

Deaf Queer Intersectionality Summary

“Do you feel more Deaf or more Lesbian?” This question sums up the Deaf intersectionality experience. Many Deaf individuals believe that although intersectionality exists and we all have multiple things that make us who we are, Deaf always comes first. The question was always one or the other. Why not both? Many in the Deaf community believed that one identity had to be dominant. This left many Deaf queer individuals feeling that if they asserted their queer identity, it would compromise their Deaf identity.

Just like in the hearing community, the Deaf community has been filled with homophobia. Deaf people who are more trained to pick up on visual cues can notice the signs like clenched teeth, squinted eyes, and shaking heads as the negative meaning that they are. These signs dissuaded Queer Deaf individuals from being open about their sexuality, but they were especially fearful about it after the violent murders at Gallaudet University. In addition to being rejected by the Deaf community, Deaf queer individuals were also rejected by the hearing queer community. Decisions made about the queer community were made by the hearing, and Deaf queer individuals were treated as lesser than.

Homophobia within the Deaf community was so prevalent they would use codes and closeted signs instead of the actual signs. For example, the sign for GOLF could be used to mean gay, BASEBALL could mean bi, and GREEN AND YELLOW also meant gay (G-A-Y). Straight Deaf individuals also refused to straight-up ask someone if they were queer. They would fingerspell A-R-E Y-O-U but would never finish the question. This left many Deaf queer individuals feeling left out or disgraced within their own community. Yet when some finally decided to compare Deaf culture with LGBTQ+ culture, they found that the two cultures had more in common than they had differences.