

An Ethnographic Study of Ballroom-attending African American Gay and Bisexual Men

Project Staff: Emily Arnold

Project Description: This is a descriptive study of the ballroom community in Oakland and San Francisco to gather pilot data. The ballroom community consists of two social phenomena: 'houses' or social networks of men who organize ballroom events and also socialize together, and 'balls', public events held where young men who have sex with men (YMSM) perform and compete for trophies. Initial research demonstrated the importance of house networks in disseminating safer sex messages and providing social support to YMSM. The current study will establish how widespread ballroom community participation is among young African American gay and bisexual men, and the extent to which house involvement contributes to HIV-related risk behavior, testing, and disclosure. This research will also test recruitment strategies and will delineate Bay Area house structures for a larger study. Data collection will consist of participant observation and 15 in-depth interviews with young African American gay and bisexual men who are involved in the ballroom community.

Significance: The ballroom community is a vital part of urban gay communities of color, yet no research has investigated its role in facilitating or halting the spread of HIV. The study will yield highly innovative results, both for its focus on the ballroom community, and for its examination of social networks, or 'houses,' of young African American gay and bisexual men and their impact on HIV transmission. Collecting data on house networks may also suggest innovative avenues for future prevention interventions with this population which is at high risk for contracting HIV.

Project Recruitment Dates: March 2006-June 2006

Project End Date: August 31, 2006