The Gay Press

Culling Legitimate Journalism from the Chaff

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Introduction

When proposing the concept of a bill of rights to James Madison, it is doubtful Thomas Jefferson envisioned the future existence of the publications *Bent*, *Queer Nasty* or *FAG!*, nor could he have foreseen a thriving, valid gay media that runs the gamut of issues, or the creation of such resources as orientation-based professional organizations and addenda to accepted style guides for the proper use of sexual minority terminology.

Envisioned or not, these elements of the press do now exist and are secure under the blanket of the First Amendment. They stretch across a continuum, from the prurient to pure journalism. The gay press is a subset of what has become known as the alternative press, which by definition is not the mainstream press. Content, formats and objectives differ, as well as control.

Origins of the alternative press in America will be explored, along with the burgeoning of the gay press in the 1960s and the current state of maturity of the gay press. The ethical implications of journalism principles, content and advertising are examined, as well as its potential evolution to emulate the mainstream press.
The Gay Press

History

America’s founders authored a number of publications, such as *The Federalist Papers* and *Common Sense*, some of which evolved from essays or correspondence; these were integral to the foundation of modern western democracy. This was the origin of the alternative press in the United States. The Brits\(^\text{15}\), our one-time colonizers, provide this definition:

1. An alternative publication deals with the opinions of small minorities.
2. It expresses attitudes 'hostile to widely-held beliefs.'
3. It espouses views or deals with subjects not given regular coverage by publications generally available at newsagents.

Like those upstart colonial pamphleteers, the gay press has disseminated vital political information\(^1\); they started in the 1960s.

"Gay Power" was the cry in the 'the sixties.' The gay press emerged, along with other alternative media, in response to such things as Vietnam, civil rights and counter culture in general. McCarthyism’s homophobia waned and alternative media helped gay expression. Nevertheless, in the late 60s, homosexuality remained illegal in every state except Illinois.

The birth of the gay rights movement happened at the Stonewall Inn. *Gay Activist, Come Out, Gay Flames, Gay Power, Gay Sunshine* and *Gay* were published at that time. Many American gay publications embraced the struggles of their foreign cousins.

Gay publications ran position papers, personal views, news and features. The *Village Voice* used "gay" in its classified pages.\(^{14}\)


**Print**

In addition to the aforementioned endeavors, there exist a huge number of gay publications in print. Distribution is a major issue with all alternatives. Paid subscribers are few for some weeklies. They often rely on honor boxes, kiosks and business office foyers to distribute their product. In early 1999, San Francisco passed an ordinance requiring papers to abandon street distribution and sell papers out of large city-owned ‘pedmounts.’

Gay newspapers and magazines extend around the world and include such publications as the *Advocate, the Bay Area Reporter, Bent, the Washington and New York Blade(s), Brother Sister, Our World, Curve, Alternative Family, Gay SA, GaySports, Genre, Gay & Lesbian Times, Hero, Instinct, In the Family, Lavender, Liberty Press, Metroline, Out!, Out & About, The Outsider, Out Smart, Q San Francisco, QC, Qink, qvmagazine, Seattle Gay News, G&L, trikone* and many more.

Separate from all-gay publications, many mainstream print firms have gay columns or segments, as do broadcasting concerns.
Broadcast

Most gay broadcasting emanates from radio and television stations that have these special segments, rather than the entire station format being gay. One exception is the all-gay Joy Melbourne, 90.7 FM. *This Way Out* is broadcast across North America. Additionally, there is the *Rainbow Network* originating from the UK, *Houston Voice*, *West Coast Live*, *VillageTV*, *In the Life*, *Queer Youth Television*, *Amazon Radio*, *Chicago Queer Radio* and *Planet Out Radio*.

*Karel & Andrew*, the radio show that left Triangle Broadcasting, Palm Springs last year, began appearing Monday through Friday in the 4-7 time slot on the station known as the home of Rush Limbaugh and Dr. Laura.³

A resource for differently oriented broadcasters is the National Association of Gay & Lesbian Broadcasters⁴.
Internet

Many newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations/segments also have a web presence or online versions. Others are exclusively internet-based. Some sites sport simple airbrushed rainbows on their web page, but others employ high quality production. Offerings include shopping, free e-mail, travel, news, business directories, financial management, erotica, calendars of events, chat rooms, search engines, auctions, long distance, entertainment, bar guides, mission statements, editor’s or publisher’s statement, opinions, bulletin board systems (BBS), world/regional news, advertisements and links, online polls, public service announcements, legislative updates, activism, feature stories and social events. (Even a link to a gay Star Trek site was found.)

Internet sites also become a vehicle for conveying more than visual stimuli; they can send an audio stream, adding another medium of expression. The internet radio station GayBCA broadcasts live via streaming audio. The Gay/Lesbian International News Network (GLINN), OutWord (outwired.com), Gaywire News Network (GNN) and several political organizations practice online journalism, not to mention every other magazine, newspaper and broadcaster with a web site.

Launched in 1998, gfn.com is the leading online resource devoted solely to the unique financial needs of the gay and lesbian community.
Advertising

Some critics claim the alternative press is selling out for profit, but there is nothing wrong with making money, alternative publishers say. Spending on advertising in gay publications rose for the fourth consecutive year to $120.4 million, a 20.2 percent increase over 1997, according to Mulryan/Nash's fifth annual *Gay Press Report*. 1998 estimates of gay publications are based on a sample of 152 publications, up from 138 in 1997.

Three decades after the Stonewall riots, gays and lesbians have emerged as a strong consumer group. Media vehicles for targeting this audience are limited. Television is inefficient. Print has been the primary medium for reaching the gay and lesbian market. Almost 21 percent of online gays, aged 35 to 44 years, frequently visit financial sites; 24 percent regularly manage or track finances, stocks, and bank accounts online; and 60 percent think they're part of an unrecognized market that needs to be tapped.

Census data are not collected on sexual orientation, but estimates from a variety of sources, including the Kinsey Report, place the gay population between 6 percent and 15 percent of the total. (Most marketers use a more conservative 5 percent to 7 percent, which puts the numbers between 10 million and 14 million.)
In recent years, gay papers have begun competing for ads from mainstream corporations: Airlines include American, British Airways, Continental and United. Automakers include Subaru, Saab and Saturn. Auto dealers with ads in local gay newspapers include those who sell Acura, Audi, BMW, Buick, Chrysler-Plymouth, Dodge, Ferrari, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Infiniti, Jaguar, Land Rover, Lexus, Lincoln-Mercury, Mercedes-Benz, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Porsche, Toyota, Volkswagen, and Volvo. Beer and liquor companies include Bacardi, Bass Ale, Budweiser, Chivas Regal, Coors, Miller and Smirnoff Black. Technology companies include Bell Atlantic and IBM. Hotels include Holiday Inn and Quality Inn. Insurance firms include local branches of AllState, Farmers, MetLife, Nationwide and State Farm. Investment firms and banks include Citibank, Merrill Lynch, Dean Witter Reynolds and Prudential Securities. Movie and video companies include Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures, 20th Century Fox and Warner Bros. Real estate firms include local branches of Century 21, Coldwell Banker, and Prudential Realty. Recruitment advertisers include American Express Financial Advisors and the Los Angeles Police Department. Restaurants include Houlihan’s and Pizzeria Uno. Other advertisers include American Express, Blockbuster Music, Bristol-Myers-Squibb, Movado, Shell Gasoline, Starbucks, Swatch, Workbench and Yahoo.com. 

The fiscal future of the gay press is dependent upon its ability to widen its appeal to reluctant mainstream advertisers.
**Media Continuum**

The gay media encompasses the prurient, tabloid, infotainment, hard news and community journalism. Twenty-three percent of all editorial coverage in this group is devoted to the arts, according to Mulryan/Nash. In 1998.

Many gay and lesbian journalists believe newspaper coverage of their community tends toward the positive, and would like to see the coverage expanded. It is felt that some gay press does not want to publish anything politically incorrect according to freelance writer Richard Shumate.
Conclusion

An example of confidence in the future came in 1997 when William Waybourn and a group of 30 investors purchased the Southern Voice, a profitable 50,000-circulation Atlanta weekly. Waybourn intended to buy up to ten more gay papers in the South. This was to be the first grouping of gay papers under one ownership. Some of the alternative press is being transformed into big business by corporate consolidators.

There are fears that the owners of alternative chains will sell them to media conglomerates that do not value journalism.

With the vast amount of information available, especially online, comes a need for increased selectivity regarding the content that the reader/listener is actually provided. By limiting focus, even within the gay press, the gay media risk losing shared experiences, which built, and continue to strengthen and maintain our democracy – a democracy that its alternative ancestors helped foster.

The truth is the gay press is maturing. Witness the recent proposed alliance between the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) and Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc. Mainstream ads replace 900 numbers. This year’s NLGJA convention features Katie Couric -- last year, Lesley Stahl.

There may always be a role for the gay press, as mainstream journalism reports the broader issues, demand for community news, calendar information and in-depth analysis of gay topics and politics will continue.
Appendix 1

http://www.advocate.com/
http://www.ebar.com/
http://www.bentmagazine.com/
http://www.washblade.com/

http://www.ourworldmag.com/
http://www.curvemag.com/
http://www.altfammag.com/

http://www.gaybc.com/
http://www.gaysouthafrica.org.za/newsdesk/gaysamag/
http://www.gaysportsguide.com/
http://www.genre Magazine.com/
http://www.trikone.org/

http://www.houstonvoice.com/

http://www.wcl.org/

http://www.gfn.com/

http://www.gaywire.net/newswire/?kx10109

http://www.glaad.org/

http://www.hrc.org/

http://www.ngltf.org/

http://www.villagetv.com/

http://www.inthelifetv.org/

http://www.rainbowway.com/qtv/qytv1.htm

http://www.planetout.com/pno/radio/new

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Appendix 2

Stylebook
Addenda of Gay/Lesbian Terminology
As of April 1997

ACT UP: AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, an activist organization with independent chapters in various cities. ACT UP acceptable in first reference. See AIDS.

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a serious, often fatal medical condition that compromises the human immune system leaving the body defenseless against opportunistic infections. Individuals may be HIV-positive but not have AIDS.

ARC: (Obsolete) AIDS-Related Complex. Replaced by HIV disease.

bisexual: An individual sexually attracted to members of both sexes. Does not presume non-monogamy.

closeted, in the closet: Refers to a person who hides his or her sexual orientation.

coming out: Short for coming out of the closet. Announcing by word or public action one's previously hidden sexual orientation. See closeted.

cross-dressing: Wearing clothing most often associated with members of the opposite sex. See transvestite.

cruising: Visiting places where opportunities exist to meet people, specifically potential sexual partners.

domestic partner: Unmarried partners who share living quarters. Typically used in connection with legal and insurance matters. See gay relationship terms.

drag: Clothing of the opposite gender.

drag queen: A man who dresses in female attire for show, often in order to perform. Not synonymous with transvestite.

dyke: Pejorative term for a lesbian.

fag, faggot: Pejorative term for a gay male.

gay: Acceptable and preferable in all references as a synonym for homosexual. When possible, use gay and lesbian. In headlines where space is an issue, bay is acceptable to describe both.
**openly gay/lesbian**: Preferred over self-avowed, self-admitted, self-confessed or practicing in instances where the sexual orientation of the individual is germane to the story: The openly gay legislator voted against the measure denying civil rights to gays. She is the first openly gay CEO in Silicon Valley.

**gay relationships**: Gay, lesbian and bisexual people use various terms to describe their commitments. Ask the individual what term he or she prefers, if possible. If not, partner is generally acceptable.

**heterosexism**: Presumption that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality. Also: prejudice, bias or discrimination based on that presumption.

**HIV**: Human Immunodeficiency Virus. The virus that causes AIDS. HIV-virus is redundant. HIV positive means infected with HIV.

**homo**: Derogatory term for homosexual. Avoid.

**homophobia**: Fear, hatred and dislike of homosexuality and persons of homosexual orientation.

**homosexual**: Of or relating to sexual and affectional attraction to a member of the same sex (adj.). A person who is attracted to members of the same sex (n.). Appropriate in medical or sexual contexts; in all other usage, gay is preferred.

**lesbian**: (n. and adj.) Preferred term for female homosexuals.

**lifestyle**: An inaccurate term sometimes used to describe gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Avoid. There is no gay lifestyle, just as there is no straight lifestyle.

**lover**: a gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual person’s sexual partner. See gay relationships.

**outing**: Publicly revealing the sexual orientation of an individual who has chosen to keep that orientation a secret. (From out of the closet.) Some activists, political groups and media believe outing is justified and/or newsworthy when the person involved works against the interests of lesbians and gays. Others oppose it as an invasion of privacy. Also a verb: The magazine outed the Senator in a front-page story. See coming out and closeted.

**pink triangle**: The symbol homosexual men were required to wear in Nazi concentration camps. (Lesbians were classified in various groups. Some wore black triangles.) Starting in the late 1970s, the downward-pointing, equilateral, pink triangle was adopted as a symbol of gay pride.

**pride (day/march)**: Short for gay/lesbian pride, this term is commonly used to indicate the celebrations commemorating the Stonewall Inn riots. One marcher said, "The day of the Pride march is the one day of the year we can feel free."
queen: An effeminate gay man. Usually derogatory.

queer: Pejorative for gays. Now being reclaimed by some gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people as a self-affirming umbrella term.

rainbow flag: A flag of six equal horizontal stripes (red, orange, yellow, green, blue and lavender or violet) adopted to signify the diversity of the lesbian and gay communities.

seroconversion: Scientifically observable alteration of blood or other bodily fluids from HIV-negative to HIV-positive. The verb is seroconvert.

seropositive: Synonymous with HIV-positive.

safe sex, safer sex: Sexual practices that minimize the transmission of infectious bodily fluids.

sexual orientation: Innate sexual attraction. In all instances, use this term instead of sexual preference or other misleading terminology.

sexual preference: Avoid. Sexual orientation is the correct term.

sodomy: Collective term for various sexual acts (see dictionary) deemed illegal in some states. Not synonymous with homosexuality or gay sex.

Stonewall: The Stonewall Inn tavern in New York City’s Greenwich Village was the site of several nights of raucous protests following a police raid on June 28, 1969. Although not the nation's first gay-rights demonstration, Stonewall is now regarded as the birth of the modern gay-rights movement.

straight: A heterosexual; a non-gay person. Also adj.

transgender: An imprecise term for individuals who cross gender lines. Sometimes synonymous with transsexual and sometimes also including transvestites.

transsexual: An individual who believes himself or herself to be a member of the opposite sex and who, by surgery or therapy, acquires the physical characteristics of the opposite sex. (See AP Stylebook entry sex change for correct usage of pronouns.)

transvestite: An individual - not necessarily gay - who dresses in garb most often associated with the opposite sex. Not synonymous with drag queen.

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### Appendix 3

#### Other Links

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