WRITING LIBERATION:  
A COMPARISON OF THE NEWSLETTERS PUBLISHED BY  
THE GAY LIBERATION FRONT OF WASHINGTON D.C. AND OF AMES, IOWA  
in the early 1970s

By

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1
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To the courageous folks of the gay liberation movement
and
To my fiercely beautiful mother, Marilyn M. W. Culp (1945-2006)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I wish to thank the folks who created and participated in the gay liberation movement. I admire their perception and their courage. Without their work, mine would not have been possible.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION: THE WHAT, WHY, AND HOW OF MY PROJECT</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epigraphs: In Their Own Words</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Description and Significance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Layout</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW: CONTEXTUALIZING THE GAY LIBERATION</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOVEMENT AND THE GAY PRESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Bother with a Literature Review?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Brief History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement in the United States</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stirrings of a Homophile Movement</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophile Movement: A Revival</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise Up, and Out: Gay Liberation Movement and Lesbian Feminism</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride and Beyond: Lesbian and Gay Identity Movement</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Brief History of the Gay and Lesbian Press in the United States</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonalities Amongst the Genres of the Dissident Press</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Ben’s <em>Vice Versa: America’s Gayest Magazine</em></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups Begin to Publish: <em>One</em> and <em>The Mattachine Review</em></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gay Press Gets Emboldened</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement/Press Relations in Gay Liberation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ANALYSES OF SELECT GAY LIBERATION FRONT NEWSLETTERS</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLISHED IN WASHINGTON D.C. AND AMES, IOWA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Publications of Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C.</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Surrounding Context for Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C.</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Liberation Front Forms in D.C.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>GLF Newsletter</em>: A Bulletin Board for the Gay Community</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Publications of Gay Liberation Front of Ames, Iowa</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Surrounding Context for Gay Liberation Front of Ames, Iowa</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Liberation Front Forms in Ames, Iowa</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From <em>Gayly Forward to Sarah Bernhardt’s Farewell American Tour</em>: A Textual Meeting Place for the Gay Community</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 CONCLUSION: FUNCTIONS OF GAY LIBERATION FRONT’S NEWSLETTERS</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN WASHINGTON D.C. AND AMES, IOWA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................................................72

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ......................................................................................................................77
For this project, I engage in a close reading of the newsletters produced by the Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C. and of Ames, Iowa during the early 1970s in order to better understand the gay liberation movement. I analyze both the appearance and the content of these newsletters in order to unpack the functions these newsletters served for their authors and their readers. I argue that although both the publications served the gay male communities of which their authors were a part, they did so in different ways because the gay male communities of D.C. and of Ames were significantly different. I place the newsletters in their historical location by providing the larger context in which they were produced, as I argue that the location of production contributed to the newsletters of these two cities being significantly different from each other. Finally, I argue that these newsletters were one place where different shades of gay male identity were being created and given meaning by movement participants themselves. Looking at this identity work occurring in these newsletters allows for a more complicated view of the gay liberation movement, and it points towards the importance of newsletters as not just tools used to document the movement, but as mechanisms for movement creation.
Chapter 1
Introduction: The What, Why, and How of My Project

Epigraphs: In Their Own Words

Things for Bored Faggots to do!
1. Learn to knit, sew, weave, paint, draw, crochet, etc. Don’t be a man, be creative instead! . . .
3. Send letters to psychiatrists thanking them for volunteering to be subjects in aversion-therapy studies. Sign the letters “THE GAY REVENGE SQUAD” or “DEATH TO SHRINKS CADRE” . . .
6. Break into the armory and paint the guns pink . . .
8. Send the football team a Valentine
9. Blackmail a straight pig. Pick someone important like the Pope or the President. Not only is it fun, but it can also be profitable. (Donate all funds to the Gay movement)
10. Infiltrate the Jesus Freak movements—the “come out.” With luck they’ll be so demoralized that maybe they’ll leave the country . . .
18. Send your mother a “Do-your-own Divorce Kit.”
19. Complain to the police when a mixed couple (male/female) shows affection in public . . .
22. Experiment with make-up, nail polish, jewelry, exotic clothing, feather boas, high-heeled shoes, glitter, sparkles, body paints and other such sleazy things. Liberate your mind, body, and soul . . .

Love and Kisses,
Lyla Butch Pompadour
(Gay People’s Alliance, Coleus & Dogbreath Too, Fall 1974.)

The Revolutionary Peoples’ Constitutional Convention (R.P.C.C.) will be held here in Washington in late November . . . The GLF Commune will serve as the information center for all Gay Liberation groups attending the R.P.C.C. The Radical Caucus and the Commune will attempt to provide all of the necessary services needed for the Convention—Housing, Food, Legal Aid, Medical Aid, and Transportation. Those brothers who are willing to help in any of the above activities or able to donate cash should call the persons listed above or fill out the form at the back of the Newsletter.

Power to the People—Gay Power to Gay People.
(Gay Liberation Front of D.C., GLF Newsletter 1.12, October 1970.)

Project Description and Significance

The selections above are taken from Coleus & Dogbreath Too and GLF Newsletter 1.12, newsletters published by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) of Ames, Iowa and of Washington D.C., respectively. I decided to open with excerpts from these two articles in order to let the
voices of the activists speak for themselves, for without their work, I could not have done this project. These two excerpts greatly differ in their content, tone, and purpose. The excerpt authored by Pompadour is written with tongue firmly in cheek. It is deceptively light-hearted in tone, as the author’s suggestions touch upon the major institutions that gay liberationists were revolting against—psychiatry, the military, the church, the police, and gender roles. The second excerpt from Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C. has a serious, neutral tone to match the informative purpose of the piece. This article is written to provide information, not to amuse the reader or to vent on the part of the author. I chose these selections because they are generally representative of the newsletters published by their respective Gay Liberation Front, and so the reader can have a taste of the material I have analyzed for my project. Though these selections differ from each other in a number of ways, they both can be seen as serving important functions for their publishers and readers, as can the newsletters from which they were taken. The newsletters published by GLFs not only recorded the events of the day, but also—and perhaps more significantly—actively shaped and gave direction to those events and the social movements they represent.

For this project, I engage in a close reading of the newsletters produced by two incarnations of the Gay Liberation Front. Focusing on Washington D.C. and Ames, Iowa in the early 1970s, I analyze the appearance and content of the newsletters published by the Gay Liberation Front in both of these locations. I also place these newsletters in their historical location by providing the larger context in which they were produced. I am particularly interested in the way these newsletters functioned for the groups who published them and for their readership more generally. What good were these newsletters? What did publishing them
accomplish? Why and how were these publications important to the gay liberation movement? These are the major questions I allowed to lead my research for this project.

I was driven to this particular project for two reasons (aside from personal interest in the subject matter). First, I intend this project as a sort of tribute to the work these activists did. The period of the gay and lesbian movement referred to as the gay liberation movement is quite short, spanning approximately three or four years depending on which scholar is counting. Furthermore, the Gay Liberation Front is characterized by a distaste of hierarchical organization, and as a result, did not keep formal, organized records of its proceedings. This, combined with the ephemeral nature of this period of the movement, has made it a difficult subject of study, and has contributed to my desire to help document this rich period in the movement’s history. I want these case studies to be a testament to the action taken by the activists I write about in the following pages.

Second, and related to the first reason, I see a gap in the existing scholarship, and I see this project as an attempt to begin filling in that gap. Much of the academic work done on the gay liberation movement takes New York as its focus. The specifics about the Gay Liberation Front seem to reference the New York group. Indeed, the Gay Liberation Front of New York was the first to form, and so set a model for others like-minded groups across the nation; however, it was by no means the only Front. I became interested in this project when I was researching GLF, and I recall wishing for more specific examples of actions and ideals of GLFs outside of New York. While recognizing the significance of New York to the gay and lesbian movement, I believe that there is value in studying the liberation movement outside of this major city.

This particular project is important to scholarship for several reasons. This project contributes to producing a historical record of liberation-oriented movement ephemera, without
which details of this period in the movement may be lost or buried. By taking seriously the work of the dissident press, this project contributes to piecing together a more nuanced, fuller picture of gay liberation. Also, in considering these newsletters as a legitimate subject of study, this project helps to bring activism into academic research.

This work is also of value to social movement scholars in particular. Analyzing these newsletters allows one to see how movement participants view themselves, and/or how they chose to present themselves and their causes to the public. Investigating how people are participating in social movements is one way to get at the question of why and how social movements form. Looking at the functions these newsletters served for their authors and their readers allows for insight into the development of the gay liberation movement; it also allows for speculation as to the reasons for the decline of the movement by looking at the lifespan of these publications.

In 1975, Crew wrote of some of the functions that the gay press was engaged in as he evaluated the development of the genre thus far: “The Gay press is a vehicle for building and affirming the very Gay Community that this society has thus actively tried to suppress and thwart. The Gay press offers for Gays a way to break out of the prevailing homophobic pattern of our culture…The Gay press functions to unite many of the Gays who read it.”¹ In this article, Crew gives a brief review/editorial about over 25 publications that are written by and for gay males at the local and national level. These publications vary in content from those that deal with gay news, to those that focus on social gathering spots, to those that discuss the place gay men have and should have in the Catholic church. These publications, as Crew notes, all provide a forum for gay folk to address each other, a way to create gay culture and gay movements.

They represent one venue where different kinds of male gayness are created as authors and readers converse on what it means to be a gay male in various positions in this society. One avenue into the ways different gay male identities are constructed is via these publications. Related, one can gain insight into the formation of the gay liberation movement by examining the meaning-making that was taking place simultaneously and the identity work that movement participants engaged in.

One can also use newsletter analysis as a way to examine movement recruitment. The newsletters published by different GLFs were, at least in part, designed to draw other gay folks into the movement, into a dialogue about what it means to be a gay male. Their call for community participation can be read just this way—as a call for new participants to join the movement.

Newsletters are particularly important for the gay liberation movement because of the do-it-yourself ethic that produced them, and this production ethic corresponds directly to the gay liberation movement itself. This was a grassroots movement, one where all gay folk were encouraged to engage in self-analysis, to think for themselves about what it means to be gay rather than relying on “expert” opinions. Rap groups, or consciousness-raising sessions were held during which gay folk would discuss their personal experiences and evaluate them in light of other gay men’s experiences. During this movement, gay men were encouraged to draw theories of oppressions and how it functioned out of their own experiences, and this emphasis on the importance of one’s own experiences is embodied in the newsletters. Many of these publications were put together quickly and cheaply by a group (or sometimes a single) of volunteers; many of them had an open door editorial policy and would accept contributions from any gay person. The motivation, generally speaking, was to get people talking—to each other, to
the heterosexual public, to themselves. This description also largely characterizes a goal of the larger gay liberation movement.

This approach, using movement publications to gain insight into the movement itself and into the movement participants’ identity work, is certainly not unique to this project. Meeker traces the development of the gay and lesbian movement in the U.S. using various gay and lesbian publications that span thirty years. Herring uses two publications to discuss the anti-urban movement of gays and lesbians, where there was a desire to return to a rural lifestyle and incorporate that into a gay identity. Jay and Young put together an anthology of writing from the publications of the gay press that focuses on its importance in communication in the gay community. Young is careful to note in his introduction that the excerpted material did not just document the creation of a vibrant gay culture in the U.S., but it also helped create that culture. Indeed, as Chasin notes, the gay and lesbian press and the gay and lesbian movement are inextricably intertwined.

Also, by engaging in a close reading of these newsletters form Washington D.C. and Ames, Iowa, this project allows comparisons to be made between Gay Liberation Fronts. Through a comparison of groups that, to varying degrees, represented the same movement, one can look at how this movement flowed in different geographical areas. These comparisons are useful for scholars because they allow one to consider questions of social movement participation, development, and decline to be discussed in relation to geographical setting. The functions and content of the newsletters I discuss in these case studies are tied to their historical location in Washington D.C. and Ames, Iowa. In other words, the purpose the newsletters

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served and the articles in them are both influenced by the setting in which their authors produced them. These case studies act as examples of how publications contribute to social movements. Gay Liberation Fronts’ newsletters not only served to document and bear witness to the goings-on of liberation during this time, but also served to help create that liberation which they appeared only to record. Gay Liberation Fronts’ publications actively helped build the liberation movement.

**Project Layout**

The second chapter of my thesis consists of a selected literature review. This literature review is necessary to providing a context in which to place the newsletters. Surveying scholarship mainly in the fields of history and journalism, I will discuss the historical context that influenced the development of the gay liberation movement and of the gay press.

While the newsletters did contribute to building the gay liberation movement, they were certainly not the only contributor. Because the gay liberation movement partially defined itself in relation to the homophile movement in the U.S., it is necessary to provide background on the homophile movement in order to fully understand the gay liberation movement. Thus, the first part of the literature review will present a picture of the social and political atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S. as hostile toward lesbians and gays. It will include a discussion of the homophile movement, as gay liberation in part defined itself as a movement specifically different from the homophile organizations. This also demonstrates that the Stonewall riots are more appropriately seen as a turning point in the lesbian and gay movement, rather than as the starting point of the gay liberation movement, as it is sometimes portrayed. This section will place the reader in the context within which the newsletters were produced, thereby allowing for a fuller understanding of the material.
The second part of the first chapter will provide a different context relevant to these case studies, as I briefly discuss the development of the gay press in the U.S. This section situates the gay press as a genre within the larger dissident press in the U.S., and discusses commonalities held by those genres lumped together under the label “the dissident press.” It includes a discussion of the origins of the gay press in the U.S. in a magazine published by Lisa Ben, and moves from there to a look at the newsletters published by the first homophile groups in the U.S. It also briefly discusses the proliferation of dissident publications that were produced in the 1960s, concurrently with the proliferation of social movements at the time, and speaks to how the publications of the gay press were influenced by this context. It closes by noting the growth in publications of the gay press and the direction many of these publications were taking toward liberation in their content.

The third chapter consists of my analyses and close reading of the GLF newsletters from Washington D.C. and Ames, Iowa. I examine three issues of the newsletter from D.C. published in 1970 and the complete archive (six issues) from Ames that was published in 1974 and 1975. I include other pertinent archival material, such as newspaper articles that appeared outside of the dissident press, as well as information culled from members’ personal recollections and oral histories as appropriate. This chapter is divided into two sections, presenting two case studies. It begins with Washington D.C., discussing the context in which Gay Liberation Front’s newsletters appeared, as well as the direct catalyst for the group’s formation. I then focus on the functions that the newsletter served for the group and the readership at large. Next, I turn my attention to Ames, Iowa, and discuss the same points I did for GLF of Washington D.C. I

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3 I was unable to determine when or why the GLF of D.C. ceased publication of their newsletter. While I realize this is a partial archive, I still think valuable research can be done with it. I look forward to a fuller archive being brought to light in the future.
provide some context and the impetus behind the creation of a Gay Liberation Front at Iowa State University. I trace this group’s publications throughout their short history, focusing on how the newsletters served GLF and the gay folks of Ames.

The final chapter of this project will bring the reader back to the larger theoretical issues relevant to my project. It begins with a comparison of the functions of the newsletters from the Gay Liberation Fronts of Washington D.C. and of Ames, Iowa. I discuss the purposes they held in common, and then move on to those purposes that were unique to each group. I also offer speculation on the reasons for those differences located in the geographical location and the constituency of each group, as well as the intended audience for their publications. I discuss the significance of my findings regarding the functions of these newsletters, and relate them to the broader picture of the gay liberation movement in academic scholarship. I end this project with ways to expand this project and suggestions for further study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW: CONTEXTUALIZING THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE GAY PRESS

Why Bother with a Literature Review?

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I attempt to provide a brief overview of the lesbian and gay movement in the United States. Recognizing the limitations of trying to address the development, challenges, ideologies, and effects of a social movement in limited space, I none the less try to touch on the major social and political influences, and shifts in movement ideology, strategy, and organization. I have taken a chronological approach in this chapter, breaking it up into sections based loosely on dates, as I think that helps draw attention to the specific historical contexts surrounding the lesbian and gay movement.

I begin with the homophile movement at the start of the 20th century, which ended with the Nazis coming to power. I continue with the homophile movement after World War II, realizing that the common conception that this is the start of the homophile movement in the U.S., as the accounts of early movement activity before that war was largely buried or lost. Then, I turn to a discussion of the gay liberation movement and lesbian feminism, as both these movements can be examined in relation to the homophile movement. Next, I look at the lesbian and gay identity movement, and how this developed in dialogue with the liberation movement. Finally, I discuss challenges to the lesbian and gay movement as we know it today.

The second purpose of this chapter is to summarize the history of the gay and lesbian press in the U.S. Following the work of previous scholars of this topic, I am limiting this summary to include only those documents published by gays and lesbians and had gays and lesbians as the intended audience. I begin with a discussion of the first publication aimed at a lesbian audience, including the author’s motivation, the content, and the ways this publication set the stage for those to follow. Then, I move to the most often mentioned historical publications, ONE, The
Mattachine Review, and The Ladder. These are often discussed in relation to the start of the homophile movement in the U.S., as each paper was produced by a group of gay men and lesbians respectively. I also touch upon how these publications change over time and with new leadership. Finally, I discuss the explosion of publications that appeared in the gay and lesbian press at the time of the Stonewall Rebellion. During this time, the number of publications and the circulation numbers rose dramatically, as more and more people created an outlet for their voices and helped the movement reach a crescendo. This discussion sets the stage for my next chapter, where I present two case studies of two publications produced in the wake of Stonewall, focusing on the functions they served for the community in which they were circulated.

A Brief History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement in the United States

Stirrings of a Homophile Movement

Some scholars date the homophile movement in the U.S. as beginning with the appearance of groups like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis in the early 1950s; however others recognize its beginnings as early as the start of the 20th century. In Germany, 1897, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee was founded by a physician, a publisher, a lawyer, and a novelist, foreshadowing the institutions that would soon be central to the public discussion of homosexuality. This was the first social group established to advance the civil rights of homosexuals, and it remained active in Germany until the rise of the Nazis.

Though started in Germany, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee carried its ideas to other countries, and in 1906 and 1907 representatives from the committee lectured in New York, helping to make new forms of organization imaginable for homosexuals in the U.S. Though not


formally organized into social movement groups, gays and lesbians had already began to congregate in certain social venues at this time. Edward Stevenson’s 1908 book *The Intersexes* identified clubs, bath houses, music halls, and cafes across the US frequented by homosexuals,\(^6\) which gave those who did not already know about these meeting places a lessened sense of isolation and a chance to form social networks. This was the first book of its kind written by a gay American writer. Historian Jonathan Katz has documented music, bars, and literature that show organized gay life among black Americans prior to World War II.\(^7\) These social ties gave early homophile groups a foundation on which to build. The Society for Human Rights in Chicago was formed in 1924, and was the first formally organized group for the advancement of gay rights in the United States.\(^8\)

The beginnings of a social movement were budding when the Nazis came to power in Germany. With their ascendancy came the systematic intimidation and persecution of homosexuals, who, when forced into concentration camps, had to wear a pink triangle on their arm as an identifier,\(^9\) and were often subject to the harshest treatment in the camps.\(^10\) The abounding sense of fear was not confined to Germany, however, and early homophile movements across the globe either went into hiding or were destroyed. However, as is obvious from the re-emergence of homophile movements after World War II, “[w]hatever gods the Nazis served, the genocide of a generation of homosexuals, the extermination of gay thought, and the

\(^{6}\) Ibid.


\(^{8}\) Adam.


\(^{10}\) Adam.
intense supervision of those who might be tempted to homosexuality were not enough to contain the human potential for same-sex love.”

**Homophile Movement: A Revival**

Systematic persecution of homosexuals did not end with the defeat of the Nazis, nor did it end with the official discovery the homosexual behavior was relatively wide-spread in the U.S. Soon after World War II, Alfred Kinsey published his findings based on interviews with thousands of individuals concerning their detailed sex histories (1948, 1953). Kinsey found that homosexual acts were fairly common, if not prevalent, in the United States. Based on this information, he described homosexuality and heterosexuality as occupying two ends of a continuum rather than as opposite sides of a strictly exclusionary dichotomy. He concluded that homosexuality was not a fixed individual propensity, but rather more of a general human desire, implying that this desire may be present in varying degrees in every individual (as opposed to only in a few exceptions) although not every individual may act on these desires to the same extent.

The overarching social and political context in the United States after World War II was completely unfriendly to homosexuals, to put it mildly. The climate at this time was characterized by a generalized fear, even panic, concerning “the other” and “the foreign.” This was the era of McCarthy, and the House Un-American Activities, whose commission was to weed out Communists suspected of hiding in the ranks of homosexuals. Across the country there was a federal, state and local purge of gays and lesbians. One specific example of this occurred in the Johns Committee’s actions on college campuses in Florida, which terrorized students,

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11 Ibid, 59.

caused faculty to lose their jobs, and contributed to a number of persons’ suicides. Homosexual lives across the country were subject to repression, criminalization, discrimination, and persecution; marked by police and street violence, blackmail, incarceration in jails and mental hospitals, as “[a] growing public homosexual menace was invoked to fuel an atmosphere of social panic and hateful politic.”¹³

After the Cold War, the U.S. government and its institutions pushed for a return to normalcy, which essentially meant enforcing traditional nuclear family values and heterosexual monogamy in service of reproduction as the American ideal. This image of the American family was held up and revered as the American ideal to which all should aspire. Indeed, this portrait was intimately tied to the identity of the nation. In the name of fostering the development of this national identity, any group of persons that did not easily fit into this imagined community of wholesome America was defined as a foreign other, facilitating their marginalization and harassment. In this way, gender/sexuality discourse and nationality became linked as homosexuals came to symbolize the betrayal of American manhood.¹⁴ Gay men were seen as deviant criminals whose behavior needed to be subdued and punished for the good of the nation.

This purposeful and aggressive enforcement of heterosexual dominance can be seen in both the state and the culture. For instance, American film helped construct an image of the polluted homosexual, by portraying gay men on the screen as child molesters and dysfunctional individuals whose lives ultimately end (or should end) in tragedy.¹⁵ Further evidence that homosexuality was viewed as deviant behavior can be found in the sociological literature from

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¹³ Seidman, 26.
¹⁴ Adam.
¹⁵ Seidman.
the time, and in the fact that homosexuality was listed as in the psychiatric Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. During this time, when both the culture and the state were purposefully and aggressively enforcing heterosexual dominance, the closet was built as an accommodation to a compulsory heterosexual society and, often times literally, as a method of survival.

Yet within this hateful context, a homophile social movement began to re-emerge. In 1951, the Mattachine Society, named after a court jester who tells unsightly truths from behind a mask, emerged in Los Angeles with leftist leanings and a stated purpose to “unify, educate, lead, assist” and to “mobiliz[e] a large gay constituency and [weld] it into a cohesive force capable of militancy.” However, in 1953, with a change in leadership came a change in movement strategy from gearing up for militant action to advocating a position of accommodation, integration, and an image of respectability which they held for over a decade. The Mattachine Society presented itself to the public as a group interested in addressing the “problems of homosexuality,” not as a gay organization. In some recent literature, “[t]he term homophile [has become] virtually synonymous with the assimilation strategy of this time.” In other words, they believed the best way to accomplish their goals was by presenting themselves as “just like everybody else,” (with one insignificant difference) and by educating both homosexuals and

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17 Seidman.

18 Adam.


20 Adam.
heterosexuals. Though the society did not present itself as explicitly political, it operated using an interest group political logic, one similar to that of an ethnic group that seeks legal consideration based on minority status. In addition to working towards legal rights, the Mattachine Society helped create social networks among gay men and helped lessen feelings of isolation through their meetings and also through their publication *The Mattachine Review*.

Though the Mattachine Society was open to members of both genders, in practice it was a gay male organization. In 1955, the first post-war lesbian organization arose in San Francisco. The Daughters of Bilitis, named for Pierre Louys’s poems on a lesbian theme, stated education, development of a library of homosexual material, facilitation of public discussions of homosexuality involving legal, psychiatric and religious professionals as its objectives. Similar to the Mattachine Society, they advocated an assimilationist strategy and a mode of behavior and dress that was acceptable the heterosexual America.

**Rise Up, and Out: Gay Liberation Movement and Lesbian Feminism**

In 1964, the Mattachine Society in New York adopted the slogan “Gay Is Good!” and elected leadership that stood for a more activist stance. This signified a shift from a strategy of assimilation to one of public activism. Implicit in the idea that gay is good is the idea that homosexuals need not present themselves as heterosexuals who just happened to have a sex partner of the same gender in order to gain social acceptance and legal rights. Rather, they

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23 Adam.

24 Adam; D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*. 

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should proclaim a pride in being gay. This shift from accommodation to activism, from integration to confrontation, did not happen without resistance. The North American Conference of Homophile Organizations in 1970 acts as a snapshot, showing how the two movement strategies and ideologies clashed as gay liberationists confronted homophile organizations. In the end, it is clear that gay liberation was to be taken seriously, as the conference passed motions stating that they would support the women’s movement, the Black Panthers, withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, and a memorial in remembrance of the homosexuals persecuted and killed under Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{25} This shift was not specific to the Mattachine Society nor to New York; it was indicative of a more general shift throughout lesbian and gay organizations across the nation.

The social and political context in the United States at this time was one of contest; the 1960s was a time when virtually every major U.S. institution was being challenged. This historical location saw the rise of the black power movement, the women’s movement, the radical student movement, the sexual revolution of the counterculture, peace movements, and environmental movements. Though working toward different ends, and containing much internal debate as to how to attain those ends, all these strands of social movements shared a confrontation with the idealized picture of America. Oversimplified, these movements allowed the public to see the gap between what this land claimed—freedom and equality—and what actually occurred in this land. Sharing much with these social movements, and moving into the social space that was created by them, lesbian and gay movements emerged in different dress.

In such a context of possibility and creativity, it seemed to many gays and lesbians that “[c]ivil rights and integration seemed like endless begging for the charity of liberals who

\textsuperscript{25} Adam.
conveniently ignored the everyday physical and psychological violence exerted by homophobic society.”

“Movement and knowledge creation were indistinguishable in a period when civil rights, women’s, and gay and lesbian movements sought to take back public and scholarly images and stories about themselves.”

Gays and lesbians wanted self-definition, and the room to form their own culture where gay people could be free.

“Within two years of the Stonewall Rebellion, gay liberation groups emerged in every major city and campus in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe.”

The Stonewall riots of 1969 are often used as a marker for the start of gay liberation; however, it is important to remember that gay liberation built upon and interacted with an already formed homophile movement. Gay liberation began with people who were tired of the homophile movement’s strategy and tactics, and felt a sense of urgency that could not wait for electoral politics while violence and discrimination continued to affect gays and lesbians on a daily basis. Liberationists sought to transform heterosexist institutions—not to be included in them. The gay liberation movement had visions of freeing the homosexual within all individuals; movement participants believed that everyone, not just gays and lesbians, would benefit from the destruction of sexual repression. Liberationists saw themselves as challenging the American standard of heterosexual monogamy, as opposed to working for civil rights based on a minority group status, and they used tactics and internal organization structures that corresponded to their goals. Immediate, direct, confrontational public actions, often called “zaps,” promoted visibility, and often drew media attention.

26 Ibid., 80.
27 Ibid., 16.
28 Ibid., 89.
The Gay Liberation Front (NY) is probably the most well-known gay liberation group, but it was by no means the only one—there was Fight Repression of Erotic Expression (FREE) in Minneapolis, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in New York, and Third World Gay Revolution composed of black and Hispanic members.\textsuperscript{29} As can be inferred from this list of groups, other marginalized persons rallied in gay liberation, though it has come to be thought of as a mainly white movement. Liberationists saw their action as connected to broader social change seeking an end to oppression along the lines of race, class, and gender, and of course, sexuality, and they pressed for revolution in coalition with other progressive forces. However, not everyone was happy with this connection to broad social issues, and some wanted to retain a focus on gay issues. For example, in NY, the Gay Activists Alliance was formed by former members of the Gay Liberation Front who felt that GLF was disorganized, spreading itself too thin, and too preoccupied with revolutionary doctrine to effectively deal with the everyday discrimination still occurring in the meantime. These groups operated with an identity political logic as homosexuality was reconceptualized as a social and political identity—it was no longer just about sexual object choice.\textsuperscript{30} They advocated creation and celebration of gay and lesbian culture, which they viewed as essential to establishing lesbian and gay identity.

Though lesbians had worked in both the women’s movement and in the homophile movement, they felt their concerns were being ignored in both movements. “Men took for granted many of the social conditions that made it possible for them to be gay. But lesbians needed to address fundamental problems facing all women – such as equal opportunity in employment and violence against women – in order to have sufficient independence to become

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} Armstrong.
lesbians.”31 And though lesbians had always been present in the women’s movement, they found themselves being marginalized there too on the basis of sexuality, race, and class, as they were seen as a threat to the possible success of the movement. As a response to this, lesbians formed their own organizations pulling from both gay liberation and the women’s movement.

This movement of lesbians toward autonomous groups, where they were sure their concerns would be at the forefront, can be seen in the evolution of group names. For instance, in NY, the Gay Liberation Front Women’s Caucus became Gay Women’s Liberation, which later became Lesbian Feminism; the Gay Activists Alliance Women’s Subcommittee became Lesbian Feminism Liberation.32 The Daughters of Bilitis collapsed as women ceded from the gay movement in search of their own space, and as homophile thinking was being overtaken with talk of liberation. In 1971, the Radicalesbians in New York produced the now infamous Woman–Identified Woman Manifesto. During this time, lesbianism was redefined as a sort of feminist nationalism. This was also a time of lesbian cultural renaissance with multiple newsletters and journals in circulation, and music festivals abounding. There was a major realignment of lesbian energy away from furthering the rights of women or gays, toward specifically lesbians’ (those at the intersection of ‘women’ and ‘gay’) concerns.

The emphasis on gay and lesbian pride and the celebration of gay and lesbian culture that, for some, seems par for the course today, is the legacy of the liberation movement. Publicly acknowledging oneself as a lesbian or gay man, or coming out of the closet is now seen as a right of passage in the gay and lesbian community. This notion has become so central that we now speak of ‘coming out’ narratives and have a National Coming Out Day. Indeed, the idea of

31 Adam, 99.
32 Ibid.
coming out of as we know it today stems from the self-affirmation promoted by gay liberation, from the idea that ‘gay is good.’

Pride and Beyond: Lesbian and Gay Identity Movement

The challenge that gay liberation posed to the repressive gender and sexual roles of mainstream America became the reification of gender as either gay male masculinity or lesbian feminist nationalism at the end of the decade. The socialist challenge that the New Left posed ironically ended up having just the opposite effect, as commercial ghettos expanded capitalism. As the New Left declined and the revolution had not come to pass, the redistributive political logic the New Left worked from was discredited. Alongside this decline, “self-professed gay liberation fronts faded as well, leaving reformist groups in the political field and engendering a new proliferation of gay and lesbian interest groups organized within existing institutions: in the workplace, church, the theatre, social services, business, and sports.”

The Reagan era and the rise of the New Right made for a social and political context hostile to the lesbian and gay movement, and left movement groups with ambivalent political opportunities. Before the onslaught of AIDS in the early 1980s, there was a rise in violence directed at gays and lesbians, legal gains repealed, the Briggs Initiative proposed (which was intended to keep gays and lesbians out of schools), the ERA defeated, and Harvey Milk (the first openly gay man elected to political office) assassinated. During this time, the lesbian and gay movements were concerned with state power and carving out a niche for themselves within existing institutions, and turned once again to a focus on gaining legal protection and civil rights.


34 Armstrong.

35 Adam, 89.
through electoral politics. Organizations such The National Gay Task Force, The Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, and Women’s Studies Centers in academia gained prominence as grassroots and direct action were quelled by a repressive political and social context. Movement goals included the legal recognition of homosexual couples, attaining elected office, gaining entry into the military, resisting both police and street violence, and a focus on individual expression.

The group Queer Nation formed in New York in 1990 by folks who felt that the gay and lesbian movement had become homogenized, mainly composed of and concerned with the needs of white upper class males. Many people, including non-whites, bisexuals, and transfolk, did not feel that the lesbian and gay movement was as inclusive as it claimed. Indeed, they felt marginalized within a movement that purportedly was working for their social and political betterment. Queer Nation brought together outcasts, which, some scholars have noted, points to the contradiction of bringing together those made to feel odd or perverse and affirm sameness by claiming an identity on the margin.36 Echoes of gay liberation could be seen and heard in groups such as Queer Nation and ACT UP, as they “combined spontaneous high energy and an anarchistic internal dynamic that resulted in a wave of high-profile challenges to heterosexism but also in the division and dissolution of many groups after a couple of years.”37 Tired of electoral politics, and criticizing the desire for inclusion in a corrupt system, or what some saw as the complicity in gay pride, Queer Nation used direct-action, confrontational tactics to shock the bourgeoisie into recognizing their existence. This approach can be seen in their slogan: We’re here! We’re Queer! Get used to it!

37 Adam, 163.
A Brief History of the Gay and Lesbian Press in the United States

I begin this section of the chapter with a discussion of the first publication aimed at a lesbian audience, including the author’s motivation, the content, and the ways this publication set the stage for those to follow. Then, I move to the most often mentioned historical publications, ONE, The Mattachine Review, and The Ladder. These are often discussed in relation to the start of the gay and lesbian movement in the U.S., as they were all tied to one of the first gay and lesbian organizations, including the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. I also touch upon how these publications change over time and with new leadership. Finally, I discuss the explosion of publications that appeared in the gay and lesbian press at the time of the Stonewall Rebellion. During this time, the number of publications and the circulation numbers rose dramatically, as more and more people created an outlet for their voices and helped the movement reach a crescendo. This discussion leads into my next chapter, where I present two case studies of two publications produced in the wake of Stonewall, focusing on the functions they served for the community in which they were circulated.

Commonalities Amongst the Genres of the Dissident Press

The gay and lesbian press needs to be situated in the tradition of an underground press in the U.S. The U.S. has a rich history of a dissident press existing along side the mainstream press that stretches back to its beginnings as an independent nation. Indeed, one scholar emphasizes that the U.S. has a “tradition” of an alternative press, showing that speaking out against the mainstream in a public forum is not a “time-bound phenomenon.”

pacifism, the various genres included under the label of “dissident press” all share a couple aspects in common.

First is the question of the views espoused in the publications of the dissident press. Regardless of their specific focus, they all promoted ideas that ran counter to mainstream opinions and beliefs current in their time. Their viewpoints were different from, even in disagreement with, those in the conventional press. One scholar sharpens this point by distinguishing between a dissident press and the larger category of an alternative press. Streitmatter explains the difference as he sees it thus: to be considered part of the dissident press (and thus included in his book), the publication “not only had to offer a differing view of society but also had to seek to change society in some discernable way” (italics in original).39

Alternative publications express a view that differs from the mainstream; however, they do not explicitly have this motivation of effecting social change. For the purposes of categorization, Streitmatter is unconcerned with whether or not a dissident press is successful in bringing about social change; the intention to do so is enough.40 He claims it is this explicit motivation for change that separates a dissident press from the larger category of an alternative press.

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40 It is in this drive that Duncome connects publications of the dissident press with his discussion of ‘zines in *Notes from Underground: ’Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, (New York: Verso, 1997). It is here that he finds one major aspect of their usefulness—in giving people “something to walk towards.” In other words, it is the striving toward the destination that is important, not the goal of reaching it, which he notes, is almost always untenable. I would add that ‘zines are also similar in their publishers’ lack of access to print in mainstream publications, and in their do-it-yourself ethic. A further comparison of modern ‘zines with the documents from the older dissident press may prove interesting for further study.
The second commonality shared by genres in the dissident press is a lack of access in the conventional press.\textsuperscript{41} Certainly this is related to their first commonality. The conventional press was (and largely still is) unwilling to provide a space for these dissident voices. Borrowing from Upton Sinclair, a dissident journalist of the early twentieth century, Streitmatter notes that “America’s largest and best-known newspapers generally do not champion fundamental social change but, in reality, construct a “concrete wall” between the American public and alternative thinking.”\textsuperscript{42} Because their viewpoints found no outlet in the conventional press, many women and men who actively sought to transform society were forced to create their own publications as a forum for their ideas. It was often they only way to see their ideas in print, and to put them into a format that could be circulated. This necessity helps to account for why the publishers would endure the harsh conditions, including harassment, financial difficulty, and exhaustion, that often accompanied these endeavors: many of them felt that they had no choice. One member of the dissident press puts it thus: “Publishers become publishers because they must. […] Behind it all is a continuing sense that each of us makes a contribution to a much greater whole.”\textsuperscript{43} In the case of the dissident press, that greater whole refers to the cause behind the various social movements these publications triumphed.

**Lisa Ben’s *Vice Versa: America’s Gayest Magazine***

The gay press started with the desires of a woman known by the pseudonym Lisa Ben, an anagram of “lesbian,” by which she is still known today (although neither that pseudonym nor her given name were ever printed on her publication). She published the first issue of *VICE*...
VERS A in 1947, and by her second issue, she had added a subtitle: America’s Gayest Magazine.

Ben methodically typed all twelve copies of each issue (with justified right-hand margins) by hand while working as a secretary for a boss who had little work for her to do, yet who also informed her she must look busy at the typewriter at all times, lest others think him not important. She then distributed each issue by hand at two local lesbian bars in Southern California, telling the women to pass the magazine along to a friend after they were done with it. Ben’s magazine, as she called it, contained short stories that provided a positive picture of lesbians, poetry, book and film reviews, and editorials, as did virtually all the gay and lesbian publications that were to follow. Each issue ranged from nine to twenty pages in length.

Deviating from Streitmatter’s qualification as a dissident publication, Ben did not publish VICE VERSA to effect social change, but rather to keep busy at work and to help her get acquainted with other women who shared her inclinations. Recently Ben recalled, “I was by myself…I couldn’t go down the street saying: ‘I’m looking for lesbian friends.’ So this was the only way I could think of to do it. That’s why I started VICE VERSA. It gave me a way of reaching out to other gay gals—a way of getting to know other girls.”44 Though Ben did not found the magazine with explicitly political intentions, she admits that, looking back, she can see how her actions were quite political at the time.

Lisa Ben put out a total of nine issues of VICE VERSA before she no longer had the opportunity or the desire. When a new owner came to the business, her work assignment was changed, and she no longer had access to a typewriter, paper, and much free time on the job; however, by this time, she also had a fulfilling social life, and felt that the magazine had

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accomplished its original purpose. Ben says, that by February of 1948, she “was discovering what the lesbian lifestyle was all about, and [she] wanted to live it rather than write about it.”

**Groups Begin to Publish: *One* and The Mattachine Review**

A few years later, in January of 1953, *ONE* was started by a group of gay men in Los Angeles who were tired of “whispering” to each other over the problems they faced as homosexuals. One of the founders, Dale Jennings, recalled saying at a meeting: “That’s not enough. We have to talk to more people. The newspapers won’t print anything about us. So let’s create a publication of our own. Let’s start a magazine.” *ONE* took its name from a quotation by Thomas Carlisle in reference to “a mystic bond of brotherhood [that] makes all men *ONE.*” Indeed, the founders took the word men literally, and by the magazine’s second issue, it was receiving letters complaining about the lack of contributions by women and the lack of content applicable to women. This exclusion foreshadowed what was to become a major issue in the gay and lesbian movement.

The Mattachine Society was founded in 1950 in LA as a secret society of gay men who gathered regularly in each others’ homes to socialize and offer mutual support. At the start of the organization, many members held leftist beliefs; indeed, some were members of the Communist party. These leftist origins of the Mattachine Society are often glossed over as more emphasis is placed on the assimilationist viewpoint that came to dominate the magazine under Hal Call’s leadership in 1953. Although the Mattachine Society was already established by the time *ONE* came out, the founders of the magazine decided to maintain its independence and to not become officially tied to the Society. This decision largely stemmed from a disagreement over the

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46 Ibid., 18.
47 Ibid., 19.
content of the magazine; the Society wanted the magazine to focus on the contributions that homosexuals had made to literature and other cultural expressions; the founder of \textit{ONE} wanted to focus on advocating and gaining equal rights for homosexuals. In January of 1955, Hal Call founded the \textit{Mattachine Review} to promote the Society’s position of accommodation, in accordance with its now right political leanings.\footnote{Ibid.}

The kind of male gayness these publications helped create included political aspects as well as social ones. Both publications were concerned with bringing together a gay community, but it can be argued that that concern was secondary to the goals of covering news that directly affected gay folk. These publications often reported on the status of laws that affected gay folk, and on the deliberations that were being held to discuss these laws and to push to have them overturned. It is likely that the average reader of \textit{The Mattachine Review} or \textit{ONE} would not look like the militant activist who would subscribe to the newsletters of the Gay Liberation Front in the near future.

\textbf{The Gay Press Gets Emboldened}

By the mid-1960’s, new publications had overtaken \textit{ONE} and the \textit{Mattachine Review}, who’s circulations diminished in large part because the editors were unwilling to shift their views in-line with those of a new generation of activists who were beginning to advocate a more emboldened view of their deserved placed in society. Influenced by the black power movement, anti-war movement, and the counterculture, these activists who were new to the gay and lesbian movement did not shy away from powerfully demanding their voice be heard. These new activists were highly involved in many of the themes that came to define the counterculture. A number of new publications that appeared in the mid to late 60’s, such as Philadelphia’s \textit{Drum},
the *Los Angeles Advocate*, and the “Homosexual Citizen” column in *Screw*, so that in mid-1969, the total circulation of publications of the gay and lesbian press rose to approximately 200,000. Just in time for the Stonewall Rebellion, the circulation numbers of the gay and lesbian press had dramatically increased tenfold,\footnote{Ibid.} and the influence from the counterculture could be clearly seen with the focus on reorganizing sexual relationships in the society.

**Movement/Press Relations in Gay Liberation**

The history of the gay and lesbian movement is integrated with the history of its press.\footnote{Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).} It may not be wrong to assert that one would not have existed without the other. As the movement shaped what was included in the content of the publications of what became known as the gay press, the content of the publications served to help define what became in included in the movement—even what would define the movement itself. It is in those pages where the ideological issues of the gay and lesbian movement gained footing and were presented, debated, generally hashed out by gay folks. It is in those pages where one can see the beginnings of a community and connection.

In the following chapter, I present two case studies of the newsletters published by the Gay Liberation Fronts of Washington, DC and Ames, Iowa. I focus on describing the appearance, structure, content, and style of their publications in order to access how the publications served their communities. I locate those newsletters within their historical moment by providing background relevant to their emergence. There has been other work done on the gay and lesbian movement as a whole, as well as work done on what GLF stood for in particular. In my case
studies, I focus on the functions of the newsletters first, then draw the larger theory out of my observations rather then the reverse. I engage in telling history from the ground up.
CHAPTER 3
ANALYSES OF SELECT GAY LIBERATION FRONT NEWSLETTERS PUBLISHED IN
WASHINGTON D.C. AND AMES, IOWA

The Publications of Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C.

The Surrounding Context for Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C.

When the Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C. formed and began putting out their
GLF Newsletter in the summer of 1970, it was not for lack of gay organizing or a gay newsletter
in the area. The Mattachine Society of Washington D.C. (MSW) published a newsletter for its
members semi-regularly from 1966 until 1970. In one of its last issues, The Insider announces
that The Gay Blade will soon be ready for distribution “in bars and other public places. This will
be a newsletter/community bulletin board/scandal sheet which will carry news of the D.C. gay
community and information for the gay community.” Indeed, the first issue of The Gay Blade
appeared, courtesy of Nancy Tucker and Art Stone (pseudonym for Bart Wenger, a member of
MSW), in October, 1969. Though this newsletter was backed by the Mattachine Society, it was
officially independent of the organization. By this time, there were at least seven gay
organizations/groups ranging from the Mattachine Society to the Spartans, D.C.’s first gay
motorcycle club in the city, but there was no central meeting place—physical or metaphorical.

The first issue of The Gay Blade was one single sided page long and was divided into three
columns. It was distributed personally by Stone to individuals because bar owners would not

51 The Rainbow History Project, “The Insider: Newsletter of the Mattachine Society of Washington,”

52 Anonymous, “Dropping the Middle Class Bag,” The Insider: Newsletter of the Mattachine Society of
(accessed September 29, 2007).

53 The Rainbow History Project, “Newspaper of Record: 35 Years of The Washington Blade,”
allow stacks of the newsletter to be left in their businesses. True to its preview description in *The Insider, The Gay Blade* contained announcements of MSW social activities, its own roommate referral service, the availability of books and article for and about homosexuals, contact information for Frank Kameny (then President of MSW), alerts for upcoming meetings, and other random information pertinent to gays in the D.C. area. The first issue also contained a piece on the formation of the Gay Liberation Front in New York and its picket that forced the *Village Voice* to change its advertising policy. Most of the entries in *The Gay Blade* consisted of no more than a couple of sentences.

The content of *The Gay Blade* reflected the vision that Tucker held for the publication. She wanted a publication that would “engender a sense of community. I felt it was very important for gays to become acquainted with one another. Publicity encourages self-confidence, it creates self-respect.” Tucker’s concern for gays’ self-respect is in the same line as Kameny’s desire to inform gays of their legal rights at a time when police harassment, blackmail, and the draft were significant issues in gay people’s lives. Kameny consistently advertised his (and Mattachine’s) legal services in *The Gay Blade*. Also, the second issue of *The Gay Blade* had a flyer attached, entitled “Blackmailer at Work in DuPont Circle Area,” that gave a detailed description of how this person blackmails gays who he thinks are cruising the area, and three detailed ways for the victim to respond to the blackmail. It even includes predictions

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54 Ibid.
56 That is until, of course, the newsletter expanded its one page format.
as to how the blackmailer would react to each of the three offered responses. Further reflecting its focus on the local community, some of the features that have come to define The Gay Blade are the classifieds, which expressly forbid ads for sex or romantic relationships, and the calendar of local events, which was augmented with a section “Of Special Interest to Women” in 1973.

**Gay Liberation Front Forms in D.C.**

When the Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C. formed, they were hardly the first organizing group of gay people, nor was their newsletter the first if its kind. Indeed, their publication seemed to draw upon the feel of The Gay Blade as a community bulletin board; however, the community it was geared towards does not seem to be the entire gay community, but rather those members active in (or desiring to be active in) gay liberation. The group formed approximately one year after the Stonewall riots in New York in response to a series of letters to the editor and articles that appeared in a local underground newspaper. At the beginning of June, 1970, Mike Yarr wrote to the editor of *Quicksilver Times* in protest of the newspaper’s use of the word “sucks” in a headline of the previous issue, designed to express negative feelings towards an individual. Yarr contends that use of the word “sucks” in such a manner contributes to the oppression of gay persons, particularly in the form of self-hatred as gay individuals see the sexual behavior of “sucking cocks” used as a euphemism to describe things as negative and/or

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58 The Community Service Committee of the Mattachine Society of Washington, “Blackmailer at Work in DuPont Circle Area” *The Gay Blade* 1.2, November 1969, [http://www.rainbowhistory.org/FirstBlades.pdf](http://www.rainbowhistory.org/FirstBlades.pdf) (accessed September 30, 2007). This topic would reappear in *The Gay Blade* (March 1970), and here, would include the directive to tell one’s friends about the details because many victims of this blackmailer “never go near the bars and haven’t seen the warnings,” explicitly encouraging gays to watch out for each other.

59 The Rainbow History Project, “Newspaper of Record.” *The Gay Blade* gained a famed status in D.C. as well as a fierce loyal following. The publication, though appearing extremely different from its first issues, exists today as *The Washington Blade*. 

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disgusting.  Yarr maintains that “inadvertent slurs against gay people such as [the one used in the offensive headline] within the ‘liberation movement’ point out the necessity in Washington for gay radicals, militants, and revolutionaries to get our shit together.” At the end of his letter, Mike Yarr listed a phone number where “all gay movement people interested in forming a Gay Liberation Front here” could contact him.

In the following issue of the paper, Quicksilver Times ran an article by D. Aiken entitled “Gay Liberation comes to D.C.” inspired by the first Gay Pride Week, marking the first anniversary of the “Christopher Street Riots” (now usually referred to as the Stonewall Riots, or simply, Stonewall). Aiken’s article makes reference to Mike Yarr’s letter and informs readers that many people (about 70) did respond to Yarr’s call to form a “Gay Lib group.” In his article, Aiken mentions some of the things Gay Lib groups in other cities have done, such as work to repeal sodomy laws, protest the firing of gay persons from their jobs, boycott overpriced gay bars that pay off either the police or the mob or both to obtain protection or avoid raids, and arrange social events where gay people can meet each other (and “right-on straights”) in a relaxed atmosphere outside of bars and public places. Aiken also emphasizes the need for a Gay Lib group as a support network for those who are dealing or will deal with “internal hang ups” and “the repression they feel from a society which demands conformity.” Finally, Aiken touches on an issue that will resurface throughout the years of gay liberation; he states the importance of

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61 Ibid.

62 Ibid. It is significant to mention the Editor’s Note underneath Yarr’s letter: “Mike Yarr’s criticism…and his ensuing analysis are so obviously correct, all we can do is apologize and say in the future we will try to delete idiomatic language which in fact is nothing more than unconscious prejudice.” Also, please note that I will not use the common indication of an error in a direct quote ([sic]) for this document, unless the error is one that may confuse the meaning of the quotation.
gay men and gay women working together in Gay Lib, even though “women will almost certainly want to have their own separate rap sessions.” Aiken also closes his article by providing contact information for himself, Mike Yarr, and Mike Gritz for anyone interested in “rap[ping] with somebody about the idea of gay lib.”

The third article in Quicksilver Times that facilitated the formation of a Gay Liberation Front in Washington D.C. was written by “a radical lesbian” in the July 14-24, 1970 issue. This article, entitled “Gay Liberation,” gives a description of the author’s perception of her experience at the Gay Pride Parade, including the supportive and derogatory remarks from folks on the sidelines, the author’s response to some of those remarks, the irony of having a permit and police protection for the parade to commemorate riots which happened because of police raids the previous year, and the various groups that came together from all over the East Coast to march. The final sentence of this article reads: “For those sisters and brothers who are ready to ‘come out and live,’ we meet Tuesdays at 8:00 pm at Grace Episcopal Church in Georgetown.” This is significant because it shows that in less than a month and a half, folks in DC had brought GLF into being.

The GLF Newsletter: A Bulletin Board for the Gay Community

Once established (and I use that word loosely) as a group, GLF-DC did not waste anytime in putting out the GLF Newsletter during the summer of 1970. The GLF Newsletter was printed weekly and served as a sort of bulletin board for those interested in or already


65 By my estimation, the first issue was published at the beginning of August, 1970. As the newsletter was published on a weekly basis, I obtained this approximation by working backwards from Vol. 1.9 (the earliest issue in my possession), which appeared on October 6, 1970.
participating in gay liberation. The issues I have range from four (4) to six (6) single-sided typed pages in length, and were published in October and November, 1970. They are all titled *GLF Newsletter*, and the “G” in *GLF* is shaped like the symbol used for “male” (a circle with an arrow pointing out from the circle on one side). The newsletters look like they were put together hastily, sometimes containing text that runs crooked down the page, which makes sense considering GLF produced a new issue each week. The contents of each issue include notes from GLF general meetings, tales of plans for and results of “radical action” done by GLFers (such as protests), comments on what was discussed in previous rap sessions, announcements for upcoming meetings and dances and guest speakers, contact information for local gay groups, articles taken from other newspapers that pertain to gay liberation, an open invitation to readers to come to a meeting or participate with specific projects, and the occasional review of a television show or a film.

One of the main functions of Gay Liberation Front’s (DC) newsletter was to make the contents of the weekly meeting accessible to readers. To that end, each issue has an informal account of Tuesday meeting’s minutes. For instance, the section entitled “Cruising Around at Tuesday Meeting” in the October 6, 1970 issue tells readers that Kent has been distributing “The Gay Manifesto” on campuses, Joe will be appearing on a local television show (wearing dark glasses to protect his job) to publicize GLF, and that money was collected to fund the phone service for the Commune, but more money is needed. Also at the meeting, one of the few persons referred to by his full name in these newsletters, Frank Kameny, suggested that GLF and the Homophile Social League jointly hold a dance.66

Finally, contained in these minutes is an announcement that the “political action committee” is planning a meeting with gay bar owners in the near future, and the writer is optimistic about developing a “permanent working committee with the bar owners.” Relations between gay bars and gay liberation groups were often conflicted. On the one hand, the bars have a history of being a public gathering place for gay persons, and having so few, many gay patrons did not want to give up that meeting place, and many wanted to actively support those owned and/or run by gay persons. On the other hand, these bars were far from the ideal. The management was often charged with engaging in racist and/or sexist practices. Often times the owners had to pay off the local police to avoid raids or the local mobsters to obtain some semblance of protection. This frustrated many patrons, as did the watered-down, over-priced drinks. So the prospect of a working relationship between GLFers and bar owners must have been an exciting one indeed. A few weeks later, Chuck Hall reported in the newsletter that a meeting was scheduled “with the barowners to talk over racial and sexual discrimination in the gay bars. At present, the prospects bode well for a productive discussion.”

By mid-November, however, the prospects had closed, as Chuck reported that his final efforts to talk with bar owners had been ignored, and that “from all indications, the barowners do not intend to discuss this subject [the practice of racial and sexual discrimination] voluntarily.”

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67 Ibid.

68 Adam; Arther Bell, Dancing the Gay Lib Blues, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971); D’Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities; John Murphy, Homosexual Liberation: A Personal View, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971). The dissatisfaction many gay men felt with the conditions of gay bars at this time was voiced repeatedly, both directly and indirectly, in many of the newsletters and memoirs of the time. A number of activists were concerned with providing an alternative to bars as a social meeting place for gay men. This was one of the purposes of the dances sponsored by Mattachine and GLF.

69 Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C., “October 20 Meeting,” GLF Newsletter 1.12, October 27, 1970, www.rainbowhistoryorg/glf1.12.pdf (accessed January 12, 2007). It should be noted that when referring to “sexual discrimination,” the author is referring to what we would call “gender discrimination” today, or the practice of discriminating against women (or in this case specifically, against lesbians as women). The author is not referring to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in this case.
This led into a long discussion at the GLF general meeting about what should be done in response to the bar owners’ refusal to address their offensive practices. There was a consensus that discrimination in bars is “palpable and real,” but members were divided as to how to respond. Some felt direct confrontation was necessary, with one member suggesting that they burn down the offending bars; some were in favor of direct non-violent legal confrontation, while some opposed this route, saying that legal confrontation would not be effective given that the courts do not work for the people.70

There was an editorial in this same newsletter, giving space for other considerations surrounding what should be done. The author of the editorial focuses on one comment made at the meeting, forwarding the idea that “there will be such discrimination as long as a sizeable portion of the gay community desires it.” Recognizing that picketing gay bars that discriminate against “blacks and women” may force them to change their practices, but it cannot force them to make black and/or female patrons feel comfortable inside the establishment. Rather, this comes from the clientele. The author suggests that if there was no desire for segregated bars on the part of some members of the gay community in the first place, there would be no problem with discriminatory practices. Therefore, little is gained by successful picketing of a bar because the root of the problem lies in people’s desire for segregation. As follows, the root of the solution should be “effort directed towards ‘educating’ the bigoted gays whose needs create the segregated bar.”71 Whether or not this education is possible is another subject, according to the author.


A second important function of the newsletter was to report on both the planning of and results of “radical actions” taken by GLF members. These radical actions include protests, pickets, demonstrations, rallies, marches, conferences, and zaps. Frequently, the actions are tied to what some would call a non-gay issue, or an issue that is not obviously and directly concerning gay persons qua gay persons. In the newsletters, the GLF presence at these actions is intended to show solidarity with other oppressed groups. For example, a piece entitled “Radical Action” notes that members of the “GLF radical caucus” were present at the planning meetings for a demonstration against Nguyen Cao Ky (South Vietnames Vice Premier) in Washington. According to the author, the members were “acting on the principal that the oppression which foreign intervention and Ky’s corrupt government bring on the Vietnamese people is of concern to gay people as an oppressed group.”

Here, GLFers extend their solidarity with oppressed persons outside the U.S., and actually link U.S. imperialism with their own domestic oppression by the American government.

Members of GLF need not go outside the U.S. to find oppressed groups to align themselves with though; throughout the newsletters, there are instances where GLF members align themselves with other oppressed groups in the U.S., including blacks, women, and Native Americans. For instance, when the demonstration mentioned above was no longer useful (because Ny decided not to go to Washington, D.C.), the GLF radical caucus turned their attention to McIntire, a Christian fundamentalist who spent much effort on advocating victory in

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73 Whether this alignment with other oppressed groups on the part of GLFers was a step towards coalition between groups or an inappropriate parallel that over-simplifies the complexities of socio-political relations is beyond the scope of this thesis.
Vietnam. They joined “the Yippies and other free souls” and put together a rock festival and rally scheduled for the same time as McIntire’s rally. The newsletter reports that “the GLF presence was made known at the Saturday rock concert by three members dressed as Indians—symbolizing another segment of the American population which has felt centuries of oppression.” Here, GLFers draw a parallel between Native Americans and gay individuals as oppressed groups, and they also imply a parallel between both those groups and the Vietnamese, as they chose to direct their action at McIntire’s rally.

A later issue of the newsletter contains another example of GLF making an attempt to align themselves with other oppressed groups. This issue reports that the general Tuesday meeting was dominated by two general discussions, one being whether or not to send a letter of support to Angela Davis and whether to do so in the name of GLF. Though it is unclear whether or not the letter was actually sent to Davis at the Women’s Detention Center in New York, the letter is reprinted in the newsletter. In it, GLF expresses support and admiration for Davis, saying “Your courage is an example and an inspiration to oppressed people everywhere on earth…No matter what physical distances or physical appearances seem to separate us, we are one in spirit. You deserve and have won the love and respect of all those who cherish freedom.” If we sift thorough the air of liberal humanism (and read Angela Davis as representing black folks), we can see that GLF implies that blacks and gays are connected in their oppression. This is an idea that reappears in newsletters from other Gay Liberation Fronts as well. Articles in the various newsletters put forth the viewpoint that although non-gay issues do not relate to gay persons as

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75 GLF of D.C., “Radical Action,” GLF Newsletter 1.9.
gay persons, they do in fact directly concern gay individuals as members of an oppressed
group.76

In tracing the development of gay-centered publications in Washington D.C., we begin to
see that there was a diverse gay community that could, in fact, support multiple gay-focused
publications. This seems to follow from Washington D.C. being a political center of the U.S.
Activism on behalf of gay folk had been occurring in D.C. for some time before the first issue of
GLF Newsletter came to print, and there was already a gay-centered publication that discussed
relevant news items and one that acted as a social event calendar. In this context, GLF
Newsletter could come into the scene and focus on the more political and social activist concerns
of gay folk in Washington D.C. Ames, Iowa, on the other hand, was no such political center for
the country with an established community. There were no other gay-centered publications for
GLF to interact with in the early 1970s, and approximately half the population of Ames was
undergraduate students. One might expect a gay-centered publication to look, feel, and read
quite different from one in D.C., and indeed, it did.

The Publications of Gay Liberation Front of Ames, Iowa

The Surrounding Context for Gay Liberation Front of Ames, Iowa

Quite the contrast to the urban metropolis of Washington D.C., Ames is a small college
town, spanning just over 20 square miles in land mass, located in central Iowa. According to
Wikipedia, the town was originally founded as a station stop on the Cedar Rapids and Missouri
Railroad. Currently, the largest employers in Ames are state and federal institutions followed by
various manufacturers, including Barilla pasta and Ball canning jars. It is home to Iowa State

76 GLF of D.C., “The Infamous Letter,” GLF Newsletter 1.12. The differing opinions among GLFers as to whether
GLF (and gay individuals more generally) should spend time and energy on non-gay issues is a major influence
behind the splintering off of members of GLF into other groups. The Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) was formed in
this way by members who were dissatisfied with the structure of GLF and the breadth of its activism.
University of Science and Technology (ISU), which began as Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in 1856. The first building on campus—the Farm House—was built in 1860. In 2000, Ames had a population of approximately 50,000, and approximately 25,000 students were enrolled at ISU. I realize this census data is not from the time period pertaining to my research, yet this brief introduction serves to highlight Ames as a college town which has the university and agriculture as its sustaining forces. As the 1970s dawned, there were no gay bars in the town, no publications that focused on gay folk, and no readily visible gay groups for students to join for social and/or political purposes. It is in this small college town setting that the Gay Liberation Front of Ames, Iowa formed on the university campus.

**Gay Liberation Front Forms in Ames, Iowa**

The Gay Liberation Front of Ames, Iowa formed in the fall quarter of the 1971-72 school year at Iowa State University. According to one of the founding members, “to be technically correct, a bit wryly ironic, Iowa State University Gay Liberation meetings first took place in married student housing” at the residence of Joey Franco located in Pammel Court.77 Gay Liberation Front at Iowa State made its first public appearance in written form in the Letters to the Editor section of *ISU Daily* newspaper. Signed by Gay Liberation Front—Ames, the letter denounced both obvious and subtle discrimination against homosexuals on campus, and announces that the gay community can no longer remain silent and invisible.78 The letter specifically opposes the University’s presentation of the play *The Boys in the Band*, which they argue perpetuates negative stereotypes about gays and is not representative of the gay community. The closing statement demands equality, and announces GLF’s presence to the ISU

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community: “We demand to be given the same rights and privileges as heterosexuals, and we will begin to come out now and assume our equal status in society.”79

During the fall quarter, the meetings at Pammel Court were private gatherings, but the first open meeting did not occur until the winter quarter. The first public meeting was held at the YMCA on Iowa State’s campus and drew 11 people, both women, and men and a reporter for the ISU Daily newspaper, Linda Kohl.80 Both Kohl’s article and Dennis Brumm’s personal account of that first public meeting speak of high tension in the room and that no one really knew what to expect at the meeting. Brumm recalls that many people were silent at the meeting because of the real or imagined risks they felt they were taking by attending the meeting; he speaks of his own fear in attending: “I was convinced by going to this meeting that the next day everybody would know I’d gone and then they would inevitably beat the living shit out of me over and over again,” and was relieved when he arrived to find that “no threatening angry people were waiting outside to kill us.”81 Brumm is quick to note that this meeting was unlike any other he would (or had) experience(d) in gay liberation—there was no planned agenda, no voting on officers, no chatting among participants, no demonstration planning. Explaining the title of his article, Brumm writes that the meeting “was special and horrible and wonderful all mixed into one setting. It’s hard to even think of it as a meeting; it was a political statement mixed in with a viewing: we were being viewed because we were at something that had never happened on

79 Ibid.


campus or [in] Ames before and even if we were an unknown, yet rumored, minority group, the 
humans came out of curiosity to see what else we might be.”

Both Brumm and Kohl agree that the tension lessened as she began to ask questions about 
the group. One member, Joe Franco, said that GLF has two main goals: “the first, and most 
important, is to foster a sense of community and self-respect among gay people…The second 
purpose…is to inform straight people that ‘we are gay people who are not ashamed of what we 
are and are not sick or perverted.’” Kohl’s article in the Daily focuses on discrimination towards 
gays taking place on Iowa State’s campus, including negative remarks made by professors about 
gay writers when their work is used in English classes, and a gay person being asked to resign 
once the university administration discovered he was gay. The article ends with Franco speaking 
about how gay liberation (and women’s liberation) came out of the struggle against oppression, 
and explaining that GLF did not make the group public until recently because they needed to be 
prepared by other liberation groups.

In April 1972, the Gay Liberation Front held its second open meeting, which prompted 
another article in the *ISU Daily*. The four GLF members present at the meeting agreed that 
“since some members of the group do not want to be harassed by a large number of students…no 
one person should be singled out.” Though no last names are used in the article, it is safe to 
assume that “Joe” is Joe Franco, a founding member of the group, who had made several public 
appearances by this time and had become a spokesperson for GLF of Ames, and “Al” is Allen 
Bell. The purpose behind the open meetings and speaking engagements is to combat 
stereotypical notions of gay persons, as a way to educate both gays and straights in the

82 Ibid.
83 Kohl, “Gay Liberation Front Organizes Here,” *ISU Daily*. 
community. The article cites three common stereotypes “that just are not true” according to GLF members—homosexuals are feminine, promiscuous, and they attack young children. The first question members are asked is “why?” which members find “irrelevant and stupid.” According to Al, often the response is to turn the question around and ask the straight “‘why are you a heterosexual?’” Recognizing the importance of the historical moment, Al notes that this response is more possible now with the explosion of gay liberation groups coming into public view, as these groups have helped dispel the notion that homosexuality is a sickness. To continue this mission of public education, the article closes by saying that GLF would be happy to communicate with both gays and straights and to answer any questions people may have.84

During the following school year, 1972-73, the Gay Liberation Front turned its focus inward. Members moved away from public speaking engagements designed to educate others about gay persons, as they spent most of their energies on each other in “rap sessions.” The shift in focus prompted GLF to change its name to Gay Men’s Rap Group that year. Dennis Brumm speculates that changing the name of the group made it more accessible for a wider range of people, “because rapping was less scary than liberating was.” This turn inward was a logical outgrowth from the meetings GLF held last year, according to Brumm. He describes the dynamic at the sessions as follows, “often times we spent meetings having weekly meetings to discuss what we weren’t discussing properly in the meetings and supporting each other through all the day to day trials we were having among ourselves or the tribulations we felt up against living in a hostile world.” Here, the inward focus is clear. At these sessions, gay men would come together to talk about whatever they were dealing with in their personal lives, including

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instances of oppression, feelings and fears about coming out, and what would go on at the next session. They expressed concern about the group as a whole as well as the individual members. This was a fertile time for personal growth for the new members “who didn’t necessarily feel they wanted to be overtly political animals. Joey Franco sat back some and let grow what he started.”

On May 12, 1973, the school year came to a close on a celebratory note with the first gay dance in Ames sponsored by the Gay Community Alliance, “a name we concocted for a group hug between the Gay Men’s Rap Group and Lesbian Alliance.” The only publicity for the dance was an advertisement in the ISU Daily that ran for the three days before the event. It seemed appropriate to end the year with a social event, as the majority of the year had been spent not on outwardly political actions, but on internal personal growth. Brumm recalls that the stage was set now for the group to turn its focus back toward the public, and though the rap sessions were vital to the group and its members, “it was time to do something besides simply talking.”

That fall semester, the group decided to formalize which meant establishing a leadership of two co-chairmen and writing a constitution that would describe the group’s goals. The reasons behind this decision included to strengthen the group, to prepare to approach the Government of the Student Body (GSB) for formal recognition (i.e. funding), and to appease some of the older group members who claimed that they would quit the group if it did not formalize. As the group discussed its constitution, members differed in opinion on what should be the central focus of the

85 Dennis Brumm, “Gay Liberation and the ISU School Year 1972-1973,” http://www.brumm.com/gaylib/gaylib1972-1973.html (accessed January 27, 2007). These group “rap sessions” served similar functions, and indeed were based on, the consciousness-raising sessions popular in the women’s movement. Brumm also believes that the Lesbian Alliance began in the same school year, and though there were both women and men present at the first public meeting of GLF, after then, “the men and women were essentially separate groups.”

group. Some felt that “the group should be more person-oriented I helping new members to accept their gayness, and to feel comfortable with themselves and with those around them.” Other members, particularly those who had already been “rapping” with the group for a year or two, wanted to be more publicly activist-orientated; one member said he wanted “to work socially; repealing laws, and making people aware of the gay person as a worthwhile human being.” Here, the emphasis is on educating the public and working toward the breakdown of stereotypes, as opposed to dealing with internal struggles. When the group decided to formalize, they were not all in agreement concerning the group’s purpose, and members differed in the level of explicitly political activity they were willing to engage in.

From *Gayly Forward to Sarah Bernhardt’s Farewell American Tour: A Textual Meeting Place for the Gay Community*

The freshly-named Gay Peoples Liberation Alliance published three issues of its monthly newsletter beginning in February, 1974. The first three issue are titled *Gayly Forward* and range from six to ten pages in length. The amount of sketches and artwork is minimal, though it does increase with each sequential issue. The third issue is the first to have a cover page, and it is adorned with a sketched line drawing of the back of a nude male. This is also the first issue where “funded by the government of the student body of Iowa State University” was typed on the cover, though the group obtained funding from the GBS earlier that semester. The issues of *Gayly Forward* include reports of public action taken by members, news articles pertinent to the gay community, articles on what gay liberation means and why it is necessary, analyses of how oppression works against gays, poetry, personal letters, suggested reading lists that include

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88 I could not find an explanation as to why the name was changed again; however, I venture that it had something to do with the decision to formalize the group and to add social change explicitly to the group’s goals. The name change is declared in the group’s official constitution.
positive portrayals of gays and lesbians, and contact information for GPLA and Lesbian Alliance.

*Gayly Forward* acted as an introduction to gay liberation for readers, as well as a medium for figuring out what gay liberation means and entails. An article entitled “Gay Lib Doesn’t Draw Crowds” in the first issue anticipates and addresses readers concerns about coming to a gay liberation meeting. The writer recognizes the fear that prevents many individuals from attending is the “result of living in a hostile, anti-Gay society” and/or the misconception that once a person attends a meeting, he has to come out publicly. Some also avoid coming to meetings because they fear they will be labeled a homosexual too, and thereby lose their friends and prestige. While this is a real risk, the author affirms, the meetings can serve an important function in simply giving an individual someone to talk to. “This is the supportive role of Gay Liberation, which is just as important as the political and social roles.” Here, the writer claims that gay liberation is about building and supporting a gay community just as much as it is about demonstration in the streets for broad social and political change.

In the same issue, there is another article that implicitly stresses the importance of the supportive role of gay liberation. In “The Mechanics Involved in Oppression,” the author devotes much space to internalized oppression, where often oppressed peoples “believ[e] the propaganda of the oppressor.” The author makes a graphic analogy about the process of internalizing one’s oppression to bring out the violence inherent in the act: “It’s much the same process as one tending to internalize knuckles from a fist shoved down one’s throat.” With this image, the author gets at the invasive process of internalizing oppression in a way that calling it “internalizing” does not. Dealing with internalized oppression, and the low self-esteem that is

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often tied to it are “the biggest battles we often have to fight,” they are often more painful and trying than those “fought with the establishment or the bigot.” Before one can fight internalized oppression, one must first see that one is being oppressed and has bought into that destructive system. This is where the rap sessions of gay liberation start to come in and play a supportive role; this is what one new member meant when he said he needed the group “to help [him] get [his] head together.”90 Discovering systematic oppression, and discovering that you have been socialized to behave in a way that upholds that destructive system, can turn your world inside out. It helps to be around other persons who have gone or are going through a similar experience.

Related to the idea that this newsletter serves as a space to create meaning around and about gay liberation in Ames is the emphasis placed on community participation with the newsletter. Gayly Forward also acts as a forum for the emerging gay community at (and around) Iowa State. The authors recognize they are doing something new and important, and they do not want to do it without input from those they are attempting to engage. The last article in the first issue speaks to this and almost begs for comments and contributions from readers: “This is the first issue of GAYLY FORWARD. Though it may be haphazard, non-professional, too radical or not radical enough, irrelevant, not newsworthy, or any of a number of other possible criticisms, it is hopefully an important step for the consciousness of the Gay Community of Ames and Central Iowa…If you are a Sister or Brother, Gay, Straight, Bisexual, Androgenous, Polymorphous Perverse, unlabellable, dead or alive, or none of the above and have an opinion about this newsletter/paper/whatever it is, send it to the above address.”91 The authors are

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91 Gay Peoples Liberation Alliance, “Gayly Forward No. 1…What Do You Think?!,” Gayly Forward 1.1. Capital letters and other rules of standard English were not always used in the newsletters. In direct quotes, I have kept the
soliciting participation in the construction of the newsletter from readers; they are asking others to help construct gay liberation. This emphasis on the newsletters as a community forum is not contained to the first issue. Rather, it continues for the life of the newsletter. It is stated directly in the third issue: “we need your criticisms if this paper is to work; write us and tell us what you’re feeling and why…g.f. [Gayly Forward] is a chance for the gay voice of iowa to be heard pro and con about anything. we have so much to talk about, so much we must do -- all of it together. use whatever non-ism language that’ll get the point across.”

The previous quote is also useful for introducing another function, found in varying degrees, of the Ames newsletters. In making gay liberation meaningful, the members attempt to align gay liberation with the liberation of all oppressed peoples. In other words, they attempt to make gay liberation a non-specificly gay issue, or one that includes consciousness of other oppressed groups and how their liberation and oppression ties into gay liberation and the oppression of gay folks. Instructing contributors to use “non-ism language” signals to readers that not only heterosexist, but also sexist, racist, classist, etc. language will not be tolerated in the newsletter. The author stresses that point that gay folk are not somehow let off the hook of self-examination by virtue of being an oppressed group: “as men in this society we’re responsible for the continued oppression of many, many people including ourselves…being gay does not automatically relieve us from the position of white, supremacist, macho, chauvenist, capitalist male or what has been done to most of the people of this society. we must do what we can to bring the supremacist, chauvenist, capitalist-pig, sexist, ageist, homophobic, racist male and

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female down in all of us. The author wants gay individuals to be conscious of other systems of oppression, including those involving race, gender, age, and class, and to realize that though they are oppressed as gay persons, they may also belong to the oppressing group by virtue of their sex or race or class.

The author of this article brings out an important implication later in the piece, albeit possibly in a simplistic way. If part of gay liberation means understanding how systems of oppression are interconnected, then there is also the implication that the work of liberating persons from these various systems is interconnected. The author clarifies: we must commit ourselves to liberation -- not partial but total. there is no freedom with women channeled into the house, children and roles, and limited and underpaid jobs; gays channeled into the arts and roles, and all the third world people confined and channeled to ghettos, roles and arenas of brute force. this means that our closest allies will be with other liberation movements (women, blacks, chicanos, puerto ricans, children, the old and any other movement that does not contain white, atleast middle-class, heterosexual, supremacist, capitalist male. we must help them and hopefully they will help us. Though the author uses a language of “us and them,” which often signals separation and value hierarchy, the intention in the article is one of advocating mutual support if not unity in multiple causes. The author does not speculate on the specifics of how those involved in gay liberation might go about helping other oppressed groups, nor on the question of whether or not those groups would want “help” in the first place; however, the central idea—that oppressed groups can be each other’s strongest allies—is one that some still find valid today.

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
During the fall of 1974, the publication *Coleus & Dogbreath Too* appeared on Iowa State’s campus, and if one did not look past the cover, one would not know that this publication was put out by the volunteer editorial collective of Gay Peoples Alliance—the new incarnation of the Gay Peoples Liberation Alliance that put out three issues of *Gayly Forward* in the past spring. On the cover is a drawing of a hippo-like creature standing upright, flanked by two smaller creatures, one of which looks like a drowsy pig, the other a wary mushroom. The hippo-creature looks cross-eyed and is wearing a crown. It is licking a large, round lollipop and holding two flowers in its other hand. The name of the newsletter appears at the bottom of the page, without explanation. This issue is ten pages long, and was distributed as a twenty page booklet, folded over and stapled in the middle (as opposed to *Gayly Forward*, which was formatted as full pages). The editorial collective would use this same format for the fourth issue, entitled *burned out*, and would return to full pages for its final issue, *Sarah Bernhardt’s Farewell American Tour*.

In *Coleus and Dogbreath Too*, two authors expressed a new hope they held for the publication. Previously, the group had included support for gays and education of the public in their goals. And I have stated that one function of the newsletter was to introduce folks to gay liberation. This issue of the newsletter includes two articles that differ in form and purpose, but both express this here-to-fore unarticulated goal of gay liberation that falls somewhere between the two: to reach out to “closety gays” and to those gay individuals who still feel isolated. The

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95 There is no mention of the thought process behind this third name change, though I speculate it may have had similar rationale to the first name change, from Gay Liberation Front to Gay Men’s Rap Group. Perhaps members thought that by dropping “Liberation” from the name, folks would be less intimidated (for various reasons) and membership would increase. This is the last time the group changed its name; however, it is not the last time they changed the name of their publication.

96 A search on Google informed me that “coleus” is an ornamental plant, known for its purple and green leaves, and it is often used to treat bad breath in dogs.
first article, “Betty Lou’s Magic Closet Door” by an unknown author,\(^97\) concerns the experience of eight panelists and the outcome(s) of a call-in television talk show. Gay Peoples Alliance objected to the “Marcus Welby, M.D.” episode of the talk show *Dimension 5* that aired on a central Iowa station. In response, the station gave GPA time on the show. Their panel was made up of four men and four women who responded to callers’ questions and comments for a two hour period. The author notes that, ideally, some viewers “who happened to be straight” learned something about homosexuals that led to some changes in attitude, but careful not to blow the educational value out of proportion, the author thinks that “years of ingrained bigotry” will not be undone in two hours. S/he hopes instead “that we can help isolated unhappy gay people feel better about themselves and give them some sort of hope for gaining positive self-concepts.”\(^98\)

The second article that expresses hope at reaching out to isolated gays, rather than education the straight public, is a personal reflection by Dennis Brumm. In “Dennis’ Depressed Article,” Brumm expresses frustration with the rhetoric of gay liberation, which he ties to his writer’s block via lack of motivation. He quickly moves to questioning his own writing and its purpose. Brumm feels his writing has not reached the “closety Gays” because their experiences are so different form his own (among other reasons). He is weighed down by a self-perpetuating system so much so that he views the above rationale as self-delusional. Brumm writes, “I’ll continue on the education trip. We must educate the students so they’ll allow us to exist, right? So they think, I only speak to classes in the hopes that some Gay person will be there and understand what I’m trying to say…And next year a new group of freshman students (ten percent

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\(^97\) As part of GPA’s editorial policy, anyone who submitted a piece to the newsletter could remain anonymous if he/she desired. I should also note that this is the first issue where the majority of the pieces are claimed by an author using both their first and last their names or an alias.

of which will be Gay) will come in from the educational and agricultural ghettos of this state, with all the bigotry of their peers. The system perpetuates itself. It is futile to think otherwise.99 Here, Brumm seems to express contradictory views of the purpose of educational appearances in the classroom by members of Gay Peoples Alliance. He waives back and forth on whether or not these appearances are effective; it seems like he is dealing with being disillusioned, realizing that anti-gay prejudice will not simply disappear with sporadic education in college. What keeps him from giving up hope entirely, it seems, is the idea that he can (or has) helped “closety Gays” in some way. Brumm views his writing as one vehicle for doing this, and speaking in a classroom as another. This is another function of the newsletter, one that is tied into the function of introducing people to gay liberation. The newsletter is a way to not only unite the community, but also to comfort those who are not yet part of it, and perhaps entice them to join as well.

Though the group changed its name and the title of the newsletter, the content, themes, and functions remained much the same as those of Gayly Forward. At Iowa State, the GLF newsletter functioned as a public forum for gay folks to figure out what gay liberation meant for those in Ames. At first, the newsletter was open to publishing pieces from anyone willing to contribute, and later, from anyone who was gay and willing to contribute. The editorial collective envisioned the publication as a place where gay folks could discuss whatever was on their minds, ranging from plans for action to depressed laments about the state of gay liberation to a campy list of “Things for Bored Faggots to do.” The newsletter introduced people to gay liberation, linked isolated gay persons to others, and helped to shape a gay community in central Iowa. It played a part in making social and emotional support a central aim of gay liberation,

99 Dennis Brumm, “Dennis’ Depressed Article,” Coleus and Dogbreath Too.
while still emphasizing the importance of outwardly directed political and educational work. The newsletter was a space for some contributors to try and align gay liberation with other liberation movements, to persuade gays that they should align with other oppressed groups in their move toward a changed society.

As can be seen in the case studies presented above, the publications put out by the Gay Liberation Front of Washington D.C and of Ames, Iowa were extremely dissimilar. Though they were both interested in building and strengthening a gay community, the groups went about this in different ways. They also seemed to define that community differently. The newsletters in D.C. and Ames were influenced by their geographical location and by their membership and readership. The ramifications of these differences are considered in the following chapter.
The newsletters published by the Gay Liberation Fronts of Washington D.C. and of Ames, Iowa, served many purposes for their publishers as well as for the community of readers; however, they accomplished those purposes in different ways, ways that best suited the group members and the readers. Both publications functioned as a sort of textual meeting place for those involved in gay liberation.

For those activists in Washington, the *GLF Newsletter* acted like a bulletin board, or a place where members would post information of use to readers. Most of the postings, or articles, consisted of factual information, such as when and where the next fund-raising dance would be held, or information on where to purchase a gay lib button. Each issue also included multiple contacts for various areas of gay liberation, including the GLF Commune, the Radical Caucus, the Women’s Caucus, and Publications, thereby making it especially easy for newcomers to get involved. The *GLF Newsletter* also included copies of articles pertinent to gay folk from other news sources, such as an article taken from *The Washington Daily News* titled “Homosexual Invasion: Alpine County sends for Reagan.”

The *GLF Newsletter* was a venue where a certain shade of gay male identity was being created and given meaning; it was one place where movement participants publicized what was important to them, what their movement priorities were. These newsletters contributed to constructing a specific instance of male gayness or an idea of what it means to be a gay male in Washington D.C. in the early 1970s, for this construction was certainly tied to its spatial-temporal location. Gay folk who evinced this specific male gayness were politically active and interested in advocating for and creating social change. They wanted to change laws, but they also wanted to change people’s minds about traditional gender roles, sexual expression, and
living arrangements. These gay folk marched for these things in the streets and also strove to live what they spoke as the GLF Communes demonstrate. The *GLF Newsletters* show one major avenue through folks constructed a male gayness that centered on political action, or a political male gayness.

From the content of the *GLF Newsletter*, we can see how a network is important to the development of a social movement. This newsletter in D.C. found a home in the hands of persons involved in gay liberation. The informative nature of this publication serves to underscore this idea. This publication could take political and activist news and facilitation as its focus because of the pre-existing community. If D.C. did not have this community, then one would expect the publication to be more focused on defining the movement’s ideology and goals, rather than just arranging meetings and such. This is exactly what can be found in the publications of GLF of Ames, Iowa.

For those activists in Ames, GLF’s newsletters acted like a coffee house, or a place where members and non-members could come together to converse with each other or to write in their journals in the company of others. To push this simile further, members could simply hang out at the coffee house and be available to talk with newcomers to gay liberation and to encourage them to join, like the author did textually in the piece “Gay Lib Doesn’t Draw Crowds.” Members could also debate on the virtues of ways to raise one’s consciousness about the oppression experienced by being forced to conform to rigid gender roles, as in an untitled piece by Stewart that tells of how his first time wearing a dress allowed him to understand on a physical level (as opposed to a purely intellectual level) how traditional feminine clothing is generally more restrictive than traditional masculine clothing. Stewart makes the jump from this experience of wearing a dress to being able to understand women’s oppression. In the following
issue of the newsletter, Cecil Lee Lloyd explains how she is tired of seemingly well-meaning men claiming they can understand women’s oppression, and she refutes Stewart’s claim that he now can do so because he wore a dress in public once. These newsletters provided a place where the gay folk of Ames could hash out what gay liberation meant; they discussed what their goals were and the methods by which they hoped to achieve them.

From the content of the publications from Ames, we can speculate on what functions they served for the contributors. There is a sense of surprise and frustration in many of the pieces—surprise at how insidious systematic oppression manifests itself in nearly every facet of daily life, and frustration at having to figure out how to deal with that oppression on your own. This leads to one of the main functions of the publication, to draw folks together so each gets a sense that he is not alone in these experiences. There is also a sense of playfulness in some of the pieces, which I believe is related to the seriousness of the issues being dealt with. I think a bit of humor and lightness is necessary to retain one’s sanity sometimes when dealing with the ugliness and destructiveness of systematic oppression on an individual and group level. Authors used the newsletters as a space to vent their frustrations, express their fears, showcase poetry, and make each other laugh.

In these publications from Ames, there is also evidence of much identity work being done by the authors. There is much self-questioning, even self-berating on the part of white, middle-class men as they see themselves being born on the side of the oppressor. These authors are in the process of actively creating their own identities, and in doing so, they are constructing a male gayness that is specific to this time and place. When Stewart writes about wearing a dress for the first time, when Lloyd writes to point out the folly in Stewart’s piece, when Pompadour suggests that readers create a name for themselves, they are all engaged in self-analysis and in
determining what is meaningful for them personally. However, these authors engage in meaning-making in the pages of the newsletters, in addition to in their private homes. This meaning-making then goes public and becomes intertwined with movement-making that is simultaneously occurring. The gay male identity being constructed in the GLF newsletters from Ames is focused inward; it centers on understanding where one is located in the oppressor/oppressed matrix, how one feels about that, and what one can do about it. There is certainly evidence of political action taken by the authors and their cohorts, including distributing flyers and demonstrating in front of events that they deemed oppressive to gay folk; however, the newsletters are characterized by a self-analysis and a concentration on building a public gay community in Ames. The male gayness expressed in those pages concerns more private action and thought than the identity found in D.C.’s newsletters.

The picture of gay liberation in the newsletters of GLF Washington D.C. coincides with what I had come to expect from a group involved in gay liberation based on previous research. D.C.’s newsletters depict liberationists as militant, politically active, confrontational folk who found the homophile movement’s modus operandi outdated and ineffectual. Rather than ask to be included in mainstream society, liberationists argued that society was corrupt and needed to be remade. The male gayness constructed in Ames complicates this existing picture of gay liberation as a loud, brash, militant force to be reckoned with. It adds not only a softer element to this picture, but also a turn inward. The newsletters of Ames emphasize how important consciousness-raising groups were to the gay liberation movement, yet we do not readily associate the two often. To be clear, this emphasis does not make the liberationists of Ames somehow less political than those in D.C., but it does add another dimension to the movement.
This emphasis on consciousness-raising found in the newsletters of the GLF of Ames becomes even more significant when we look at the overall transition from the homophile movement to the liberation movement. During the homophile movement, gay folk often relied on various experts (psychiatrists, doctors, lawyers) to tell them what they should think and feel about being homosexual. One important aspect of the homophile movement was this reliance on persons in positions of intellectual authority in the U.S. Indeed, sometimes a sympathetic authority-figure could be counted on to vouch for the character of homosexuals and push for their inclusion in society. In the 1950s and 1960s, many homosexuals either believed they were sick or turned to professionals for confirmation that they were not. With the development of gay liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there is a shift away from this reliance on expert opinion concerning the state of the homosexual. Rather, gay folk began to rely on themselves and each other for their opinions of what it meant to be gay. Here, one can see why consciousness-raising groups would play such an integral part in gay liberation. These sessions, or rap groups, provided a semi-structured safe space where gay folk could come together and talk about being gay and form their own opinions. The Ames newsletters were an extension of that space—they brought it into concrete print form. The newsletters served as a place where the gay folk of Ames could speak for themselves, and they represented a shift from homophile movement political to liberationist politics.

In the late 1970s, another shift took place within the movement, one I briefly spoke of in the introduction, and one which can be seen in traces in the GLF of Ames newsletters. Though not explicitly named as such, the Ames newsletters discuss the importance of pride as they develop as sense of pride in their male gayness.
The late 1970s gay movement was largely one of pride, which emphasized a positive self-image for gay folk. The focus was on celebrating (and further creating) those images, rather than on more traditional forms of overt political action. Adam observes that “The irony of the 1970s, then, was the ease with which gay and lesbian aspirations were assimilated, contained, and overcome by the societies in which they originated.”\(^{100}\) Here, he is referring to the aspirations of the liberationists. But how did this assimilation occur? Armstrong offers a partial answer while discussing an identity political logic. This is the logic offered by the ‘gay pride’ strand of gay liberation, which she separates from the ‘gay power’ strand (whose redistributive political logic was deflated with the decline of the New Left). Armstrong notes that this identity logic was able to make sense out of the conflicting ideas on appropriate movement goals and strategies through the idea of unity through diversity, which then presents difference as non-threatening: “By seeing meaningful social change as a product of individual self-expression, an identity logic suggested that positive change could occur even if differences were not resolved. Change would occur simply through broadening the range of authentic expression possible in society.”\(^{101}\) Differences within the gay and lesbian movement, then, could be seen as cause for celebration rather than for anxiety.

Both of these strands, gay power and gay pride, are visible in the newsletters from Ames. There are pieces that discuss political actions and there are those that explore ways to develop a positive sense of one’s self as a gay man. This dual focus of the Ames newsletters can be read in two ways. First, the focus on consciousness-raising and on fostering a positive sense of self rooted in male gayness can be seen as a precursor to more overt political action. One can argue

\(^{100}\) Adam, 108.

\(^{101}\) Armstrong, 98.
that, before engaging in direct political action, folks need to engage in self-analysis and develop a political consciousness. Secondly, this inward focus expressed in the Ames newsletters can be read as the beginnings of the pride movement in Ames.\textsuperscript{102} Had the student government of Iowa State not cut off the funding of GLF of Ames, thereby forcing production of the newsletter to halt, we might have a clearer picture of the direction the movement was taking in Ames, and a more accurate characterization of the part these newsletters played in shaping the movement. In light of my research on other Gay Liberation Fronts, I speculate that, had they continued to publish, both of Armstrong’s political logics would be present in future issues of the newsletters, and both would have become more defined. I venture that, in time, this may have led to a split in the group, as happened with many of the other GLFs, and one of the political logics would have come to exclude and/or outlast the other.

The differences in the functions of the newsletters from GLF of Washington and GLF of Ames, and in the kinds of male gayness they constructed, are tied to the location in which they were published. Not only is Washington a big city, but it is also a political center of the U.S. The \textit{GLF Newsletter} was published in a context that already included homophile groups and gay bars, in a place that had already seen protests and felt police brutality and had people writing about it. There were multiple gay-centered publications, as well as activists who would make it into the national scene. The publications produced by GLF of Ames came out into no such context—there was no hotbed of political activity, no gay bars in town, and no other gay newsletter. These folks were paving the way in Ames, and many of them (if not the majority) were students. Ames had no Frank Kamenies to lead the way. It makes sense that this publication strove to build community and was incessant in the call for readers’ involvement in

\textsuperscript{102} However, both these readings rely on a time progression that can give the appearance of the movement somehow getting better as the years progress. I do not intend, nor do I agree with, this conceptualization.
the production. Their newsletter functioned as a textual coffee house because there was no such place for people to gather before it came out. GLF of Washington had a pre-existing network to work with—there were folks who were active in gay liberation, and they would serve as a sort-of guaranteed audience for this publication. D.C. already had coffee houses in which gay folk had been gathering and doing the introducing and conversing and debating that the folks in Ames were just beginning to do. Because of this pre-existing network and geographical location in an urban political center, it made sense for the GLF of Washington to put out a publication that readers could access quickly for new information, while they were on the go.

This project has looked at the ways newsletters published by the Gay Liberation Fronts of Washington D.C. and of Ames, Iowa functioned for the authors and the readers. I have worked with these newsletters as a way to better understand the gay liberation movement. I have located the gay liberation movement in relationship to the homophile movement that came before it and to the pride movement that followed. I think an extension of this project is needed, and I think there are at least two ways to do so. The first is to focus on lesbian publications from the same time period. Though GLFs did not exclude lesbians, many did not feel comfortable and did not feel their concerns were taken seriously because of the sexist in the groups. I did not intend my work to exclude women, but as I became more involved, I found that the majority of participants in GLFs were gay males. So in studying GLFs, I studied mostly gay men and their newsletters. It also would be useful to examine whether there are publications from this period in movement history that attempted to act as a forum for open discussion between both gay men and lesbians. Were there any publications that made a serious effort to build a gender-integrated movement? A second way to extend this project is to do a close reading of publications that started in the late 1970s, those that could be seen as coming out at the start of the pride movement in the U.S., and
see how they compare to those publications from the gay liberation movement. Did they have the same focus as evidenced by their content? How did the publications function for the authors and readers? How did they function in relation to the social movement?
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amanda Culp was born in Portland, Oregon, and moved to Miami, Florida in 1987. There, she graduated from La Salle High School in 1998 and continued her education at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, in the fall of that same year. For personal reasons, she returned to Florida in 1999 and attended the University of Miami (UM) where she pursued a double major in English Literature and psychology as well as a double minor in sociology and philosophy for the rest of her undergraduate career. Amanda graduated from UM in 2003, and she spent the fall of that year on a solitary journey driving across the United States.

After a much needed break from life as a student, Amanda returned to school in the fall of 2005 to pursue a masters degree in women’s studies and gender research at the University of Florida in Gainesville. She will graduate with a perfect GPA in December 2007. During her graduate career, she worked as a teacher’s assistant, a bartender, and a teacher in the Academic Foundations Department at Santa Fe Community College.

Upon completing her MA, Amanda intends to continue teaching at Santa Fe Community College and catch up on aspects of her life that she had to ignore in order to make time for her studies. Chiefly among those priorities are spending leisure time with her family and friends and finishing the home remodeling that grinded to a halt when she began to work on her thesis.