

VARIETY

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SUNDANCE

OUT AT WORK

(DOCU - 16mm)

An Anderson/Gold Films production. Produced, directed by Kelly Anderson, Tami Gold. Camera (color, video-to-16mm), Gold; additional camera, Larry Pellegrini, David Shulman, John Hammond; editor, Anderson; music, Don DiNicola; sound, Anderson. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (*American Spectrum*), Jan. 23, 1997. Running time: 56 MIN.

Out at Work" makes a strong, accessible case against discrimination toward homosexuals in the workplace, one ideally angled for employee-seminar use. Gay and docu fests and educational broadcasters will also find its well-made points worth slotting in.

Given that Middle America still stereotypes gays as being largely Caucasian, white-collar, urban and profligate, co-helmets Tami Gold and Kelly Anderson cannily focus on three subjects whose lives upend any such glib categorizing. Two among them have long since celebrated 10th-anniversary domestic partnership; one is African-American. The sole eligible bachelor here could

hardly be more Average Joe in job, looks or manner. Point is quickly made: These people deserve no less respect than any other loyal worker.

But they get a lot less. Shot between 1991 and 1995, pic charts progress in separate cases from Detroit to Georgia to NYC. Cheryl Summerville had never experienced any real homophobia until her Bremen, Ga., employer — the chain restaurant Cracker Barrel — suddenly required staff to "demonstrate normal heterosexual values." Within days, she was fired. (It's legal to fire for homosexuality in 41 states.)

Detroit auto-plant electrician Ron Woods enlisted his local United Auto Workers to campaign against Cracker Barrel's policy, thus "outing" himself; overnight, co-workers ostracized and threatened him.

A third subject, the very gender-ambiguous male African-American Nat Keitt, enjoyed "an ideal work situation" at his Bronx city library gig. Yet he was compelled to take up an agitational stance when longtime companion David became disabled by AIDS-related illnesses — lack of domestic-partner health coverage shoved huge medical bills onto Nat alone.

These three stories are first advanced in long preliminary segs, then intercut to good effect. All central figures become reluctant media spokespersons, sacrificing privacy to a greater good.

Cheryl and her lover hook up with Queer Nation activists; though Cheryl's life is ultimately bettered by public exposure, Cracker Barrel hasn't yet changed its discriminatory policies. Nat's lover dies — but library-worker unionists have rallied their official support. Ron registers a true triumph when, elected to national convention rep status, the UAW approves a contractual clause prohibiting sex-orientation biases.

All subjects are personable, funny and self-aware, affording docu an inspiring human dimension beyond blunt agitprop. Package's pacing is sharp, other tech aspects adequate.

—Dennis Harvey