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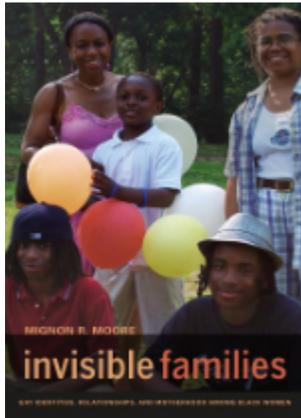
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Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood Among Black Women by Mignon R. Moore

by Rachel Wexelbaum

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Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood Among Black Women

By Mignon R. Moore

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There are approximately 39 million people who check “Black or African-American” on their Census forms. Nearly sixty percent of those individuals identify as female. If Census numbers provide an accurate reflection of a population, then one could imagine that Black or African-American women would be highly visible in their own communities, as well as others. The Census does not do as well as job when it comes to counting unmarried partner households by race. While women were more likely than men to note that they lived in a household with a female partner, data on unmarried partner households is organized by region rather than race. For this reason, the true count of lesbian-headed households—as well as lesbian couples with children—remains an unknown.

If the ratio of African-American women to men is higher than the ratio of white women to men, it is possible that the percentage of African-American lesbians may be higher than that of white lesbians. Unfortunately, it is the entertainment industry, and not the Census, that informs mainstream Americans about LGBT populations. Most of the time, the media presents white middle or upper-middle class lesbians on television shows and news programs, reinforcing a stereotype that all lesbians are white and rich. The Black and African-American communities sometimes perceive “gay” or “lesbian” as “white”, or reject these populations completely due to

religion or fear. For these reasons, many African-American families headed by lesbians remain hidden from mainstream society as well as their own communities. This lack of visibility often leads to inequity in health-care and social services for these families, as well as potential mistreatment of children from these families.

UCLA Associate Professor of Sociology Mignon R. Moore has given Black and African-American lesbians a voice in her book *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood Among Black Women*. Using interviews and surveys, she explores how race and class have influenced how these women understand their sexual orientation, meet significant others, and build families. To gather her information, Moore followed a population of Black and African-American women in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods in New York City for three years. While one could argue that the Black and African-American community of New York City does not represent the entire population, New York is home to the largest and most diverse Black and African-American population in the United States, as well as the largest number of Black same-sex couples, according to Moore. Prior to conducting interviews and surveys, Moore had spent two to five days each week at public social events and private house parties intended for Black lesbian majorities. When Moore had told the lesbians at these events that she was writing a book on lesbian families, she was amazed at how many revealed that they had children and were eager to talk about them. She found this refreshing and surprising at the same time, as people usually do not talk about their children in bars and clubs. Moore had also attended gay pride and Black gay pride events not only in New York, but also Washington DC, Atlanta (Georgia has the fourth largest Black population), and Orlando (Florida has the second largest Black population), all of which attracted significant numbers of Black women from New York. Seventy-one percent of the participants for this study were recruited from these events.

Moore explains the objectives of her study, as well as the research design, in great detail. She also provides copies of the survey instrument and the interview questions, which could serve as a model for those who would like to conduct a similar study. The organization of the book is incredibly helpful; each chapter focuses on a different topic addressed in the study, and how the lesbians responded to those questions. The most in-depth chapters address how Black and African-American women discover their sexual orientation and enter the lesbian culture, and how motherhood is perceived and valued in that community. What may be of most interest to the widest audience of readers, however, is the chapter titled “Openly Gay Families and the Negotiation of Black Community and Religious Life”. *Invisible Families* is a scholarly title, but the personal stories and snippets of interviews from research participants will engage readers who seek a deeper understanding of this population.

While many solid non-fiction titles about LGBT African-Americans exist, it appears that *Invisible Families* is the first book specifically about African-American lesbians and the families that they create. Not only will this book give visibility and light to African-American lesbian families, but social sciences researchers will cite the construction, development, and conclusions from Moore’s study for years to come.

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