

Interview with Amaya Bradford
April 3, 2019
Davidson, NC

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Transcribed by Lily Burdick

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

Amaya Bradford: In college?

LB: Yes.

Bradford: I gotta think about that for a second, sorry. I normally, I describe my identities as, could you explain the question?

LB: Yeah, I think identities, kind of, you know, they change, and they're really complicated, and they evolve especially when you're in a college environment, so you're no longer necessarily attached to the kind of person you were -

Bradford: You were in high school?

LB: Yeah, and like, you're away from your family, you're away from the people you who grew up with, and so, I don't know, I feel like your identities change, and so, I guess, how would you describe your identities now?

Bradford: Okay. My identities I definitely would describe as biracial with African American and white and queer. From high school, it changed to having to no labels - well, for queerness it changed from having no labels to being bisexual to being lesbian to all types of sorts of stuff, and for race, throughout most of my life, it's been like, 'oh, I have to check one or the other,' so sometimes I'll check the white box and sometimes I'll check the black box, and then I realized I could check both boxes, and I was like, 'oh, okay, let's do this now.' But then again, it's also navigating what kind of space I'm in, and how much I claim those parts of me. Claim - not claim - but how much I relate to the African American side of me and the white side of me.

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?

Bradford: I definitely thought it was, like, going to be non-existent. I thought that, like, because just in popular media in anything that I've heard, I've already had, like a lack of exposure LGBT life in my high school. Like I didn't really officially meet my first queer person until I was a junior in high school, and she was white, so like, it just wasn't anything that I really heard about. So I definitely, when I came to college, I thought it was like the stereotypical all white, cis, gay or lesbian people. And I thought that the queer black community was completely non-existent here. And now that I'm here I realize that it is, and it's very diverse, which is absolutely amazing. Well, mostly diverse.

LB: As you know, I am working on a project for an independent study called The Queer Black South, and 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?

Bradford: I would say that it is prevalent - it's there. You can see it within different people. I feel like that's the biggest - that's where the life is - is within the people. That's where you see all of this representation and you see how they interact and how they live and my experience with it has been mostly through the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, and STRIDE. That's where I have had my most, like, interactions. Because that's where I've met all the people of color, and then, as an open queer person myself, I just kind of find out who else is queer, and especially who else is - and that, and my STRIDE mentor is a queer black woman, so

I've mostly met everyone through her and through STRIDE, and my experience has been interesting in the fact that I am still looking for more diversity, mostly within the gender spectrum that I could maybe relate to someone a little bit more closely to. But yeah, that's where I have mostly had my experiences with it.

LB: I know you're a first-year.

Bradford: Yes.

LB: But what do you think you are going to remember about Davidson's queer/black/queer black life after graduation?

Bradford: I'm going to remember, I keep saying the people but I'm honestly going to remember the people. Like I'm not going to remember any kind of like, specific aspects I don't think, because I just don't think it has much of a place here yet. As in like, you can remember there are certain instances or certain events for the queer people or for the people of color, but the amount of events for queer people of color or for like, queer black people in specific - the only thing we have is QPOC and I'm not sure if I'm really going to remember that. Just those meals.

LB: And those just started this year.

Bradford: Yeah, just started. And I work in the CDI, so like, putting that together has been interesting. But yeah, I think those events aren't there so I'm just going to remember those certain people who are black and queer, because that's all I feel like, is really - that's just what's holding down the queer black community here. It's just those people who identify as both.

LB: What terms do you use to describe your gender/sexuality/race - we talked about that a little bit - but also, what does queer mean to you?

Bradford: Yes, we did talk about that a little bit. Gender - questioning at the moment. So, don't really know. For the most part female, she/her/hers pronouns. Sexuality, queer. Also something I am just now experimenting with labels and all that. And race, biracial, African American and white. My definition of queer is what I've - that's what I've been trying to define to myself, because all these labels say certain things and all these labels have certain connotations within the community, and trying to find my own place within these labels and trying to figure out even if I have to fit myself into these labels. So queer to me just means liking people who you like with no kind of restriction. With no restriction to gender or anything like that, or expectations. Queer just means loving people who you love without any kind of restriction. And excluding any kind of cis-gender strictly heterosexual people.

LB: Do you have anything else that you want to talk about?

Bradford: Those are all your questions? I thought that was definitely going to be longer! Nothing on you, I was just -

LB: Vance and Kaiya have just been at Davidson for longer, so I think they've seen change over time in a different way, because QPOC didn't exist until now, basically.

Bradford: Yeah yeah yeah. I definitely, like, as a first-year, as a woman who is, I guess technically from the south, because I'm from Kentucky, and living in the south, and then being biracial and being queer, I guess, just like, seeing all this come together while hearing all these stories that just like, none of this existed is like, very - while at one point exciting and heart-warming to me, that it's like different for them than when they were freshmen, but at the same time, I see a lot of work that needs to be done. So it makes me very determined to try to get things to the point where these identities and this intersection is prominent and it's not like,

hidden or you have to go searching for it, or anything like that. Because especially, like I said, back in high school, that wasn't there either at all. So I just want to make this establishment so that anyone who comes in, if anyone had that kind of background that I did that no one really knew about anything - anything about the intersection, then as soon as they get to Davidson they can kind of get to know it pretty quickly.