

My name is Hannah Cook, and I am a senior at Longwood University. I'm majoring in Business Administration, concentrating in Finance and Real Estate, as well as minoring in Economics. My identity is strongly rooted in the LGBTQ+ community, and I am proud to have been a part of Dr. Hannah Dudley-Shotwell's Citizen 410: Queer Virginia course.

Before taking Queer Virginia, I had a limited knowledge of queer history. I knew queer people have always existed, but didn't realize to what extent the history of the LGBTQ community has been erased and filtered. I did, however, want to learn more about this subject and stories that have been left over for years, so I decided to take Queer Virginia.

The evolution of my understanding of queerness and some queer history greatly came from higher education courses. My freshman year at Longwood University, I took a Gender, Culture, and Representation class that introduced me to the genderbread person. I learned about several queer identities that were new to me, and I found some that I could relate to. I also took Dr. Hannah Dudley-Shotwell's intro Citizen 110 course, where we learned about many queer terms, queer people, and discrimination against them. Sophomore year, I took LGBTQ in the Media, and my horizon expanded from watching queer movies and short films. I learned about how queerness could be and has been erased, just like for Emily Dickinson and her lover Sue.

Queer erasure is a big deal. Just like other minority groups whose history was erased and rediscovered over time, history of the LGBTQ+ community is important. Representation of queer people is critical because of the high suicide rates of LGBTQ+ youth; organizations like the Trevor Project advocate for suicide prevention and crisis intervention for queer kids, as mentioned in "As Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' law takes effect, schools roll out LGBTQ restrictions" by Matt Lavietes. Seeing yourself or someone you know being represented in a book, a movie, a song, or a tv show can be life-changing for some and life-saving for others. Having that representation makes those within the community feel validated and seen. When you don't ever see someone like you, it can feel very isolating from society.

Historically, those who have filtered queer history are those with authority, religious power, and even academic power. In the later 20th century, organizations formed to protest the erasure of the LGBTQ+ people and to protect our history. In "Public History and Queer Memory" by Lara Kelland, it details how historians, librarians, and graduates from all over the country banded together to save and secure queer history.

Queer history belongs in classrooms, whether that be in K-12 or higher education. LGBTQ+ kids deserve to see themselves in history and know that we've always been around. Queer history being taught would normalize the community and shared experiences we've gone through. It would lead to lower suicide amongst LGBTQ+ youth and make the youth feel included. With normalization there would be less bullying and discrimination. It wouldn't have to be whole sections or whole classes taught just on LGBTQ+ people from history, but incorporating their queer identities within the already made curriculum. Not purposely leaving out these details from their lives.

I am finding my lost history; are you?