

The Lady Is A Stud: African-American Lesbians, Hip Hop and Gender Presentation



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Introduction

In Southern California many African-American lesbians refer to themselves as studs. This term describes lesbians who take on masculine or androgynous characteristics in the way they dress and behave. They also tend to form romantic partnerships with more feminine lesbians. Studs have been visible within African-American communities for several decades (Faderman 1991). On the streets of 1920s Harlem African-American lesbian couples with a masculine and feminine partner would celebrate their unions in wedding ceremonies (Faderman 1991).

African-American studs defiance of established gender roles for women and their increased visibility within society based on their stud identities makes their experiences distinctly different from feminine lesbians.

Data will be collected over a four- month period among 10 Southern California studs and their social networks. This study explores the experiences of African-American studs and will examine the meanings behind their stud identities.

Methods

This is a qualitative study that will use semi-structured formal interviews, field notes, informal interviews and participant observation to gain insight into the experiences of the participants.

The criteria for participants are to be African-American/Black, self-identify as lesbian and as a stud, butch, aggressive, "boi" or dominant, which are all related terms to describe masculine lesbians, is 18 or older and has masculine physical markers like wearing masculine and androgynous clothing or unisex hairstyles.

Research will be conducted at gay and lesbian clubs and bars, religious services, and other social events and outings.

Research Questions

1. What factors into how African-American studs construct their identities? Are their identities as studs fluid or fixed? What determines when and where they change them if they do?
2. What influences African-American lesbians to become studs?
3. Where did they first learn about stud gender presentation?
4. How do they deal with the dominant African-American views and attitudes towards homosexuality? How does race and class factor into the studs' experiences within dominant society?
5. How do they deal with the social pressure of gender presentation for women?



Pictured. A 30 something Southern California stud.



Pictured. Two Southern California stud friends pose at the beach

Results

Based on preliminary findings taken from a mini-ethnographic study of Southern California African-American lesbians as well as informal interviews with African-American studs and their social networks there are distinct differences in the experiences of women based on their age.

Older lesbians and studs over 50 years old were expected to get married, have children and revealed their sexuality after 30 years old. While younger lesbians and studs, 30 years old and younger felt less pressured to choose a lifestyle that includes a traditional family and children. They also revealed their sexuality during their teenage years or when in college.

"What studs represent challenges people's ideals, morals and their Perception of God and Biblical scripture. What we Represent crosses people's boundaries. We make people think." - Imani

References

Faderman, Lillian

1991 *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Conclusions

This study on African-American studs will add to the growing body of literature on lesbians, African-American women and gender presentation and performance. Additionally, this study will offer greater insight into how factors such as race, class, gender and sexuality impact the lives of African-American lesbians in particular, and women in general.

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"That's one thing about my mom, she let me pick my clothes and dress How I wanted to dress [when growing up]. She never pressured unless It was an event I had to go to and she was like, "Tammy, you got To put on that dress!" - Tammy