

Interview with Luis Toledo  
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By Lily Burdick  
Transcribed by Lily Burdick

Lily Burdick: Okay. Recognizing that our identities are complex, in flux, and especially evolving and changing in college, how do you think about and describe your identities?

Luis Toledo: Hmm. Well, I think coming here I wasn't more able to identify myself with my blackness, just because, I guess living in Miami, there's this clear divide between Afro-Latinos and African Americans. Afro-Latinos tend to really identify themselves with their, I guess, Latinidad. And, just because, you're in Miami where the majority of people are Latino, and a majority are actually, like, white Latinos, it's easy for you to identify yourself with that part of yourself, but in general it was really a struggle in Miami. Just to assert my blackness and for people to see me as fully black, which has only happened here at Davidson. Where people are more comfortable with complexity and understand that people have like, different experiences and different identities. And that the way I have experienced the world is not the same as other people. Yeah.

LB: I remember having a lot of different fears and thoughts about what college was going to be like. Do you remember what you might have thought about in terms of queer black life before you arrived at Davidson?

Toledo: Yeah, for it was more, coming here it was about being out, and there was definitely a lot of hope in that. But at the same time that was something completely new to me. I have my uncle from my dad's side of the family who is also black and queer, but he is - it's something we don't talk about in our family, at all. So it's something I wasn't exposed to, like, I didn't have anyone to think about - like a queer black man - I didn't have any point of reference of what that was going to look like, so yeah. I really struggled in that sense.

LB: As you know, I am working on a project for an independent study called Queer, Black, Intersectional Davidson. I am particularly interested in recuperating documents from the recent past that talk about the intersections between queer and black at the College. How would you describe queer black life at Davidson today, and what has your experience been?

Toledo: I feel like queer black life is just queer life here at Davidson, I feel like in general. I feel like it's queer black voices are the ones that have really stood up for the community, and the ones who constantly try to create spaces in which all queer people are welcome. Just, and if I had to guess, because queer white people tend to take refuge in their whiteness and find the other spots on campus in which they can fit, while in general black people have been more used to, I guess adversity and being the odd one out. If you just add an identity on top of that, like, we just kind of deal with it. So I would say yes, like I've felt comfortable just because I've had a space and I've had people here at Davidson who are definitely leading the way in trying to create a space that is open to, like, all queer people.

LB: What do you think you will remember about Davidson's queer/black/queer black life after you graduate?

Toledo: I'm going to remember Vance. I am, yes. It's, just, that passion - the amount of passion, the amount of love he has for the community, and at the end of the day what I'm going to take away from Davidson is going to be those relationships. Those connections with people who have similar experiences.

LB: What terms do you use to describe your gender/sexuality/race, and what does queer mean to you?

Toledo: I don't know. I think I tend to think about them separately, depending on who I'm talking to. Like I feel like around my black friends it's easy for me to just identify as gay - that's just what I do, that's just what I say, just because everything else is a given. But in general when I have to present myself to other people I have to think more of the intersectionality and the ways that I'm different and how my experiences are different from theirs.

LB: What does queer mean to you?

Toledo: I mean, initially, when I was thinking about queerness, and being introduced to the word itself - queer - it was anything that wasn't straight. But after that it became more of an identity, I think, just being queer is just being subversive. I think it's just being outside the norm when it comes to sexuality. Which, yes, in and of itself means not being straight, but it means so many other things. And being open, not only when it comes to the gender that you love but also being open to many other things when it comes to your sex and health and all of the things that come with that as well.

LB: That's all the questions I have.

Toledo: Oh!

LB: Anything else that you wanna like, talk about regarding what it means to navigate Davidson with an intersectional identity?

Toledo: Hmm, I just feel like I've been really lucky to have a community here that is really welcoming. Working in admissions, when people actually ask me about the students of color here on campus and what it means to be a student of color here on campus, and presumably also what it means to be a queer student of color here on campus, I feel like I generally talk about, you know, like usually, I grew up Christian, and usually when they're

talking about a small church they say 'a small congregation, but very powerful.' That's usually the words I use to define the queer POC community here at Davidson. Small congregation, but very powerful. Yeah.