

Emma O'Neill-Dietel

Project Title:

“Signs of Pride: Deaf LGBTQ+ Activism in Washington, D.C., 1979-Present”

Project Summary:

The goal of this project is to collect, preserve, and publicize the stories of d/Deaf LGBTQ+ activism in Washington, D.C. from the 1970s to present. The result, aside from an article for the G&LR, would be a digital exhibit hosted on the website of the Rainbow History Project (RHP) archive. This grant would go towards paying interpreters and translators-transcribers for narrative history interviews of d/Deaf community members involved in this activism. The grant would also fund travel to Washington, D.C. to collect materials from the narrators and digitize materials to become part of the RHP archive.

Project Description:

This research highlights a lesser-known facet of LGBTQ+ history: solidarity between the LGBTQ+ community and the d/Deaf community at the local and national level. The research for this project will result in a physical and digital archive of materials that may not otherwise be preserved, as well as an article for *The G&LR* and a digital exhibit on the Rainbow History Project (RHP) website.

My research began as a personal quest as a deaf, queer person to locate myself in history. I have experienced the overlap between d/Deaf and LGBTQ+ communities, but never saw that unity represented in the history I learned about either group. While living in Washington, D.C. (a central location for both Deaf and LGBTQ+ culture), I wanted to find out whether this solidarity had always existed, or if it was a development of the 21st century. As a volunteer with RHP, I met and collected materials from a Deaf Washingtonian who participated for several decades in D.C. Pride and the Marches on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

The color photographs in his personal collection showed scenes of resistance and joy: Protesters signing “I love you” to the camera as they marched through the streets of Washington; Volunteers at one of D.C.’s earliest Pride block parties signing animatedly in front of a banner for their organization; A circle of protesters at the base of the Washington Monument watching an ASL interpreter translate a speech.

These photographs were an answer: the allegiance between Deaf and queer people has always been here. However, they also raised questions about how d/Deaf people contributed to D.C.’s LGBTQ+ community. This grant will allow me to conduct narrative history interviews¹ with people involved in these organizations. The interviews, along with materials I collect from the narrators, will become a part of the RHP archive. There, they will be freely accessible for anyone wishing to learn or conduct further research on Deaf LGBTQ+ history.

In addition to creating a new body of archival material, the article in *The G&LR* and the digital exhibit will demonstrate that D.C. is not just the seat of federal power, but a city and community in its own right with a vibrant history of grassroots LGBTQ+ activism. Though Deaf

¹ *Narrative history interview* is a more d/Deaf-inclusive term for oral history interview

people have historically been excluded from LGBTQ+ spaces and vice versa, this story is ultimately one of hope. The d/Deaf-queer activism of the latter half of the 20th century shows both groups' resilience during the conservative turn of the 1980s, the AIDS crisis, and the fight for disability rights throughout the 1980s and 90s. This project shines a spotlight on a time in history when d/Deaf, disabled, and LGBTQ+ people came together to advocate for each other.

Article Description

This article would trace the development of Deaf LGBTQ+ organizations (including the Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, the Capital Metropolitan Rainbow Alliance, and the Lambda Society of Gallaudet) their key members from the 1970s to the present to understand what role they played in shaping LGBTQ+ activism in D.C. during this time. Through this timeline, the article would explore the broader commonalities between the Deaf and LGBTQ+ communities and their experiences. The readership of *The G&LR* is likely already familiar with the links between the disabled and LGBTQ+ communities thanks to the writings of contributors like Denise Noe.

This project features key events from LGBTQ+ history that nonacademic readers are likely to know but examines those events from the lesser-known perspective of Deaf individuals. This story, at its heart, is about ordinary people who will never appear in the history books, making a difference in their community and their country. Local D.C. history has the intimate appeal of local history and the large-scale resonance of national history. *The G&LR's* popular podcast has demonstrated that D.C. history has found a home with *The G&LR's* audience.

Whether readers lived through these decades or not, this history is easily accessible through captivating photographs and visual culture of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s.