

The Sunset

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WHEN VIRES MEETS VIOLET

Sapphic connection at Florida State
University and the city of
Tallahassee

BY DACEY TIETZ

When Vires Meets Violet

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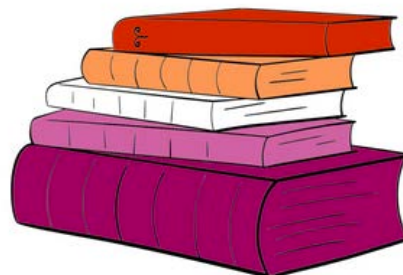
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On the evening of August 29th, 2025, the faintest whisper of rain sprinkled across Landis Green, accompanied by cheers and applause. Clad in button-up shirts and wielding books of feminist literature, lesbian students lined up to be judged on their satirical performances of the “nonchalant masc” stereotype that’s grown to be oh-so infamous among Gen-Z sapphics. I found myself standing nervously among the many participants. Although I didn’t think I stood out among the crowd, I couldn’t help but join the fun – after all, when would there be another “Performative Masc Lesbian Contest” at Florida State University?

Queer people throughout history have always managed to find community in unexpected places. There’s certainly no exception here at Florida State. The masc lesbian competition stands as a recent testament to the interconnectedness of the sapphic scene on this campus in particular.

“It was a moment for people to see [us] supporting one another, and I think that was a good experience for people to see”, as described by sociology and EWM double-major Raquelle Elson, who attended the event as an audience member.

Created as a campy, queer spin-off of the “Performative Man” contests that trended on TikTok this past summer, this event invited sapphic students to playfully poke fun at the stereotypes about mascs (i.e. masculine lesbians) that circulate within our own community. While the contest inspired satirical commentary on our current understanding of gender presentation, it also offered a little bubble of acceptance for



The colors of the lesbian flag, depicted as a stack of books.

LGBTQIA+ students – particularly underclassmen and transfers – who may struggle to find sapphic spaces on campus. Contest winner Lee Klodner recalled having this sort of experience last year as a freshman. “I know when I came to Tallahassee I was like, ‘oh, it’s North Florida, you know, we’re in the panhandle. I’m cooked,’” they say. “But then there were like 140 lesbians that just came out of the woodwork and I was like, ‘oh, okay, I guess that’s how it goes here.”

While the sapphic community may be small relative to the rest of the student body, I truly believe that we’re more visible now than ever before. Many of our student organizations draw in significant queer audiences. The Pride Student (PSU) stands out as the most notable of these. PSU hosts events throughout the academic year that seek to foster friendship

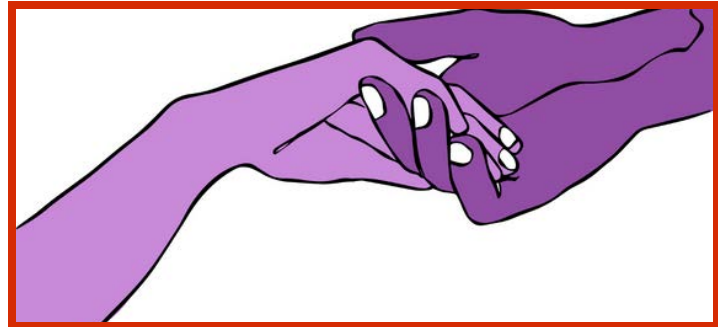
and solidarity among its members, notably including a lesbian identity night at the beginning of this month. The Askew Student Life Center, while not designated as a queer organization, serves as a platform for representation through their LGBT History Month film showcase each October.

Still other organizations that aren't explicitly associated with the LGBTQIA+ community boast a large number of queer members. When asked about which orgs tend to be hotspots for the queer community at FSU, Elson pointed to her involvement with *Diverse World Fashion Magazine (DWF)*. "I think that there's a very specific type of creativity that [DWF] draws out of people," she says. "It attracts people with that abstract, alternative, artistic side to them. And then a lot of those people happen to be queer."

DWF isn't a queer publication, but Elson's description of the org

brought to mind Tallahassee's broader history with sapphic media. The Naiad Press was, at one point in time, the largest publishing house of lesbian literature world. Tallahassee's own Barbara Grier and Donna McBride co-founded and ran the company for thirty years, beginning in 1973. The eccentric couple is remembered for serving as keystone members of the Tallahassee lesbian community, and the Naiad Press is credited with spotlighting the creative prowess of countless sapphic authors. Many of the works published by Naiad remain archived in Strozier Library at Florida State today.

It's safe to say that sapphic social connection within the FSU student body extends far beyond the winding brick paths of camp-



Two lavender hands, clasping one another.

us. Similarly to DWF and Naiad, queer spaces in Tallahassee today often mimics those of our past. In 1979, sapphic-owned Rumours opened at 517 Gaines Street as one of the more classy gay bars in the downtown area. The space is now occupied by The Plant, an inclusive cultural center which remains very openly pro-LGBTQ+. While Tallahassee's queer scene enjoyed Club Park Avenue in the 80's, 926 Bar & Grill is cherished by many today for their weekly drag performances. Common Ground Books, Tallahassee's only LGBTQ+ and feminist bookstore, carries on the legacy of Rubyfruit Books, which proudly served the queer community until its closure in the late 90's.

Beyond that exist queer spaces that don't fit neatly within the boundaries of campus versus community. Dyke Soccer has recently soared in popularity within the Tallahassee sapphic scene, gaining over 160 members since its creation in Fall of 2024. The group consists of mainly FSU students and alumni, meeting at Tom Brown Park to practice every week. While Dyke Soccer remains focused on attracting lesbian members, anyone who expresses



Contestants lined up in the Performative Masc Lesbian Contest at FSU.

interest is invited to join, granted that they identify as sapphic in some way. This warm sense of community made a lasting impact on Klodner, who joined around the same time that he began grappling with his identity as a genderfluid lesbian. During our interview, they explained, “Dyke Soccer definitely taught me that there's a lot more different ways to express yourself than I previously thought you could.” The unwavering solidarity Klodner received from his teammates gave him the courage to embrace his gender identity.

Tallahassee is the city that we know it to be today because of its people. The queer community has always been a

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FSU’s Pride Student Union celebrating National Coming Out Day in 2015.

part of that history, no matter how relentlessly our current state government fights to bar LGBTQ+ topics from the classroom. Being a lesbian student at Florida State University carries its own unique set of challenges. However, I’m deeply proud to be a part of the sapphic subculture that flourishes on this campus and in this city today. We as a community have fostered a special kind of queer joy – one that has taken the form of the spaces we carve out for ourselves. The sapphics of FSU stand as a pillar of solidarity in a time where diversity as a principle is threatened by our political climate. Make no mistake – Florida State is gay, and will continue to be gay so long as we are here.

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