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Lesbians, leisure, and the constructions of space among black lesbian women in Johannesburg

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Abstract

Space is a site of contestation where oppression and resistance simultaneously reside. Social classification, prejudice and identity politics regulate and exclude certain groups from accessing different kinds of space. This can be overlooked when groups are seen as homogenous. Intragroup differences produce different kinds of experiences. This makes the analysis of intersections of identity categories in understanding lived experiences critical. Sexuality, gender, race and class are important identity axes that are mutually constitutive of identity and experience. Among lesbian women, experiences are not the same, although the group may share oppressions, differences along the lines of class and race, carve out unique lives. Black working class lesbian women are the most invisible and have the highest risk of violence, exclusion and oppression. Urban and suburban areas offer safer leisure spaces, whereas townships pose a risk of victimisation. The findings in this study suggest that while black lesbian women create their own exclusive leisure spaces with familiar and close peers, they also resist power and gender norms imposed on their bodies and identities. It appeared that class, race gender and sexuality are identity categories that shape daily lived experiences and inform the multiple ways in which participants navigate space. These identity categories determined the spaces participants had access to and the alternative spaces that could be created. Working class lesbian women create alternative leisure spaces indoors where safety is assured, instead of local taverns in the townships, while middle class lesbian women negotiate their identity performance as they move in and out of working and middle class spaces. Insisting on one's sexuality and openly performing identity proved to be an important aspect of being a black lesbian woman, it spoke to visibility, agency and being assertive of one's sexuality.

Keywords: **Identity politics, sexuality, gender, race, class, intersectionality, space, resistance, leisure.**