

Interview with Jalin Jackson  
April 3, 2019  
Davidson, NC

By Lily Burdick  
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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?

Jalin Jackson: Yeah. In general, my identities in general?

LB: Yeah.

Jackson: Yeah, interesting. Yeah, I like to think that socially we have, kind of, fixed, or at least more fixed, kind of constructs and categories – that don't necessarily match how we feel, for example. Like, in terms of my LGBTIA identity/sexuality, I see myself, I would say, I'm between gay and bi. Because I'm like, while, I'm not, you know, 50/50, I do see it as a weird, kind of, percentage that just depends on a lot more than some objective type of, biological kind of standard, you know? So, there may be times where I'm really attracted to a certain person and then other times, I'm like attracted to nobody for a long time. Um, in terms of women specifically, you know. But then I'm just usually attracted to men, so I'm like, "Okay, I'm not really gay because I am attracted to some women, but I'm not bi either, you know," because I'm not – that one relationship isn't equal and besides all of the politics of naming and binary-ness and stuff like that, you know. I'm also not quite pan either, you know, 'cause I'm like, yeah, on the one hand I'm also attracted to, um, some female-to-male transsexuals because I do see them as, you know, men, as they would see themselves, as some of them would at least. Um, so, it's just, kind of, however you feel, is usually how I advocate for going about it, or understanding yourself.

LB: Cool. Um, 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 at Davidson?

Jackson: Because of my, kind of, one upbringing I'm from Camden, New Jersey, um, so I've had a long experience with like, poverty, and all this other stuff and homophobia and so on, um, that really did condition me before going to high school in Philadelphia, um, that's when I really, about junior year I would say, is when I really started to kind of, um, actually question it. Even though I was already, since like 6<sup>th</sup> grade I could like, um, fantasize about a guy friend, you know, and still be like, "oh, I'm straight." Like, "that doesn't mean anything," you know? But, once I started to really question it, and all this other, kind of, mental health stuff started, kind of, getting the best of me at the time, um, I really did see college as an escape, a breath of fresh air, that regardless of what that environment might be like at Davidson College, it would be better – anything could be better – than, kind of, what I was going through at the time, before I graduated high school.

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

Jackson: Yeah, so, there's as we know, kind of the idea of sexual racism, you know, um, one, the dating pool's already small enough, being at Davidson College, what, 25 minutes away from Charlotte, and so on. So, when I initially started to kind of play around with it, and so on, it was like, OK, um, maybe I'll get lucky or I'll have, kind of, all these options or just as many options as white friends, or everyone else, because we're all, you know, gay, or LGBT, in some kind of way, therefore, our options should be kind of limited. That was kind of the initial thinking coming out of high school and again, influenced by a kind of, this slight idealization of Davidson as this, kind

of, breath of fresh air, a safe haven, you know, as so on. That's the way I was thinking. So, then, you get to these dating apps and you have these guys who are like, "oh, um no Blacks, no this, no that, no this," and it's just like, OK, you know, what? "Sorry it's just a preference," or, "I'm not racist, but..." and they'll just go on down the line again. Um, so that's the more overt form of, I guess, sexual racism but you also have, um, I would say a subconscious sexual racism, too, because you have all of these white men especially, on campus who, um, and people have done it on YouTube, they call it like, 'Dating Their Brothers,' because they look alike, or whatever, it's kind of funny actually, sometimes, but, it's the idea that OK, you still have these same sentiments, you're just not saying it outright. You still engage in these kind of microaggressions along racial lines, and then you see your sexuality as something separate from that, which doesn't make sense too much, you know? Um, yeah sexual racism can be, I think, explicit and implicit, you know, and that has also really shrunk, again, the dating pool here, where you have all these people, but, one, how many are actually interested in me, as a Black man, and so on, you know, and I could just go on about that forever but that's essentially what it is.

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

Jackson: Yeah, yeah. Um, yeah, what I will remember... one, is just the relationship fever? I think everyone kind of experiences that at one point or another, but, there's one point, kind of after freshman year, you know, I was just like, "Wow, I really, I don't necessarily want to be in a relationship for the sake of being in a relationship, I kind of just want, somebody who gets it, you know, and who is there with me, you know and so on, and I get their struggles and their, kind of, anxieties and so on." That's really kind of what, um, what I felt, you know, and that

feeling really did imprint on me, and still does and kind of, remembering what it's been like the past few years, and so on, and also that, again, that sexual racism and that kind of, um, depravity that other people are causing because of their own personal stances, and viewpoints and so on, that really did amplify, or does amplify, the um, the desire for sexual expression, you know.

LB: What does queer mean to you?

Jackson: Yeah. So, queer to me, one, implies just, kind of, that there's a mainstream, right? Different, um, weird, in a way, you know, not normal. Um, so, for me queer, just that term itself, implies, or is, indicative of all the structures that exist now, and so on, right, because we're thinking about, okay, if that's, if queerness is associated with gayness, trans-ness, or different genders, or different sexualities, that aren't necessarily heteronormative or heterosexual, then queer is kind of a catch-all term for, you know, all of that. But at the same time I do agree sometimes that some people will kind of trivialize queer as like, um, something that everybody is, or everyone kind of, feels that equally, or so on, let me flesh that out, what I mean. Like, I was in class once and I was just talking like, kids kept saying, "LGBTQ", because that's like the framework, that's kind of you know, known and said, right? But there was a GSS major and she was like, "Nah, I wouldn't include queer in that category," for some reason, and I was like, "oh, I guess that does make sense," you know? Because usually the Q part is like 'queer', or like 'questioning,' I'm not quite sure that's the kind of implication of it. Or, um, you could also use it in the kind of general sense as like, a gay person could be queer, you know and so on. So, sometimes it could be a little – It loses its power, more so than other labels or terms,

that I think really does, um, kind of, sometimes affect how we think about queer issues or LGBT issues and so on.

LB: Do you have anything else that you wanna say or talk about with your Davidson experience and what it meant to navigate Davidson with an intersectional identity?

Jackson: Yeah, so, there's just a lot – there's so much to Davidson, but I will say that even though, like, I'm an Africana major so race is kind of the central um, I guess concern for me in terms of thinking about identity and how that factors into how, um, everything, every aspect of life that we could possibly imagine, and so on. But what still concerns me is that, I have a problem, I just recently wrote a Davidsonian article as well about, kind of, um white people not showing up, and so on, you know that was just kind of part of it. But that also happens in the same, like you can be gay and still not show up, that's still a problem that you're not showing up, you know, for talks about Black queerness, right, because of the Black part, you know? You're picking and choosing but if, I think if anything that's more harmful than you know, straight white men not showing up to a talk about whatever, you know, that doesn't necessarily, they feel that doesn't concern their identity, you know, because where there's power in the Black community, there's power in the communities of color, there's power in communities of non-mainstream sexuality and so on, in terms of kind of activism, it points, the platforms they have to raise these issues and so on, it's not being used to its full capacity and the same problem that Black feminists had with white feminisms, is the same problem that, um, Black gays have with you know, white gays and so on, and it all overlaps and it's just that, and that to me is you know, probably one of, that should be our concern here at least, but I

think that gayness, for some reason, has another layer of kind of blinders, or complacency that people just don't really care to, you know, or want to get, at Davidson especially, you know.

LB: For sure.

Jackson: Everyone's liberal and so on, but at some point, they kind of give themselves a pass, you know, and in a lot of circles, especially LGBT circles, queer identity is that pass, you know, and I can stop there, because, I'm oppressed too and that's it, you know?

LB: Mm-hm. Well, thanks for talking to me.

Jackson: Yeah, no problem.