

## AUTUMN NEAL

### *Homosexuality in the Heartland: Alternative Print Media from 1970s Kansas City*

The 1960s and 1970s were full of cultural, political, and social change in the United States in which activism for civil rights became widespread. These decades are remembered as a time when ideas about counterculture permanently changed, a time when African Americans fought for equal recognition, when young Americans who did not want to conform to the ideals of their elders created their own culture, and when average Americans stood up against what they believed was an immoral war. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Vietnam War, and the Kent State massacre are events often discussed from this period. However, one area of American activism is often overshadowed: the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual (LGBT) community and its fight for equal rights.

Counterculture movements, which go against widely accepted social ideas and actions, always need a way to disperse information and connect their members. This can be said about any movement that seeks to gain acceptance by the majority of society. Alternative media is an essential part of modern social movements because it spreads ideas and information that are typically ignored by mainstream media. It pushes against the status quo and calls for major change in widespread social thought and action. Alternative media consists of newsletters and magazines, the main methods used in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as modern methods such as independent online news outlets dispersed through social media (Armstrong 16). These outlets for information are vital to social change because the voices and issues of the oppressed and marginalized are often ignored by mainstream, commercially owned media.

Along with the growth of the gay rights movement, an increase occurred in the number of gay and lesbian newsletters and magazines in the United States (Armstrong 249-250). By 1981 there were “as many as 250 [gay and lesbian] publications” in the United States (Armstrong 333). The ideas transmitted by these publications were vital to gay rights movement victories and the changes that occurred in the ideas of mainstream society. This social movement’s advancements did not immediately occur on a national scale, however, and were often made through the combination of advancements within individual communities.

Kansas City, Missouri had its own gay and lesbian community that published various newsletters and magazines throughout the 1970s. Like magazines from cities such as Boston and New York, Kansas City’s publications became records of changes within the gay and lesbian populace as well as its relationship with the city’s general community (Streitmatter 154). Without the support of mainstream media, the publishers of these newsletters and magazines connected local gay residents to form a strong gay alliance. These periodicals consisted of newsletters from local organizations, the Women’s Liberation Union, the Gay People’s Union, and Gay Community Services, as well as the local magazines *Kansas City Coming Out*, *Spectrum*, and *Calendar*. The advertisements, design, layout, and content of these six periodicals reflect changes in Kansas City’s gay and lesbian demographic throughout the 1970s, and when examined chronologically, they tell a story of change within Kansas City’s gay and lesbian community. During this time, this community became an active subculture that demanded its own advanced form of communication and reflected changes in alternative media across the United States.

While there is extensive writing on LGBT culture across the United States, Kansas City’s history is almost completely untouched. In 2009, the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America (GLAMA) was created to protect and preserve Kansas City and its surrounding area’s LGBT history. In the last five years, GLAMA has collected many documents that allow the first in-depth research on the LGBT history in Kansas City.

One of the first works of scholarship on Kansas City's gay history, "Navigating Change in the Homophile Heartland," examines the rise and fall of the Phoenix Society for Individual Freedom (Scharlau). Formed in 1966 by local activist Drew Schafer, Phoenix became the first local organization to publish media aimed solely at gay individuals. Like many other gay publications across the country, the Phoenix Society was a financially difficult venture and did not survive the tumultuous turn of the decade, folding in 1971 (Streitmatter 153). The Phoenix Society's importance cannot be understated, as it paved the way for other Kansas City organizations to gain momentum.

After the Phoenix's demise, the first gay or lesbian publication in Kansas City came from the Women's Liberation Union (WLU), a feminist organization aimed at ending oppression of women. Lesbian groups had the fewest number of publications, despite being the first alternative publications in the 1970s and an instrumental part of the gay rights movement. The WLU, formed in early 1971, which published bimonthly newsletters, opened its bookstore in late 1973 (Women's Liberation Union September/October 1973, 2). The Union, its Women's Center, and New Earth Books were located in Kansas City's Hyde Park neighborhood (Women's Liberation Union January/February 1974; Jackson 10). The location of the bookstore, which sold radical publications, allowed it to function as a meeting point for the various gay and lesbian organizations within the city (Women's Liberation Union September/October 1973, 7). Like other lesbian organizations in the country that disassociated themselves from the gay male press, the WLU newsletter only allowed female writers (Streitmatter 155). However, New Earth Books functioned as a meeting place for both men and women and aided in the development of positive relationships and solidarity between the city's gay and lesbian residents.

Two years after the formation of the WLU, students at the University of Missouri-Kansas City formed an on-campus gay and lesbian organization named Gay People's Union of Kansas City (GPU). The origins of the GPU lie in an on-campus discussion group that began in

January 1973. By the fall the group had evolved into an organization focused on gay rights education and community support (Gay People's Union August 1975, 1). The group moved off-campus to a house in Squier Park, nine blocks away from the WLU. The GPU did not last long and was incorporated into a third Kansas City gay and lesbian organization in 1976.

Established as an official business in 1974, Gay Community Services (GCS) consisted of gay Kansas Citians hoping to provide support and counseling to the gay community (Jackson 28; Gay Community Services October 1974). The organization ran a community house, together with the GPU, where it provided services and entertainment. After the demise of the GPU, GCS took over operations, including publication of a newsletter (Jackson 31). GCS published its first newsletter, later known as *Gay Community News*, in September 1976, which ran for at least six months.

From spring 1977 to fall 1978 there was a significant lack of gay and lesbian media in Kansas City. While other publications across the country, like New York City's *Gaysweek*, were flourishing, Kansas City's publications seemed to disappear (Streitmatter 218-220). From the last available copy of *GCN* in March 1977, only two issues of other magazines cover the subsequent two years. GLAMA holds one copy of *Kansas City Coming Out*, Kansas City's first independent LGBT newsmagazine, from September 1977 (*Kansas City Coming Out* September 1977, 2; Armstrong 251). This magazine marked a major change in local publications because it was the first not associated with an organization, but was a commercial interest. It was a first for Kansas City and began a trend that closed out the decade with professional, independent publications.

As later publications became more successful, they featured less information on the organizations behind them, but more on other aspects of news media. *Calendar*, a second Kansas City news magazine, began in late 1978. It solely targeted gay men and, of the Kansas City newsmagazines, most closely resembled national publications. June 1979 saw

the beginning of *Spectrum*, a gay and lesbian newsmagazine that called itself “classy but not stuffy” with the slogan “People Communicating with Other People” (*Spectrum* July 1979, 2; 27). This biweekly magazine, like *Calendar*, included a legal disclaimer and listed its editors, directors, and contributors. The previous publications had no official staff list and only in some instances credited authors. *Spectrum* and *Calendar*’s differences speak volumes about the shift in Kansas City’s LGBT community. Instead of only having private newsletters from local activist groups, there was a desire to have professional, public magazines. These magazines were meant to be in the vein of revenue-producing mainstream media as opposed to newsletters that relied on subscriptions and donations.

Gay and lesbian media’s design and layout improved throughout the 1970s, not only in Kansas City, but also in most gay and lesbian publications like Berkeley, California’s *Gay Sunshine*. These publications made efforts to become streamlined and less radical, more like professional mainstream media sources (Armstrong 250).

Even though the Women’s Liberation Union began publishing its newsletter in 1971, the earliest copy available is from late summer 1973. Throughout its run, this newsletter maintained the same layout, consisting of a multipage booklet style magazine usually running twenty-seven pages. It featured a basic table of contents, articles, and news pieces in two text columns with almost no advertisements. The images mostly consisted of hand-drawn sketches with a few advertisement-like boxes focusing on New Earth Books, the WLU’s bookstore (Women’s Liberation Union September/October 1973).

The Women’s Liberation Union generally did not accept advertisements, but the presence of these images and mock adverts suggest that editors were attempting to break up the monotony of continuous text and create a sense of professionalism. Additionally, the Union gave the newsletter a proper title for the March/April 1974 issue. *Women as Women as Women* still had the same basic layout, but the title created a stronger impression and

resembled a magazine as opposed to a newsletter (Women's Liberation Union January/February 1974).

Towards the mid-1970s, the publications of Kansas City's gay community stepped backward after *Women as Women as Women*. The Gay People's Union newsletters took on perhaps the most interesting transformation in design and layout.<sup>1</sup> When the GPU officially formed, its newsletters were basic. The October 1974 issue was a single, typewritten one-sided page, but by August 1975 it had transformed into a professionally printed multi-page magazine style publication much like the WLU newsletters (Gay People's Union October 1974). This new style also imitated the WLU with its hand-drawn images and lack of advertisements. A small group of people with a vision about on-campus support initially ran the GPU. This group worked with limited resources to create a local gay news outlet and made many advancements in less than one year.

As stated previously, the Gay People's Union did not survive past the mid-1970s and Gay Community Services absorbed it along with the newsletter. *Gay Community News*, the newsletter of GCS, also became more visually refined (Armstrong 250). At first *GCN* was similar to the late GPU newsletters with a two-column layout and no ads. *GCN* still included small images, but these changed from hand-drawn to clip art. Previously, the GPU newsletters were inconsistent, switching between fonts throughout each issue with randomly placed sketches that created a disorderly appearance.

By *Gay Community News's* third issue from December 1976, major changes had occurred. The layout shifted from two-column to three-column and grew in dimensions. This issue also featured the first advertisements, which drastically changed its visual appearance. The layout was creatively designed around these advertisements. In addition, each section heading featured its own font, which accompanied clip art that corresponded to the column's topic, such as a typewriter for news or a cross for religion (*Gay Community News*, Gay Community

Services December 1976). The absorption of the GPU by GCS and the subsequent newsletter changes indicate evolution in the gay and lesbian community during 1976 and the conscious decisions to update the organization.

The trend in visual changes was still in effect when the one available issue of *Kansas City Coming Out* was published in September 1977. The newsmagazine was significantly larger than its predecessors and the first to feature photographs. *Kansas City Coming Out's* layout was vastly different than the others as it had a small amount of text dispersed between large, overpowering advertisements (*Kansas City Coming Out* Sept. 1977, 5). It was not as sleek, refined, or organized as the later issues of *GCN*, and was haphazard with various advertisements seemingly thrown onto the page without much thought. However, this haphazard appearance is not a result of the time period or a degeneration of publication practices, because the most refined publications begin less than two years later.

When *Spectrum* began publishing in 1979, it was one of the two most professional Kansas City gay and lesbian magazines of the 1970s. *Spectrum* was the first gay and lesbian Kansas City publication to have a cover photo, be printed on coated magazine paper, or have any amount of color. The June and July issue titles, section headings, and filler designs were printed in dark red ink and rich green ink respectively (*Spectrum* July 1979, 2; *Spectrum* June 1979, 4-5; *Spectrum* June 1979). They did not feature a large amount of color, as the photos were still black and white, but just enough to make this publication stand out (*Spectrum* July 1979). The July issue was also the longest publication to that point, with thirty-one pages, while featuring only a handful of advertisements.

April of the same year saw the first available issue of *Calendar*. Like *Spectrum*, *Calendar* was printed on coated paper and featured a cover photo but was not as sleek. There were more ads and a steady flow between the sections and the advertisements. The magazine had no color, but the inclusion of adult-themed ads and photographs changed the aesthetic

properties of the pages and caught the reader's attention. Its layout was complicated by variations in font style and size, but these also drew the reader from one section to the next (*Calendar* April 1979, 4-5). While earlier Kansas City publications fluctuated in their page numbers, *Calendar* consistently grew from its thirteen pages in April 1979 to thirty-one in October. These new features and the drastic changes they represented only stress how much the magazines of the late 1970s took on new roles in the alternative media of Kansas City. They became commercial products of the community as opposed to information outlets for private organizations.

The visual appearance of these magazines did not have anything do with their success or failure, however it is reflective of their ability to adapt to the changing times. David Armstrong suggests that early radical publications such as New York City's *Come Out!*, which did not survive the decade, failed to update their "crude layout" and let go of their radical ideas, which led to their demise (Armstrong 250). As the decade progressed and the older newsletters fell away in favor of newer commercial magazines, the gay and lesbian residents of Kansas City moved away from extremist ideas and toward acceptance of conformity in their news media as well as their community.

In addition to how each publication became more aesthetically professional, they went through content transformations that made them more inclusive and entertaining. They left behind the simple design consisting of only articles written by unknown contributors and moved toward a system of regular staff contributors, adding sections that mimicked national publications (*Spectrum* July 1979, 2). Like many of the other gay and lesbian publications throughout the United States, the publications from Kansas City began featuring reviews and columns. While publications elsewhere focused less on national news and more on local, Kansas City's later gay and lesbian media did the opposite (Armstrong 250).

Not only did the change in design greatly improve the publications' appearance, it allowed for the inclusion of more information. The WLU newsletters initially featured local gay and lesbian news, information on the organization, and columns on physical and mental health (Women's Liberation Union September/October 1973; *Women as Women as Women*, Women's Liberation Union July/August 1974). By the summer of 1975, it branched out and covered news of national and international importance (*Women as Women as Women*, Women's Liberation Union May/June 1975). The GPU newsletters, while only one page, initially discussed various aspects of its Community House such as clinics, discussion groups and parties. By August 1975, the newsletters covered local community events like the 1975 Gay Pride Festival and featured articles of national importance, like gays in the military (Gay People's Union August 1975; Gay People's Union October 1975).

Gay Community Services' newsletters were the first Kansas City publications to imitate mainstream media by featuring columns and articles more often found in national magazines (Armstrong 250). From its first newsletter, GCS included sections on local and national news, entertainment, politics, and religion. *GCN* featured the advice column, "Tell It to Mama", letters to the editor, and an opinion section. This mimicking of mainstream media and larger LGBT media throughout the country means that Kansas City's community was large enough to produce semi-professional publications with many types of information because the readership warranted it. Even without publication numbers, it is unlikely these organizations would have continued to print and increase in size without a substantial readership.

While the first newsletters of the decade featured items pertaining to local events, reports on gay national news, and a few advice columns, the end of the decade saw even more attempts at imitation of national media. *Kansas City Coming Out* increased its content amount by featuring want ads, book reviews, church news, and reports on events such as "Coming Out Party Night" at the Jewel Box, a female impersonator club (*Kansas City Coming Out* September 1977, 7). In the same way, *Spectrum's* July 1979 issue went beyond *GCN* in its endeavor to

emulate mainstream national news magazines. Like *GCN*, *Spectrum* featured national news, entertainment reviews, and an advice column, but also went a few steps further by featuring cooking, zodiac, and gay health columns (*Spectrum* July 1979). This combination of regular and professional content proves that during the mid-to-late 1970s, these publications transformed into refined news outlets as opposed to basic organizational newsletters.

Likewise, *Calendar* featured both negative and positive national gay news, an events calendar, adult comics, classifieds, and a directory. Its most interesting features were the “Dear Jim” advice column from Pastor Jim Glycer of Metropolitan Community Church, the “Get Potted” gardening column, the “Gay and the Law” legal column, and the “Doing America” travel column (*Calendar* April 1979, 11; *Calendar* June 1979, 11-12; *Calendar* July 1979, 16). New York City’s magazine *Christopher Street*, which began in 1976, was the first gay magazine to feature music and book reviews and, beginning in 1979, a gay travel column (Armstrong 251). Therefore, *Spectrum* and *Calendar* were not introducing new ideas, but were imitating popular gay media from across the country. This made local publications not as underground as they were now connecting with Kansas City’s gay community in a way that had not been done before.

When it came to funding, the Women’s Liberation Union initially found support in grants, appearances, and membership fees (Women’s Liberation Union September/October 1973, 5). Feminist organizations oppose capitalism because it oppresses minorities, including women. In that spirit, the WLU did not allow advertising because they did not want to be part of “a national hierarchy” (Women’s Liberation Union September/October 1973, 5). They did allow local women to print small ads to “establish a business or service” (Women’s Liberation Union September/October 1973, 2). Their refusal to host paid advertisements prevented them from becoming subjects of capitalism and was a way of stating independence.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Women's Liberation Union faced funding problems. In its September/October 1973 newsletter, the Union discussed its restructuring due to financial issues (Women's Liberation Union September/October 1973, 5). To remedy the burden of rent for the Women's Center, utilities and operational expenses, the WLU transformed into a membership organization and asked supporters to volunteer their money or time (Women's Liberation Union September/October 1973, 5). Even with this statement, the Union's situation had not changed six months later. Its March/April 1974 newsletter featured a one-page appeal for monetary help featuring bold letters that read "bigger, better, and broke" followed by an explanation of the newsletter's difficulties and a request for even more subscriptions (*Women as Women as Women*, Women's Liberation Union March/April 1974, 23). The production and distribution costs had "exhaust[ed] [their] funds" at the same time that the Union decided to "expand and revitalize" the newsletter (*Women as Women as Women* March/April 1974, 23).

The Union's financial difficulties were also experienced by lesbian publications elsewhere. Los Angeles' *Lesbian Tide*, founded in 1971, openly asked its readership for money. *Lesbian Tide* accepted advertisements, but could not sell enough ad space to support its costs until the late 1970s (Streitmatter 160-161). However, unlike *Lesbian Tide*, the WLU never experienced success, more than likely due to its rejection of paid advertisements. By not adapting to the changing face of activism, the Union caused its own downfall.

Like the Women's Liberation Union, the Gay People's Union requested financial assistance from its readership early on. Unlike the WLU, however, the GPU explicitly reminded its readers that it was non-profit with a constant need for funding (Gay People's Union October 1974). The organization also stated that all gay and lesbian groups in the city needed further funding, which not only demonstrates the relationship between the city's organizations, but also proves there were widespread funding issues in the beginning. There was no income. There were no ads. The next two months featured changes in the content of *GCN*

that foreshadowed the end of the organization. The October 1975 issue featured a finance report that presented costs associated with running the Union and requested pledges to cover rent for the Community House. The next month's small page number demonstrated that the Union did not meet this goal (Gay People's Union October 1975). The new layout and design suggests the Union was moving forward when in reality they were unable to maintain operations leading to its eventual absorption by GCS.

In the same way, Gay Community Services also faced funding issues, however its approach to requesting assistance was far more advanced. While the WLU took on a more colloquial tone when asking for financial assistance, GCS used professionalism. Instead of using phrases like "everybody is broke" and "we need subscriptions" like the WLU, GCS said "our needs are also great" and "we must look to you—the gay community—for support" (*Women as Women as Women* May/June 1974, 24; *Gay Community News* September 1976, 3). As opposed to using an informal tone for a small inclusive group, *GCN* aimed for a wider audience of readers who may not have personally known the contributors.

As Kansas City's gay and lesbian publications took on advertising, there was less discussion of finances. In fact, *Kansas City Coming Out*, *Spectrum*, and *Calendar* did not address finances at all. The shift from newsletters to magazines suggests that the city's gay and lesbian residents realized the money behind advertising would translate into business prospects as opposed to barely surviving organizations.

The acceptance of advertising in Kansas City's gay and lesbian media is not surprising when one looks at the pattern of alternative media. As explained by Armstrong, large groups eventually accept radical and counterculture ideas because the media distributes them. In addition, American media has always and will always be associated with commercial interests (162-163). He goes on to say, "many underground media ventures could not escape the snares of commercialism, for built into their concepts and structures were many of the values

that underlie any business enterprise” (Armstrong 162-163). In that spirit, Kansas City’s gay and lesbian activists initially resisted commercialism but later accepted that commercial interests were their only way of survival.

As previously mentioned, the Women’s Liberation Union did not accept paid advertising and only accepted small, unpaid ads from local women. Up until the spring of 1975, the newsletter had run only these along with ads for its own bookstore, New Earth Books, and one ad for a women’s journal (Women’s Liberation Union September/October 1973, 4; Women’s Liberation Union January/February 1974, 4). Its May/June 1975 issue featured a quarter-page advertisement for a female United States Congressional candidate that clearly stated it was paid (*Women as Women as Women* May/June 1975, 7). As previously discussed, the WLU did not initially print advertisements due to matters of principle. However, financial challenges drove a change in operational policies that caused them to step away from their original convictions. In the end, the Union’s only paid advertisements were still bought by women and aimed at women.

Unlike the Women’s Liberation Union, the Gay People’s Union did not feature paid advertising but never spoke against it. It was not until Gay Community Services absorbed the GPU that Kansas City’s gay and lesbian media featured regular paid advertisements. Armstrong states that “with the exceptions of radical left and grassroots community media, underground media aggressively pursued advertising dollars,” and GCS was the first to do this in Kansas City (Armstrong 163). The need for funding outside of membership fees drove GCS toward advertisers with little reservation. Its third newsletter, from December 1973, stated that “only two of the area gay bars agreed to advertise in the newspaper” (*Gay Community News* December 1976, 3). However, its first issue featuring ads ran thirteen in total; they were mainly from businesses that supported the gay community. GCS’s attempt at advertising was successful because subsequent issues featured ads for all these businesses except one.

The businesses that advertised in *Gay Community News* were not only explicitly gay and lesbian operations such as the Round Up, Club Baths, and Sappho's but also Midtown businesses like Serigraphix (art print shop), Westport Bookstore, Silver Leaf (handmade gifts), Westport Gallery & Frame Shop, and The Hair Den (salon). While it is entirely possible that these businesses were run by individuals involved in the gay and lesbian community, the way they were handled still advanced. Prior to *GCN's* December 1976 issue, no one advertised specifically to the gay community. These businesses still had an interest in advertising to the gay community over a four-month period and, without success, they would have pulled their advertisements instead of purchasing additional space in later issues.

When it came to advertisements, *Kansas City Coming Out* was the most populated. It was the first publication to have more space dedicated to ads than to text. Twenty-two advertisements covered its twelve pages with some taking up a half to a full page. As with *Gay Community News*, they were not solely from gay or lesbian businesses. Aside from the ads that were present in *GCN* like The Tent Lounge and Round Up, *Kansas City Coming Out* featured new ads from mainstream businesses such as Posh Puppy (dog grooming) and Rick's Muehlebach Flowers (*Kansas City Coming Out* September 1977, 7-9). While still taking ads from businesses outside the community, *Kansas City Coming Out* featured advertisements mostly from gay businesses that were aimed at gay customers. Interestingly, the one issue of *Spectrum* from two years later featured significantly less ad space than text. It was more focused on information distribution as opposed to advertisements. *Spectrum* featured only two ads for local establishments, bars in Kansas City and St. Joseph, while running four ads for national organizations like the National Kidney Foundation (*Spectrum* July 1979, 20-24.) The differences in these two publications demonstrate the necessity for balance in local media in order to be successful. In addition, a small amount of text fails to draw the reader in and too little focus on local business fails to connect the community.

Where *Kansas City Coming Out* and *Spectrum* were opposites in terms of ad space versus text space, *Calendar* successfully found this balance. Its April 1979 thirteen-page issue had twenty-three advertisements, a number that remained consistent through the following months, while featuring the various columns discussed earlier. It featured ads for gay establishments such as bars and bathhouses, like Red Head Lounge and Club Midwest, but also ran more advertisements from mainstream businesses than the previous magazines. Unlike the basic advertisements of other publications, *Calendar's* grew more explicit and sexual. Some of these businesses had straightforward layouts for their services like counseling and chiropractic services, but others took their advertisements further and turned ads for common services into explicitly provocative pieces. The Hair Den, a hair salon who previously placed basic circular ads in *GCN*, now ran an ad that featured a suggestive phrase in a large eye-catching text (*Gay Community News* December 1976, 8; *Calendar* April 1979, 6). In the same way, Ron Barnhart advertised their hair replacement services with an illustration of two shirtless men in a provocative pose with the caption "Hair so real not even his fingers will know for sure!" (*Calendar* April 1979, 5).

At the close of the decade, Kansas City's mainstream businesses had gone from not advertising in gay media to purchasing space for provocative ads. Armstrong states that when gay magazines first printed ads in the 1950s, they "could not depend on advertising, traditionally the major sources of revenue for commercial publications, because businesses refused to be identified with homosexuality" (Armstrong 29). This stigma was still present in the 1970s and the inclusion of mainstream ads, let alone provocative mainstream ads, in Kansas City's magazines demonstrates that by 1979 citizens of Kansas City were accepting the gay community and the community itself was becoming less underground than ever before.

Kansas City's gay and lesbian alternative media is just one aspect of counterculture community activities. From the Phoenix Society to *Calendar*, the publications of the late 1970s are great sources for information on the attitudes, opinions, and activities of the gay

and lesbian community's members. These newsletters' and newsmagazines' aesthetic and promotional aspects prove there were major social and cultural changes in 1970s' Kansas City. The layout of each publication to the way they were funded, and even the patterns of outside advertisers tell us that from 1971 to 1979, the gay community demanded more from its media, grew more involved in the community and became less of a social taboo. The Gay Rights Movement of the early 1970s opened doors to activism that eventually led to the decriminalization of homosexual acts, the legalization of gay marriage and the development of strong gay and lesbian communities. Without the benefit of internal communication provided by media sources these successes would not have been possible.

Since the 1970s, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) activism has made many advancements, but the community's adversity is still an often discussed topic. It has only been a few years since the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and one year since the Supreme Court ruled sections of the Defense of Marriage Act as unconstitutional. These recent victories only remind the LGBT community that the fight for equal rights for gays and lesbians is ongoing and a slow-moving process; it is evolving, however. The gay and lesbian movements across that world, from New York to San Francisco and from Berlin to Amsterdam, have a plethora of literature and research dedicated to them. The feeling of solidarity within these cities is so strong that when gay-friendly cities are brought up, one of these places is often mentioned. In this sense, the gay history of Kansas City is just as important for our local community as the history of the West Village is for New York.

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