The notion of intellectual freedom is one which is central to the work of alternative media practitioners—indeed, they might see it as their core purpose due to their demonstrated commitment to providing the public with a broad range of information and context to news and current affairs that (they believe) the public cannot receive elsewhere (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011). Much of the literature surrounding the notion of ‘intellectual freedom’ is centred around librarianship, primarily focusing on the importance of removing censorship, providing public access to a broad range of views, and not restricting thought or expression. Dresang summarises:

Intellectual freedom as a concept in librarianship means freedom to think or believe what one will, freedom to express one’s thoughts and beliefs in unrestricted manners and means, and freedom to access information and ideas regardless of the content or viewpoints of the author(s) or the age, background, or beliefs of the receiver. Intellectual freedom is closely allied with the U.S. brand of democracy, which depends upon the rule of an informed citizenry that is able to deal with conflicting ideas and ultimately to make wise choices. (2006, 169-170)

Certainly, the principles expressed here by Dresang draw essential connections, which media scholars also draw, between democracy and intellectual freedom. The US Office for Intellectual Freedom notes that ‘citizens must also be able to take part in the formation of public opinion by engaging in vigorous and wide-ranging debate on controversial matters’ (2010, xvii). What is key in this discussion for alternative, independent and community media workers—and what occupies the bulk of this chapter—is the concern
about the connections between intellectual freedom, an ‘informed citizenry’, the ability of the citizenry to actually engage (participate) in the deliberations and debates, and the connection between these issues and a highly functioning democracy. This is at the heart of the work that alternative media scholars do—we investigate the underpinnings, the practices, and motivations of alternative media work in order to develop arguments around its importance to democracy and an informed public. To that end, this chapter will examine the increasingly important role that alternative and community media forms are playing in developing an open public sphere; in creating spaces for marginalised voices; and in providing a forum for views and opinions that do not receive attention from more mainstream outlets. In this, they have an incredible amount in common with those who stretch for broad-ranging intellectual freedom within our society.

Before examining this intersection, it is important to establish parameters for this discussion. Most alternative and community media scholars are regularly asked—what do you mean by ‘alternative media’? Alternative to what? Indeed, one of the key scholars in our field John H. Downing rejects the term ‘alternative’ as an oxymoron because, at some point, everything is alternative to something else (2001, ix). He prefers the term “radical media” to describe the media of social movements and social change which will also be included in this discussion here. Nevertheless, I intend to stick with the term ‘alternative’ because I believe convention establishes a broad understanding for what that term means. It encompasses radical, community, grassroots, independent, citizens’ media forms—all of them variously committed to their own, and their audiences’, intellectual freedom. Indeed, if we consider the aims of publications such as Australia’s independently owned news magazine *The Monthly* (Warhaft, 2006), and the Australian-based but global online alternative publication *Eureka Street* (Cranitch, 2006), they describe a journalism which focuses on providing news and information relevant to the needs of the community members; ‘to engage these members in public discussion, and to contribute to their social and political empowerment’ (Jankowski 2003, 4). In that, they have everything in common with notions of creating an informed citizenry and of giving that cohort the opportunity to engage in wide-ranging debate in the public sphere about civic issues.

**Alternative and community media**

I will intersperse the terms ‘alternative’ and ‘community’ throughout this work, as both describe sub-sections of the media and journalism that form the backbone of this essay. Numerous scholars have made useful attempts at defining the sector (for example, Atton 2002; Atton & Hamilton 2008; Rodriguez
Forde: Journalism for Social Justice

2001; Downing 1984 and 2001; Couldry & Curran 2003; Howley 2010; Kidd and Rodriguez 2010), and all generally agree that while there are differences between the structure, format and raison d'être of many of these outlets, they have traits in common (Forde 2011). Independent and alternative media are often characterised by their reliance on strong notions of social responsibility (Atton 2003, 267) and their journalists generally demonstrate stronger commitment to the idealistic norms of journalism than their mainstream counterparts (Forde 1997a). Their work is consistent with Jankowski’s definition of ‘community’ media, focusing on providing news and information relevant to the needs of the community members; ‘to engage these members in public discussion, and to contribute to their social and political empowerment’ (Jankowski 2003, 4). Rodriguez refers to citizens’ media which sees localised media outlets integrated into communities, with audience members participating in production of content for their (often troubled) community members; Atton refers to the not-for-profit, often amateur ‘alternative’ media; Downing deals specifically with politicised radical media which usually exists within social movements, and indeed, forms their ‘lifeblood’ (see also D’Adamo, 2006 for a practitioner’s perspective on this). As Howley reinforces, community media serve as “an exceptional vehicle to explore the way local populations create media texts, practices and institutions to serve their distinctive needs and interests” (2010, 3). Clemencia Rodriguez argues that alternative media forms, what she calls ‘citizen’s media’, need to be defined by what they are, not by what they are not (Rodriguez 2001); and says the terms ‘community media, alternative media, autonomous media and radical media all fit within the broad definition of ‘citizens’ media’ (Rodriguez 2010, 132). Rodriguez overwhelmingly focuses on the processes of participation, organisation, and connection between people as the key defining characteristic of citizens’ media, and does not really address ‘what it is responding to’—more it is, a consideration of the mediations that occur, rather than the media itself (2003,190). Research conducted with colleagues at Griffith University found similarly—the processes of creating content, the creation of community that occurred in doing this, was just as important (if not more) than the actual content being produced (Meadows, Forde, Ewart, Foxwell 2007). In line with the descriptions and definitions above, we can perhaps conclude with the recognition that alternative and community media are examples of a consistent and long-serving ‘disruption’ to media power and by extension, to existing social and economic power.

**Alternative journalism and freedom of expression**

The specific journalistic practices of such alternative media outlets can also be considered as part of this discussion. It is here, within the practices of
the journalists, that the intersections with intellectual freedom are expressed daily. Research conducted in the 1990s found independent press journalists self-reported that they undertook their duties for the higher ideals of autonomy, the chance to help people, and editorial freedom rather than the superficial concerns expressed by mainstream journalists such as the pay, fringe benefits, the chance to 'get ahead' and job security (Henningham 1996, 211) and (Forde 1997b). Furthermore, alternative media journalists are more committed to the active public and 'citizens' form of their craft in that Australian independent news journalists nominate 'providing context to the news', 'motivating the public' and 'giving a voice to the voiceless' as their primary journalistic aims (Forde 1997a, 118). Again here, connections with the importance of intellectual freedom in both the librarianship context and the broader social context is evident—Dresang refers to the tension between what we might term 'absolute' intellectual freedom and 'conditional' intellectual freedom which takes account of the impact of the published word on marginalised and oppressed groups. In essence, absolute intellectual freedom defends the right of anyone to express their view, regardless of the impact of that view on others. A more conditional intellectual freedom—which we certainly see in evidence in the anti-racist, anti-sexist, equal opportunity alternative media suggests 'that there might be limitations to that principle when it does not encompass respect for marginalized social groups. A tension, over the years, for the in-library practice of intellectual freedom has arisen from conflicting social values' (Dresang 2006, 170-171). In contrast, the Office for Intellectual Freedom finds that intellectual freedom 'implies a circle, and that circle is broken if either freedom of expression or access to ideas is stifled (2010, xvii).

Dresang's summary, however, is reflected in alternative media's realisation of 'intellectual freedom'. John Downing's classic study for example, Radical Media, which provides the foundation for much contemporary analysis of alternative and community media forms, finds that many forms of radical media do not encourage increased freedom for media. Far left political media, such as the socialist publications, demand allegiance to the Party and its key doctrines. So for many radical media editors and journalists, their intellectual freedom is quite limited to working within the boundaries set by a socialist ideological framework (Downing 1984). We may argue they are no more constrained than the journalist writing for a commercial, 'professional' news organisation—but certainly, there is evidence that their political expression and their angle on stories and comments is significantly dependent upon the view of the Party. To that end, Downing suggests for radical media to be more representative—for our purposes, to be more 'intellectually free'—they should ensure the following conditions apply to their work (1984, 17). Chris Atton repeats these conditions in his important and foundational 2002 work, Alternative Media (2002, 20):
1. the importance of encouraging contributions from as many interested parties as possible, in order to emphasise the 'multiple realities' of social life (oppression, political cultures, economic situations);

2. that radical media, while they may be partisan, should never become a tool of a party or intelligentsia;

3. that radical media at their most creative and socially significant privilege movements over institutions

4. that within the organisation of radical media there appears an emphasis on prefigurative politics

Downing's analysis, in essence, focuses on radical media's connections to social movements which are 'the lifeblood of these media, and they are the movements' oxygen' (2001, 390). This allows Downing's work to ignore forms of alternative media not connected to a particular social movement—he excludes music fanzines, for example; political opinion blogs; individual websites espousing personal opinions, etc. The late-American intellectual and author Gore Vidal offers a useful perspective on the term 'radical' used widely by Downing, drawing connections between 'radicalism', 'liberalism' and politics and concluding that the information imparted to the public was necessarily limited, and 'stifled':

*The word 'radical' derives from the Latin word for root. Therefore, if you want to get to the root of anything you must be radical. It is no accident that the word has now been totally demonized by our masters, and no one in politics dares even use the word favourably, much less track any problem to its root. But then a ruling class that was able to demonize the word 'liberal' in the past ten years is a master at controlling—indeed stifling—any criticism of itself. 'Liberal' comes from the Latin liberalis, which means pertaining to a free man. In politics, to be liberal is to want to extend democracy through change and reform. One can see why that word had to be erased from our political lexicon.* (Vidal, 1992)

News media researcher Thomas Patterson (1992) examines this notion of freedom within the media in more detail, although his focus is on the mainstream rather than the alternative media. His work is important to this study, however, as he draws essential conclusions about what 'freedom of the press', or 'freedom of expression' really means in the news media context. Patterson's work looks for signs of diversity in news coverage in countries which apparently had a high level of press freedom—freedom of expression, of access, of voice. Patterson found that more than two-thirds of journalists defined freedom of expression in terms of their own, and their news organisations' rights rather than the public's right to diverse information which
reflected a narrow professionalism which did not take account of journalists' place in the larger democratic scheme (1992, 15).

Patterson also finds evidence that increased professionalism has caused greater homogeneity in news content. He blames professionalism for the failure of the news media to create a diverse marketplace of ideas—in his survey, United States journalists ranked highest on the professionalism index (determined by their attitudes to objectivity, impartiality, neutrality) and also ranked lowest on the diversity index (1992, 9). His international study of professional values across a range of countries found that, in the nations such as the United States, 'the same news stories are highlighted each day by the great majority of newspaper and broadcast organizations from coast to coast' (1992, 4). Patterson believes this narrowness can be attributed directly to the requirement for 'professional and objective' journalism, which forces news reporting to be driven increasingly by events rather than issues. Relatively minor editorial decisions such as which facts and events are more important do not constitute diversity of information, and are 'a far cry from a competitive marketplace of ideas' (1992, 4). Zelizer notes that the 'sixth sense' or 'nose for news' that most journalists use as a way of defining their work is a leading reference point for the industry (2005, 68) but Patterson interprets this as common definition of news, developed out of professional training and experience which again, sees the same top stories appearing each day across a huge range of media outlets (1992, 4). Gurevitch and Blumler further argue that adherence to professional definitions of news values act as a powerful force for conformity and ensure journalists all arrive at the same decision when considering—'What is the most significant news today?' (1990, 282) (Zhong and Newhagen, 2009).

I.F. Stone, a United States journalist who established the successful alternative publication I.F. Stone's Weekly in 1953, wrote of the mainstream media:

The fault I find with most American newspapers is not the absence of dissent. It is the absence of news. With a dozen or so honourable exceptions, most American newspapers carry very little news. Their main concern is advertising. The main interest of our society is merchandising. All the so-called communications industries are primarily concerned not with communications, but with selling. . . . Most owners of newspapers are businessmen, not newspapermen. The news is something which fills the spaces left over by the advertisers. The average publisher is not only hostile to dissenting opinion, he is suspicious of any opinion likely to antagonize any reader or consumer. (Johnson 1971, 6)

This is particularly relevant to isolated and marginalized communities—"... if we have been effectively shut out from official public communication, if we are women, First Nations, refugees, children, undocumented workers, who is there
who has any sense of obligation to listen to us, to the specifics of our experience, to our framing of the world?” (Downing 2007). The American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom notes that providing “intellectual freedom” to immigrants is the only way to provide them with information that they require to become productive members of society (2010, xvii). Community media has fulfilled this role in the life of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers for some time—not just in providing new arrivals with news of their home country, but more specifically providing community-building and networking opportunities for immigrants to create their own important social connections in their new country, usually with others who have migrated before them. There is also a strong recognition that the ability of community media—particularly community radio—to provide essential service information to immigrants in their native language is key to the successful settlement of immigrants and refugees (Forde, Foxwell, Meadows 2009). It is also key to their ongoing sense of social well-being and general ‘satisfaction’ with life (Meadows and Foxwell 2011).

A consideration of the alternative media and freedom of expression, then, suggests intellectual freedom within the alternative media sector is not absolute (particularly in the radical political sections of the alternative media). There is also evidence here which, predictably, proves that in countries where freedom of expression is assumed to be at a near-ideal level—for example, in advanced democracies such as the United States and the United Kingdom, in fact there is very little diversity in the breadth of views presented or in the actual definition of ‘what is news’ in those countries leading to significant homogeneity of news and information. Finally, this part of the discussion suggests that isolated and marginalised groups are most likely to suffer from this ‘shutting out’ from official public communication due to the narrow definitions of news—and it is here that community media in particular is picking up the ball and properly representing or giving voice to these communities. It is important to consider this final point in more detail, as it is in their social justice role that the alternative media best demonstrate their commitment to more completely informing the citizenry, and to creating a broader, more inclusive public sphere.

**Alternative journalism and its public role**

Librarian scholar Emily Knox, fittingly notes that information professionals around the world ‘approach intellectual freedom as a social justice issue’ (2011, 49). And so it is with alternative media and their journalists—their overwhelming commitment to covering the news they see fit, to providing context to news already in the mainstream, and providing a voice for the marginalized, the downtrodden (Downing 2003) is related to their foundational
commitment to social justice. If intellectual freedom is inexorably tied to freedom of access to information, then it is a core calling of the alternative journalist. One alternative media worker, Jessica Lee from the successful New York alternative newspaper The Independent, explained:

*I consider myself a journalist and I guess from certain perspectives you could consider what we do as social justice journalism or activist journalism. Just because we give regular people, people in the grassroots movements more of a voice in our articles than you might see in a different publication.* (personal interview, 2009)

The Council of Europe clarified in a 2009 declaration that the key motivation and rationale for the further development of community media in the European Union was due to the proven role the sector could play in improving social cohesion and intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe 2009) and see also (Lewis 2008). This section of the chapter turns to the evidence from alternative journalists which bears out their commitment to social justice and their perception of their role as a conduit to provide the public with information they would otherwise not have access to through more mainstream media outlets. The evidence presented here is based on 19 qualitative interviews with alternative media journalists from Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. The interviews usually lasted about an hour, and recordings were transcribed and evaluated through the qualitative software program NVivo. Through this analysis, I have presented data elsewhere (Forde 2011) which investigates the role of the alternative journalist in the contemporary media landscape in more detail. For the purposes of this work, I wish to focus specifically on that evidence from the journalists which emphasizes a commitment to ‘freedom of information’, to social justice, to ‘filling the gaps’ of the mainstream all which point to an overriding connection with the essence of intellectual freedom. There is a juncture where I believe alternative media and the absolute form of intellectual freedom depart, and I will discuss this in the closing section of this chapter.

In the mid to late 1990s, mainstream and alternative journalists’ attitudes to their role in society were compared. The two groups shared several broad perceptions of their role, notably that their job was to ‘uncover and investigate problems’ and to ‘impart information to others’. However, a range of more proactive roles which were presented to both sets of journalists began

---

1 Personal interviews were carried out with journalists in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom throughout 2009 and 2010 as part of a project called 'Rethinking Journalism'. Data from some of these interviews is quoted in sections of this chapter and is presented in more detail in the author’s monograph, 'Challenging the News: The Journalism of Alternative & Community Media' (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
to highlight the differences between the two cohorts. The aspects of ‘influencing the public’, ‘influencing public policy decisions’ and ‘championing particular values and ideas’ were rated as much more important by alternative journalists. More than three-quarters of the independent press sample felt it was either very or quite important to influence the public, where only 49 percent of the mainstream sample considered this important. Overall, 10 years ago alternative press journalists nominated that ‘providing an alternative view’, ‘contextualising the news’, ‘motivating audiences and providing access for audiences’ and ‘balancing the mainstream’ were key themes of their work. In 2010, those themes still resonate although the general description to ‘provide an alternative view’ is now, through the qualitative data, a little more complete in its form as ‘covering stories others won’t cover’. Importantly, a new theme has emerged which was previously not nominated by either mainstream or alternative journalists—which is to provide local news to a local audience. This was also identified by both community broadcasting volunteers and journalists; and community broadcasting audiences as a key function of, particularly, community radio news (Meadows et al 2007). This theme also re-occurred in discussions about news values.

It was expected that those publications primarily run to provide investigative journalism, and publications such as the UK’s The Spark ethical quarterly would identify their overarching role to provide longer-form journalism. However, alternative journalists nominated this as their role even when they were providing daily journalism, such as at Australia’s crikey.com. Proprietor and journalist Eric Beecher refers to the publication’s role as looking ‘under the bonnet’ (i.e., under the hood) of Australian politics to get the story behind the story. Similarly, Jeff Clarke at Northern California Public Broadcasting in the USA, which runs daily news and current affairs programming, identifies a key difference between what his organisation does, and what the mainstream journalists do that he worked with more than 30 years ago as a broadcaster for commercial radio and television, and prior to that with the American Forces Radio & Television service:

> I think the real essence and the real difference between independent journalists, public broadcasting journalists and the mainstream media is there are different levels of depth and quality in the arena that independent journalists are handling, versus the what I would call the ‘mile-wide and inch-deep’ coverage that we get in the normal mainstream media. Both have a purpose but I think where we have excelled in the public broadcasting landscape has been to really provide a level of intelligent information that really covers the ground of a specific story or issue, or conflict in a way that allows people to make up their own minds. People want to get behind the headline and really see the depth of story. (personal interview, 2010)
Carol Pierson, from the US National Federation for Community Broadcasters notes that individual stations' abilities to carry out good, in-depth alternative journalism depends entirely on their resources, but it was an overarching goal of most of the stations to provide contextualised news and deeper analysis as much as they could:

... we were definitely looking at more [substantial] stories than what a lot of the commercial stations were covering, which tends to be a lot of accidents and crime and those kinds of stories. So we were looking at stories that were about issues that made a big difference in people's lives ... we also wanted to do longer pieces and more in-depth reporting so we gave people more time to work on stories. (personal interview, 2009)

The 'more time' factor is an issue, and is one that is perhaps an advantage of alternative journalism that needs to be recognised. Many mainstream journalists, given similar circumstances, might also be able to write long-form, investigative journalism. The reality is however, that the chances of mainstream media organisations investing time in journalists producing one strong story a week; or perhaps taking several weeks or even months to work on a significant investigative piece is dwindling. Newsrooms are being downsized all over the world and there is irrefutable evidence that mainstream organisations—particularly commercial ones—no longer see the economic benefit in investigative journalists delving 'behind the story'. In fact, the opposite is the case with demand increasing, every day, for more news, more quickly, due to the insatiable appetite and unlimited news hole of news websites (Paterson 2006; Barker 2009; Johnston and Forde 2009; Gawenda and Muller, 2009; Australian Press Council 2008). So while it may not be the 'fault' of mainstream journalists that they are not doing more in-depth journalism, which alternative journalists strongly identify as one of their key roles in society, it is certainly the case that this content that alternative journalists are producing is becoming more important as mainstream newsrooms scale down even further and journalists become 'disseminators' rather than 'gatherers' of original news (Barker, 2009).

In particular, when speaking about their 'motivations' for what they do the large majority of alternative journalists put their work in the context of what I have termed 'enhancing journalism and democracy'. Indeed, many of the journalists identified that they were not, and could never be, in the business for the money or the dependable wage—but more that most people working in the alternative journalism industry were doing so out of a sense of the potential for social change. Carlton Carl from the Texas Observer, and Carol Pierson from US community broadcasting's representative body the National Federation of Community Broadcasters illustrate:
Forde: Journalism for Social Justice

... everyone draws a salary, they’re not huge salaries. One certainly wouldn’t go to work for the Texas Observer to get rich and it’s unlikely that anybody would ever go to work for the Texas Observer if they didn’t share our mission for enhancing equality and justice and so forth [Carl]. (personal interview, 2009)

Well I would say that it’s not so much the good pay that it’s much more a real dedication to getting information that’s important to people so they can act responsibly in a democracy and have an insight into what’s going on [Pierson]. (personal interview, 2010)

Peter Barr from community station RTR in Perth, Australia just wants to ‘pay my rent and buy some fruit’ and if he can do that, he will continue to work in his position at RTR because he would rather be just getting by, financially, than doing well and feel ‘stifled and bored’ (personal interview, 2009).

When Professor John Henningham conducted the first national survey of Australian journalists in the early 1990s, he applied a long-tested quantitative survey to his sample of more than 1000 journalists which replicated work by David Weaver and Cleve Wilhoit in the United States (1986; 1991; 1994; 1996; and Weaver et al 2003). One of the questions he asked was designed to test journalists’ commitment to the public service ideals of journalism, with a series of questions which probed respondents about why they chose journalism as a career. Most nominated their ability at writing as the primary reason for becoming journalists, while issues related to the glamour and excitement of journalism were second most important. Less than four percent of journalists nominated the desire to serve the public (tested by categories such as ‘finding the truth’, ‘putting things right’ etc) as an important reason for entering journalism (1996, 210). Henningham concluded: ‘Hence, a strongly service-oriented notion of journalism was not found among Australian journalists . . . ’ (1996, 210). The responses of alternative journalists lay in direct contrast, as alternative press journalists were found to be significantly more committed to the public role of journalism—to serving the public interest, influencing public policy through information and providing background and context to information in the public arena. In 2009 and 2010, those values held true and perhaps appeared stronger through these qualitative interviews across three continents than they did through the original Australian-based quantitative survey. Anderson found similarly in her study of information-based programming on 4ZzZ community radio in Brisbane, Australia that the values of agitating for action, educating audiences, and organising communities of like-minded people were key roles of some parts of the community radio sector (2005).

This study reinforces that alternative journalists see their primary role as providing context and depth to information already (perhaps cursoryl)
available in the public sphere; and to both educate audiences about issues and campaigns, and potential contributors on the practices of alternative journalism. Most importantly, these functions are underpinned by a driving desire to motivate audiences to participate—whether in demonstrations, community life, or other forms of political action. It represents an "imagining" of journalism as a key player in facilitating the public's involvement in democracy, in a variety of ways.

Concluding thoughts: Alternative media, democracy and intellectual freedom

The evidence from alternative journalists working in a range of alternative and independent media outlets suggests a number of areas where we might say alternative media is intersecting with the core meaning of intellectual freedom. Firstly, alternative journalists are undoubtedly highly committed to providing the public with access to information they might not otherwise find or hear about. To be specific, they see it as one of their key roles to uncover information not currently covered by mainstream commercial or publicly funded outlets—to give air to stories that have so far remained hidden. I refer to this as the alternative journalists' motivation to uncover "the scoop", a huge investigative story that is broken by an independent outlet. On another level, they are committed to following the news agenda of larger, mainstream outlets with a purpose of delivering information and context that they consider has not yet received the air-time it deserves. That is, they believe strongly in "filling the gaps" left by the mainstream media, in providing the behind-the-scenes story about government policy, perhaps covering a story about more illegal boat arrivals from the perspective of the refugee, rather than the government which is usually mouthing concerns they perceive to exist in the community at large.

Again, I see this as a demonstration from the alternative media that their concern is to provide access to information for the public—to enhance democracy by widening the public sphere of debate. Importantly, research into community media audiences makes a third point—not only are alternative media committed to providing access to information, but one of their key functions is to provide access (itself) so that people feel free to participate in media production thereby dissolving the audience-producer boundary. Through their informal structures and the nature of the organisation as rooted in the community, ordinary audience members feel welcome and able to participate in media production, to ring the station and talk to the announcer, to offer input to programming—to assist in the creation of community through their involvement in the community media outlet (Meadows, Forde, Foxwell, Ewart 2007). I believe their contribution to dissolving
the audience-producer boundary is further evidence of the role alternative and community media are playing in delivering key aspects of intellectual freedom—they are, without doubt, giving voice to voices otherwise unheard (and importantly, people are listening).

The American Library Association reports that intellectual freedom is (and I will cite at length here, as this is a key concluding thought):

... the right to seek and receive information from all points of view, without restriction, even those ideas which might be highly controversial or offensive to others. As a personal liberty, intellectual freedom forms the foundation of our democracy. It is an essential part of government by the people. The right to vote is not enough—we also must be able to take part in forming public opinion by engaging in open and vigorous debate on controversial matters. (1999, 1)

This description echoes that provided by Dresang in the opening comments of this chapter, tying the notion of intellectual freedom to the US First Amendment, core to the protection of individual liberty and right to freedom of expression. In many countries, however—and in the alternative media—there is a caveat on freedom of expression, on intellectual freedom. It is that every citizen should have the right to express themselves freely and to be heard but that this should occur within a context which is not designed to incite hatred against particular groups in society; or which is designed to deliberately misinform. In essence, the intellectual freedom that I assess is being practiced by alternative journalists is not so much rooted in an absolute right to say whatever they think, regardless of the consequences—but more, to deliver news, opinion and analysis which is based in truth and which is gathered out of a genuine desire to improve the quality and breadth of discourse in the public sphere. While the industry is diverse, the research evidence suggests this truth-seeking mission and the overarching motivation to improve public sphere debate is central to our analysis of how alternative media conceptualises and carries out 'intellectual freedom'.

References


Warhaft, Sally, 2006. *Personal interview with the author*, recorded August 3.


