

## The Ballroom Community Project: Social Networks and Social Support for Young African American MSM

**PI:** Emily A. Arnold PhD

**Project Staff:** David L. Williams (Research Assistant)

### Project Description

This research investigates the relationship between social networks, social support, and HIV-related risk behavior among young African American MSM who participate in the Ballroom community. The Ballroom community consists of houses, figurative and sometimes literal homes, for queer youth of color, and the elaborate balls they host and compete in. The Ballroom community exists in urban centers across the US, and provides African American queer youth with support for same-sex desire and identity, along with multiple forms of support for HIV prevention.

This research looks at the forms of social support that young men receive through their involvement in the community, particularly with regard to HIV-related risk behavior.

The study will be carried out in three phases:

1. An ethnographic phase to determine the forms social networks and social support take with young African American MSM in the Ballroom community,
2. A phase to develop and adapt appropriate scales of social networks and social support for a young African American MSM population, and
3. A cross sectional survey of social networks within young African American MSM Ballroom communities to determine the association of social networks and social support with HIV-related risk behavior.

The data accumulated during this study will be used as the basis for developing an intervention tailored specifically to the Ballroom community. Approximately 300 young African American MSM will be recruited into the study, which will take place in the San Francisco Bay Area.

### Significance

For many young people, houses within the Ballroom community constitute a form of family due to the social marginalization they experience in day-to-day life. Despite the long history of this community and its prominence in the lives of queer youth of color, little to no scholarly research has been done to assess the impact of Ballroom community involvement on the lives of its participants. Through studying the impact of social networks on health-related behavior, we hope to develop strategies for effective HIV interventions based on existing social structures within the community that have the potential to reach young African American MSM in a genuine, organic way.

**Project Recruitment Dates:** Ongoing

**Project End Date:** July 2012