# Ballroom Brotherhood

HIV prevention in the house(s)

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The ballroom scene—an underground culture of voguing competitions, fierce catwalk strolls and lavish fashion—had a moment of celebrity in the 1990 documentary Paris Is Burning. But ballrooms' glory has not faded; today they set the scene for HIV prevention.

For many black and Latino LGBT youth, the ballroom, with its fraternity-like system of membership in "houses" (figurative or actual homes), provides love, acceptance and mentoring. Ballrooms offer many things young LGBT people may not receive from their own families, churches or peers.

"HIV prevention is always part of the balls. So many [ballroom participants] have succumbed to the disease," Tommy Sampson, house father in Chicago's House of Avant Garde, told *POZ*. And HIV prevention is undergoing a resurgence, Sampson says, because "our young people cannot [remain] desensitized to this epidemic any longer."

That education and prevention messaging comes in many forms. It could be a ballroom theme where all the costumes are made of condoms. Houses might participate in a local AIDS Walk or hold meetings to discuss STIs and how to negotiate condom usage. Some houses distribute condoms and offer HIV testing at their balls.

A key to effective HIV prevention and surviving the disease is economic stability. "A homeless kid with HIV, or one who is tricking for money, doesn't have a stable place to take meds," Sampson says. "We [also use ballroom] to get our kids off the streets and connect them to care so that they can begin to take care of themselves."

The scene is not just a big-city phenom. Numerous houses dot the Midwest and the South, where the need is also great. With HIV rates skyrocketing among gay youth of color, this form of prevention might just strike the right pose for reducing new infections.

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