

Loud!

“Your silence will not protect you.” - Audre Lorde

ON COMMUNITY, ACTIVISM, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM: LGBTQI+ INTERSECTIONALITIES OF IDENTITY, EXPERIENCE, AND MEANING

By Dr. Emalina McSpadden, Faculty Coordinator

In academia, it is often a good idea to begin with definitions. It helps to get everyone on the same page before beginning a discussion in earnest. In this particular historical moment, and in light of our country's current legislative and administrative climate, definitions are a rather large part of many discussions. For decades, queer-identifying Americans, especially queer people of color, have struggled against the sadly persistent currents of hatred and bigotry at the root of many of the definitions dominating a generally white, cisgendered, and heteronormative discourse. What does it mean to be married? What does it mean to be a woman, or a man, or both, or neither? What does it mean to be a parent? What does it mean to have the right to a loved one's health coverage, or to hold their hand in a hospital room, or to claim their property when they pass away? In the eyes of the law, these meanings have shifted and transformed time and again, and we now find ourselves in a time when, as Americans, LGBTQI+ people have gained substantial ground. However, it is impossible to sit comfortably with any of these gains when such glaring injustices remain. As long as there are Black Americans and other people of color who do not enjoy the privileges of their white counterparts, no gains for LGBTQI+ people in this country can be counted as complete victories.

In this time of revolution and social upheaval, definitions play a crucial role in how citizens choose to take part in a movement. What does it mean to fight for something? Does it mean that you march and demonstrate? Does it mean that you speak out against injustice? Does it mean that you become political, or turn away from government as an agent of change? And if you are a queer person of color, where is your place in the fight? In the midst of so many intersectionalities of identity, Black and brown queer people already wrestle with establishing definitions of their own. Am I a part of my culture if my culture says it's wrong to be the way I am? Am I part of my religion if it teaches to shun and despise people like me? Am I a part of my own flesh-and-blood family if they cannot love me for how and who I love? To already be mired in such struggles of defining, and then to undertake defining what the fight for the rights of Black and brown people should look like, many queer people of color, including many members of our own BCC community, struggle with defining their own place in the fight, even though the fight is very much at the center of their concern.

That is why, if we are to be true and full members of our community, we must step away from our definitions just long enough to remember their purpose: to capture the meaning of things. It is entirely possible for members of the same movement to define that movement in myriad ways, including how the fight should look or who should do what kind of fighting. In any movement that matters, there is room enough for that. But what is more important than how any of us define things is to remember the essence of meaning. When a Black trans BCC student, in the height of the pandemic, makes the journey for her first doctor's appointment to begin gender-affirming hormonal treatment, that is part of the fight, and it has meaning. When a Black gay male BCC student struggles with his own positive coronavirus test result in the midst of homophobic ridicule from family members, that is part of the fight, and it has meaning. When a Black lesbian BCC student risks a momentary virtual connection with her chosen family of queer BCC students during the pandemic despite fearing discovery by her family at home, that is part of the fight, and it has meaning. When an Afro-Latinx trans BCC student experiences frightening physical and verbal threats from her own parent but remains calm so she can stay in her current housing situation, that is part of the fight, and it has meaning.

None of these students may necessarily fight within a greater social movement in the same ways many others can, but their fight is nonetheless part of the greater movement, because the meaning of the movement is imbued in each of these students' lives. Anything we can do to help them in their fight matters to the greater fight. Their very lives and selves are revolution. When we cry out for justice for the Black and brown trans women and men we've lost to violence, we must also remember those that are still very much alive and very much among us. They are part of our campus family. They are part of our community of past, current, and future students. They are enrolled in classes at BCC this fall. Their safety, their dreams, their fears, their joys, their prayers, and their futures are at the heart of our meaning as a community, of our movements as a society, and of our purpose as an institution.

(This was written in collaboration with students from the BCC LGBTQI+ Resource Room who agreed to share their stories for this article.)



LGBTQI+ RESOURCE ROOM
 2155 University Avenue
 Roscoe Brown Student Center [BC] 301
 718.289.5300
 Dr. Thomas A. Isekenegbe
 President

Dr. Lester Edgardo Sandres Rápalo
 Vice President and Provost,
 Academic Affairs

Dr. Irene R. Delgado
 Vice President for Student Success

Dr. Alexander Ott
 Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for
 Curriculum Matters and Faculty Development

Dr. Manny Lopez
 Associate Dean for Student Development

Dr. Emalinda McSpadden
 Faculty Coordinator
 Social Sciences

Donna Paroff-Sherman
 Safe Space Committee Chair
 Personal Counseling

Aimee Herman
 Queer Lit Book Club Advisor
 English

Edwin Roman
 Rainbow Alliance Advisor
 Loud! Designer and Editor
 Transfer Services

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MISSION

The LGBTQI + Resource Room at Bronx Community College works to foster an inclusive, safe, and welcoming environment for students, faculty, and staff of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. The LGBTQI + Resource Room aims to sustain visibility and a sense of community by providing education, programming, and support services on campus.

Weekly [Remotely] !

- **The LGBTQI+ Resource Room meets virtually daily, Monday through Friday from 12-5 pm.**
- **Students, faculty and staff may enter the room without joining a specific group or club.**
- **Contact Dr. Emalinda.McSpadden@bcc.cuny.edu for Zoom Information.**

- MONDAYS !

Pride Slice

A weekly discussion series focusing on different LGBTQI+ topics and concerns. Students are invited to offer topic suggestions for ongoing programming. **12-2 p.m.** Meets virtually through Zoom. To gain access please email Emalinda.McSpadden@bcc.cuny.edu



Music Mondays

On Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/lgbqti/>



- TUESDAYS !

LGBTQI+ Support Group

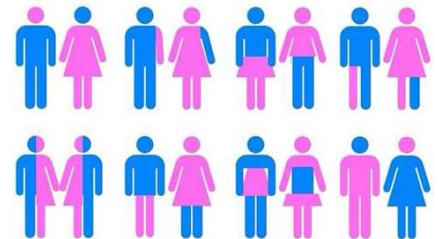
Share. Express. Support. Let's come together to express thoughts, hopes, and feelings with other like minded people. **4-5 p.m.** Meets virtually through Zoom. To gain access please email Emalinda.McSpadden@bcc.cuny.edu



- WEDNESDAYS !

Beyond the Binary Group

BCC's 1st and only transgender and non-conforming support group for transgender women and men, gender queer, gender fluid, gender non-conforming, non-binary and questioning students. We are experts, allies, and advocates ready to give support oriented speech and offer student to student led feedback. **4-5 p.m.** This group meets virtually via Zoom. Please contact Emalinda.McSpadden@bcc.cuny.edu



- THURSDAYS !

Rainbow Alliance Club

The Rainbow Alliance, the oldest LGBTQI+ club on campus, provides extracurricular activities that address the needs of LGBTQI+ students as well as the greater campus community. **4-5:30 p.m.** This group meets virtually via Zoom. Please contact Edwin.Roman@bcc.cuny.edu for information.

