

Self-defined identity

Adam Hunter

Colin Vaida's Perspectives article, "Identity as Plural," reached a valid and obvious conclusion: that people differ in how they identify across an array of social constructs. I argue that speaking about sexuality and promoting queer visibility on Davidson's campus is one way to advance Davidson into a future in which we are unafraid to be our truest, freest selves. To quell conversations about sexuality would propel our campus culture into the past.

Arguing that discourse on LGBTQIA inclusion "is obsessed with sex" is, I think, incorrect. Reduction of sexual orientation to a predisposition to have sex with a certain subset of people does not reflect the myriad dimensions of love and its expression. Most of us do not define our identities simply on whether we "like penis, vagina, both, or neither," because we prefer people to parts (however, if you are in that sexual minority, welcome to the queer community!). I think that Davidson's queer discourse is less obsessed with sex and more interested in giving voice to a group that was heretofore silent on campus.

The "I am not just..." campaign has illustrated the many ways that we can self-identify, and they sometimes conflict. But identifying based on sexual orientation should not limit the number of other identities one can express. Vaida wrote, "The talk on LGBTQIA visibility and inclusion falls into this trap of defining people through a single identity, non-heterosexual, and in this way we forget the other parts that make an individual." The assumption that identifying as gay somehow prevents me from experiencing the other ways I can identify is illogical. But to ignore my sexuality in order to preserve my plurality of identifications would mean ignoring a vital part of my self-concept. After a lifetime of suppressing the person I truly am, and finally, finally after having the courage to come out, I am excited to embrace my

sexuality. Maybe that looks like preoccupation, but I think I should be free to publicly prioritize a part of my identity if I choose.

Humans, as social animals, seek ways to group ourselves because like birds, we tend to flock together. Vaida worries about creating a binary, but the great thing about the binary of heterosexual and non-heterosexual is that it includes exactly everyone. If sexuality must be categorized, at least the whole spectrum of sexual expression falls into those two groups, and theoretically there is even space for movement between the two. It's problematic that one group is classified by the absence of qualities that define the other because of the presumption that something (maybe normalcy?) is missing, but that's a topic for another essay. Rarely do two distinctions better include all types of being, and here a

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binary is necessary because inclusivity would be forfeited without one of the two parts.

Vaida recommends that Davidson shies away from assumptions about others, which I strongly support. We need to stop assuming that everyone is straight and that we identify as the gender (or ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class, etc.) that we appear to be. But shying away from our inherent differences isn't the same as not making assumptions, and it doesn't increase learning and understanding. If the only thing everyone shares is difference, then that is the great equalizer. Historically, Davidson has silenced discussions of

difference and sexual minority students* have felt repressed (see "Being Gay at Davidson: A compilation of student narratives" at http://www2.davidson.edu/studentlife/stu_orgs/grc/int.htm). To revert to that kind of Davidson would harm students far more than legitimization of their identities. Stigma and shame are exacerbated when the response to an identifier is indifference.

The fear that the LGBTQIA Task Force survey, the RLO flag issue, and talkbacks will de-normalize a group is rooted in a system where some identities are already defined as abnormal. Normality is an irrelevant idea if equality and respect are our goals. The LGBTQIA Task Force administered a survey which enabled Davidson to quantify the sentiments of this community, straight and non-straight members all included, so that we can see how far we've come and how far we need to go in creating a place where everyone feels welcomed. This is a chance for us to make changes to our institution so that future students will also feel affirmed and validated, regardless of orientation.

The assumptions that informed Vaida's article were flawed, despite surely good intentions. This is a time to be fearless in activism and advocacy to promote inclusivity at Davidson. Eliminating the stigma and shame over an identity (one of many!) requires making the identity unapologetically visible, not worrying about preconceived notions of normality, and learning to be proud of our true selves.

*Professors and staff may also have felt repressed but their perspectives were not included in the student narrative compilation

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On Self-Selection: Wildcats and Pigeons

Mark Brannan

Last Monday, PCC hosted an educational event along with CAMPUSPEAK in Duke Family Performance Hall. The event featured Michelle Guobadia, a CAMPUSPEAK keynote speaker, who delivered a lecture with accompanying PowerPoint entitled "Hazing Makes You a Better Greek, and Other Stupid Myths." Guobadia's speech included some personal anecdotes from her time as a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. at the University of Delaware, as well as a top ten list of false myths about hazing.

Throughout her lecture Guobadia cracked jokes and called on audience members to answer questions about their own experiences with hazing at Davidson. There were several points brought up by Guobadia that aroused murmurs of contention throughout the audience, which was composed mostly of new members, all of whom were required to attend by PCC.

Rather than harp on how I disagree with some of the finer points of Guobadia's semantics, I'd like to focus on one large blunder she made, which I felt lost her the attention and respect of the majority of the audience. This point is relevant to the experience of every PCC member and organization, as well as some students who are not involved in PCC. Rather than focus on my own experi-

ence within my own organization, I'm going to focus on the one night in which new members of each PCC organization are on proud display for other organizations to see: Self-Selection.

This time-honored Davidson tradition that hundreds of students look forward to every year was the subject of one question from Guobadia when she asked something along the lines of "Can someone tell me about the night with all the sauce?" As laughter slowly rippled through the crowd, one girl raised her hand and stood up to answer. She explained the process by which new members of eating houses are covered in a variety of condiments by existing members who have the luxury of wearing plastic ponchos.

As students continued to chuckle at the explanation, Guobadia continued her line of questioning with "And why do you do this?" with a tone of condescension that was as rude as it was indicative of her ignorance about Davidson life. Insulted by her tone and perplexed by her need of an explanation, I shouted "Because we're kids!" from my balcony seat while other students interjected their own similar explanations. The girl being questioned paused for a moment before simply replying "It's fun."

Guobadia then offered two hypothetical scenarios in which Self-Selection may harm the organizations and members involved. One was the possibility that during

the process of condiment application a bottle could slip from a member's grasp and hit a new member in the face, breaking their nose and causing a lawsuit. This scenario is so unlikely and absurd that it does not merit the number of words required to explain how frustrating I find it.

The second scenario was that due to the prevalence of social media, some outsiders may see what happens during Self-Selection and have a different, less positive outlook on the event. While Guobadia did not get into the specifics of what she was implying, she likely meant pictures and videos from Self-Selection could easily draw the skeptical eyes of students from other schools and potential employers.

I would like to paraphrase one of Guobadia's slides in her top ten list that contained the myth "Hazing is necessary because other organizations haze." To dispel this myth, Guobadia stated quite poetically that "Eagles do not concern themselves with the opinions of pigeons." Clearly her intention was to appeal to every organization's conceited belief that they are the best organization on campus. I believe Davidson students share a similar belief about our great school being better than others of similar academic and social standing. Self-Selection is one of my favorite nights at Davidson and one of a few truly unique aspects of Davidson life that I hold dear. One reason I love it so much is precisely because my friends at other schools don't understand it.

While typically only new members participate in the Running of the Court, I have had and taken the opportunity for repeat performances in all three of my years as a brother of Phi Delta Theta. No one is forcing new members beyond their will to subject themselves to physical or psychological trauma. Self-Selection is at its best a celebration of the freedom of college life unique to Davidson. Guobadia implied with her questioning that the way we choose to exercise our freedom is frivolous and dangerous. It is here that she lost the crowd Monday night.

I don't pretend to speak for all of PCC, but I know this Wildcat is certainly not concerned with the opinions of that pigeon.

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