

Interview with Daric McKinney
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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?

Daric McKinney: I describe them in the same way that just, like, the question does, in a way. I feel like they are constantly flowing together, even with their specific aspects. So being a queer black man at Davidson, I'm very much at the intersection of being black at Davidson but also being queer, um, so in that way my life is centered around my intersections and even what I do at Davidson is centered around my intersections as well.

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

McKinney: Um, no, in the sense that when I first got to Davidson I wasn't necessarily like really focusing on my queer identity, because for me, in a lot of ways it wasn't fully formed. In high school, I had started coming out to my friends about junior year, and it was a slow process. And, I remember the first day I came out to someone, that was one of the most nerve-wracking experiences of my life. It took me like 40 minutes just to build up the courage to say the words. So coming to Davidson, I definitely wasn't focused on that, in terms of just general support – I was more focused on that and having a community that I really felt was going to support me in general regardless in some ways of my identity, but also because of my identity. And more specifically focusing on my blackness in that kind of aspect. And I guess, for me, in terms of queer support, as time went on at Davidson, I realized that I really don't, like there's not a lot of support for queer people of color at Davidson. We're a very isolated group, and in terms of just

community, besides the QPOC dinners now, there's not much for us. There's not really programs focused on queer POC identity. It's very very few.

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?

McKinney: Queer black life at Davidson is really interesting because in a lot of ways, a lot of us are very acclimated in the community. But it's because of our blackness, not because of our queerness. Although our queerness is something that a lot of us, especially if we're out on campus, like does manifest through our blackness. A lot of times, I don't know we get the chance to show off our queer black side, versus our black side, or identity. It's, yeah, in some ways I don't have a lot to say, only because it's so not a thing at Davidson, which is also saying a lot. So there are very few queer black people of color that are out specifically, because there are always more, there are always more that aren't out – that aren't comfortable – that's just the thing in general in terms of queerness, queer identity. In terms of people that are out, there's only maybe, right now there's only, less than 20 people out of this whole school that I can think of, and out of 2,000 that's a very very small percentage. So there's very few people I can really relate to in that way, who I can talk to about my specific struggle. And even just larger just queer people of color, there's a little bit more, but not that much more.

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

McKinney: Can you say that one more time?

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

McKinney: Um, this is difficult. So those are like, 3 different categories for me. In terms of queer life at Davidson, not much past my freshman year. I feel like my freshman year, more than any other year, was the most time where I really saw queerness at Davidson really manifesting. It was weird because it was a really small community at the time but it was more united, in some ways, especially through things like YANASH meetings, events with Q&A, and I think that fervor for appreciating queerness on campus is coming back, which is good, but there's still a ton of work to do. In terms of black identity, being black at Davidson is definitely something I am really really going to remember a lot, just because of how many ways blackness, and even through my work as an Africana studies major, blackness at Davidson for me has been very centered. And I think about queer blackness as something I wish, I think I'll leave Davidson wishing that I had more experiences dealing with queer blackness. Yeah, because in some ways, it's finding yourself and your own representation of queer blackness that's very hard at Davidson. And it's not necessarily because of how rigid the binary is in terms of just thinking about like, presentation and stuff like that, but really experiences or conversations or just like daily dress. I feel like because of Davidson, in terms of being black and queer, I've very much started to come into my own, and I don't know if that's just a part of growing up and being comfortable with myself, but I think it's also the fact of just being like 'I'm going to do what I want, and everyone else is actually irrelevant.' Because, I mean people have been talking shit about me my whole life, so like, I really don't give a fuck anymore. Like, I don't.

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

McKinney: Wow, so um, I use he/him/his pronouns, I am male identified, male presenting. I identify as African American specifically – most of my family comes from the slave generation. Most of my family lived in the South at some point, then all migrated to Detroit, Michigan, where most of my family is now during the Great Migration of the 1930s and 40s – 30s for my family specifically. And in terms of my queer identity, I've been jumping around with different labels, but right now I just kind of identify as sexually fluid. Because I was wrestling with bisexual but I felt like bisexual almost had a quota with it – that I had to either be intimate or feeling some type of way about a number of people from both genders – if I'm using the binary genders. I know that bisexuality is very expansive and bisexual is a very expansive term, but I just feel like sexually fluid allows me to not have to be constrained in that type of way, and that's where I'm at.

LB: What does queer mean to you?

McKinney: Queer means, queer means liberation for me. In the sense of, because we live in a heteronormative society, queerness allows me in society to not have to worry about gender roles. I don't have to worry about, 'did I open the door for this person,' or 'do I have to always pay.' And I know that some of these things are just, like, minimal, but at the same time these are different things that are really permeating through society about what a man could look like, what a woman should look like – do – and I've always thought it was bullshit, but like, especially now being queer, it's really bullshit to see it manifest. And just seeing it growing up, and throughout my life, it doesn't – it just doesn't – for example, my mom owns her own

business. She's been a business owner for over 25 years, very successful, amazing woman. It doesn't make sense for her to have to be a housewife. It just doesn't make sense that that's the only thing she can do. It just doesn't. And so even just thinking about queer relationships, like let's say I do end up marrying a man, I – I don't have to worry about like, 'oh am I going to be the house-husband?' Because we can both do it! It's not the either-or anymore, it's a both-and. A lot of things in my life are starting to become both-ands, and I appreciate that a lot more because I don't have to be constrained to, like, 'I have to do this,' or 'I can only do this, this person does this.'

LB: Is there anything else you would like to add about navigating Davidson with an intersectional identity?

McKinney: Ooh, child, it's hard. It's hard. It's so hard. It's difficult because, especially with sexuality, it's not something that just is, like, presented and always put at the forefront. So in that way, it's hard to always see yourself and see representations of yourself on campus, so in terms of just intersectionality in general, like, that's definitely an issue. Certainly with race, Davidson does not do well, in my opinion, with handling – or not even handling – with really engaging with students of color. There are things set up in place, programs, clubs, stuff like that, but Davidson has a long way to go in terms of really understanding what it means to be a person of color and how people of color have to navigate spaces at Davidson. So even just starting there with race, adding everything else into it, it gets really difficult to think about, and Davidson is very surface-level.

LB: Thank you.

McKinney: Thank you.