Black Lesbian & Bisexual Women:

Community-Based Health Promotion at Erotic Performance Events in Washington D.C

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"I think we feel it is a comfortable space, a safe space for us to go and enjoy the entertainment we also feel free to express ourselves and not be intimidated. It's a safe haven basically. Everybody in there knows why everyone's there" -Angel Tavares, event audience

member

All sexualized space is not "created equal"

LGBTQ communities and strip clubs are often segregated by race. "Outlaw spaces," such as heteronormative strip clubs, may

- Bar women's entrance to strip clubs or require a male escort
- Render female patrons invisible (bar staff/dancers refuse to serve)
- Render female patrons hypervisible (male patron harassment)
- Black strip clubs more welcoming to black female patrons

Thus, Black women created and sought their own spaces to experience same-sex desire in a strip club atmosphere.

Black Women's Erotic Performance Events

- Are a celebration of black women's bodies and sexualities
- Provide affirmation of same-sex desire between black women
- Allow safety, comfort, relaxation and increased social support
- Provide a break from racism, sexism and homophobia

Which allows:

- Fundraising for black women's LGBTQ Health Programs
- Targeted advertising outreach opportunities
- Connection with community and group support systems
- -Addressing targeted health needs and reduce health disparities

The Office on Women's Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in Washington D.C. states, "past negative health care experiences can discourage a lesbian from seeking care in the future, including preventive and screening measures, which further jeopardizes her health" (National Women's Health Network, 2005). For Black lesbian and bisexual women, a lack of health insurance coverage (whether unable to afford their own or ineligible through a same-sex partner) can impact their ability to have access to regular health care with a consistent health provider whom they trust and to whom they can come out about their relationships and sexuality. Based on three years of ethnographic research at three erotic event sites in Washington DC, this presentation explores how Black women's bi/lesbian social spaces use erotic imagery and strip performance events to promote greater self-acceptance and foster community, as well as an opportunity to encourage health behaviors (such as self breast exams) and connect to culturally competent health resources. Pairing visual materials with interview data, we can better understand how the safe space of welcoming, acceptance and sexual freedom makes "partying with a purpose" a powerful means of valuing Black women's same-sex desire unconditionally, simultaneously encouraging increased access to health resources and strengthened community bonds.

Free and Confidential STIscreenings

Safer Sex Materials Geared for Our Needs

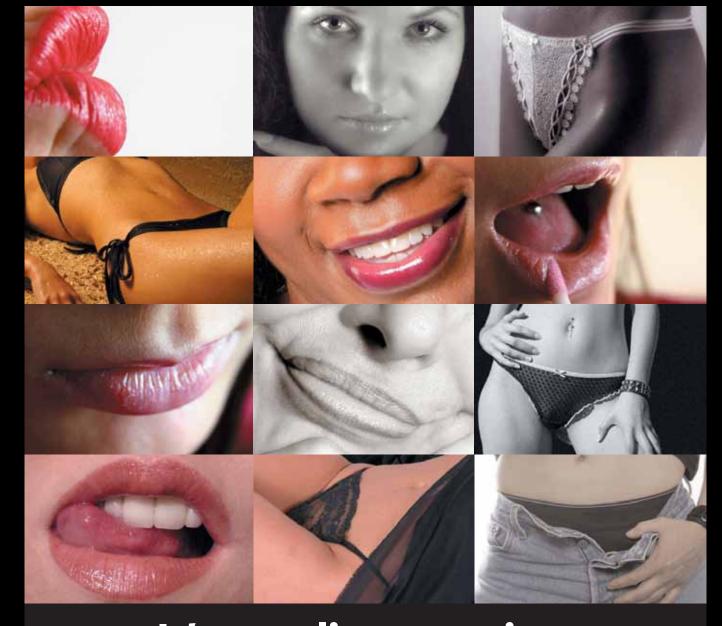




Self-Breast Exam Demo at Soft N' Wet

"Vicki Harris...allowed the Mautner Project, a national lesbian health organization, to set up a breast selfexamination booth. 'I'm very proud of that, because as African-American women, sometimes we don't take care of our health,' Harris says. As a result, five women, including a dancer, found lumps but remain healthy thanks to early detection. 'Soft N Wet helped us find so many new clients and volunteers over the years." - Kathleen DeBold, executive director





It's your lips...or mine.

Put Your Lips to Better Use Campaign "We kind of went in thinking that we

would show pictures of lesbians with their puppies and lesbians walking on the beach, but [the women in the focus groups] were real clear, so that's what we went with," explains Cheryl Fields, the Mautner Project's deputy director'

(Lunglhofer 2004: 1). The resulting campaign uses close-up block images of women's mouths and tongues (some are wearing lipgloss, some have pierced tongues, some are licking their lips.) The mouths and tongues images are right next to images of a variety of women's crotches, wearing lacy underwear or in the act of removing their pants, suggesting that kissing (but also, cunnilingus) is improved and more enjoyable for your girlfriend when you quit smoking.

