

ACCESS DENIED

The Impact of Internet Filtering Software on the Lesbian and Gay Community



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Filtering Software
On The Lesbian and Gay
Community

A Report by

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance
Against Defamation

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Executive Summary - GLAAD Internet Filtering Software Report

With the *Reno v. ACLU* decision (familiarily known as "the CDA decision"), lesbian and gay people heaved a sigh of relief, thinking that the vibrant community they had formed on the Internet was safe from interference of misguided efforts to enforce "decency" on the Web. Unfortunately, the advent of Internet filtering software (which is being used more frequently to block sites deemed by either the manufacturer or a third party as "inappropriate") and ratings systems mean cyberspace is poised on the edge of doing to gay men and lesbians what the CDA was prevented from doing—rendering us invisible.

Internet filtering software does exactly that: it filters material on the Internet, whether it's Web sites, chat rooms or mailing lists, either through the use of "keywords", such as "gay" or through URL addresses, such as "www.gaynews.com." The majority of software on the market, as well as new products in development, place informational sites serving the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in the same categories as sexually explicit sites. For example, a site which lists the contact information for groups of lesbians and gay men interested in square dancing is blocked by many of the filtering software makers, who are either unable or unwilling to consider that information about sexual orientation and identity has nothing to do with sexual behavior, and everything to do with culture and identity.

Among those most threatened by this software are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. The resources available on the Internet—Web sites, chats, and educational resources—are literally life-saving to these young people, who may live in isolation, not only geographically but emotionally as well.

Also left out of the big picture are the children of lesbian and gay parents who number between an estimated six to thirteen million in the United States. These young people would be prevented from accessing sites specific to their needs, such as COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere). Their site is blocked by a majority of the filtering software already used by unsuspecting parents who may not even know that these sites are considered "inappropriate."

The lesbian and gay population at large might be unknowingly blocked either at home, or more insidiously, at libraries, where some are insisting that filtering software be installed. Using filtering software at libraries may in fact be in violation of Constitutional rights to speech and expression.

Ratings systems may enforce invisibility as they become more widely used. Sites that refuse to rate themselves may be blocked from the popular web browsers (such as Netscape or Explorer) or by the filtering software of companies afraid of lawsuits and backlash. These sites would then "cease to exist" in the eyes of users whose software only allowed rated sites. In addition, there has already been talk of criminal penalties for site owners who "mis-rate" their sites—with the decision of how a site should be rated to be made by Government officials.

GLAAD supports the need for children to have age-appropriate images—and the need for organizations to provide sites with such images without interference from governmental regulation cannot be overstated. The American Library Association is one of the many groups working to make a free, child-friendly Internet a reality.

As the debate around Internet filtering software and ratings systems continue, the most important and effective way to combat enforced invisibility on the Web is to be an educated consumer: know what software blocks lesbian and gay sites with no regard as to actual content; advocate for fair and accurate software and ratings systems, and work to make the cybercommunity safe and "friendly" for everyone.

Consider these suggestions:

- Uphold a single, universal standard when rating gay and non-gay material
- Use URL-based blocking vs. keyword-based blocking
- Consider alternatives to audit trail features
- Utilize inclusive advisory boards
- Adopt Fair and Equal Access Clauses
- Use GLAAD as a Resource
- Participate in GLAAD's Proposed "FAIRsite" program

Introduction: What's GLAAD Got to Do With It?

When staff approached me about issuing a report on Internet filtering software and ratings systems, I shared their alarm at the detrimental effects of this new technology on the gay and lesbian community. While I had at first thought that the *Reno v. ACLU* decision, which struck down the Communications Decency Act, had removed the threat of invisibility, I soon realized we had gone from the frying pan of active censorship into the fire of censorship by passive omission.

Lesbian and gay presence in all media is a testament to the strength and success of the movement for equality. Yet, our representation is constantly threatened by those who would rather we go back into our closets. It's difficult to foster ignorance and bias against people when they have names and faces—and the more fair-minded Americans are exposed to the realities of our lives, as mundane as they may be sometimes, the more they will understand and support our need for equality in all arenas of public life.

As the parent of three young children—one eight-year-old girl, and two three-year-old twins, a boy and a girl—I am as concerned as any parent, straight, gay or otherwise, with what my children see in the media. Whether it's on television, in the movies or on our home computer, I make sure that they are taking in age-appropriate images.

The many groups working on Internet issues around children miss some very important points about the lesbian and gay community. There are an estimated six to thirteen million children of lesbian and gay parents living in the United States. These young people deserve the right to access groups of other young people like themselves, whether it's through the Web page of Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) or through a chat group. These Internet advocacy groups also miss the very important distinction that not all things lesbian or gay are sexual in nature. Think about it—are all Web sites that are not lesbian or gay then "heterosexual" in nature? If so, should they then be classified as "sexual" and then blocked?

I appreciate the primary concern that motivates individuals and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to install filtering software on their systems: The alarming stories about young girls and boys being approached by predators on the Internet. GLAAD vehemently condemns these people who prey on children, abusing not only their trust but their innocence. We must be vigilant in teaching our children about safety. Just as we tell them not to speak to strangers, never accept rides or candy or gifts from someone they don't know and to go to a safe place (a store, a firehouse or a neighbor's home), we must teach them how to use the Internet safely: Never give out your personal information, never arrange to meet someone from a chat room, and if they feel uncomfortable, go to a safe place (notify an online employee).

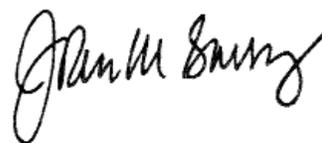
When I speak of the safety of our youth, I speak not only for my children, I speak for gay, lesbian bisexual and transgender youth, who use the Internet as a literal lifeline to those

like them who struggle everyday, not only with "being different" and the pain that causes, especially at adolescence, but with homophobia at school and sometimes at home. The Internet has become a community for these young people, and the elimination of gay-youth supportive sites, whether through filtering or by spying via audit trail programs, can put these young people at more risk than they already are.

I urge you to read this report and learn the troubling implications of filtering software. Whether it's through the testimonials of lesbian and gay youth, or an essay written by a gay father, these voices must be heard. I also hope you will read the recommendations GLAAD has made for industry leaders and Internet service providers, and utilize GLAAD as a resource on cyber issues and the lesbian and gay community. We are committed to making the Internet a place where all Americans can learn and grow—and where equality isn't a lofty aspiration, but a reality. We are committed to ensuring access to information via the Internet that is a fundamental right of all Americans guaranteed by the First Amendment. It's that simple. It's that challenging.

Finally, I would like to recognize the following GLAAD staff for their significant contributions to this report: Loren Javier - Interactive Media Director; Don Romesburg - Publications Manager; Liz Tracey - Associate Communications Director; Cathy Renna - Training Services Manager; Karin Jaffie - Design and Publications Associate; Jason Hefner - Senior Director Of Programs; Wonbo Woo - Communications Associate; and Michael Travis - Intern.

GLAAD also offers special thanks to Roman Frillarte for his research and input, and without whose dedication, this project might not have been complete. More thanks go to Jim Fagelson from Gay & Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI) and Ben Jenkins for adding their unique perspectives on the issue of Internet filtering software. Thanks also to C.J. Liotta, Julie Gedden from Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Patricia Nell Warren, Jeff Bennett and Mark Elderkin from Gay.Com, Jeffrey Bollinger from Pride Media, Jeff Walsh from Oasis Magazine, Jean Richter from the PERSON Project and Barb Solomon from Common Bond for their assistance in obtaining youth testimonial for the report. Additional thanks to Bennett Haselton from Peacefire and David Sobel from the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) for their consultation on the project and to PFLAG and the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) for their statistical resources. Thanks also to Chad Johnson, GLAAD's legal counsel, for reviewing the report.



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Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

Section 1

Political Implications Of Internet Filtering Software

Political Implications of Internet Filtering Software

As we have witnessed with the TV ratings/V-chip controversy, the public's lack of knowledge of new technologies, combined with confusing and manipulative political rhetoric, have dire implications for advocates of fair, accurate and inclusive representations of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in the multimedia world. (For example, the television show *Ellen* has received content ratings far outweighing the level of subject matter presented.) The national debate concerning the use of Internet filtering software has led GLAAD to advocate for the unrestricted access of vital information to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, as well as lend an important voice to the coalition of organizations and industry leaders concerned about preventing censorship and promoting free expression.

The complex political implications — and manner in which GLAAD becomes part of this national discussion — are extremely sensitive. As we saw with the TV ratings/V-chip controversy, the underlying goal of ratings and V-chip advocates became clear only towards the end of the battle. The fight was not about children's rights or quality of content in television programming, but the imposition of conservative political ideologies to change the content of television programming to suit their views. The confusing system that was created for rating television programming served only as the first tentative step towards censoring content. As Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT) said in a statement following the recent ratings decision, the issue is not about "rating the garbage" but how to "get rid of the garbage."¹ He went on to say that "we will continue to protect our right to legislate where and when the quality of television programming requires it." Much of the rhetoric is used in discussing content on the Internet as well.

The major difference — and reason for swift response by GLAAD — between the television ratings/V-chip and Internet filtering software is that the technology for filtering Internet content is easily available and already in use by millions of users. (The V-chip will be included by all television manufacturers as a way to allow parents to block television shows by using a ratings system.) There is the added challenge that many users are unaware of profound and value-laden differences between filtering software products.

GLAAD's task is to make the public aware of filtering software differences and explain how they impact on all children and youth, particularly those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. GLAAD is not advocating the diminishment of parental authority nor are we asking for any kind of "special treatment" in regard to content. We are merely urging discussion around the implications of filtering software for gay and lesbian youth in households where denied access to possibly life-saving information and support services could be catastrophic. GLAAD seeks to have an open, honest debate of the full ramifications of this new technology.

In a 1995 essay entitled "Rating the Net," which describes the effects of filtering software on the Internet and its users, Jonathan Weinberg, an associate professor at Wayne State University Law School, points out how easy a target the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community has become to content filters and rating systems. He writes:

"Sites discussing gay issues are commonly blocked, even if they contain no references to sex. SurfWatch, in its initial distribution, blocked a variety of gay sites including the Queer Resources Directory, an invaluable archive of material on homosexuality in America, and the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs. It responded to protests by unblocking most of the contested sites. Other blocking programs, on the other hand, still exclude them: Cyber Patrol blocks a mirror of the Queer Resources Directory, along with Usenet newsgroups including clari.news.gays (which carries AP and Reuters dispatches) and alt.journalism.gay-press. CyberSitter is perhaps the most likely to block any reference to sexual orientation, forbidding such newsgroups as alt.politics.homosexual. In the words of a CyberSitter representative: 'I wouldn't even care to debate the issues if gay and lesbian issues are suitable for teenagers.... We filter anything that has to do with sex. Sexual orientation [is about sex] by virtue of the fact that it has sex in the name.'"²

Our other challenge is working with the computer and technology industry developing this software, in cooperative fashion by clarifying the complex issues that lie behind the filtering of content that relates to the gay and lesbian community. The computer industry must be persuaded that wholesale filtering of content solely because it is about,

directed at, or contains information for the gay and lesbian community does not de facto categorize it as sexual and therefore requires screening. Software that would conduct a blanket shutdown of Web sites and newsgroups containing the word "gay" could easily filter out sites with no sexually explicit material. For example, this would shut down GLAAD's Web site, even though this would be akin to blocking the Anti-Defamation League or the NAACP for the work that they do.

At a recent White House briefing by President Clinton and Vice President Gore which followed a meeting of educational groups, children's rights groups and computer industry leaders, there was much discussion of creating a "family-friendly" Internet and "protecting children," but no comment about content and the implication for gay and lesbian Web sites.³ GLAAD is equally committed to

protecting children and young adults. As the use of filtering software becomes more common, more discussion on how this impacts gay and lesbian youth, and the broader discussion of the effect on content of gay and lesbian related Web sites will become more important.

At the "Internet Summit" being held in Washington, DC, GLAAD will have a voice in this process and help protect the rights of parents, gay and lesbian youth and other Internet consumers. Through working in coalition with industry leaders, child advocates, law enforcement and consumer advocates, GLAAD will contribute to this important discussion as well as educate the public about gay and lesbian issues and foster free exchange of information that is appropriate for children and young people.

Section 2

GLAAD, Internet Filtering Software and Online Censorship Issues: A Brief Overview

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For over a decade, GLAAD has been promoting fair, accurate and inclusive representations based on sexual orientation or identity in all forms of media. As the Internet has become a mainstream reality, GLAAD has been a leader in ensuring equal access for gay and lesbian people.

In 1995, GLAAD became aware of a new technology that affected gay and lesbian presence on the Internet. Filtering software was being developed to help parents filter the Internet for “indecent” materials. Through keyword blocking (the use of descriptors to block sites) and outright censoring, the world found gay and lesbian sites being filtered off the Internet. SurfWatch Software, Inc. had just released a software program called “SurfWatch” that “helps you deal with the flood of sexually explicit material on the Internet. By helping you to be responsible for blocking what is being received at any individual computer, children and others using your computer have less chance of accidentally or deliberately being exposed to unwanted materials.”⁴

Online activist Christopher Kryzan noted that SurfWatch’s database of censored sites had included many that “clearly do not contain sexually explicit materials, but rather provide information, education, resources and calendars of events.”⁵ Among the blocked information services were those provided by the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs, the Queer Resources Directory, the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Association of the University of California at Berkeley, and the Maine Gay Network.

GLAAD joined OutProud! in its criticism of the software, notifying its members and the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community of SurfWatch’s discriminatory database.⁶ Within a few days, a representative from SurfWatch contacted Kryzan and assured him that the informational, educational and support sites would not be blocked in the next release of the software. SurfWatch also put together a site review advisory board that would include members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

In November, 1995, GLAAD criticized the Massachusetts-based Microsystems Software, Inc. for its software “Cyber Patrol,” which was also blocking gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender resources.⁷ Some of the sites that were being

blocked were the San Jose gay and lesbian newspaper, OutNOW!; gay and lesbian community center sites around the country; and resource guides for gay student and employee groups.

GLAAD promptly encouraged its members to write Microsystems Software with concerns that important resources were being blocked. Almost immediately, Richard Gorgens, Microsystems’ Chief Executive Officer, contacted GLAAD to discuss Cyber Patrol and how it affects the gay and lesbian community. Gorgens explained that their Internet researchers, made up of educators and parents, chose sites blocked following a criteria of “12 well-defined sections based on their opinion.” He assured GLAAD that gay and lesbian sites would not be considered a part of that criteria.⁸

Taking from what was learned during its work with SurfWatch, GLAAD’s suggestion that Microsystems Software invite gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to be part of the Internet research committee was received with much enthusiasm. In February 1996, Microsystems Software held true to its word and developed a CyberNOT Oversight Committee for Cyber Patrol, appointing GLAAD as a charter member to act as an advocate for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender sites up for review.⁹ The CyberNOT Oversight Committee is comprised of representatives from different areas of experience and expertise, including groups such as parents, teachers, clergy, the National Rifle Association, Anti-Defamation League, ACLU, GLAAD and women’s rights groups.

In December 1996, online service provider CompuServe deleted more than 200 Internet newsgroups from its worldwide system after a request made by a German prosecutor who was investigating “illegal” material being transmitted through CompuServe.¹⁰ While GLAAD’s research indicated that CompuServe was not asked to ban or censor gay and lesbian newsgroups, CompuServe did use the words “gay,” “lesbian” and “homosexual” as part of their blocking criteria. As it turned out, groups such as the gay, lesbian and bisexual youth support newsgroup, soc.support.youth.gay-lesbian-bi, and gay and lesbian journalism newsgroup, clari.news.gay, were blocked.

GLAAD then received a statement issued by CompuServe CEO Bob Massey that said, “I want to make it clear that regardless of how this issue is resolved, there are certain newsgroups that will not be added to our index.”¹¹ William Giles, a spokesman for CompuServe, said the provider was

working on a way to resume broadcasting a full range of Internet content to its subscribers.¹² While the statement GLAAD received did not specifically name which newsgroups would continue to be banned, GLAAD was troubled that CompuServe continued to confuse legitimate lesbian and gay newsgroups with child pornography and erotic newsgroups. In the meantime, GLAAD launched a campaign that alerted its members and the gay and lesbian community to consider other Internet service providers.¹³ CompuServe was also barraged by e-mails and letters, urging the company to reinstate gay and lesbian newsgroups.

“Our gay membership is an important segment of our audience, and that was reflected by the activities that we saw in light of the suspension of access...It showed that this is an active, vocal segment of our [subscriber] population,” acknowledged CompuServe spokesperson Jeff Shafer to the *Washington Blade*.¹⁴

After a month and a half of deleted gay and lesbian newsgroups, CompuServe finally reinstated all but five of the 200 newsgroups.¹⁵ The five that remained blocked were not gay and lesbian, but dealt with child pornography. CompuServe also installed free parental controls in the form of Internet filtering software Cyber Patrol.

In February 1996, the Telecommunications Reform Bill, which contained the highly controversial Communications Decency Act (CDA), was passed into law. The CDA would place heavy restriction on Internet publishing by making it illegal to post “indecent” materials. However, the CDA’s wording was so vague that it had the potential to make information about AIDS, safe-sex, abortion and information relevant to the gay and lesbian community illegal. It was now clear. GLAAD had to become the leader of ensuring equal access for the gay and lesbian community.

While the CDA was found unconstitutional by both a three-judge panel of the Federal Court in Philadelphia¹⁶ and by the United States Supreme Court¹⁷, GLAAD has warned of the danger of censoring gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender information and stepped up its fight against Internet censorship.

In January 1997, GLAAD criticized the manufacturer of the Internet filtering software NetNanny for its “audit trail” feature, which allows parents to check what sites and newsgroups their children have tried to access in their absence.¹⁸ While this may sound harmless, GLAAD finds this auditing

feature particularly dangerous to youth, particularly to those wrestling with their sexual orientation, but indeed for all youth. This kind of digital paper trail can lead to the accidental disclosure of a young person’s sexual orientation before she or he is ready, potentially causing tension and isolation within the family.

NetNanny did not block on the basis of sexual orientation or identity, however.

GLAAD informed its members and the gay and lesbian community of this auditing feature. After several e-mails and letters, Gordon Ross, Chief Executive Officer of Net Nanny, called GLAAD to discuss how NetNanny works and committed himself to working with GLAAD to finding solutions that would benefit both parents and all communities.

At the same time that it challenged NetNanny, GLAAD also criticized Solid Oak software company and Cybersitter, its Internet filtering software.¹⁹ Like NetNanny, CyberSitter provides parents with an audit trail function, but went a step further. CyberSitter actually blocks keywords such as “gay,” “lesbian,” “homosexual” and other words. While the software allows parents to choose whatever information they want to block from their children, gay and lesbian information is blocked regardless, a fact that is not made available in any literature for CyberSitter.²⁰

CyberSitter’s owners have made their anti-gay agenda public on several occasions. When Bennett Haselton from the teen online free-speech group Peacefire discovered various sites that were being blocked by CyberSitter, one of the sites that was mentioned was the National Organization for Women’s (NOW) Web site. Solid Oak president Brian Milburn told *News.com*, “The NOW site has a bunch of lesbian stuff on it, and our users don’t want it.”²¹

While Solid Oak denies allegiance with any organization, CyberSitter was at one point the favored Internet filtering software of religious radical group Focus on the Family, most probably due to Milburn’s alleged membership with the organization.

GLAAD is not only appalled by CyberSitter’s wholesale censorship of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender information, but also by Solid Oak’s gross misrepresentation of itself in not making buyers aware of its automatic blocking in its literature.

In June 1997, GLAAD became aware that, for the first time since CyberSitter, a new content filtering program outright discriminated against the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. PlanetWeb, the Web browser of the highly popular Sega Saturn game console, offered the option of blocking what was originally termed as "alternative lifestyles." This category offered three filtering levels: "1) Mention of alt.lifestyle: Impartial references to homosexuality, bisexuality, transvestites and transgender issues or lifestyles. 2) Approval of alt.lifestyle: Acceptance or approval of alternative lifestyles. 3) Ads for alt.lifestyle: Promotes alternative lifestyle or attempts to recruit the viewer into that lifestyle." ²²

GLAAD contacted both PlanetWeb and Sega of America, Inc. Both companies defended the content filtering program; claiming that since as it allows parents the right of choice, the program did not automatically filter out gay and lesbian information. While GLAAD respects and supports a parent's right to choose what information his or her child sees, PlanetWeb and Sega do not provide parents the option to choose to block out other entire classes of people, on such traits as race, gender, age, national origin or physical or mental ability. By singling out the gay community among these groups, these companies perpetuate the misconception that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are a "controversial ideology," sending a message that there is something implicitly wrong with being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

GLAAD challenged PlanetWeb and Sega to ask themselves if the same technology had existed before the civil rights movement, would they have offered the option to filter out civil rights information or positive representation of people of color. ²³ PlanetWeb founder Ken Soohoo told News.com that "he never would filter out a certain racial or ethnic groups. 'We're not in the business of selling prejudice here.'" ²⁴

A week after GLAAD contacted PlanetWeb and Sega, PlanetWeb took a step forward. ²⁵ While it did

not remove the option or provide more options, it did reword the anti-gay language of the filter. So, instead of "alternative lifestyles," it now offers the option to block "Gay, Lesbian and Transgender subjects." While it still offers filters of "positive" and "impartial" gay representations, it has added the option of blocking sites with "a negative representation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender subjects." At the same time, Sega of America's Chief Operating Officer, Bernard Stolar, sent GLAAD a letter explaining its position and asking GLAAD to put its suggestions in writing.

GLAAD has since written letters to both the companies, offering itself as a resource, and awaits a response.

In August 1997, GLAAD learned that InterGO Communication's search engine, SafeSearch, designed to assist families to "explore and enjoy the Internet without being exposed to objectionable sources." However, when GLAAD conducted searches for gay and lesbian sites that contained no sexually explicit materials and for those that offered important educational, informational and support resources about the community, it was shocked to see the results. ²⁶ Gay and lesbian youth support sites, such as the Web site for !OutProud!, The National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth, and Youth Assistance Online, were rated for "Mature" viewing only (17 years and older). National gay and lesbian organizations such as GLAAD and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) were rated for "Adults Only" (21 years and older).

GLAAD has tried to contact InterGO. As of this printing the company has not returned any calls or e-mail.

The Internet remains a concern for GLAAD. Access to it by the community is vitally important. GLAAD will continue to monitor developments in the Internet filtering and rating industry and will work with any industry leader that believes in equality for all communities on the information superhighway.

Section 3

The Communications Decency Act and Its Future Impact: A Legal Examination

The Communications Decency Act and Its Future Impact: A Legal Examination

When the Supreme Court issued its decision in *Reno v. ACLU* (known colloquially as “the CDA decision”), lesbians, gay men and advocates of free speech everywhere heaved a collective sigh of relief at the finding of the Justices, thinking that the thriving and vibrant community which they had formed on the Internet would live to see another day. Unfortunately, the day was short lived. It seems a new Internet filtering software is announced almost every day that either through unwitting ignorance or outright homophobia tears at the very fabric of the CDA decision.

The Justices writing for the majority had several concerns regarding the constitutionality of the CDA. One such concern was that free speech would be stifled due to the fear that of all those that would read it, one or more might be minors, thereby opening up the author to criminal prosecution. The Court found that this burden was unreasonable, and that adult speech should not be compromised. In previous decisions (*Butler v. Michigan*, *Bolger v. Youngs Drug Products*), the Court had affirmed the rights of adults to access information which might not be appropriate for children, saying the effect of such blanket censorship was not unlike “burn[ing] the house to roast the pig.”²⁷

Internet filtering software is not unlike setting every house on fire to try and burn a pig whose whereabouts are unknown. The software companies, in the interest of retaining what they see as proprietary information, refuse to list either the specific criteria used in blocking Web sites and newsgroups, or else they will give a vague list of categories, but nothing concrete in terms of what is being blocked (e.g., URL addresses). What this means to an individual who brings the software home is that they will never know what they are missing in particular unless they have vast prior knowledge of Web sites and their content. This changes the process of “surfing the Web” into an activity more like looking at the Web through someone else’s glasses.

The CDA decision explicitly granted the Internet the highest form of protection with regards to speech.²⁸ One of the primary reasons is the active role a user must take in pursuing particular materials, whether newsgroups, Web sites or chat rooms. The odds of someone simply happening onto offensive or obscene material are slim, with-

out the user’s either knowing the site address or by using a search engine and entering keywords that would pertain to the material (e.g., “sex,” or “Nazi”). This level of participation is much different than television or radio, which has more limited protection, due to the ease with which anyone, including minors, can have access to them.

Another finding in *Reno v. ACLU* was that the Communications Decency Act was not the “least invasive” way to accomplish what the law set out to do—protect children from material which was either “patently offensive” or “obscene” (these categorizations were problematic in themselves, since they define different types of speech.) Because the CDA stifled all speech in a effort to protect a particular set of users, it reduced the level of discourse to “the sandbox.”²⁹ The Justices were adamant in their holdings that the nature of the Internet “is as diverse as human thought.”³⁰

PARENTAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Supreme Court has affirmed and reaffirmed the rights of parents to raise and nurture their children as they see fit. This of course would include protecting them from material which they feel is harmful or detrimental to their upbringing.

However, one should be cautioned: one parent’s standard may be much broader (or narrower) than another’s. Because filtering software does not alert parents to the scope and breadth of the sites and information it removes, parents using the software, thinking that only obscene matter is being hidden, may instead find themselves and their children in a vast wasteland of homogenous infotainment with little of the substance and diversity that makes both the United States and the Internet the democracies that they are. It must be remembered that parents are not a monolithic entity; an estimated six to thirteen million American children have at least one gay or lesbian parent.³¹ We are certain that the parents of those children would want to have access to informational Web sites that would help their children not only learn about the different types of families that exist, but would allow them to connect with others in their peer group, so that they might not feel alone or isolated.

Also, the parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth may very much want to be able to access sites for parents, such as that for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), so that they too can meet and talk with other parents who may be looking to share their experiences with others, and gain the knowledge

of other like-minded people. They may also want their children to be able to meet other lesbian and gay young people, so that the pain of being different can be eased by having friends who share similar experiences.

The filtering software companies tend to assume all parents are the same. By using broad categories, and refusing to be explicit in their listings of criteria for exclusion, they are actually closing themselves off to a market that might otherwise be interested in making sure that their children see age-appropriate material (i.e., that all explicitly sexual and pornographic material be blocked but not all matters relating to sexual orientation). Unfortunately, many of the software companies, along with many in the general public, mistakenly think all materials pertaining to the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender community are sexual and therefore “patently offensive” in nature. This is not only untrue, but insulting to the community—there are numerous cultural, social, political and artistic sites for lesbians and gay men that have little or nothing to do with sex (and many of these sites are blocked by such software, simply for the use of the words “lesbian” or “gay,” including square dancing, school alumni groups and youth discussion groups).

Let this be very clear: The right of parents to raise their child as they see fit is primary in the discussion of this issue. Adults have the right, as affirmed by the decision issued in *Reno v. ACLU*,³² to have access to speech that is not appropriate for minors, and the Internet is protected from interference in this way. Parents may well choose to use one of the many softwares to prevent their children from accessing sexually explicit sites. But parents may not know what else they are missing when purchasing this software. A disk with computer code cannot replace parent-child discussion and interaction.

THE MORE FREE SPEECH SOLUTION

GLAAD’s position is that the solution to the debate around the Internet and obscenity rests on three basic tenets: A greater understanding of issues of sexual orientation as being about more than just sex; a more active parental participation in the Internet activities of their children; and a greater faith of the values of free speech which makes our country and the Internet fertile soil for free thought. We also believe that the filtering software companies have begun what is a misguided attempt to build a business, in part, out of using scare tactics that scapegoat and misrepresent the

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. These same companies, when questioned about how they develop their exclusionary profiles, state that they’re filling a market need; however, when asked about blocking sites based on blatantly biased criteria (such as race), these same companies recoil in horror at the very suggestion of such blatant “discrimination.” GLAAD maintains that the invisibility enforced by filtering software is plainly discriminatory, and singles out gay people for punitive treatment based on stereotypes, misperceptions and prejudice.

PARENTING IN A FREE INTERNET WORLD

As with any topic that may make parents uncomfortable, oftentimes a discussion doesn’t arise until a child actually encounters a situation which makes a dialogue imperative. Many educational advocates would suggest that these conversations happen before an incident occurs, and the Internet should be no exception.

While there is little chance that a child or adolescent will accidentally “happen upon” sexually explicit material on the Internet (to gain access, you have to search for it, or know the address, and then are repeatedly warned to sign off if you are under legal age), that doesn’t mean that parents shouldn’t acknowledge its existence. Similarly, as children are told to protect themselves on the street from strangers (don’t speak to anyone you don’t know, don’t ever go anywhere with someone you don’t know, always run into a store if you don’t feel safe), these same “virtual” precautions should be introduced to children who use the Internet (never give out personal information, never arrange to meet anyone you’ve spoken to online without having the parents speak first, etc.) In this way, not only do parents and children build trust and deep bonds, but the chance that the child will be able to react in a dangerous or difficult situation correctly are much higher than if parents wait until a crisis.

Finally, one of the most important things about free and open access to the Web for young people is the ability for those adolescents who are dealing with understanding their sexual identity to find other young people to talk to. Adolescence is a time of great excitement and struggle as one’s self-knowledge and identity grow; learning that one is “different” is exceptionally difficult at a stage when what seems most important is to fit in. The information provided by the Internet to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth is nothing less than life-saving in some cases (see Youth Testimonials, Appendix B). By limiting or

eliminating access to these Web sites, children may think they are alone, isolated, and “the only one” in their town or city. This sort of emotional distancing can put young people at risk for behaviors meant to dull this pain, especially when they are unable or unwilling, or simply not ready, to talk about their sexual orientation with their parents. This entire situation can take place without the parents’ knowing there is anything wrong until it’s too late.

When it comes to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, information literally saves lives. And while filtering software eliminates many of these resources from the landscape, audit trail software allows access to many sites, but then tracks where a user goes, thereby keeping a record of all the sites accessed by a user. (Sometimes, filtering software also includes an audit trail feature.) This enables parents to track their children’s computer usage (or for a business to track an employee’s usage).

Aside from violating an expectation of privacy, whether legal or moral, the audit trail presents a threat to lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender young people, who may, in trying to answer questions they may have about their sexual orientation, reveal themselves to their parents at a time when they are not ready to deal with the issues with others. Additionally, those children whose parents may, through ignorance or outright hatred based on stereotypes, have homophobic values, can be put at risk for verbal, emotional and physical abuse, without knowing how or where to turn for help.

Both filtering and monitoring software present ethical problems for parents: Does one take the risk that one’s child might encounter material on the Internet that one does not want him or her to see, or does one install software that may leave them with a narrow and inaccurate world view, blocking far more than just sites deemed “inappropriate” by parents?

What parents can do is seek out suitable materials and sites for their children. Organizations like the National Education Association and the American Library Association are working to create “family-friendly” Web sites that children can visit and that are linked to many other sites of educational value. Parents who make the investment of time and education (for themselves) will see the payoff in the future with children who are mature and capable of negotiating the diverse attitudes, values and beliefs as presented on the Internet.

HOW SITES CAN PARTICIPATE IN A FREE INTERNET

Individual sites can help keep the Internet free and democratic in a number of ways.

There is no requirement (at least yet) that sites participate in a ratings plan. The more that sites refuse to participate in a plan for sites to “name their own censorship,” the more likely it is that they will lose momentum and not become standard operating procedure, like network television, which now operates under two different ratings systems, neither of which are particularly effective or liked.

Internet Service Providers should make sure that their resources for children and young people are interesting and engaging: These areas should be where children want to go when they log on. This will help maintain a free Internet, because when more sites are available for children, the less concern will be that children will be surfing aimlessly and “happen upon” inappropriate material.

Adult site operators should make explicit warnings regarding materials that they publish. Warnings should be given, and they should comply with whatever safeguarding procedures they can reasonably take to make sure that young people are not accessing their sites.

Sites that are unfairly blocked by filtering software should form coalitions to publicize and raise awareness about the issues of Internet censorship and bias.

As stated in the ACLU report on cyberliberties, *Fahrenheit 451.2: Is Cyberspace Burning?*:

*“It should go without saying that under no set of circumstances can governments constitutionally require anyone—whether individual users or Internet Service Providers—to run user-based blocking programs when accessing or providing access to the Internet.”*³³

LIBRARIES: A SPECIAL CASE

The American Library Association’s Bill of Rights includes the following passages:

“I. [...] Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background or views of those contributing to their creation. [...]

“III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment. [...]

“V. A person’s right to use the library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background or views.[...]”³⁴

Contrast these ideals with current advertisements for filtering software such as X-Stop, which uses large type to scare libraries: “LIBRARIES MUST USE FILTERING SOFTWARE!”³⁵

In fact, libraries—whose mission is to give free access to information regardless of its source, author[s], or the person seeking it—would be severely compromised by filtering software and forced to comply with the values system of that software. In fact, the ACLU makes the case that utilizing filtering software on libraries constitutes

prima facie censorship. In its report on Internet filtering software, it states that “[t]he First Amendment prevents the government, including public libraries, from mandating the use of user-based blocking software.”³⁶

The future of the judicial cyberliberties fight may well be centered around blocking software and public usage. The “self-regulation” of the Internet may have a chilling effect on free speech for site overseers. Out of fear of either being blocked, or accused of mis-rating, many sites may refuse to carry speakers who might be deemed unacceptable, thereby negating the CDA decision in both intent and reality. Even GLAAD, while publicizing and criticizing sites such as godhatesfags.com, maintains the right of the speakers to have their say. What may well happen is that to defend the hard won rights to freedom of speech and expression, cyberlibertarians may find themselves in judicial and legislative battles for years to come.

Section 4

Internet Filtering Software: A Parent's Perspective

The Internet and Gay and Lesbian Parents

by Jim Fagelson

Internet Filtering Software: A Parent's Perspective

The Internet and Gay and Lesbian Parents

The Internet has become one of the most useful tools in the education of our children, allowing them the freedom to explore information on different lands and people, research information contained within the greatest libraries of the world, be introduced to information that will broaden their views on issues important to them, as well as interact with their favorite cartoon characters and television personalities or play games. However, the Internet has also brought into our homes access to information and visual images that may not be appropriate for our children to view or that they are too young to understand.

We, as gay and lesbian parents, view some of the Internet information as an assault on our families; at the same time, we often desire and search out contact with sites that we may not want our children to see. The members of the Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI) have spent a significant amount of time discussing how best to protect our children from information and images that we, as a gay or lesbian individuals, may seek for ourselves.

THE PROBLEM

We have looked at many blocking systems that are commercially produced and have been disappointed with the philosophy used to generate these software packages. The blocking software, while intended to protect children from information and images that are considered for mature audiences or adults only, have taken a "clear-cutting" approach to protection. In devising a method to protect individuals from "objectionable" materials, the software producers have developed a process that is so sweeping in its discrimination that information necessary for the health and safety of our children has been blocked along with information and images that may be appropriate to block.

Many blocking systems have focused on certain keywords that the programmers feel would represent materials that should be viewed by adults or mature audiences. Such words as "gay" or "lesbian" have been blocked for containing information and images that would allegedly be considered inappropriate for children. As parents, we

have experienced the dilemma of wanting our children protected, but we want them to have access to sites that affirm our families and allow them the freedom to receive appropriate information and assistance when they have questions.

GLPCI has an organization that was created by and for our children. COLAGE, Children of Lesbians and Gay Everywhere, provides information and assistance to children who have gay or lesbian parents. The Web page (www.colage.org) contains information on programs, access to newsletters and mailing lists and information on scholarships, as well as articles and self-help information that affirm the child's family, supports their living arrangements, helps them address homophobic remarks by friends, family and classmates, and provides access to local support groups throughout North America. The Web page is written by children, for children. No information is contained on this page that is "objectionable" in any way. The site is intended to help a child who has just learned that their mother or father is gay or helps them to understand that you cannot judge a person based upon stereotypes or rumors. However, this site is blocked because it contains the words, "gay" and "lesbian". This preconception by the software developers as to what designates adult material blocks a site that provides vital information and support for children.

With the blocking software in place, our children see a world devoid of people like themselves and their family. Our children live in a variety of family structures, all of which are legitimate and deserve support and validation. However, the blocking software sends a message that being gay or lesbian is somehow "bad" or "inappropriate." This is the exact message that we as parents are trying to avoid.

The GLPCI Web site (www.glpci.org) is likewise blocked due to the "keyword" mentality that has been used to design the software. When a parent first starts to realize that they may be gay or lesbian, they search for information and help. A person looking for "gay fathers," "lesbian mothers," or "gay parents" would be told that all the sites are "adult content." Since they would be looking for support and information, they would assume that such information does not exist. GLPCI receives contacts daily that express relief when they have found our site and realize that they are not alone. They realize that they are not the only gay parents in the world and that there are organizations available to assist them during their coming out period.

Too often images of gays and lesbians have been defined by the 15-30 second news clips concerning demonstrations or gay pride events. Few scenes shown contain an average family. Seldom does the news show a lesbian couple with a stroller or the gay father with his children. The pictures of gay and lesbian parents do not make the news because we are truly "the family next door," nothing remarkable and nothing unusual. Our site affirms that we are parents first, that our children are the most important elements of our life, and that there are millions of people just like us. The blocking software prevents this information from being seen and supports the negative view that, somehow, gay parents are an aberration and should be hidden.

OUR CONCERNS

Surveys have shown that there are more than 25 million gay and lesbian parents, their partners and children in the United States.³⁷ The blocking software packages seek to hide these individuals and prevent them from seeking each other out for support and understanding. This software prevents the dissemination of information that might prevent a child from committing suicide because they feel that they are totally alone. The software is similar to a lock on the closet door it allows a very narrow view of the outside, but allows neither a full view of the diversity contained within the gay and lesbian community or the support for our dual roles as parents and gay or lesbian individuals.

We seek to protect our children from the harassment and visual invasion of inappropriate images. The thrusting of images of naked men and women into the lives of our children is a problem not only on the Internet, but also in books, magazines, television and motion pictures. GLPCI encourages parents to have an open dialogue with their children, to discuss their children's fears and concerns, to have their children ask questions if they do not understand what they see or hear, and to become involved, as active viewing partners, in the use of the Internet, television, or reading materials by children. Only through an open discussion can a parent raise a child that questions what is "right" or "wrong" with the world around them, and does not blindly accept what they are told.

In order to protect our children from the inappropriate images that can be found on the Internet, many of us have used various blocking devices. These devices are not foolproof. They sometimes do their job with a rigid single-mindedness that leads one to question the programmers original purpose. GLPCI is concerned when library materi-

als and general health information is blocked because of the name of the offering institution. Parents in New Jersey have told us about not being able to access the Public Health Service in Sussex County or the library in Middlesex County because the letters "s-e-x" appear as a unit in their name. Members in Massachusetts have likewise stated that certain sites are blocked because the letters "a-s-s" appear in Massachusetts or that site providing information on breast cancer are blocked because of the term "breast".

In a recent discussion among gay and lesbian parents who were trying to find a way to protect their children from pornography on the Internet, one father talked about helping his son with a homework assignment. He was searching the Internet for sites on eagles. This child linked to a site entitled "spread eagle" and came upon a photograph of a naked woman in a "spread eagle" position. This happened even with blocking software installed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An easy solution does not exist. What is appropriate for one family would be inappropriate for another. However, GLPCI would like to suggest two methods that warrant further discussion and refinement:

Parent Controlled Software - GLPCI would suggest that blocking software allow a list of blocking words that can be set by the parent so that the parent, not the programmer, decides which words are deemed inappropriate and which are allowed. The selection section could be password protected so that the parent could modify the type of blocking to adjust for the age of the child or their need for information. An appropriate feature may be a multiple password system that could allow different control level for different children in the family. By providing separate passwords for each family member, the parent could control the viewing patterns of each child separately, while allowing the parents complete and free access to all sites just by using their password.

Rating System - A second suggestion would be the development of a rating system, similar to that used by motion pictures or the one recently inaugurated on television. A site could be rated according to the type of images or information contained therein. The rating panel would have to be representative of the entire Internet user population and should not represent a particular political or religious bias. The blocking software could then

be set to allow various levels of ratings, blocking those sites that are of an inappropriate rating or are "unrated." While each of these methods could be subject to abuse or controversy, GLPCI feels that they offer a start to a dialogue that will lead to a proper method of protecting our children while also protecting our constitutional rights to free speech and freedom of choice.

Jim Fagelson is a director for The Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI) which is an advocacy and support organization of lesbian mothers, gay fathers, bisexual and transgender parents, their partners and children. They are located in nine countries and have over 100 chapters. GLPCI can provide some information and referrals on custody issues, adoption, surrogacy, alternative insemination, and the rights of co-parents. GLPCI can be reached at glpcinat@ix.net-com.com

Section 5

Internet Filtering Software: A Youth's Perspective

Coming Out In Cyburbia

by Ben Jenkins

Internet Filtering Software: A Youth's Perspective

Coming Out In Cyburbia

Like many people, I've grown up knowing I was different. I began coming to terms with my sexuality around eighth grade. That year was perhaps the hardest I can remember. I left middle school certain of my sexuality, but uncertain of my future. I have always been interested in computers and upon entering high school, I was given the opportunity to have Internet access, e-mail and a computer with a modem to hook up at home.

At the time, the Web was just beginning to get big. Most Web sites were simple, Yahoo was unheard of, Netscape was in version .b94. I logged in to a few public UNIX boxes (bulletin board services), I surfed the Web. And then I found IRC. IRC stands for Internet Relay Chat, which is a global network of servers which allow users to connect and talk to other people in various different rooms. I knew I was either gay or bisexual. Once on IRC, I realized that it was a place where I might be able to find other teenagers like myself. I tried #gayhelp, and #gayteen. I spent a lot of time in #gayteen for the first few months. When my real life friends began showing up on IRC, I always hid from them when I was in gay channels. Nobody knew I was gay, because I was still closeted.

In the following year, I found numerous resources for gay youth on the Web. At the time they were not very organized, or easy to find, but they were there. It was more than I had in real life. Even though I've been raised in a very supportive and loving family and my hometown of Ann Arbor, Michigan, has a history of being liberal and gay friendly, the Internet gave me the strength to come out to all the people in my life. Thanks to the Internet, I could read what other gay teens my age had gone through, and that they were still going through. I could talk to them in "real time." I could read about "gay issues," gay people and gay everything, and all from the comfort of my room, I was able to be my true self.

The Internet has done two very powerful things for me. First, it has given me the opportunity to learn about myself, others and being queer. It's enabled me to be a happy queer teenager and has assured me that "yes, I am normal." Second, it has given me a platform from which to come out to my friends. As a neutral medium to say "I'm gay," the Internet

provided a non-threatening barrier between the reaction which I was scared to death about and the reality. A spur of the moment decision prompted me to come out to two good friends one night. It went beautifully. I saw them the next day and I beamed. They smiled. I can never remember being so happy.

Gradually, over the next few months and the summer I managed to come out to all my close friends. I also started meeting people who were gay in real life. I could talk to people about it, be my real self in real life. A friend from school had an elder brother who was gay with whom I have now become very good friends.

I now run a e-mail list for the University of Michigan's Office of Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgendered Affairs. I feel I'm giving back to the Net, helping out a community which has helped me.

Now I'm completely out of the closet — put to friends, parents, teachers, everyone. Now that I've got my life sorted out, I've taken a great interest in how the Internet affects other people's lives. The Internet helped me become a happy individual, and I want everyone to have the same opportunity.

Of late, there has been a lot of talk and controversy surrounding some of the material which can be found on the Internet. Many speak out about pornography and "inappropriate" material being available on the Web for children to see. Unfortunately, it seems that a lot of people's definition of "inappropriate" material extends to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues. I see this trend as an extremely disturbing sign that freedom of speech and access to information the Internet may be in harm's way.

I belong to an organization called Peacefire. Peacefire is a completely teen-run organization which is fighting for youth rights on the Internet. We believe strongly in an individual's right to free speech on the Internet, a medium which has always been free of censorship. We believe that everyone, especially youth, should have the right to access whatever material they want on the Internet.

Peacefire and I are concerned about legislation that attempts to censor the Internet by making certain classes of speech illegal. We are also very concerned about filtering or monitoring software, which parents or schools can install on computers. These two methods of Internet censorship pose

what is perhaps the most threat to free speech on the Internet today.

Legislation, such as the Communications Decency Act, could make content termed indecent illegal on the Internet. The CDA in particular outlawed the transfer of material which may be "damaging to minors." The definition, in theory, could extend to resources like sites offering safe sex information and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender sites. The CDA prevented many of the essential freedoms which Americans enjoy under the First Amendment. The Supreme Court (rightly) struck down the CDA in a landmark decision which will hopefully set a precedent for future Internet free speech cases.

On the other side of the spectrum, there is the software that individuals can install on their computers to protect their children from accessing material they do not believe is appropriate for them to see. Software like CYBERSitter, NetNanny and CyberPatrol all give parents control over which sites can and cannot be accessed on the Internet. The programs are installed on a computer, and deny access to any Web sites, IRC channels and even e-mail messages that contain so-called "inappropriate" or "bad" words. Some of these lists even include the words "sex" and "gay," not taking into account the information on that site. While software programs vary in their interpretation of "inappropriate," CYBERSitter goes so far as to block all gay content including the International Human Rights Commission, the National Organization for Women (NOW) and numerous other safe sex and political sites. It even blocks sites which are critical of its practices. Most disturbing of all, most of the products available today do not include a list of the content that is blocked.³⁸ A parent might install the software without knowing that numerous sites are blocked, thus (unwittingly) installing a possible secret political agenda being pushed by software companies.

In addition to being installed in homes, these products are also being installed in schools. School administrators, afraid of giving students access to pornography, information on constructing bombs, etc. are desperate for a way to limit children's access to the "bad" stuff. Without respect or rationalization they blindly install software which not only blocks pornography, but valid research material.

A scary feature of nearly all the products is the capability to monitor where users of the computer have visited. For instance, if I went to www.oasismag.com, a gay youth Web site, with a piece of Internet filtering software installed, the administrator of my machine could see that I had accessed that page. This provides homophobic parents or others with a very powerful harassment tool. A free society should not limit what children can or cannot access. Parents and authority figures should not try to limit a child's ability to gain knowledge. Diverse opinions and knowledge should be passed on, even if not everyone agrees with it.

Sadly, most of the Internet filtering software products today consider Internet sites containing information for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to be offensive. From blocking sites to filtering out the very words "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "faggot," most software sends the message gay is offensive, inappropriate, bad. This message is wrong and often prevents youth like me from accessing information of vital importance. Companies and people must learn that grouping gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as a category of people is detrimental to all of society.

Most of all, I worry about the gay youth, like myself, who are living out the daily nightmare of being gay in an unfriendly society. The Internet is a remarkable oasis, a safe haven and resource center for gay youth. The ignorance surrounding legislation and filtering software can only cause more harm to what has always been a safe place for gay youth.

I'm fighting hard to see that the truth about all of these issues is uncovered. The key is in education. Teaching people that censorship is wrong, that the Internet is a global community composed of millions of individual voices, and that silencing just one of those voices is harmful. People should be able to access information on the Net which is valuable to them. For me, and others like me, it is simply a safe place to be ourselves.

Ben Jenkins is a 17-year-old youth and is a member of Peacefire, an entirely student-run organization that fights censorship on and off the Internet.

Section 6a

Review of Content Filtering and Monitoring Software: *How They Impact The Gay and Lesbian Community*

Review of Content Filtering and Monitoring Software:

How They Impact The Gay and Lesbian Community

GLAAD has reviewed several of the most popular Internet filtering software on the market for the potential impact they could have on the lesbian and gay community. The criteria used were:

- Keyword blocking
- Ambiguous and/or discriminatory content filters
- Consultation with the gay and lesbian community
- Audit trail features

While some Internet filtering software may be better than others, GLAAD does not endorse any of these products. The information is here to make choices easier for those who are searching for Internet filtering software, yet would like to continue fair and equal access for the gay and lesbian community.

Bess

Manufacturer: N2H2, Inc. (800) 971-2622

Web page:

<http://www.n2h2.com/schools/phil.html>

Description: Bess is a server-based software with accompanying proprietary ratings. It was developed primarily for use in school computers.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Bess filters based on several broad categories. One of the notable features for Bess is that it blocks sites that are discriminatory, which it describes as "Denigration of others' race, religion, gender, nationality and/or sexual orientation," so it appears as if N2H2 wants to make everybody happy. A worrisome feature could be Adult Content, which it describes as "any material that has been publicly labeled as being strictly for adults." Gay and lesbian sites, even those geared toward youth, have often been categorized as "adult" by many software companies and ratings systems. The software also blocks online-chatting, which is a feature that many gay and lesbian youth say has helped reduced isolation.

Cyber Patrol

Manufacturer: Microsystems Software, Inc.

Web Page:

http://www.microsys.com/cyber/cp_list.htm

Description: Cyber Patrol is a PC and server-based filtering software that provides proprietary ratings.

Cyber Patrol is used as the parental controls for both CompuServe and Prodigy. It is also being used in many libraries and schools.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Cyber Patrol has 13 categories, which it refers to as CyberNOTs, on which it bases its blocking criteria. Cyber Patrol does not specifically block gay and lesbian sites. A notable CyberNOT is "Intolerance" which it describes as "pictures or text advocating prejudice or discrimination against any race, color, national origin, religion, disability, or handicap, gender, or sexual orientation. Any picture or text that elevates one group over another. Also includes intolerant jokes or slurs." Cyber Patrol has invited the gay and lesbian community on its CyberNOT oversight committee of which GLAAD is a charter member. Microsystems Software has also made representatives available to discuss review of blocked sites. An unfortunate CyberNOT is "Sexual Education" which potentially blocks AIDS education sites.

CYBERSitter

Manufacturer: Solid Oak Software, Inc.

Web Page:

<http://www.cybersitter.com>

Description: PC-based filtering system with monitoring capabilities

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: CYBERSitter is the most discriminatory toward the gay and lesbian community. Using phrase blocking, CYBERSitter automatically blocks out certain words and phrases. Among the organizations banned are GLAAD's site as well as the homepage for the National Organization for Women (NOW), for its lesbian content. Bennett Haselton, co-founder of Peacefire, a teen group that objects to Internet filtering software, was able to crack CYBERSitter's encryption codes to find that CYBERSitter secretly blocks keywords and phrases such as "gay community,"

“gay rights,” “homosexual,” “lesbian,” “bisexual” and others. To top it off, CYBERSitter also has a monitoring system or audit trail, which alerts parents as to which sites and newsgroups were accessed in their absence. This is a very dangerous feature for gay and lesbian youth, especially to those who live in families and schools within the extremely conservative market that are most likely to buy this product. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation.

Cyber Snoop

Manufacturer: Pearl Software

Web Page:

<http://www.pearlsw.com/csnoop/snoop.htm>

Description: PC or server-based monitoring software designed for home, school or workplace.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Cyber Snoop does not block Web sites, it monitors them and provides an audit trail for parents, teachers and employers. Audit trails are a dangerous feature for gay and lesbian people. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation. For the gay and lesbian employee, it can potentially mean the loss of job due to lack of non-discrimination policies.

Internet Filter, The

Manufacturer: Turner Investigation, Research, and Communication and J.D. Kofinoff Software Ltd.

Web Page: <http://www.turnercom.com>

Description: PC or server-based blocking software, geared for the home, school and work.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: The Internet Filter relies on keyword blocking, which has the potential to produce the most censorship. Users can easily plug the words “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “transgender,” “homosexual,” etc. Even a gay-friendly user could find themselves blocking gay and lesbian sites if that person tries to block the word “sex,” as “sexual orientation,” “same-sex,” “homosexual” and “bisexual” contain the word “sex.” The Internet Filter also monitors activity, providing parents, teachers and employers a list of sites that a youth,

student or employee tried to access. This is a dangerous feature for gay and lesbian people. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation. For the gay and lesbian employee, it can potentially mean the loss of job due to lack of non-discrimination policies.

Internet WatchDog

Manufacturer: Algorithm, Inc.

Web Page:

<http://www.algorithm.com/internet/watchdog.html>

Description: PC or server-based monitoring software, designed for home, school or workplace.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Like CyberSnoop, Internet WatchDog does not block Web sites, it monitors them and provides an audit trail for parents, teachers and employers. Audit trails are a dangerous feature for gay and lesbian people. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation. For the gay and lesbian employee, it can potentially mean the loss of job due to lack of non-discrimination policies.

KinderGuard

Manufacturer: InterGO

Web Page:

<http://www.intergo.com/tour/kguard.htm>

Description: PC-based filtering/blocking software for use at home and at schools

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: KinderGuard is the built in filtering software for InterGO, a filtering Web browser with other utilities built-in such as an address book and e-mail. InterGO uses Teachsoft’s “whitelists,” which are approved sites for families. Remarkably, none of these sites contain any gay or lesbian contents. KinderGuard, however, is used when more exploring of the Internet occurs. While it uses its own proprietary rating system, KinderGuard is said to be PICS-compliant and is compatible with SafeSurf. InterGO boasts that “KinderGuard rates Internet sources for sexual and violent content through in-house editorial review, a Web crawler that searches for objectionable termi-

nology, and an automated customer feedback system. The company then applies a rating code established by video game manufacturers (EC - Early Childhood; KA - Kids to Adults; T -Teens; MA - Mature Audiences; and AO - Adults Only)...This emerging standard gives parents and educators explicit control over access to sex, violence, profanity, and other types of objectionable material. Unfortunately, most of the sites that are gay and lesbian are marked for Mature Audiences or Adults Only. In fact, most gay and lesbian youth groups, such as !OutProud! and Youth Assistance Online, are suggested for "Mature" audiences. Most gay and lesbian national organizations, such as GLAAD's own site and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG), are rated for "Adult Only."

LibrarySafe

Manufacturer: netFilter Technologies

Web Page: <http://www.librarysafe.com>

Description: LibrarySafe is a server-based filtering software designed for public libraries and classrooms.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: LibrarySafe uses a three-tiered filtering system. This includes a Site Database, which contains "Web sites containing sexually explicit, fraudulent, and other materials inappropriate in a public library," Rating Codes; and "Stop Words," which the company describes as indicating "the presence of sexually explicit or otherwise inappropriate material." For its filtration device, LibrarySafe uses netFilter, which does not seem to block gay and lesbian sites automatically. Youth groups and national organizations seem to be unaffected.

Net Nanny

Manufacturer: Net Nanny Software International Inc.

Web Page: <http://www.netnanny.com>

Description: Net Nanny is both a PC and server-based filtering software, mainly used on home computers, although some schools and libraries have started using this software.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Net Nanny does not offer spe-

cific blocking of gay and lesbian sites. This has been confirmed by the company itself, which says that it does not discriminate on any level. However, it does allow the option to name your own filters. So, a parent, school or library could easily create a filter that blocks out gay and lesbian information. It also allows keyword blocking, which means if someone blocks the word "sex," it has the potential to block out "sexual orientation" and "same-sex," two terms that can exist on the most innocuous of Web sites. The most troublesome feature on Net Nanny is the audit trail feature, or monitoring feature. This allows parents to see what information their child has tried to access in their absence. This is potentially dangerous to closeted youth, especially to those of homophobic parents. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation.

NetRated

Manufacturer: PC Data Power

Web Page: <http://www.netrated.com>

Description: PC-based monitoring software for use at home and at schools

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: NetRated (formerly Rated-PG) is designed to block "X-rated" and "violent" information from a child's experience not only on the Internet but on other forms of interactive media such as CD-ROM and video games. However, a list provided by the company shows that amongst its pre-programmed blocked sites are several gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender information and educational sites are blocked, including GLAAD's Web site, a site devoted to religious issues for gays and lesbians, Beth El Binah, a Jewish congregation that is also a member of the world congress of gay and lesbian Jewish organizations, the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs, the Boston Latin School Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Alumni home page and others. NetRated also gives the option of an audit trail for parents. This allows parents to see what sites their children have tried to access in their absence. This kind of audit trail is always dangerous to gay and lesbian youth, especially closeted youth of homophobic parents. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation.

Net Shepherd

Manufacturer: Net Shepherd Inc.

Web Page: <http://www.netshepherd.com/>

Description: Net Shepherd is a PC or server based software that offers PICS-compliant ratings system.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Net Shepherd tries to be democratic in its "World Opinion Rating Service." The goal is to place the ratings within the hand on the Internet community rather than raters. Web sites and newsgroups are then rated for two levels: six maturity levels (General, Child, Pre-teen, Teen, Adult and Objectionable) and five quality levels (1 through 5 stars, with 5 stars signifying excellence). A search for "gay" through their filter demonstration pulls up ratings for sites such as Northampton Area Lesbian and Gay Business Guild, Texas Gay Bars and Gay Rights, all of which it rates as suitable for general audiences (or all audiences). A search for lesbian produces similar results. However, ratings could possibly change if more anti-gay raters become involved.

NetSnitch

Manufacturer: NetSnitch LLC

Web Page: <http://www.netsnitch.com>

Description: PC and server-based monitoring software, designed for home, businesses and institutions.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: NetSnitch operates like other monitoring software. It does not block Web sites, it monitors them and provides an audit trail for parents, teachers and employers. Audit trails are a dangerous feature for gay and lesbian people, as a forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation. For the gay and lesbian employee, it can potentially mean the loss of job due to lack of non-discrimination policies.

PlanetView

Manufacturer: PlanetWeb, Inc.

Web Page: <http://www.planetview.com>

Description: PlanetView is a content filtering service offered by the PlanetWeb Web browser.

The browser is available only on the Sega Saturn game console.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: PlanetView offers 13 different content filters. Amongst the content filters is the option to block "gay, lesbian and transgender subjects." Previously entitled "alternative lifestyles," this filter offers three filter levels, labeled as such: 1) Informational: Information regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender subjects presented in an impartial, informative manner. 2) Promotional: Site content presents a positive representation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender subjects. 3) Opposing: Site content presents a negative representation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender subjects." The company argues that the filters are only options chosen by demand from consumer market. GLAAD believes that offering the option sends the message that sexual orientation in and of itself is a "controversial ideology" rather than a class of people such as people of color and women.

Smart Filter

Manufacturer: Secure Computing Corporation

Web Page: <http://www.webster.com/>

Description: Server-based filtering and monitoring, designed for blocking at corporations.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Smart Filter claims to have the most comprehensive URL database which spans 27 categories. One of the filters is "Lifestyle," which it describes as "... tend[ing] to be related to discussions or material relevant to an individual's personal life whether it be unique characteristics, orientation or proclivities. They may include such things as men's groups, "Generation-Xers," gay and lesbian discussions, senior citizen clubs, transgender, vegetarian, naturism etc." Smart Filter also provides an audit trail for employers. Audit trails are a dangerous feature for gay and lesbian people. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can poten-

tially mean the loss of job due to lack of non-discrimination policies.

SurfWatch

Manufacturer: SurfWatch Software and Spyglass, Inc.

Web Page: <http://www.surfwatch.com>

Description: SurfWatch offers PC and server-based filtering. SurfWatch also serves as parental controls for America OnLine (AOL).

Impact on the gay and lesbian community: SurfWatch offers no outright content filter that blocks gay and lesbian sites. In fact, the company notes in its description of blocking features, "We do not block on the basis of sexual preference, only on sexually explicit materials." While the wording of the statement is antiquated (using "sexual preference" as opposed to "sexual orientation"), SurfWatch tries to uphold a universal standard. SurfWatch also consults with the gay and lesbian community when reviewing sites to be blocked.

WALL, THE

Manufacturer: Raptor Systems, Inc.

Web Page: <http://www.thewall.com>

Description: PC and server-based security software with filtering technology, designed for schools.

Impact on the gay and lesbian community: THE WALL is a firewall product developed by Raptor Systems to act as network security for school systems. As part of THE WALL, Raptor Systems offers an optional subscription service of WebNOTs, which are based on Microsystems Software's CyberNOT list for Cyber Patrol. Like Cyber Patrol, THE WALL does not block gay and lesbian sites specifically. Also like Cyber Patrol, THE WALL filters out intolerant sites, but also filters out sex education sites.

WebSENSE

Manufacturer: Net Partners Internet Solutions

Web Page: <http://www.websense.com>

Description: WebSENSE is a PC and server-based filtering software designed for home, schools, libraries and work places.

Impact on the gay and lesbian community: WebSENSE utilizes a URL database of over 70,000 URLs, spanning 28 categories. One of the filters is "Sexuality/Lifestyle." This category often refers to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. Also, the use of "lifestyle" is an antiquated term. WebSENSE also provides an audit trail for employers. Audit trails are a dangerous feature for gay and lesbian people. A forced revelation of sexual orientation can create strains on family relations as well as further feelings of isolation. For the gay and lesbian employee, it can potentially mean the loss of job due to lack of non-discrimination policies.

Section 6b

Ratings Systems

Ratings Systems

Ratings systems fall into several broad categories. One major distinction is based on where the ratings originate: the page's author (self-rating), a ratings board (third-party rating), or by users themselves (a vote-based system). Another major distinction is whether the ratings system is PICS-compliant or not. PICS ("Platform for Internet Content Selection") is not itself a ratings system, but rather a guideline for creating ratings systems which can all be used interchangeably on a browser or other Internet device but which may each have a different focus or intent. One could say that PICS is a ratings grammar within which ratings systems can be devised.

Keep in mind that even a well-intentioned system can fall prey to over-complexity. For example, a self rating system might include "anti-gay intolerance" as a ratings category, but could unintentionally lead homophobic site administrators to allow such intolerance or even allow other intolerant sites in the interest of allowing anti-gay material, thus leading to exactly the opposite effect the ratings system designers likely had in mind. Or, even if used as intended, an overly complex ratings system might prevent students and other users from intentionally reading bigoted or objectionable material so they can broaden their experiences and learn what is objectionable directly from the source. A simpler system allows an administrator the option to block those sites whose authors knowingly provide materials aimed solely at an adult audience.

In broad terms, vote-based and third-party ratings systems each offer more hazards to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community than do self-ratings. Vote-based systems are subject to the "tyranny of the majority" when faced with any ideas which are not agreed upon by clear, large majorities but instead by minorities or even large pluralities; they can lead to overly restrictive ratings being placed on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender content when comparable non-gay material is not rated as harshly. Third-party ratings can be similarly harmful when created by organizations with anti-gay sentiments or even by well-intentioned raters who are simply uninformed. Self-ratings do not seem vulnerable to either of these problems, but there still exists the possibility of abuse if governments, online communities, schools, or others mandate their use and/or provide penalties for misstated ratings; self-ratings can lead to self-censorship or a chilling of free

speech, both of which leave content based on sexual orientation or identity especially vulnerable.

ACF (Automated Collaborative Filtering)

Manufacturer/Authority: Alan Wexelblat et. al.

Web Page:

<http://wex.www.media.mit.edu/people/wex/rate-proposal-ACF.html>

Primary category: Vote-based

PICS-Compliant: No, but PICS-based ratings systems can probably be added to an ACF-based ratings network

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: ACF is a voting-based ratings system like Net Shepherd, but it allows for a much richer form of interaction in that the self-description of each user/voter is stored along with their votes. Then, for example, when a child uses an ACF-equipped browser, sites are rated and blocked based on the votes of parents whose responses to a questionnaire indicated tastes like their own. The voting is also relative to the final user, so that in the hypothetical example, the blocking is also guided by what like-minded parents would block from a user of his/her age and description. In this way, ACF seeks to create online communities of raters which can rely on themselves and others who share similar tastes to be the arbiters of what they block and do not block. ACF allows for other ratings systems to be indicated as trustworthy to one of the sub-communities that use it, thus allowing for externally-created ratings to be optionally applied. Although ACF is presented as an academic proposal, it has already been implemented in two projects, HOMR (<http://rg.media.mit.edu/homr/>), a community of CD shoppers, and Webhound (<http://webhound.www.mit.edu/projects/webhound/doc/webhound.html>), which uses "Feature Guided ACF" to seek out Web pages that are like a favorite Web page.

Although the document describing ACF is extremely well researched and informative, it does not seem to address problems specific to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth who might find themselves growing up in a family which is not tolerant of them. Parents of such youth using an ACF-based system might join an anti-gay online community, so the children would have few valuable Internet resources available to them. ACF is laudable in that it focuses as much on making subsets of sites more available in certain contexts (such

as HOMR's community of CD shoppers) rather than only the negative tasks of blocking, filtering, and negatively rating. In this light, ACF is not in itself objectionable, but like PICS, it is actually a rather values-neutral framework which can be put to good or poor use with regard to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender concerns.

CyberPatrol's CyberNOT PICS Service

Manufacturer/Authority: Microsystems Software, Inc.

Web Page: Overview:
http://www.microsys.com/pics/pics_msi.htm#PICS.MSI

Ratings criteria:
http://www.microsys.com/cyber/cp_list.htm

Primary category: Third-party ratings

PICS-Compliant: Yes

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: The CyberNOT PICS service rates sites on a scale of 0-8 in two fields: "sex" and "other". The 0 indicates no content in any of the sex category, 2 indicates there is content in one out of the "sex" categories, 4 indicates content in two of the "sex" categories, 6 indicates content in three of the "sex" categories, and 8 indicates content in four of the sex categories. For content in one of the "other" field, the number indicates the number of "other" topics found on the page. The "sex" field includes these categories: Gross Depictions; Sexual Acts/Text; Partial Nudity, and Nudity. There are descriptions for each of these that attempt to cover many exceptions, such as "wholesome nudity" which may be indicated by the source, such as a museum site, or the nature of the content, such as the fine arts. Mysteriously enough, there is also a "sex education" category which includes proper condom use. There is also an "intolerance" category which includes prejudice based on sexual orientation.

Although Microsystems appears to have tried to balance concerns such as artistic merit, intolerance and educational intent, their system contains the possibility that the opinion of the raters or of a user who succeeds in appealing a rating could get an important gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered related site blocked to large numbers of users. Also, due to the large amount of subjective judgment that goes into creating these often well-intentioned but complex ratings, there is a great possibility for

being too eager to rate gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender content as being of a prurient nature.

EvaluWeb

Manufacturer/Authority: Sserv, Cameron Kaiser, Computer Workshop

Web Page: <http://www.sserv.com/eval-uwweb/pics.html>

Primary category: Third-party

PICS-Compliant: Yes

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: EvaluWeb uses a text-scanning program to rate pages into one of only three categories which can be blocked at the discretion of the PC's administrator user: General Viewing ("no content on this site that would not be suitable for most children, and certainly none unsuitable for older children"), Parental Advisory ("mild expletives, suggestive imagery (not necessarily nudity) either pictorially or verbally, mild violence, frank discussion of controversial topics"), and Explicit Content ("vulgar or extremely profane language, crude or explicit discussion of bodily functions (especially sex acts or sexual organs), nudity (especially of a sexually explicit nature), Satanism/dark occultism, drug use or advocacy, graphic violence (depicted or written)"). There appears to be a review process in case a human user or one of the EvaluWeb staff feels a rating was in error. The EvaluWeb site itself warns of the possible dangers: "Some truly educational material may fall under this rating due to the subject matter and depth of discussion." Since computer programs are doing most of the reviewing with humans working only as backup, even with the best of intentions some very important sites to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth and others may be inaccessible. Any automated system would likely miss the special language usage that might be found in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender material and mistakenly rate that page respectively. It appears that these concerns have been subordinated to the concern for rapid, economical rating of pages. This in combination with the option to block unrated pages makes for an overly broad, possibly inaccurate and possibly dangerous ratings system.

IVSR (Internet Voluntary Self-Rating)

Manufacturer/Authority: Alex Stewart
(riche@crl.com)

Web Page:
<http://www.crl.com/~riche/IVSR/proposal.html>

Primary category: Self-rating

PICS-Compliant: No

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: As the name implies, this system consists of the application of a voluntary, self-rated tag to be placed anywhere within a Web page code, USENET posting, or mail message. The ratings areas are numerous and explanations of what each term describes are quite vague:

- L - language unsuitable for some readers
- M - material unsuitable for some readers (including "directions to perform illegal activities")
- S - textual descriptions of sexual acts
- D - disturbing textual content ("Stories about murdering people")
- E - controversial or extreme viewpoints
- N - pictorial depictions of nudity
- P - pictorial depictions of sexual acts
- G - disturbing pictorial content ("Kurt Cobain's dead body")
- U - unregulated medium (including unmoderated USENET groups)
- A - rating generated by automatic mechanism (in order to explain, for instance, that an e-mail rating "may have missed some subtleties").

IVSR has not been widely implemented since this document was first written in June of 1995 as a response to the so-called "CDA" and appears to be languishing. However, IVSR is presented in a thoughtful document that shows just how tricky ratings can be and at times even appears to be a tongue-in-cheek commentary on how ratings systems can disguise extremes of viewpoint; Stewart suggests at one point that "discussions about all religions deserve an 'E' rating".

As a model for other ratings systems creators, IVSR has had negative implications for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender-related material since it attempts to be fair by focusing only on the exact surface-level description of a page's contents rather than the contents as they appear in context or

intent. Under IVSR, safe sex education material, gay youth support forums, and commercially produced heterosexual pornography might all be lumped together. These would all then be treated alike for blocking purposes by well-intentioned teachers, parents, or librarians.

KidCode

Manufacturer/Authority: Nathaniel S. Borenstein, First Virtual Holdings

Web Page: <http://www.librarysafe.com/kidcode.html>

Primary category: Self-rating

PICS-compliant: No, but might be modifiable to become PICS-compliant.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: KidCode suggests adding additional age-based ratings and content keywords to the end of each URL. The age would be the minimal age that the page is suitable for viewing by. The content keywords would indicate possibly objectionable aspects of the page's content. Suggestions for keywords include: sex, violence, profanity, nudity, drugs, racism, and gambling. KidCode is not widely used but could cause negative impacts for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Internet users and content-providers since its categories are very broad and do not differentiate the rated content by context or intent and thus present difficulty for a self-rater of a site which contains sex-related material needed for subjects like safe sex and AIDS prevention, other health and safety concerns, news items, or matters of history or public debate.

Non-Intrusive Community Content Control

Manufacturer/Authority: Brian Behlendorf

Web Page:
<http://www.organic.com/staff/brian/community-filters.html>

Primary category: N/A

PICS-compliant: N/A

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Behlendorf's proposal is much more a set of goals for a ratings and filtering system to follow than it is a ratings system in itself.

However, it has been influential in the development of other ratings systems in that it seeks to be as unintrusive as possible.

Simply stated, NICCC proposes that all sites which are not related to the specific user community in question, or a group at work on a task, be blocked by a proxy server or other mechanism, such as in a school lab setting or for customers who use a certain ISP. The blocking must not intrude on others who are not part of a community. Like ACF, NICCC seems to have good intentions and to be focused on causing the fewest wide-ranging restrictions as possible. However, also like ACF, NICCC does not seem to consider the unique dangers this presents for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons who often find themselves members of online or other "communities" that do not value their concerns: schools, workplaces, and even families. For example, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth often grow up with non-gay parents, teachers, and librarians and who thus may not be sensitive to their needs. It is not as simple to leave such communities as it is in Behlendorf's example of switching ISPs should an ISP's ratings system become too restrictive.

Net Shepherd NSI CRS (Net Shepherd Inc. Content Rating Service)

Manufacturer/Authority: Net Shepherd, Inc.

Web Page: <http://www.shepherd.net/products/NetShepherd2.0/faqs.htm>

Primary category: Third-party ratings

PICS-compliant: Yes

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Net Shepherd claims to be the first PICS-compliant commercial ratings database service: a subscriber-based ratings system through which subscribers can anonymously rate sites based on "maturity level" and quality. Quality is rated one through five stars, maturity as "General," "Child," "Pre-teen," "Teen," "Adult," and "Objectionable"). NSI CRS makes the winning claim that their ratings system is "democratic". However, it is therefore subject to the whims of the majority, which may not always be sensitive to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues. Depending on the users whose opinions were solicited, content based on sexual orientation or identity is subject to misunderstanding and subse-

quently, to overly restrictive ratings. Furthermore, NSI suggests that all tabulation is done on a simple enough basis that in theory an interest group of any kind could "stuff the ballot box" by asking many members to subscribe and give restrictive and derogatory votes on sites with certain subjects. Like most ratings systems, NSI CRS is vulnerable to misuse through inappropriately restrictive setting being placed on computers for use in libraries, schools, and places of work. On the positive side, Net Shepherd does not currently block search terms (although linked sites that are retrieved may be listed but then blocked), USENET groups, chat or e-mail, all of which are important tools to at-risk gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth seeking information and support.

ORC (Objective Ratings Criteria)

Manufacturer/Authority: Ohio Public Library Information Network, Tim Kambitsch

Web Page: <http://pics.dayton.lib.oh.us/PICS/ORC.HTML>

Primary category: Self-rating

PICS-Compliant: Yes

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: ORC has two basic rules: 1) The only sites that are included in the ORC database are those which self-identify as having content appropriate only to adults over 18, and 2) the entire ratings database is available for public review (upon e-mailed request to orcMgr@dayton.lib.oh.us). Even sites which "common sense" might say are obscene are not included in the ORC database for ratings if they do not self-rate themselves as having content suitable only for adults 18 or over. ORC is in many ways a more fully realized implementation of the ideas presented in VCR [See page 33].

Using a properly configured browser (only Microsoft Internet Explorer at this time), this ratings systems appears to have only a small capacity for harm in that it only blocks sites that self-identify as carrying adult-only material. Sites containing art, health information, and counseling materials would not likely be labeled as adults-only. One possible misuse would be for employers or governments to restrict access for adults. ORC is not likely to be misused at this time by blocking any unrated sites since that would result in almost all sites being blocked. Although Behlendorf argues against self-ratings systems, they provide some of

the best assurances against misuse for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender content in that there is the least possibility for overly restrictive misinterpretation of content based on sexual orientation or identity by non-gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender raters.

RSACi (Recreational Software Advisory Council on the Internet)

Manufacturer/ Authority: Recreational Software Advisory Council on the Internet

Web Page: <http://www.rsac.org>

Primary category: Self-rating

PICS-Compliant: Yes

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: The RSACi system rates Web sites by different “descriptor” categories (sex, nudity, violence, offensive language [vulgar or hate-motivated]) and offers 5 different rating levels for content, from the more subtle to the extreme. By registering with RSACi, Web site owners fill out a questionnaire on which the rating will be based. RSACi is sponsored by Microsoft, IBM, SPA, USWeb, CompuServe, Point, Dell, Disney Online and CyberPatrol. The system has been integrated into Microsoft’s browser, Internet Explorer, and MicroSystem’s Cyber Patrol Software. CompuServe will also rate with the RSACi system. None of the descriptor categories or the rating levels seem to indicate singling out the gay and lesbian community. Also, notable is the definition for “Hate Speech,” which is a level of offensive language. It states that “ any portrayal (words, speech, pictures, etc.) which strongly denigrates, defames, or otherwise devalues a person or group on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or disability is considered to be hate speech.”

SafeSurf

Manufacturer/ Authority: Ray Soular and Wendy Simpson, SafeSurf

Web Page: <http://www.safesurf.com>

Primary category: Self-rating

PICS-Compliant: Yes

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: SafeSurf prides itself on being the most descriptive ratings system available, offering eleven categories by which to rate in hopes that it can describe both the content and the context of the content on the page. It also bills itself as the first voluntary self-rating system. The goal is to make ratings flexible. But it is troublesome how they separate “heterosexual” and “homosexual themes.” One could argue that there are no differences between the two and that neither heterosexual nor homosexual themes are considered more adult-oriented than the other. Since there are no ratings that separate people of color or gender, one cannot help but wonder if the separation was made to point out gay and lesbian Web sites, making it easier for parents to block these sites from their children.

VCR (Voluntary Content Rating)

Manufacturer/Authority: Solid Oak Software, Inc. (makers of CyberSitter filtering software, reviewed elsewhere in this document)

Web Page:

Overview: <http://www.solidoak.com/vcr.htm>,
Instructions for implementation:
<http://www.solidoak.com/vcr.txt>

Primary category: self-rating

PICS-compliant: No

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: As the name implies, VCR coding is done on a totally voluntary basis by each page author her/himself in the page’s HTML code within a META tag. No central authority can exist under the current specification of VCR for tagging others’ material since the code exists on the page itself. VCR is offered as a simple alternative to Webmasters of “adult or mature content Web sites” who want an easy and free-of-charge alternative to PICS-based ratings schemes and provides only two categories: “mature” (age 13 or over) and “adult” (age 18 or over). Solid Oak does not appear to offer any suggestions for how to judge what content falls into each ratings category.

In its current form, impact would be minimal. Because there is no ratings authority nor are there content standards, this appears to be a proactive method for Webmasters who are offering content which would normally only be offered to adults, such as erotica. These Webmasters would be seen as aware of content in stating so on their pages.

Furthermore, since there is no "all ages" category, there can be no browser-based "block all unrated sites" if relying on VCR ratings. Thus providing for minimal chance that useful, artistic, or enriching gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender content other than erotica would be so self-rated by Webmasters.

VCR provides a model for placing the onus of ratings on the content provider and/or Webmaster themselves rather than on parents or central and arbitrary authorities. If this ratings system remains as it is, it will provide a good, minimal amount of intrusion in that it is not centrally or arbitrarily imposed.

Like all ratings systems, the possibility exists for misuse. One such possible negative and misguided use of VCR ratings would be to make material available online but to arbitrarily rate any type of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender content as "mature" or "adult". VCR is probably not as likely to be misused in public settings such as schools and libraries since any content tagged as "mature" or "adult" would be tagged by the Webmaster and is therefore likely to represent material not normally in a library's collection. However, even this relatively non-restrictive system should always be allowed to be bypassed upon user's anonymous request if necessary.

Section 6c

Filtering or Rating Search Engines

Filtering or Rating Search Engines

Another alternative to Internet filtering software is the search engines that will either filter the Internet for information deemed “appropriate” for youth, or that will rate individual Internet sites.

SafeSearch

Web page: <http://www.safesearch.com>

Administered by:
InterGO Communications, Inc.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: InterGO, SafeSearch’s developer, claims, “Unlike other access control products, SafeSearch does not simply block access to objectionable sites. Working with the latest technology in search engines, SafeSearch helps you and your family explore and enjoy the Internet without being exposed to objectionable sources.” SafeSearch searches through its database of Web sites and assigns one of five ratings to the site (EC - Early Childhood; KA - Kids to Adults; T -Teens; MA - Mature Audiences; and AO - Adults Only). A search for gay and lesbian sites that contains no sexually explicit materials or that offer important support resources are rated so that they could be inaccessible to youth. Unfortunately, most of the sites that are gay and lesbian are marked for Mature Audiences or Adults Only. In fact, most gay and lesbian youth groups, such as !OutProud! and Youth Assistance Online, are suggested for Mature audiences. Most gay and lesbian national organizations, such as GLAAD’s own site and PFLAG, are rated for Adult Only.

Matilda

Web page: <http://aaa.com.au/matilda/>

Administered by: AAA World (Australian based)

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Matilda was developed by Australian-based AAA World as a multi-lingual search engine that would search the Internet and

assign a rating, based on the SafeSurf rating system. It appears as if Web site owners must submit their sites for a 12-month period. AAA World will then assign an age based rating. A search for “gay,” pulls up no Web pages, however, there are listings under “lesbian” and “homosexual.” The ratings assigned for these Web pages are “All Ages,” so it allows for some information about sexual orientation issues to be accessed by youth.

Net Shepherd

Web page: <http://www.netshepherd.com>

Administered by: Net Shepherd, Inc.

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Net Shepherd offers a demonstration search engine on its Web site. Web sites and newsgroups are then rated for two levels: six maturity levels (General, Child, Pre-teen, Teen, Adult and Objectionable) and five quality levels (1 through 5 stars, with 5 stars signifying excellence). A search for “gay” through their filter demonstration pulls up ratings for sites such as Northampton Area Lesbian and Gay Business Guild, Texas Gay Bars and Gay Rights, all of which it rates as suitable for general audiences (or all audiences). A search for lesbian produces similar results. However, ratings could possibly change if more anti-gay raters become involved.

Yahooligans!

Web page: <http://www.yahooligans.com>

Administered by: Yahoo! (Ziff-Davis)

Impact on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community: Yahooligans! is a database that was specially set up by Yahoo!, and is geared toward children from 7 to 12 years of age. Unfortunately, there are no lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender sites listed in the database. Not even Web sites for gay youth groups, PFLAG (Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) or COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), an organization for children of gay and lesbian parents, are listed in the database.

Section 6d

Suggestions For
Industry Leaders

Suggestions For Industry Leaders

GLAAD would like to take this opportunity to offer suggestions when planning new versions of software or for planning to create or offer filtering software:

- **Uphold a single, universal standard when rating gay and non-gay material:** Use the same criteria on gay and lesbian Web sites and newsgroups that you would with those that are non-gay. By offering the option, software manufacturers are sending a clear message to parents and children using the Internet that there is something wrong with being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The option should not exist in the same way that a software manufacturer would not cater to racists or sexists. Just as a company would not and should not support a filter that blocks sites that celebrate racial diversity or gender equality, the same consideration should be given to issues of sexual orientation.
- **Use URL-based blocking vs. keyword-based blocking:** GLAAD recommends URL-based blocking. A Web site or newsgroup should be blocked for its individual content, and not because certain words are used in those areas. For example, a blanket keyword blocking of the word "sex" could also block out innocuous sites containing the phrases "same-sex" or "sexual orientation."
- **Consider alternatives to audit trail features:** Audit trails can definitely open up conversation in a family, which is much healthier than censorship. However, for a closeted gay or lesbian child of anti-gay parents this will certainly cause problems. A gay or lesbian youth that is "outed" before he or she is ready can find him or herself at the center of the strains on family relationships, and may have further feelings of isolation. While GLAAD realizes that auditing features are often intrinsic to the nature of some of the software developed, alternatives should be found. When at all possible, auditing features should be left out of software.
- **Utilize inclusive advisory boards:** When at all possible, GLAAD recommends the creation of an advisory board made up of people from different areas of experience and expertise to review the sites to be blocked for upcoming versions of software. This allows

for fair discussion on Web sites and newsgroups that might be blocked. If an advisory board exists, invite members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community to be part of the process. Both SurfWatch and Cyber Patrol have had great success with gay and lesbian members on their review teams.

- **Adopt fair and equal access clauses:** GLAAD also recommends that the World Wide Web Consortium and other organizations and companies that might be involved in PICS adapt a clause encouraging raters to be fair when reviewing Web sites.
- **Use GLAAD as a resource:** By all means, GLAAD is here to assist in any way it can. When in doubt, please do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to answer your questions in regards to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.
- **Participate in GLAAD's proposed FAIRsite program:** See Section 7 of this report.

Section 7

FAIRsite:
A Proposal
For Future Ratings

FAIRsite

A Proposal For Future Ratings

FAIRsite is a proposed “rate the ratings” system that GLAAD will implement in future years as a guideline to Internet filtering software manufacturers, ratings providers, ratings boards, individual ratings judges, schools and parents. This will be GLAAD’s way of demonstrating either an Internet filtering software’s lack of attention to or discrimination against the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

GLAAD hopes Internet filtering software manufacturers and raters understand the importance of the Internet to gay and lesbian people and that they will be willing to comply with a fair, accurate and inclusive software and/or rating system.

This “rate the ratings” system is offered as a pragmatic response to the fact that filtering software exists now and is not likely to be legislated away. GLAAD shares the ambivalence of much of the online world with regard to filtering. However, just as legislation could not halt the free flow of encryption software technology, legislation cannot be expected to prevent parents from using software to attempt to control or monitor their children online. Rather FAIRsite allows individual consumers, libraries, schools and the market to act with a new awareness rather than in the dark of ignorance.

Currently, software and ratings systems often rely on endorsements from magazines, user groups and, increasingly, public interest groups. Software packages often carry relatively innocuous-looking seals which are copyrighted by a company or group and can only be used by sites or software which meet the group’s criteria or have won an award. In fact, Solid Oak’s CyberSitter has won the prestigious mainstream award “*PC Magazine Editor’s Choice*” and displays this seal prominently on their Web site. To those software and ratings systems that comply with the most fair and inclusive standards, GLAAD will award a “FAIRsite Seal.” The FAIRsite Seal will show that those filtering software and rating systems which bear its mark are not in conflict with the GLAAD mission.

The FAIRsite Seal will be good for one year after which the software or rating system will be reviewed for its fair, accurate and inclusive representation of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

Implementation/Ratings

The FAIRsite ratings system, like its name, derives from elements of the GLAAD mission statement. The implementation will fall mostly into two broad areas: a careful reading of the descriptions, documentation, Website, and packaging of the software or ratings system, and the testing of each system against a benchmark set of sites and content to examine how each new system compares. The benchmark set itself would be confidential until after the testing period at which point it would be announced along with results.

All publicity and announcements would be made with a caveat that, in most cases, the best filtering solution is not to use filtering software at all, but that the favorably-ranked software at least meets GLAAD’s FAIRsite criteria as outlined below.

1) Fair:

- The software/system does not treat lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender-related material differently than similar non-lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender-related material.
- The software/system does not allow for specific tracking of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender material nor does it encourage full tracking and resulting “fishing expeditions.” In general, preference would be given to omitting tracking features at all when they divulge specific users’ identities rather than showing that someone nameless in a department or household visited some site.
- The software/system is created to make it difficult to remove overly broad categories of materials with unintended (sometimes laughable) results. In general, this includes a preference for software which does not come preset with filtered forbidden words or which allows blocking on a page or word-by-word level of administrator-selected forbidden words. One example of a problem software would be software which blocks all incoming e-mails with the word “gay,” thus disallowing news that a friend suffered a “gay-bashing” or even that they moved to a town called “Gaylord.”
- The software/system does not actively or tacitly equate all lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender-related sites with some vice or criminal activity, such as “sites which allow or promote gambling” or “sites which promote drugs/alcohol/smoking.” For example,

a ratings systems does not have “gay content” as a broad category of objectionable material alongside “gambling sites.”

- The software/system does not allow tracking on an individual user basis or allow administrators to determine who is visiting sites with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender content.

2) Accurate:

- The software/system does not describe/rate/block material for any gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender-related subject area based on uninformed or outdated concepts (such as rating sites that “recruit” gays, sites which “endorse a lifestyle,” etc.) regardless of the effect of the system on possibly blocked sites. One example would be if the only problem with a system was the wording that existed in the PlanetWeb ratings system before they were contacted by GLAAD. [See pages 6-7]

3) Inclusive:

- The software/system should allow the current year’s benchmark sites to be read by appropriate age categories for those sites which are age specific. This will be an annually compiled list of sites which should be broadly available to any Internet user, with some limited set which should only be available to older children and adults.
- For software companies and ratings systems that have advisory boards, gay and lesbian people should be part of the discussion and advisory processes.

A proposed year-one benchmark set

Internet filtering software and rating systems will be evaluated annually as to whether they block these innocuous sites, newsgroups and other resources. Benchmark sites will be kept current.

1) Sites that contain valuable support information

- **PFLAG site:** <http://www.pflag.org>
- **Youth crisis referral line by LYRIC:** <http://thecity.sfsu.edu/~lyric/talkline.html>
- **Oasis Youth Magazine:** <http://www.oasis-mag.com>

- **!OutProud! site:** <http://www.outproud.org>
- **Youth Assistance Online:** <http://www.youth.org>
- [soc.support.youth.gay-lesbian-bi newsgroup](http://soc.support.youth.gay-lesbian-bi.newsgroup)

2) Sites for national gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender organizations

- **GLAAD site:** <http://www.glaad.org>
- **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) site:** <http://www.glsen.org>
- **Human Rights Campaign:** <http://www.hrc.org>
- **National Black Lesbian & Gay Leadership Forum:** <http://www.nblglf.org>

3) Sites which are descriptive or educational in nature:

- **Alan Turing, a celebrated gay scientist and mathematician:** <http://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/~ahodges/Turing.html>
- **ENDA text found on The Library of Congress’ THOMAS site, S.869 in the 105th Congress, which contains a definition: “The term `sexual orientation’ means homosexuality, bisexuality, or heterosexuality, whether the orientation is real or perceived.”:** <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/1?c105:./temp/~c105hvCs:e1891:>
- **Holocaust sites, as they relate to lesbians and gay men and whether those sites are treated the same as non-gay Holocaust content:**
 - (non-lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender content) <http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/helenr.html>
 - (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender content: symbolism of pink triangle) <http://www.enqueue.com/ria/triangle.html>
 - (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender content: history of the Holocaust that mentions most all targeted groups, from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum): http://www.ushmm.org/misc-bin/add_goback/education/5quest.html
- **News story searches and specific news stories about ENDA or the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy:** <http://www.excite.com/search.gw?collection=timely&trace=NT&search=ENDA>

- **A story from a typical American metropolitan daily newspaper, in this case, one about Episcopalian dissent over gay issues:**
http://www.phillynews.com/inquirer/97/Jul/29/front_page/EPIS29.htm

4) Sites which have important health information:

- **AIDS research articles available from NIH:**
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/htbin-post/Entrez/query?form=4&db=m&term=AIDS&dispmax=20&reldate=No+Limit>
- **News searches for stories about AIDS prevention:**
<http://search.main.yahoo.com/search/news?p=AIDS+prevention&n=10>
- **Links on McMaster University's "Illness: Health Care Information Resources Page" and others to the Mautner Project for Lesbians with Cancer:**
 - <http://www.sirius.com/~edisol/mautner/index.html>
 - <http://www-hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/cancer.html>

- <http://dc.yahoo.com/Community/Health/Organizations>
- **Hypothetical non-sexually-explicit e-mail from an anonymous re-mailer which is one friend's coming out to a schoolmate.**

5) A test to weed out simple-minded word searches which would lump too many things together, such as:

- **"Fairytale and Folktales from Around the World":**
<http://itpubs.ucdavis.edu/richard/tales/>
- **Online maps of the cities of Gay, WV and Gay, GA:**
 - <http://maps.yahoo.com/yt.hm?FAM=yahoo&CMD=GEO&SEC=geo&AD2=&AD3=gay%2C+wv>
 - <http://maps.yahoo.com/yt.hm?FAM=yahoo&CMD=GEO&SEC=geo&AD2=&AD3=gay%2C+ga>

Endnotes and Appendices

End Notes

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Appendix A

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is the Communications Decency Act?

The Communications Decency Act (CDA) was a vaguely worded piece of legislation that would have placed government regulation on the Internet. The CDA was signed into law in February 1996, but after a three judge panel voted it unconstitutional (*ACLU v. Reno*), it was put on hold until the Supreme Court could make a decision. In June of 1997, the Supreme Court struck the law down as unconstitutional (*Reno v. ACLU*).

2. What are Internet Filtering Software and Content Filters?

Internet Filtering Software is one type of software that filters the Internet for key phrases or for specific URLs (Universal Resource Locator). Most of these software were developed from old security device programs. Content filters are any software or company that filters out information either through key words or phrases or specific URLs.

3. Isn't Internet filtering software a better solution than a government regulated Internet as the CDA would have mandated?

Yes, it is better to leave the regulation of the Internet at the hands of the individual user rather than have a government-controlled Internet.

4. You understand that Internet filtering software does not need to be installed on your computer, don't you?

Yes, we understand that Internet filtering software is something that must be purchased, installed and configured by consumer. It is not mandated that we use these controls. However, public institutions such as libraries and schools are also installing these software onto their computers, as are parents who do not necessarily fully understand the implications. Legislation is also being discussed to make filtering software and/or ratings systems mandatory.

5. If Internet filtering software is a better option than the CDA and we are not mandated to have this information on our computers, why should the gay and lesbian community be concerned?

While Internet filtering software might not be of concern to some people, it is a serious concern to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. Many feel that while the CDA's defeat is a victory, but our communities access to and visibility on the Internet continues to be profoundly challenged. In an effort to offer the consumer market what it wants, companies developing this software have often forgotten about the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. What we have seen and continue to see is blockage of sites dealing with sexual orientation and gender identity and audit trails that make it impossible for a closeted gay or lesbian youth to find out information about their community.

We live in an age in which the Internet has become an extremely important part of the coming out process for many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. In many cases, it can be a lifeline to those in isolated areas of the country or the world. To deny even basic educational or support resources could seriously endanger the well-being of a gay or lesbian person.

Libraries, schools, workplaces and game systems are now beginning to use Internet filtering software. The Internet is a place in which our community thrives. It is a place where youth can find their role models. If we are careful, however, we could become as invisible on the information superhighway.

6. Wait a minute...why would gay and lesbian parents want to use Internet filtering software?

Because they are parents and parents are concerned with protecting their children from certain information. However, a gay or lesbian parent might block their children's access to sites of a graphic sexual nature only to find out that the software blocks out any Web sites that include the word "sex," including the mention of "sexual orientation." This could mean that their children might not be able to access Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays' (PFLAG) Web site, Gay & Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI) and their sub-group COLAGE's (Children of

Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) Web sites or even GLAAD's Web site.

7. Many of these programs, such as Sega Saturn's PlanetView, give parents the option to choose what filters are used. So, why should we care if there is an option to block out homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism?

By offering the option, software manufacturers are sending a clear message to parents and children using the Internet that there is something wrong with being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The option should not exist just as a program catering to racists or sexists would not. A company would not and should not support a filter that blocks sites that celebrate diversity.

8. But, isn't it a parent's right to choose what information their children sees?

GLAAD strongly believes that parents should have the right to choose what information their children see. However, we stress that this should be left to the parent to decide. In this case, companies are deciding for parents what information their children should see and block. Even if the company gives parents options and freedom of choice, by the selection of some filters over others, it makes a statement and assumption on what parents should consider as potentially "right" or "wrong."

9. What are audit trails?

Audit trails are a special feature offered by a few Internet filtering software that allows parents to check what sites their children have tried to access in their absence.

10. Wouldn't an audit trail be a better way to filter out information than totally blocking sites?

It would definitely open up conversation in a family, which is much healthier than censorship. However, if you are the closeted gay or lesbian child of homophobic parents, this will certainly cause problems. A gay or lesbian youth that is "outed" before he or she is ready can find him or herself at the center of strains on family relationships, and may experience further feelings of isolation.

11. What is the Platform for Internet Content Selection(PICS)?

PICS (Platform for Internet Content Selection) is a "neutral" rating system developed by the World Wide Web Consortium. PICS allows parents to chose a rating system that best suits them. Some examples of PICS are RSACi (Recreational Software Advisory Council) and SafeSurf.

12. I've heard that PICS is flexible and a better selection than Internet filtering software. Why should a gay or lesbian person be worried about PICS?

While PICS is flexible, because it is so flexible, it leaves rating open to a number of interpretations. While PICS itself does not seem to promote anti-gay bias it has the potential to become one of our biggest censors. PICS allows for raters to create their own system. Anti-gay parents or raters could just as easily promote our community's invisibility by creating an anti-gay rating system.

As with Internet filtering software, rating systems should not adapt anti-gay language or biases.

Appendix B

Testimonial

I had the most massive and life-changing realization of my life about five weeks ago. After years of confusion and suppressed emotions, I finally realized that I am gay and have been gay since the day I was born. I am thrilled about starting to live a real honest life with raw emotions and am very comfortable with myself and my sexuality. I can't conceive how coming out could have occurred without the Internet. I owe the Internet my sanity.

Where should I begin? Well, about six months ago, my father began communicating with an old elementary school friend by e-mail. They became close on the Internet, and my dad eventually took a trip out to Pittsburgh, where his friend lives. My Dad met Leland, the step-son of his childhood friend, and later continued to communicate with his friend and Leland over the Internet. Eventually, he gave Leland my e-mail address and we began to have conversations about movies and books and other impersonal things. Well, it eventually came out that he was gay and I responded, saying that I had no problem with that and we continued on with our e-mails. About a month ago, I wrote Leland a letter asking him if he had a love life. He responded, talking about his boyfriend, and asked me about my love life. This was my chance. I wrote him a letter telling him that I was confused and insecure about my sexuality, and that I thought I might be gay because I had a crush on a guy. I knew I was gay, but had not made a firm decision to come out until I wrote that letter. It was my way of slowly being comfortable with having the words "gay" and "Matt" next to each other. The night I wrote that letter, I came out to one of my best friends. Hours after I came out to my friend, I wrote Leland a letter telling him that, without a doubt in my mind, I knew that I am gay. He responded quickly, saying the perfect things, and he from that day forward became one of my dearest friends.

We write each other daily, and he is the key to my sanity and well being. I really do not know what I would have done this without the constant support and help Leland has given me. Leland is coming to visit me at the end of the month and we will see each other's faces and hear each other's voices for the first time. Along with the support I received from Leland, he was able to locate a support and youth group in my area with only my zip code and

city. I found my local gay and lesbian community center's Web page on the Internet and got the information I needed to meet other gay youth in my area. I also read a very important article on coming out to your parents. The article had wonderful advice that prepared me for the step of coming out to both of my parents, which I think is one of the most important and significant things I've done in my 15 years.

The Internet is a phenomenal communication tool that has helped me escape loneliness, fear and anxiety. Words are a powerful tool to help anybody express themselves, learn and understand each other. I hope all gay youth can have the same experiences and support I've found on the Internet.

—Matt, age 15

When I look back on my life from some distant vantage point, I think I will definitely be able to say that my whole "gay experience" only started after I got online and was able to talk to other people and break out of the shell that I built around me...Before, I was in a dark room with no one but myself, and I was trying to hide from that person. Now, there is a little bit of light in the room.

—Chris, age 19

In April of the year I was 16 years old, we tried a free trial of America Online. The first night we had it I was home alone and exploring my new toy, the online world. I went to the People Connections and noticed that there was a gay and lesbian chat room. I wanted to go, but what would happen if someone did an online search for me and that's where I was? People would know. What would they say? I created a "secret" screen name that had nothing to do with my real name. I didn't write myself a profile. I just signed on and went to the gay and lesbian chat room, not really knowing what to expect. For some reason I was still a little nervous, feeling like going in there was like signing a gay contract. When I got there I explained my situation, I got an Instant Message that really struck me. It said, "me too."

I wrote back to the person who sent me that message and we went to a private chat room. I found out his name was Jason and he was about a year older than I was, living in Ohio. We talked for about a half hour before we finally discussed the issue of our same sex attractions. Neither of us were really sure. We had noticed a strong attraction to men, but weren't sure exactly what it meant. We were afraid to affirm the fact that we were gay. Not being sure created a bond between us. Because we

lived far away we could tell each other everything we wanted to without having to worry about the rejection or being laughed at, or even worse, outed. We shared fantasies, talked about funny experiences, talked each other through hard times, gave each other someone to believe in. We provided for each other another person going through the same difficult process to relate with.

Because of my relationship with him, three months later I built up the confidence to tell a friend of mine. Things moved pretty fast from there until ten months later I was writing an article about gay rights for the school newspaper, for which I won a Western New York School Press Association Award. With my new confidence I even worked up the courage to tell my parents.

As for Jason and me, we still talk pretty regularly. I call him when I've had enough and he calls me when things are rough. We still talk about life and what is going on. He now has a boyfriend and couldn't be happier. He told his parents, and although the reaction was much less than good, he has built the confidence to wait things out and hope they improve. I am almost all the way out of the closet and proud of it.

Someday when we're both a little older, we're planning on meeting in person. A chance to give each other the supportive hug saying, "you made it," that we've been giving each other over the Internet and telephone wires for over a year now.

Still I can't help wondering where I'd be right now if I hadn't signed on that night and asked for someone to talk to. If I hadn't found someone to show me that I wasn't alone.

— Matthew, age 17

When I was in Mountain View I did not know any openly gay people. I was isolated. The only connection I ever made was through America Online. I can remember browsing through the teen issues section and running into the gay section. It was like discovering a whole new world. Every night for a week I would disappear into my room at night and listen in to the gay and lesbian chat lines, just watching other people's interactions, too nervous and scared to say anything myself. Eventually I started joining in on the conversations, and I found a pen-pal, his computer name was Greenblood. For months we sent e-mail back and forth and talked in private chat-rooms. We never told each other our real names out of fear, I guess. But we connected. In my isolated world in Mountain View I was able to reach out and share

my true self with a peer who could understand what I was going through.

— excerpted from the affidavit from Hunter Allen, age 17. Allen is a member of YouthArts, one of the plaintiffs in the *ACLU v. Reno* case surrounding the Communications Decency Act.

I have had an account with America Online since late June of 1995. I have been able to network with a number of people, many who have similar ideas and identities, ridding me of my depressing, yet common, thoughts of isolation. Among those people are a multitude who oppose some of my beliefs, which is positive, whereas conflict is the foundation of great discussions. The Teen Conferences and People of Color Conferences of the Gay and Lesbian Community Forum of America Online have given me the opportunity to chat with other similar people. Through the Teen Conference, I've formed friendships with other teens. The most valuable friendship I've had was created on America Online. The weekly conferences of teenagers organized by the Gay and Lesbian Community Forum of America Online have been helpful for my general welfare. It reinforced the idea that I was not alone. Because I live in a conservative area that is far away from an urban area, most gay and lesbian organizations and other resources are limited. The Internet diminishes the distance between users and organizations, capable of bringing the institution to one's home.

— excerpted from the affidavit of Rheana Parrena, age 16. Parrena is a member of YouthArts, which was a plaintiff in the *ACLU v. Reno* case surrounding the Communications Decency Act.

Living in a small town in South Carolina makes it almost an impossibility to be open about sexuality. Both emotional and physical safety is in the hands of those who are not primarily known for their open-mindedness and understanding. Through e-mail, I've created a support system for myself of different gay/lesbian listservs, and through people I could not have otherwise contacted. Coming to terms with my sexuality would have been so much harder if I had been alone. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the people I've met, and who have supported me — the people who told me I was not "evil," or "immoral," or "sick" after these very things were drummed into my head. At 16, I am content with myself.

— Katherine L., age 16

To me, the Internet has been a lifeline to other gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. It's not easy finding resources for youth. The Net has been a place where I know I am not alone and there are resources to help us on our adventure through life that at times can be extremely difficult.

— Marie, age 17

I was glad to find an opportunity to tell how the Internet has helped me as a gay youth. I finally realized that I was gay two years ago. As everyone I knew was fairly homophobic, including myself, I found it really scary to realize I was gay. I wasn't able to tell anyone. I had heard somewhere that the Internet had a lot more open gay youth. I immediately got my parents to hook me up to the Internet, and sure enough, soon found other gay youth. There is a huge community of friendly gay youth, that made me realize I could be happy as a gay person. I met my best friend on the Internet, and we went through the slow coming out process together. I am slowly learning how to be gay in "real life," but I don't know how I would have been able to do it without my Internet community.

— Holly, age 17

I was totally ostracized after coming out, and I almost went crazy. All my friends at school dumped me. I didn't do any work at all. I stopped going to any activities I was in, like sports because there I was not welcome either. I gained weight, and was mercilessly hounded because of that. I was teased, rejected, and taunted because I was different. Then I found people like me, teenagers across the country who were fighting themselves, trying to be different to make people happy, and being miserable themselves. One of my friends committed suicide. But, the Internet really helped the rest of us, and now I'm out and happy with it.

— Sea, age 13

I have found the Internet to be a huge help for me, in support and information. When I came out to my mother, I retrieved over a dozen pamphlets online for me, and my parents, on coming out. Without the Internet (and sites like !OutProud!) I could have never done it. The pamphlets, I got showed me normal responses for my parents, and how to deal with them. The pamphlets for them showed them how to deal with my coming out. I also found numerous listings for support in my area, such as PFLAG hotlines. Once again, if I had not had the Internet to use, I would probably have no way of finding this information. With chat-rooms, I have found support from other gay

youths. With e-mail and Usenet I've shared my experiences with others. With the Internet, I've been able to find information for myself, and how to deal with things that come along. I feel that Internet filtering is a good thing, but only when it pertains to vulgar information children shouldn't see, whether it be homosexual or heterosexual pornography, etc. But filtering out support sites like PFLAG and !OutProud! (which I've heard are filtered by some programs) is a crime, not a help.

— Tristan, age 16

Hello my name is Joshua. I am in Kenner, Louisiana. I have had problems that many have helped me with on the 'Net. But I have also having problems trying to find an area that will allow 17-year-olds to enter. I have been dealing with the fact that I was different since I was 10. I also have been denying it until about a year ago. I just came out to my mother. She took it very well. She told me that she loved me more now than she ever did. The Net was what made me get the courage to tell her. I have also had a problem with my sister. She is a homophobic and I have gotten the address and phone number of PFLAG, a support group down here in Louisiana by using the Internet. Also when I had personal problems I had friends to help me.

— Joshua, age 17

I am 20 years old and gay. I have known for quite a while, but just recently came out to part of my family a month ago. Needless to say, they didn't take it well. I have gone through so much emotionally with knowing, denying, and accepting that I am gay. And I needed (and still do) someone to talk to about it. I stumbled upon the GAY.COM chat house..., and suddenly found someone to talk to. It was the best thing that could have happened!! The hardest part of this whole process is not having someone to talk to about it. And although it would be much better to have someone near-by to share my thoughts and fears and needs with at least the chat house brought me to others just like me for a while. If I wouldn't have found that place, I would probably still be completely alone.

— Lori, age 20

The Internet has done many things for me as a young gay male. Growing up in this homophobic society I believed many myths of homosexuality and because of that, suicide was an idea that frequented my mind. When I gained access to the Internet, I began to search out gay-related sites. I found a few good sites and visited them frequently. I read all the information I could find. As myth

after myth began to fall, I began to think more of myself as a gay male, even pride began to overshadow shame. I began looking for others on the Internet who were in the same position as myself, and I found them. This boosted my self-confidence even more, even to the point where the idea of coming out to my friends and family seemed less threatening. Shortly after I graduated from high school this year, I started coming out to my friends. So far I have had positive results. This was made easier by a few “e-friends” I made over the Internet. I still talk to these people on a regular basis and I feel I would never have been able to do what I have done with out the support of my “e-friends” and the Web sites on the Internet. I would have taken my own life by now if I didn’t happen to gain access to the Internet.

— Brad, age 18

As a 17-year-old lesbian in Alabama, yes, filtering IS an issue. In the public high school nearest me, filtering not only blocks gay/lesbian/bi sites, but it blocks pro-choice sites as well. I think that in keeping the students ignorant, they are breeding hate as it is OPENLY taught inside the school (public I might add again) that anyone who is not Christian, Straight, White, or socially “acceptable” by other means is someone to be cast out, looked down upon, and openly harassed. The school has a policy that gay and lesbian students (or even those suspected of being) may not defend themselves against harassment whether or not it is physical. In fact, the school openly punishes students thought to be gay for “bringing the harassment on themselves and causing distraction to the good and God-fearing students.” This is a quote from an address to me by an administrator. Alabama also has no laws protecting gays and lesbians, and in fact, has laws to harm them.

—Solaris, age 17

The Internet, in my case, has been my sole link to g/l/b resources. I live in a very conservative part of Alabama and I’m also very shy, so there’s no going to meetings for me! Without the Internet I probably would still believe I’m alone in this world. I would probably believe I’m as ‘wrong’ as common opinion here would have it. And most importantly, I still wouldn’t have any gay friends to talk openly with!

— “Bob,” age 21

I think I started exploring places like OnQ on AOL last year (I’ve known I’m bi since I was a tiny child). I became involved in the youth com-

munity for some time there, and found PlanetOut on AOL soon after. At that point I think was my first contact with the coming out brochures, youth organizations, etc. I had always thought that the gaylesbi community kept to themselves before then, and I became more and more involved with becoming comfortable with myself, eventually telling my friends and my mom (which was a slow coming out process, but when I did finally tell my mom, my computer friends were there). I found people like me (luckily) and now I have good friends with the same frame of mind as myself—we’re really lucky that we have each other. Anyway, recently, I became more involved with the online-activist community (in regards to discrimination against religion, drug-use, and gaylesbi issues). It has been a very interesting coming of senses, and the Internet definitely helped information-wise. I just wish I could be more involved with the political side of everything.

— Josh, age 15

Hi, I’m writing to say that the Internet was the most positive experience for me coming to terms with my bisexuality. I had come out to my parents six months before I found a great group called Common Bond. It seemed to my family that I had a handle on things but in reality I was still scared and unsure about why I felt the way I do and I had a horrible time dealing with people that hated me and my ‘kind.’ If it were not for the Internet a lot of information never would have made it to me and I imagine that I would still be struggling with the whole idea of being ‘different.’ I owe much to all the people I have met over this strenuous time of my adolescence.

However on another note, it opened me to ridicule when I entered a room designed for lesbians and gays. Many bashers frequent these areas just to harass us and much of our time goes to reporting them instead of discussing ourselves. But there I learned to ignore and not even bother trying to get them to understand me and my feelings. So while it hurt I guess that it too was a good experience in the long run.

— Melissa, age 17

The Internet has played a major role in helping me become exposed to more of the lesbian and gay community. Without it, I feel I would have become sheltered in a sense, because I live in an area where it is not widely accepted. By speaking to and becoming friends with many others like me on AOL, I have learned others’ feelings toward this

lifestyle and have learned to accept myself for who I am. Luckily, I have been blessed to know a few friends in real life that share my feelings and understand how I am. Yet without the Internet, this extremely wonderful source, I would not have become as exposed or nearly as interactive in the lesbian and gay communities.

— Quinn, age 16

The Net has become the new focus of coming out. It's a place where people can be with their peers and receive a lot of support. Their self-esteem gets nurtured by peers who aren't as judgmental and are essentially in the same boat as they are.

— Youth Action Online founder Mary Gray,
February 9, 1996 — The Washington Blade

It's [The Internet] done one primary thing that hasn't happened until this time, and that's allow gay teens, at a very young age, to find a sense of community and have their questions answered.

— !OutProud! Executive Director Chris Kryzan,
February 9, 1996 — The Washington Blade

Appendix C

Statistics on Gay and Lesbian Youth

Part of the difficulty surrounding Internet filtering software and rating systems is their lack of attention to factoring in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. Here are some statistics on gay and lesbian youth to add perspective to the importance of the Internet to this particular community:

- Studies show that gay and lesbian youth are at least three times more likely than hetero-sexual youth to attempt suicide. In a study on gay male and lesbian youth suicide, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that lesbian and gay youth are two to six times more likely to attempt suicide than other youth, and that they account for up to 30% of all completed teen suicides.¹
- 45% of gay males and 20% of lesbians suffer harassment in high school, resulting from perceptions about their sexual orientation.²
- 86% of students would be “very upset” if they were called gay or lesbian.³
- The average high school student is barraged with an average of 25 anti-gay comments a day, ranging from epithets to more off-handed comments.⁴
- 34% of self-identified gay, lesbian and bisexual students report having suffered anti-gay harassment at school.⁵
- Gay male adolescents report becoming aware of a distinct feeling of “being different” between ages five and seven; they also report that they did not yet connect this feeling to the issue of sexuality until much later.⁶
- The median age at which lesbian and gay youth become aware that their feelings of “difference” are linked to a same-sex sexual orientation is 13.⁷
- 97% of students in public high schools report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from their peers.⁸
- 80% of gay and lesbian youth report severe social isolation.⁹
- 19% of gay men and 25% of lesbians report suffering physical violence at the hands of a family members as a result of their sexual orientation.¹⁰
- 26% of adolescent gay males report having to leave home as a result of conflicts with their family over their sexual orientation.¹¹

Footnotes for Appendix C

¹ Gibson, P. "Gay Male and Lesbian Youth Suicide," *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1989.

² American Association of University Women, "Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools." 1993.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ "Homophobia in Schools Project:" Study conducted by Concerned Students. Des Moines, IA, 1996.

⁵ Safe Schools Coalition. Statewide survey. Washington, 1997.

⁶ Treadway, Leo, and Yoakum, John, "Creating a Safer School Environment for Lesbian and Gay Students," in *Journal of School Health*. September, 1992.

⁷ Sears, James. *Growing Up Gay in the South*, New York: Harrington Park Press. 1991.

⁸ *Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Report of the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth*. 1993.

⁹ Hetrick, Emery, and Martin, A. Damien. "Developmental Issues and Their Resolution for Gay and Lesbian Adolescents." *Journal of Homosexuality*. 1987.

¹⁰ Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force, "Discrimination and Violence toward Lesbian Women and Gay Men in Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." 1992.

¹¹ Remafedi, Gary, "Male Homosexuality: The Adolescent's Perspective," *Pediatrics*. 1987.

Statistics compiled by GLAAD and from sources by Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

Appendix D

A Short History of GLAAD

In the early 1980s, most media coverage of lesbians and gay men was overwhelmingly negative. The media coverage surrounding AIDS and HIV was almost always homophobic. Headlines in the *New York Post* read "Gay Plague!" Realizing the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community needed an organization that could challenge bigotry and effectively educate the public about our lives, a small group of New York writers and activists, headed by Vito Russo, founded the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation in 1985 and met with early and remarkable success.

In 1988, a chapter was established in Los Angeles to address homophobia in the southern California based entertainment industry. Soon, chapters began to form all over the country, from Atlanta to San Francisco and from Kansas City, Missouri to Washington, DC. Together, these chapters effectively monitored and responded to representation of

the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in the media. In addition, significant relationships with various media professionals were established, so that GLAAD could proactively educate and advise while encouraging balanced and accurate coverage in programming and materials.

While the chapters were very successful, there was a need for national cohesion. GLAAD/USA, an informal group of representatives from each chapter, discussed ways that GLAAD could respond as a unified voice as well as offer appropriate technical assistance and media expertise to the local level. In 1994, GLAAD took the historic step of establishing itself as a national organization. Its two largest chapters in New York and Los Angeles merged. Shortly after, other chapters in Atlanta, Kansas City, San Francisco and Washington, DC followed suit and merged with GLAAD.

The new national organization allowed for a strong, unified voice, both proactive and reactive, in both new and entertainment media. As times changed a new form of media began to develop, GLAAD took on the challenge by addressing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender representation in interactive media.

Endorsements

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)

COLAGE's mission is to foster the growth of daughters and sons of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents of all racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds by providing education, support and community on local and international levels, to advocate for our rights and those of our families, and to promote acceptance and awareness in society that love makes a family.

Common Bond

Common Bond is an online support group for families and friends experiencing feelings of isolation during the process of coming-out by a gay child. It offers AOL chats, AOL message boards, E-mail and website suggestions. Any parent of a gay child and any gay child will find compassion in this cyber-family.

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR)

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) is a public-interest alliance of computer scientists and others concerned about the impact of computer technology on society. It works to influence decisions regarding the development and use of computers because those decisions have far-reaching consequences and reflect our basic values and priorities. As technical experts, CPSR members provide the public and policymakers with realistic assessments of the power, promise, and limitations of computer technology. As concerned citizens, it directs public attention to critical choices concerning the applications of computing and how those choices affect society.

Gay & Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI)

The Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI) is an advocacy and support organization of lesbian mothers, gay fathers, bisexual and transgender parents, their partners and children. GLPCI is located in 9 countries and have over 100 chapters. GLPCI can provide some

information and referrals on custody issues, adoption, surrogacy, Alternative Insemination, and the rights of co-parents.

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

With over sixty chapters, and a membership of over five thousand teachers, parents, and concerned citizens, GLSEN is the only national organization working to ensure that schools are places where all people are valued and respected, regardless of sexual orientation.

Oasis Magazine

Oasis is an online magazine for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth. Each month, it reports on news and entertainment written by and about queer youth.

!OutProud!, The National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

!OutProud!, The National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Youth, serves the needs of these young men and women by providing advocacy, information, resources and support. Its goal is to help lesbian youth become happy, successful, confident and vital gay, lesbian and bisexual adults. It provides outreach and support to lesbian youth just coming to terms with their sexual orientation and to those contemplating coming out. by letting them know they're not alone. It believes in effecting change at a grass-roots level by catalyzing and fostering the development of a new generation of lesbian youth activists who will take positions at the forefront of our civil rights and social movements.

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual

orientation, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

The Internet Filter Assessment Project (TIFAP)

The Internet Filter Assessment Project ran from April to September, 1997. It was a volunteer project

involving close to 40 librarians, all told. The project manager was Karen G. Schneider, a government librarian and library-press columnist. TIFAP arose from questions and concerns librarians had about the use of filters in libraries. Some of the volunteers were "pro," some were "anti," some were uncertain, but all were of the mindset that you don't know a tool until you use it.

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