



ABSTRACT

Black Lesbians Matter: An examination of the unique experiences, perspectives, and priorities of the Black Lesbian community

“The First Ever Black Lesbian Census”

“[For Black lesbians] out of sight many times translates to ‘out of hearing;’ and ‘out of hearing’ sometimes translates to ‘out of luck.’ – a survey participant.

Zuna Institute announces the release of the Black Lesbian needs assessment report, "**Black Lesbians Matter.**" Authored by **Francine Ramsey**, Zuna Institute's Executive Director; **Dr. Marjorie J. Hill**, Gay Men's Health Crisis, Chief Executive Officer; and **Cassandra Kellam**, PhD Student, Graduate Center, CUNY, this report examines the unique experiences, perspectives, and priorities of the black lesbian community.

As the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) movement gains momentum around the country, it's important to ensure that the perspectives and priorities of black lesbians are represented. This groundbreaking and first of its kind study is akin to a black lesbian census conducted over several months in 2009 – 2010. Participants from regional, statewide, and local organizations asked Black lesbians to speak up and be heard, to stand up and be counted; 1,596 women answered that call by participating in focus groups in New York, Atlanta, Chicago, and Denver, and through an on-line survey.

This study shows that advocacy needs of black lesbians persist in the areas of financial security, healthcare, access to education, and marriage equality. Research studies in the report also show that black lesbians are among the most vulnerable in our society. The study key areas are: Health, Family, Identity, and Aging.

- **Demographics**- 40 to 49 years of age; 84% holding undergraduate degrees; annual salary of at least \$51,000.
- **Health** - There is a pattern of higher suicide rates among Black lesbians. Scholars have primarily associated these higher suicide rates with one's ability to deal with 'coming-out'.
- **Family/Parenting** – 45% of Black female same-sex households include a biological child of one of the partners in their household. Anti-gay parenting policies in the United States may disproportionately affect Black lesbian parents, or would-be parents.
- **Identity** -18-24 age group 69% least likely to identify as lesbian. Mostly identify as Queer.
- **Aging** – 25% over the age of 50; with 33% live alone and fear of poverty and homelessness. Concerned with retirement and residing in retirement communities with other Black lesbians.
- **Invisibility** – 48% has been rejected and discriminated against, disclosing one's identity in the workplace will often lead to exclusion from company events, restricted in contracts, or even termination.

This survey brings to the forefront information from a traditionally marginalized group. This survey also highlights the needs and concerns of Black lesbians as defined by them.

Zuna Institute is a national advocacy organization for Black Lesbians that addresses such issues as health, economic development, education, and public policy. Zuna Institute brings about visibility and empowerment to the Black Lesbian community, and strives to eliminate barriers that are deeply rooted in public policies that encourage homophobia, economic and educational injustices, and other forms of social discrimination. www.zunainstitute.org.

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