

October 9, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

I write to express strong support for Prof. Denise Bennett's oral history project and archive, "Idaho's LGBTQ Community." This is an important project that I believe will not only benefit LGBTQ individuals and communities in Idaho and the greater Northwest, but also contribute to the fast-growing field of research that focuses on the lives of LGBTQ people outside of East and West Coast cities.

The academic field of LGBTQ studies, which reaches across academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, is rapidly expanding and shifting its focus to better understand the LGBTQ people that live in rural places and elsewhere outside of the major cities that are commonly assumed in popular media and scholarly writing alike to be unlivable for gender and sexual minorities. Thus, "Idaho's LGBTQ Community" promises to contribute to breaking down the assumptions that cities like San Francisco and New York are the only places that LGBTQ people and communities can survive and thrive. Until now, Idaho has been largely left out of LGBTQ studies and this project will help to remedy that absence. Indeed, the oral histories collected through Prof. Bennett's project will not only illustrate the unique personal journeys, challenges, and joys of LGBTQ Idahoans, but also how these individuals construct identities and lives in conjunction with their local communities, not necessarily despite their environments. These oral histories and archival materials will be of keen interest as primary sources for historians, sociologists, geographers, and others who are working to better understand the full range of LGBTQ life.

Making these oral histories widely available by sharing them online will not only expand the possibilities for academic research with this population, but promises to both have a positive impact on LGBTQ people in Idaho and to foster better understanding of the diversity of Idaho's population. Developing a sense of community and history can be an important aspect of survival for marginalized populations, such as LGBTQ youth and adults. In recent years online resources have begun to act as lifelines for marginalized individuals who are geographically isolated, such as queer and transgender youth living in the many rural areas of Idaho. The audio and visual materials from "Idaho's LGBTQ Community" will add a key resource for isolated individuals to know that not only are there other LGBTQ people, but that there is a rich history of LGBTQ life across Idaho. In fact, the participants in the project themselves are likely to derive psychological benefits and a greater sense of community from sharing their stories and seeing their lives alongside other LGBTQ people in their state. Further, projects like Prof. Bennett's undoubtedly work to highlight the unique needs and issues of this often-invisible group of people. A greater understanding of these issues, as derived from this project, will likely impact public policy and provide all Idahoans with greater knowledge of, and empathy for, the people that make up the state.

In sum, this is a timely project that will make important contributions to interdisciplinary academic scholarship, the lives of LGBTQ Idahoans, and potentially the larger social and political life of the state and region.

Sincerely,



Miriam J. Abelson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor