**Alternative Voices:**

**Underground Press and Countercultural Community in 1960s-70s Toronto**

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Toronto was home to a thriving underground press network. These publications, which were as varied and numerous as the communities that produced them, were a manifestation of this setting’s diverse countercultures. From hip community paper *Harbinger* to gay liberation journal *The Body Politic*, to the voice of the American war resister in Canada, *AMEX*, these papers contained various topics, but were similar in their value as tools of self-definition and declaration. These community newspapers also created vital communication networks between readers and contributors and gave voice to their resistance of a dominant culture.

The emergence of this alternative press was partially in reaction to the lack of (fair) representation of alternative communities by the mainstream media. By creating their own press, alternative communities in Toronto were able to broadcast their own voices and create connective networks to support and grow alternative communities, circumventing typical commercial means of media production. In providing an information network that broadcasted alternative voices, Toronto’s underground press played a significant role in the growth and cohesion of alternative community.

This is not to say, however, that the counterculture of this time was one single community. Rather, the communities that might be classified as countercultural were a diverse mixture of groups with various interests, causes, backgrounds, and identities. These were “imagined communities” in the sense that members were not linked by interpersonal connection, but the mythos of a shared sense of identity. Alternative press helped sustain this sense of community but also reflected a subdivision of “the counterculture” into distinct groups in the variety of different publications collected under the term “the underground press”.

These divergent countercultural communities wove together in a multitude of ways: groups borrowed from one another - tactics, styles, theory, ways of understanding themselves - and yet simultaneously drew up hard borders to distinguish themselves from each other. While a common struggle against domination by the mainstream might bind these groups together, internal conflicts and diverging politics divided them. However, rather than destroy the counterculture, this splintering of community led instead to a diverse network of different countercultural groups which created new identities, spaces, and media.

Ultimately, this phenomenon of division was one step further in the process of self-definition that this alternative press allowed. Circumventing the third-party input of mainstream media that often misrepresented alternative groups, these communities could express their personal and collective identities through alternative means. More than this, their voices reached and connected with audiences to further develop community among individuals and groups who existed outside the dominant, mainstream culture. Alternative media in 1960s – 1970s Toronto thus provided a space for alternative voices to speak – defining themselves and connecting their countercultural communities through the medium of the underground press.