

One Person, One Perspective

Ian Thomson

"1 Girl, 5 Queers," the flyer read, "Wanna hear a panel of five LGBTQ students air their dirty laundry? Have questions on LGBTQ culture, terminology, or SEX? Don't miss this chance to ask your LGBTQ peers WHATEVER you please! What happens here, stays here. Las Vegas Style." Imagine this poster being scattered around campus, advertising for a panel of black students or any other minority group. "Wanna hear a panel of five black students air their dirty laundry?" "Come ask Asians anything you please!" "Find out about Jewish students and their sex lives!" Would these panels ever be tolerated at Davidson? Absolutely not. So why was it okay for us to have an "Ask-A-Gay" Panel, an event where students could ask LGBTQ students about their sex lives? Though I think this event was not misguided in its attempt to open straight students' eyes to the gay experience, I feel that the framework, questions and answers of the "Ask-A-Gay" Panel, created a sexualized, and frankly "other"-ing portrayal of gay life on Davidson's campus.

It seems to me that the essentialization of gay life began with how the event was advertised. Reducing the panelists to the label "1 Girl, 5 Queers" and calling the event the "Ask-A-Gay" Panel was to me, an openly non-straight student at this college, offensive. First of all, I am not "a gay." Nor am I "a queer." And neither were any of the people on the panel. While I may identify as homosexual, my sexuality is not my identity. I like to think that I am more than who I am attracted to, and I know that other non-straight students feel that they are more than the label of their sexual orientation. Advertising this event with phrases such as "a gay" and "5 queers" allowed straight students to believe these are acceptable labels for other people, when I believe they are just as "other"-ing as "fag" and "homo."

While I was unable to attend this event (I was in a dress rehearsal for the student-directed One Acts), I have asked many students on the panel and in the audience that night

to share their experience with me, hoping that those who were there could broaden my perspective. Panelist Madeline Parker '14, told me, "There was a lot of focus on physical appearance, and, actually, cock size... a lot of time was spent talking about Grindr (a mobile app designed to help members of the LGBTQ community meet other interested members in their area, mostly for hook-ups) and hook ups." A student in the audience also legitimately asked Parker how many fingers she's put inside someone. And according to both she and audience member Rob Stevens '14, many of the answers from the panelists unfortunately revolved around sex.

Stevens pointed out that "it was nice" because it gave students an opportunity to "get rid of the awkward misconceptions," and Parker also mentioned that "people were joking around but it was a serious tone." I just personally don't understand how these questions could enlighten anyone about the experience of being gay. Asking and answering questions such as "What's your type?" "Are you top or bottom?" or "Is it true that gay people are more promiscuous?" (real questions from the event) may give you some knowledge about that person's sex life, but not much about who they are or their experience in the world. In the straight community, your favorite sex position and type does not define you, so why do we insist on it defining people who aren't straight?

Moreover, I do not believe that my experience as a non-straight person is all about sex. Sure, I have had sex. I've had hook-ups that I'm not too proud of, but I've also been in a serious, committed, loving, monogamous relationship that lasted almost a year. In my opinion, my sexual experience has been very similar to the experiences of other straight students at this college. The hook up culture is rampant here, but that's another story. It isn't exclusive to the gay community.

What events like the "Ask-A-Gay" panel are trying to do is promote the GSA's main goal, "To help the Davidson College community become so comfortable and so accepting that every LGBTQ person on campus feels comfortable enough to be open and honest about his or her respective sexuality."

It is wonderful that students feel comfortable enough in their own skin and experiences to be able to stand up in a room full of strangers and share their secrets. It takes a lot of guts. Unfortunately, I believe what was gained through this event was not necessarily liberating for the gay community. The LGBTQ community is, and has been, facing challenges. We must question our very rights. While questions about gay-bias and homophobia on campus, and coming-out stories were asked, these were not the central theme of the night. Much of the LGBTQ movement has been unfairly sexualized; this is a problem exclusive to Davidson. I just fear that it sets the rights movement back and exoticizes the love that can exist between a man and a man or a woman and a woman.

I am in no way faulting the GSA or the panelists for this event. All of the panelists were volunteers, and any student that identified as LGBTQ had the opportunity to be on this panel. They all answered honestly and candidly about their experiences. And the audience was completely self-selecting; they chose to be at this event and ask the questions on their mind. Unfortunately, this limited the actual amount of perspective given. No one person can speak for another's experience, straight or gay, speaks for anyone's experience. Going forward, it is important for all of us to keep in mind that every individual experiences life differently. While it is important to understand another's perspective, we must remember that that perspective is limited. And in our world where homosexuality is a topic at the front of our lives, we must not limit ourselves to any single perspective. Even mine.

I am happy to talk to anyone about my experience in the LGBTQ community, and while I will not tell you if I am top or a bottom, I promise to give you my perspective on life as a student who is gay, in hopes that it will help you grow in your understanding of sexuality, love, and equality.

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Eviction Notice

Rashaun Bennett

In the fall of 2013, the highly anticipated pub/coffeehouse for the Davidson College community is set to open. On April 25, 2013, at the SGA meeting, Dean Shandley announced that the Multicultural House would become the temporary space for the new pub/coffeehouse. In return for using the Multicultural House, Dean Shandley stated that Multicultural Affairs would move into one of the newly renovated spaces in the Union. The Dean welcomed the idea and pitched it as a "win-win for everyone." However, one may ask, is this really a win-win situation?

Some of the justifications for the move included the notion that the Multicultural House was underused. Another justification was that the house was cut off and separated from the school. The committee who decided to move the Multicultural House felt that attendance to multicultural events would increase if it were put in the Union. Personally, I believe that people who want to participate in multicultural activities and events will do so and are already doing so.

The lack of student input in regards to whether the Multicultural House should be used as a location for the pub is astonishing. I do not remember ever filling out a survey or receiving an email in regards to whether or not the Multicultural House should be moved. This article may actually be the first time people hear about the committee's decision to use the Multicultural House. Like most of the student body, I had no idea that the Multicultural House was among the proposed locations for the pub.

In a *Davidsonian* article written in September 2012, the author outlined some of the changes that would be coming to the Union's former bookstore location. In the schematics was a diagram of a "multicultural workspace." The description in the article stated, "In addition to an office for the program director, Dr. Tae-Sun Kim, plans include a small lounge for informal gathering space and storage for organizations." I welcomed the idea of a "small lounge" for Multicultural Affairs because, to my understanding, I thought it would be in addition to the Multicultural House, not a replacement. The article suggested that it would be an addition by stating, "The current Multicultural House, opened in 2010 in the former PIKA house, will continue to operate much in the same way, as a space to study, for student groups to hold meetings and as a location for film screenings or performances in the basement. According to Kim, the house is in high demand

by student minority, religious and performance groups, as well as academic departments." The previous quote does not suggest that the Multicultural House is underused, but it does suggest that the house would no longer be the Multicultural House.

Although the space for the pub is intended to be temporary, it is very unlikely that Davidson will have the Multicultural House in the future. The move to the Union appears to be the administration's permanent fix to the problem of the Multicultural House being separated from campus and students not taking part in the activities because it is "secluded." Since the administration sees that moving the house to Union will fix the problems that the Multicultural House supposedly faced, it is unlikely that they will move it out of the Union, because that would be retrograde according to their justifications. This move seems to be a temporary solution for the pub, but a permanent move to Multicultural Affairs.

I believe that the groups, clubs, and students who use the Multicultural House lose more than they gain from being relocated to a space in the Union. The Multicultural House provided comfort and privacy to have inclusive, intimate conversations and personal gatherings with people. That comfort will disappear by being in the Union, a place without activities, concerts, and gathering occurs. The loss of windows that will now be in the room of the Multicultural workspace in the Union may make students feel less comfortable, because privacy has been erased.

It is in my greatest interest and favor that Davidson College improves and continues to be the vanguard of liberal arts colleges. Although the effects of the pub are debated, I do believe that the pub/coffeehouse has good intentions. It is intended to alleviate some of the social stressors of Davidson and be a location for people who do not favor the "Down the Hill" experience. However, whether people want to admit it or not, Davidson is unintentionally encouraging the consumption of alcohol, by providing yet another place for people to buy and consume alcohol. I hope the committee reconsiders their decision. Since reconsideration is unlikely, I hope that the administration would consider the voice of the student body, and students who are most affected by these changes, before they make crucial decisions in the future.

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