Gabriel Rotello, editor of *OutWeek* magazine that had just “outed” deceased millionaire and gadfly Malcolm Forbes, Shilts was cast as the mainstream journalist expert, while Rotello represented the gay media interested in outing closeted gays. Shilts acknowledged that

I’ve got several opinions on this issue, some of which are contradictory. I would agree... that the world would be a much better place if every person who was gay would say so publicly. I think it would enrich everyone’s knowledge of the fact that there are lots of gay and lesbian people who they respect....So I agree with that. In my own life, I’ve made that decision and I talk about being gay. That’s my moral choice. What I have a problem with is as a journalist using my professional role to make other people’s moral choices for them (Snyder, 1990).

Perhaps reflecting his conflicted views on the issue, Shilts openly criticized newspapers and other media who willingly accepted “planted” stories by publicists that implied certain people were heterosexual when they were not – but then feigning disgust at the prospect of outing someone. “I think there is a contradiction in the media,” Shilts said. “That contradiction fuels anger, and I think that anger is something that’s leading to this trend among some gay publications” (Snyder, 1990).

Shilts was more animated, and more pointed in his remarks on the Malcolm Forbes “outing” when he appeared opposite his nemesis Signorile on CNN’s *Larry King Live*. Shilts openly defended the position of his bosses at *The San Francisco Chronicle* to basically ignore reported stories about the alleged homosexuality of Forbes (as well as similar “outing” reports surfacing about Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams). Signorile noted that instead of fully exploring the issue of whether the mainstream media should or could have reported on outing issues earlier, “Shilts did as he had always done in the past, he blasted the radicals,” engaging in what Signorile viewed as a self-loathing commentary. Shilts’ remarks to King and his national audience were ample evidence of a growing distaste for gay leaders supporting outing:

No matter how high-sounded the rhetoric, outing makes some of the most august gay journalists and leaders look like a bunch of bitchy queens on the set of *Boys in the Band*, bent not on helping each other but on clawing each other. It’s not a pretty sight. As for the nastiness of outing, whether outing is done to Army privates by the Pentagon policy or to prominent officials by the gay press, it’s still a dirty business that hurts people (Signorile, 1993, p. 154).

Signorile and other gays openly seethed at Shilts, with Signorile declaring that Shilts’ remarks “reeked of self-loathing” (Signorile, 1993, p. 155). Richard Rouillard, editor of *The Advocate*, declared Shilts’ commentary as “particularly vicious” (Weir, 1993, p. 47).

The controversy over Shilts' remarks reflected the same battles he had faced before – what he viewed as being straightforward or direct commentary that reflected an objective point of view (one including a critical analysis of gay politics and society) he tried to employ as a “mainstream journalist.” Shilts said,

I don't consider myself an activist or an advocacy journalist. I feel that prejudice in our society (against homosexuals) is born less out of malice than out of ignorance, and that if you just inform people... you can do more to erase prejudice than any other kind of action. Because (straight people) just don't know any better, they're just dumb, and they live in a society where we weren't talked about, where all these silly images of us exist, the fantasy images, really, and you try to replace that with some facts (Weir, 1993, p. 47).

Shilts' most pronounced criticism of the supporters of outing among gay journalists came at a meeting of the National Association of Lesbian & Gay Journalists where Shilts referred to them as “lavender fascists” interested in forcing their ideology on everyone. “There is a fundamental fallacy in preaching diversity but rejecting the most important form of diversity of all, which is diversity of thought,” Shilts said (Gross, 1992).

Some perceived Shilts' comments then – and earlier statements – as evidence of a personal struggle they believed raged within him to fully accept himself as a gay man, despite his open disclosure of his homosexuality from an early age. Even his self-effacing humor may have been revelatory of such feelings: “I'm not a very good homosexual – I can't keep house, decorate, cook or dress,” he told a *New York Times* reporter for a profile story (Reinhold, 1987). Others point to his ready self-reporting on scorn he suffered in the gay community noting,

There was a lot of denial in the gay community (about AIDS). I was going out of my way to write as much about AIDS as I could. My very existence was a slap in the face of that denial. They said I had gone to work for the *Chronicle* and sold out, currying favor with my heterosexual bosses by writing about something that made gay people look bad. They called me a gay ‘Uncle Tom.’ It was horrible (Reinhold, 1987).

Late in 1993 as Shilts battled the after-effects of pneumonia and a healing collapsed lung, *Out* magazine dispatched writer John Weir to Shilts' Castro-district condo, presumably to promote the release of his third book, *Conduct Unbecoming*. Weir's essay – "Reading Randy" – focused less on Shilts' work and more on his persona, one Weir described as having been wrapped in a reputation for arrogance:

I had been told that Shilts was egotistical, but what impresses me about him most is his reckless self-regard. He is concerned with his professional reputation but not much interested in his personal well-being. He has the courage and authority of a man who is skilled at observing everything except himself (Weir, 1993, p. 46).

Shilts' reputation for being outspoken and blunt had won him few friends in the gay and lesbian community, for while Shilts has earned the respect of straight journalists, "many of his gay and lesbian colleagues continue to regard him with suspicion, if not hostility," Weir wrote. Weir suggested that Shilts critique was symptomatic of a 'peculiarity' of the LGBTQ community who closely monitored Shilts' work after he "crossed over into the mainstream press and that many of those watching have been men controlling the gay press who might also have successfully worked and advanced in the mainstream if they'd remained in the closet" (Weir, 1993, p. 46).

In an interview for *The Washington Journalism Review* in 1990, Shilts put part of the blame for the argument about the propriety or fairness of outing on the media: "What bothers me is the media piously talking about private lives. They just find homosexuality so distasteful and don't want to write about it. They don't have a problem lying about it; their problem is telling the truth about it" (Alwood, 1996, p. 267). Conversely, Shilts also expressed abhorrent feelings about outing, telling a reporter for *Gentlemen's Quarterly* magazine that "When the threat of outing is employed (by gay leaders) to pressure a public official to vote a particular way, it amounts to nothing more than blackmail, plain and simple" (Alwood, 1996, p. 278)

Ironically, Shilts revealed in his biography on slain San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk that it had been Milk who was responsible for one of the earliest and most noted “outing” incidents in the media. Somehow Milk had learned the sexual orientation of ex-Marine and Vietnam vet Oliver Sipple, who became an instant national hero on September 22, 1975 when he blocked the gun of Sarah Jane Moore as she attempted to assassinate President Gerald R. Ford outside a San Francisco venue. Sipple later unsuccessfully sued *The San Francisco Chronicle* and other publications for invasion of privacy for naming him as a homosexual, thus “outing” him to his family and friends, though Sipple never denied he was gay (Alwood, 1996; Shilts, 1982).

### ***Shilts as Author***

Alwood (1996) reported on a small gap that opened in the coverage of the AIDS story by both the *Chronicle* and Shilts. After having broken ground in 1981 with some of the very first reports about what would become the AIDS pandemic, *Chronicle* coverage “dried up” for a short time. The noticeable gap is likely the result of time-off by Shilts to promote his first book, and requests to him by local and federal health experts to hold off on reporting too much about the issue as they searched for answers amidst the growing health crisis afflicting gay men. By early 1982, Shilts’ first book, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* was about to be released by St. Martin’s Press. *Chronicle* editors gave Shilts leeway to go and promote the book that he had written before joining their staff, and while Shilts’ text was critically well accepted and praised, it was far from a best seller. In a March 1982 interview about the book with *The Los Angeles Times*, Shilts breathlessly took in the attention the book offered him, playfully complaining about the alleged strain of too many reporter interviews and

radio call-in shows (even referring to himself as a combination of fictional journalism characters Clark Kent and Lois Lane in one man). *The Times* offered that what “Shilts has written and is promoting on his days off from the city room at *The San Francisco Chronicle*, is one of the first avowedly gay nonfiction books to be accepted – embraced even – by the mainstream press and public” (Mehren, 1982). From there, however, *The Times* profile moved decidedly on the story of Shilts himself, detailing his coming out journey, his commitment to being an openly gay reporter, and his long struggle for acceptance – and employment – in journalism. “From the outside, it looks like a solid rise,” Shilts said of his resume. “But do you know how much I’ve been through? Do you have any idea?” (Mehren, 1982). Shilts settled into the rarified role as journalist and author by noting that many others had *said* they wanted to write a biography on either Harvey Milk or George Moscone, but only he had actually done so. Shilts’ bravado was on full display as he told the *Times*,

A straight journalist could have written this book, yes, but only if they had overcome their own biases about writing what is essentially a gay book. In a way, it’s ‘Randy Shilts’ Greatest Hits.’ I mean, I was there, I covered it (Mehren, 1982).

Shilts offered up that his row of reporter’s desks in the *Chronicle*’s City Room – desks occupied by a female, Asian, Latino, Black and Gay reporter – was “Minority Row” and accepted the casual title afforded him as “The Gay Reporter,” but was quick to sound a defense he would return to often: “I am not a propagandist. My existence is a political stand” (Mehren, 1982).

Before Shilts ever began writing about Harvey Milk, the idea of a biography on Milk’s extraordinary life was born in a West Village coffee shop in New York City as Michael Denny and his friends began to process the news that Milk had been murdered. Denny continued to

ponder the idea that a biographical treatment of Milk's life was not only necessary, but potentially profitable. Denny said,

Everyone was afraid there was going to be a great backsliding in gay rights, where we had hit our high point, and then watch it all be swept away. So we came up with this idea of having a biography written on Harvey (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

As time passed and through the controversial trial of Milk's accused assassin, Dan White, the idea of book continued to percolate. In 1980, Denny remembered meeting Shilts, an ambitious young reporter in San Francisco during a meal that also included Armistead Maupin and Cleve Jones. At the time, Shilts was scraping by on unemployment (the *Newsroom* program on KQED having coming to an end and his *Chronicle* staff hiring yet to have occurred). Denny recalls,

Randy was poor and had to have a job to keep living, so we worked out a deal whereby we would pay an advance of \$4,000 to \$5,000, and have Randy write up a 30,000 word essay on Harvey, who knew him well. Then I would be able to use that and he could get paid, but then I could use that essay as a proposal to try and get a book contract, which is in fact, what happened (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

Denny recalls Shilts' treatment of Milk's story was "very impressive" and it was published by *Christopher Street* magazine, a gay liberation publication based in New York City. Translating the Milk essay into a book, however, as "an uphill fight," Denny said (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011). Denny personally handled the presentation and "pitch" of the Milk biography to the editorial boards at St. Martin's Press, where he worked at the time, and found a lackluster response. Most of the concern about a Milk biography centered on the idea that he was too local, or too regional of a character to inspire any interest outside of California, and that topics about gay politicians would lack widespread appeal among readers. Denny persisted and said

In those days we used to have sales conferences twice a year where you go to an auditorium and the whole sales force would gather, with all the editors, and this would be 200 or 300 people. You would present the new list of books and describe each one. Every other editor absolutely refused to present the Milk book, so I ended up presenting it at the sales meeting. I got up on stage and presented the book, and then one salesman said he had read Randy's article or manuscript and was very disturbed about the description of the Mine Shaft Bar ... There was a description there of fist fucking. This guy simply did not believe that it was possible. I remember I had a moment then where I wanted the floor to just sort of open up underneath me so that I could just disappear. I went on to explain what fist fucking was, and you could have heard a pin drop (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

After lengthy arguments, and a little strong-arming by Denny and some of his bosses, the idea of a Harvey Milk biography was given the green light. The approval came with a paltry \$12,000 advance payment for Shilts – barely enough to cover his travel and other expenses in the long months of research and writing ahead. Shilts would later make large claims about the overall success of *The Mayor of Castro Street*, a book that did win favorable reviews, but was far from a best-seller. Denny said, “I think it sold somewhere between 9,000 and 12,000 copies in cloth, and we put Randy out on a sort of abbreviated book tour” (a tour that included stops before gay liberation organizations, including one or two who had surprisingly never heard of Harvey Milk despite their active role in the still-developing gay rights movement and his New York roots) (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

After the book was published and during its short publicity tour, Shilts told Randy Alfred, host of KSAN Radio's “The Gay Life” weekly news program, that he took 10 months to write Milk's story and went broke in the process – living off a small advance from a still skittish-St. Martin's Press and unemployment checks from the State of California. He prepared for *Mayor of Castro Street* as he would again later for *And the Band Played On*, by reading as much James Michener material as he could get his hands on. Shilts was particularly drawn to Michener's style

in *Hawaii*, a 1959 best-seller about the first citizens of the Hawaiian islands that artfully demonstrated Michener's episodic, narrative style that mixes actual history and anthropology with fictional devices, including internal thoughts and reconstructed dialogue between central figures (Alfred, 1982). "I read *Hawaii* by James Michener, and that gave me the concept of doing books where you take people and have them represent sort of different forces in history and different social groups," Shilts said (Wills, 1993). It was a style that won both praise and scorn – the latter of which raised loud questions about how Shilts could actually know what particular actors in his story were thinking or saying at any particular moment in time. But Shilts believed his "reporter's eye view" of Milk's life and death and the resulting actions in San Francisco and beyond made for a fascinating story, and one that is appropriately told "through a reporter's point of view, which aren't bad eyes, which isn't a bad way to look at this story" (Alfred, 1982).

Shilts' unapologetic amity for Milk shows through, even with unflattering references to Milk and his private life on full display, and even though the Milk story ends on a tragic, violent note. A further example is found in Shilts' praise of Milk as a natural legendary figure for gay people, but also as an extremely naïve political operative. "When you look at what (Harvey) did, he registered voters, he walked and canvassed precincts, he built his economic clout," Shilts said. "Well, that's as old-fashioned American as you can get and he didn't expect to be gunned down by a colleague whom he should be debating" (Alfred, 1982).

Shilts included in his research of Milk's life the fact that the ground-breaking San Francisco pol always sought to keep reporters as part of a friendly relationship. Shilts said,

I always thought that Harvey loved me, but in doing the research for the book, I found out that he sort of thought of me as this very obnoxious, unpredictable guy. But I always thought that Harvey liked me a lot, but it was just that he was following his number one rule: always be nice to reporters (Alfred, 1982).

The “White Night” riots that erupted in San Francisco on May 21, 1979 following the conviction of former San Francisco Supervisor Dan White on lesser included charges in the assassinations of Milk and Mayor George Moscone, afforded Shilts additional insights into the Milk story and reveals an important time when Shilts had to address the sometimes thin line between objective journalist and entrenched member of the gay community. Working as a freelance reporter at the time for KQED-TV’s *Newsroom* program, Shilts covered not only the violent and angry reaction among gays to White’s near-acquittal for killing two persons, but also the aftermath. He noted,

I remember being at the City Hall the day after the riot. I was working for (KQED) Channel 9 then and I was at the press conference with Dianne Feinstein and everybody was saying how surprised they were that it happened. Well, I was saying, ‘Hey, I’m just a dumb reporter and I could tell you I knew there was going to be a riot, why don’t you guys know it?’ (Alfred, 1982).

Fellow gay journalist David Israels, writing at the time for *The Bay Area Guardian*, recalls Shilts dealt with the Milk and Moscone cases as breaking news, including the angry disbelief among his fellow gay citizens about the lesser conviction and resulting light sentence given to White.

Israels, who still today calls White “an outright murderer,” said

Randy was far more interested in what the meaning or repercussions of the verdict was in the wake of the assassinations and trial. On those issues I think, he was a reporter. He could act professionally and he was fair and balanced as most reporters do who claim that they are objective. But there really is no such thing as objectivity, and he never made any great claims to that. The very act of reporting creates an effect on the thing you are reporting about, there are some things you put in and some things that you leave out. You have to construct a story, a narrative. You are expected to be fair and to be balanced. I think that’s certainly how Randy presented himself and he was very insistent on that (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012).

Israels said Shilts talked to him on occasion about the pressure he felt from gay leaders to write articles that were more favorable, or at least more helpful, to gay civil rights causes. But Israels thinks, at least partially, Shilts enjoyed “stirring things up” with people on either side of an issue.

“Randy was a scamp,” Israels said. “Randy sometimes took delight in doing things that were annoying to those who wanted to be politically correct” (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012). He thinks Shilts knew that “sometimes he could report more critically on the community than people wanted him to, and the criticisms came, and he enjoyed some of those because they seem to testify to his, for want of a better term, his objectivity or professionalism” (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012).

Dan White’s light sentence for the deaths of Milk and Moscone meant he was slated to be back in the community after a rather light prison sentence of just over five years for the murders of Moscone and Milk. Shilts was cast in an interesting role by then – in January 1984 – as both reporter for *The San Francisco Chronicle* covering the implications of White’s pending release, and as a source for other reporters writing about what White’s release may mean to the gay community. Shilts wrote a lengthy story on White’s pending release that was picked up and carried in newspapers across California and the country, quoting a variety of sources including Mayor Feinstein, city supervisors, and his friend Bill Kraus, a former Milk aide (Shilts, 1984-a, p. A1). For its pick-up of the story, United Press International reduced its quotable sources down to Shilts (whom they referred to as “a widely-known writer on San Francisco’s homosexuals”) and turned his news account of posters of “Off White” appearing in the Castro District into first-person eyewitness reports from Shilts (rather than his story sources), and quoting him: “I think there are isolated individuals who are angry enough and crazy enough to hunt him down and kill him. There are people out there who want him dead” (United Press International, 1984).

Shilts noted that “People sometimes say to me, ‘Have you ever thought about writing fiction?’ and I always say, ‘I could not be as imaginative as the world is. What you get, you

couldn't make up'" (Wills, 1993). Shilts viewed part of getting the story, though, in such imaginative and amazing detail was analogous to being a good reporter:

Always asking extra questions – always, because there are two ways you can be a journalist. You can ask enough to get enough information for a story, or try to do more than enough because it is always the little connections that come out in side comments (Wills, 1993).

### *Shilts as Chronicler*

By any measure, Randy Shilts was a prolific newspaper writer. His editors and colleagues often marveled at how many column inches of copy he was able to churn out on a regular basis, and not just on topics that had captured his interest. For example, in the middle of Shilts' growing portfolio of articles about the AIDS crisis, the destructive and deadly Loma Prieta earthquake struck the San Francisco Bay area just after 5 p.m. on Tuesday, October 17, 1989. Shilts was at his desk at the *Chronicle* in his new role as assistant city editor, and along with reporter and friend Susan Sward, coordinated the literally hundreds of news reports and updates pouring in from *Chronicle* reporters and outside sources as the scope of the 6.9 magnitude quake became known. In the end, 63 people died, more than 3,700 were injured and many thousands more were left homeless. Shilts was later tapped by editors at the *Chronicle* to lead compilation of the newspaper stories and photographs of the quake to be published in a bound book. Friend and fellow journalist David Israels said he was impressed at Shilts' ability to pull such a large and developing story together and recalls,

I remember talking to Randy about that, asking him 'How the hell did you do that?' He just looked blasé about it and just said, 'That's what I do. They picked me because I write so fast.' Here he was at the computer and he was getting how many reports from out in the field, sending in reports, and he pulled it all together, that is a pretty amazing accomplishment (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012).

The distinguishing characteristic of Shilts' reporting, however, beyond covering general assignment or other local stories, has to be the direction or outline it provides for Shilts' overall scholarship on AIDS, gay civil rights, and gay military service. Neither Shilts nor his editors at the *Chronicle* seemed to make much of an effort to separate his reporting on various topics from his work on other published works (whether it be books or magazine columns), from his weekly editorial columns coming until the title "AIDS: The Inside Story." A classic example is found in the *Chronicle's* coverage of the sad "milestone" achieved as the number of U.S. AIDS cases recorded by the Centers for Disease Control topped 100,000 in July 1989. Shilts wrote poignantly,

Someday this week in suburban Atlanta, the AIDS program of the federal Centers for Disease Control will receive a phone call from a state health department providing its latest statistics on the disease. The calls come in every day of the week, but this one will mark the watershed in the history of acquired immune deficiency syndrome: it will put the number of diagnosed AIDS cases in the United States over 100,000....And still the disease rages (Shilts, 1989-b, p. A1).

Shilts recorded that the "march" of AIDS across America had been swift: In six and a half years the epidemic reached 50,000 cases; the next 50,000 cases were found in just the 18 short months that followed. Also revealed: "There have been no new, novel, or surprising outbreaks of the disease. Indeed, the people who have tended to get AIDS are just getting it in far greater numbers" (Shilts, 1989-b, p. A1).

Shilts signaled other problems, however, that reflected his growing fear that the AIDS story had become blasé and tuned out to many Americans:

Although heterosexual AIDS is emerging as a dark and chewing problem for minorities in inner cities, the national heterosexual epidemic some experts feared several years ago has not materialized. Although AIDS is turning into a disease of the underclass on the East Coast, it remains largely a disease of gay men in most other parts of the country (Shilts, 1989-b, p. A1).

Gay men, at the time of Shilts' story, made up 61 percent of all AIDS cases in America; one in five cases in California alone. Shilts said the feared "second epidemic wave" of HIV and AIDS had not materialized to any great measure in the heterosexual community, although intravenous drug users, their partners and their children were at high risk. Even the feared risk to heterosexual populations via prostitution or other portions of the sex trade had not surfaced in any great way. "The bulk of white heterosexual cases in the coming years will be less likely coming from sexual contact than from blood transfusions dating back to the early 1980s," Shilts wrote (Shilts, 1989-b, p. A4). Shilts chose to quote AIDS expert June Osborn as noting the possibility of a "bleak nightmare" in which 40,000 new cases of AIDS would emerge each year – but because they were among gay men and other underclass segments of society – there would be widespread acceptance of AIDS as just a reality for some Americans.

Shilts' boyfriend and live-in lover during this period, Steve Newman, recalls covering the AIDS beat was taking a great toll on Randy. Fully engaged and convinced that HIV and AIDS was "the story" of the gay liberation movement for a generation, Shilts had trouble letting loose of the stories he wrote. Newman reported that

He was convinced that it was a very important story and that others would not report it as well or as completely as he would. He would say to me, 'If I don't report this, no one will, and people will just keep on dying.' But it really took a toll on him. He would come home from reporting and be very beaten-down and quite devastated from the reactions he would get from some people. He would come home night after night and take a Quaalude and then start drinking heavily, and by the end of the evening, he was just blasted, and day after day it was no fun watching such a brilliant person drag themselves down in such a way in order to deal with what people were saying about him (S. Newman, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

Newman said he decided to confront Shilts about the situation and met with a brief flash of anger at the suggestion that he give up the AIDS beat and let someone else do some of the writing. "He

was furious with me,” Newman said. “He felt like it was the most important subject of our generation and that it was happening to a very marginalized population and that no one was going to report about it” (S. Newman, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

Shilts stepped outside of the AIDS story for one column that foreshadowed homosexual debates yet to gain traction – that of gay marriage or domestic partnerships for same-sex couples. Using his column to explore a local “domestic partners” proposition that would apply only to San Francisco – Proposition S – Shilts linked the desire of some gay couples to register their partnerships with the city (as would be allowed via Proposition S) as helpful to building understanding of AIDS. Once again, we see Shilts’ worldview that words via journalism could perhaps change minds – quoting local activists and health officials that promoting stable relationships among gays could help promote further understanding and support for AIDS funding. “By allowing gay partners to get some form of official recognition for their relationships,” Shilts wrote, “(activists) feel it will help reinforce the message they’ve been dispensing throughout the AIDS epidemic: Reduce sexual contacts and don’t spread this disease” (Shilts, 1989-b, p. A4). Shilts downplayed more controversial aspects of Proposition S that would provide bereavement benefits for unmarried couples (such as work leave), and requirements for hospitals to grant visitation rights to same sex couples as they do to married couples. Using the personal stories of gay men who had lost partners because of AIDS and other causes, Shilts called opponents to Proposition S “vicious” and “callous” and concluded,

There is a cruel incongruity here. On one hand, some conservative clerics have fiercely criticized gay men for not rushing into monogamous relationships with the advent of AIDS. Now the same clergymen are violently opposing a law that could foster such pairings. Gay men quite literally are damned if they do and damned if they don’t (Shilts 1989-g, p. A4).

The measure ultimately failed in a razor-thin vote margin of just 1,686 votes on November 7, 1989, failing 50.4 percent to 49.5 percent with 168,178 votes cast citywide (San Francisco Public Library, 2013). Shilts and others were gravely disappointed by the loss, worried that it signaled a weakening of gay political strength in the city. Mainstream media *had* covered Proposition S, but with the election coming just a month after a devastating earthquake, coverage had faded.

Shilts' disdain with American media coverage of gay-related issues was always seemingly at the surface, particularly its coverage of the AIDS crisis. In an August 3, 1985 *Chronicle* article carried on the news pages (as opposed to the editorial or opinion pages and in the days before Shilts was given an opinion column) Shilts complained about the "recent explosion in media coverage of AIDS" in the days following the July 25, 1985 disclosure by famed Hollywood leading man Rock Hudson that he had contracted AIDS. Shilts concluded, "The new-found interest in AIDS only highlights the sorry truth that most American media have given the AIDS story only haphazard attention from the start" – but Shilts would later note the Hudson disclosure as a "demarcation point" (Shilts, 1987-c, p. xxi) in the American understanding and awareness of AIDS. At the time, though, Shilts' bitterness slipped in:

It should not have taken the diagnosis of a movie star to nudge the nation's television networks, newsmagazines and national dailies into serious AIDS coverage. By anybody's standards, more than 12,000 Americans dead or dying from a disease nobody even heard of just four years ago is a giant news story. Still, outside San Francisco, the subject has evaded the kind of thorough coverage any comparable threat to public health would engender (Shilts, 1985).

Expanding on his theme, Shilts told *San Francisco Focus* magazine that

I think history will record the news media's response on AIDS as one of the darkest chapters in our profession. After Vietnam and Watergate, reporters became very aggressive in their pursuit of the truth. We stopped settling for press releases. We were going to find out what the truth was. Not the official truth, but the real truth. But in covering AIDS, we've generally had newswriting by press release (Kelley, 1989, p. 101).

Schwitzer (2004) affirmed the journalistic challenge Shilts alluded to and noted that journalists who cover medical and health-related issues have formed the Association of Health Care Journalists as an independent advocacy group to increase the quality of reporting on health care issues. Since its start in 2001, the group has attracted more than 750 members from all areas of media who are attempting to move health care reporting beyond simple parroting of medical and scientific experts, and more aligned with other types of investigative reporting. Schwitzer reported that health care journalists remain concerned with “sensationalism, commercialism, single-source stories, and interpretation of statistics and medical evidence ... Unbalanced, unquestioning coverage of new drugs ... concern about conflicts of interest leading to troublesome entanglements of sponsors, researchers and journalists” (p. 2).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the “dark chapter” Shilts found in news media coverage of AIDS bypassed his employer, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, setting them out as the exception, noting that he and his editors had decided early on to move the AIDS story from “just” a science or medical story, and one that also had social and public policy implications. Stories on AIDS were divided between various reporters at the paper, and Shilts took credit for “challenging government officials and health officials” with his reporting. He added,

Most of the people in charge of the federal agencies are eminent scientists or doctors, and for some reason reporters feel insecure about challenging them. Well, those guys wear white coats and have Doctor in front of their names, but they can be as dissembling and deceitful as any politician. And that’s the way I treat them (Kelley, 1989, p. 103).

Through his stories for the *Chronicle*, Shilts was honing his later thesis based on the fact that “the groups most victimized by acquired immune deficiency syndrome are not exactly an honor roll of America’s favorite minorities” (Shilts, 1985). Risking a broken arm as he patted himself and his employer on the back, Shilts wrote, “It is noteworthy that San Francisco is both the only

city where the local media have most consistently covered AIDS and the city which boasts the best public AIDS educational and treatment programs” (Shilts, 1985) – a statement that displayed Shilts’ true belief in the power of journalism to shape and even change realities.

Shilts said mainstream journalism struggled so much with covering AIDS because of the nature of its transmission, primarily via anal intercourse among gay men. “The media has never been comfortable with anything homosexual,” he said. “They did none of the stories that would have saved men’s lives. The media didn’t do anything political – like on the Reagan administration’s failures....The media’s job is to be the watchdog of government, but it didn’t do that, so the government was left to do things as they saw fit” (Reynolds, 1987).

For a July 27, 1987 *Chronicle* article, Shilts went back to his hometown of Aurora, Illinois for a report titled, “The Heartland Loses Its Innocence.” Shilts wrote about the growing reality of AIDS in small-town America with a clear sense of enterprise – that he was *uncovering* the AIDS story for the folks back home in Illinois – “a change that AIDS has brought to all of America this summer, including Aurora, Illinois” (Shilts, 1987-a, p. A2-3). Shilts linked the arrival of AIDS – and 11 diagnosed cases in the county of just over 300,000 residents at the time – to the deterioration of the downtown shopping district of Aurora, and the “closing closet doors” of a once thriving, but apparently fragile homophile movement in the community.

A shift did occur in Shilts’ work at the *Chronicle* and can be found in a particularly prolific period in October 1989 when he produced four weekly columns (of about 1,000 words each) and five major byline stories – in addition to coordinating the *Chronicle’s* extensive coverage of the devastating Loma Prieta earthquake. The earthquake itself, and its aftermath, could not be separated from the realities of AIDS for Shilts, as evidenced with his column one month after the deadly shake, opining that “death, an issue once so comfortably distant, suddenly

becomes an imminent threat” and linking the fears of thousands of Bay Area residents amidst aftershocks rattling their homes with the fear people with AIDS must feel. “Death becomes a preoccupation,” Shilts wrote, not revealing whether it was his own personal struggle of which he was writing. “Sleeping is difficult, nightmares are frequent. A vague, nameless depression sets it” – feelings all too familiar to an estimated 35,000 gay men in San Francisco (one in 20 city residents at that time) living with HIV and AIDS. Buttressing his provocative analogy, Shilts noted, “Experts say the psychological stresses imposed by the earthquake bear striking similarities to those raised by infection with a virus that can kill you” (Shilts, 1989-i, p. A11). One expert quoted by Shilts compared living with AIDS to suffering the trauma of a massive earthquake everyday – and noting that while earthquakes may have widespread impact on the entire community, a virus such as HIV leaves some of its victims feeling isolated and targeted: “HIV-infected people typically must work and live within a larger society that barely recognizes the huge numbers of HIV-stricken people in its midst. This leads to a depressing sense of isolation.” While Shilts’ column represented an interesting direction in which to take the *Chronicle’s* ongoing coverage of the Loma Prieta earthquake and the AIDS epidemic dramatically impacting the city, the tone and basis for the column must have struck some readers as a rather odd correlation, held together by a rather thin string of relevance.

Elsewhere in his flurry of words in the fall of 1989, Shilts took up release of a new book titled, “The Myth of Heterosexual AIDS” by author Michael Fumento, for one of his first columns. He openly worried messages such as this would continue to erode support for more money for research and treatment of AIDS and was predicated on the absurd idea of white privilege that presupposes that some people are simply immune from immunodeficiency viruses, perhaps on the basis of their race, class or even gender. Reminding readers that the crack

cocaine-sex connection in a large part of the nation's urban areas was fueling widespread HIV transmission (as he suggested gay bathhouses had done before), he still doubted the powerful would turn their attention to this tragedy. "Without a heterosexual threat – or more accurately, a white heterosexual threat – both the media and the government seem far less focused on the epidemic," Shilts wrote, noting that one fellow report once confided to him, "If you think we're going to be doing cover stories on Puerto Rican women in the Bronx, you're crazy" (Shilts, 1989-c, p. A5). Three days later, in a news article and in his opinion column, Shilts led with criticism of federal funding for AIDS that trailed that allocated for drought relief for farmers when covering an American Foundation for AIDS Research conference that drew 2,500 doctors, nurses and researchers to San Francisco (Shilts & Tuller, 1989, p. A10). *Chronicle* readers were given a second day of coverage for the conference, with Shilts reporting that federal officials expected a "dawning age of intervention with AIDS" that could help reduce the number of cases expected in the coming decade (Shilts, 1989-d, p. A4). Shilts' article was mainly focused on remarks from Dr. Anthony Fauci, associate director for AIDS research with the National Institutes of Health. Fauci, who eventually would earn Shilts' scorn for the manner in which the NIH approved AIDS treatment drugs, told Shilts that "We have proven conceptually that you can control HIV infection. We can't cure it yet... but the skeptics who said that we could never find a cure or control of it have already been proven incorrect." Shilts contextualized Fauci's optimism with a prominent reminder, however, that no vaccine to prevent HIV infection was forthcoming any time soon. Coming on the heels of these reports, two days later Shilts then offered a nearly 6,000-word story that explored the federal government's role in helping force down the cost of expensive drugs for AIDS treatment, such as AZT. Shilts quoted a top U.S. Department of Health and Human Services official questioning the "social responsibility" of

some drug manufacturers, focusing specifically on the ongoing battle with massive drug maker Burroughs-Wellcome, the manufacturer of AZT (Shilts, 1989-e, p. A4). Shilts would follow up this article with another, more lengthy piece just weeks later that further explored the AIDS drug pricing wars – noting that some manufacturers had become known as “the great Satan’s of the AIDS epidemic” – and its particular impact on a small company known as Lymphomed, makers of an aerosolized version of the antibiotic drug pentamidine, used to treat pneumonia and other lung infections (Shilts, 1989-e, p. A4). Consistent with his normally balanced approach, Shilts told of the struggles to get AIDS treatment drugs into the hands of those who needed them – but offered context:

Few argue the right of the public to be defended from extortionate pricing on drugs crucial to the public health. On the other hand, many public health officials and AIDS researchers are worrying that the politicization of drug pricing may drive pharmaceutical companies away from manufacturing AIDS medications (Shilts, 1989-e, p. A4).

Shilts attempted to link the struggle of people living with HIV to include hemophiliacs for three articles (covering more than 4,000 words) in early December 1989 that were likely part of a larger effort to continue to keep alive the symbiotic relationship hemophiliacs with HIV shared with homosexuals with HIV. Shilts’ analysis of the responses to people infected with HIV via their needed blood products rang familiar. He noted although more than 60 percent of the nation’s 20,000 hemophiliacs carried the HIV virus, “government agencies and private organizations have been slow to confront the AIDS problem, leaving hemophiliacs to suffer from substandard health care.” He noted special problems hemophiliacs faced, including lack of knowledge of HIV treatment by their physicians who were unaccustomed to dealing with the emerging virus, and the ironic reality that although “hemophiliacs are more assimilated into the general population than other high-risk (HIV) groups, (they) have been subject to some of the

cruellest discrimination reported in the AIDS epidemic” (Shilts, 1989-f, p. A1; Shilts, 1989-h, p. A11). Perhaps inspired by the calls for reduced drug costs for people living with AIDS (who coincidentally, and unknown to the readers of his columns and articles included Shilts himself), Shilts churned out additional editorial columns that explored the fact that the need was not for altogether new treatment programs, but for more parity in how they are accessed by all those in need. A further complication he warned about concerned the fact that as long as access to basic health care coverage eluded (at that time by federal estimates) more than 31 million Americans, coalitions would be needed to bridge gaps in health care for all needs – not just AIDS. Shilts quoted medical experts and ethicists as saying that a growing need was emerging for AIDS support groups “to join with other constituencies who are underserved by the way America provides its health care, such as the elderly, and, of course, the 31 million uninsured, most of whom are among the working poor” (Shilts, 1989-f, p. A4).

For all of Shilts’ columns championing the need to lower costs for AIDS treatment drugs, and the need for more government-supported research for a vaccine or “cure” of some sort, he still could win and influence enemies perhaps quicker than any reporter who ventured to cover *any* gay issue. His December 11, 1989 column – “Patiently Tiptoeing through the World of Word Twisters” – took on a “helpful glossary of politically correct terms” handed out to reporters at a recent AIDS conference. His attempt at humorous commentary would win him even more scorn, especially among gay leaders. Declaring the efforts “gobbledygook” and recording the arrival of the “AIDS Word Police” who sought to enforce “AIDSpeak,” Shilts openly lamented the effort by some to change the nomenclature of language from “AIDS victim” or “AIDS sufferer” to “person with AIDS”, or “prostitute” to “sex industry worker,” or “IV drug abuser” to “injection drug user.” He noted that “In no medical crisis has the politics of language

become such a central issue, leaving journalists and researchers to tiptoe their way through a mine field of linguistic sensibilities.” Shilts said the problem with this form of “word doctoring” was that it represented what he saw as “well-intentioned eagerness to use the language to bend the public mind” as a tool of manipulation rather than illumination. Shilts said,

What’s most troubling about all this grouching from AIDS groups, however, is that it distracts attention from the truly profound issues confronting our society in the HIV epidemic. At a time when the federal government is not devoting anything resembling adequate resources to present the epidemic’s spread and to speed the development of treatments – both issues that are life and death matters for hundreds of thousands of people – it’s difficult to take the complaints about the word ‘sufferer’ very seriously (Shilts, 1989-l, p. A8).

Controversy also followed Shilts’ columns and news coverage of protests by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT-UP. Shilts extended his critique of ACT-UP by taking on its provocative forms of protest – most especially its interrupting Catholic masses and vandalizing Catholic churches as forms of protest. Shilts posed typically pointed questions in his narration:

What if Catholic militants vandalized the headquarters of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation? Wouldn’t ACT-UP be screaming ‘Nazis!’? ACT UP says every act of science should be based on the standard of saving lives, but does the blocking of the Golden Gate Bridge do anything to save lives? (Shilts, 1989-m, p. A4)

Shilts open battle with the leaders of ACT-UP was at the center of several of his columns, including a December 18, 1989 effort that scathingly declared, “If I didn’t know better, I’d swear that the AIDS protestors who have been disrupting services and vandalizing Catholic churches... were being paid by some diabolical reactionary group dedicating to discrediting the gay community” (Shilts, 1989-m, p. A4). Shilts called their actions the embrace of a troubling, yet understandable double standard given the Catholic church’s opposition to distribution of condoms to prevent HIV, opposition to any sexual relations except those contained within the confines of a heterosexual relationship, and their financing of a strong campaign to defeat a

domestic partnership ordinance (Proposition S) in the November 1989 election in San Francisco. Despite all this, however, gay protestors did not have the prerogative to deny Catholics the right to their own worship and beliefs, he declared. Shilts said the ACT-UP protests targeting churches were “not only morally wrong, but it is strategically stupid” and that militant AIDS protestors were missing the sad history reflected in attacks on Catholics believers. “There is a difference between opposing the doctrine of the Catholic hierarchy and opposing Catholics,” he wrote.

With the ink barely dry on Shilts’ blistering analysis of the ACT-UP protests, editors at the *Chronicle* interestingly assigned him and printed a Christmas day *news* story on the same topic (“ACT-UP’s Acting Up Gets Mixed Reviews”). Shilts’ article quoted several gay and non-gay leaders expressing disapproval of ACT-UP’s tactics – which had included a debilitating rush-hour blockade of the Golden Gate Bridge in February 1989. Shilts attempted to explain that some of the actions attributed to ACT-UP were actually the work of a splinter group from the sect, but added that ACT-UP and all other AIDS protest groups “enter 1990 with sagging support among gays and tougher challenges than they faced in 1989” (Shilts, 1989-n, p. A6). The decision by the *Chronicle* to continue to let Shilts navigate between opinion columnist and news writer on the same subjects (such as the ACT-UP protests) served to overshadow a well-written, 4,000 piece analysis of “the year in AIDS” also published Christmas Day 1989.

As 1989 drew to a close, KQED-TV announced it had tapped its former *Newsroom* reporter Randy Shilts to host and narrate a major documentary titled, “*Wrestling with AIDS.*” Dubbed a comprehensive look at six challenging issues expected to emerge in the AIDS battle of the 1990s, *San Francisco Chronicle* entertainment writer John Stanley declared that “if anyone is qualified to talk about the shifting issues of AIDS, and the new dilemmas that the 1990s will bring, it is probably Randy Shilts” (Stanley, 1989). Shilts told Stanley the program would move

beyond his oft-stated central thesis that the government and researchers weren't doing enough to address AIDS and more toward "broader social issues" that AIDS had introduced, including paying for rising health care treatment, more universal access to health care and drugs, euthanasia or assisted suicide issues for terminally ill patients, and the future of gay and AIDS-related political activism in a clearly decimated LGBTQ community. Shilts promised that the 90-minute special would move beyond TV's usual role of being "a diary of the obvious" and said, "What I like about this show is that it's ahead of the story; it's dealing with issues just now emerging and accelerating" (Stanley, 1989). A long portion of the program was devoted to suicide pacts or "euthanasia cocktail parties" organized for those with no hope of any further quality of life under the crushing reality of AIDS. During this segment, where Shilts profiled a young gay couple in San Francisco who had already made elaborate plans to commit suicide together, Shilts acknowledged knowing 25 other people who had similar plans, or had already carried them out. He said most of them "didn't commit suicide out of despair. The experts call it 'rational suicide,' because the decision to die is fairly well-thought-out weighing the risks of life against the benefits of death'" (Shilts, Smith, & Schwarz, 1989).

Watching Shilts narrate "*Wrestling with AIDS*" takes on added meaning and dimension in the years following his 1994 death. It is noteworthy that as Shilts recorded the stand-up segments and interviews featured in the nationally-distributed (and later local Emmy nominated) documentary, he was himself wrestling with the reality of HIV and AIDS in his own life. That he had knowledge of others who had personal suicide plans, and had "rationally" thought out the idea of ending their own life before it became too awful to bare, is not at all surprising with post-script knowledge that Shilts would deliver with his HIV "coming out" four years later in February 1993.

Shilts' work on the "*Wrestling with AIDS*" documentary came as Shilts and the *Chronicle* announced he was taking "a year's sabbatical from his coverage of the AIDS story" and that he would turn his attentions elsewhere. Shilts offered that the only reason for the shift was that "I am totally burned out" (having written more than 60,000 words in stories and columns on the pages of the *Chronicle* in a flurry of activity in 1989 alone). He added

I'm feeling completely depleted. Until this year, I hadn't felt burned out, and I didn't have a lot of sympathy for those who said they were burned out. I thought they were weak. Then I started having nightmares. In my dreams, I was wandering around funerals, screaming, 'I can't take it anymore!' I've spent eight years recording the decimation of my generation. I need a break (Shilts, 1990-c, p. A9).

Shilts' regular editorial page column "AIDS: The Inside Story" ended with 1989 and his regular contributions to the news pages of the *Chronicle* were limited to major events, such as the Sixth International AIDS Conference conducted in San Francisco in June 1990 (for which he produced daily stories and columns throughout the week-long event). As a lead up to that, Shilts covered an opening session featuring Academy Award-winning actress Elizabeth Taylor – making her first appearance since a recent hospitalization. Taylor's appearance was a benefit for the International Fund for AIDS. He followed up his news coverage of Taylor's brief stop with an editorial page column – labeled "Analysis & Opinion" on the editorial pages by taking a tongue-in-cheek look at the "AIDS celebrity circuit" (Shilts, 1990-c, p. A9). Shilts drew attention to the fact that the major researchers, imminent virologists and scientists of types from around the world, were secondary stars to the actual stars, such as Taylor, who showed up. "It's a world where a man can be called the world's leading expert in treating AIDS patients but he doesn't really treat many patients because he's too busy giving speeches and interviews about treating patients," Shilts wrote. He did not spare himself, however, noting that it was also "a world in

which you go on TV to talk about covering a story that you're not really covering because you're on TV talking about covering it." And while he may have lamented in print about giving speeches about what he was writing about, Shilts was afforded some outstanding opportunities to make his point in front of important audiences. Shilts' rising celebrity status following the release of *And the Band Played On* afforded him a prime speaking position at the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montreal in 1989, where he served as the keynote speaker before an audience of 12,000, and urged scientists to speed their research into the disease:

You in science are not getting hundreds of millions of dollars in government research grants simply because you look fabulous in white coats. You're getting that money because you're supposed to produce under the tightest deadline pressure the epidemic demands. Any solution to HIV infection that comes only after most HIV-infected people are dead will not be relevant science (Mutter, 1989).

Shilts added,

Having compassion for people with AIDS is like having compassion for starving people. Starving people don't need compassion - they need food. It does no good to tell starving people that the food is growing in some field somewhere. Those hungering for treatment news are merely being told that the grain is growing in the field, somewhere, out of reach (Mutter, 1989).

While his pleas on behalf of people living with AIDS met with applause, some boos and hisses emerged when Shilts cautioned AIDS protesters that they

would be held accountable for the manner in which they conduct their anger. Expressing anger can give you a warm fuzzy feeling inside, but this conference is not a therapy session. It is not enough to be angry, if that anger is not paired with intelligence about its best tactical timing and its best strategic targets. Anger that does not move us forward, that, too, is irrelevant (Mutter, 1989).

After his unusual speech given as keynote speaker at a major international health conference (as opposed to scientist or medical expert), Shilts claimed the mantra of objectivity:

Personally, I'm not an ideological person. I don't think you can be a journalist and really have a political ideology, because you tend to see fallacies in all ideologies... The whole problem of AIDS from the start was that liberals were trying to be sweet and not tell the whole story, and conservatives were determined to downplay the whole story, and I felt what I wanted to do was to get the whole story out. At some point I just have to say, I think my work has integrity. I think my work is honest (Crimp, 2004, p. 124).

Dr. Marcus Conant believes Shilts' Montreal speech represents a demarcation point where Shilts moved from simply journalist to advocate:

He was saying, in essence, that I am positive that we're going to come up with some way we're going to treat this thing like diabetes so that you can live with it for the rest of your life, but we've got to find the insulin for it right now. He became more and more an activist in that sense toward the end of his life because it was a matter of survival at that point. (M. Conant, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

While the media reports of Shilts' remarks at Montreal were generally positive and helped solidify Shilts in his position as the nation's premier journalistic expert on HIV and AIDS, the event was not without its problems. Shilts' friend Cleve Jones recalls an "awkward" Shilts who attempted a joke about AIDS as part of his preparatory remarks, a joke that fell flat. Jones said,

He had an amazing ability to put his foot in his mouth sometimes. I remember being with him at an International AIDS Conference... Randy got up in this room full of scientists and researchers and it was kind of hushed and dramatic, and he made this really stupid joke. He made this appallingly bad joke in front of this room full of scientists, researchers, activists and people with AIDS (PWAs), and all sorts of important people and he said, 'You know, I'm often asked if one can contract HIV from a mosquito. And I say only if you're having unprotected anal sex with a mosquito!' You could have heard a pin drop in that room. It just appalled the audience. Then one guy from the back of the room shouted out, 'Randy, you're such an asshole!' (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

In addition to his major speech at Montreal, Shilts was previously a special speaker at the historic and prestigious Commonwealth Club of California. In his September 29, 1987 speech

(coinciding with the release of *And the Band Played On*) Shilts spoke on the “politics of AIDS” and laid bare his belief that the media played a strong role in setting the agenda not only for society, but also for the government:

In our media age, the press and government are indivisible. The news media sets the agenda for social issues. To a large extent, it sets the agenda for what government will deal with. Nothing illustrates this fundamental reality of our day better than the AIDS epidemic (Saum, 2004, p. 282).

Shilts used his point about the interconnectedness of the media and social issues to demonstrate how government inaction was fueled, in part, by a lack of media attention to the rise of AIDS. Shilts said he had done his part, but “because of the lack of media attention, it was difficult to mobilize the federal government into allocating enough resources” and he went on to “suggest that the difference in the media coverage was determined by who was being stricken” (Saum, 2004, p. 283). AIDS continued to be covered as a “science story” Shilts told his audience, “not a serious public policy story that required the government to set priorities and develop resources” because “the media still avoided tough investigative stories on whether or not government policy was coinciding with needs” (Saum, 2004, p. 283). Why did this occur? Shilts suggests that it “wasn’t the aggressive prejudice that some militant gay leaders would assert, but it was functional (prejudice), nonetheless. It was functional in the news media as well: AIDS was considered a ‘gay’ story – not something to do manly investigative reporting on” (Saum, 2004, p. 284).

If Randy Shilts thought “making it” in mainstream journalism at one of the nation’s largest dailies and being invited to deliver policy-level speeches before respected audiences would lift him from the sometimes blistering criticism he had come to know firsthand during his days as a writer for gay publications, he surely was disabused of this idea quickly. Gay people in

San Francisco had opinions about Randy Shilts and what he wrote, and it didn't matter where he wrote his stories. While letters critical of Shilts and his work were somewhat rare on the opinion pages of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, letter writers to *The Bay Area Reporter*, a weekly gay newspaper, didn't hold back in their views. His reporting on the bathhouse issue was in fact the match that ignited a long-burning firestorm. Under a letter titled "Shilts is a sellout," one writer accused Shilts of "manufacturing the gay bathhouse/AIDS issue" as an issue close to his "objective heart," and said, "Shilts proves that power politics is alive and well and all gussied up in journalistic drag at the *Chronicle*" (Worden, 1984, p. 4). Another writer accused Shilts of engaging in "blue-nosed morality" and noted, "What I find even more intolerable is the *Chronicle's* use of biased reporting and the presentation of one reporter's opinions as news in this, and other articles on the subject by Mr. Shilts. If the *Chronicle* wishes to take a stand on this issue, it should do so on the editorial page as appropriate" (Goodman, 1984, p. 6). Another letter, titled "Gay homophobia," noted that "now we have this homophobic slime out of our own community in the person of Randy Shilts. His sickness is being spread to the straight community, most of whom would never consider closing the bathhouses" (Jansen, 1984, p. 6).

Additional letters followed Shilts' large article for the *Chronicle* about the two-day party and auction that marked the end of one of the city's most popular gay bathhouses, Sutro Baths. In his story – titled "A Farewell 'Orgy' at Sutro Baths" – Shilts noted that the city's famed "bisexual bathhouse threw in the towel" as "another casualty of the city's changing sexuality during the AIDS crisis" (Shilts, 1984-c, p. A7) Shilts noted that while gay customers still frequented the Sutro, patrons who identified as either heterosexual or bisexual had sworn off the baths in the midst of the AIDS crisis. Five-hundred guests attended the "orgy," which apparently was a provocative term Shilts and his editors used to mean meeting or gathering, rather than

sexual activity. Among the activities were remarks “by an AIDS victim who praised Sutro, a singer who mourned the baths’ demise” and a ceremonial burning of AIDS prevention brochures by five bathhouse employees who were losing their jobs. Letters quickly popped up in *the Bay Area Reporter* taking Shilts’ coverage to task. In a letter titled “Shilts without the L,” a *BAR* reader asked “Why does the *Chronicle* continue to keep a writer with a history of irresponsible journalism, especially when he continues with this behavior? I am referring to Randy Shilts and his recent article on the closing of the Sutro Bathhouse” (Folk, 1984, p. 6). The letter continued,

The Sutro closing that Randy Shilts described was a far cry from the type of event that actually occurred....He completely de-emphasized and distorted the reason for the actual closing. It was not because of the AIDS crisis, but because of political maneuvering...(causing) the public to be misinformed and misled (Folk, 1984, p. 6).

The writer concluded that the bathhouse closure was a “political injustice that has occurred surrounding the scapegoating of the bathhouses” and “apparently Mr. Shilts continues to be unaware of the damage that is caused by his insensitivity to issues which dramatically affect peoples’ lives” (Folk, 1984, p. 6). The owner of the now-defunct Sutro, Bill Jones, joined the chorus with a letter titled “Randy got it wrong again!” and noted:

If you want to know why the gay community dislikes the *Chronicle*’s token fag so much, just look at the headlines for his story on the closing of my bathhouse .... The headline said, ‘A farewell orgy at Sutro Baths’.... No one attending our party could possibly define it (as an orgy) and Randy (Shilts) was not there. Our Grand Closing Party was fun, but not that much fun and Randy Shilts has again sensationalized a very human story into something grotesque and fearful (Jones, 1984-a, p. 6).

Later in 1984 when the bathhouse issue was dying down, a bit, Shilts reignited criticism within the gay community via his commentary on gay political leaders – commentary that had included words such as “jerks” and “inept.” His remarks prompted one *BAR* reader to comment,

If Randy Shilts truly thinks that he is a ‘journalist first’ – presumably being one who impartially records facts and events – he is under a major misconception about himself. He is a commentator first. Read his articles. Read his interviews. How about his slur against gay leaders on page one of the *Chronicle*, which he later rationalized he did because he honestly thought it was funny? But don’t condemn excessively. Mr. Shilts at worst is only right in there with the rest of the pack who report about gay events .... It is a sad loss for the community that Mr. Shilts and others can’t get beyond the drag queen level. So he’s a commentator ... and a knowledgeable observer (Nelson, 1984, p. 2).

Another reader wrote that “Mr. Shilts is no more committed to acting responsibly than he is in pursuing journalistic ethics such as verifying his sources and ‘facts’” (Edwards, 1984, p. 2). One final letter took a jab at Shilts’ attractiveness (or unattractiveness) as a gay man by noting that “I just met Randy Shilts for the first time. Now I can see why he wants to close the baths” (Benedict, 1984, p. 6).

One letter in support of Shilts appeared on the editorial pages of *the Bay Area Reporter*, with a reader noting that

I am tired and angry to hear the continuing sarcastic, critical remarks related to Randy Shilts by the gay press. The bottom line of his message to us is – take responsibility for yourself and others. I have mixed feelings about closing the baths, but I do not have mixed feelings when I talk with other gay men who could not give a damn about who they sleep with, could care less what their health status is, mine, or others in the community. As Randy pointed out in his article of March 7, the epidemic is growing (Lader, 1984, p. 4).

The wording of the letter, remarkably, reflects how Shilts’ reportage had come to be viewed by many – the phrase of Randy’s “message to us” – reflects that many in the gay community were beginning to view Shilts’ words as cautionary, instructive and certainly directed toward specific positions as opposed to others. A truly “objective reporter” would have winced ever-so-slightly at the open suggestion that his reporting carried a “message” to the community that went far beyond any role as watchdog journalist. The letter writer also praised Shilts as among a small

group of “gay brothers” who were “helping sound the alarm about AIDS so long ago, very often at great ridicule from the very people they were trying to protect” (Lader, 1984, p. 4).

Criticism of Shilts was not limited to the opinion pages of *the Bay Area Reporter*. In a large news story addressing the political issues surrounding the proposed closure of gay bathhouses in San Francisco, *BAR* devoted most of its April 5, 1984 edition to covering the kerfuffle. *BAR* reporter George Mendenhall analyzed coverage the bathhouse issue was receiving in the mainstream press and noted

While television and print media appear to be balanced (on the issue of closure), there is increased criticism within the gay community of the coverage by gay reporter Randy Shilts of *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Increasingly, activists were openly calling Shilts prejudicial in his bathhouse articles (Mendenhall, 1984-b, p. 1).

Two weeks later, an April 19, 1984 front page story in *The Bay Area Reporter* reported that the Alice B. Toklas Lesbian/Gay Democratic Club had “denounced *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Randy Shilts who is responsible for the wrong message” on gay bathhouses (Pettit, 1984, p. 1). The story quoted Toklas Club President Randy Stallings as naming Shilts “the most homophobic person in the Bay Area” and that “I am sick to death that he continues to victimize the gay community in the name of objectivity... (via his) continuing blasts and inaccuracies written against our community.” The vote to “denounce” Shilts was taken by voice vote, with few dissensions heard in the crowd, *the BAR* reported. (Pettit, 1984, p. 2). The Toklas Club vote had followed an earlier “non-binding” vote of the Stonewall Gay Democratic Club that had chastised the bathhouse closure process, but stopped short of opposing outright closure, and made no mention of Shilts or his reporting (Mendenhall, 1984-b, p. 8). *BAR* reporter Brian Jones also took issue with Shilts as part of his coverage of newly released public health statistics regarding the rate of sexually-transmitted diseases among gay men. Jones focused his story on

the more than 60 percent drop in infection rates for all forms of STDs among gay men and noted, “The unprecedented drop in (venereal disease) rates indicates that most gay men have made dramatic changes in their sexual behavior as a response to the AIDS epidemic” (Jones, 1984-c, p. 1). Jones noted that the statistics showed rates of rectal gonorrhea, for which gay men were particularly susceptible, had risen dramatically between 1979-1983, but that a “statistical plateau” appeared to be forming with about 1,800 cases of being reported each quarter. Jones wrote,

Time was such news and such statistics hardly rated front-page attention. That changed early this year when a slight rise in venereal disease became the centerpiece for a major article in *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Under the headline, ‘AIDS Expert Says Bathhouses Should Close,’ gay reporter Randy Shilts’ February 3 story stated, ‘A new study by the San Francisco Department of Public Health shows that rectal gonorrhea among gay men is surging again’ (Jones, 1984-c, p. 4).

Jones disputed the claim of a “surge” made in Shilts’ story. Jones refuted Shilts’ reporting for its lack of use of statistical data to make relevant comparisons. Apparently not satisfied at that, and again placing Shilts in the context of being part of the news story and not just reporting on it, Jones wrote:

Questioned by *The Bay Area Reporter* after his article appeared, Shilts said he had not reviewed the statistics. He said he had relied solely on an interview with then-director of the health department’s Bureau of Communicable Diseases, Selma Dritz. Shilts’ article – and the slight upturn in VD rates it recorded – are widely regarded as having initiated the latest campaign to close the city’s bathhouses, sex clubs, and bookstores (Jones, 1984-c, p. 4).

Jones analysis of not only VD rates among gay men in the city – whether one believed they were going up or on a “statistical plateau” – seemed oddly fixated on Shilts’ reportage and its implied impact. Jones did quote local public health officials about the VD rates, but his inclusion of Shilts’ story and casting doubt on its accuracy reflected Shilts’ new role as a major voice in gay

politics in San Francisco (whether he wanted to remain *just* a newspaper reporter or not). Jones would later take to the “Viewpoints” page of *the BAR* to criticize Shilts and the *Chronicle* for its coverage of a recent census of gay men in the city. Shilts’ story emphasized the census was one of the first of its kind to measure how many gay men and women actually lived in the Bay Area, but Jones noted, “The silliness began, as so much silliness does, on the front page of *The San Francisco Chronicle*” and that the mainstream press had ignored the primary point of the study: “The biggest story of the whole affair is this: Why did the mainstream media ignore the tremendous change in sex habits documented in the study? That was, after all, the real point” (Jones, 1984-d, p. 2). Jones’ relationship with Shilts had a bit of a history – Jones (along with Shilts) had been one of 10 college journalists to be honored years earlier in writing contests sponsored by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation. Shilts says Jones “became my nemesis over the bathhouse issue and he just hated me. I think he was jealous because we had known each other going back to college and I was so successful” (Marcus, 1989).

Shilts’ coverage of a 1984 recruitment drive by San Francisco County Sheriff Michael Hennessey – that included a pitch for applicants at Chaps, a gay leather bar where patrons often dressed as cops anyway – drew additional disgust from some gay leaders for allegedly portraying the gay community in a bad light. Shilts wrote his story about Hennessey’s effort in a sardonic tone, noting the irony of a sheriff trying to recruit for new deputies among gay men who already like to dress like cops. The controversy Shilts’ story stirred, however, seemed to bite gay activists most painfully because it was later picked up by *The National Enquirer* and used in a splashy story about the different ways of San Francisco life – including the sheriff speaking at a gay leather bar. *The Bay Area Reporter* reported that Hennessey later apologized to his department and the community for the event, but quickly detailed how Shilts’ story had included

a photo of Hennessey speaking to a group of gay men partially clad in leather outfits, and the heavy use of Shilts' article by reporters from the tabloid *Enquirer*. Hennessey joined in the focus on Shilts' story by noting that he would not have held the recruitment forum at the gay leather bar if he had fully understood it was a gay bar and "the portrayal and light that it has (brought to the sheriff's department) by *The San Francisco Chronicle*" (Mendenhall, 1984b, p. 2). After *The National Enquirer* had its fun – the story titled "City Hell-Bent for Leather as Sheriff Recruits in Gay Bar" – highlighting the irony of Hennessey's actions, *BAR* reporter Dion B. Sanders was back with another story that both noted the *Enquirer* "has never made any attempt to conceal its hatred of gays" but also emphasized it had its article in the first place thanks to Shilts' reporting. Sanders wrote,

The *Enquirer* repeatedly referred to a story in the *Chronicle* – while neglecting to mention that the story was written by a gay reporter, Randy Shilts. Using such quotes as 'A lot of them (the patrons of Chaps) are already in uniform!' and quoting Shilts' article as reporting that Chaps 'draws the type of patrons who know a lot about punishment, if not about crime!' broadcasting to a readership of more than seven million nationwide Shilts' send-up of Hennessey's visit (Sanders, 1984, p. 2).

Criticism of Shilts and his reporting popped up elsewhere. His name was tossed around freely as a topic for discussion at some of the earliest AIDS-related public forums in San Francisco. An April 1984 forum organized by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation brought out Shilts critics – among them City Supervisor Harry Britt, the man who succeeded Harvey Milk as the city's only openly gay official. Britt walked a tight line between his call for "some very basic changes in how we conduct our sexual activity if we are to survive as gay people" and his caution that "we must fight back against moralistic messages that say gay sex is wrong or immoral, we must advocate for our sexual freedom as much as we ever have done" (Britt, 1984-a). The bathhouse forum, which presented speakers from the AIDS foundation, the city's health department, and

the Northern California Bathhouse Owners Association, was followed by the kind of raucous public comment section that one would expect in San Francisco.

Speaking on behalf of the bathhouse owners, Sal Accardi, owner of a city bathhouse, took quick aim at Shilts, accusing him of “misquotations, lack of context, and an overzealous position” opposed to keeping the venues open. Accardi said,

To Mr. Shilts, who calls for urgency and an alarmist approach (to stopping the spread of AIDS), we say that such approaches didn’t work for Chicken Little and I doubt it will work for Randy Shilts. While Randy Shilts, and those who think like him, may be sincere and well-intentioned, they are wrong, along with Jerry Falwell and his ilk, and they are fueling the fires of bigotry and repression. They are not thinking, they are only reacting (Accardi, 1984).

Sounding a familiar theme, Accardi noted that closing bathhouses would do little to stop so-called “unsafe” sex practices (and the resulting risk of spreading AIDS), and would just result in new locations for “unsafe” sex practices to occur, and chastised city leaders for their lack of attention paid to curtailing sexual activity in the city’s gay adult movie theaters and go-go clubs.

Fellow bathhouse owner Bill Jones said he was unconvinced bathhouses played any greater role in the spread of AIDS than anywhere else in the city. Jones’ remarks revealed important information about the nature of Shilts’ reporting style. Jones attempted to use quotes attributed to Supervisor Britt in articles written by Shilts (ascribing bathhouse activities as not associated with pleasure, but with death) as evidence that Britt was not serious in his support of ongoing gay sexual liberation. Jones said he worried Britt would try to “wiggle out” of his statements reported by Shilts, and said he had called Shilts directly and “he verified what he reported was what you said. He said that he had witnesses who also heard you say these things, but that he does not have tapes of you saying them” (Jones, 1984-c). Britt seemed rattled by Jones’ assertions, noting that

Randy Shilts very much wants someone to say that the bathhouses should be shut down. He is trying very hard to find someone to say that. I have not said it, and I am not going to say it. In the particular interview that you are referring to, I spent the better part of an hour trying to convince Randy that we should talk about sexual practices, not about where they take place (Britt, 1984-b).

Britt fell back on the fact that “Mr. Shilts does not carry a tape recorder” and “writes down about every twenty-fifth word you say” and “he then fits those into what thesis he had laid out.... I think that tells you an awful lot about how he works and what his motives are” (Britt, 1984-b). Describing Shilts “as my friend a large part of the time,” he said “on this particular issue, he is trying to get the community divided around this particular issue” (Britt, 1984-b).

In a rare example where a working journalist got to give back a little bit of the criticism he had suffered throughout 1984, the November 21, 1984 front page of *The Bay Area Reporter* featured a large photograph of Shilts smiling under a provocative headline: “Shilts calls gay leaders ‘inept,’ ‘bunch of jerks’” (Heymont, 1984, p. 2). Shilts’ interview with *Stallion*, a gay porn magazine, had “stirred up controversy again” calling gay leaders “inept” and “a bunch of jerks” – “strong words from the reporter who is assigned to cover those leaders for his newspaper.” Shilts clarified off the top,

Whenever a hot issue comes along, I’m going to become an unpopular guy, because I’m always going to be a journalist first and a gay person second .... Look, you can do two things in journalism: You can tell people the truth or you can tell them what they want to hear. Given a choice, most people would far prefer to hear what they want to hear. They really don’t want any bad news (Heymont, 1984, p. 1-2).

Shilts said he resented the presumption that “the only mode for being a correct homosexual in this society is to be a political activist” and that

those people will never understand the difference between being a newspaper reporter and being a paid propagandist for the gay community. The reason I get screamed at so much by such movement people is that I will not be a gay activist.

I'm a professional who chooses to be open about being gay (Heymont, 1984, p. 2).

Shilts accused gay political leaders of being “immature” and that “let’s not kid ourselves, the local gay political scene is a loony bin. This community is top-heavy with chiefs and not an awful lot of Indians. You’re not dealing with normal people – these folks are crazy” (Heymont, 1984, p. 2). Not finished yet, Shilts noted that the gay leadership of San Francisco “looks like all these naked emperors walking around trying to appear clothed. The people currently running the political aspect of our movement are a bunch of jerks who wrap themselves in silly, dogmatic rhetoric” (Heymont, 1984, p. 2).

Shilts said he believed the AIDS crisis sweeping the gay community had found many of its organizations wanting, and

If anything, AIDS is forcing gays to do something which we have resisted for a long time; to start dealing with each other on an ethical basis beyond sex. Before, everyone was spending his nights picking up one-night stands in the bars. Every man you met was weighed by his sexual status... Lord knows, I did it too. But it was a very immature and adolescent stage to go through (Heymont, 1984, p. 2).

The damage done and Shilts’ personal views apparently aired once and for all, in an unusual move, Shilts wrote a follow-up letter-to-the-editor of *The Bay Area Reporter* to comment on the controversy his remarks had created. Shilts said reading the story convinced him that

I made too many broad generalizations about the gay leadership. There are a number of political leaders and gay organizers – of diverse political perspectives and gay activist organizations – who are firmly and primarily committed to the pursuit of a better world for lesbian and gay people. Not all are motivated by thoughts of selfish political gain (Shilts, 1984-e, p. 2).

He added, “Looking back on what I said, I feel my broad brush blurred over the many people who have demonstrated sincere altruism....I apologize for this oversight in my comments”

(Shilts, 1984-e, p. 2). Other readers to the *BAR* seemed split, based on other published letters, with one reader saying they found much to agree with in Shilts' remarks, and another noting that while Shilts' reporting "could be maddening at times," he may have spurred a necessary debate about the nature and diversity of leadership in the gay community.

### ***Shilts Strikes up the 'Band'***

It would be many years before Randy Shilts would meet Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, but the influence of those two *Washington Post* reporters credited with unearthing the secrets of the Nixon administration held a strong sway over Shilts' writing process. A fan of the book *All the President's Men* that followed the efforts of Woodward and Bernstein to untangle the myriad lies that eventually engulfed President Nixon, the journalistic style employed by Woodward and Bernstein clearly influenced Shilts' writing process. For his first book, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*, friends recall Shilts employing a similar writing process style as depicted in the film version of *All the President's Men*. "I remember visiting him at his apartment and being amazed at all the pieces of paper that he had taped up on the walls," Cleve Jones recalls of Shilts' work in 1980-81 in preparing the Milk biography. He added,

I was sort of fascinated by the physical work of making the book. It was kind of intriguing for me to see him operating in this sort of new way that was very different type of writing than what he did as a column or a 12-paragraph news story. He was extremely conscientious. He, I think, wanted it to be the definitive biography...I think that Randy really, sincerely wanted to preserve the story and he was just very conscientious, and he was also just agonizing over the story line and the narrative, which was typical of him, wanting it to be readable, to be an easy read for people. I think he did a great job (C. Jones, personal communication, October 4, 2011).

Dr. Don Francis, one of the earliest scientists researching the onset of HIV and AIDS (and still today a researcher looking for a vaccine to block or prevent AIDS) said he saw a 20 to 30 foot row of note cards in Shilts' apartment as he made his way through the complicated issues for his second book, *And the Band Played On*. Francis said,

He had all these 3 x 5 cards, and they were all in chronological order with all the information that he gleaned, some of them were just names, and a lot of them were whole paragraphs. But this was his whole book, the outline of his book which was written out on these cards and they were standing upright so they were all across the room, hundreds of them, all handwritten (D. Francis, personal communication, January 20, 2013).

Shilts asked Francis to look at several of the cards, and where questions or issues were raised, “Randy had these sticky notes that he would stick to them and he would pull them out and ask for a clarification or wonder whether he had something right” (D. Francis, personal communication, January 20, 2013).

David Israels was in an elite group of friends and associates who were sent mimeographed copies of the earliest typed drafts of both *The Mayor of Castro Street* and his second book, *And the Band Played On*. Israels remembers

He had a number of us, I think it was three or four of us, who got copies of the manuscript as he produced it. He made copies for us to read and talk to him about it as he wrote it, but it was also to protect it in case the original copy got destroyed, there would be a multiple copies in different locations. This is still in the typewriter days, so when he finished a chapter, or could have been multiple chapters at a time, he would give each of us a copy .... By then we were good enough friends and he respected my opinion and he wanted multiple reactions to the book (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012).

Israels cannot recall making any significant suggestions for changes – he viewed Shilts as a mentor and always respected his writing style – “I just gobbled it up,” he said. His biggest suggestion, that of changing the name of the Harvey Milk biography to something other than *The*

*Mayor of Castro Street* was advice Shilts ignored. Israels thought Castro Street was too obscure for most people to know anything about (D. Israels, personal communication, October 8, 2012).

Michael Denny, Shilts' editor at St. Martin's Press, said there was never any question that Randy would write a second book and that it would be about HIV and AIDS. As a result, all of Shilts' work researching and writing on the issue for his daily news stories in the *Chronicle* formed valuable research and background material. Denny said

We knew that was going to be his next book, but this was at the very beginning and we did not know when the 'event' would resolve itself. We were constantly arguing about when would be the best time to start writing a book on this. I cannot remember when Randy decided that he should decide to do that, but it must have been 1983 or 1984. I remember that I thought it was too early and that we didn't have the story yet and there was no ending. Randy and I had a lot of arguments but he finally convinced me that we had to go ahead anyway. So I proposed it to the editorial board (at St. Martin's). Well, I got no support whatsoever. I got no votes in my favor. Everybody was saying, 'Nobody knows what it (AIDS) is yet, it's too early, there's no ending, etc., etc.' So finally, they passed on it (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

By now, Shilts had hired a writer's agent, Fred Hill of Los Angeles, and when Denny delivered the news that St. Martin's Press said no, they went shopping. Denny said Hill tried to pitch the book to 12 other publishers – all without success. Also by now, Denny said, he was feeling a personal and professional conflict of interest. Over the course of working on *The Mayor of Castro Street*, Denny and Shilts had become friends, yet Denny still was professionally obligated to represent the views and interests of St. Martin's Press. As a result, the two worked out an "at work" and "not at work" communication system in which Denny stood firm in the "no" for a book on AIDS, but privately coached Shilts on how he might be able to shoe-horn in an agreement to get it published. A first step was getting Hill and Shilts to drop their \$80,000 to \$100,000 advance proposal, and a second step involved getting Shilts to sharpen his pitch for an AIDS-book down to a crisp 88-page proposal. "It was the best book proposal I ever read,"

Denneny said, but still lacked an ending since the “outcome” or result of the AIDS pandemic was unknown. Finally, St. Martin’s agreed to another small advance, only \$15,000 “because they were not convinced there was any arc to the story, no shape, and no ending” Denneny said. “I got on my high horse and said, ‘This is a literary question and I am the editor, and I guarantee that it will have an arc and an ending!’” (M. Denneny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

Now it was Shilts who balked and said the \$15,000 advance was an insult, and he wanted to pass on the new offer. Denneny went into his “not at work” mode:

I went home and had dinner and called Randy up and said, ‘I am now talking to you as your friend,’ and I said, ‘You’re being an asshole.’ I said, ‘This is the book that you were meant to write. I don’t care if we pay you \$2,000. I don’t care if it costs you \$5,000 to write it. If you don’t realize that this was the book that you were put on Earth to write, then you are a bigger fool than I ever thought you were. Money is irrelevant. You have to write this book’ (M. Denneny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

Shilts took some convincing, but with the backing of the *Chronicle* and the knowledge that he would be able to write the book and keep a weekly salary coming in from the newspaper, he agreed. Denneny said,

the *Chronicle* had been, and continued to be, very supportive. Basically, they allowed him to keep working only exclusively on the AIDS beat and that meant that they were essentially paying him a salary as he wrote the book. He kept writing stories on AIDS and doing research for the paper, but always with the book in mind overall (M. Denneny, personal communication, November 23, 2011)

After reading Shilts’ manuscript completed in early 1987, originally skeptical St. Martin’s Press sales agents and others became convinced they had a best-seller on their hands – increasing the original hard-back press run to 35,000 copies. What followed, however, would be some of the most controversial decisions about *And the Band Played On* that would haunt Shilts for years. As Denneny worked to get the book promoted, major newspapers and others were taking a pass on

reading it – most notably the book reviewers at *The New York Times*. Subsequently *Time*, *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post* all indicated they, too, would pass on reviewing Shilts' book in any prominent way (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

Desperate and facing pressure from his St. Martin's colleagues who had relented to Denny's push to get Shilts' book published, Denny called on a former press agent he knew and asked him to read the manuscript, and provide ideas on how to get it some publicity. The idea hatched was one Shilts would come to regret. Denny said,

The press agent told me, 'Look, there is only one way you're going to get any publicity. I can tell you exactly how to do it, but you're not going to like it. It is really yellow journalism. The only way the media is going to cover a story like this is if you mix together, glamour and death, and all of these are tied up in this Patient Zero character in the book.' In the book, the book is something like 640 pages, there are exactly six pages on Patient Zero. It is a very minor part of the whole book (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

Denny said the press agent came up with a pitch that the editors of *The New York Post* couldn't resist – and one that would guarantee the whole front page of the tabloid *Post*, known for its screaming headlines. Born was "The Man Who Brought AIDS to America" 90-point headline that filled the top third of the *Post's* front page on October 6, 1987 (with a hammer head that offered, "Triggered 'gay cancer' epidemic in U.S."). The actual article appeared inside on page 3 under a separate headline, "AIDS": The Man Who Started It All!" and declared, "Homosexual Gaetan Dugas, who died of the killer disease in 1984, is a modern-day Typhoid Mary, says *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Randy Shilts" (though Shilts is never quoted in the story, only small excerpts from his book highlighting Dugas) (New York Post, 1987, p. 3). The story highlights that not only was Dugas allegedly linked to 17 percent of the first 248 cases of AIDS in the United States, but also to the first two known AIDS cases ever in New York City. Skipping the portion of Shilts' thesis that took on the political and medical failures to be found

throughout society in its response to AIDS, *The Post* instead reported only on Shilts' suggestion that AIDS had been treated as a public relations problem by the gay community rather than "a medical problem rooted in promiscuity" (New York Post, 1987, p. 3). A day later, *The New York Times* picked up a 600-word story on Shilts' book (after having previously declined to cover the book's release) under a calmer heading of "Canadian Said to Have Key Role in Spread of AIDS" (New York Times, 1987, p. B7). Days later, the weekly tabloid gossip magazine *The Star* offered its own version of the story under an equaling screaming headline, "The Monster Who Gave Us AIDS," although the text of the story itself was far less inflammatory than the headline (Stinton & Eaton, 1987, p. 6-7). By now, *Time* magazine had changed its mind and ran a story on Shilts' book on its "Medicine" page under another ugly headline, "The Appalling Saga of Patient Zero," though the story itself quickly dispatched with details about "Shilts' discovery" of Dugas as "Patient Zero," and instead launched into the growing political disagreements simmering among members of President Ronald Reagan's advisory commission on AIDS (Henry, 1987, p. 40-41). The same week *Newsweek* took a calmer approach – "The Making of an Epidemic: A Reporter Pursues the Origins of the AIDS Crisis" (Miller & Abramson, 1987, pp. 91, 93). A review of both Lexus-Nexus and NewsBank Archive databases reveals the tone of wire stories concerning Shilts' book were equally alarming – the Associated Press offering "Gay Community Was Slow to React Adequately to AIDS Epidemic" for its version (Cartiere, 1987). Not unexpectedly Canadian media focused more on questions being raised about the validity of Shilts' claim that Dugas as an originator of HIV and AIDS, *The Toronto star* offering, "MDs Doubt Claim Canadian Carried AIDS to Continent" (Toronto Star, 1987, p. A2). Topping off the hysteria whipped by *The New York Post*, gay publications quickly pounced on the coverage and the possible scapegoating of Dugas that appeared to be at hand. An ad in *California* magazine

(which paid to excerpt large portions of Shilts' text as it was released) hit a particularly sour note among a growing cadre of Shilts critics among gay leaders as it displayed a copy of Dugas' Air Canada employee ID card with the provocative claim, "The AIDS epidemic in America wasn't spread by a virus. It was spread by a man" (Buse, 1988, p. 8).

Shilts and Denny watched the story play out, and Denny stands by the decision to go forward with the "Patient Zero" story upfront. "It was the only way the mainstream press was going to cover this book, through this salacious, melodramatic, yellow journalism sort of way," Denny said (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011). There was a problem, however in getting the "salacious" approach off the ground. Initially, Shilts balked. Denny recalls,

I called up and explained it all to Randy and he just went through the roof. He hated the whole idea. He said, 'That is not the entire book, it is just a minor part of the book. The book is about indicting the Reagan administration, and a lot of other people, on their lack of response to AIDS.' It took me five days of arguing with him on the phone every night to convince him that we had to do this, or otherwise we were dead in the water (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

That Denny pulls blame for the exploitive approach to the "Patient Zero" idea, complete with a press kit focused on G etan Dugas, is instructive to know, but it has spared Shilts little of the wrath that followed then, and even today. The one major complaint and criticism gay activists, scientists, and even journalistic experts have always raised with Shilts' otherwise brilliant work in *And the Played On* has been the appropriateness of the publicity granted to "Patient Zero."

Today, Denny says

I feel guilty about this because Randy took so much shit because of this, and God knows how many essays have been written about Patient Zero and G etan Dugas, and there are chapters in various medical books about it. There are all these writers in Canada who have taken up that issue, one of them wrote a 40-page essay on just that whole thing, critical of Randy

...I feel somewhat guilty because Randy has always taken abuse for this when in fact he was very reluctant and I basically had to twist his arm like mad to get him to agree with this approach. He really shouldn't have to take the responsibility for this. I have tried any number of times to publicly say, 'Hey, if you're going to blame someone (for Patient Zero), blame me.' It should be aimed at me and I have no problem with that. I stand by it today (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

As predicted, however, the publicity worked – *The New York Times* not only quickly featured Shilts' book prominently in their Sunday book review, but also wrote additional news stories about the claims in the story, and even the controversy stirred by the naming of "Patient Zero." Other national media quickly picked up the story as well, and Shilts' book was in reprint within weeks, and eventually landed – and stayed – on *The Times* best-seller list for non-fiction books. After the release of *And the Band Played On*, Shilts returned briefly to the *Chronicle* newsroom before setting off on an ambitious book promotion tour. Patricia Holt, one of the *Chronicle*'s book reviewers offered *Band* a glowing review – where she christened Shilts as the official "mini-biographer" of AIDS and "one of the few people who saw the AIDS crisis for what it was". She made special mention of the "news" Shilts' book had generated just days before via the screaming headline in *The New York Post*. Holt also offered some of the first explanation Shilts would engage in trying to tamp down the commotion created by the headline assertion that one person – the person of Gäetan Dugas – had single-handedly brought AIDS to America. Using words such as "probably," "maybe," and "likely" noting his confirmed promiscuity in the gay community, Holt offers the first line of Shilts' defense in the "Dugas as Patient Zero" debacle that would follow him for years to come. Holt asked, "Did AIDS actually come into the United States because of a single person, someone Shilts has tracked down and identified –

someone, therefore, we can all blame? Yes, yes, and no, as Shilts contends” (Holt, 1987), quickly adding that

it’s a shame that some headlines initially focused on Dugas, a minor player in the complicated drama....What should have been emphasized... was Shilts’ accusation that the AIDS epidemic ‘did not just happen to America, it was allowed to happen by an array of institutions, all of which failed to perform their appropriate tasks to safeguard the public health’ (Holt, 1987, p. B1).

Wald (2008, p. 17) suggested that Shilts and the mainstream media engaged in an “outbreak narrative” to help explain the complexities of the quick spread of a fatal communicable disease, part of Shilts’ recognition that “the epidemiological investigation drama (represented by Dugas) would make his analysis widely readable” as did casting CDC and other health officials as heroic characters in the story. Wald also focused on the post-Patient Zero publicity that the focus of his book had been lost on the role played by Dugas. By doing so Wald found Shilts in retreat on the importance of Dugas to the overall story:

Here I’ve done 630 pages of serious AIDS policy reporting, with the premise that this disaster was allowed to happen because the media only focus on the glitzy and sensational aspects of the epidemic. My book breaks, not because of the serious public policy stories, but because of the rather minor story of Patient Zero (Wald, 2008, p. 231).

Wald adds a measure of doubt to how sincere one should take Shilts and his claims of concern about the focus on Dugas, especially in light of subsequent information that revealed he green-lighted publicity efforts to use Dugas’ story to get *And the Band Played On* off the ground. Beyond that, Wald noted, “Shilts weaves (Dugas) throughout the story, tracking his movements as he depicts his increasing recalcitrance and malevolence” (p. 231).

Murphy (1994) suggested that Shilts created Dugas as

the Aristotelian efficient cause of the AIDS epidemic, insofar as he appears as its mechanism of transmission in this country, and the gay ideals were the formal

cause of the epidemic insofar as they shaped the culture in which transmission could occur easily....Shilts does not offer Dugas as a portrait in biography as much as a one-dimensional scoundrel in a Gothic novel, an occasion for lamentation about the evils of gay men (p. 13).

Murphy (1994) further challenged Shilts' claim that he was merely reporting the epidemic as it occurred, and noted the portions of Dugas' life were fictionalized by Shilts "as an emblem and symbol for gay life and especially the excesses imputed to it" and adds, "If Dugas is blameworthy in the origins of the epidemic, by extension so too is the sexual ethos of gay life itself because Shilts uses Dugas, and especially his willful sexuality, as a figure for all gay men" (p. 14). Carrying Shilts' thesis further, Murphy notes that Shilts inspires an anger among gay men for his narrow construction of gay male sexuality by representing Dugas in the beginning of his work as a gay ideal, what every gay man wanted in a sexual partner, to becoming what every gay man dreaded, a pathogen borne killer with no morality. Murphy posthumously defends Dugas against the characterization Shilts created

In many ways, Dugas lived no different from many of the continent hopping, urban peers of his time. Why therefore should the hammer of judgment fall as heavily on Dugas as Shilts' narrative requires, especially since a judgment replicates the homophobia that equates homoeroticism with AIDS, especially since a large measure of Dugas' fault was not that he lived differently from others, but mere that he got it first? (p. 17-18).

Despite Shilts' reservations – never stated publicly – "Patient Zero" was never far from the center of the coverage *And the Band Played On* was garnering and was a tough topic to shake. No less than CBS News correspondent Harry Reasoner, who referred to Shilts as "the scribe and historian of the epidemic," proclaimed that Shilts had offered "a startling new theory, a theory the epidemiologists, the medical detectives believe." (Bergman, 1987) In his report, Reasoner notes that "Shilts, a gay himself," was hired by *The San Francisco Chronicle* in part to report

about the gay community. Reasoner's discomfort with the story shows through at times – including an awkward question posed in the story about whether vegetable shortening used as a lubricant for gay sex was checked out as a cause. Archival CBS video shows Reasoner sitting down for a drink with Shilts at a Castro district gay bar, Reasoner looking a little like his skin is crawling. Undeterred, Shilts hammered away on with his essential point from his reporting:

AIDS did not just happen. AIDS was allowed to happen. This disease did not emerge full-grown on the biological landscape, and I don't think you can look to medicine in order to understand how AIDS was able to spread so quickly across this country unimpeded, I think you have to look at the politics of AIDS. And when you get into the politics of AIDS, you're left with one very unfortunate timing factor about this epidemic. AIDS was detected five months into the first Reagan administration. And this administration had come in with one, overriding commitment: That commitment was to keep the lid on federal domestic spending. Consequently, during the first years of the epidemic, whenever there was a choice between do we go whole-hog against this epidemic, or do we keep the lid on domestic spending, the Reagan administration invariably chose to keep the lid on health spending. The fact is that the files of the Reagan administration are redolent with the odor of smoking guns (Bergman, 1987).

Shilts assertion to the nation was clear, “politics was allowed to triumph over public health. In 1987, the political question is should we let a certain political version of morality triumph over what is good public health and educating people. And again, politics is triumphing over public health” (Bergman, 1987).

Reasoner quickly focused on Gäetan Dugas as “Patient Zero,” running a clip with Shilts explaining with little apparent apprehension:

It was through Gäetan Dugas that they realized that AIDS was an infectious disease. By the time they were done with the study, which became known as the cluster study, they found that 40 of the first 248 gay men who got AIDS in the United States had either gone to bed with Gäetan Dugas, or had gone to bed with someone who had gone to bed with him. With Gäetan, you get a horrible combination of circumstances. You get a guy who has unlimited sexual stamina, who is very attractive so he has unlimited opportunity to act out that sexual stamina, and he is a flight attendant for Air Canada so he gets these flight passes so he can fly out all over and have his fun in any number of cities. I mean, it was

just a horrible combination of factors that helped really speed this disease into every corner of America (Bergman, 1987).

Tiemeyer (2013, p. 177) noted that few in the media questioned Shilts' suggestion, however qualified it became over time, that one man was responsible for AIDS in America, with report after report simply "reinforcing the salacious drama surrounding Patient Zero" (Tiemeyer, 2013, p. 177). Canadian media were an exception, driven perhaps by the fact that one of their own was being cast in the villain's role. While Dugas' employers at Air Canada stood mute, Canadian AIDS experts "questioned the likelihood of ever being able to track down the original North American carrier" (Letheridge Herald, 1987, p. 1). Tiemeyer (2013, p. 178) concluded that "Clearly, rather than requiring Shilts to clarify his exaggerated claims about G aetan Dugas, the vast media attention instead allowed Shilts to capitalize on the unfortunate, easily misrepresented way G aetan was intertwined within the early AIDS crisis."

In subsequent interviews to his interaction with Reasoner on CBS, Shilts offered a more succinct summary of his thesis that didn't include mention of Dugas' role:

The Reagan administration dealt with AIDS as a budget problem. Scientists dealt with AIDS as a matter of prestige. The public health officials saw AIDS as a political problem. The gay community saw it as a public relations problem. And the media didn't care because it considered it a homosexual problem that wouldn't interest anyone else (Reynolds, 1987).

Shilts' writing style for *And the Band Played On* created a variety of heroes and villains – with HIV/AIDS being the biggest anti-hero presented. Dr. Don Francis, a once obscure scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, was to become one of Shilts' heroes. Francis gained fame in part because of the HBO film adaptation of Shilts' work where actor Matthew Modine was cast as the crusading Dr. Francis trying to fight his way through a bureaucratic maze that was unable to respond to AIDS. To hear Francis talk a couple of decades

removed from the premier of *Band*, it's clear Francis' positions on AIDS and his opinion of Shilts have changed little: "Once I got involved with Randy in his book writing, not to mention his newspaper articles, his remarkable ability came shining through very quickly. He could cover anything in-depth. He left a very great impression on me" (D. Francis, personal communication, January 10, 2013). The idea for Shilts' book – and his desire for Francis to help him – was not one Francis was initially excited about. "He said he was thinking about writing a book and wanted to know if I would help him," Francis said. "At that time and AIDS, we were just so wiped out working on AIDS that I was very reticent to get involved in anything of that sort" (D. Francis, personal communication, January 10, 2013). Francis forgot about Shilts' book idea until months later when drafts and outlines came his way, convincing him that Shilts was not only very serious about writing the book, but was smart enough to write it correctly.

As he wrote in the foreword of the book, Shilts said his book was "a work of journalism" and that "there has been no fictionalization." He added,

For purposes of narrative flow, I reconstruct scenes, recount conversations and occasionally attribute observations to people with such phrases as 'he thought' or 'she felt.' Such references are drawn from either the research interviews I conducted for the book or from research conducting during my years covering the AIDS epidemic for *The San Francisco Chronicle* (Shilts, 1987-c, p. 607).

Francis believes Shilts' approach fit the story he was attempting to tell – noting that the "club of knowledge" about HIV and AIDS in the early years was quite small. The "club members" who knew about the history of growth in reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases among gay men was even smaller. Shilts was among those who knew, Francis said, recalling he had talked to Shilts by telephone during his earliest days at CDC when he helped map a Hepatitis B study among gay men in New York City in the late 1970s. Francis makes this point, he said, to emphasize that not everyone agreed or supported the idea that a transmittable or communicable

agent was behind the growing exotic illnesses impacting gay men (initially known as GRID). He believes Randy Shilts understood this important fact from a very early point (D. Francis, personal communication, January 10, 2013). Another fact that Shilts understood, likely because Francis shared it with most anyone he could, was a rising level of frustration and anger among CDC employees about the federal government's response to AIDS. Francis said,

In all the time that I spent fighting infectious diseases, I was appalled and shocked, and so was everyone at CDC, they were quite a bit discouraged, by having essentially the disease of the century in terms of severity in our hands, and we still didn't know how big it was going to be, and we're being told that we can do nothing. We pushed everybody we could politically but there are limits when you are in a government setting, you have to go up the government channels to operate. There was really tremendous frustration. We got fairly sophisticated politically, we would send around our prevention plans, and when they said no, we would just do a little bit of calling around asking others to help us. But you couldn't come up against these Reaganites and do anything. They were truly evil people (D. Francis, personal communication, January 10, 2013).

Francis likes to ask "Where would we be on the issue of AIDS without Randy's book?" and answers his own question with a declaration that Shilts "chronicled the pain, the society and the people who were involved with AIDS and what they went through, and he did that in a beautiful way and you can really see the misery and the successes and failures" (D. Francis, personal communication, January 10, 2013).

A contrast in reactions continued to emerge to Shilts' tome. As mainstream and generally heterosexual sources, such as Francis and others, heaped praise on Shilts, criticism from the homosexual community continued to grow. The criticism Shilts felt from the gay community was highlighted in a *Los Angeles Times* preview of *And the Band Played On* and the annual Castro Street Fair served as backdrop, Shilts "figuring his chances were equally good of getting slugged or hugged." *Band* had just arrived at San Francisco booksellers and was a popular item. Regardless, Shilts began the first of many efforts to explain or at least downplay the publicity

that had surrounded “Patient Zero” following the screaming headlines offered by *The New York Post* in its gratuitous preview of Shilts’ work – blaming them and other headline writers for “blown out of proportion” accounts of his book. As in other instances, however, the discussion of *Band* and its writing style (which Shilts referred to as “pure Michener”) was secondary for the requisite review of Shilts as “openly gay reporter.” The *Times* focused on Shilts’ claims of “personal integrity”:

To me, being open about being gay is solely a statement of personal integrity. I’d met a lot of older gay professionals who lived their lives in terror that they were going to be discovered. I decided I was never going to be in a position in my life where I had to cover up who I was (Siphen, 1987).

Shifting back to his ground-breaking book, seemingly secondary to the venerable story of Shilts as “openly gay reporter,” *The Times* noted Shilts’ open frustration that his news articles on the emerging “gay cancer” (later to be known as AIDS) created little ripple among fellow journalists. “I’m not God’s gift to journalism,” Shilts said. “The people who gave me memos (about government inaction on AIDS) would have done anything to get them into the papers” but that other investigative reporters “who were real men didn’t want to cover AIDS-related anything. It was trivial. . . . There was lots of sob sister reporting. There was great, eloquent science reporting, but nobody was doing behind-the-scenes political stuff.” Shilts acknowledged his approach to the AIDS story – which he happily distinguished from other journalists – was based on his sexual identity. “I wasn’t just an author doing a story,” he said. “I live in the gay community and AIDS is a part of my life. The people who have died because of institutional neglect aren’t just ‘those people out there,’ they’re people I care about.” Despite such altruism undergirding his reporting, Shilts could not escape the wrath of many in the gay community, allowing

The gay community didn't want me to write about things like bathhouses that made gays look bad. But to me, that was like going to one side of a burning building and covering the firemen trying to put out the fire, and then ignoring the guy on the other side who's dumping gas on it (Siphen, 1987).

Beyond his ability to hit a nerve with activists, Shilts seemed to possess an incredible sense of timing with his stories as well. *When* a story appears can often be as or more important than what the story actually reports. Editors have long debated with reporters the timing of stories, timing which preserves any desired impact for a story (often the reporter's deepest wish), and a sense of fairness and equity for the source(s) involved in a story (often an editor's prime concern). Journalists have frequently and loudly engaged editors who have decided to place a hold on a story when they are interested in releasing it now, before anyone else, and when it can have most impact, is critically important. Ample evidence of this can be found in the now infamous battles of the 2000 Presidential campaign in which a Portland, Maine reporter knew as early as July that George W. Bush had lied about, and not disclosed a 1976 drunk driving arrest, but that editors had prevailed in holding the story, only to be scooped by a local FOX TV affiliate two days before the November 2000 election (Shepard, 2000). Shilts certainly knew about the importance of properly timing a story, and practiced it from the reporters' perspective. He openly acknowledged, and sources confirmed, that he timed stories in order to have the most impact possible on readers and policymakers alike. One example is his June 15, 1984 "Political Scene" commentary titled "On Bathhouse Politics" (Shilts, 1984-d, p. A6) where Shilts declared "among the only-in-San Francisco attractions to amaze delegates to the Democratic National Convention next month will be a new civic donnybrook over gay bathhouses" noting that "gay Democratic activists already are cringing at the possibility of a nationally-televised debate which will detract attention from more serious civil rights concerns." Shilts quoted an unnamed "prominent gay

Democrat” as saying, “The cameras will be pointed at a bunch of crazies arguing for our right to commit suicide in sleazy bathhouses.” Apparently fearing no risk of overstating the attention the assembled Democrats would pay to a still specialized, and localized story such as whether gay bathhouses should remain open, Shilts predicted that “it now seems that the simmering controversy will boil over again just in time for the Democratic National Convention.” That the DNC and its presumptive nominee, former Vice President Walter Mondale were in any way concerned about the bathhouse issue in the face of a daunting fall election against a popular incumbent president seems, in retrospect, to be a bit of an overreach by Shilts. Is this an example of Shilts attempting to drum up an issue as being bigger and more important than it actually was? In reality, how many DNC delegates descending on San Francisco that summer lived in a community where a gay bathhouse operated, or had even heard of one? Further, in this instance Shilts’ focus did not seem to be on how to curtail or prevent out-of-town conventioners from exploring the gay bathhouse experience, but rather on the simmering political – albeit local – battle over their future.

### ***Challenges Stump the ‘Band’***

As *The Los Angeles Times* put it, “The one person Shilts will never have to face is also the person who has, so far, stirred the most media interest in the book: Patient Zero” (Siphen, 1987). The “Patient Zero” character has continued to overshadow larger points Shilts intended to make with *And the Band Played On*, and remains at the center of the Shilts critique.

Shilts told reporters he learned of an unnamed, sexually promiscuous flight attendant as early as 1982 who may have been helping spread still mysterious diseases and ailments among gay men he met sexually, and early cluster studies by local and federal health officials made similar assertions, “but you couldn’t tell from reading the cluster study that he may have been the

person who brought (the AIDS) virus to the United States,” Shilts said (Siphen, 1987). *The Times* openly declared that “Shilts has never claimed that Dugas... is the man who brought AIDS to the United States” and instead shifted such a claim to Dr. William Darrow, an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control. Darrow, however, ultimately may win the “blame game” for having outlived Shilts and having authored the original cluster study and maintains that Shilts got this portion of the history wrong from the start, but built in enough wiggle room in his *Band* text that allowed him to escape blame.

Among the most vociferous Shilts critics in the months and years after *Band's* October 1987 release was historian Douglas Crimp at the University of Rochester. Crimp wrote that Shilts' book was “pernicious” and that proof of its worthlessness to the actual history of AIDS is its best-seller status, positive reviews from mainstream or straight media, and the fact that it was eventually made into an HBO made-for-TV movie. Taking up a familiar review that Shilts' work relies heavily on creating heroes and villains in the story of AIDS, Crimp chastises Shilts for employing “imprecise, callous and moralizing” in his reporting without apology, all while casting himself as one of the few heroes in the story. Crimp believes that Shilts possessed

contempt for gay political leaders, AIDS activities, and people with AIDS, and his delusions about their power to influence public health policy and deeply revealing of his own politics. But to Shilts, politics is something alien, something others have...Shilts has no politics, only common sense; he speaks only the truth (Crimp, 2004, p. 315).

Crimp raises the troubling and provocative motive some gay leaders have asserted may exist for Shilts' approach:

The criticism most often leveled against Shilts' book by its gay critics is that it is a product of internalized homophobia. In this view, Shilts is seen to identify with the hetero sexist society that loathes him for his homosexuality and through that identification to project his loathing onto the gay community. Thus, Patient Zero ...is Shilts' homophobic nightmare of himself, a nightmare that he must

constantly deny by making true only of others. Shilts therefore offers up the scapegoat for his heterosexual colleagues in order to prove that he, like them, is horrified by such creatures (Crimp, 2004, p. 481).

Another strong Shilts critic to emerge in the decades since *And the Band Played On* is Richard A. McKay, a scholar from King's College of London, has openly called Shilts' use of a "Patient Zero" one of the worst myths perpetrated via the AIDS crisis. McKay has taken special effort to explore the views and reactions of the family and friends of the so-called Patient Zero, Gaëtan Dugas. McKay reported they

were left wondering how his medical confidentiality had been breached, and how Randy Shilts – the journalist advancing these claims – had learned his identity. They almost certainly could not have imagined the scale of the networks of sexual contact and information sharing at work in the construction of this persistent origin myth (McKay, 2012).

McKay believes that despite Shilts flawed analysis that suggests that Darrow's original CDC "cluster study" placed a "Patient Zero" at the center of a group of infections, it was already out of date at the time Shilts was writing *Band* -- the "story-telling potential" of the concept was too good to resist. McKay said,

I argue that in the course of writing his popular history – and in spite of his stated aim of 'humanizing this disease' – Shilts became seduced with discovering and revealing the identity of the man he would call 'Patient Zero'.... (and that Shilts) drew upon an extensive international network of informants and contacts to bypass the barriers of confidentiality erected by public health professionals .... Shilts' dark characterization of Dugas drew its intensity from – and indeed combined with – the journalist's intention to cast the disease itself as a character in history (McKay, 2012).

McKay asserts that Shilts' reporting on the AIDS crisis in America has impacted subsequent reporting on public health issues in America and has experienced a long life in social folklore, popular culture and media frameworks for reporting on disease. McKay points to episode of Seth

MacFarlane's animated TV series, *Family Guy*, and its take on Patient Zero where a flight attendant with a foreign accent has sex with a monkey. "The punch line is that apparently the flight attendant infects the monkey," McKay said. "It's not a particularly funny joke, but it is one that is reflective of how these myths (such as employed by Shilts) exist in popular culture about how disease is transmitted" (McKay, 2011).

Further, McKay suggests Shilts' use of Dugas as the centerpiece for the "Patient Zero" concept may be simply an artifact of the fact that Dugas maintained a rather complete address book, and was, at least initially, quite cooperative with epidemiologists and others attempting to learn more about what was then labeled GRID. "It is a very good illustration of media reporting of the cluster study (by the CDC's Darrow) in 1984, and how they reworked the study" and came up with the idea of an original source for HIV/AIDS – discounting growing evidence that a long incubation period for someone infected with HIV before developing AIDS created serious doubts about the discovery of any "one" source for AIDS – as claimed by Shilts. "Shilts himself had written about the fact that scientists had discovered that the incubation period was actually much longer than previously thought," McKay points out (2011). McKay believes Shilts' less-than-forthright reporting on this matter created many unintended consequences

and really starts to arise and really takes off from a very driven, ambitious, angry and upset journalist – Randy Shilts. Shilts seems to harness this idea and he and his publisher would eventually help to drive it to international dissemination (McKay, 2011).

Tiemeyer (2013) picks up on this theme saying Shilts used Dugas as "the scapegoat extraordinaire of the AIDS crisis" and that Shilts and his publishers at St. Martin's Press "rode the wave of revulsion" created with Patient Zero to the best-seller list. Shilts succeeded,

Tiemeyer believes, in creating a perfectly cast “promiscuous gay male flight attendant with an alluring Quebecois accent – a man who refused to give up sex even after learning of the infections and deadly nature of his ailment” – in fact, “a world-wide villain” (Tiemeyer, 2012). Tiemeyer suggests “complex motives” existed for Shilts and his publishers to slander Dugas, but conveniently filled in existing discourse about suspected unchecked sexual excess among gays and that Shilts’ book made the case for these “tropes” with noteworthy “succinctness and psychological impact” (Tiemeyer, 2013, p. 138). He adds,

The fact that so many people still believe G etan Dugas brought AIDS to North America is testament to the impact of Randy Shilts’ Patient Zero myth. The myth’s power owes far more to the operation of stereotypes about male flight attendants and gay men, couple with Shilts’ own skillfully articulated rendition of the story, than it does to medical facts (Tiemeyer, 2013, p. 139).

Tiemeyer believes Shilts knowingly or unwittingly played into the hands of 1980s-era conservatives and their efforts to “foreclose normalization of people with AIDS” and even fueled highly-charged suggestions to quarantines for people living with AIDS. Tiemeyer’s indictment is based on

a close reading of Shilts’ text with quarantining efforts circa 1987, I conclude that Shilts crafted the ‘Patient Zero’ myth to more broadly demonize what I call ‘recalcitrant queers,’ those who preached a safe-sex positive, non-monogamous vision of homosexuality even in the face of the AIDS crisis. The end result was to broadly stigmatize a queer lifestyle amidst the larger public, while politically jeopardizing the civil rights of only a more concentrated group of PWAs (Tiemeyer, 2013, p. 140).

The result was Shilts successfully raised Dugas from the grave with his 1987 book (Dugas having succumbed to AIDS on March 30, 1984 at the age of 31) and created a “fantastical myth” of the AIDS crisis that placed Dugas as a central character in linking the mysterious, heretofore “African disease” to the American heartland. Tiemeyer reclaims McKay’s theme that Shilts’ kept

“Patient Zero” alive because of the irresistible narrative it allowed: Shilts “...vilifying G etan (Dugas) in *And the Band Played On* seems anachronistic, belonging more to the hysteria of summer 1983 than to fall 1987” (Tiemeyer, 2013, p. 168). Tiemeyer openly accuses Shilts of “artful writing,” “outright misrepresentations” (p. 171) and “omission of key facts, misconstrued CDC data, and colorful embellishments” (p. 174) of Darrow’s CDC cluster study to bolster the idea of the evil, promiscuous gay man at the center of *all* AIDS in North America (Tiemeyer, 2013, p. 171).

Fritscher (2007) said that Shilts

so loved the hook of the Patient Zero concept that he tilted the HIV truth, not into a lie, but into the legend that, I think, immorally demonized the fun-loving flight attendant G etan Dugas into some kind of Typhoid Mary. In short, Shilts succumbed to a storytellers’ temptation: he narrowed down the huge AIDS story in the same way journalists simplify and dramatize... about the Stonewall Rebellion (p. 108).

Not surprisingly, the rough and tumble treatment controversial AIDS research Dr. Robert Gallo received in Shilts’ *Band* (later to be immortalized in a dark performance by Alan Alda in the film version of Shilts’ book), prompted heavy criticism from the noted scientist. Gallo took immediate issue with many of Shilts’ assertions in *Band*, and readily told reporters that he had talked directly to Shilts about needed corrections: “He told me he would correct every single thing that I told him about, but the damage is done” Dr. Gallo told *The Los Angeles Times*. He blamed Shilts’ inaccuracies for causing him to lose focus and desire to further investigate the Human Immunodeficiency Virus that causes AIDS. “You don’t feel like working on the problem any longer,” he said. “I shouldn’t let these things bother me, but they do, they bother me a lot.” (Siphen, 1987).

### *Shilts 'Conducts' His Last Words*

Anyone paying attention could have predicted the subject of Shilts' next book – passing up on ideas to write about struggles of Native Americans or a transsexual spy used to infiltrate Nazi officer encampments during World War II – he turned to the issue of allowing LGBTQ individuals to serve openly in the U.S. military. News events were once again timed well for Shilts' new interest – an October 1990 battle by decorated Army Colonel Edward Modesto to avoid court martial fell into his lap. Modesto, who faced a 65-year prison term “largely stemming from the fact that he is gay or bisexual,” was being made an example of because of his rank, Shilts believed. A half-dozen other soldiers had been charged or discharged from the military in connection with the Modesto inquiry, an investigation that was responsible for the suicide of Air Force major implicated as well. Suspected of violating the military's rules against homosexual conduct or against any “conduct unbecoming an officer,” Army investigators raided Modesto's home – that he shared with his male lover – and openly reported they surfaced a large amount of wigs and women's clothing which Modesto said were used by his lover who worked part-time as a female impersonator at a local gay bar. While forthcoming with the results of their search of Modesto's home, Shilts reported military officials refused to talk about his pending court martial – “It is the Department of Defense policy that homosexuality is incompatible with military service. Homosexual acts by a soldier are a criminal offense under military law,” said Fort Carson's public affairs officer, Sergeant Mike Howard. Beyond that, the military clammed up to an outside and civilian source such as Shilts – “We're not going to be able to give our perspective on this,” Howard concluded (Shilts, 1990-d, p. A6). Ultimately, Modesto was convicted on charges of violating the military's ban on homosexuality and was sentenced to nine months at the Fort Leavenworth Prison in Kansas, fined \$27,000, and dishonorably discharged.

Shilts continued his focus on gays in the military as the ramp up for the 1991 Persian Gulf War accelerated, first offering an opinion column that predicted troubles for the military in recruiting and assigning ground troops for the battle to push Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces out of neighboring Libya. "Some experts believe that if a shooting war lasted longer than a few months, the military may need more troops than are now available among both active duty and reserve personnel," Shilts opined, meaning a draft may be necessary which would run head-on into the emerging reality of an openly gay segment of society virtually unknown during earlier military conflicts (Shilts, 1991-a, p. A21). Two days later Shilts reported as a news story on "an abrupt policy shift on the event of possible war in the Persian Gulf" that "may allow openly gay personnel to serve in the military based on the services' 'operational needs'" (Shilts, 1991-b, p. A19). Shilts followed this hopeful news, however, with a report based on interviews he did with 60 closeted gay men, lesbians and bisexuals currently in active duty and how they categorically understood that coming out meant facing a dishonorable discharge (Shilts, 1991-d, p. A1). Despite that reality, Shilts found a lesbian woman serving as a support specialist in the 129<sup>th</sup> Army Evacuation Hospital who was openly challenging the ban on gay service. Originally designated to go to the Persian Gulf, Reservist Donna Lynn Jackson's assignment was abruptly changed after her coming out (Shilts, 1991-c, p. A6).

Sensing the growing sentiment for a change in the military's gay-ban policy first adopted in 1942-43, Shilts wrote that 40 members of Congress had written to President George H.W. Bush asking that the Defense Department suspend discharges under the policy – a letter Bush ignored (Shilts, 1991-e, p. A1). Shilts further stirred the pot with an exclusive story published on June 25, 1991 that revealed he had obtained a copy of a confidential Army memo sent to Pentagon officials that urged reversal of the gay ban policy. The military quickly dismissed the

memo as having come from an Army officer “acting on his own initiative” and that there would be no change in policy forthcoming (Shilts, 1991-f, p. A1). Shilts would keep attention focused on the issue throughout 1991, including the pending discharge of Army Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer for being a lesbian. Cammermeyer had answered “yes” when asked whether she was gay during a 1989 investigative interview, setting in motion the military’s discharge process. A nurse and veteran of six years of active duty (including a Bronze Star won in the Vietnam War), she had once been selected the Army’s “Nurse of the Year” – honors that meant nothing in the face that she was a gay woman – Shilts reported (Shilts, 1991-g, p. A12). In the weeks that followed, Shilts found gay members of the military falling into his lap and he produced dozens of articles telling their stories – including one where he quoted then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney as referring to the gay military ban as “a bit of an old chestnut” (years before Cheney would reveal that one of his two daughters was gay) in defending the role of Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams who had been revealed as a closeted gay man by activist/author Michelangelo Signorile (Signorile, 1993). As Stephen H. Miller (1991) reported, “Williams’ homosexuality was no secret in Washington gay circles, yet most national media commentators were aghast at the outing – the same pundits who kept silent while the Pentagon forced out more than 1,000 gay veterans of Desert Storm, leading to at least one suicide”. Shilts took exception to Williams’ outing in a “Pro/Con” feature the *Chronicle* ran on its editorial pages on August 8, 1991. Shilts reported that “partisans on both sides of the outing debate are claiming the moral high ground as the inevitable rush of news stories surrounding the revelation,” but quickly quoted Cheney about the need for private lives to remain private and noting: “What’s clear from both sides of this debate is there’s plenty of hypocrisy to go around” (Shilts, 1991-a, p. A19). While bemoaning Williams’ outing as unnecessary and unfair to him professionally and

personally, Shilts took issue with Cheney's "awesome institutional hypocrisy" as he told reporters of his intent to keep Williams in place as the Pentagon's front man with the media, while widespread discharges of active duty personnel went forward:

He has said, in effect, that while he believes homosexuality should be no barrier to serving in the Defense Department's most privileged echelons, he still backs the ban on allowing gays to serve as lowly boatswain's mates and staff sergeants. To the hundreds of thousands of lesbians and gay men in uniform, the contradiction is nothing short of cruel (Shilts, 1991-a, p. A19).

The column gave Shilts the opportunity to highlight the manner in which the military rooted out gay soldiers, including harsh interrogations, harassment, and threats of prison terms if they didn't disclose the sexual identities of other service members. In May 1992, 29 members of Congress (all Democrats) introduced legislation that would end the exclusion of gays in the military – a bill Shilts wrote about but one that would gain little to no traction in the House or Senate (the ban on gay service ending officially more than a decade later on September 20, 2011) (Shilts, 1992-a, p. A8). Shilts kept the drumbeat reporting going by writing up a Congressional study that the cost of rooting out and replacing gay military personnel was an estimated \$27 million a year – with more than 17,000 service members discharged for being gay between 1980 and 1990, according to the Pentagon's records (Shilts, 1992-a, p. A7). While Shilts quoted Defense Department spokespersons as saying the study was flawed and greatly overstated the actual costs involved, he focused attention on a new reality of the military's policy: lesbian women were far more likely to be discharged than were suspected or admitted gay men (women making up 11 percent of the armed forces in 1990, but representing 22 percent of all gay-related discharges – numbers even worse in the Marine Corp where women were 5 percent of the force, but 28 percent of gay-related discharges).

Political events in first few months of 1993 as the new Clinton Administration worked to get its bearing in Washington, D.C. brought the media to Randy Shilts, weeks before he or his publisher wanted to talk to them. The raging battle over whether gay men and lesbian women could serve openly (or at all) in the nation's armed forces continued to grow in intensity. History would show conservative Republicans were happy to let the new Democrats in town, the Arkansas Clintonians, take a run at a controversial issue about the role of gays in one of society's most venerable organizations, the military. The record would show the Clinton team ran its own train off the tracks, getting sidetracked on to the gays in the military issue in their first few weeks in office, away from their "It's the economy, stupid" mantra that had served them so well in winning the White House in the 1992 election. Word had spread that by-now the nation's anointed "openly gay journalist" (and now author) was about to release his newest book on this very topic, *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays & Lesbians in the U.S. Military*. As the *Los Angeles Times* reporter Bettijane Levine affirmed,

There are two reasons why Randy Shilts says he shouldn't be talking. First, he must conserve his strength while recovering from a collapsed lung, a complication of AIDS. Second, the publishers of his book... threaten that 'there will be no book' if the author doesn't close his mouth until late April when the volume hits the stores. Shilts tells one reporter, 'Oh God, I'm really not allowed to talk,' but goes forward with an interview on the subject of gays in the military, because 'the subject of gays in the military can't be popped back in the bottle, to be uncorked when the time is right' (Levine, 1993).

Shilts decided to finish the very brief, rare interview, but not to give away any secrets. Among the secrets he was willing to release were "story after story" from gays serving secretly in the military, and even heterosexuals in the same units reluctant to take action against their closeted gay colleagues. Shilts noted

The military's administrative regulation says that you cannot be in the service and be gay, or even have a propensity to be gay. What's so hair-raising is that it's a

‘thought crime’ – just for allegedly thinking (a gay thought), you could be brought up on charges, and you have to prove yourself innocent (Levin, 1993).

Shilts’ editor at St. Martin’s Press believes *Conduct Unbecoming* is an even more important work of non-fiction and literary journalism than *And the Band Played On*, although *Band* sold many more copies and is viewed as a much larger critical success. Denny said,

From a purely technical point of view, *Conduct Unbecoming* is an even bigger writing accomplishment than *Band* in terms of the sheer difficulty of weaving all of those different stories and getting a narrative continuity out of it. This is just an editor talking, but I am very interested in technical questions such as that. We didn’t have the drum beat, the increasing number of cases that added the dramatic urgency to *Band*. But I think Randy did an incredible job, technically. If you ever try to write about a subject that doesn’t have a single, central character, then take a look at that book. It is just a magnificent example of how one can do it (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

*Conduct Unbecoming* was originally set to be published in late 1991 as a lead-up to the upcoming Democratic and Republican presidential primaries in ’92. Shilts’ rate of work, and his growing medical problems, made that impossible. Denny kept “buying time” with his bosses at St. Martin’s who continued to push for a completed manuscript in time for early spring 1992. By December 1992, Denny knew a secret few others did. Shilts had suffered a collapsed lung and was on a ventilator at Davies Medical Center in San Francisco under an assumed name, in and out of consciousness, and his book was not finished. Based off the success of *And the Band Played On*, St. Martin’s had advance orders for more than 250,000 copies of *Conduct Unbecoming*, but no completed manuscript and an author in and out of a coma. Just after New Year’s 1992, Denny packed up enough essentials for a long stay and flew to San Francisco to try and salvage what he could of Shilts’ book – whether he lived or died. Denny said “by flying out to San Francisco and being on the spot I was able to handle things out there without the home office, they would simply have to accept whatever I was doing” (M. Denny, personal

communication, November 23, 2011). When he was conscious, Shilts was sometimes lucid and sometimes not – but was clear on one thing – if news of his illness related to AIDS got out, no one would pay attention to his latest effort on gays in the military and instead would focus on the pending death of its author. Denny and Shilts’ personal assistant Linda Alband believe that literally hundreds of people in San Francisco knew Shilts was hospitalized, but out of respect kept the secret until Shilts was ready to disclose it himself (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011; L. Alband, personal communication, January 4, 2013). Finally able to communicate with Shilts, Denny laid it on the line: The last 300 pages of the book *had* to be completed immediately as with each passing day it appeared likely a former Arkansas Governor named Bill Clinton was going to win the ’92 election, and integrating gays into the military would be a very hot issue for the new administration. Denny recalls

I said to Randy, ‘If we were going to have any chance whatsoever, we have to get this moving. I can finish this for you, but I gotta make sure you understand that situation that we’re in and that I get a clear answer from you.’ Well, he said, ‘OK, I trust you, you do it.’ I was working with his researchers and his initial editor out there. I had everything brought to my hotel room, cartons and cartons of drafts and materials, all in various stages, and we went through it. I am a great believer in authors having the final cut on their book. I was very reluctant to do this, but it was the only way that we were ever going to get the book done. Randy was in a semi-coma a lot of the time. He would be in a coma for four or five hours, and then he would float into consciousness for 10 or 15 minutes and you could then talk to him. He would brighten up again (M. Denny, personal communication, November 23, 2011).

Denny said one of the things that pleases him is that most readers are unable to pinpoint where Shilts’ writing stopped and his started. Deadlines and Shilts’ questionable condition forced a major decision to cut a large section of the book regarding the just-wrapping up Gulf War. Details from that part of Shilts’ research would be added to later drafts.

When it was finally completed, a now healthier Shilts attempted to make headlines in 1993 with the release of *Conduct Unbecoming*. Highlights from the book given to reporters writing about it included Shilts' assertion that honored General Norman Schwarzkopf privately did not oppose allowing lesbians and gays to serve as military personnel, a claim Schwarzkopf publicly denied repeatedly. "The military ban is the most dramatic example of the fact that lesbians and gay men in America are not truly free, that this is not a free country," Shilts asserted, and that examination of the military's ban on gays served as a "wonderful microcosm of prejudice against gays and lesbians in the country as a whole." Shilts seemed pleased and excited about the attention the book was receiving, acknowledging that "my great fear was that this would be an issue nobody would care about." His excitement was understandable, reporting that he had traveled 70,000 miles and interviewed more than 1,000 people and examined more than 15,000 pages of documents he gained via Freedom of Information Act requests (Tuller, 1993).

"I often said this book was going to kill me, but I meant it figuratively, not literally" Randy Shilts told his *Chronicle* colleague Patricia Holt for a profile accompanying the release of *Conduct Unbecoming* (Holt, 1993). Shilts expressed gratitude to his book editors and research assistants for "finishing" the book as he remained hospitalized. Showing the growing distance between his own coming out in 1972 and his rise to gay and literary "stardom" in 1993, he expressed surprise "to see how open a lot of the younger people in the military today are about being gay. Most of them are ordinary people who happen to be gay and don't mind who knows it." Again reflecting his view, or hope, that his writing could change things, Shilts added that "if the book shows anything, it's that a lot of people cannot accept homosexuality in the abstract but have no problem accepting individuals who are gay." Shilts' essential thesis in *Conduct*

*Unbecoming* attempted to not only take up the issue of how the military had drummed gay members out for decades, but the rather inhumane manner in which they did it. Shilts found the military had passed through various eras since the 1940s when gays were officially banned, periods that reflected a view that gays were criminals, gays were sick individuals, gays were a security risk, to a more current view that gays would be disruptive to unit cohesion and military order (Shilts, 1993-a). Beyond these themes, however, Shilts' research had strong implications for the role of women in the military, particularly its ongoing struggle with sexual harassment of female enlistees and officers, the military's and society's application of sodomy rules and laws to homo- and heterosexuals, as well as how the military handled HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases among its ranks (the latter of which Shilts referred to as "an admirable effort") (Gross, 1993).

Perhaps showing growth from the time he wrote *Band* half a decade earlier, Shilts acknowledged his research revealed a "pandemic" of sexual harassment and abuse of women in the ranks of the military. "I had always known intellectually that there was a relationship between the women's movement and the gay movement, but I'd never seen the mechanics of how it works out in people's lives," he said. "This book allowed me to figure it out: Both of the movements reflect a threat to the ideology of masculinity, which remains the central cultural imperative in America" (Holt, 1993). *Los Angeles Times* writer Constance Casey offered a favorable review of Shilts' latest work – "bulkier than Shilts' landmark 1987 bestseller about the AIDS epidemic...(and) will inevitably be called monumental, and it is too big and too good not to be a major force in the (current) debate" (Casey, 1993). Casey declared Shilts' latest effort as "surprisingly engrossing, entertaining and optimistic" and that "Shilts is obviously a great interviewer alert to those moments when people describe their humiliation or pain, and highly

aware of ironic juxtapositions and funny details” (Casey, 1993). Shilts observed what he found to be a long-term supposition that the military was good at “making men out of boys” – concluding that the gay ban was

all about manhood and the confusing place we are in American society today about the roles of men and women. The military is an institution that guarantees to do one thing beyond all else, and that is to take boys and make men out of them. The reason the military did not want women ... has been the same reason the military does not want gay people. The presence of women and gay people in the military is a threat to those individuals who sought out this institution as a way to reinforce their own sense of manhood (Gross, 1993).

Still recovering from a lack of oxygen after a collapsed lung nearly killed him, Shilts appeared via satellite from his San Francisco home rather than an in-studio guest as is the tradition on *The Charlie Rose Show*. For the April 14, 1993 broadcast on PBS, Rose opened by declaring Shilts “an acclaimed journalist” and noted that Shilts’ timing was spot-on – his book coming out at the start of a years-long debate about the role for openly gay men and women in America’s armed forces. Shilts acknowledged that as he wrote the book that included more than 1,100 interviews with current and former veterans, and it became more and more apparent that Bill Clinton would win the 1992 Presidential election, the book gained more urgency each day. He also jumped head-first into his over-riding thesis that information could overcome homophobia and anti-gay prejudice. “The main reason I did the book was that, as I traveled around, I believed that a major point of *And the Band Played On* was to show how anti-gay prejudice interfered with our society’s ability to deal with AIDS,” Shilts said. “I realized that with a lot of heterosexuals, they could be very well-meaning people, but they were in some sort of denial when it comes to the existence and devastating effects that anti-gay prejudice has” (Rose, 1993).

Shilts particularly took on what he terms as “juvenile-level testimony” before Congressional committees considering Clinton’s edict to integrate gays into the military by

noting how quickly those discussions fell into fearful explanations of how gay men in a military setting would just use their access to gain sexual partners. “That reflects an overall social attitude that gay men are sex-obsessed animals who do nothing but ponder how to seduce heterosexuals,” Shilts said, noting that the argument was a red herring, and that existing military policy covering fraternization could deal with any such problems, however rare or common they may be. Shilts also linked the importance of breaking down the military’s ban on homosexuals to that of its earlier struggles to integrate racial minorities and women into its ranks and that the military’s reluctance to change and its strong commitment to old traditions reflect the aching changes overall American society must face regarding homosexuals. Shilts attributed the struggles to integrate women into the armed forces as more closely aligned to efforts to preserve masculinity – much like what was behind banning gays from openly serving. Shilts contended that

The issue of women in the military was never about women. It was about men and their desire to define their masculinity....And this issue has very little to do with gay people. It’s all about heterosexuals, particularly heterosexual men.... (who are) using an institution to define their manhood, and then if you let these people in who define you being less than a man, less than a human, then it takes away from the ability of that institution to give one their own self-definition (Adams, 1993).

### ***Shilts as Journalistic Expert***

Greenman (1999) makes a distinction about Randy Shilts and how he was cast as both a journalist and a representative of the gay community. Noting that most mainstream media referred to him as “the first openly gay reporter hired for a major mainstream newspaper” when in reality, “Shilts became the *only* openly gay reporter writing on lesbian and gay issues for a major mainstream newspaper, and was to remain the only such reporter for some time after 1981” (emphasis added, p. 410). The distinction is important, Greenman noted, given that a great deal of responsibility and respect flows toward the first person to reach any status. “As a

consequence,” Greenman noted, “Randy Shilts was regarded by mainstream media and the public as the *only* voice for lesbian and Gay America. There were no other sources known to the media against which to compare Randy’s perceptions and perspective” causing a level of authority and weight to be applied to Shilts’ words. “This made his role highly problematic for the lesbian and gay community,” Greenman believes.

The “take me to your leader” approach of the mainstream media found Shilts cast as a gay advocate or activist leader, when he held no official leadership role or responsibility in any gay organization or community. “The question remains: did Randy Shilts represent anyone and, if so, whom?” Greenman asked. Greenman suggests that Shilts’ views were not representative of any large segment of gay men or lesbian women, although he continually was cast as a spokesman or overall representative of the whole. He adds, “What makes Randy Shilts unique is that, for a longish and crucial period in history, he was accepted by the mainstream as an expert, not only on AIDS, but also on the gay community” (p. 412) and resulted from his role as a gay man writing about gay issues giving him an exclusive “insider status.”

Signorile (1993) adds to the theme noting that by the time Shilts’ second book, *And the Band Played On* came out in 1987, Shilts was well-received as a gay media spokesperson, in part because of his at least partial blame of the AIDS crisis on gay men (p. 149). The explosion of mainstream media coverage on issues such as “Patient Zero,” gay bathhouses and the reluctance of gay leaders to deal head-on with AIDS, became a sideshow, Signorile contends:

Shilts seemed to play right into the circus that took place in the mainstream media soon after his book was published. Seen less as an activist attacking the powers that be than a critical commentator on the gay movement itself, Shilts was just the kind of television talk show spokesperson the media liked at the time . . . as long as he also attacked the gay community for this disease that straights were not afraid of getting, editors and publishers would be sure to invite him back. In their bias-tinged perceptions, Shilts was ‘fair’ and provided ‘balance’ rather than behaving like what they called a pure ‘advocate’ (p. 149-151).

This “balanced” (or objective) role for Shilts becomes problematic, Signorile believed, because it played effortlessly into the expectations and norms of “a virulently anti-gay society (where) messages that resonated most were the ones faulting the gay community for the AIDS pandemic” (p. 151).

Greenman also explores the issue of objectivity and as with other minority groups, LGBTQ people “are considered to be inherently incapable of being objective about their own community” (p. 411). He suggests that “far from being biased, lesbian and gay people are the experts on issues having to do with sexual orientation” and that posit is reinforced by the fact that most privileged heterosexuals, including whites, men and English-speaking people, have little or no interest in pursuing queer studies and issues related to difference in sexual orientation or identity. And while on its face, Shilts’ role as a gay reporter covering gay issues was a move in the right direction, Shilts’ perspectives were “limited and partial in that he very much exhibited the perspective of a gay white man of the 1980s rather than an expert reflecting our entire community” (p. 412). Greenman’s commentary introduces the hegemonic criticism that persists about Shilts and how many of his most important works on AIDS had little or no mention of women (beyond prostitutes) – although his coverage of women in the military had progressed.

Casting of Shilts (or any journalist) as an expert has a long tradition in journalism via what Patrona (2012) deemed a “participation framework” where “journalists are shown to possess insider knowledge of political activity” but perhaps more importantly “are positioned to express personalized, albeit expert, views on the motives of political actors, and the far-reaching ramifications of their actions for government, the economy and the people (p. 159). Even in

broadcast settings where clear distinctions between news and opinion pieces are more often delineated, journalistic monologues function as opinion pieces where personal views can be elaborated. Patrona noted that the journalistic function of gathering and constructing information in specific creates a “professional” or “authoritative” role for journalists and that “this role epistemologically positions the journalist as superior to the general public” (p. 159).

Author Daniel Curzon, decidedly not a Shilts fan, said he felt sorry for Shilts during one of his TV appearances that featured him on a panel with the Rev. Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority (patched in via satellite). “Randy and the others were floored by Falwell,” Curzon said, “partly because his face was on a screen that took up three times as much space as theirs did, but also because Falwell was forceful, wasn’t the least bit thoughtful, and was saying his spiel. Shilts didn’t come off well at all. Where was all our gay aggressiveness when we needed it?” (Curzon, 2004, p. 91).

It wasn’t just the mainstream media, however, that sought Shilts as “the gay expert.” As early as 1980 during his start-up days as a freelance contributor to public television station KQED-TV and their nightly program, *Newsroom*, Shilts was an expert guest invited to discuss gay issues. He appeared on “The Gay Life with Randy Alfred,” a weekly radio show, and was particularly pointed during one radio discussion about portrayal of gays in mainstream media, giving voice to fears that such reporting could harm the gay movement. Referring to the city’s new mayor as “Dianne” (rather than as Mayor Feinstein), Shilts said, “Dianne is petrified of us, from what I have heard” and then took up the discourse offered most vocally in later days by his critics that mainstream media report about homosexual issues

brings out every dirty sexual thing that has always bothered Feinstein and other straights about the gay community. That’s going to be a negative. In the long run, and in my experience as a TV reporter, it’s been my experience that TV creates a major impact when you see it, and then it goes away. It creates perception... there

is going to be a hangover, so to speak, for some time....San Francisco will be more gay than ever by next year, but I think the major impact will be to just further alienate gay people from the media, which is a real shame, but I don't think you can blame gay people when the media lies like it does (Alfred, 1980).

Signorile has often regarded Shilts with begrudging respect and notes that Shilts' success as "official gay spokesman" flowed from his ability to infiltrate what he calls "the Trinity of the Closet" – including New York print, broadcasting and publishing media; Washington, D.C. political landscape; and Hollywood's entertainment industry (Weir, 1993, p. 46).

To his credit, Shilts both acknowledged and expressed aversion for his role as "gay community spokesperson." He believed being one of the first openly gay reporters anywhere granted him national prominence as a spokesperson, "And so some people in the gay community believe that when I'm on *Nightline* or *Donahue* or when I'm writing, my job is to be the spokesman for the community. My role is to present information and present both sides of the information" (Witt, 1991, p. B1). It's an problematized position Shilts took – on the one hand expressing dismay at the inherited role of "gay spokesman" and on the other ticking off news shows and interviews he readily did (including a highly criticized appearance on a daytime shock-TV show of the late 1980s, *The Morton Downey Jr. Show* in which he and other panelists shouted down audience members and the host about their advocacy for quarantining people with HIV and AIDS) that clearly cast him in such a role. Shilts recalled that when he started as "the openly gay reporter" – "Everybody wanted me to write about the good things the gay community was doing about AIDS, and I wrote that. But to write only about that would have been like covering a fire and talking about the firemen who are on one side of the fire, pouring water on it, but not talking about the guys who in the back of the fire, throwing gas on it. It would have been dishonest" (Witt, 1991, p. B1).

Shilts also seemed to understand that the struggles he encountered with gay leaders who sometimes resented his assumed role as “gay spokesman” was based on where he worked:

I am perceived now as part of a power structure. I work for the *Chronicle*. It's a major institution, and since some of my point of views have run counter to the community, especially around the bathhouse stuff... people don't like me, that's basically why they're mad at me....It's like I became wrapped up as some kind of authority power figure (Marcus, 1989).

Near the end of his life, Shilts openly suggested that criticism he received from the left about his anointed and/or assumed role as a gay spokesman was born, at least partially, out of professional and literary jealousy. Weir (1993, p. 48) noted that “Shilts’ contribution to the gay and lesbian communities as an openly gay reporter with heterosexual sanction is ironically what most aggravates his peers.” Shilts’ suggestion that jealousy has reared its head in LGBTQ consideration of his life and work may gain credibility as an argument when one considers how the mainstream media have seemingly only “allowed” a certain number of homosexuals to “crossover” into mainstream participation – and Shilts has done so (as Signorile suggested) in many important aspects of American life: journalism, publishing, politics, and entertainment.

Weir (1993, p. 48) noted

The fear that the straight community will listen only to a limited number of homosexual voices may be endemic among gay and lesbian writers. But what is remarkable about Shilts’ career is that his dedication to replacing prejudice with fact is both his singular innovation in gay and lesbian journalism and the source of his alienation from homosexual activists, writers, and politicians.

A prime example of Shilts’ designated role as journalistic expert can be found on the day NBA All-Star Earvin “Magic” Johnson became the biggest celebrity since the now-deceased Rock Hudson to announce he had contracted the HIV virus. Randy Shilts was back on the AIDS beat declaring that Johnson’s disclosure came at a “crucial time” and created hope among AIDS

advocates “that renewed attention will mobilize badly needed action against the epidemic” (Shilts, 1991-j, p. A22; Stevenson, 1991, p. 1). Shilts said “the past year has been the worst of times for those organizing to fight the disease. The media have grown bored with covering AIDS; new government actions against the epidemic have ground to a halt, and the public has grown apathetic” (Shilts, 1991-j, p. A22). Shilts declared that Johnson’s disclosure “could prove to be an even more compelling development” than Hudson’s death-bed disclosure because he was viewed as young, healthy, in the prime of his NBA career, and not rumored to be or perceived to be gay. “Those involved with fighting AIDS argue that the battle against the epidemic is in dire need of major league assistance,” Shilts wrote, as the nation’s HIV positive number ticked ever-closer to 200,000 Americans (126,000 of which had already died). Shilts’ transparent desire to have someone of import to middle-America move to the front of the AIDS battle was something he seemingly acted as if he could trumpet into being.

In a special column for *Sports Illustrated*, Shilts suggested that central casting could not have come up with a better spokesman for the AIDS crisis than Johnson, “a man of integrity from the world of sports” meaning that Johnson “couldn’t be better suited for taking on the cause of AIDS awareness. If this sports champion preaches the gospel of safe sex and more research, there’s a good chance that heterosexual mainstream America will listen” (Shilts, 1991-k, p. 130). Regardless, Shilts noted Johnson had some work to do in refining his message – taking special note that an audience on *The Arsenio Hall Show* had cheered wildly when Magic declared that he was “far from being a homosexual” (Shilts, 1991-k, p. 130). Johnson was needed, Shilts said, to help bridge the gap between “innocent” AIDS victims and “deserving” or “sinful” AIDS sufferers, most often gay men, drug users, or prostitutes. Apparently not worrying about the risk of overstating things, Shilts report that “No human being in the history of the AIDS epidemic is

better positioned to get the battle against AIDS moving than Johnson” – noting that AIDS research funding had stalled under President George H.W. Bush, and that safe sex message inroads among African-American communities remained a serious challenge (Shilts, 1991-k, p. 130).

Just a year before Randy Shilts died, he offered one more column for the editorial pages of *The San Francisco Chronicle* – this time engaging the familiar fantasy engaged by many a struggling gay person – “What if the world were turned upside-down and gay people were the majority, and straight people were the minority?” Such a visualization, Shilts said, would give straight people “a glimmer of how it feels to be gay and watch the public policy debate over homosexuality this year....when gays ask for the same rights as everyone else, they’re accused of wanting special privileges. The reality is that the story of gays in America is less a story about gay people than about heterosexuals. Gay people, in truth, have very little control over the most basic conditions of their lives” (Shilts, 1992-c, p. A17). Calling out the fact that heterosexuals restrict gays from serving in certain professional roles for jobs, deny the legitimacy or legalization of gay marriages, or even where gay people may live. Shilts ended on a deflated note:

The political tragedy for gays in this country is that for those heterosexuals who support gay rights, the majority, the issue is not a determining factor when they vote. To most, it’s not a big deal. They have never stopped to imagine what it is like to live as homosexuals live, alone, in fear and in hiding. They won’t have to, as long as homosexuals accept such treatment – but that time is fast running out (Shilts, 1992-c, p. A17).

Reporters continued their trek to Shilts as “expert source” on gays in the military in the weeks following the formal release of *Conduct Unbecoming*. For its version, *Los Angeles Times* writer Danica Kirka described Shilts as “an unlikely firebrand in the raging debate” about gays in the

military by noting “he took the results of his research a step further, appearing on the talk-show circuit and roundly attacking the terror tactics used by military investigators to purge homosexuals from the ranks” (Kirka, 1993). Kirka declared that Shilts was widely recognized as “the chronicler of gay issues” and retold the oft-repeated tales of Shilts’ differences with the gay community he covered, and noted that Shilts felt obliged as a reporter to cover all sides of any issue he wrote about. And while he continued to proclaim his objective approach to reporting, he openly acknowledges that his interest in pursuing the gays in the military issue grew out of a sense that “gender conflicts” within society continue, particularly for gay people, “but we don’t really have new ways of dealing with gender differences....I don’t think there is a better case study of homophobia than the military” (Kirka, 1993). Shilts launched quickly into an indictment of the military’s ban on gays serving openly, noting that the basic argument “boils down to showers and barracks and bunks – which all basically reflects the social attitude that gay men are all obsessed sexual predators whose sole purpose to get in the military is to glower people in the showers.” It seems to the end, Randy Shilts was determined to call out and, hopefully, change how people perceived “the gay other” (Kirka, 1993).

Displaying some of the “true believers” mindset that often set Shilts apart from other gay activists, he acknowledged the “fear and ignorance around homosexuality” but noted, “I don’t think people are as malicious as much as just uninformed. If you bring information and replace their fiction with the truth, you can eradicate the fear and the prejudice” (Kirka, 1993). This is where Shilts saw his work as possibly having the most hope of impact – “society’s attitude toward gay people is one that’s going to be evolving for decades,” he said. Signaling the undergirding principle that seemed to guide all of his reporting, whether it placed him outside the role of objective reporter or not, Shilts said he believed “the gay community isn’t really fighting

discrimination so much as it's fighting what has long been a social taboo against homosexuality" and added, "Taboos only have their power if people don't talk about it and never question it. Once you start questioning it, then it's gone in time. So whenever homosexuality gets discussed, it's a win for the gay community" (Kirka, 1993).

Shilts' belief that information could help advance the rights and lives of gay people, was prominently featured at the time of his death. His colleagues at *The San Francisco Chronicle* quoted him as saying, "I believe I can do more by informing with well-documented facts than through anything else. I view my role in life as writing stories that wouldn't get written unless I do them" and balanced that claim with the acknowledged scorn he had earned from gay advocates with "I think good reporters know that life is not a popularity contest" (Olszewski & Tuller, 1994, p. 1).

Among the last national interviews Shilts would give came from the reporters and producers of the CBS franchise hit, *60 Minutes*, the same show that a half-decade earlier had helped propel Shilts and his writing to international acclaim. Reporter Steve Kroft noted that "it's not often that we do stories about reporters, but Randy Shilts was more than a reporter," as he introduced the story that originally broadcast on CBS on February 20, 1994, just three days after Shilts' death. Explaining that *60 Minutes* began work on its profile of Shilts weeks before, Kroft described him as "a pioneer of sorts" and "a witness to 20 years of social change that allowed him to express, far better than most—at least to straight people—what it's like to be gay in America" (Kroft, 1994). Reflecting the ever-authoritative and assured manner in which Shilts seemed to discuss anything in the waning days of his life, he told Kroft that even as a college journalist he knew his professors were wrong and that "it was so obvious that (gay issues) were going to be a huge story" because "you can't hurt as many people as get hurt under the status

quo, you can't disrupt that many people's lives without it ending up causing a kind of reaction that breeds news stories" (Kroft, 1994).

Shilts *had*, after all, enjoyed some tremendous luck or great vision – depending on your perspective – in being in the right place at the right time for emerging news waves. He was front and center for the rise and ultimate fall of gay icon Harvey Milk; he was at ground-zero in San Francisco for the AIDS pandemic in America; and his last years were spent exploring integration of gays into the armed services – an issue that played out in Washington over the two decades that followed. Shilts' confidants, such as Linda Alband, noted that even his planned future projects (such as an examination of sexual abuse inside the Catholic Church) seemed to be at the center of the news spotlight (L. Alband, personal communication, January 4, 2013). Shilts shared with Kroft, as he had with many other reporters, thoughts about the backlash he had experienced from both gay and straight sources. He said he had begun a practice many people undertake as they become aware their lives are drawing to a close; he had reflected on what his life had meant (even if a reporter's question asking him to do the same for the record had hurt his feelings in earlier days). "A lot of times people sit down and they want to ask you these soul-searching questions, almost as if you have some sort of sustaining wisdom now that you know, presumably, that you're coming closer to God or something like that," Shilts said. "It's a real drag" (Kroft, 1994). A gaunt and drawn-looking Shilts added that he was not going happily unto his death:

I have never felt it was evitable. I can't say I feel bitter. You go through your 'why me?' stage and it's very frustrating because here I am at the pinnacle of my career. I could do literally anything I wanted to do in the world of journalism, and you're left with the strange feeling that your life is somehow finished without being completed (Kroft, 1994).

## ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

By the time the very first meeting of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association drew 300 journalists to San Francisco in the summer of 1992, Randy Shilts had already become one of “the most famed gay journalists” a noted figure among many of his colleagues – some of whom would not provide their names to a reporter from *Editor & Publisher* magazine for fear of losing their journalism job back home (Iwata, 1992). The conference, however, moved beyond the need for newsroom “coming out” and explored gay journalists’ identities, and their potential power and influence in mainstream journalism. As Iwata (1992) reported, “For many gays, the debates took on a real-life urgency. As several speakers observed, it is dangerous to be gay today. Attacks from conservatives, rising street violence against gays, and the hysteria around AIDS make life risky for politically active gays.” The notion of “politically active gays” working as journalists begged the obvious question: If gays were fighting a cultural war for overall survival in society, what role, if any, should mainstream journalists who are gay play in that war? The debate among the journalists present ranged from advocating more and better coverage of gay rights issues, to those who saw a conflict of bringing their personal interests into their work. Still others opened the long-debated question of journalistic objectivity and whether it even mattered at all (Iwata, 1992).

Pierson (1990) explored Shilts’ earliest reporting at *The San Francisco Chronicle* that at its heart considered the role a gay journalist could or should have in covering day-to-day news. Pierson particularly looked at stories Shilts wrote about murders and assaults targeting some of the city’s gay population, and profiles of a local lesbian judge and an openly gay cop. Pierson quoted Shilts as saying that his presence in the newsroom had helped improve the perception of the *Chronicle* with gay readers and had created no problems with his editors or readers about his

objectivity. Tucker (1994) reported that ideas about objectivity and the matter of *who* was reporting the news began to change during the 1970s as women and racial and ethnic minorities began to make headway in gaining newsroom jobs. Tucker said the issue was clear, “Can a reporter from a segment of society which has long been discriminated against resist the temptation to become an advocate?” (Tucker, 1994, p. 83). Tucker raised even more interesting questions when she explored the issue of what stories minority reporters were given – noting that breakthrough African-American reporters were often assigned to cover stories in the “black community” and that “by putting black reporters into a news ghetto, where they covered only black politicians and ‘black’ issues, white news managers helped create an environment in which too many black reporters were protective of those politicians” (Tucker, 1994, p. 83) – ironically the exact opposite claim that often came against Shilts insisting that he was not favorable or amenable to providing positive coverage to gay political leaders. Tucker also retold the story of Jeffrey Schmalz, a closeted gay man who came out while a reporter at *The New York Times* shortly after learning he had contracted HIV, and was later diagnosed with AIDS. His personal situation notwithstanding, Schmalz plowed headlong into coverage of AIDS issues (including a 1993 interview with Shilts) and openly acknowledged that he had “used my affliction (with AIDS) to advantage, to obtain interviews, and force intimacy” and asked a tough journalistic question of himself: “Does that make me feel guilty? You bet. But to have AIDS is to live with guilt and shame” (Tucker, 1994, p. 83).

Nishikawa, Towner, Clawson & Waltenburg (2009, p. 243) suggest that it is still unclear whether the increased presence of minorities in the newsroom has any actual effect on coverage afforded to minority communities, although minority reporters self-reported they believe they are making a difference despite the constraints of “journalistic norms.” These “journalistic norms”

are often built around long-established “rules” for gathering news from authoritative sources, political and government leaders, and a resulting marginalization and/or exclusion of divisive or minority voices. While the Nishikawa, et al. (2009, p. 244-45) noted that minority-based advocacy publications often work to overcome this reality, “minority journalists in mainstream organizations, however, face a great deal of pressure to steer clear of advocacy journalism or any type of coverage that presents a complex picture of minorities.”

Shilts’ one-time TV colleague, Belva Davis, knew something about breaking barriers in journalism. Hired in the early 1970s by KQED-TV during a push by local TV stations to add more on-air talent that included blacks and other minorities, she quickly rose to be the first female black TV anchor west of the Mississippi River when she was named host of *Newsroom*. Davis said,

I had no role models to follow, but fortunately for me, I worked for people who allowed me to do stories that I found of human interest, I covered everything. In Randy’s case, I got myself involved because I wanted to come into the struggle of gay reporters to cover gay communities because that was a problem that they had. Some of my colleagues then thought that if you had gay reporters, they needed to be barred from covering certain issues. I have always said no to that. I would have quit if they told me I could not cover black stories, otherwise, why was I hired? (B. Davis, personal communication, February 8, 2013).

Davis, who identifies as heterosexual, believes Shilts’ journalistic struggle for acceptance was perhaps greater than her own:

I can’t draw a line between my single experience coming out of an era where the government was encouraging and asking people of color to end segregation in the media. I at least had my country’s backing, the FCC, encouraging stations to hire minorities. Gay people did not have that kind of front door support system from the government. They just sort of had to figure it out on their own. There was all of this uncertainty, (a gay reporter such as Randy) couldn’t know how people would react to them. With me, I had no choice, they could see that I was brown right away (B. Davis, personal communication, February 8, 2013; Pierson, 1990).

Fellow KQED reporter Rita Williams said she and Shilts both felt they had something to prove in television news. “Randy was a fierce reporter,” she said, noting that while he was trying to prove a gay man could be an authoritative and credible on-air reporter, just as she was trying to provide similar evidence about the still-relatively new idea of female reporters (R. Williams, personal communication, June 6, 2012).

The question and debate about what the role for a gay news reporter could be did reflect how far gay journalists had come. It was Shilts himself who had queried the editors of the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 1978 to simply report on the existence of gay men and lesbian women in the mainstream media. Shilts’ story idea was rejected in a kindly worded letter by James Boylan, editor of the *CJR* at the time. Boylan said he and his fellow editors “like the subject” and found Shilts’ proposed article “readable” but added – “if this were the one major treatment we were likely to do on this issue for a while, it really ought to be definitive. While you present the professional problems of gays, I feel the lack of solid documentation” (Boylan, 1978). Boylan said Shilts’ story needed more coverage of any legal protections gays may have against workplace discrimination, whether local or federal statutes, whether any gays had challenged hiring or firing decisions based on sexual orientation, consideration of gay employees in trade and union contracts with journalists, and “Have there been any recent trends in the handling and treatment of gay-rights news that ought to be documented?” At first blush, Boylan’s reply appears to be eliciting more information – but on further consideration it displays a tremendous amount of cynicism. Boylan and any editor at his level in 1978 would certainly know that little to no workplace discrimination protections existed for gay journalists then (or now), and that even if legal challenges had gone forward, they would have failed miserably under local and federal laws that ignored the rights of homosexuals. Boylan offered a predictable

approach – he encouraged Shilts to “severely shorten” his suggested piece and transform it from a piece of reporting about journalism into an opinion piece that they might consider for publication (Boylan, 1978).

Back at the inaugural session of gay journalists, Shilts urged his fellow gay journalists to fight the inclination to engage in “political conformity that snuffs out diversity of thought and opinion” (Iwata, 1992). His strongest statement, however, was aimed at gay journalists whom Shilts dubbed “lavender fascists” for their practice of what he termed “the politics of petulance” and “journalism of rage” that threw objective standards out the window. Signorile (1993, p. 155) highlighted that Shilts “didn’t seem to catch the irony of his remarks. He, a man who had called for government imposed curtailing of sexual activity years earlier, was attacking others as fascists.” Shilts’ remarks were a cannon shot across the bow of openly gay journalists operating outside of the mainstream newsroom that Shilts enjoyed, and it was a comment that would further cement resentment against Shilts by more progressive or radical gays who more often than not viewed themselves at the forefront of the queer movement. Frequent Shilts critic Signorile blasted back that gay journalists working for gay publications “are journalists in the best sense” and that “we’re reporting the truth, not controlling thoughts or pushing a political agenda” (Iwata, 1992). Shilts’ artful, yet provocative use of the words “lavender fascists” would ring in his ears for the remainder of his life including into the ongoing debate about whether closeted gays in public positions should be “outed” (a position Shilts opposed in most circumstances, again placing him at odds with more radical gay journalists).

It seems Shilts never held back in his critique of the gay press – or any press – never concerned with building bridges or forging a stronger gay press. His critique of the gay rights movement is revealed early in his writing career. In a brilliant April 1978 story for *The Village*

*Voice* about the fight between New York’s “feisty” Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) and prominent New York City attorney Adam Walinsky. Shilts colorfully reported on a late-night “raid” on the front lawn of Walinsky’s suburban Scarsdale, N.Y. home (that included cutting the phone lines to the home so Walinsky and his family could not call the police), Shilts dubbed the exercise “just an old-fashioned urban-guerilla confrontation” between two enemies (Shilts, 1978-a). Walinsky, a once-prominent 1960s civil rights advocate and aide to Senator Robert F. Kennedy, won the wrath of gay activists with his remarks in *The New York Daily News* in which he referred to homosexuals as “a sad aberration” and worried aloud about efforts by gays to recruit young children to homosexuality. Walinsky sued “the gay goons” (as *Time* magazine called them) for the charter-busload of gays who took up residence on his lawn one August night – and the American Civil Liberties Union quickly jumped in to defend the GAA.

Shilts reported that “the most important issue to emerge from the Scarsdale controversy, however, has less to do with the combatants’ respective sexual identifies than with the sticky constitutional question of residential picketing” (Shilts, 1978-a). As a young writer, just three years removed from his University of Oregon journalism classes, Shilts demonstrated a skillful mastery of the issues at play in the battle between the two sides – but pleased neither side as he carefully examined the issues each were raising. Gay advocates likely found Shilts’ article too considerate of Walinsky’s positions – and surely objected to use of words such as “gay militants” and “guerilla tactics” to describe the protest organizers. Walinsky was likely also displeased with having his reaction couched in terms of “Nazi-like tactics” and “Nazi ideology” to silence the protestors. Shilts found a source from the more conservative National Gay Task Force to affirm his statement that “Some New York gay activists remain worried that the illegal tactics of the wire cutting gay radicals creates a bad image for gays at a time when the comprehensive gay

civil rights ordinance is emerging as a major issue in New York City” (Shilts, 1978-a). Perhaps channeling his youth forays as a volunteer on the 1964 presidential campaign of Republican Barry Goldwater, Shilts added an interesting riff: “One of the militants who participated in the illegal actions at the picket, however, says extremism in the defense of gay liberty is no vice” (Shilts, 1978-a).

In a freewheeling 1987 interview with a Philadelphia gay newspaper, *Au Courant*, Shilts was in full tilt in both in his assumed role as gay leader, and as objective journalist. Describing his amazement that gay bathhouses continued to operate years after he had successfully helped shutter them in San Francisco, he said, “In Seattle, I met with the leaders of the Northwest AIDS Foundation. I was very blunt and said they should shut the baths down. I just wanted to tell people not to wait until half of your friends are dying before they move against these horrible institutions” – but achieved no success. Citing the political aspect to the issue, Shilts excoriated gay leaders on the issue:

How dare we go and demand that the federal government pull out all stops for treatments and vaccine research (for AIDS), when we’re not willing to do even so much as to close a business? It’s a travesty on our part and politically stupid to boot. It makes us (gay people) look incredibly irresponsible (Grzesiak, 1987).

A more palpable example of Shilts engaging in discourse as a “gay leader” perhaps doesn’t exist – and there was more to his critique that included gay-owned and operated newspapers.

Crowther (1995) offered a thought-provoking analysis of Shilts’ role – and objectivity – by questioning the motives of religious fundamentalists who picketed a February 1994 memorial service for Shilts. He noted, “Maybe the demonstrators didn’t hate Shilts, dead of AIDS at 42, because he was a homosexual. Maybe they only hated him because he was a journalist” (p. 299). He believes Shilts’ death earned him a leave from “a profession in crisis” where most

“mainstream journalists sign over their honor without a murmur” (p. 300). Crowther’s thesis is that

When there are no reparable wholesalers in the marketplace of ideas, it reverts to the law of the jungle – might makes right, and shrillness and repetition make what passes for the truth. The jungle is a lonely place for independence. A journalist’s popularity rests on the security of groupthink .... No one faced more pressure than the late Randy Shilts (but).... for Shilts there was no closing of the book and moving on to the next assignment. From the beginning, when *The San Francisco Chronicle* hired him from the all-gay *Advocate*, the homosexual community was his beat, his responsibility, his family (p. 300).

Crowther believes, “For Shilts, the challenge was objectivity.... He was totally immersed in the history and politics of San Francisco’s gay enclave, known as the Castro, long before it was Ground Zero of the AIDS explosion” (p. 301). He noted that Shilts’ narrative in telling the life of Harvey Milk was “anything but detached and impersonal” and that Milk’s story “often (became) a vehicle for expressing Shilts’ own central torment: why the straight world insists on making life so difficult for homosexuals” (p. 302). He adds

No one expected much objectivity for a reporter whose friends were dying all around him. But Shilts discovered, under the pressures of this AIDS story that he was uniquely qualified to tell, that he had a weakness for the hard stuff – the unvarnished truth (p. 302).

Another journalist who weathered many a storm over his objectivity – *Washington Post* writer Carl Bernstein – commented upon the death of Shilts that “he was a great journalist. Finally in our profession there is some first-rate journalism being done about gays and lesbians, and that is largely attributable to Randy Shilts’ work” (Olszewski & Tuller, 1994, p. A1).

Shilts viewed his writing about the gay community very much as a community function, but that did not necessarily translate into advocacy journalism. Shilts said,

Writing about the gay community is like being a journalist in a small town. You get immediate reaction. I walked down the street and had people shout at me. Though I’m open about being gay, I do not perceive myself as being an activist of

any sort. The book (Band) has a point of view, but I reject advocacy journalism. I'm just your basic reporter (Reinhold, 1987).

April Witt, a military issues reporter for *The Virginian-Pilot* interviewed Shilts in 1991 as he visited with and interviewed closeted gay military members living in the Navy towns surrounding Norfolk, Virginia, all part of work on *Conduct Unbecoming*. Under story headlined: "Gay Rights: Clearing the Path of Prejudice" Shilts quickly declared his role as journalist. "Some would call him an activist. Left wing homosexuals have called him a 'Gay Uncle Tom.' But Randy M. Shilts knows who he is. He is a journalist" (Witt, 1991, p. B1). Still bristling from a Peter Jennings description of him as "an angry man" when *ABC World News Tonight* named him their "Person of the Week," Shilts said that he actually hated controversy, "but I do what I think is right. And I'm not going to change a story so that people will like me" (Witt, 1991, p. B1). Shilts told historian Eric Marcus that he had battled with tremendous internal rage, "horrible rage" and that it drove him to drinking and drugs – rage he attributed to both familial alcoholism and a childhood spent as the singled-out target of his mother's physical and verbal abuse (Marcus, 1989).

Moving beyond the basic journalistic struggle over whether sources and story subjects like the reporter, Shilts walked straight into the description of himself as just what he claimed he was not: Activist. Acknowledging "there is a level of anger there" inside of himself, he added, "I consider myself an optimist because I am doing something I feel like I'm part of the solution. So I am not just stepping in on the problem" (Witt, 1991, p. B1). His use of the term "stepping in on the problem" is an interesting choice of words, one that is often used in describing the role of reporters who observe and report, but don't openly seek or claim a role as change agent. To the

contrary, Shilts was claiming an activist role forthright – “I feel like I’m part of the solution” – an unshielded role as a person who wants things to change.

It wasn’t always easy. Although Shilts was lucky to have landed in San Francisco, it was still the 1980s and attitudes sometimes changed slowly. As he retold his arrival in the *Chronicle* newsroom later, Shilts reflected it as a welcoming environment, but one colleague at the paper recalls at least one painful moment for the new gay reporter in the room. At a Newspaper Guild meeting shortly after joining the paper, Shilts rose and asked the local guild to consider endorsing health benefits for domestic partners of *Chronicle* staff. “One of his colleagues shouted, ‘Sit down, you little faggot,’” recalled Jerry Roberts, who later became managing editor of the newspaper. “Nobody stood up to defend Randy, who left the meeting in tears, which tells you something about the enlightened views of the San Francisco press corps about gay rights at the time” (Power, 1994).

Roberts recalls Randy Shilts as a reporter in his “pre-AIDS fame” and a series of reports he wrote about alleged physical brutality against gay citizens, and others, by members of the San Francisco Police Department. Shilts’ “original tip (for the story) came from complaints from gays about being harassed by cops,” Roberts noted, “but by the time he was done, it was in no way, shape or form a ‘gay piece,’ just a good, solid investigation of an under-the-radar problem in city government that affected everyone” (Power, 1994). Another one of his earliest *Chronicle* stories also gained notice after Shilts voluntarily spent the weekend locked up in what was known as “the Queen’s Tank,” a special cell at the city’s jail for cross-dressing and obviously gay inmates.

Shilts’ book editor Michael Denny said he believed Randy was “in love” with the idea of being a journalist. “I think of him as a classic journalist,” he said. “Somebody who took the

almost romantic notion of being a journalist, totally believed it, and lived it out” (Weiss, 2004). His love affair with the role of journalism was at the heart of a lot of the criticism leveled against him by fellow gays – many of them labeling him an “assimilist” because “he chose to write about gay issues for the mainstream precisely because he wanted other people to know what it was like to be gay. If they didn’t know, how were things going to change?” said Shilts’ literary assistant Linda Alband (Weiss, 2004).

*Rolling Stone* writer Jon Katz, in writing about the release of Shilts’ last book, noted that “no other mainstream journalism had sounded the alarm so dramatically, caught the dimensions of the AIDS tragedy so poignantly” as did Shilts, and adds:

But Shilts’s work matters not only because it’s about gays or AIDS but because he has broken journalism’s hoary tradition of viewing conviction as anti-journalistic, even unethical. He has fused strong belief with the gathering of factual information and the marshaling of arguments, the way the founders of the modern press did. In doing so, he has exposed the notion of objectivity as bankrupt, ineffective, even lethal (Katz, 1993, p. 31-32).

Katz rejoins Shilts’ lament about the lack of meaningful response to his work (discussed at length by Shilts in a first-person account for a March 1989 *Esquire* magazine article called “Talking AIDS to Death”). Katz asks,

If *And the Band Play On* was so great, why hadn’t newspapers already done it? The answer goes to the heart of the way journalism works, or doesn’t. By any definition, the advent of AIDS was one of the most compelling stories of modern times. It met every criterion for a story the media would ordinarily rush to cover: intrigue, celebrity, politics, medical mystery, sex, unspeakable tragedy, pathos and death. . . . Yet at least five years went by before Rock Hudson’s death in 1985 forced the spreading epidemic onto front pages and evening newscasts (Katz, 1993, p. 32).

McKay (2011) also references the growing frustration Shilts demonstrated via the stories he first wrote about homosexuals and their struggles in society, and later about people with HIV/AIDS – both stories that directly impacted his own life. McKay said Randy Shilts

very passionately, very ardently tried to explain homosexuality to the straight world. When he came out of the closet, he was part of the gay liberation movement of the 1970s, and was convinced that much of the homophobia that he was witnessing was a result of a lack of understanding of what it meant to be homosexual. He believes that if only he could do a really good job of explaining homosexuality to straight people, some of this prejudice might go away (McKay, 2011).

McKay's discourse on the idea that Shilts believed his journalism could change the world is born out in comments Shilts made in the last year of his life:

I don't consider myself an activist or an advocacy journalist. I feel that prejudice in our society (against homosexuals) is born less out of malice than out of ignorance, and that if you just inform people... you can do more to erase prejudice than any other kind of action. Because (straight people) just don't know any better, they're just dumb, and they live in a society where we weren't talked about, where all these silly images of us exist, the fantasy images, really, and you try to replace that with some facts (Weir, 1993, p. 47).

Weir (1993, p. 47) said Shilts' remarks reveal his political outlook underlying his journalism:

“He believes the way to justice is to replace lies with facts.” The argument some – particularly on the left – have made with Shilts and his commitment to facts is that facts can be interpreted, manipulated, omitted, emphasized in particular ways, or even purposefully misstated. As such, some of Shilts' “facts” – such as those about “Patient Zero” and his role in the advent of HIV and AIDS in America – are presented as truth and have the impact of truth – whether they be based on a shaky factual basis or not. Similarly, McKay believes that Shilts' prolific schedule of writing about HIV and AIDS convinced him that inaction he perceived as occurring on the national and local level were the result of deep-seeded homophobia and anger (McKay, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

Shilts remains a controversial *and* respected figure in journalism and non-fiction publishing. No other gay author has come close to selling the amount of books or gaining the amount of attention and notoriety Shilts achieved – even amidst the fast-forward nature of LGBTQ issues in twenty-first century America. Permanently enshrined in San Francisco’s new “Rainbow Honor Walk” along Market Street of the Castro District, Shilts’ name was one of the original 20 honorees recognized as self-identified LGBT individuals, now deceased, who made significant contributions in their fields. Shilts is also the namesake of the “Randy Shilts Award” that annually honors authors for gay non-fiction writing presented during the Publishing Triangle Awards, and the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) offers a “Randy Shilts Visibility Award” that recognizes efforts to highlight struggles of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender military service personnel to the public’s attention. In addition, Shilts is a member of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists’ Association (NLGJA) “Hall of Fame” and his alma mater, the University of Oregon, has named a journalism scholarship in Shilts’ honor and he was posthumously inducted into the University of Oregon’s Hall of Achievement in 1998. Shilts was also listed (along with the likes of Ernie Pyle, H.L. Mencken, Christopher Hitchens, Walter Cronkite, Ida Wells-Barnett, and Katharine Graham) as one of the “100 Outstanding Journalists in the United States in the Last 100 Years” by the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute at New York University. In 2012, the Library of Congress listed Shilts’ 1987 book, *And the Band Played On*, on its list of “100 Books That Shaped America.” Scholar Judith Patterson elevated Shilts into an elite group of 10 journalists who have penned books of social importance – along with the likes of Lincoln Steffens, Betty Friedan, Taylor Branch, Michael Harrington, Jessica Mitford, and Alex Kotlowitz (Patterson, 1994).

Even Shilts' staunchest critics begrudgingly grant him status as an outstanding researcher and writer who successfully carved out expertise in areas related to gay life and culture that were never occupied before, or particularly since, by anyone else. Through the prism of Shilts' career we clearly can access the idea of Lippmann's "societal elite" who exists for the purpose of transcribing and analyzing sometimes complicated or complex issues. In essence, as the "chronicler" or "scribe" of the AIDS crisis singularly, and the gay experience in America more broadly, Shilts fulfilled the role Lippmann described as essential to navigating a democratic society in all its variants. It is interesting to ponder how Shilts would conduct his journalism (and book writing) in today's more democratized means of journalism where information is a commodity held by many and broadcast as quickly as hitting a "post" or "send" button, and books are rarely read. Would his assumed or earned, depending upon your position, role of informed journalistic expert have a continued role? Perhaps so in the world of cable television where such "panelist experts" (as suggested by Patrona, 2012) still thrive, Shilts would be front and center, as a frequent contributor.

This understanding, or placement, of Shilts and his journalism is important to a fuller and fair analysis of his work. Posthumous critics have been harsh in their treatment of Shilts (particularly around the casting of G aetan Dugas as "Patient Zero"), but a larger, more inclusive consideration of Shilts and his work is in order. In a larger view of Shilts, serious questions about "Patient Zero" or other issues of objectivity notwithstanding, there is no diminishment of Shilts' contribution to journalism *and* advancement of knowledge and understanding of gay people – movement toward more liberation of homosexuals in America. In both the categories of journalism and gay liberation, Shilts' work contributes greatly to enhancing these components of society, and is remarkable from beginning to end. There is direct evidence that his journalism

*changed the world in which it was offered.* Gay bathhouses closed and San Francisco and the larger gay community finally tackled, however painfully, issues of sexual freedom amidst the fledgling gay liberation movement – nothing less than Shilts advocated for in his writing. And although it would take another decade to achieve, Shilts’ original push for an end to the ban on openly gay or lesbian people serving in the U.S. military was remembered in 2011 when the compromise “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy finally came to an end, and gay people began open integration into the military. Would these cultural and political shifts have occurred without Shilts? Perhaps so, but his reportage on them in their earliest days assures him of an important place in the history of journalism and of gay liberation. If he were alive today, Shilts would likely be surprised to find the languishing issues such as gay marriage, child adoption, and even non-discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations still waiting to be checked off the “gay agenda”.

At Shilts’ funeral, mourners were handed a small red card carrying a quintessential quote from the swift of tongue journalist – “And while we’re talking conclusions, hopefully, history will record that I was a hell of a nice guy and that people who have criticized me are a bunch of fools and bimbos” (Pogash, 1994, p. 9). It seems to the end Shilts was trying to control the story, even his own.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PRIMARY SOURCE INTERVIEWS

SOURCE:	RELATIONSHIP TO SHILTS:	DATE:	MODE/LOCALE:
Linda Alband	Editorial assistant and friend	Various dates	Via e-mail
Marcus Conant, M.D.	Dermatologist, University of California; founder, San Francisco AIDS Foundation	Sept. 6, 2011	Via telephone
William Darrow, M.D.	Former epidemiologist, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention	Feb. 1, 2013	Via telephone
Belva Davis	Former news anchor and reporter, KQED-TV, San Francisco, CA	Feb. 8, 2013	Via telephone
Michael Denny	Former editor, St. Martin's Press, New York, NY	Nov. 23, 2011	Via telephone
Donald Francis, M.D.	Former biological researcher, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention	Jan. 10, 2013	Via telephone
Wes Haley	News room manager, <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	Jan. 9, 2012	In person, San Francisco, CA
David Israels	Former reporter, <i>Bay Guardian</i> , San Francisco, CA	Oct. 8, 2012	Via telephone
Cleve Jones	AIDS activist; former aide to Supervisor Harvey Milk	Oct. 4, 2011	Via telephone
Duncan McDonald	Retired journalism professor, University of Oregon	Sept. 1, 2011	Via telephone
Alan Muter	Former city editor, <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	Jan. 2, 2012	Via telephone
Steve Newman	Former lover/partner of Shilts, meteorologist at KTVU-TV	Nov. 30, 2012	Via telephone
George Osterkamp	Former news director, KQED-TV, San Francisco, CA	Feb. 15, 2013	Via telephone
Gary Shilts	Brother of Randy Shilts	Various dates	Via e-mail
Mervyn Silverman, M.D.	Former San Francisco City & County Health Officer	Jan. 8, 2012	In person, El Cerrito, CA
Urvashi Vaid	Gay activist; former editor,		Via e-mail

Rita Williams

*The Advocate*  
Former reporter, KQED-TV,  
San Francisco, CA

June 6, 2012

Via telephone

## APPENDIX B

### QUESTION GUIDE USED FOR STUDY INTERVIEWS

When and where do you recall first meeting Randy Shilts?

Do you recall socializing with Randy or were your interactions with him profession only?

How would you describe his personality both personally and professionally?

How aware were you of his personal struggles to overcome alcoholism and illicit drug use?

Did you have a sense of his ego, and desire for competition?

How did he get along with or interact with his bosses and his colleagues in the newsroom?

What was your sense of how prepared he was for interviews and the level or type of questions that he asked?

How would you assess this level of objectivity?

Would you characterize him more as an activist or advocate, or more of an objective journalist?

Shilts seems to have been one of the few who decided or understood early on that AIDS was a result of some sort communicable transmission. How do you think this impacted his manner of reporting, or what directions/sources he pursued?

Regarding the bath house issue, do you think Shilts was comfortable with people knowing that he was clearly advocating for their closure?

There does seem to be a pretty significant notation between his desire to be taken seriously as an objective reporter, but also a personal awareness of his significance as being a gay person covering gay issues. How do you think he handled pressure from the gay community who are looking for him to be more an advocate?

From your contact with him, including the time while he was at the *Chronicle* as well, did you notice any difference in his reportage or style or manner over the course of that time? Did he change it anyways you noticed?

What was your experience with him as a source?

What did you notice about his reporting style in terms of how he collected information in news conference or interview settings?

How successful was he at cultivating sources, even amidst the controversy he inspired at times?

How did he handle the criticism and scrutiny his reporting received?

Were you involved in or did he discuss with you his work regarding his books?

What sort of feedback or critique did you provide Shilts on his book drafts?

Regarding Patient Zero, what is your view on its accuracy as a claim?

Did you discuss with Shilts the validity or challenges to that assertion?

Do you believe he was convinced there was one, singular source for AIDS in America?

How able was Shilts to properly understand and then impart scientific information, including information about the human immune system, etc.?

His major thesis is that government, health, the media, and even the gay community all failed in their response to the AIDS crisis. What is your assessment of his posit? Was it fair? What about the inclusion of gay men and their sexual practices as part of the scrutiny provided?

When and how did you learn that Randy had HIV?

What do you think of his decision to keep his HIV status secret for so long?

When was the last time you interacted with him?

Was is the lasting legacy of Randy Shilts and his work, in your view?

## APPENDIX C

### SECONDARY SOURCES FROM SHILTS' PAPERS

#### SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY AND GLBT HISTORY CENTER

DATE:	ITEM:
Aug. 8, 1951	Birth certificate for Randy Martin Shilts issues by Scott County, Iowa, Mercy Hospital, Davenport, Iowa.
Oct. 2, 1964	Letter from <i>Aurora News-Beacon</i> to Randy Shilts congratulating him as one of the winners of the "Why I wish I could vote" essay contest.
1967-1970	West Aurora High School yearbooks, Aurora, Ill.
Jan. 2, 1970	Aurora College grade report for Randy Shilts.
1972-1975	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> , student newspaper at University of Oregon, articles about Randy Shilts in student government.
1973	University of Oregon student ID card for Randy Shilts.
Feb. 13 and 20; March 6; and April 10 and 11, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> letters to the editor in support of Randy Shilts' candidacy for student senate, and later for IFC board.
Feb. 19; March 1 and 6, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> letters from Randy Shilts urging support of his candidacy as only openly gay candidate in student government.
March 3, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> photo of Randy Shilts and other elected members of the student Incidental Fee Committee.
March 6; April 5 and 13, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> campaign profile articles on student government candidates – articles about Randy Shilts.
1973	Campaign flyers and leaflets for Randy Shilts and Gloria Gonzalez campaign for student government leadership.
March 30, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> interview with Randy Shilts about new position leading IFC – titled: "Shilts: Incredible things we can do"
May 18, 1973	Randy Shilts column in <i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> in support of Oregon gay rights bill; tag line refers to Shilts as "Oregon's first openly gay public official."
May 23, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> article, Shilts objects to cuts to Gay People's Alliance funding by student organization.
Oct. 13, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> article about break-in and theft of papers from Gay People's Alliance office, Randy Shilts quoted about signature petition documents in support of Eugene gay rights ordinance among items stolen.
Nov. 14, 1973	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i> article about upcoming Gay Pride Week on University of Oregon campus, Shilts quoted extensively.

- Dec. 3, 1973 *Oregon Daily Emerald* article: “Homosexual relationships topic of campus forum.” (Eugene Gay Peoples’ Alliance event)
- Feb. 4, 1974 *Oregon Daily Emerald* article about Randy Shilts declining to seek re-election as head of IFC board.
- June 18, 1974 *Oregon Daily Emerald* article about hold-up of student activity funding in flak over funding gay students’ group, Shilts quoted.
- July 1, 1974 Handwritten “thoughts” – journal entry? – by Randy Shilts – apparently after visit home to family in Illinois.
- September 1974 Randy Shilts’ name begins appearing in staff box for *Oregon Daily Emerald* as the paper’s managing editor.
- Sept. 30, 1974 *Oregon Daily Emerald* article about first gay literature class ever to be offered at the University of Oregon.
- November 1974 Award certificate for second place in news writing from William Randolph Hearst Foundation to Randy Shilts.
- Nov. 22, 1974 *Oregon Daily Emerald* article by Randy Shilts on local drag queen contestants – article later won a Hearst Award.
- Dec. 2, 1974 *Oregon Daily Emerald* article about Gay Pride Week – Randy Shilts quoted about planned activities.
- Dec. 16, 1974 *Oregon Daily Emerald* news staff photo – wishing happy holidays. Randy Shilts pictured first row, center.
- Jan. 7, 1975 *Oregon Daily Emerald* article announcing Randy Shilts as winner of Hearst Journalism Award.
- July 30, 1975 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Sodomy Appeal Signed by Washington Governor.”
- Aug. 13, 1975 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Candy Jar Politics: The Oregon Gay Rights Story.”
- Oct. 22, 1975 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Future of Gay Rights? The Emerging Middle Class.”
- Oct. 22, 1975 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Sandy & Madelyn: Homosexual Parents” about rights for parents who come out gay.
- Nov. 19, 1975 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Can You Ski Gay? Cross Country Ski Touring” about friendly ski resorts for gay customers.
- Dec. 3, 1975 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “The Final Appeal and the Aftermath” about struggles for openly gay teachers to keep their jobs.
- Dec. 17, 1975 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Foster Homes for Gay Children: Justice or Prejudice?”
- Feb. 15, 1976 Typed letter from Randy Shilts to “Gary” – apparently a Chicago friend.
- Dec. 14, 1977 Letter from Randy Shilts to his editor at *The Advocate* quantifying the articles he has written and asking for a raise in his weekly salary from its current \$75.

1976 to 1978 *Bay Area Reporter* gay community and political news articles – scanned from microfilm – including Harvey Milk campaigns, assassination, etc.

Feb. 13, 1976 “*Dear Jim*” personal letter written by Randy Shilts.

July 28, 1976 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Olympic Decathlon Athlete Dr. Tom Waddell: And He’s Gay.”

Aug. 11, 1976 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “A Most Conventional Convention” covering the 1976 Democratic National Convention.

Sept. 8, 1976 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Gay Campus Movement: Trading Pickets for Proms”

October 1976 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Jean O’Leary: A Powerhouse Turning Heads” – profile of new leader of the National Gay Task Force.

Nov. 3, 1976 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “A Gay Backseat on the Nirvana Express” reviewing “new religions” and their views toward openly gay congregants.

Nov. 3, 1976 *Advocate* book review by Randy Shilts titled “Walter Rinder: A Bubble Gum Thoreau.”

Dec. 16, 1976 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “I Kink, Therefore, I Am” examining the popularity of kink and fetish sex.

Dec. 16, 1976 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Special Report: The Hazards of Gay Sex.”

Jan. 15, 1977 Handwritten note from Dave (Yoder) to Randy Shilts reviewing their sexual encounter and wishes for long-term relationship.

Jan. 12, 1977 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Hepatitis: It Doesn’t Come From Needles, It’s Sexually Transmitted”

Feb. 9, 1977 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Fear & Faith in Arizona” about gay politics in Arizona.

March 3, 1977 *Bay Area Reporter* article about Randy Shilts appointment as new openly gay correspondent for KQED-TV.

April 20, 1977 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “A New Plague on Our Houses: Gastro-Intestinal Diseases.”

June 1977 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Gay Youth: The Lonely Young.”

Nov. 4, 1977 *San Francisco Chronicle* article: “Anita Bryant wants to outlaw gays”

Nov. 5, 1977 *San Francisco Chronicle* article: “Anita Bryant says: ‘So the gays kill me? I’ll battle on’”

Dec. 28, 1977 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “Be It Ever So Violent: There’s No Place Like Home” detailing violence against gays, including child abuse and domestic violence.

Undated, 1978 Handwritten thank you note from Harvey Milk to Randy Shilts.

Undated, 1978 Handwritten street flyer protesting the verdict in the Dan White trial.

- March 8, 1978 *Advocate* article by Randy Shilts titled “The Polyester Plot: A Conspiracy of Belief” reviewing views of Christians and other faiths toward gays.
- Nov. 8, 1978 *San Francisco Chronicle* coverage of defeat of Biggs Initiative, Proposition 6 banning gay teachers in California.
- Nov. 9, 1978 *San Francisco Chronicle* perspective piece on how gays may have won California battle, but are still losing the war across the U.S.
- Nov. 10, 1978 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about surprising announcement of resignation of San Francisco City Supervisor Dan White.
- Nov. 16, 1978 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about Dan White’s change of mind, asking Mayor George Moscone to ignore his previous resignation.
- Nov. 19, 1978 Coverage of the Rev. Jim Jones and the Guyana suicide of 900 of his followers, and the murder of U.S. Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.) and others.
- Nov. 21, 1978 *San Francisco Chronicle* coverage of Mayor Moscone’s “backing away” from reappointing Dan White to the Board of Supervisors.
- Nov. 28, 1978 Coverage of City Hall murders of Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk by former City Supervisor Dan White.
- June 1979 *Christopher Street* cover story by Randy Shilts about Willie Carter Spann, bisexual and incarcerated nephew of President Jimmy Carter.
- Oct. 12, 1979 Letter from Jeffrey Paison to Randy Shilts about upcoming New York City visit, and planned liaisons.
- Jan. 14, 1980 Handwritten letter to Randy – dear “ha ha” – from his brother Dennis Shilts.
- May 10, 1980 Transcript of interview with Randy Shilts and fellow journalist David Israel’s regarding CBS News documentary, “*Gay Power, Gay Politics*” – as aired on KSAN-FM Radio, San Francisco.
- July 13, 1980 Handwritten letters from Randy’s parents.
- June 6, 1981 *San Francisco Chronicle* article titled “A pneumonia that strikes gay males” – no byline.
- Nov. 30, 1981 *San Francisco Chronicle* press card.
- Jan. 10, 1982 California Highway Patrol press card for Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1982 Flyer announcing book signings and personal appearances by Randy Shilts at the Castro General Store & Patio Café.
- Feb. 28, 1982 Transcript of interview with Randy Shilts about his first book, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*” – as aired on KSAN-FM Radio, San Francisco.
- March 30, 1982 Handwritten personal card from Steve (Newman) to Randy Shilts celebrating their first anniversary together as a couple.
- April 18, 1982 Negative review of Shilts’ “Mayor of Castro Street” book by Michael H. Price of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.
- May 13, 1982 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “The strange,

deadly diseases that strike gay men” (Dr. Selma Dritz interview)

- June 6, 1982 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “An Interesting Medical Oddity” about deadly sexually transmitted disease outbreaks reported in Los Angeles and New York.
- May 10, 1983 Letter from Dr. Mervyn Silverman to Larry Littlejohn about closure of gay bathhouses in San Francisco.
- June 1, 1983 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “SF to require warnings on AIDS”
- June 2, 1983 Memo from San Francisco city attorney to Dr. Mervyn Silverman regarding closure of gay bathhouses.
- June 27, 1983 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “An evening at the Sutro Baths: How the AIDS era has affected patrons of the only coed bathhouse in SF.”
- July 11, 1983 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “A gay bathhouse closes its doors in SF”
- July 13, 1983 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Geometric rise in AIDS cases seen”
- July 15, 1983 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “4 ‘mystery’ cases of AIDS reported”
- July 20, 1983 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts about “gay drifter” sentenced in gruesome Guerneville murder.
- Sept. 12, 1983 Letter from Dr. Mervyn Silverman to Larry Littlejohn about closure of gay bathhouses in San Francisco.
- Dec. 27, 1983 Draft of Randy Shilts article about convicted assassin Dan White term in prison, and his expected release on parole.
- Jan. 15, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Politics and bathhouses: Local complexities”
- Feb. 3, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “AIDS expert says bathhouses should close”
- Feb. 4, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “AIDS researchers try to stop bathhouse sex”
- March 20, 1984 *The Advocate* national story on bathhouse flap in SF – titled “Bathhouses: Scapegoat for AIDS or real health threat?”
- March 20, 1984 *The Advocate* report from CDC’s James Curran saying Randy Shilts misquoted him, misrepresented his views on bathhouses
- March 28, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Gay campaign to ban sex in bathhouses”

- March 30, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled *SF planning to close gay bathhouses*”
- March 31, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Silverman delays on gay bathhouses”
- April 5, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* editorial and letters to the editor criticizing Shilts and others as “killing the gay rights movement” over bathhouse issue.
- April 10, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “SF orders ban on sex in bathhouses”
- April 10, 1984 *Washington Post* article: “San Francisco banning public sex; city health director trying to halt spread of AIDS”
- April 19, 1984 *Washington Post* article: “San Francisco’s move to fight AIDS creates rift among gays”
- May 15, 1984 *The Advocate* national report: “SF health director announces ban on sex in baths, sex clubs”
- May 17, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* article titled “A retreat in the sexual revolution: Saying goodbye to the baths”
- June 1, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Mayor Feinstein defends use of bathhouse ‘spies’”
- June 4, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “A farewell orgy at Sutro Baths: Casualty of AIDS crisis closes doors”
- June 7, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* editorial criticizing Mayor Feinstein as “big sister” who illegally ordered police surveillance of bathhouses
- June 12, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “AIDS continues to spread, 38 new cases in SF”
- June 14, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* articles and editorials on “The fallacy of closing the baths” – arguing for keeping bathhouses operating.
- June 15, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Supervisors postpone bathhouse decision; 45-day delay”
- July 16-29, 1984 *New York Native* special report by Randy Shilts: “Notes from the plague” about the onset of AIDS in San Francisco.
- Aug. 9, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* article titled “SF Supervisors giving up on bathhouse rules”
- Aug. 16, 1984 *The Advocate* national report: SF Sups say ‘no’ to sex ban rules
- Sept. 27, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* articles: “Community plan to regulate baths offered,” and “Mayor quizzes MDs on closing baths in secret meeting at City Hall”

- Oct. 10, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Gay bathhouses told to close; 6 refuse”
- Oct. 24, 1984 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “9 defiant gay sex clubs close down”
- Nov. 1, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* report titled “300 rally to decry closed baths” – coverage of protest at San Francisco City Hall.
- Nov. 29, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* article titled “Silverman says AIDS experts are mixed on closing baths”
- Dec. 13, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* article titled “City demands list of bathhouse customers”
- Dec. 27, 1984 *Bay Area Reporter* article titled “Most sex banned at gay bathhouses, judge toughens order”
- Aug. 3, 1985 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts called “The Story is in the Closet” about media reluctance to report on HIV-AIDS.
- Aug. 8, 1986 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “Gay Games at Kezar” about the national gay Olympics coming to San Francisco.
- July 27, 1987 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Randy Shilts titled “The Heartland Loses its Innocence”
- Sept. 29, 1987 Transcript of Randy Shilts speech before Commonwealth Club of California meeting in San Francisco, pages 281-85. Copied from Saum, S.B., ed. (2004). *Each a Mighty Voice: A Century of Speeches from the Commonwealth Club of California*.
- Oct. 5, 1987 *San Francisco Chronicle* story by Randy Shilts titled “Fear of Epidemic in the Mud Huts” – part of series of articles he wrote from Uganda on the AIDS crisis in Africa.
- Oct. 6, 1987 Associated Press interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 7, 1987 *New York Times* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 7, 1987 *Toronto Star* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 9, 1987 *Los Angeles Times* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 11, 1987 *Washington Post* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 14, 1987 Randy Shilts letter to Dr. Robert Gallo clarifying errors and corrections needed for *And the Band Played On*.
- Undated Scene-by-scene rebuttal of HBO film-version of *And the Band Played On*

- challenging assertions of filmmakers and Shilts.
- Undated 1987 Transcript of CBS “60 Minutes” report on AIDS, interview with Randy Shilts by Harry Reasoner.
- Undated 1987 *Philadelphia au Courant* interview with Randy Shilts.
- Oct. 17, 1987 *London Times* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 18, 1987 *Chicago Tribune* book review of *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 19, 1987 *Maclean’s* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 19, 1997 *Newsweek* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 19, 1987 *TIME* magazine report on “Patient Zero” aspect of Shilts’ new book.
- Nov. 1, 1987 *Chicago Tribune* interview and profile article on Randy Shilts.
- Nov. 1, 1987 *Chicago Tribune* Tempo section cover story with excerpts from *And the Band Played On*.
- Nov. 3-6, 1987 Promotional tour schedule materials used by Randy Shilts for Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, and Boston appearances.
- Nov. 6, 1987 *National Review* brief on *And the Band Played On*.
- Nov. 22, 1987 *Sunday Mail* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Nov. 22, 1987 *Washington Post* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Dec. 1, 1987 *Washington Post* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Dec. 6, 1987 *Los Angeles Times* book review of Shilts’ *And the Band Played On*.
- Dec. 12, 1987 *Toronto Star* interview with Randy Shilts promoting *And the Band Played On*.
- Dec. 21, 1987 *TIME* magazine profile on incoming San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos – quoting Randy Shilts and others about challenges he faces.
- Fall 1988 St. Martin’s Press media sheet featuring praise and review of Shilts’ book, ATBPO.
- Aug. 18, 1988 *Melbourne Herald* article about “Randy Shilts’ sad vigil” promoting ATBPO in Australia.
- Sept. 6, 1988 *Windy City Times* (Chicago) article taking issue with promotion of ATBPO using “Patient Zero” references.
- March 1989 Randy Shilts column for *Esquire* magazine, describing book tour for *And the Band Played On*. Titled: “Talking AIDS to Death”
- June 1989 *San Francisco Focus* magazine profile and interview with Randy Shilts – discusses AIDS, testing, alcoholism, etc.

- July 30, 1989 *Los Angeles Times* report and remarks from Randy Shilts about *And the Band Played On* being prepped for movie.
- Sept. 12, 1989 Transcript of recorded interview with Randy Shilts by author Eric Marcus. Recorded at Shilts' San Francisco apartment. (Provided by Marcus, excerpts used in his book, *Making Gay History*.)
- December 1989 *San Francisco Chronicle* special insert on "The Quake of '89" with "Lessons" commentary by Randy Shilts.
- March 30, 1990 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about Peninsula Press Club awards – including award won by Randy Shilts.
- May 13, 1990 *San Francisco Chronicle* book review written by Randy Shilts about Allan Berube's new book, *Coming out under Fire*.
- Feb. 18, 1991 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about gay Marines stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.
- Feb. 22, 1991 *San Francisco Chronicle* letter to the editor complaining about Shilts' gay military article.
- Aug. 10, 1991 *Aurora* (Ill.) *Beacon-News* interview and profile of hometown author Randy Shilts.
- Oct. 1, 1991 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about director Joel Schumacher pulling out of directing HBO version of *And the Band Played On*.
- Oct. 11, 1991 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about Randy Shilts among initial contributors to the new Gay & Lesbian Archives Center at the San Francisco Public Library.
- Oct. 17, 1991 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about Randy Shilts as panelist at the West Coast Investigative Reporters & Editors conference.
- Oct. 29, 1991 *NPR's Morning Edition* interview with Randy Shilts about the Boy Scouts of America and their ban of gay members.
- Nov. 3, 1991 *Aurora* (Ill.) *Beacon-News* report and interview that Shilts' book will be made into a movie by HBO/NBC.
- March 5, 1992 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about gay protests of Oliver Stone being tapped to direct HBO's version of *And the Band Played On*.
- May 28, 1992 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about the signing of openly gay director Gus Van Sant to direct *Harvey Milk: The Mayor of Castro Street* biopic.
- June 25, 1992 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about first ever convention of the National Gay & Lesbian Journalists Association in SF, speakers to include Randy Shilts.
- Aug. 10, 1992 *Los Angeles Times* report that Shilts' book is back on track to being made into a movie, despite earlier delays.
- Aug. 11, 1992 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about new director, Roger Spottiswoode, signed to direct HBO's *And the Band Played On*.
- Dec. 10, 1992 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about signing of actors Matthew Modine, Lily Tomlin, and Whoopi Goldberg for HBO's *And the Band Played On*.

- Feb. 16, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* report with Randy Shilts confirming he has HIV-AIDS.
- Feb. 17, 1993 Randy Shilts press statement about AIDS diagnosis on *San Francisco Chronicle* letterhead.
- Feb. 17, 1993 *Los Angeles Times* report with Randy Shilts confirming he has HIV-AIDS.
- March 1, 1993 *TIME* magazine report on Randy Shilts' HIV status, and the upcoming release of his new book, *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- March 9, 1993 *Los Angeles Times* interview with Randy Shilts about *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- March 21, 1993 *Los Angeles Times* report that HBO will produce Shilts' book.
- March 29, 1993 *Los Angeles Times* book review on Shilts' latest book, *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- April 3, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article detailing General Norman Schwarzkopf's no objection to listing gay military ban, as reported in Shilts' new book.
- April 11, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* book review of Shilts' new book, *Conduct Unbecoming*, written by Patricia Holt.
- April 13, 1993 Transcript of Randy Shilts interview on PBS program, *The Charlie Rose Show*, discussing his HIV-AIDS status and the release of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- April 14, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* interview by Patricia Holt with Randy Shilts on his physical struggle to complete *Conduct Unbecoming* amidst the onset of HIV-AIDS.
- April 19, 1993 Transcript of Randy Shilts interview with *NPR's All Things Considered*.
- April 22, 1993 *New York Times* long-form profile and interview with Randy Shilts and his struggle against HIV-AIDS. Discusses release of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- April 23, 1993 Transcript of Randy Shilts interview on NPR's "Fresh Air with Terry Gross."
- April 26, 1993 *People* magazine long-form profile and interview with Randy Shilts and his struggle against HIV-AIDS. Discusses release of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- April 26, 1993 *Newsweek* magazine lists the nation's "Top 30 Gay & Lesbian Advocates" including Randy Shilts.
- May 2, 1993 *Chicago Tribune* interview with Randy Shilts, and discussion of release of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- May 4, 1993 *Boston Globe* article about Randy Shilts and *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- May 10, 1993 *Newsweek* article discussing "explosion of gay writers" including Shilts.
- May 24, 1993 *TIME* magazine review of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- May 27, 1993 *Rolling Stone* interview with Randy Shilts.

- May 30, 1993 *Stars and Stripes Sunday magazine* article about Shilts' new book, *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- June 4, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about Randy Shilts selling to HBO and Propaganda Films the rights to his latest book, *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- June 7, 1993 *The Nation* book review of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- June 19, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about on-location filming in San Francisco for HBO's *And the Band Played On*.
- July 4, 1993 *San Jose Mercury News* book review and article with Randy Shilts.
- July 25, 1993 *Los Angeles Times* interview with Randy Shilts about HIV-AIDS status and *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- Aug.-Sept. 1993 *Out* magazine interview with Randy Shilts.
- Sept. 2, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about scheduled HBO premier of *And the Band Played On*. Randy Shilts featured with actors Sir Ian McKellen and Angelica Houston at Hollywood premiere.
- Sept. 8, 1993 *And the Band Played On* wins honorable mention award at Montreal World Film Festival.
- Sept. 16, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article: "Shilts' 'Band' is a winner for HBO" detailing ratings success of the movie, with 2.6 million viewers watching the premiere on HBO.
- Sept. 20, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about some local figures taking issue with "poetic license" used about their roles in AIDS crisis for new HBO film.
- Sept. 30, 1993 *Rolling Stone* long-form profile and interview with Randy Shilts and his struggle against HIV-AIDS. Discusses release of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- Nov. 1, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about award for Randy Shilts from national AIDS caregivers' organization.
- Dec. 23, 1993 *San Francisco Chronicle* article: "Randy Shilts updates 'Conduct Unbecoming' – detail efforts to include the ongoing Gulf War in subsequent editions.
- 1993 Michelangelo Signorile critical commentary on Randy Shilts' work – contained in Signorile's book, *Queer in America: Sex, the Media and the Closets of Power*. Pages 149-155
- 1993 *Current Biography Yearbook* essay on Randy Shilts, pages 525-529.
- 1994 *Outing: Shattering the Conspiracy of Silence* by Warren Johansson and William A. Percy. Shilts remarks included on pages 121-202.
- Jan. 25, 1994 *Advocate* report on Randy Shilts disclosing HIV status and discussing desire to keep that information private.
- Jan. 25, 1994 Randy Shilts letter to the editor of the *Advocate* regarding coverage of GLBT in the military.
- Feb. 14, 1994 Log of final communications and attempts to reach Shilts at Guerneville home just prior to his death by aide Linda Alband.

- Feb. 17-23, 1994 DVD of taped television news coverage of Shilts' death and memorial service, features video and reports from TV stations in San Francisco and Sacramento, CA.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *Chicago Sun-Times* report on the death of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *New York Times* news report, reaction to death of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *New York Times* obituary of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *Washington Post* report on the death of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *Los Angeles Times* news report, reaction to death of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* news report, reaction to death of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial on the death of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* first-person column by Keith Power on the life and work of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 18, 1994 *Denver Post* first-person column by Patrick O'Driscoll about meeting Randy Shilts during Hearst competition in college.
- Feb. 19, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* report that CBS plans to go forward with Shilts interview on Feb. 20, 1994 for "60 Minutes."
- Feb. 19, 1994 *Los Angeles Times* editorial praising the life of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 19, 1994 Copy of news release from Westboro Baptist Church announcing plans to picket Shilts funeral – headline reads, "Filthy Face of Fag Evil."
- Feb. 19, 1994 *Salem (Ore.) Statesman Journal* commentary by Carolyn Nizzi Warmbold about the death of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 21, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* report on praise for Randy Shilts offered by HHS Secretary Donna Shalala during San Francisco speech.
- Feb. 22, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* report on memorial service plans for Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 22, 1994 *Los Angeles Times* report on HBO film of Shilts' *And the Band Played On* to go forward.
- Feb. 22, 1994 DVD of Randy Shilts memorial service, Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, San Francisco, CA.
- Feb. 22, 1994 Copy of program given to attendees at Shilts' memorial service, including schedule of events.
- Feb. 23, 1994 *San Francisco Bay Guardian* profile on the life and death of Randy Shilts – "The sayer of Castro Street."
- Feb. 23, 1994 *Los Angeles Times* report on Randy Shilts memorial service speakers.
- Feb. 23, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* report on Shilts memorial service and protests outside the church.
- Feb. 24, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* report on San Francisco Board of Supervisors voting resolution in honor of Randy Shilts.
- Feb. 24, 1994 *Bay Area Reporter* report on the life and death of Randy Shilts.

- Feb. 24, 1994 *New Orleans Times-Picayune* first person column remembering Randy Shilts by columnist John Pope.
- Feb. 25, 1994 *San Francisco News-Telegraph* report on protests of Shilts' memorial service by Westboro Baptist Church.
- February 1994 *Bay Area Reporter* news report and obituary on Randy Shilts.
- Spring 1994 *American Writer* magazine editorial about the impact of Shilts.
- March 4, 1994 *Washington Blade* column by Torie Osbon on the death of Randy Shilts and his "radical feminism."
- March 5, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about planning opening of a gay bathhouse in Berkeley, reversing decade-old trend of closure.
- March 6, 1994 *San Francisco Chronicle* column by Susan Sward on the protests at Randy Shilts' memorial services. Featured in "This world" endpaper section of the Chronicle.
- March 14, 1994 *The New Republic* review of recommendation of Shilts' last book, *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- March 17, 1994 Linda Alband letter to Shilts' estate attorney Paul Newman.
- March 28, 1994 *Los Angeles Times* report that NBC will pick-up and rebroadcast HBO dramatization of Shilts' book.
- March 29, 1994 Linda Alband letter to Shilts' estate attorney Paul Newman.
- April 10, 1994 Linda Alband letter to Shilts' estate attorney Paul Newman.
- May 25-31, 1994 *Russian River News* article and interview with Shilts' surviving mate Barry Barbieri- raising concerns about Shilts' family and staff.
- June 3, 1994 Linda Alband letter to Shilts' estate attorney Paul Newman.
- June 15-21, 1994 Letters to the editor of *Russian River News* from Gary Shilts and Linda Alband refuting claims in earlier article by Barbieri.
- July 3, 1994 Linda Alband letter to Shilts' estate attorney Paul Newman, re: funeral costs.
- July 3, 1994 Linda Alband letter to Shilts' estate attorney Paul Newman, re: care of Shilts' dog Dash.
- Aug. 2, 1994 Jennifer Finlay letter to Shilts' estate attorney Paul Newman – insulting Newman and Barbieri.
- Aug. 14, 1994 Sign-in sheet with addresses for guests attending posthumous "Shiltsmas '94" event.
- Oct. 17, 1994 Letter from Randy Shilts' former community college professor, Lorraine Prince, to Linda Alband.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Clifford L. Morrison, R.N., organizer of the AIDS ward at San Francisco General Hospital, on his friendship of Randy Shilts and media coverage of AIDS.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with

- Andrew R. Moss, Ph.D., AIDS epidemiologists for the CDC on dealing with Randy Shilts.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Marcus Conant, founder of the KS Foundation, and AIDS doctor, on interactions with Randy Shilts.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Meryvn Silverman, former SF city health officer, and his banning of Randy Shilts temporarily from covering his agency; disputes over AIDS coverage
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Selma Dritz (deceased), former epidemiology director for SF health department; frequent Shilts source; Shilts friend.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. James M. Campbell, AIDS clinician for the CDC, on dealing with Randy Shilts, and all AIDS media.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Herbert A. Perkins, director of the Irwin Memorial Blood Bank, and outspoken critic of Randy Shilts coverage of HIV-AIDS crisis in SF blood banks.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Arthur J. Ammann, pediatric AIDS immunologist, and occasional Shilts critic.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Paul A. Volberding, oncologist and AIDS clinic developer, on dealing with Randy Shilts, bathhouse issue, etc.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Paul Monahan O'Malley, AIDS and Hepatitis B vaccine trial leader for CDC, on Randy Shilts portrayal of governmental support of AIDS research.
- 1995 T California AIDS Oral History Project transcript of interview with Dr. Jay A. Levy, animal virologists and earlier researcher on the AIDS virus.
- 1995 California AIDS Oral History Project Transcript of interview with Dr. Donald I. Abrams, KS and AIDS-Related Clinic and Community Consortium director.
- March 7, 1995 *San Francisco Chronicle* story about CD-ROM version release of *Conduct Unbecoming*.
- June 16, 1996 Linda Alband letter to Gary Shilts discussing ongoing struggles with settling the Shilts estate.
- June 18, 1997 Linda Alband objections to final account of Shilts' estate, filed in San Francisco County Court.
- May 28, 1998 *Bay Area Reporter* news story about return of Westboro Baptist Church members to protest AIDS deaths in San Francisco.

- June 1, 1998 *San Francisco Chronicle* report on the activities of the Westboro Baptist Church and the Rev. Fred Phelps since their 1994 pickets at the Randy Shilts memorial services.
- Nov. 30, 1998 Attorney Mark Senick letter to Linda Alband and 12 other Shilts' estate creditors explaining settlement discussions, and final disposition.
- Nov-Dec 2001 *Columbia Journalism Review* remembrance of the life of Randy Shilts – “People I Cared About” by Scott Sherman.
- 2002 Commentary, essays by Douglas Crimp on Randy Shilts work. Included in Crimp, D. (2002). *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*. Pages 46-126.
- Dec. 12, 2003 *San Francisco Chronicle* report on the death of Bob Ross, publisher of the *Bay Area Reporter*, controversial gay newspaper in San Francisco community.
- Feb. 17, 2004 *San Francisco Chronicle* “10 years ago” article remembering the life and death of Randy Shilts.
- March 26, 2004 Newspaper Guild of America profile and interview with David Perlman, longtime science writer for *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Discusses work with Shilts.
- June 22, 2004 *Advocate* report by Craig Zadan reviewing the lives and work of Randy Shilts, Vito Russo and Harvey Milk.
- Dec. 2, 2004 PBS *Frontline* transcript of interview with Dr. Meryvn Silverman, former public health officer in San Francisco, includes references to Randy Shilts.
- Dec. 7, 2004 PBS *Frontline* transcript of interview with Cleve Jones.
- Jan. 18, 2005 and Feb. 15, 2006 PBS *Frontline* transcript of interview with Dr. Jim Curran of the CDC, includes references to Shilts' earlier work.
- 2005 Transcript of documentary, “*Reporter Zero*,” produced by Carrie Lozano, University of California-Berkeley, School of Journalism.
- 2008 Priscilla Wald critical commentary on Shilts' work in her book, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. Pages 214-320.
- Sept. 8, 2008 *San Francisco Chronicle* article on the death of Dr. Selma Dritz, early AIDS leader and frequent Shilts source.
- Nov. 28, 2008 Actor James Franco discusses Gus Van Sant's film, “*Milk*,” with Terri Gross on NPR's “*Fresh Air*.” Complete transcript including Franco references to Shilts' earlier work on Harvey Milk.
- Dec. 7, 2008 Blog posting by Shilts' former *Chronicle* editor Alan D. Mutter calling Randy “the conscience of Castro Street.”
- Jan. 9, 2009 Screenwriter Dustin Lance Black discusses writing Gus Van Sant film, “*Milk*” with Terri Gross on NPR's “*Fresh Air*.” Complete transcript, includes references to Shilts' earlier work on Harvey Milk.

- May 26, 2011 *Bay Area Reporter* report on success of film, “*Milk*,” with references to Shilts’ earlier work.
- July 22, 2011 *New Civil Rights Movement Report* on gays recalling Randy Shilts’ work as Don’t Ask-Don’t Tell policy is repealed.
- Aug. 25, 2011 FBI letter – response to FOIA request for file information on Randy Shilts. FBI reports no such file exists in their central records, or field offices in San Francisco, Portland or Chicago.
- Aug. 28, 2011 Audio National Vanguard Authors interview with AIDS activist Larry Kramer remembering Randy Shilts and his work.
- Dec. 7, 2011 Author John-Manuel Andriote discussed his new book, *Victory Deferred*, which he positions as picking up where Shilts’ *And the Band Played On* left off in 1988.
- Undated Handwritten “love letter” from John in Tulsa to Randy Shilts.