



Gay Print Culture

**A Transnational
History of
North America**

**Juan Carlos
Mezo González**

Gay Print culture

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of North America

JUAN CARLOS MEZO GONZÁLEZ

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Cover art: Photograph and flowers from a shoot for *Macho Tips*, no. 19,
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This book is dedicated to my parents María and Carlos,
to my sister Carla,
to my partner Paolo, and to Louis (†)

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contents

Acknowledgments

ix

Introduction

i

| 1 |

***Periodicals, Coming Out,
and the Visualization
of Gay Liberation***

23

| 2 |

***Sexual Imagery,
Transnational
Communities, and the
Politics of Visualization
in The Body Politic***

67

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UNIVERSITY
PRESS

| 3 |

***Liberationist Politics,
Colonial Optics, and the
Desire for Latin America
in Gay Sunshine***

103

| 4 |

***Gay Masculinity and the
Commodification of the
Mexican Body in Macho Tips***

141

| 5 |

***The Gay Editorial Market
and the Transnational
Production of
Racialized Desires***

185

Conclusion

221

Notes

227

Bibliography

253

Index

269

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UNIVERSITY
PRESS

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introduction

Print magazines have been one of the most important mediums for gay men to circulate information, make contacts, build community, and offer positive visual representations of homoerotic desire. This was particularly the case in the 1970s–1990s period, which followed the emergence of the modern gay liberation movement and predated the popularization of the internet. An unprecedented growth in gay publishing took place during this period and developed in close relationship with the gay liberation movements that surfaced around the globe. One of the magazines that emerged in this context was *Nuestro cuerpo* (Our Body), which the Mexico City–based group Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria (FHAR) launched in 1979. FHAR presented *Nuestro cuerpo* as a nonprofit publication that pursued three main goals: strengthening the revolutionary homosexual movement in the country, raising gay and lesbian awareness and pride, and linking the homosexual movement with other popular struggles.¹ As its title suggests, the magazine also aimed to offer a space to reflect on the body and its role in the movement. The body, as many gay and lesbian activists thought, was a vehicle to achieve one’s liberation, both political and sexual. This thought, further discussed below, was also present in other gay liberation publications of the time, such as the San Francisco–based *Gay Sunshine* (1970–1982) and the Toronto-based *The Body Politic* (1971–1987), both of which inspired FHAR’s editorial work. Like *Nuestro cuerpo*, these and similar publications discussed the relationship between body and liberation while featuring nudity and erotic imagery to offer positive and celebratory representations of homoerotic desire. The inaugural issue, for example, featured artwork by Guillermo Santamaría that represented nude men and celebrated male beauty (figure 1.1). But unlike *Gay Sunshine* and *The Body Politic*, which published 46 and 135 issues, respectively, *Nuestro cuerpo* disappeared in 1980 after printing its

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FIGURE 1.1. Published in Mexico City in 1979, the first cover of *Nuestro cuerpo* featured artwork by Guillermo Santamaría that celebrated the male body. Colectivo Sol Online Archive, Magazines Collection.



second and last issue. The other two gay liberation periodicals based in Mexico City at that time faced a similar fate: *Política sexual* (Sexual Politics), another initiative of FHAR, published its only issue in 1979, while the Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual published only five issues of their magazine *Nuevo ambiente* (New Scene) between 1979 and 1983.² This brief though meaningful chapter in the history of gay publishing in Mexico opened the doors for another chapter in the mid-1980s, when the magazine *Macho Tips* changed the gay editorial landscape in the country.

The Mexican accountant Aurelio Refugio Hidalgo de la Torre launched *Macho Tips* in Mexico City in 1985, publishing twenty-three issues until 1989. In 1990, he relaunched his magazine as *Hermes* and published twenty-six issues through 1994 amid a growing market of gay erotic and consumer magazines. *Macho Tips* became popular and successful in Mexico because of its color centerfolds and covers that celebrated Mexican male beauty (figure 1.2). It also became popular because of its rich editorial content, which included local and international gay news, articles about sexual health and AIDS, publications on gay culture and history, and a vibrant section of classifieds that provided readers with the opportunity to meet other queer people in Mexico and abroad. Shaped after US gay lifestyle and erotic magazines, *Macho Tips* was significantly different from the leftist gay liberation periodicals that published in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Mexico City. In contrast to those publications, *Macho Tips* did not employ a radical and revolutionary language, and it did not challenge the Mexican State. Nonetheless, selling an openly gay magazine with erotic imagery in the newsstands of 1980s Mexico was no small feat considering the conservative climate of the time. And in that context, the visually appealing content of *Macho Tips* fulfilled an important liberationist task: It visualized and celebrated homoerotic desires. In this particular way, *Macho Tips* was not so different from those publications that preceded it and whose content was more explicitly connected to the project of gay liberation. By engaging with this liberationist project, *Macho Tips* became part of a larger history of gay print culture in North America, a history that constitutes the focus of this book.

Gay Print Culture investigates the relationship between transnational gay liberation politics, periodicals, and images in Mexico, the United States, and Canada from the early 1970s through the mid-1990s. The book examines the production, content, circulation, and reception of leading gay periodicals published in these countries, including gay liberation newspapers, lifestyle, and erotic magazines. In bringing this diverse corpus of materials together, *Gay Print Culture* explains how, in many regards, these diverse publications actually performed quite similar work. The book demonstrates how these periodicals aimed to visualize the

political goals of gay liberation, particularly those concerning the liberation and celebration of homoerotic desires. Visualizing these goals allowed activists, editors, publishers, and artists to foster the formation of gay communities and identities, while also advancing gay liberation movements at the local, national, and international levels. As readers will discover, the sexual and erotic imagery printed in these publications was at the heart of such efforts.

This book's focus on the relationship between gay liberation and the politics of visualization invites readers to reconsider the meaning of "gay liberation." This concept generally refers to the radical and leftist movements that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in anglophone North American contexts, and in the 1970s more broadly in much of Latin America. As part of their movements, gay liberation activists across the two regions sought to transform sexual norms and fought against their oppression, linking their movements to other struggles against structures of oppression, which included colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, racism, and sexism. It was in this context that body, pleasure, and desire became intertwined with the politics of gay liberation. Inspired by the writings of Marxist philosophers, gay activists in this period began to advocate for the liberation of the body and, particularly, for a reconceptualization of eroticism and pleasure. It was also in this context that the visualization of those principles in gay periodicals became essential to advance gay liberation movements. *Gay Print Culture* follows the evolution of this project from the early 1970s through the 1990s, studying how activists, editors, publishers, artists, and readers imagined gay liberation, and how they worked to visualize those ideals.

This book argues that gay periodicals were at the center of the transnational history of gay liberation, both because they facilitated the circulation of information across borders and because they produced images that visualized the political goals of the movement, which included the liberation of desires and sexual representations. Before the popularization of the internet, gay periodicals were the most important resource to learn about and report on local and international news regarding struggles for gay rights around the world. They were also the most important resource to develop a strong visual and political language that encouraged people to embrace and celebrate their homoerotic desires, come out, join the movement, and appreciate the international nature of this struggle. As an editorial of the San Francisco-based *Gay Sunshine* declared in October 1970, "The oppression of Gay People, international in scope, arises from heterosexual chauvinism, religious dogmatism, police persecution, and other forms of discrimination and social intimidation."³ These were issues that gay people faced around the globe, and gay periodicals were the most important medium to write about, contest, and visualize them. Their pages included

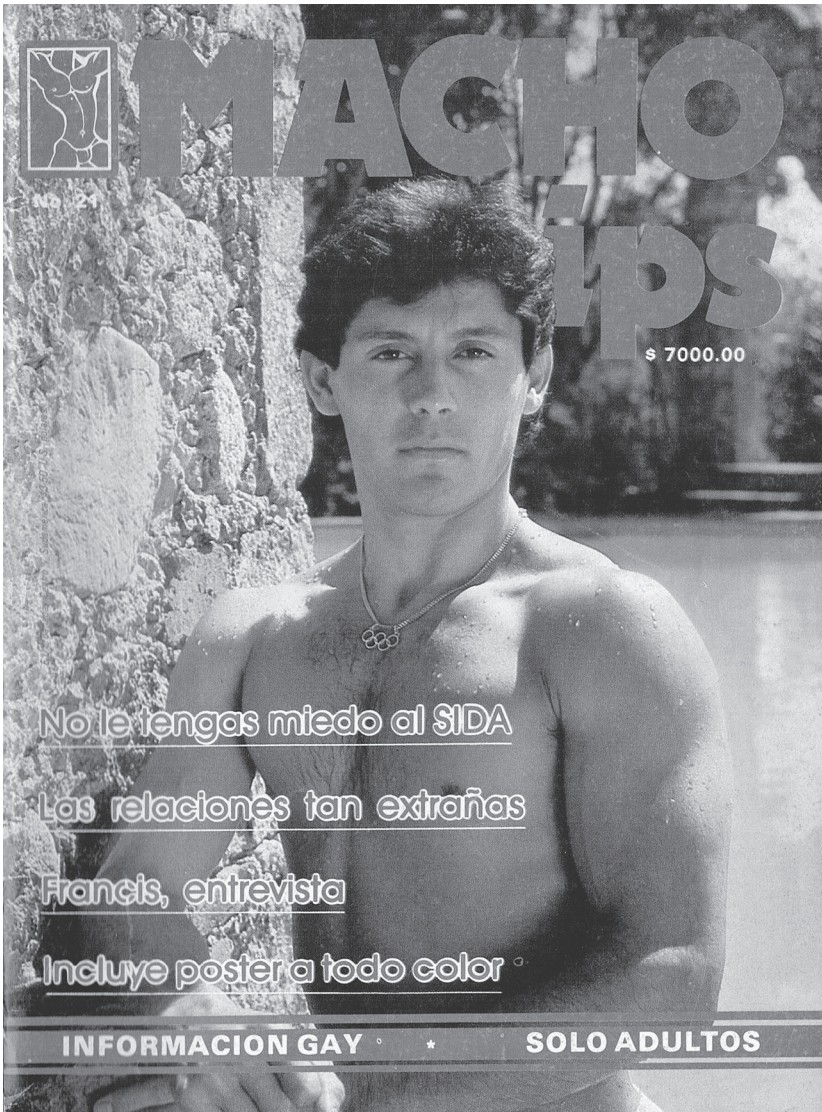


FIGURE 1.2. Published in Mexico City in 1989, the cover of *Macho Tips*' twenty-first issue featured a photograph by Juan Carlos Yustis. Almost all issues of *Macho Tips* featured artistic male nudes on their covers, and most of this erotic imagery was locally produced. Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América, Mexico City.

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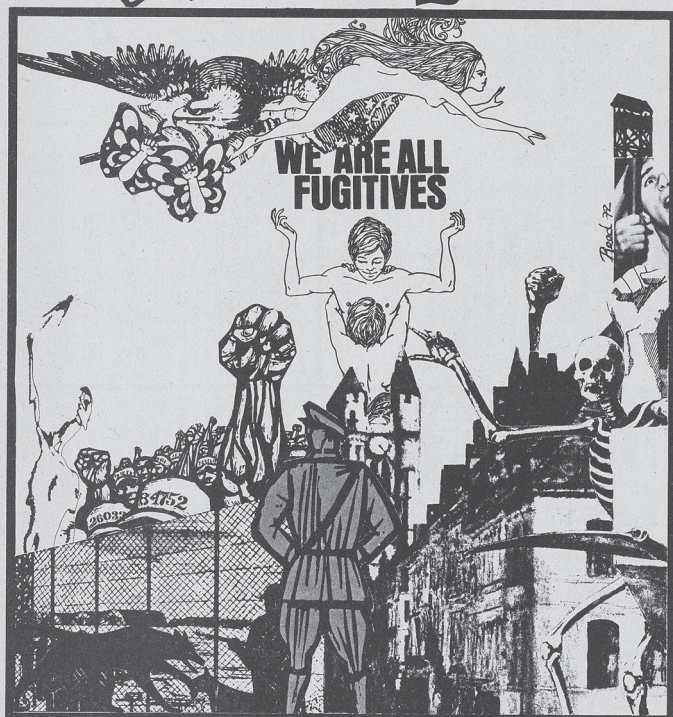
numerous depictions of gay oppression and resistance, as well as images that defied heterosexism by celebrating gay sexuality. The transnational movement of activists, publishers, and readers, combined with the circulation of gay literature and imaginaries, shaped the visual content of gay periodicals and made it legible across borders. For this reason, gay periodicals were instrumental in consolidating a politics of gay liberation and in visualizing those principles through their production and use of images. They published writings on gay liberation theory alongside erotic images that presented the body as an important vehicle to achieve gay liberation, as a site of pleasure and eroticism, and as a contested terrain in which liberation and oppression often clashed.

Gay Print Culture examines this transnational history by focusing on three thematic threads. The first of them is the transnational nature of gay periodicals. The activists, editors, writers, entrepreneurs, and artists involved in the production of gay periodicals worked to connect with one another across borders in order to circulate and exchange information and to expand their markets in an increasingly commercial landscape. As a result, periodicals not only influenced one another, but they also enabled the emergence of transnational gay networks and communities from the early 1970s through the 1990s. This book shows that the people producing gay periodicals were invested in internationalizing their publications, in terms of both content and circulation. For a number of these people, particularly for those who were also activists, connecting with other gay men and building local, national, and transnational communities was an important strategy to advance gay liberation. For example, the activists who published the first gay liberation periodicals in Mexico sought international connections with organizations like the Toronto-based *The Body Politic*, which by the late 1970s had reached a wide distribution and maintained a lively correspondence with gay communities around the globe. In July 1979, the Grupo Lambda wrote to *The Body Politic* to introduce their organization and their magazine *Nuevo ambiente*. The letter explained that Grupo Lambda was “comprised of Lesbians and Gay men dedicated to the struggle for a society free of sexism and oppression in all its forms.” The letter also proposed an exchange of publications, as well as of information regarding the gay liberation movement in Mexico and Canada.⁴ The members of *The Body Politic* editorial collective were also invested in this same struggle and were enthusiastic about the exchange. In their response, the Canadian gay activist Tim McCaskell emphasized the importance of having regular contact and circulating news relevant to the movement. This, he claimed, would help to strengthen the solidarity between their movements, and to exchange critical opinions on the politics of gay liberation.⁵ As the following chapter explains, one factor that helped to connect gay communities across the

Americas was the leftist and internationalist mindset that many activists shared. Indeed, this mindset facilitated McCaskell's identification with and interest in Latin American gay struggles, as well as his notion of a transnational gay community. But the exchange between *Nuevo ambiente* and *The Body Politic* illustrates just one of the reasons why publishers and activists sought international connections. For entrepreneurs and some artists, for example, building such communities and cultivating gay markets was an effective way to make a profit from the circulation of periodicals and erotica, while also contributing to gay liberation in their own particular way. For instance, the creator of *Macho Tips*, Aurelio Hidalgo de la Torre, sought international connections and exchanges both to circulate his magazines abroad and to acquire content for them. Although his archive is virtually lost, some sources discussed in chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Hidalgo de la Torre established communication and exchanges with activists, artists, and publishers in the United States and Europe, such as with the California-based editor John Rowberry. Periodicals were therefore documents, and in many instances also commodities, meant to circulate across borders and appeal to or serve transnational readerships.

The second thread is the relationship between gay liberation politics and visual culture. By focusing on a selection of Mexican, US, and Canadian publications, the book examines different ways in which the production and use of images in gay periodicals intersected with the project of gay liberation and how that intersection adapted to changing social, economic, and political landscapes over the years. The analysis pays particular attention to images that centered on the body, gay sexuality, and homoerotic desire, but it also discusses how the visual representation of gay oppression, resistance, and pride was a core component of gay periodicals. The book also explores how these images circulated across borders, influencing and shaping the visual content of gay periodicals, which developed a shared visual language. For example, chapter 1 examines this visual language by focusing on how gay liberation periodicals visualized ideas of gay oppression and resistance in the 1970s. A fascinating example of this language is the cover of *Gay Sunshine's* fourteenth issue, published in 1972. The cover featured a collage by James Reed that evoked the severe oppression that gay and other marginalized groups faced, but that also communicated an important message of resistance and hope (figure 1.3). At the bottom of this collage, a police officer faces a city and what appears to be a prison. Behind the prison's wall, two dogs and an armed man patrol the area, while a crowd of individuals—perhaps prisoners, judging by the numbers written on their hats—seem to protest with their fists raised. A skeleton holding a scythe on the right side of the collage and pointing to a nude gay couple in an embrace reminds the viewer about the life-threatening

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OF GAY LIBERATION

no. 14

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50¢ outside
Calif.

FIGURE 1.3. Cover of *Gay Sunshine*'s fourteenth issue, published in San Francisco in 1972. The cover features a collage by US artist James Reed that uses symbols such as the butterfly, the eagle, the police, and the raised fist to offer a message of resistance, liberation, and hope. Pennsylvania State University Libraries, Digital Collections.

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nature of oppression, which affected not only gay men but also other marginalized communities—as a legend above the couple states: “We are all fugitives.” One of the most striking features of this collage is the presence of an eagle at the top of the page that chases two butterflies while a nude woman seems to emerge and fly away from the scene. Significantly, the butterflies’ bodies are constituted by raised fists, a symbol that the Black Power movement popularized. As the following chapter explains, the butterfly was a recurrent symbol of liberation in gay cultural production, and similar allegories of repression and resistance, such as the one on this collage, appeared in other gay liberation journals in the 1970s, which made them legible across borders.

The third thread in this book is the existing tensions between the liberation of some and the oppression of others as it arises in gay print culture. The publishers of the periodicals studied viewed the relationship between images and liberation from different political, aesthetic, and ethical perspectives. Consequently, the erotic and sexualized imagery they produced acquired different meanings for readers, activists, and fellow publishers. For example, some of these individuals praised the publication of images of nudity, sadomasochism (s&m), and pornography, while others regarded these images as sexist and oppressive, as shown in chapter 2. In other cases, racial representation complicated liberationist projects. Most gay periodicals presented white men as objects of desire, particularly in the 1970s and early 1980s. In subsequent years, some publishers aimed to diversify their erotic imagery, either to address issues of representation, to expand notions of the erotic, or to make a profit. As part of this transition, some periodicals eroticized but also fetishized nonwhite individuals for the consumption of others, giving rise to a visual culture that reinforced colonial imaginaries of non-Western sexualities. At the same time, many of these images challenged dominant representations of homoerotic desire and offered alternatives on the market. For instance, *Macho Tips* began as a publication that emulated US gay lifestyle and erotic magazines such as *Blueboy*. As in those magazines, the erotic imagery in the first issues of *Macho Tips* featured mostly white men. Over time, though, the magazine began to feature models who resembled what most consumers would have identified as Mexican men based on dominant ideas of race in the country: mixed-race-appearing brown men. In fact, these types of models illustrated most covers of both *Macho Tips* and later *Hermes* and played a significant role in Hidalgo de la Torre’s editorial success. These representations eroticized and celebrated an ideal of Mexican male beauty at a time when gay magazines continued to favor white desirability. Even the Mexican magazine *Del otro lado* (On the Other Side), which gay liberation activists like Juan Jacobo Hernández edited between 1992 and 1996, favored this dominant desire—Hernández had been a

member of *Nuestro cuerpo's* and *Política sexual's* editorial collectives and had also worked as editor for *Macho Tips* in the 1980s. The commercialization of locally produced erotica in *Macho Tips* and *Hermes* served to offer positive and celebratory representations of homoerotic desire, which had been a core project of gay liberation politics for many years. Much of this imagery, though, built on exoticizing imaginaries that portrayed nonwhite models as primitive, hypersexual, and/or closer to nature. In some respects, these images could be questionable, but in appreciating racialized male beauty they also reconceptualized what could be considered erotic in a Mexican gay market. Therefore, one of the main goals of *Gay Print Culture* is to analyze the intersections between the production and consumption of erotic imagery and the transnational history of gay liberation. The book does not assume a liberatory nature in any of the materials studied. Instead, it examines how gender identity, class, and race shaped the production, content, reception, and circulation of gay periodicals, as well as how they shaped readers' understandings of liberation and oppression. Moreover, the book does not aim to set the boundaries of what constituted liberatory and oppressive visual representations. Instead, the focus is on the way activists, editors, publishers, artists, and readers negotiated the meanings of the images they produced, published, circulated, and consumed.

Periodicals and the Formation of Gay Communities

Gay Print Culture centers periodicals and their visual content in the transnational history of gay liberation for two major reasons. The first one is that the local, national, and international circulation of gay liberation imaginaries, as well as the formation of transnational gay networks and communities across the Americas, would not have been possible without the existence of gay periodicals. As historian and gay activist John D'Emilio asserts, prior to the technological revolution that the internet brought, "the community press was, really, the only resource other than word of mouth for letting people know that a new world, a new outlook, and a new community were in formation."⁶ In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, gay liberation activists across the region turned to the printing press as a tool to advance their liberationist movements and to build local, national, and transnational communities. Many of the earliest gay liberation periodicals in the region had the specific purpose of documenting gay liberation movements and encouraging people to "come out." Coming out, connecting people across borders, and circulating information about these movements was crucial to advancing gay liberation, and the gay press was at the center of that process.

Alternative media has played a central role in social movements because of its capacity to build community and forge identities. In his transnational study of 1980s gay Polish magazines, Łukasz Szulc argues that “the chief function of alternative media created by social movements is to create and sustain the movement’s identity. The focus is on the self: self-definition, self-representation and self-expression of a particular group, community, or movement.”⁷ The question of what makes a publication “alternative” is not easy to address, but the concept generally refers to publications with a small-scale production and limited distribution, and whose content is not typically found in mainstream printed media.⁸ The gay periodicals studied in this book fall within this broad spectrum. As such, and echoing Szulc’s observations, gay periodicals in the 1970s–1990s period played a crucial role in creating and validating a sense of common gay identity among the producers, contributors, and readers of these publications.⁹ They also played a crucial role in the formation and consolidation of local, national, and international gay communities. Therefore, it is fundamental to study the histories of gay periodicals using a transnational lens and with a focus on the relationship between the history of gay political activism and the production, content, reception, and circulation of these publications.

Aside from facilitating the flow of information, periodicals also performed the important task of producing and circulating images that visualized the cultural and political imaginaries of the gay communities that created and consumed these publications. This is the second reason for which this book focuses on gay periodicals so attentively. Gay newspapers and magazines visualized images of gay pride and resistance, of homoerotic desire, and of same-sex sexuality that could not be found in mainstream media outlets. Much of this content reflected the desires, emotions, and concerns of the papers’ readerships; since most of these periodicals relied on sales and advertising to survive, they constantly tried to be more visually appealing and sought to cater to consumers’ demands. Therefore, gay periodicals offer valuable insight into the cultural history of gay liberation, community, and identity at the local, national, and international levels.

Indeed, through their vibrant editorial and commercial content, and through their wide circulation, gay periodicals connected gay men across borders and allowed them to imagine and form nationwide and international gay communities. Historians such as Marc Stein and David Johnson have examined the relationship between gay periodicals and community-building in the context of the United States. Commenting on the Philadelphia-based gay magazine *Drum* (1964–1969)—a publication that featured both news and erotic imagery—Stein writes that the magazine “confirms Benedict Anderson’s argument that language

has the ‘capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities.’” *Drum* magazine, Stein claims, illustrates how “print media have played a central role in the development of imagined communities.”¹⁰ Most gay periodicals with wide distribution in the twentieth century, including commercially oriented periodicals, had a similar outcome. Johnson asserts that, aside from the images and the merchandise, publishers of pre-1969 physique magazines provided their customers with “contact, both real and imagined.” They also provided them with the opportunity to publish letters, participate in contests, and submit photographs, as well as with business directories and pen-pal clubs where customers could interact directly with one another and find information about photography studios, book services, and gay bars.¹¹ “Buying magazines, writing letters, and exchanging photographs were central features of this network,” Johnson writes.¹² Szulc has identified a similar process in studying the histories of 1980s Polish gay magazines. These publications were crucial for developing a common sense of identity among readers and for establishing transnational communication between Poland and other European countries during the late Cold War period. Building on these scholars’ work, *Gay Print Culture* demonstrates how gay liberation, lifestyle, and erotic magazines published in Mexico, Canada, and the United States between the 1970s and 1990s also allowed gay men to establish meaningful connections across borders and imagine transnational communities. Examining the role of images in the formation of those communities and networks is one of the main goals of this book.

In tracing the transnational formation of gay communities and identities through the production and circulation of gay periodicals and images, this book echoes Martin Meeker’s assertion that gay and lesbian community-building is a process with local, regional, national, and global dimensions.¹³ This occurs because, in gay and lesbian history, identity-formation and community-building are interconnected. Those who identify as homosexual, Meeker writes, “recount the process by which they came to that identity as one that involved feeling, longing, sensing, and thinking . . . [;] the desire to contact others like themselves is a logical next step.”¹⁴ Such desire to connect helped to justify not only gay existence but also activism. Cross-border connections, Meeker contends, facilitated the exchange of information, advanced a self-awareness of gay identity and oppression, and led to the organization of collective action against that oppression.¹⁵ Significantly, Meeker studied the role of homophile periodicals in this process, analyzing how they fostered the formation of nationwide communities in the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

As shown by existing scholarship, gay magazines in the twentieth century played a crucial role in the formation of gay identities and communities, and

they were central to the transnational history of gay liberation. As the chapters of this book demonstrate, the international focus of gay periodicals published in North America from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s allowed activists, editors, publishers, artists, and readers to identify a common experience among gay communities in different contexts. This international focus also allowed these communities to develop a similar visual language that offered powerful representations of their experiences, desires, and liberationist projects. Furthermore, it allowed gay publishers and entrepreneurs to create markets for those representations, which further consolidated the existence of gay communities and identities.

A Visual and Transnational Approach

Gay Print Culture is the first major research project to examine gay periodicals and their visual content in a transnational context focused on Mexico, the United States, and Canada. To pursue this task, the book builds on and contributes to two bodies of scholarship: one that focuses on national and transnational histories of gay liberation across the American continent, and another that examines gay print culture with a focus on local, national, and, to a lesser extent, transnational contexts. The first body of literature includes the works of scholars who have focused on gay and lesbian liberation movements in the United States and Canada, such as Becki Ross, John D’Emilio, Miriam Smith, Gary Kinsman, Nan Alamilla Boyd, David Churchill, Marc Stein, Tom Warner, Kevin Mumford, Emily Hobson, and Tim McCaskell, among many others.¹⁶ This literature also includes the works of scholars who have focused on gay and lesbian liberation movements in Latin America, such as James Green, Norma Mogrovejo, Rodrigo Laguarda, Jordi Díez, Lucinda Grinnell, Adriana Fuentes Ponce, Omar Guillermo Encarnación, Pablo Ben, Joaquín Insausti, Javier Fernández Galeano, Felipe Caro Romero, Patricio Simonetto, and Martín González Romero, among others.¹⁷ Although I am indebted to the work of all these authors, much of this scholarship has been dominated by approaches that pay little attention to print and visual culture, treating them mostly as sources and rarely as objects of analysis.

In situating print culture and images at the center of transnational LGBTQ+ history, *Gay Print Culture* contributes to another body of scholarship. Specifically, it joins the efforts of several scholars who have made significant contributions to the study of gay and lesbian media and/or visual culture. This body of literature includes book-length projects by Rodger Streitmatter, Martin Meeker, David Johnson, and Łukasz Szulc.¹⁸ It also includes various journal articles, book

chapters, and recent doctoral dissertations by scholars such as Richard Meyer, Lucas Hilderbrand, Robert Dewhurst, Scott de Groot, Patricio Simonetto, Nick Hrynkyk, Valerie Korinek, Kelly Phipps, and Bryan Pitts, among others.¹⁹ The work of all these scholars contributes to our understanding of gay print culture and visibility in the second half of the twentieth century. But unlike most of them, my work transcends nationally bound frameworks, investigating instead the shared histories of gay periodicals across North America, while also considering other Latin American contexts.

Thus, although *Gay Print Culture* draws from and contributes to these two bodies of scholarship, it departs from them in important ways. The historiography on gay liberation in Canada and the United States has focused mostly on either local or national histories, or on anglophone North American contexts. While scholars of Latin America have been more attentive to the relationship between gay liberation in the region and in anglophone North America, their works also remain very much focused on national contexts, and in most cases, they adopt social and political approaches only. A similar situation has shaped Canadian histories of gay liberation, some of which trace relationships to US contexts, but not to Latin America. *Gay Print Culture* shows how these local and national histories were mutually constitutive. It also shows how gay communities helped to advance gay liberation across borders through the production and circulation of periodicals and images. During the period covered by this study, periodicals were the dominant form of gay print culture and the only effective resource to connect communities at various levels. Analyzing their content and histories from a transnational lens is therefore crucial for understanding the cultural history of gay liberation in the Americas. It is also crucial for understanding how gay activists, editors, publishers, artists, and also readers worked transnationally to shape and advance gay liberation politics.

This book employs an interdisciplinary methodology and a wide variety of sources to examine the production, content, circulation, and reception of gay periodicals. These sources are grouped into three categories: documentary, oral, and visual. The first category is comprised of newspapers and magazines, their administrative files, and letters sent to and by their editorial teams. These sources are housed in numerous archives across the Americas, including institutional and community-based archives, as well as digital repositories. Representative archives include the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles, the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, the Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América in Mexico City, and The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives in Toronto. The second category is comprised of oral history interviews I conducted between 2016 and 2022 with individuals who produced, read, or contributed to

gay periodicals, including activists, editors, writers, photographers, illustrators, and artists. I conducted these interviews in various locations, either in person or online, and in both English and Spanish. Interviewees include people from Mexico, Canada, the United States, and other nationalities. A copious visual archive constitutes the third group of sources. Each chapter of this book engages in close readings of the visual content of gay periodicals, particularly of their erotic imagery. The discussion considers the production and reception of these images, the ways in which publishers used them, and the messages they conveyed. This interdisciplinary methodology allows *Gay Print Culture* to have us reconsider our understanding of gay periodicals by situating them, and their visual cultures, at the center of a transnational history of gay community-formation and liberationist politics.

Since it would be impossible to study all the periodicals published in the Americas from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s, this book focuses on a selection of North American newspapers and magazines that had a wide distribution and an international scope, and that were leading voices of gay liberation in major cities. These periodicals varied from community-based gay liberation publications to commercially oriented gay lifestyle and erotic magazines. Thus, their gay politics and use of images differ significantly. The gay liberation and community-based periodicals examined in this book include magazines such as *Gay Sunshine* (San Francisco, 1970–1982), *The Body Politic* (Toronto, 1971–1987), *Gay Community News* (Boston, 1973–1999), *Política sexual* (Mexico City, 1979), *Nuestro cuerpo* (Mexico City, 1979–1980), and *Nuevo ambiente* (Mexico City, 1979–1983). Aside from being leading periodicals with an international scope and wide circulation, their publishers were part of transnational networks of gay liberation activists. Moreover, the content of these publications helped to advance gay liberation and community-building through the visual representation of gay sexuality and homoerotic desires, as well as of gay resistance and pride. This happened at a time when the access to such representations in the mainstream media was largely unthinkable. On the other hand, the gay lifestyle and erotic magazines analyzed in this book include *Macho Tips* (Mexico City, 1985–1989), its refurbished version *Hermes* (Mexico City, 1990–1994), and *Del otro lado* (Mexico City, 1992–1996). These magazines advanced gay liberation through a different approach: the production and circulation of erotic imagery alongside news and information on gay sexuality and culture. In addition to these sources, the book is also attentive to the histories, content, and international connections of other Latin American publications, such as the Argentinian *Somos* (Buenos Aires, 1973–1976).

Studying the histories of these magazines posed various methodological challenges, particularly in relation to the disparate levels of documentation they left

behind. For instance, the archival records of *The Body Politic* (*TBP*) in The ArQuives are rich and abundant. The histories of *TBP* and the archives are actually linked; initially called the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives, this community-based archive was founded in 1973 out of the *TBP* newspaper collection. From the beginning, the editorial collective of *TBP* kept almost every single document they produced and received over the years—a decision that has produced more than one hundred boxes of archival sources related to the history of this publication. Similarly, the *Gay Sunshine* records at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives are comprised of eighty-one boxes and other related materials, while another, though much smaller portion of these records, is housed at the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco. Since both magazines had a wide distribution and correspondence with individuals and organizations from across North America and beyond, it is easy to also locate the materials they produced in other collections. For instance, they are found at the Special Collections of various university libraries that house personal papers of gay activists and publishers (see the archives section of this book's bibliography). In contrast to these publications, the Mexican magazines studied in this book left very few archival records other than the magazines themselves. Although it is possible to also locate letters and other materials they produced in various US and Canadian archives and collections, as well as in government archives in Mexico, the documentation is limited and fragmented.

When archival silences and erasures produced crevices in my research, oral history helped to fill in those gaps. The memories of gay and lesbian individuals who interacted with gay periodicals as producers, contributors, or readers were a valuable source of information to reconstruct the histories of the gay press. They were also valuable sources to trace the international circulation of gay periodicals and the networks that gay activists, editors, publishers, artists, and readers established across borders. This was particularly important when researching Mexican magazines, as their subscription lists and most of their correspondence no longer exist. In each of the following chapters, I treat oral history interviews in almost the same way I treat other primary sources: drawing from them and contrasting peoples' recollections of the past with evidence from other primary sources. Engaging with deeper discussions on historical memory or the politics of remembering is beyond the scope of this book, but those interested in oral history as a methodology will hopefully appreciate the central role of such sources in this book.

Another methodological challenge faced throughout the research for this book was the whiteness of the archive. Despite their radical liberationist politics, many of the periodicals studied in this book were not particularly inclusive. For

example, scholars and activists have long criticized *TBP* for presenting and promoting an implicitly white and cisgender gay male experience in its pages; the same could be said about *Gay Sunshine* and other similar publications. Claiming that these were leading voices of gay liberation in the anglophone-speaking world might be triggering for some readers whose experiences were absent or misrepresented in the pages of those magazines. The analysis in this book does not mean to reproduce what some consider a “whitening” of the queer archive, whereby queer people of color are disappeared from the record.²⁰ Despite my admiration and respect for these magazines, this book is not oblivious of their scope and role in the history of gay liberation—hence the attention to the tensions between liberation and oppression. Nonetheless, the undeniable work of these magazines to establish connections across borders made them central to the transnational history this book aims to reconstruct.

Finally, the rich visual content of gay periodicals also deserves some commentary. Each chapter of this book examines photographs, drawings, advertisements, and all kinds of illustrations. These media possess different characteristics that inform their use in gay periodicals and the engagement of readers with them. For instance, photography was the leading medium to visualize and provide powerful depictions of gay pride and resistance in gay periodicals, and the indexical nature of photography was central to accomplish those goals. In photography, indexicality refers to the ability of a photograph to capture an image of something that existed and happened at a particular time and in a particular place. To what extent a photograph represents reality has been the subject of much debate. However, what matters in this book is that, at its most basic level, photography allowed readers to appreciate and circulate *actual* moments of gay liberation. In his famous work on photography, *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes explains that the essence of photography is simple: “that has been.” The photograph, he notes, “is an extended, loaded evidence—as if it caricatured not the figure of what it represents (quite the converse) but its very existence.”²¹ The object or scene that a photograph captures *existed* and was *there*. For this reason, as discussed in chapter 1, photographs of protests, of same-sex love, and of liberation in gay periodicals nourished activism across borders.

Drawings and other kinds of illustrations in gay periodicals were also powerful ways to visualize the political goals of gay liberation. As shown throughout the book, editors and readers alike took drawings, collages, comics, and other images very seriously. These images constituted another vehicle to circulate messages of gay resistance and liberation, as well as to celebrate gay sexuality and homoerotic desire. Although they were not as effective as photography in producing visual pleasure, they were no less stimulating. The fact that they triggered

important debates, such as those analyzed in chapter 2, shows how these images produced and were charged with emotions and feelings. It also shows that these images had a strong cultural significance, especially considering the absence of similar representations in the mainstream press. Something similar occurred with advertising, which, aside from using appealing imagery to invite viewers to consume a product, played a crucial role in the formation of gay identities across borders. As the chapters in this book show, the imagery in gay advertising had deep roots in an international visual culture of gay consumerism.

Thus, the methodology of this book places a diverse corpus of sources—written, oral, and visual—in dialogue with one another. The analysis of these primary sources also involves drawing on a rich literature that includes social and cultural history, visual and media studies, queer theory, and scholarship on gender, sexuality, and race in Canadian, US, and Latin American contexts. This methodology allows *Gay Print Culture* to offer a novel approach to the history of gay print culture in the Americas.

Narrative Arc and Organization of the Book

Gay Print Culture follows the boom in gay publishing in Mexico, the United States, and Canada from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s, while also drawing connections to other cultural contexts in the Americas. In the 1970s, gay presses across all three countries began to publish liberation journals featuring political and visual content that bolstered the ideological foundations of the movement in each of its local contexts. Yet by the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, many gay publishers had turned their attention away from overt political discourse and toward expanding into more lucrative markets, such as pornography. This change constitutes the narrative arc of this book. Through a close reading of gay periodicals, visual analysis of their content, archival research, and oral history interviews, the book explores how and why gay communities turned to the printing press over the period of study, and it follows the evolution of the markets they created. The book examines how in the 1970s and early 1980s, gay communities used the press to advance their liberation movements through the creation and circulation of periodicals with strong political and visual discourses. Then, the book examines how in the 1980s and 1990s, as sex acquired a more central role in the formation of gay community and identity, gay periodicals left behind their political content but continued to be invested in the liberation and visualization of homoerotic desires. Each of the five main chapters that constitute this book explores the intersections and tensions between gay politics, ideas of gay liberation, uses of the erotic, and changing visual represen-

tations that aimed to liberate and celebrate homoerotic desires. This arc begins in the early 1970s with the emergence of the first activist-oriented gay liberation periodicals in North America. It then moves to the 1980s to focus on commercially oriented gay lifestyle and erotic magazines. Toward the end of the book, the focus shifts to consumer and pornographic gay periodicals with little politics and big profits.

Chapter 1 focuses on the relationship between gay liberation movements, visibility, and the gay press from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Specifically, the chapter examines how gay liberation activists used periodicals and images to advance their movements and build communities across borders. The chapter argues that gay liberation periodicals were central to the formation of communities because these publications developed an ideological and visual language legible at the local, national, and international levels. The development of this shared language was possible because the radical activists who published these periodicals were inspired by the same theories of gay liberation. These theories built on Marxism and traced connections between sexual and political liberation, while also linking them with the liberation of the body and erotic desires. To support this argument, the chapter focuses on various gay liberation periodicals, with particular attention to those published in Toronto and Mexico City. These periodicals presented the body as a vehicle for gay liberation, and used images that evoked pride, joy, and resistance to foster community-building.

Chapter 2 delves deeper into the role of the body and desire in the transnational history of gay liberation through a close analysis of the use and reception of erotic and sexualized imagery in gay liberation periodicals, with a particular focus on *The Body Politic*. The chapter examines the debates on nudity, sexism, and pornography that this imagery prompted among the editorial collective, contributors, and local and international readers of this publication from 1971 to 1987. The chapter argues that the contestation of this imagery was instrumental in the formation of gay liberation identities among the people who both produced and consumed periodicals like *The Body Politic*. To support this argument, the chapter compares these debates with similar disputes about erotic imagery in other gay liberation publications, such as the Boston-based *Gay Community News* (1973–1999). The chapter shows how the publication of sexualized and erotic imagery embodied the gay liberationist goals that brought gay liberation papers into existence. It also demonstrates how these images triggered debates because readers and editors ascribed different meanings to “pornography,” “sexism,” “gay liberation,” and “community.”

Chapter 3 focuses on two areas of analysis. The first one is the role of images in *Gay Sunshine* and the larger Gay Sunshine Press. The second one is

the production of Latin American content for both the magazine and the press, as well as the formation of transnational networks of gay activists, writers, and visual artists who established contact across the Americas thanks to the production of such content. The chapter argues that *Gay Sunshine* and Gay Sunshine Press publications fostered gay liberation across the Americas through the visualization of homoerotic desires, the production of Latin American content, and the formation of transnational gay networks. Moreover, by analyzing the work of *Gay Sunshine*'s editor Winston Leyland and of his collaborators Erskine Lane and Edward A. Lacey, and by engaging with scholarship on queer theory, the chapter discusses the intricate relationship between gay mobility, consumerism, liberation, and oppression in the context of transnational gay history. The chapter offers a critique of the contradictions evident in the ways publishers and readers in the United States and Canada related to Latin America. Some in the Global North expressed solidarity with their Latin American counterparts, but also reinforced colonial imaginaries of non-Western sexuality through the reproduction and circulation of exoticizing discourses about Latin America.

The roles of images and homoerotic desire in transnational gay liberation are further examined in chapter 4 through an analysis of the Mexican gay magazine *Macho Tips*. Hidalgo de la Torre launched this magazine in 1985, inspired by a long tradition of US gay print culture. The magazine quickly became famous for its erotic representations of brown Mexican models and for its celebration of gay masculinity—it was so popular that by 1987 some pirate copies began to circulate in Mexico City. The chapter argues that the production and content of *Macho Tips* were integral to the transnational history of gay liberation movements that placed homoerotic desire and its visual representation at the center of community-building and identity formation. Building on scholarship of race, gender, popular culture, and sexuality in modern Mexico, the chapter also argues that the editorial and visual content of *Macho Tips* reproduced Mexican national discourses of race and gender to appeal to domestic and international consumers and to challenge stereotypes that marginalized gay men. Hidalgo de la Torre continued this project in the early 1990s, relaunching *Macho Tips* as *Hermes*. Through his editorial work in these magazines, he created a gay market for the brown Mexican body in Mexico and, as chapter 5 shows, this undertaking was part of a larger history of North American gay consumer culture.

Chapter 5 focuses on the growth of the gay publishing industry in Mexico, and it also examines how, since the late 1980s, some gay publishers, editors, visual artists, and pornographers in North America began to think of brown Mexican, Latin American, and Latino men as marketable. Some of those individuals were the Mexican editor Hidalgo de la Torre, the US editor and publisher John

Rowberry, and the US visual artists, editors, and pornographers Jim Moss and John Shown. The chapter argues that by creating a network and by producing and circulating gay magazines, erotic imagery, and pornography that capitalized on brown bodies, these men expanded notions of the erotic and helped to consolidate a gay market for these representations in Mexico and the United States. The chapter situates this process against the backdrop of the gay editorial market in Mexico and the United States while also examining its relationship with the larger history of gay liberation. At the same time, the chapter discusses how the editorial, artistic, and entrepreneurial work of these men fits into the larger history of the emergence and growth of the US Hispanic market. Moreover, the chapter also offers a critique of these men's work; while it expanded notions of the erotic and offered alternatives on the gay market, their work also drew on and reinforced colonial mindsets that profited from the production of exoticizing images for white and/or middle-class gay consumers.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this book I use the terms *gay* and *homosexual* when necessary but prioritize the former in most cases. My choice is guided by the historical contexts I examine. From the late 1960s through the 1970s, gay men in anglophone North America began to increasingly replace the term *homosexual* with the term *gay* to refer to themselves and to their movement. Whereas the former was semantically charged with the harmful legacy of medical and criminal science, the latter is “tied to happiness, pride, community, and the declaration of legitimacy and difference.”²² In contrast, Latin American activists, particularly men, adopted the term *homosexual* in Spanish and Portuguese—despite its medical connotations existing also in their contexts—to refer to themselves and to their movement and to challenge more harmful terms that society had cast upon them. For instance, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s in Mexico, activists referred to their movement as the *Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual* and they founded organizations like the *Frente de Liberación Homosexual* (FLH) and the *Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria* (FHAR). However, in the specific context that I explore in this book, many middle-class Latin American activists, editors, artists, readers, and many other men who sexually, erotically, and affectively desired other men also began to use the English word “gay” to refer to themselves. In fact, the word was used frequently in the Latin American gay press since the 1970s. Numerous Latin American activists knew about, learned from, identified with, and linked their struggles to Canadian and US gay liberation movements, which explains their adoption of the term “gay” and justifies my using of it.

notes

INTRODUCTION

1. *Nuestro cuerpo*, no. 1, May 1979.
2. In Mexican gay culture, *ambiente* is a word that connotes the “gay scene” or “ghetto.” To be “de ambiente,” means to be gay. See Monsiváis, “De las variedades de la experiencia homoerótica,” 166–68.
3. “Editorial,” *Gay Sunshine*, no. 2, October 1970, 5.
4. Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, letter to *The Body Politic*, Mexico City, July 9, 1979, Box 22, F0002-02-364, The ArQuives, TBP Fonds, Toronto (hereafter TBP Fonds).
5. Tim McCaskell, letter to Carlos Max Mejía, Toronto, November 4, 1979, Box 22, F0002-02-364, TBP Fonds.
6. D’Emilio, “Foreword,” 10.
7. Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland*, 129.
8. Dunn, *Contracultura*, 56.
9. Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland*, 129–30.
10. Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 237. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson argued that print culture was instrumental in defining nations and national identities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through print culture, people were able to imagine national communities and to visualize their national belonging.
11. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 19.
12. Johnson, *Buying Gay*, 150.
13. Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 5.
14. Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 11.
15. Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 72.
16. Ross, *The House That Jill Built*; D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*; Kinsman, *Regulation of Desire*; Gentile, Kinsman, and Rankin, *We Still Demand!*; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*; Churchill, “Personal Ad Politics”; Churchill, “Transnationalism and Homophile Political Culture in the Postwar

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Decades"; Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*; Warner, *Never Going Back*; Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*; Hobson, *Lavender and Red*; McCaskell, *Queer Progress*.

17. Green, *Beyond Carnival*; Mogrovejo, *Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre*; Laguarda, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México*; Díez, "El movimiento lésbico-gay"; Díez, "La trayectoria política del Movimiento Lésbico-Gay en México"; Grinnell, "Lesbianas Presente"; Fuentes Ponce, *Decidir sobre el propio cuerpo*; Encarnación, *Out in the Periphery*; Ben and Insausti, "Dictatorial Rule and Sexual Politics in Argentina"; Simonetto, *Entre la injuria y la revolución*; Caro Romero and Simonetto, "Sexualidades radicales"; Fernández Galeano, "Cartas desde Buenos Aires"; Caro Romero, "Más allá de Stonewall"; Simonetto, "La otra internacional"; González Romero, "La revolución sexual."

18. Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*; Meeker, *Contacts Desired*; Johnson, *Buying Gay*; Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland*.

19. Meyer, "Gay Power circa 1970"; Hilderbrand, "A Suitcase Full of Vaseline"; Dewhurst, "Gay Sunshine"; de Groot, "Out of the Closet and into Print"; Simonetto, *Entre la injuria y la revolución* (specifically chapters 3 and 4); Hrynyk, "Pin the Macho on the Man"; Korinek, "VOICES of Gay, Lesbian, and Feminist Activists in the Prairies"; Phipps, "Look over here, look over there, lesbians are everywhere"; Pitts, "Hung, Hot, and Shameless in Bed."

20. See Haritaworn, Moussa, and Ware, "Marvellous Grounds," 3.

21. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115.

22. Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, "From Fags to Gays," 116.

I. PERIODICALS, COMING OUT, AND THE VISUALIZATION OF GAY LIBERATION

1. Numerous historians consider it important to acknowledge the significance of the Stonewall riots, their crucial role in the history of gay liberation, and their international impact. However, they also consider it important to acknowledge the various trajectories that gay and lesbian liberation movements followed around the globe. For instance, some scholars have argued that pre-Stonewall gay and lesbian subcultures in the United States were not only visible and thriving, but also contributed to the emergence of the gay liberation movement. See, for example, Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*; Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*. Canadian scholars have also decentered the history of gay and lesbian liberation from the 1969 Stonewall riots. See, for example, Grube, "No More Shit"; Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*; and Millward, *Making a Scene*. Likewise, various Latin American scholars have reconceptualized the emergence of homosexual liberation movements in this region by highlighting both local and transnational influences. See Encarnación, *Out in the Periphery*; and Caro Romero and Simonetto, "Sexualidades radicales."

2. Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 8.

3. See foreword and contributions to Jay and Young's *Out of the Closets*; Kyper, "Coming Out and into the GLF," 33; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 109; McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 54; Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 2.

4. See Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 125–28; Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*,

89–97.