

Safe space at York University

By: Andrew DiVito - For: GEOG2075 (LA&PS)

Where do you feel safe? Until recently I had never been faced with this question. Sure, I had thought about it subconsciously, incorporated my childhood lessons into my everyday actions, but it was never an issue at the forefront of my thoughts, until now. Something about this question resonated with me, and it got me thinking, and the more I thought about it, the more questions I had. Where should you feel safe? Is it important to feel safe? What makes an individual feel safe?

With all these unsolved questions I started to seek answers, this is what I got...



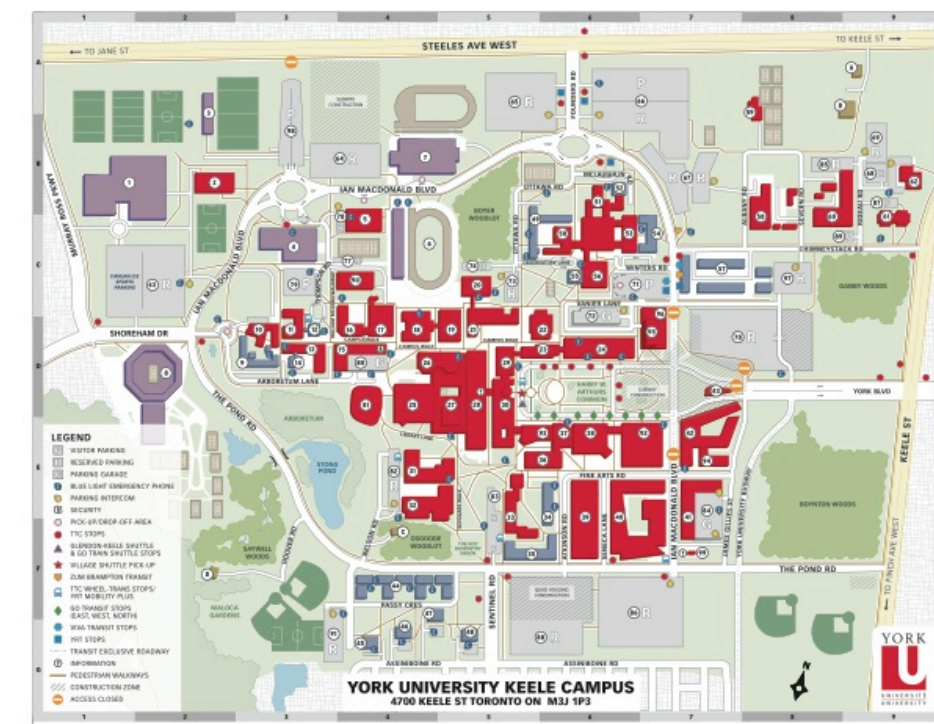
The space (interior): The above image, taken by myself, depicts the Accolade West (ACW306) classroom. Here Dr. Koopman (Sara) can be seen lecturing.



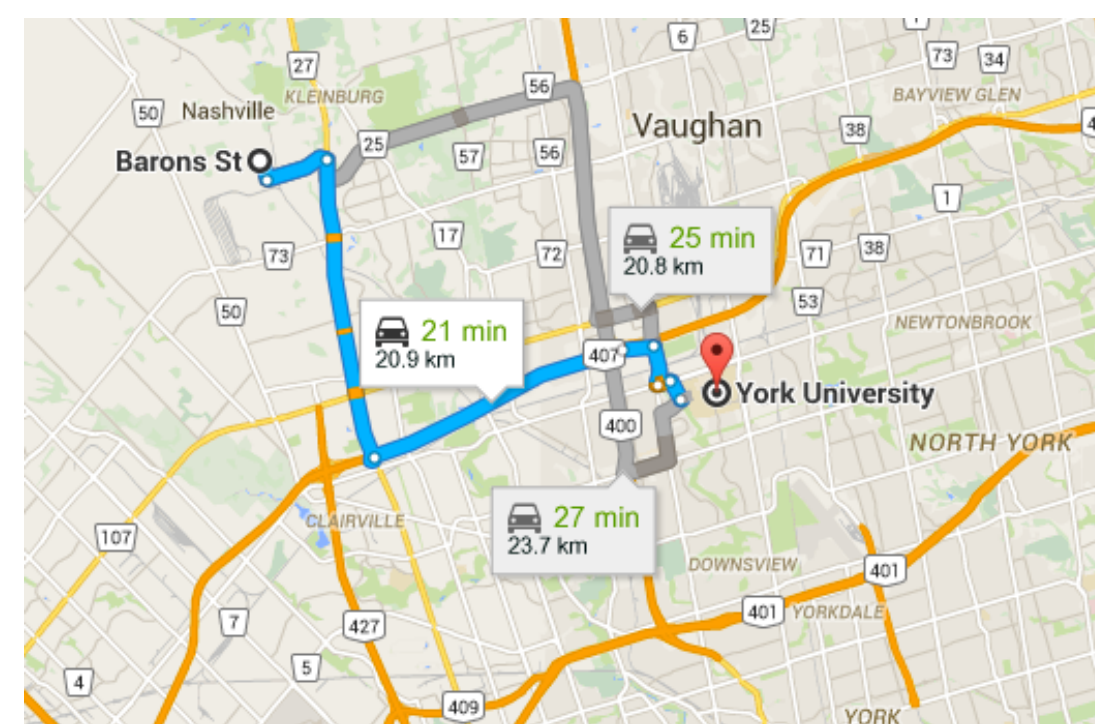
The space (Exterior): The above image, taken from the B+H architects website, depicts the exterior of the Accolade West building.

Background Information

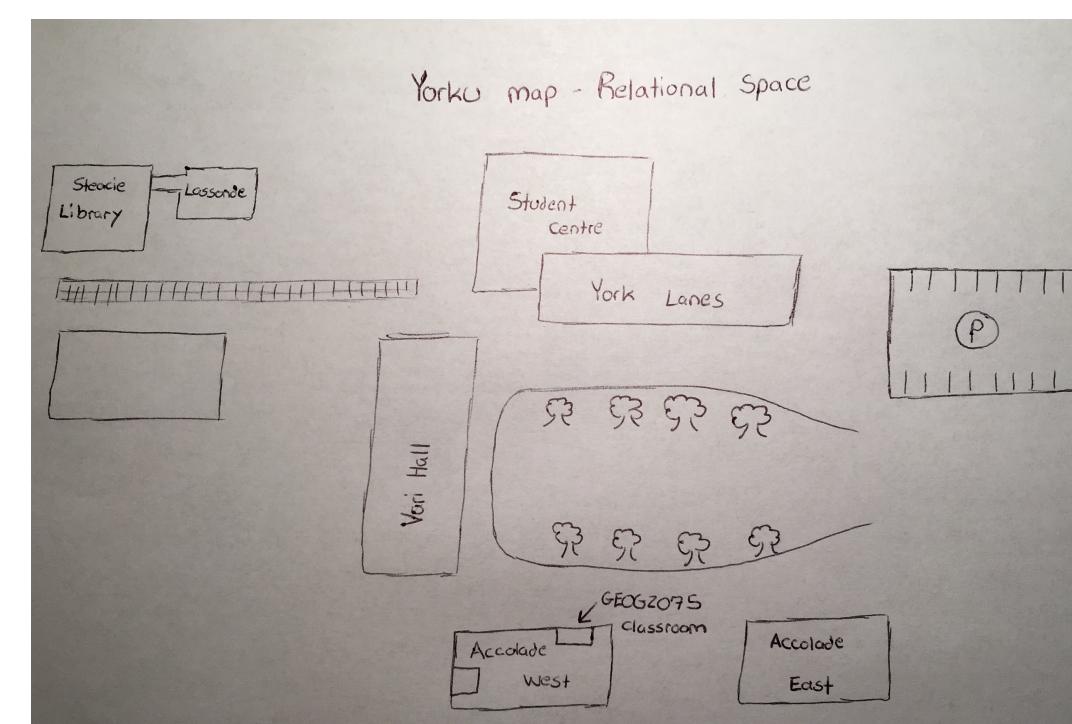
David Harvey claims space can be absolute, relative and relational. Absolute space refers to fixed and unmovable space, relative space describes a movable measure of absolute space, and relational space refers to the relation of objects.



Absolute space: The above image, taken from the York University website, depicts York as an absolute space; it is fixed and unmovable.



Relative space: The above image, taken from Google maps, depicts York as a relative space, a movable dimension; different routes allow York to be closer or further.



Relational space: The above image, an original sketch, depicts York as a relational space. Drawn from memory this map is showing the most important places.

Methods

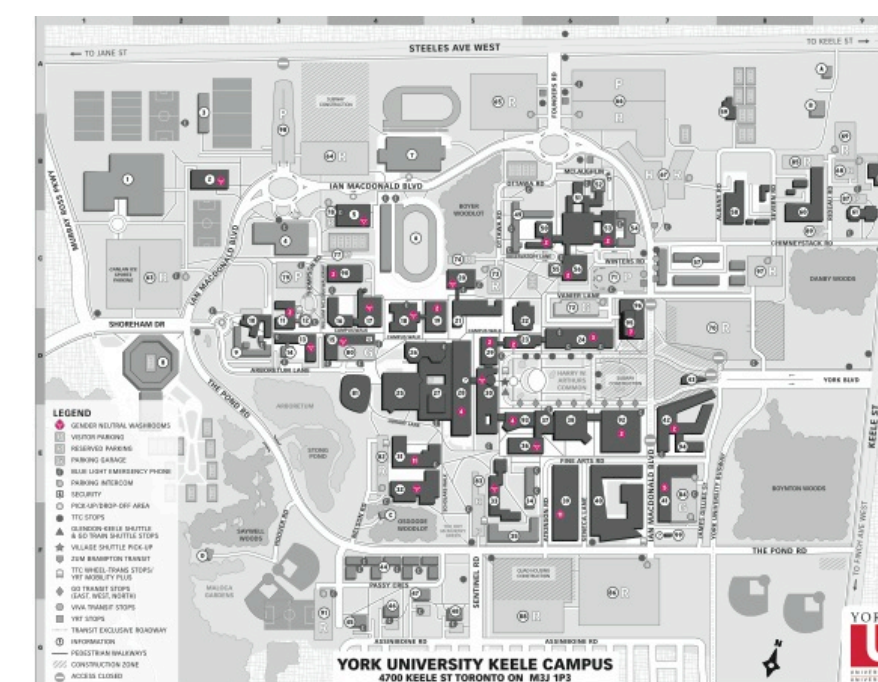
Information was obtained through participant observations and extensive research pertaining to how one space may vary from another. The participant observations allowed me to gain insight on what made this space feel so safe, and more importantly if it appeared as if others also felt safe within. Openness to questions and body language were used as criteria in evaluating comfort.

Conclusion

York University is the most diverse school in Canada, it is not racialized and although it is a private space, it behaves as a public space. There are many misconceptions pertaining to York, specifically, whether or not it is a safe space. Dr. Koopman helped to dissolve these misconceptions about the university itself and the students within. Ice-breaker exercises along with weekly group discussion facilitated a sense of fraternity within the classroom that made everyone feel more comfortable. Dr. Koopman has created the safest space at York and my research recommends that the methodologies used by Dr. Koopman be translated to some kind of learning system to allow all professors to practice these actions. Although York university strives to be inclusive to all, such a system would make York an even safer space.

Abstract

To feel both comfortable and thus safe within a space an individual must feel as if they belong. Using Accolade West room 306 as the gold standard for safe space at York University the purpose of this research is to determine methodologies in which York may become more inclusive and in turn a safer space for all. Through participant observations and vast research pertaining to space it was determined that spaces can be gendered, raced, aged, etc. and that the people within could facilitate or breakdown these barriers. Dr. Koopman (Sara), the professor for GEOG2075, was able to speak on theory behind racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, further, she is able to host open conversations on these topics, encouraging all students to participate -- especially if they are part of a marginalized group that traditionally does not have a voice to contribute with. I was able to conclude that by breaking down barriers and making the space inclusive it facilitates a sense of openness, comfort, and safety, something that can be expanded to all classrooms at York University.



The figure to the left, taken from the York University website illustrates all of the gender neutral washrooms on campus. This was included to illustrate that York University is striving to be inclusive and safe to all, but as with all things there is room for improvement.



The figure to the left, taken by myself, depicts the ACW306 classroom, empty. This picture was significant, because by observing the classroom empty I was able to confirm that the space in itself did not attribute to it feeling safe, but it was the environment that Dr. Koopman created within.