



Uniformity in Place-Making:

How a Focus on Image and Tradition can Restrict Personal Expression and Repress Queer Identities

ABSTRACT

This study looked at the University of Richmond campus, a campus built in a collegiate gothic style of and comprised of uniform buildings and highly managed landscaping. Specifically, it surveyed queer students at UR to ask about their experiences and feelings being on the UR campus. The survey found that a majority of the 44 surveyed students felt pressure to be or act straight, felt there was a lack of queer visibility on campus, felt most uncomfortable in the settings such as the Business School and Greek Life locations and most comfortable in personal housing. Overall, students liked how the campus looks, but have a majority negative feeling about being on campus and over half did not feel like they belonged socially. The majority also felt there was not a space for queer students to connect and express themselves. Based on this, this study proposes that physical atmosphere of the school reinforces heteronormativity, gender roles, and expectation of behavior for the student body, leaving queer student feeling “out of place”. This study suggests the University of Richmond create a new space for Queer Life, including a natural green space which many students listed as their favorite places on campus.

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Understanding Place

The concept of place is familiar to most people. If asked, an average person could reply that a place is a location such as a home, local park, or school. This is true, all these examples are places. But there are several components that make them places: a location, a locale, and a sense of place (Cresswell, 2004). A place isn't just a location found at a set of coordinates. Places have associations, history, and elements that illicit certain feelings and actions (Kogl, 2008). Sense of place describes how a person feels within that space, what emotions and attachments people feel to the place. It could be a childhood home bringing associations of comfort and happiness or a place like a war memorial museum that brings feelings of loss, grief, or patriotism. Sense of place can be both communal and individual. A space such as a park can be a safe, bonding place for one community while an individual might associate it with danger and upsetting memories if they had a violent experience there.

Places do not just appear, but rather are created through political and economic processes that shape the values of the space (*The Sociology of Spatial Inequality / Edited by Linda M. Lobao, Gregory Hooks, Ann R. Tickamyer.*, 2007). Place-making is the practice of curating places through the introduction of structures, occurrences, and the process of investing power and control over spaces to create. Physical structures play a large part in place-making, but an aspect that can go less-noticed is the manipulation of the land on which the place is.

Land Domination and Values

As humans took over and changed land into places, a common theme of taming the natural world into something that could be controlled and contained arose. Every place was once untamed nature, growing freely in its natural state. Man began to spread across the lands of the earth, conquering new land with each exploration and beginning the domination of the earth's surface (*Ecological Feminist Philosophies / Edited by Karen J. Warren.*, 1996). As man came into the picture, he began to change the land from its natural state into places and spaces that can suit his needs (Parikka, 2014). As civilizations expanded and more natural landscapes became colonized places, man continued to exert his control over shape. Historically, men have held all positions of political and economic power and made all decisions regarding land use and place creation (*Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature / Edited by Karen J. Warren with Editorial Assistance from Nisvan Erkal.*, 1997). What has resulted from this is a patriarchal control of land and nature that has resulted in a repression of many natural spaces and depletion of natural resources (Raina & Ahmad, 2020).

One specific output of this is lawn culture. Vast, full, green, monoculture lawns are highly desired and widespread across the US. From neighborhood to neighborhood, lawn culture creates a sense of uniformity and collective identity from place to place. Rather than letting the

natural plants and grasses of the region grow in what could be undeveloped natural space, the idea of the lawn began in the mid eighteenth century as a sign of privilege and wealth, the idea spreading as more wanted to show their case their social standing by dominating the landscape around them and controlling it (Steinberg, 2006).

The idea of controlling a landscape is gendered due to the historical precedent and telling of the values of that place and its makers. Environmental domination is a common theme throughout man's interactions with the Earth and continues to call into question the values place-makers promote. The decision to remove the natural plants, animals, and even terrain of a land in the place-making process is a political action that changes how people see that space (Raina & Ahmad, 2020). Specifically, the desire to remove everything that naturally occurs and install carefully picked plants into a space during the place-making process enforces the space as a highly controlled environment that is looking to promote an image. Landscape culture has its roots in showing wealth and privilege and these messages are still sent by today's landscaped places (Steinberg, 2006). This desire to repress what naturally comes and instead curate an image and uniformity does not just affect the physical appearance of a place, but also how people within the place feel (Ahmed, 2006).

Place and Bodies

The same political and economic processes that create places dictate who enters the space and how they feel within it (Kogl, 2008). People are a crucial aspect of place; without people, there would be no places, merely space, which can be defined more abstractly as an area in movement or place to pause (Cresswell, 2004), (Key Concepts in Urban Geography / Alan Latham ... [et Al.], 2009). Every place is relational to bodies, to which bodies it invites, which it excludes, who the place was made for (Ahmed, 2006). Place-making plays a crucial role in how people relate to a place (Cresswell, 2004). For example, a country club is an exclusive place that only welcomes upper-class, often white, individuals. It is categorized with a carefully controlled landscape (notably large, rolling green lawns), dress codes, and sophisticated architecture. This space is also gendered with certain parts reserved for men and with activities usually inhabited by men (Massey, 1994). This is a place that has a very different sense of place for a wealthy white man than it does for a working class Black woman.

The way bodies are accepted and excluded from places influences how people feel and act within these spaces. Specially, spaces can affect a person based on their gender and sexual orientation. When places have expectations for how a person of a certain gender is to present themselves, this creates discomfort and a corrosive atmosphere that pushes a person to adapt their behavior to fit this space (Butler, 1988). Historically, there are expectations about how men and women are expected to present themselves, both through appearance and actions (Butler, 1988). These expectations are reinforced by places, especially locations with strong social

pressures (Calogero et al., 2017). This extends from gender expectations to expectations around sexuality, especially the expectation of heterosexuality (Ahmed, 2006). These expectations are present throughout places and spaces and influence how comfortable a person feels within that space. Heteronormativity can be visualized in places through the absence of visible queerness (Creating Safe and Supportive Learning Environments : A Guide for Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth and Families / Edited by Emily S. Fisher and Karen Komosa-Hawkins., 2013) as well as historical landscapes that promoted exclusion and violence towards queer people. The presence of other queer people is often crucial to a person's ability to feel comfortable within a place and can lead people to feel comfortable enough to explore queer identities (Ahmed, 2012), (McDermott, 2016).

Expression and Uniform Landscapes

The visibility of queerness and freedom of gender expression is at odds with a sense of place that promotes values of uniformity, hyper-control over appearance, and the subdual of what naturally occurs. The University of Richmond campus is a place where every building, whether it was built in 1920 or 2020, has a similar look . Most of the land is formed into green lawns with carefully trimmed bushes and trees. UR was just named the most beautiful college campus by the Princeton review, a fact that it is an actively celebrated and promoted around campus. While the current political and social powers are celebrating this place-making "success", it is left to wonder how the bodies that inhabit this place relate to it. There is limited queer visibility on the UR campus and with a college system that divides students by gender, questions about how comfortable students feel expressing their gender identity are relevant. This study seeks to examine how the University of Richmond's focus on a traditional, uniform image within its place-making affects its students' abilities to express and explore queer identities and gender identity within these spaces.

Roadmap

To begin, this paper will examine the study-site, the University of Richmond campus. This paper will look at both the physical landscape and history associated with UR. This will include where the land came from, a discussion of the architecture, the physical elements such as the natural space and the lake. Following this, this paper will address the social history that impacts the campus's sense of place. Specifically, this paper will look at the gender divide on the campus, both physically and spatially, and the traditions that formed around it. A survey of University of Richmond students was conducted to assess student experiences in relation to place on campus. This survey included questions about the architecture, sense of place, identity and expression, and comfort within different places on the campus. These results are presented and followed by a discussion that examines the possible connection between sense of place and students' abilities to comfortably express gender and queer identities, specifically focusing on

which elements of the campus's space promote or alleviate discomfort. Finally, recommendations based on the data for how the campus could adapt to better allow for the comfort and acceptable of all its students will be offered.

History of the Land

First, this paper would like to acknowledge that the land the University of Richmond campus sits upon is Powhatan Confederacy Land, belonging to the Powhatan Confederacy that lived there for thousands of years before European colonists came to this land and forced indigenous people off of their land through a triad of violence. The Monacan nation and other indigenous tribes may also have been on the land at some time.

The University of Richmond campus is located in Richmond, Virginia, in the left most sections of Richmond, known as the West End. This is a predominantly wealthier, white area compared to the rest of Richmond. The University of Richmond (UR) moved its campus there in 1910. Before UR came there, the land went through several ownerships. Before slavery was ended in 1865, the land was home to several plantations where Black men, women, and children were enslaved. The next major settlement on the land was from 1889-1910 when the True Reformers, a freedman's organization, purchased the land and began a farm. Around 130 families live on this land. By around 1901, the Westhampton Park Railway Company, who owned part of what is known as the Richmond side of campus, began trying to purchase the rest of the land from the True Reformers, to much resistance. In 1902 there was a devastating fire on the True Reformers land, which burned down the major barn and most of the harvest. The fire had an unknown cause and is chalked up to be an accident, though many suspected foul play as there was no explanation to why the fire started. The True Reformers were eventually forced to sell their land and after the Westhampton Park Railway Company sustained heavy losses, a group of wealthy men known as the Westham Land Corporation bought the land, selling much of it to UR and donated more land as well. The Westham Land Corporation soon began advertising the racial exclusion and social exclusivity of the new development with UR.

Architecture



Figure 1: Image of the University of Richmond Campus. Source: University of Richmond.

The University of Richmond's campus is built in Collegiate Gothic style and was designed by architect Ralph Adams Cram. Ralph Adams Cram wanted to create a uniform campus that embodied Western values and Christianity. His mission was to "go back to the perfect style that was developed by our own kin in the old home overseas, to express just these high and eternal ideals of education that were so calculated to breed high character...that last and most final type of the great Christian style of architecture." These ideals put white supremacy on the fore-front of how the UR campus was created. The desire to create a school for white Christian men by white Christian men is strongly conveyed in this quote. Almost every building on the UR campus is built in this style, making buildings built in 1912 undesirable from buildings built as recently as 2020. This Collegiate Gothic style recently won UR the number one ranking by the Princeton Review for the "Most Beautiful Campus"; the architectural style and uniformity of building is a large part of this. A goal of this stylization was uniformity, which is a goal confused to be upheld by UR through its continuation of this style. This place-making initiative that is about 120 years in the making places a value on everything looking the same and being in the original style set out to display Western ideals and Christian values.

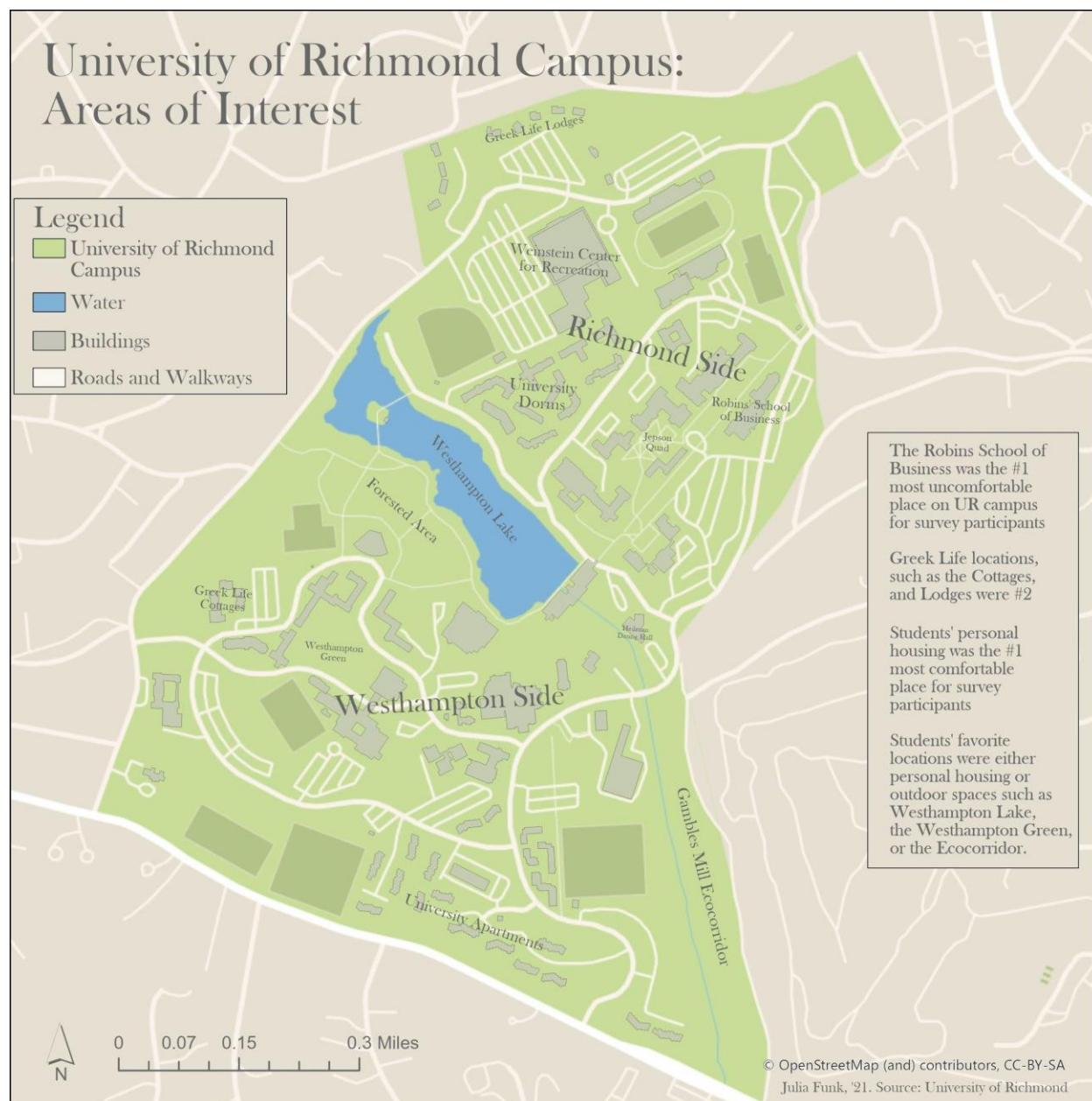


Figure 2: Map of University of Richmond Campus showing locations discussed within the study.

Natural Landscape

The University of Richmond campus sits upon 350 acres of land. It is home to many large, sprawling lawns such as the Westhampton green and the Jepson Quad. There are many tall trees on campus, including many oaks and pines. UR has heavily managed landscaping, with many areas of flowers changed several times a year and sprinklers built into the ground to keep the lawns green and luscious. There is also a section of campus that is unmanaged forest area, on the Westhampton Side along the northern region of Westhampton Lake. This forest has a path

running along the shore of the lake and is a stark contrast to the highly managed land around it. Several kinds of trees grow within this forest and it is home to some wildlife. The newest addition to UR campus the Gambles Mill Ecocorridor, which has forested areas around the Westham Creek, as well as pollinator gardens and a wetland. It is also home to wildlife, and it also backs up to the Virginia Country Club. After opening in Spring of 2020, students have begun enjoying the .25 mile path that runs through it, similar to the path that runs through the forest by the lake.

The Westhampton Lake is a central part of the University of Richmond campus. While it once divided the women and men on campus, it still acts as the divider between the Westhampton and Richmond Sides of the campus. The lake has various benches along the Richmond side shore, creating some communal space for students. However, it used to be a place for many students to gather and have fun. Before the 1970s, students swam in the lake, with a beach on the Richmond side. However, UR banned swimming in the lake in the late 70s, taking that space away from students and establishing the lake as an isolated fixture of campus, but not a place for students. Additionally, UR drains the lake every summer to deal with sediment build-up from a poorly managed eroding shoreline, hurting the wildlife population who rely on it. This action, again, cements the Lake as a purely aesthetic element of campus, but not valued for its social justice capability or its ecosystem.

A Campus Divided by Gender

The University of Richmond has two separate colleges within it: Westhampton College (for women and gender non-conforming students) and Richmond College (for men). Each college has its own set of Deans and students' government. Westhampton College was founded in 1914, about 85 years after Richmond college began in 1830. The colleges have had several divides, a notable one being the physical divide in where students of each college could live. Westhampton college was on the South side of the lake (this side of campus is called the Westhampton side) while Richmond college was on the North side (now known as the Richmond side of campus). Until 2002 all Westhampton students lived on the Westhampton side while Richmond college men lived on the Richmond Side. For a long time, the lake served as a physical barrier to divide the two groups of students, with Richmond men having limited access to the Westhampton side, mostly to female student's housing.

Along with different governments, sides of campus, and deans, the two colleges also have different traditions. Westhampton College has traditions such as Ring Dance and Proclamation that still continue today. Ring Dance emulates a debutante ball where students are presented by their parents and proclamation has a long history of expecting students to wear white dresses (recently changed) and involved handing each freshman a flower to begin. Westhampton also has a history of practices such as the Women's Lifestyle Committee, a student organization that focused on promoting Eurocentric standards of beauty and femininity to its students. It also held

an annual May Day celebration where a student was crowned the May Day Queen, usually based on Eurocentric beauty standards in a ceremony that promoted femininity and gender roles (Franceski, 2018). Richmond college also participated in an event known as the “panty raids” where they would flood onto the Westhampton side of campus and break into the women’s dorms to steal panties, with many women’s “rooms broken into, property stolen, and dormitories damaged” (Franceski, 2018). This tradition that lasted from the 50s to the 80s prompted toxic masculinity, violence against women (including sexual), and a heteronormative culture (Franceski, 2018).

Gendered organizations also still thrive on the UR campus in the form of Greek Life. UR has 7 fraternities (and 2 additional unofficial fraternities that have been kicked off campus but still have a presence) and 6 sororities. Greek life is a dominating presence on the UR campus and has the most student spaces of any organization. There are not clear numbers on the amount of students currently involved in Greek Life due to a large anti-Greek life movement in the summer of 2020 that began in the wake of BLM and several students creating an Instagram page that posted anonymous stories from students about their experiences with Greek life, including racism, homophobia, sexual assault, sexism, and more disturbing information (Evans, 2020). In light of this page, it is abundantly clear that Greek Life promotes heteronormativity, gender roles and expectations of gender expression, toxic masculinity, and a culture of exclusion on campus

Survey Construction

A survey was conducted to analyze how queer students feel on campus and get records of their experience. The survey was anonymous and none of the questions were required to be answered. Most questions had different options of which students could select multiple as well as an option to write in an answer additionally or instead of the pre-written answer choices. Some of the questions were also open ended, meaning students had to write in their answer. Pre-written answers were chosen for both ease of use and ease of quantifying results. There was also the option for students to select multiple answers because their feelings may not be captured by just one answer. Students could expand and add if they felt their feelings were not fully shared in a pre-written choice. Several questions in the final section of the survey had only write-in options.

This survey was qualitative and focused on student’s experiences and feelings. The survey was organized into four sections: basic information, sexuality and experiences, gender expression, and space on campus. Each of these sections sought to establish a different portion of the queer student’s experiences. The purpose of the first section, basic information, was to get demographics of the participants. This data was used to both see who took the survey and to analyze results by different demographics. These questions included asking for pronouns, class year, race, sexuality or sexual orientation, gender identity, and major[s] and minor[s]. The second section was comprised of questions relating to student’s experiences being queer on

campus and how comfortable they felt expressing their identity. The first questions asked when they realized they were not heterosexual, following up with questions about whether they were “out” at the University of Richmond and if they felt comfortable with it. It also asked about whether students felt pressure to act differently than how they would like to represent themselves and if they felt pressure to “act straight”. The final questions asked if the participant felt there was visibility of queer students on campus and if they felt comfortable exploring queer identities at UR. The third section asked questions about gender expression, in a similar vein to the previous sexual orientation sections. Questions included how comfortable students feel expressing their gender identity and if they feel pressure to dress differently than what is authentic to themselves. It also asked if they liked the two college systems divided by gender and if they felt campus had a spatial divide by gender and a social divide by gender.

The final section asked about the space of campus. The first question was an open response asking how they felt on campus to gauge a sense of place. The next questions asked what places on campus they felt most comfortable in and which they felt least comfortable in. All three of these questions were open responses instead of pre-written options so as not to influence their students’ answers at all by suggesting feelings or spaces. They were asked about the architecture with questions asking if they liked how the campus looked and that all the buildings looked the same. They were asked if they preferred one side of campus, and if they felt like they belonged on campus. Another question asked if they like that UR focuses on campus beauty and promotes this focus. The final questions asked if they had considered transferring, if they felt there was a space on campus for queer students to express themselves and connect, and what their favorite place on campus was.

To analyze the results, totals for questions with pre-written responses were tallied and the percentages of students who picked each answer or combination of answers were calculated. For some questions with open ended responses, key words or places were picked out and those responses were quantified. Differences based on the student's class year were also examined. For the survey sample group, only students who identified as queer or somewhere under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. The survey was disseminated through reaching out to organizations such as WILL, SCOPE, Stripes of Pride, and through social media.

For clarity, this paper will use “they,” a gender neutral personal pronoun, to refer to all participants in the singular to help maintain total anonymity with responses. This survey asked students for their pronouns, but it has been decided in the interest of anonymity that they will not be shared. “They” will also be used as a plural pronoun when multiple students are being referred to. Numbers of students will always be clarified so there is no confusion. Additionally, all participants, including alum, will be referred to as students as this survey reflects a participant's time and experience as a student in the University of Richmond campus.

Results

44 participants completed the survey. Of those 44, 26 identified as white, 4 as Black/African American, 3 as Black/African American and white, 2 as white and Asian, 2 as Latinx/Hispanic, 2 as Latinx/Hispanic and white, and 1 in each as white and Indigenous, Asian, Asian and Southeast Asian, white and middle eastern, and Latinx/Hispanic and Asian. There was a spread across class years. 13.6 % were the class of 2024, 9.1% class of 2023, 20.5% class of 2022, 27.3% class of 2021, 18.2% class of 2020, and 11.4% class of 2019. Many students identified with multiple sexual orientations and I will list the overall percentages of students who chose each option. 38.6% identified as bisexual, 27.3% as queer, 20.5% as lesbian, 13.6% as pansexual, 6.6% as ace/aro (asexual and/or aromatic), 25% as gay, 2.3% (1 participant) as “I don’t use labels”. Many students also identified with more than one gender identity, so I will report the findings as percentages of students who selected that answer. 63.8% identified as cis women, 20.5% as cis men, 6.8% as non-binary, 4.5% as gender non-conforming, 2.3% as transmen, 2.3% as gender fluid, and 4.5% as “I don’t use label”. As more majors/minors, there was a widespread across participants and it did not prove to be a helpful tool analyzing results, so I will not list all of the responses.

The first question of the second set of results asked at what point in their life participants realized they were not heterosexual. 2.3% said elementary school, 34.1% said middle school and 34.1% said early high school (freshman or sophomore year). Following that, 25% said late high school (junior and senior year), 9.1% said early college (freshman and sophomore year), and 6.8% said late college (junior and senior year). The majority of participants knew they were not straight before entering college, with only 7 participants not realizing till after they began at college. The following question asked participants whether they were out, meaning open about their sexual orientation, at the University of Richmond. Of the 44 participants, 1 was not out at UR, with 18 out only to close friends and 25 out to everyone. After this, the survey asked if participants would feel comfortable being out at UR. To this, 20 students said yes, 19 said yes to close friends, 1 said no, 1 said only in queer spaces, 1 said not completely, and one said maybe. This results slightly varied from the previous results. Based on the data, some students who said they were out to everyone stated that they only felt comfortable being out to close friends. showing some discomfort with being out to everyone for a few students.

The question that followed asked students whether the atmosphere at UR pressured them to act differently or inconsistently from how they would like to represent themselves. To this, 6 students said yes, 32 said yes only in some places or social scenes, and 7 said no. The participants were then then asked if they felt pressure to be or act straight at UR. 8 said they did not, 10 said they did (in the past), 17 said they only felt that in certain places on campus, 5 said they do currently, while 2 said they do currently and only in certain places on campus, and 2 said they did (in the past) and only in certain places on campus. There was no relationship between

class year and currently feeling pressure to act/be straight. Students were asked if they felt comfortable continuing to explore your identity or other queer identities while at UR. To this, 12 students said yes, 3 said no, and 24 said they would feel more comfortable doing this in other places that were not the UR campus setting. It should be noted that 4 students who already graduated wrote in “not applicable due to being alum” as to the question being in the present tense. Of the remaining 9 alum, 2 said yes and 7 said they would feel more comfortable in other places. The final question in this section asked if students felt there was visibility of queer students on campus. 1 said yes, while 7 said somewhat, 30 said not very much but some, and 6 said no. There was no relationship between any demographic feature and these responses.

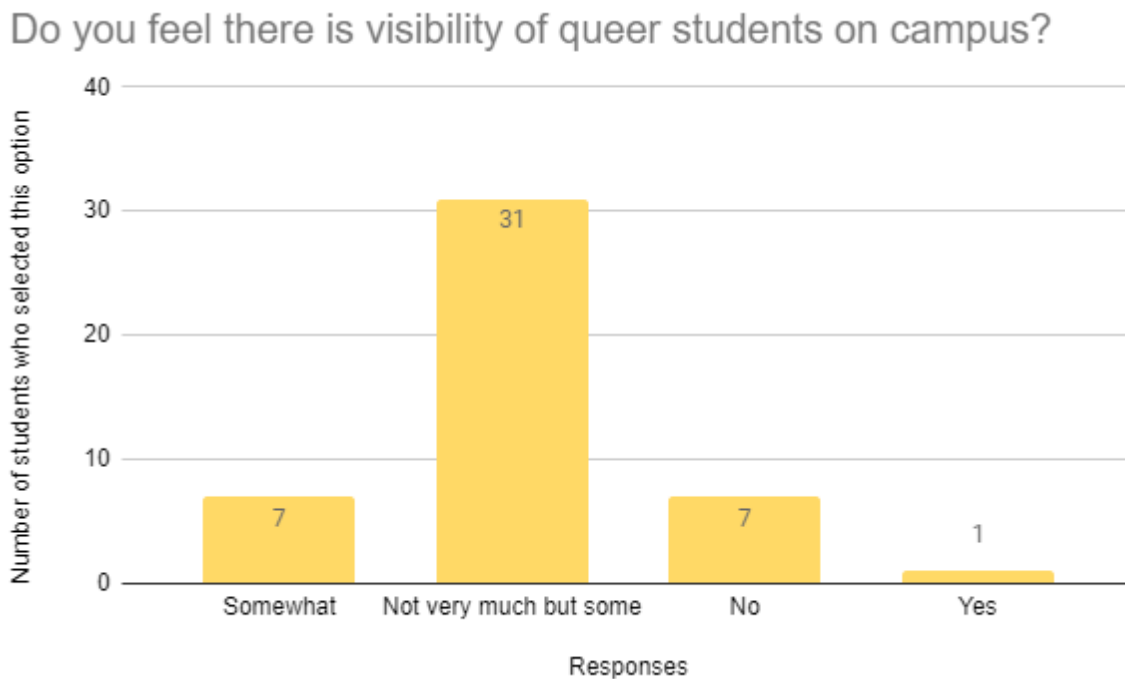


Figure 3: Graph of results for "Do you feel there is visibility of queer students on campus?"

The third section of the survey asked students questions relating to their gender expression and comfort with it. It should be noted that the majority of students who answered this survey identify as cis gendered, so these results cannot be understood as an accurate sample of the trans and non-cis community at UR (including non-binary and gender non-conforming students). While trans is both a specific identity and umbrella term for non-cis people, this paper will use it as an identity only where students identified as trans and not as the umbrella term because the blanket version of trans was not used for gender identity demographic question. Results are given for all participants and also for participants who don't identify as cis, which I will now refer to as non cis. Out of 44 participants, 9 identified as non cis, with one student identifying as a transman and the rest as either gender expansive, non-binary, gender non-conforming, "I don't use labels", or genderfluid. Of the full surveyed group, 35 were comfortable

expressing their gender identity, 7 didn't feel totally comfortable, 1 didn't used to feel comfortable but does now, and 1 did not. Of the non cis participants, 4 said they were comfortable, 3 said they didn't feel totally comfortable, 1 said they used to not but do now, and 1 said no. Students were next asked if the atmosphere at UR makes them feel pressured to dress differently/inconsistent from how they would like to represent themselves. Of all participants, 17 said they do not feel pressure to dress in a way that is inauthentic to themselves, 7 said pressure to conform does impact them, 12 said they used to feel pressure but not anymore, 2 stated that they do not dress in way that is authentic to themselves because of this pressure, and 5 said they feel pressure but ignore it. Of non cis students, 2 said pressure to conform does impact them, 5 said they used to feel pressure but not anymore, 1 stated that they do not dress in way that is authentic to themselves because of this pressure, and 1 said they feel pressure but ignore it.

The last three questions of this section had to do with gender divides on campus. The first asked students if they liked the two-college system divided by gender. Of all participants, 3 students said they liked it, 22 said they do not like it, 11 said they see the benefits of it but do not like it, 5 said it did not matter to them, 2 said that while they personally liked it, they believe it should go, and 1 said that while it does not matter to them, they see the harm it could do to non cis students. Of non cis students, 1 said they like it, 4 said they did not like it, 3 said they see the benefits but do not like it, and 1 said it did not matter to them. Students were then asked about their perception of a gender divide on campus, both spatially and socially in individual questions. The first asked about a social gender divide. For all participants, 25 said yes, 13 said only in Greek life (both the organizations and social scene). For non cis students, 7 said yes, 1 said only in Greek life, and 1 said no. The second questions about a gender divide spatially on campus. For all participants, 15 said yes, 17 said somewhat, 10 said no, and 1 said only in Greek life (locations). For non cis students, 2 said yes, 3 said somewhat, 3 said no, and 1 said only in Greek life (locations).

The fourth and final section of the survey asked about the physical campus, including spaces, sense of place, the school's focus, and the architecture. The first three questions were all open answer questions with no pre-written options. Due to this, some students chose not to answer, mainly seen in the first question. The first question asked students how they felt on campus, including adjectives, sensations, association. Out of the 32 responses, 22 had associations and descriptions of negative feelings associated with their sense of place. The other 10 had associations and descriptions of positive feelings associated with their sense of place. These answers have been simplified into key words, including combining close synonyms that students used. Most who answered used multiple words. The amount of times certain words was used is reported. The top answer to this question was feeling "out of place", which 9/32 students used directly. The second most popular answer was "happy" with 6 answers. "Surveilled" and "watched" came in next with 4 responses, which was tied with feeling "at home", and feeling "contained", "boxed-in" and "claustrophobic". "Isolated" and "anxious" both have 3 responses.

“Stifling”, “awkward”, “uncomfortable”, “lonely”, “supported”, and “comfortable” all received 2 responses. 33 other words/feelings were also used by students, ranging from “pressured” to “fulfilled”.

After this, students were asked which space they were most uncomfortable in on campus. 39 students replied to this. Out of 39, 25 students named the Robins School of Business- or as it's known on campus, “B-school”- as the location they felt most uncomfortable in. 11 students named locations and settings associated with Greek Life as the most uncomfortable, while 7 said the dining hall, and 6 said locations associated with arthritis and sports. No other location had a significant amount of responses. The next question asked which spaces students felt most comfortable in. 39 students also responded to this. 16 said their dorm or on-campus apartment, while 9 said in classes and/or buildings for their major and 9 said wherever their club, sport, or group meets. there were no other occasions with a significant amount of responses. 39 students responded to the question of what their favorite place on campus is. While there was again a range, the most popular locations were again personal student housing and various outdoor places on campus, such as by the lake and in the new Ecocorridor.

The rest of the questions in this section had the same first as the other section switch pre-written answers and a write-in option. 33 students said they liked how the campus looked, with 10 saying they liked it, but it could be better, and 1 saying they did not like it. 2 students pointed out their dislike of the highly managed landscaping and 1 that the campus was too redundant looking. 18 students said they liked that every building is built to look the same, with 24 saying they liked it, but they wished there was some variety, 1 saying they didn't mind it, and 1 saying they did not like it. When asked if they liked that UR focuses on campus beauty and promotes that information, 7 students said they liked it without reservations, 4 students said they liked but they wished UR focused on other elements more, 23 students said they wished UR focused on other elements more, and 10 students said they liked the focus but not the promotion of it. 23 students said they preferred the Westhampton side of campus, 6 said they preferred Richmond side, and 15 said they had no preference.

The last 3 questions all had to do with feelings of inclusion. When asked if they felt like they belonged when looking around at the buildings and landscape of UR, 17 students said they felt like they belonged, with 18 saying they felt they belonged academically but not socially, 3 saying they did not feel they belonged, 1 saying they felt that they belonged socially but not academically, and 3 saying they felt this campus was not built for them. Of those 3 students, two identified as Black/African American and 1 as white. When asked if they had ever considered transferring, 15 students said no, 26 said yes, with 14 of those students saying they used to want to but no longer did, and 2 students who surveyed did transfer from Richmond. The final question asked if students felt there was a place for queer students to connect and express themselves. 18 said no, 7 said yes, 8 said they felt there was a place to connect but not express

themselves, 2 said there was a place to express themselves but not connect, 4 said there may be a space but they don't know of it, and 2 said there was but it was limited.

Issues with the Survey

This survey had several issues I wish to address. The first major issue is the sample. The survey was not directly distributed to every UR student and recent alum, and therefore had to spread through knowledge and communication of queer students and alum. Because of this, the survey only reached students who are out (the 1 student who answered they were not out at UR is an alum who is now open about their sexuality). This created a bias of students who already feel more comfortable than the unknown number of students who do not come out during college or soon after. It is likely that students who don't feel comfortable enough to be open about their sexuality may not have the same experiences students who do feel that comfortable with it have at UR, both in positive and negative ways.

This leads to another issue which is the conflict and overlap of reasons students may feel more or less comfortable. the majority of students who took this survey were white, meaning it cannot give the full picture of BIPOC queer students at UR. Race plays a large factor in life for students, especially Black students at UR, and that should not be ignored. This survey gives a majority white perspective and race was not used in all the questions to analyze the data due to the lower numbers of BIPOC students who took the survey. This survey did also not consider students' income or whether they attended private or public schools before UR, two factors on top of race that impact a student's experience at UR. Outside of this bias, the majority of students who took this survey were cis students and only one student who identified as transgender took this survey, meaning it cannot give a full picture of trans experiences at UR. Also, the majority of participants identified as cis women, another factor that impacts their experience. Overall, the sample can be taken as a sample, but this is not necessarily representative of the whole Queer community on campus, and especially for BIPOC queer students, trans students, and the students on campus who are not out.

Other issues include the necessity to simplify answers in order to quantify and aggregate responses. Many students wrote in answers alongside their selection of pre-written choices, which is not always fully reflected in the above results. If the extra information was vital to understanding their selected answers, it was included, but many were expansions on their feelings and experiences, which are really valuable. Unfortunately this paper does not have time to look at each individually, but hopefully more work can be done in the future to fully record queer students' experiences, especially in their own words.

Sexuality & Gender Expression

Based on the questions asked in the sexual orientation and expression sections of the survey, students do not all feel comfortable being totally open about their sexuality at UR. A large part of this is due to the lack of inclusion many students on campus expressed when describing their sense of place with feelings such as “out of place” and “stifled”, “watched”, and “isolated” or “lonely”. Obviously, this was not uniform across all surveyed, with 10 students expressing positive associations such as “at home” and “happy”. But the majority did not have positive associations with being on the UR campus. The visibility of other queer people plays a large factor into queer students feeling included (Ahmed, 2012), (McDermott, 2016). Of all surveyed students, only 1 said they felt there was queer visibility on campus, with 7 feeling there was somewhat, 30 saying not very much, and 6 said no. Clearly, there is not a strong sense of visibility among queer students on campus, and that is for students who are out and likely know other queer students. Many students who are not out or don’t know any queer students may have an even lower sense of visibility. A lack of visibility can lead to feelings of exclusion, along with a reluctance to continue exploring queer identities. With 61.5% participants said they would feel more comfortable continuing to explore their identities in other places with an additionally 7.7% saying they did not feel comfortable exploring it at UR, showing the UR is not an ideal place for queer students to comfortably explore their identities. This leads to the question of why.

Based on what students communicated both in their sense of place answers, their lack of comfort with being fully out, lack of queer visibility, and the only 8/44 participants saying they never felt pressure to be or act straight, there is clearly a heteronormative environment on the UR campus that restricts queer students’ ability to feel fully included and comfortable. Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed write about how places have expectations for how a person of a certain genders and sexualities are to present themselves, which pushes people to adapt their behavior to fit this space (Butler, 1988), (Ahmed, 2004). The UR campus has an atmosphere where the expectation is on the normative, communicated through the lack of queer visibility and hyper control of the physical environment. There is a lack of diversity within buildings and strict guidelines about how every element of the campus must look, which reflects back on the student body. The campus is also designed in a style meant to communicate “Western ideals and Christian values”, both of which do not lead to a string inclusion of queerness which fits into neither of those values. 24/44 students said they felt they did not belong (mostly socially) on the UR campus. This likely has to do with the absence of a social atmosphere that promotes the inclusion of queerness and people outside of the norm at UR, which would be white, upper-class, straight, Christian students.

Places on Campus

Sara Ahmed discusses in her book “Queer Phenomenology” how people orient themselves within a space based on features such as physical objects and other people, which

create social atmospheres. She discussed how most spaces are created to accommodate straightness and whiteness, leaving those outside of that norm to feel “out of place” and with the need to adapt to function within that environment. For queer UR students, that adaptation may be suppressing their queerness in certain settings, especially highly gendered social settings (such as Greek life settings) and spaces that promote gender roles, social hierarchy, and high expectations of appearance such as the Business School, which is associated with privilege, certain kinds of dress, and attitude. Very straight setting, same with Greek life, exclusion. The topmost uncomfortable place for surveyed students (24/39 picked this) as the Business School. This is a location associated with expectations of dress, with most students often dressed in formal, gender-normative attire, and emulating the business world, which has high competition, expectation of gender, and heteronormativity. In “On the Violence of Heteronormativity within Business Schools”, Nick Rumens writes about in “specific business schoolwork contexts there may be stern disapproval and judgement concerning manifestations of LGBT and ‘queer’ sexualities and genders”, exemplifying the feeling expressed by queer students in this survey (Rumens, 2016). Clearly, a few students expressed the lack of other queer students, “safe space” stickers, and professors who were respectful of pronouns as reasons for this discomfort, while the majority of those who expanded on their answers discussed the dress of other students, instances of hearing homophobic comments, feeling of judgment, and overwhelming feelings of being surrounded by witness, wealth, and privilege. Additionally, Greek life has a history of being homophobic and heteronormative (Yeung & Stomblor, 2000), also exemplified through the recent student testimonies on the Abolish Greek Life at UR Instagram page (Evans, 2020). Given the high amount of students who felt that there was a gender divide on campus, spatially and even more socially, with many attributing the social divide to Greek Life, it is no surprise that these settings with high expectations of behavior, dress, and fitting a norm leave many queer students uncomfortable.

Comparatively, the places students felt most comfortable in were all spaces they either chose to be a part of or had control over. The number one most mentioned space of comfort was personal housing, a space which can be mostly controlled by the student who lives there. The student who lives in the space gets to decorate it and control who enters the space, making it a space where elements of campus that do lead to exclusion can be avoided. Several students mentioned their housing feeling like a haven away from the campus, suggesting a disconnect between how they feel in their own space versus on the campus at large. The second two most mentioned spaces were locations where a student went for a club/group/sport meeting and within classes and buildings associated with their major. Both are spaces full of people that students share either interests or identities with and feel a part of, creating that sense of belonging and comfort. Slightly different from most comfortable, students’ favorite places included their personal housing, likely for similar reasons as comfort, and also outdoor spaces. Many of the outdoor spaces mentioned were less managed areas, such as the new Ecocorridor, the area down by the lake, the unmanaged forested area on Westhampton side, and the overgrown former

garden behind Keller Hall. It seems that placed students have control over (their housing) and outdoor spaces- which are known to have high benefits associated with mental health and physical health (WHO, 2017)- are where students most like to be on campus.

Lack of Connection Between Sense of Place and Physical Space

While most students had feelings of needing to adapt their behavior and suppress their queerness on the UR campus, the majority did not have qualms with the physical appearance of the campus. Only 1 student did not like how the campus looked with 10 saying they liked it, but it could be better, and the other 33 saying they liked it. It is a visually pleasing campus with the continuity between buildings and classic collegiate gothic style. Many students described it feeling like “Hogwarts” (the school from the Harry Potter books) and other statements of admiration of its beauty. While many expressed this, it contrasts with the negative sense of place many students expressed. There does not seem to be a strong association between the physical landscape and the social settings for most students. Again, while almost all students liked how the building looked the same, the majority said they also wished there was some variety, suggesting that students may not be totally at home in an environment where everything is created to look the same, even if they do not know exactly why. The overwhelming majority of students also expressed that they wished UR did not focus so much on campus beauty and instead focused on other elements of campus. This perhaps reflects that while students do not see the physical landscape as very connected to the social atmosphere, they feel the focus the administration puts on physical beauty and do not see it as the most valuable element to focus on. Several students mentioned UR feeling like a false advertisement, where the beauty of campus created this promise of an experience that they did not feel was actually delivered on once they went to school here. This could point to students feeling that the focus on beauty is an artificial way to promote the campus and attract people without actually having strong initiatives of inclusion. While it seems students do not have a strong connection between the physical appearance of campus and the social atmosphere, it is interesting to question whether they would have the same pressures of heteronormativity if this same student body was moved to a modern-looking campus in a city, where there would be much different sense of place. Due to the high research precedent of places influencing actions and feeling (Ahmed, Butler, Cresswell, Kogl), it is unlikely that a place built without the same associations of wealth and “Western and Christian values” would lead the student body to act the exact same.

Recommendations

The majority of surveyed students did not feel there was a space for queer students to express themselves and connect with one another and the lack of queer visibility. The majority of students also expressed the desire to have more variety of buildings on campus and the appreciation of outdoor spaces, especially less managed outdoor spaces. Based on this, this paper

recommends the creation of a new Queer Life Center that is visible and easily accessible for students. It should be created in a style that diverges from the collegiate gothic style, and include an outdoor element, such as a garden or connection to an exciting space such as the Ecocorridor where students can be within nature and decompress (WHO, 2017). Having a specific building dedicated to Queer Life would show that inclusion is a priority for the campus and do a lot to help queer students connect with one another and have more visibility. The current LGBTQ+ lounge on the 3rd floor of THC is a small room with no windows that can accommodate at most about 5 students and is very cut off from the rest of campus. This space is clearly not adequate enough to meet the needs of the queer population given the lack of students who felt there was a queer space where they could both express themselves and connect.

Outside of this, there are other factors on campus such as Greek Life, which students felt contributed to gender divides, and the business school which participants overwhelmingly uncomfortable in, that should be addressed. Many students suggested having more queer faculty, class offerings, and visible support from professors as other factors that could help promote more visibility and a sense of inclusion of campus. Again, while this paper has not focused specifically on race due to the surveyed sample, there is also a lack of BIPOC faculty and course offerings (discussed recently by the recent by the call for an Africana Studies major and department by the Africana Studies Student Committee), let alone the intersection of BIPOC Queer faculty and course material. Additionally while this study did not focus specially on the bi-coordinate college system divide by gender, the majority of queer students did not like it and expressed again they felt the campus was divided by gender both spatially and socially, leading to a discussion on how the bi-coordinate college system impacts this. The ending of this system may also be in the best interests of queer students and overall inclusion and decreased division on campus. This study has focused more so on the physical space of campus, but it is clear from student's feelings that these areas of improvement within our curriculum, faculty, and potentially college system would also be highly beneficial to queer students.

Final Remarks

There is an atmosphere of heteronormativity on the University of Richmond campus that is negatively impacting queer students. This sense of place has been enforced by a hyper fixation on physical beauty above other elements and highly managed campus. Students don't feel there is strong visibility of queerness or place for queer students to connect. While most like how the campus looks, many wish for variety within the look and feel "out of place" in settings, especially uncomfortable in the Business School and Greek Life settings, which both have association with gender roles, heteronormativity, wealth, and privilege. To be more inclusive of queer students, the University of Richmond would benefit from having a building dedicated to Queer life where students can connect and express themselves, with a natural green space element involved. This would increase queer visibility, show inclusion was a priority, and also

add diversity to the appearance of the campus while creating a physical and social place that the campus currently lacks.

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