

Serving Realness:

Exploring and Documenting Ballroom Kiki Culture, Community, and Gender in Arizona

by

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ABSTRACT

The Kiki scene, an autonomous youth subculture within the broader House Ballroom community, has recently emerged in Arizona, serving as a critical space for Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ individuals to find belonging, resistance, and creative self-expression. Amidst Arizona's sociopolitical landscape, where transgender identities face legal discrimination, Kiki house members navigate complex intersections of identity, community building, and gender performance. This dissertation explores the lived experiences, perceptions, and aspirations of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community through Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), Participatory Action Research (PAR), autoethnography, and qualitative interviews. The first paper employs autoethnography to examine the researcher's personal journey as a white non-binary transmasculine individual navigating identity and gender expression within the predominantly Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ Ballroom Kiki scene, a community that embraces femininity in all its diverse forms. The second paper presents findings from semi-structured interviews with members of two Kiki houses, uncovering themes related to their perceptions of Ballroom culture, aspirations for representing their stories, and concerns in working with researchers, such as cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. The Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and talent of its members, who have built a thriving community despite facing numerous challenges. The third paper examines the application of CBPR and PAR methodologies through themes developed from focus group interviews with Kiki house members, discussing ethical and practical considerations of conducting collaborative research with marginalized LGBTQIA+ communities. Key findings underscore the

importance of honoring the history and legacy of Ballroom, cultural preservation, authentic representation, community agency, empowerment, and equitable tangible benefits for the community and its members. The study highlights the transformative potential of the Ballroom scene in fostering resilience, creativity, and social change while addressing the challenges of navigating power dynamics and the potential for unintended harm from the actions of researchers, policymakers, and society at large. By centering the voices and experiences of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community, this research contributes to understanding the sociocultural significance of Ballroom culture and its impact on LGBTQIA+ People of Color, emphasizing the need for inclusive, participatory, and empowering approaches in documenting and supporting marginalized communities.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The House Ballroom scene, a vibrant subculture rooted in the African American and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities, has long served as a vital space for creative expression, kinship, and resilience against systemic marginalization. Emerging from the Harlem drag balls of the 1920s and evolving into its modern form in the 1970s and 1980s, the Ballroom scene has provided a powerful platform for queer and transgender people of color to affirm their identities, showcase their talents, and build supportive networks in the face of pervasive discrimination and oppression (Arnold & Bailey, 2009; Bailey, 2013).

In recent years, the Kiki scene has developed as a youth-oriented subculture within the larger Ballroom community, offering a more accessible and inclusive space for LGBTQIA+ youth to engage in the art, culture, and kinship practices of Ballroom (Rowan et al., 2013). As Ballroom culture has gained increasing mainstream visibility through popular media representations such as *Paris Is Burning*, *Pose*, and *RuPaul's Drag Race*, the Kiki scene has become an increasingly important site for cultural preservation, intergenerational transmission, and community mobilization among queer and trans youth of color (Bailey, 2011; Harper et al., 2022).

However, the growing popularity and commodification of Ballroom culture has also raised concerns about cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and exploitation of the community by outsiders (Hilderbrand, 2013). The history of academic research on marginalized communities, particularly those of color and LGBTQIA+ communities, is fraught with instances of unethical and harmful practices that have perpetuated

stereotypes, pathologized identities, and extracted knowledge without benefit to the community (Chavez et al., 2008). As such, there is a critical need for research approaches that center the voices, experiences, and leadership of Ballroom and Kiki communities in documenting and analyzing their own cultures and histories.

This dissertation aims to address this need by employing community-based participatory research (CBPR) and participatory action research (PAR) methodologies to collaborate with the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community in an exploration of their emerging cultural scene. Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of Paulo Freire, Kurt Lewin, and Sol Tax, this research seeks to embody the core principles of CBPR and PAR, including equitable partnership, co-learning, capacity building, and social transformation (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Specifically, this dissertation is composed of three interconnected studies that engage the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community as co-researchers and cultural experts in documenting and analyzing their own experiences, perspectives, and aspirations. The first study (Chapter 1) is an autoethnographic exploration of the author's experiences as a white, transmasculine nonbinary individual immersed in the predominantly Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ House Ballroom scene in Arizona. Through personal narratives and reflections, this study examines the intersectional complexities of gender identity and the transformative power of the Ballroom community, while also grappling with issues of privilege, allyship, and accountability as a white researcher in this space.

The second study (Chapter 2) focuses on establishing a community-driven documentation of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene, in collaboration with members of the House of Paragon and House of Majestic. Through semi-structured interviews and

participant observation, this study explores the community's perceptions, aspirations, and concerns regarding the research process, and seeks to develop a collaborative framework for documenting and archiving the history and culture of the scene in a way that prioritizes the community's needs and interests.

The third study (Chapter 3) delves into the methodological dimensions of applying CBPR and PAR approaches with the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community, with a particular focus on the desires and concerns expressed by the community regarding the research partnership. Through a series of focus groups, this study examines the key themes of authenticity, empowerment, and tangible benefits that emerged as central priorities for the community, as well as the apprehensions around exploitation, misrepresentation, and cultural appropriation that were raised as potential risks of engaging in research.

Together, these three studies offer a multifaceted and nuanced exploration of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene, grounded in the lived experiences and cultural expertise of the community itself. By centering the voices and leadership of the community in the research process, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on Ballroom and Kiki cultures, as well as to the broader discourse on ethical and transformative research practices with marginalized communities.

At the same time, this research also grapples with the complex positionalities and power dynamics that arise when conducting participatory research as an outsider to the community, particularly as a white, masculine-presenting researcher in a space that centers femininity and Blackness. The autoethnographic study in particular seeks to critically examine and reflect on these issues, and to offer insights into the challenges and

possibilities of engaging in authentic allyship/accomplice-ship and solidarity work through research.

Ultimately, this dissertation aims to contribute to the empowerment and self-determination of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community, by providing a platform for them to document and share their own stories, cultures, and visions for the future. By collaborating with the community to develop a framework for ongoing, community-driven research and archiving, this research seeks to support the sustainability and perseverance of the scene, and to amplify the voices and experiences of queer and trans youth of color in the face of ongoing marginalization and erasure.

At the same time, this dissertation also seeks to advance the theoretical and methodological foundations of CBPR and PAR, by demonstrating the relevance and urgency of these approaches for engaging with underground and marginalized communities. By grounding the research in the core principles of equitable partnership, co-learning, and social transformation, this dissertation aims to model a more ethical and liberatory approach to knowledge production, one that challenges traditional academic hierarchies and centers the expertise and agency of communities themselves.

In the following chapters, each of the three studies will be presented in detail, along with a discussion of their findings, implications, and contributions to the larger body of literature. The dissertation will conclude with a synthesis of the key themes and lessons learned across the three studies, as well as a reflection on the broader significance and potential impact of this research for the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community and beyond.

CHAPTER 2

NAVIGATING BALLROOM AND GENDER: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF A WHITE TRANSMASCULINE EXPERIENCE IN THE ARIZONA KIKI SCENE

Abstract

This autoethnography explores my experiences as a white, transmasculine nonbinary individual immersed in the predominantly Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ House Ballroom Kiki scene in Arizona. Through personal narratives and reflections, I examine the intersectional complexities of gender identity and the transformative power of the Ballroom community. By engaging with the nuances of my own identity and positionality, I aim to shed light on the multifaceted nature of white masculine nonbinary gender expression within the Black femme-centered world of Ballroom, discuss the accountability as a transmasculine person, and highlight the sacredness of this space and community that continues to redefine and expand the boundaries of gender, performance, and belonging. This autoethnography is a testament to the ongoing journey of self-discovery, community interdependence, and the recurrent quest for authenticity in a world that often seeks to confine identities within rigid boundaries.

Introduction

The House Ballroom scene, a unique culture rooted in the struggles and triumphs of Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities, specifically relating to femme and transwomen's struggle and triumphs, serves as a powerful lens through which to examine the fluidity of gender and the multifaceted nature of intersectionality (Bailey, 2011, 2013, 2014). It is an arena where competition, solidarity, and resistance converge, where I seek

to understand the contours of my own identity while navigating the broader dynamics of inclusion and representation.

Guided by principles of empathy, ethical engagement, and authentic expression, this autoethnography aims to interweave the personal and the cultural, illuminating the reverent and transformative potential of the Ballroom community. Through the methodology of autoethnography, I endeavor to navigate the layers of my journey with candor and integrity, acknowledging the privileges I carry and the spaces I traverse. This narrative is a testament to the resilience, the celebrations, and the unyielding spirit of a community that continuously redefines the boundaries of gender, belonging, and kinship.

Methodology and Positionality

Autoethnography emerges as the methodological backbone of this exploration, offering a unique blend of personal narrative and cultural analysis that honors the depth and complexity of my experience in Ballroom (Adams et al., 2015; Bailey, 2013). This approach not only aligns with the methodological rigor of qualitative research but also resonates with the ethical imperative of navigating and researching a space as a white, transmasculine nonbinary individual amidst a culture primarily forged by Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities. Furthermore, members in Ballroom communities have been historically exploited and dismissed by white queer researchers and journalists, and white individuals have historically profited off of the appropriation of Ballroom culture while members of the communities receive no to little credit or compensation.

As a white individual navigating a predominantly Black and Latinx space and as a researcher who is extracting data from this community, my positionality warrants constant reflection and accountability. It is crucial to acknowledge the historical and

ongoing oppression faced by these communities and to actively work towards being more than an ally or advocate but rather an accomplice (Rogers, 2006; Rudy, 2014). It is imperative to be in active collaboration in the struggle against colonialism and systemic injustices, prioritizing actions over passive words, and committing to direct tangible support to communities historically harmed by systemic injustice (Rudy, 2014). The Ballroom scene was born out of the exclusion and racism experienced by Black and Latinx individuals in white drag ball spaces, exemplified by the iconic Crystal LaBeija walking out of the 1967 Miss All-America Camp Beauty Pageant in protest (Maisel, 1968; Tucker, 2021). It is a gift and an honor to participate in this space, not a right. I must consistently ensure that my presence honors the legacy and ongoing culture of the Ballroom community, never allowing my whiteness and other privileges to overshadow or exploit the expansive world created by Black and Latinx individuals.

Moreover, as a transmasculine nonbinary person, my identity challenges the rigid gender binary and cisheteronormativity that permeates society. It is a constant negotiation of being perceived as a man while internally grappling with a more fluid understanding of gender (Noble, 2016). This positionality adds another layer of complexity to my engagement with the Ballroom scene, as I navigate spaces that often celebrate and reify traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

The methodological flexibility of autoethnography, allowing for creative forms of representation, aligns with the expressive needs of transgender narratives (Johnson & LeMaster, 2020; LeMaster, et al., 2019). This approach can capture the emotional and psychological dimensions of experience, which are often overlooked by traditional research methods (Adams et al., 2015; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Ellis et al., 2011). My

exploration of vogue femme, a dance form emblematic of femininity and "kunt-ness", and my reflections on my masculinity (which has been impacted by various intersections of my identity, including the US military) demand a method that accommodates such diverse modes of expression.

Through the detailed portrayal of personal experiences, autoethnography fosters empathy and deeper understanding among readers (Ellis et al., 2011). It illuminates the complexities of navigating gender identity within a cisnormative society, bridging divides between author and audience. This narrative approach can create spaces of recognition and empathy, which is something I aim to achieve by sharing my journey.

Finally, autoethnography serves as a form of advocacy, drawing attention to the specific challenges faced by transgender individuals (LeMaster et al., 2019). It empowers narrators to control their stories, reducing the risk of misinterpretation or harm (Holman, 2005). It contributes to the body of knowledge on transgender experiences, emphasizing individual narratives, and believing those narratives.

Entering the World of Ballroom

My initiation into the Ballroom scene began when I attended a local vogue night at Stacy's at Melrose (a local gay club) in Phoenix, Arizona, on January 19, 2023. I saw the flyer for the Pokémon-themed event on Stacy's Instagram and decided I had to go and I begged a friend to go with me. While I was familiar with some Ballroom concepts -- I would quickly learn that this was something that I had never experienced or truly understood until I was there in the moment. My friend and I had arrived "on time" based on the flyer to a nearly empty venue. Later, I would come to learn that in Ballroom

“time”, we were actually two hours early (if only I had read Marlon Bailey's book, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps* (2013) prior, I would've learned this was typical of events.)

As the night unfolded and the space filled with a rainbow of personalities, I began to witness the vast spectrum of gender expression and identity. I saw joy, freedom, and celebration. A Femme Queen at the event told me, “Resilience is in our DNA.” The Ballroom scene, with its roots deeply embedded in the struggles and triumphs of Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities, was a revelation---a testament to the resilience and defiance against a world that often seeks to marginalize and silence (Bailey, 2013). Instantly enveloped in an ambiance of electric energy and unapologetic expression, I felt a profound sense of witnessing something sacred and unlike any other "queer" spaces or events I had attended.

As a white, transmasculine nonbinary individual stepping into a predominantly Black and Latinx space, I was acutely aware of the layers of privilege I carried. The Ballroom scene welcomed me with a complexity that was both challenging and enlightening. It was a space where the performance of identity was both an art and a survival strategy, where the categories of "realness" allowed individuals to explore and affirm their identities in a society that often denied their existence (Bailey, 2011).

The Ballroom scene was more than a mere backdrop for gender exploration; it was a dynamic cultural phenomenon that bridged the personal with the political, the individual with the community. Bailey's ethnographic journey highlighted the Ballroom as a critical site of queer Black kinship and sociality, a notion that deeply resonated but also contrasted with my previous experiences in the queer community. The balls, the vogue nights, and the house meetings were not just events; they were rituals, a testament

to the strength and creativity of the Ballroom community. Through these engagements, I began to understand the importance of the Ballroom not just as a space for competition but as a sanctuary for those who sought a sense of belonging and affirmation.

In navigating the Ballroom scene, I was constantly mindful of the intersections of race, gender, and privilege. Bailey's work reminded me of the importance of respecting the origins and traditions of the Ballroom culture, of being an ally/accomplice rather than an intruder. My role was not to dominate the space but to learn from it to contribute to its richness while acknowledging the boundaries of my experiences as a white transmasculine person. Ballroom, with its history of resistance against racial and gender oppression, offered me invaluable lessons on the power of community, the importance of visibility for transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, and the transformative potential of art and performance in challenging societal norms.

Immersing myself in the dynamic world of the House Ballroom scene, I embarked on a winding journey of self-discovery and expression. Each event and interaction became a thought-provoking moment, a reflective mirror that not only revealed my present self but also illuminated the parts of my identity that society had taught me to suppress (or that society taught me to embrace, but I chose to suppress.) Through this journey of active participation within the Ballroom scene, my understanding of my identity was not just performed but lived, breathed, and constantly reimaged.

Participation, Identity, and Expression

One week after attending the Pokemon Vogue Night, I attended my first ball, Desert Diamond, the first ball held in Arizona. Balls were an atmosphere of fierce competition and communal celebration; I found myself in a world where voguing

transcended dance---it was a language, a form of communication that encapsulated struggle, triumph, and an unyielding desire for recognition (Bailey, 2013). Oddly, I was familiar with some of the movements, but vogue femme was where my body, not yet fluent in this language, moved hesitantly, but the cheers from others around me offered support and freedom from judgment, helping me feel accepted and free within the space (even if my dancing was horrible.)

The categories, especially "transman realness," offered a unique space to explore and affirm my transmasculine identity. Yet, as a nonbinary individual, I grappled with the binary confines of these categories. Walking "transman realness" became an act of defiance against a world that sought to erase or simplify the complexities of my existence, a sentiment often shared by many people that walk in Ballroom (Valentine, 2007). Each time I presented myself before the judges, it was a declaration of my identity, an assertion of my presence in a world that oscillated between visibility and invisibility for trans individuals like myself.

Navigating the Ballroom scene as a transmasculine nonbinary individual amidst a culture that predominantly celebrated trans-femininity and softness was akin to walking a tightrope between worlds. My presence in this space wasn't necessarily an anomaly, but it was a divergence from the norm concerning competition, which brought with it a sense of isolation but also purpose. This sentiment is often shared by nonbinary people in various spaces (Velocci, 2022). Still, the Ballroom scene, for all its inclusivity, often mirrored the binary gender norms of the society it sought to challenge. My participation, therefore, to me was not just about competition; it was about expanding the narrative, about embodying a spectrum of gender that defied conventional categorization. Yet as I

continued walking “transman realness,” I would eventually come to symbolize the ideal of a “real man” and even be nominated for Transman Realness Of The Year (OTY) for the West Coast Kiki scene.

Participation in the Ballroom scene was as much about learning as it was about unlearning. In order, to further understand Ballroom and connect more with people in the Arizona Ballroom Community, I started attending vogue femme dance classes every other week. The vogue femme classes, in particular, became arenas of intense personal reflection and growth. Each session pushed me to explore the boundaries of my masculinity, to confront and embrace the parts of my identity that society had taught me to embrace growing up as a girl, but that I desired to suppress. Moving my body in ways that celebrated femininity, grace, and vulnerability was initially disorienting. I struggled to shed the layers of social conditioning that equated masculinity with rigidity and dominance. However, with time, these movements became meditations, avenues through which I rediscovered the fluidity of my own gender expression. I would learn this was not about discarding one identity for another but rather about accepting the complexity of my being: transmasculine, certainly, but also inherently marked by the femininity I had endeavored to erase.

While I was masculine as a child, my ideas on masculinity heightened and became more entrenched in toxic masculinity when I joined the US military in July 2010. The military valued “manliness,” directness, and roughness and often explicitly criticized femininity. While serving as a woman, I did my best to fall in line with masculine norms, especially since in my squadron of over 250 people only 8 were women. My transition from military-defined masculinity---characterized by its emphasis on toughness,

directness, and an almost aggressive dismissal of perceived weaknesses---to the expressive, fluid gender performances celebrated in the Ballroom scene marked a stark metamorphosis in my understanding of strength and identity. The military had instilled in me a rigid archetype of masculinity, where problem-solving equated to the brute force dismantling of obstacles. In stark contrast, Ballroom and its vogue femme discipline offered a new paradigm: one where strength was found in precision, patience, and the embrace of one's whole emotional and expressive self.

Within this new landscape, the metaphor of the brick wall emerged as a powerful personal analogy, symbolizing my evolving approach to challenges and self-perception. If the military had taught me to confront obstacles with sheer force (e.g., burst through a brick wall), the Ballroom scene, through vogue femme, illuminated an alternative path: the strength in gently navigating around the wall, in understanding and embracing the journey's nuances. This realization was pivotal, marking a departure from a confrontation-based approach to one rooted in mindfulness, subtlety, and the nuanced strength of softness.

This process of unlearning extended beyond the dance floor; It touched every aspect of my participation in the Ballroom scene, challenging me to reconsider my notions of strength, beauty, and identity. The lessons learned here were not confined to the realms of performance but seeped into the fabric of my everyday life, reshaping my interactions with the world around me. Ballroom often helps challenge who we are and how we view the world and participate in it (Tucker, 2021). The grace and fluidity demanded by femme vogue initiated a dialogue with the suppressed parts of my identity, challenging me to embrace the full spectrum of who I am.

Further into the Category of “Transman Realness”

As the only transmasculine individual in the kaleidoscopic world of the Arizona Ballroom scene, I faced a unique paradox. The scene is a riotous celebration of gender fluidity and defiance of societal norms, but it also presents challenges for me. The category of "transman realness" became an arena for exploring visibility and representation, casting a spotlight on my negotiation of embodying transmasculinity.

Embodying "transman realness" demanded a meticulous curation of masculinity that transcended mere performance. It required a deep engagement with the layers of my identity, crafting a presentation that resonated with the expectations of realness while staying true to my lived experience of gender. This involved a careful calibration of mannerisms, the cultivation of a walk that exuded confidence and toughness, and the selection of attire that aligned with the conventional aesthetics of maleness.

Competing in the "realness" category often placed me in a vulnerable position of comparison with cisgender gay men, where the physical markers of gender became subjects of scrutiny. These moments, when the judges would "chop" me, transcended the immediate sting of exclusion. They prompted a reevaluation of my journey of gender expression. Each instance of being deemed not "real" enough echoed larger societal dilemmas about the legitimacy of transgender identities, igniting an internal struggle with the concept of "passing" and the elusive quest to be seen as "man enough." Similar sentiments have been shared by transgender people competing in the realness category (Valentine, 2007). However, for myself, it forced me to confront the multifaceted nature of gender identity, pushing me to question and ultimately redefine what being "masculine enough" meant on a deeply personal level. My experiences of loss and doubt in the face

of societal and cultural benchmarks of masculinity ultimately fortified my resolve. They highlighted the intrinsic value of my transmasculine nonbinary identity, underscoring the importance of self-acceptance and the reclamation of my narrative on my own terms. Despite the adversities and moments of introspection that competing in "transman realness" elicited, the act of participating itself emerged as a potent form of advocacy. I was the only person who walked "Transman Realness" in Arizona, and I walked as I knew there were young transmasculine people in the audience who couldn't imagine what a trans future looked like or what was possible. Through this, young transmasculine people would come to talk to me, and I would give them my old binders, teach them how to walk, discuss my personal journey or answer their questions. (I was worried about walking as I am a bit old to walk in the Kiki scene, but that is the only scene here in Arizona, so I wanted to show people what was possible as I hadn't met any older transmasculine person before, and if I had, then I imagine I would've felt more confident and surer of myself and my identity.) Thus, my walking Transman Realness was a deliberate exercise in visibility for the young transmasculine people at the events. Each performance was imbued with a message of masculine resiliency and affirmation, a statement that masculine people can be and thrive in a femme-centered space while still honoring and respecting femininity and gender expansiveness.

Navigating Masculinity: Challenges and Affirmations

My journey through the House Ballroom scene has been an intricate one, full of challenges and profound growth. As a transmasculine individual, I have had to navigate the delicate boundary between visibility and vulnerability, embodying a form of masculinity that sometimes appeared discordant with the prevailing expressions of

gender. This unique positioning precipitated frequent misunderstandings, necessitating a relentless negotiation of my identity within a space that, despite its inclusiveness, sometimes struggled to grasp the subtleties of transmasculine existence.

Navigating these spaces was complicated by the dual experiences my presence elicited. My efforts to assert my gender identity were occasionally met with skepticism or misconstrued intentions. For instance, smiling, a habit deeply ingrained in my upbringing as a girl, became a contentious action, sometimes interpreted as flirtation that could breach the safe spaces reserved for women and femme-identified individuals. I still often saw myself as "womanly" or feminine, my small frame, lack of defined jawline, short stature, and tiny hands and feet, but that isn't how anyone else saw me. They saw a man, a short man, but still a man with a beard and deep voice, with the intentions of a "man." This underscored the necessity of an ongoing process of learning and unlearning, challenging me to dismantle the societal impositions of masculinity and embrace it as a spectrum encompassing vulnerability, empathy, and respect.

Despite these obstacles, Ballroom has also been a place of connection and validation, especially from fellow transgender individuals. The affirmations of my gender exploration from this community were transformative, reinforcing my sense of belonging and underscoring the value of my journey. These interactions---each acknowledgment, each shared story---fortified a communal bond, illuminating the essence of Ballroom as a haven of mutual recognition and acceptance. My realness was affirmed in those moments.

Affirmation from other trans individuals within the Ballroom scene has served as a poignant reminder of the authenticity and significance of my gender journey. These

moments of validation have prompted introspection on my interactions with cisgender individuals, revealing the extent to which I have modulated my identity to accommodate cisnormative comfort at the expense of my authenticity. This realization has been both liberating and challenging, encouraging me to embrace my identity more fully and to engage with others from a place of genuine self-assurance.

A pivotal aspect of my journey has been the conscious cultivation of respect and understanding within these feminine and femme-centered spaces. Acknowledging my unique position---as someone who grew up as a girl/woman and now perceived as a man participating within a culture that reveres femme identities---I have strived to listen earnestly and to affirm the experiences and words of women and femme-identified individuals unequivocally. This commitment to validation is not merely an act of respect but a recognition of the complex power dynamics at play, ensuring my presence reinforces the principles of safety and comfort for all, especially for those historically marginalized.

Self-reflection on my positionality, perceived as a man in a space celebrating femininity, has been a continuous journey of accountability. It has involved acknowledging the privileges associated with this perception and actively working to mitigate its impacts. This reflective process on gender and power is a commitment to contributing positively to the Ballroom community, ensuring my actions, words, and presence foster an environment of joy, liberation, and inclusive engagement.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic journey through the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene has been a personal exploration of identity, community, and authenticity. As a white,

transmasculine nonbinary individual navigating a space created by and for Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities, I have grappled with the complexities of privilege, allyship/accomplice-ship, and accountability. This autoethnography has highlighted the importance of advocacy, the need for spaces that embrace the full spectrum of gender expressions, and the acknowledgment of the diverse journeys that shape our individual and collective experiences of gender identity.

The Ballroom scene has served as a powerful lens through which to examine the fluidity of gender and the multifaceted nature of intersectionality. It has challenged me to confront my whiteness and the binary confines of society, pushing me to embrace the full spectrum of my gender expression. Through the art of vogue femme, I have learned to reconcile the seemingly disparate parts of my identity, discovering strength in vulnerability and authenticity in the face of societal expectations. The Ballroom scene, with its rich history of resistance and celebration of queer identities, has provided a unique lens through which to view this journey, offering a space where every step taken is a move toward greater understanding, inclusivity, and authentic engagement with both myself and the beautiful community that defines the Ballroom.

Navigating the realms of "transman realness" has underscored the transformative power of visibility and the importance of self-acceptance. It has taught me that masculinity, nonbinary identity, and identity more broadly, are not fixed destinations but paths marked by continuous exploration and redefinition. Throughout this journey, I have learned the importance of solidarity, authentic engagement, and ongoing advocacy for all voices within the Ballroom community. I have strived to honor the legacy and ongoing

culture of this space, recognizing the gift and the responsibility that comes with participation.

Throughout this autoethnographic journey, I have embraced the fluidity of my gender identity while respecting the cultural heritage and lived realities of the Ballroom community. I have learned the importance of solidarity, authentic engagement, and ongoing advocacy for all voices within this space. As I conclude this narrative, I am grateful for the lessons learned and relationships formed within the House Ballroom scene. I hope that this autoethnography can contribute to the ongoing dialogue around gender, culture, and inclusion, offering insights that resonate with others on their journeys of self-discovery and community engagement.

Through these experiences I am reminded of the transformative power of sharing our stories, listening deeply, embracing the full spectrum of who we are, and the endless journey of becoming.

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CHAPTER 3
PERCEPTIONS, ASPIRATIONS, AND CONCERNS: ESTABLISHING
COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DOCUMENTATION OF THE ARIZONA BALLROOM
KIKI SCENE

Abstract

The “Ballroom” scene has existed for decades as an autonomously organized community created by and for Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ people as a space for social support and creative expression. However, the house culture of Ballroom has recently emerged in Arizona within the past few years, when LGBTQIA+ identities, specifically transgender identities, are subject to legal discrimination. The Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene members desire to record and archive their story to educate people on Ballroom culture, preserve their history, and further build community. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the research explores the views of members of the Arizona Ballroom Community on their community, their aspirations for how their stories should be documented, and their expectations from the documenting process. Findings highlight the scene's emphasis on community, creative expression, and empowerment, stressing the critical need for respectful and authentic documentation. This study addresses the tensions between preserving a growing nuanced community that has deep roots in the Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ experience, ownership and attribution of intellectual property, and the risk of mainstream appropriation and community exploitation, contributing to the discourse on cultural preservation and the empowerment of marginalized communities.

Introduction

The House Ballroom Kiki Scene in Arizona represents a significant cultural space within the Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities, marking a unique intersection of social support, artistic expression, and resistance against marginalization. This community-based research project delves into the perceptions, aspirations, and concerns of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene's members, with a focus on understanding their views on the community and establishing guidelines for researching/documenting the scene and its members. Amidst challenges such as the systemic erasure of Black history and the contributions of Black people as well as legal discrimination against LGBTQIA+ identities, especially transgender individuals, the need to preserve and accurately represent the Ballroom culture's history and contributions becomes paramount. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and participant observations, this study aims to explore the community's narrative from within, seeking to understand the complexities of documenting a culture rich in heritage that has been historically harmed by mainstream appropriation, exploitation, and misrepresentation. By highlighting Ballroom culture's historical roots as a space for marginalized identities and its contemporary significance, this research contributes to the broader discourse on cultural preservation, authenticity, agency, and community resilience.

Ballroom Culture

“Ballroom” was originally created by and for Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ people as a space for social support and creative expression. The “Ballroom” scene is an autonomously organized community that provides liberatory spaces for people from historically marginalized backgrounds, specifically for LGBTQIA+ BIPOC, who are

often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Jones & Ellis, 2017). The “Kiki” scene is a youth-centered subculture of Ballroom. Within the “Ballroom/Kiki” scene, people gain social support by joining “houses” that act similar to a family. Houses compete against each other at “balls” by performing in unique gendered categories (Bailey, 2011; 2013).

Bailey (2013) describes three fundamental properties of Ballroom culture: kinship structure, the gender system, and ball events.

The kinship structure is composed of “houses.” In Ballroom, houses are not physical structures but instead are socially constructed groups organized similarly to a family unit. Houses consist of parent figures such as a “mother,” “father,” and sometimes “godparents” who act in leadership roles to mentor and guide their “children.” Each House has their own chants and symbols, which are often used to signal affiliation or membership to said house. The name of a person’s associated house is taken similarly to a last name (e.g., Hector Crespo was known as Hector Xtravaganza). Individuals within the Ballroom community who do not belong to a house are known as “007s” (pronounced as “double oh seven”) and are essentially free agents that can be recruited to a house.

The gender system is an expansive intersectional collection of categories that transcend cis-heteronormative views of gender*sex. “Ballroom gender and sexual identities serve as the basis of all familial roles and the competitive presentation and performance categories at ball events” (Bailey, 2013, pg.5.) These categories encompass linked perceptions of gender*sex, gender performance, and sexuality. See Table 1. For the gender or demographic categories.

Table 1
Gender or Demographic Categories within Ballroom

Category	Description
Femme Queen (FQ)	Trans women
Drag	Cis gay men in drag (cross-dressing)
Women	Cis women
Female Figure (FF)	Open to femme queens, drags, and women
Butch Queen (BQ)	Cis gay men
Transmen	Trans men
Butch	Lesbian cis women
Male Figure (MF)	Open to butch queens, trans men, and butches
Gender Non-Conforming (GNC)/Non-Binary (NB)	Open to gender-expansive people
Open To All (OTA)	Open to all genders/demographics

Additionally, while categories may say “gay,” a person may be bisexual or encompass another aspect of queer sexuality. The same maintains for the gender terms such as “trans woman”, which could also include a transfeminine person. Additionally, the gender category is also linked to a person’s house title (e.g., a house mother or daughter would compete in one of the “feminine” categories. While a house father or son would compete in the “masculine” categories).

Ball events have a ritualized performance system in which members of the Ballroom scene compete against each other in various categories separate from the above gender categories (e.g., Realness, Sex Siren, Performance, Bizarre, Face, etc.). During the event, houses will compete against each other for trophies, cash prizes, and prestige. These events often last several hours and include some level of participation from all attendees. Bailey (2013) refers to the performance system as the practices and interactions at a ball by the commentators, DJs, spectators, and performers that create a space for competition and community.

Overall, the Ballroom scene 1) positively impacts queer and transgender youth and young adults' health and development (Harper et al., 2022; Telander et al., 2017); 2) focuses on mentorship, informal knowledge sharing, and community building (Harner, 2020; Lundy, 2019; Mountz, 2016; Reid, 2022); 3) allows for creative flexibility in “de-biologizing” kinship, categorical flexibility of gender “realness,” and re-imaginings of other concepts that may be taught as static and binary (Klitgård, 2019; Molé, 2021). 4) sponsors public health awareness events, especially HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment (Arnold & Bailey, 2009; Wong, et al., 2020).

Context: Why study the Arizona Ballroom Community (ABC)?

Currently, the political landscape in AZ is hostile to BIPOC, drag performances, and trans people. The Arizona Ballroom Community (ABC) is fairly new in contrast to other ballroom scenes, which have existed for a decade or more. Additionally, the other ballroom houses are in states such as PA, NY, and CA that have a different political climate than AZ, especially with regard to transgender rights.

The Movement Advance Project (MAP), an independent non-profit organization focused on building equity among people in the United States, rated Arizona as the 7th worst state for gender identity policy, with a score of -3.5 out of 22. The overall tally for Arizona rates LGBTQ+ equality as low, with a score of 2.25 out of 42.5. The state of Arizona does not have gender identity or sexual orientation nondiscrimination laws for adoption, recognition of parents using assisted reproduction, and credit or lending services. Thus, LGBTQ+ people can legally be refused service, care, and support when adopting a child, requesting family assistance, or applying for a loan. The state has a robust religious exemption law that permits people, religious organizations, non-profits,

and occasionally corporations to discriminate against people that burden their religious beliefs. This is especially reinforced in terms of “child welfare.” Additionally, the state lacks LGBTQ+-inclusive definitions for spouses, partners, parents, and children.

Arizona has unclear guidance and policies for name changes and lacks the infrastructure to aid transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people in navigating these complex systems, which makes it more difficult to exist and receive external validation as a gender-expansive person. Arizona requires proof of sex reassignment surgery to change gender markers. Minors have a more difficult time as there are bans on transgender participation in youth sports, and state law requires parental notification of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula in schools and allows parents to opt their children out. As of 2022, thirteen bills have been introduced targeting transgender youth in Arizona.

The House of Paragon (founded in May 2020) and the House of Majestic (founded in July 2022) are Arizona’s first Ballroom/Kiki houses. The Arizona Ballroom Community (ABC), specifically the Kiki houses, are anticipated to provide members with “social resources (Connecting with Others, Cultivating Family, Helping Others, Participating in Culture and Spirituality), affective generative resources (Engaging in Enriching Pursuits, Accessing Economic Resources), and introspective resources (Exploring One’s Authentic Self, Persevering through Hardship) that are theorized to contribute to Sexual and gender minority (SGM) resilience across the life course” (Edwards, et al., 2023, pg. 2).

Glegziabher (2022) demonstrates that the omission of Black folks and their contributions to Arizona’s history propels the false belief that the presence and impact of Black folks in Arizona is relatively recent. Black folks have long and storied histories in

Arizona, but these histories, including structural landmarks, have been/are neglected, erased, and “willfully forgotten” due to the dominant white narrative of the U.S. West (Glegziabher, 2022). Additionally, narratives of Black Arizonans may be co-opted and whitewashed to fit into the hegemonic discourse. Black Arizonan’s stories need to be told, understood, and honored. As Glegziabher has pointed out,

“Exploring the reasons behind, and the manifestations of, this erasure is an important first step in expanding public knowledge about the history and present realities of Black communities in Arizona and ultimately incorporating those communities in shaping the future of the state. The next step is highlighting, honoring, and amplifying the existing historiography that exists as cultural production among Arizona’s Black communities.” (2022, pg. 361-362)

The Arizona Ballroom Kiki community members desire to record and archive their story to educate people on Ballroom culture, preserve their history, and further build community.

Background: Historical Context

Tracing back to the late 1800s through the Harlem Renaissance (1920s-1930s), the Ballroom scene's inception is anchored in an era renowned for the burgeoning of African American cultural and intellectual life. This period heralded the emergence of drag balls where primarily Black LGBTQIA+ individuals could explore and express their identities (Snorton, 2017). Rockland Palace, located on 155th Street and Eighth Avenue in Harlem, New York, was a prominent venue during the Harlem Renaissance. It functioned as a pivotal cultural space where the Black LGBTQIA+ community could

safely engage in drag balls, particularly during a time when such expressions were marginalized. These events at Rockland Palace not only offered a venue for performance and self-expression but also played a significant role in shaping the social fabric of LGBTQIA+ culture in Harlem. However, cross-dressing or being queer was often taboo or illegal, and white police often raided balls and harassed/assaulted Black individuals participating in these events (Snorton, 2017). By the 1940s, these gatherings within the early Ballroom scene were overtaken by white drag queens, reflecting the racial and social stratifications of the era. In response, Black and Latino LGBTQIA+ communities carved out their own spaces, actively countering racial segregation and discrimination. This act of self-determination laid the foundational ethos for the Ballroom scene, distinguishing it as a realm of vibrant cultural assertion and community identity.

The documentary *The Queen* (1969), which depicts the experiences of the drag queens organizing and participating in the 1967 Miss All-America Camp Beauty Contest held at New York City's Town Hall. In a scene toward the end of the documentary, Crystal LaBeija, upset with racism in the white-run balls, accused the pageant organizer Flawless Sabrina of rigging the judging in favor of a white queen. Crystal leaves the white-run drag pageant scene to form a space for Black and Latinx queens. She and other Black queens established the first Ballroom Houses; the houses and the legacies of those houses are prominent within Ballroom culture today.

The progression into the 1970s and 1980s marked a significant evolution within the Ballroom scene, underscored by the establishment of "Houses." These entities, akin to surrogate families, provided a network of support and belonging for individuals often marginalized by mainstream societal norms and their own biological families. This period

also saw the crystallization of distinctive cultural practices such as voguing, runway shows, and thematic categories (e.g., realness, face, vogue), which served to codify the scene's unique cultural lexicon and performative traditions (Bailey, 2013).

Mainstream Exposure and Sociocultural Implications

The release of the documentary "Paris Is Burning" (1990) directed by Jenni Livingston (the film is considered the quintessential documentary on Ballroom and documents the "Golden Age" of New York City drag balls in the 1980s through interviews with well-known members of the scene) constituted a pivotal moment for the Ballroom scene, enhancing its visibility and sparking a nuanced discourse on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class. While the film was praised for its intimate portrayal of the community, it also faced criticism from scholars and activists who argued that it perpetuated a voyeuristic and exploitative gaze on the lives of Black and Latinx queer and transgender people, failing to adequately address the structural inequalities and systemic oppression that shaped their experiences.

The mainstream adoption of voguing, particularly through Madonna's song "Vogue," highlighted the complex interplay between subcultural expressions and their broader societal consumption and appropriation. Finally, while members of the Ballroom community were pleased with exposure from Paris is Burning and the popularity of Madonna's song "Vogue" (especially as the music video featured two of the pioneers of voguing, Luis Xtravaganza and Jose Gutierrez Xtravaganza, who were already well-known in the Ballroom community), they often reported they did not receive proper credit for their contributions or financial compensation that was promised to them by the white artists who profited off their stories and culture.

Methodological Implications: Community-Driven Research

There have been numerous accounts of informants criticizing the interpretations, methods, and ethics of anthropologists, researchers, and other information extractors. Specifically, within the Ballroom community, Jenni Livingstone and her MFA documentary *Paris is Burning* (hooks, 1992; Hilderbrand, 2013). The academy has historically erased and dismissed LGBTQIA+ people, colonized people, enslaved people, poor people, prisoners, immigrants, women, disabled people, and many other people across varying intersections of identity as meaningful producers of knowledge (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Anthropology has historically been a colonial extractive discipline; thus a current challenge in anthropology is to ensure that researchers are not “othering their research participants, exploiting them, or leaving them voiceless in the telling of their own stories” (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 165).

I aim to center the narratives of members of the Arizona Ballroom Community while recognizing my role in the story, this is especially important as some more famous stories have neglected the lived experience and wants of the individuals they are portraying and neglected to acknowledge the role that they play in the story as observer and documentarian.

The conditionality of “community partnerships,” in which an entity offers funds, resources, or other things of value to a community, is rooted in white supremacy. It centers on the desires of grant organizations, mainstream media, and individuals who do not share the same needs/experiences as members of the community. These “partnerships” are capitalist, transactional, and maintain power hierarchies that have historically and continue to restrict power to the communities they say they serve. These

“partnerships” deny the expertise, autonomy, and agency of the community, which ultimately leads to displacement instead of inclusion.

Ballroom culture and language have been commercialized, appropriated, and made visible in the mainstream media. Yet the people who created/maintain this subculture and its original purpose have been minimized, dismissed, coerced, unfairly represented, and erased.

“There is no doubt that ballroom’s future is one of expansion, whether voluntarily or coerced, but it is essential to be critical of where the future is headed, because what is imaginable in this era differs dramatically from the imagined futures of older members of the Ballroom scene.” - Joseph Soto, 2022

Thus, it is imperative for community members to lead research priorities and maintain control over their narratives.

These critiques underscore the importance of community-driven research approaches that prioritize the agency, autonomy, and empowerment of Ballroom participants. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is one such approach that has gained increasing attention as a way to conduct research with marginalized and underserved communities (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). CBPR is grounded in social justice, equity, and empowerment principles (Freire, 1970; Lewin, 1946; Tax, 1958). It seeks to build collaborative partnerships between researchers and community members to address community concerns and has been effectively employed in working with transgender people (Travers, et al., 2013; Bauer & Scheim, 2015).

In the context of the Ballroom scene, CBPR has the potential to generate new insights and knowledge rooted in participants' lived experiences and perspectives while contributing to the community's own goals and aspirations for social change (Husbands et al., 2020). By centering the voices and agency of Ballroom members, CBPR can help challenge dominant narratives and representations of the community and promote a more nuanced and empowering understanding of Ballroom culture.

Kiki Scene and Further Sociocultural Implications

The “Kiki” scene is a youth-centered subculture of Ballroom. The Kiki scene emerged in the early 2000s as a community for people aged 16-26yo. The Kiki scene is known as a more “beginner-friendly” and less competitive space than Mainstream Ballroom (Harper et al., 2022). It has an emphasis on inclusivity, HIV/AIDS education, and social advocacy tailored to the needs and aspirations of younger generations (Harper et al., 2022; Jones & Ellis, 2017). This subculture mirrors the adaptive resilience and community-focused aspirations of historical Ballroom.

In Arizona, the Kiki scene has become a vital space for young LGBTQIA+ people of color to find support, mentorship, and artistic expression. However, it has also been shaped by the broader social and political contexts in which it operates, including the ongoing marginalization and criminalization of LGBTQIA+ youth of color. Specifically in Arizona, where conservative politics and anti-LGBTQIA+ policies have created a particularly hostile environment for queer and transgender young people, the Kiki scene has taken on an even greater significance as a space of resistance and resilience.

By collaborating with members of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community to document their experiences, aspirations, and challenges, this study sought to contribute to a growing body of research that highlights the importance of community-driven approaches to understanding and supporting marginalized youth cultures. At the same time, this study aimed to generate insights and knowledge that informed the community's own efforts to sustain and grow its cultural legacy in the face of ongoing social and political challenges.

Meeting the Arizona Ballroom Community: The Beginning of a Collaboration

My journey into the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene began on January 19, 2023, when I first attended a local vogue night. It was at one of these events that members of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community discussed with me their desire to document and preserve the rich history and growth of their scene.

As an anthropologist, I recognized the importance of capturing and celebrating the stories, experiences, and cultural significance of this community. I shared my background and training, expressing my genuine interest in collaborating with them to create a project and digital archive that would honor their legacy and provide a platform for their voices to be heard.

Throughout February and March 2023, I met several times with leaders from the House of Paragon and the House of Majestic. These meetings were crucial in establishing trust, understanding their goals and aspirations for the project, and ensuring that the outcomes aligned with their vision. It was during these discussions that the scope and direction of the project took shape, guided by the wisdom and insights of those who had built the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene.

Community Intellectual Collaborators

The House of Paragon | (represented by a diamond icon)

“The Kiki House of Paragon was established as “Arizona’s first Kiki House” in May 2020. As underground ballroom culture is not native to the Arizona communities, Paragon has been a huge pillar for building ballroom culture in the state. Founding Mother Rylee Paragon moved to Philadelphia and appointed Elle Paragon to be the new Mother for the AZ chapter. Rylee expanded the house to create a Philly chapter, which officially debuted in October 2022. Both chapters uphold the mission of Paragon, which is to strive to be a model of excellence in and outside of the Kiki Scene.” – Rylee Paragon

The House of Majestic | (represented by a crown icon)

“The House of Majestic is a Kiki House formed in July 2022 in Phoenix, Arizona, by Deandre Taylor, also known as “Big Blue Majestic.” We are a group of individuals who chose one another to form a family that competes in competitions called Balls within the LGBTQIA+ community. We are a house comprised of gay, lesbian, non-binary, cis-gendered women, transgender men and women, and drags. Our house’s morale is built on having or showing impressive beauty and dignity.” – Big Blue Majestic

Methods

This study represents a collaborative endeavor with the Arizona Ballroom Community, emphasizing participatory research methods to ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance. In developing the study design and methods, we engaged directly with community members, incorporating their insights and feedback. Prior to implementation, all study procedures were reviewed by local House leaders. This collaborative approach

was crucial to confirm that our methods would not disrupt community activities and were tailored to the needs and preferences of the target population; this included a focus on community-building rather than “trauma-mining” or “stereotypical stories” of marginalized people. Consequently, certain demographic details such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, employment status, and education level were omitted to respect community preferences and sensitivities. See the Appendix for the Questionnaire and Consent Forms. The study was approved by ASU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) under ID: STUDY00017886.

Recruitment and Sampling

The sampling strategy was purposeful, leveraging the leadership within the Arizona Ballroom Community to ensure engagement was reflective of the community’s structure and dynamics. Recruitment presentations were coordinated through House leadership and given to community members, along with a link to the consent form and a link to a page for anonymous feedback related to the project. Interviews were held at convenient locations for participants, including dance studios in Phoenix, AZ, and the Arizona State University Tempe Campus. Each interview lasted around 1.5 hours, with participants receiving \$50 as compensation. Eligibility criteria required participants to be over 18 years old, residents of the Phoenix Metro area, and active members of the Arizona Ballroom Community, specifically affiliated with the House of Paragon or the House of Majestic. The study excluded individuals under 18, those active in the scene but not affiliated with these houses (i.e., "007"), and members residing outside of the state.

Ethnography and Participant Observation

In my research, I aimed to engage deeply and reflectively with the historical and contemporary applications of ethnography, particularly among vulnerable populations (Pacheco-Vega & Parizeau, 2018). Through my project, I integrated the principles of intersectionality as my analytical framework, akin to the approach described by Esposito & Evans-Winters (2022). They highlight the challenges inherent in ethnography and narrative inquiry, such as the risk of misrepresenting the participants' perspectives and the focus on identifying common patterns and meanings in shared stories. This insight was crucial in guiding my methodological approach, ensuring that I remained aware of the potential discrepancies between my interpretations and the participants' self-perceptions. This reflexivity was central to my effort to portray the participants' stories and lives authentically.

Participant Engagement and Data Collection

Data was collected through participant observation from June to November 2023. Observational research took place at various community events, including balls, practice sessions, and gatherings throughout the metro Phoenix area. From July to October 2023, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with 16 members of the Arizona Ballroom Community (House of Paragon n=9; House of Majestic n=7; Total n=16). The individual interviews explored participants' perceptions, aspirations, and concerns across seven distinct areas: (1) the overall Ballroom scene, (2) the Arizona Ballroom scene, (3) this project, (4) their Kiki House, (5) themselves within the Ballroom community and this project, (6) their House members in the Ballroom community and this project, and (7) the researcher within the Ballroom community and this project.

Data Analysis

Interview data were qualitatively analyzed using a keywords-in-context (KWIC) approach to identify recurring patterns and develop a thematic codebook (See codebook located in Appendix). This method facilitated the systematic identification, documentation, and interpretation of themes across the dataset. Our codebook was informed by both existing literature and insights unique to the Arizona Ballroom Community, allowing for the nuanced exploration of participant experiences and perspectives. This method involved an iterative process of data immersion, theme identification, and refinement, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the participants' narratives while also drawing on existing literature for comparative and interpretive depth. Each theme was meticulously documented and supported by direct quotes from participants. This comprehensive approach ensured that our analysis was both rigorous and reflective of the community's diversity and complexity.

Results

The analysis revealed significant themes in three primary categories—[A] perceptions and associations, [B] aspirations, wants, and desires, and [C] issues, undesirables, and concerns—across seven distinct domains: (1) the overall Ballroom scene, (2) the Arizona Ballroom scene, (3) this project, (4) their Kiki House, (5) themselves within the Ballroom community and this project, (6) their House members in the Ballroom community and this project, and (7) the researcher within the Ballroom community and this project. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
 Synthesis of Perceptions, Aspirations, Concerns in the Arizona Ballroom Scene

CATEGORY	PERCEPTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS	ASPIRATIONS, WANTS, AND DESIRES	ISSUES, UNDESIRABLES, AND CONCERNS	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
OVERALL BALLROOM SCENE	Vibrant community, creativity, freedom of expression, concept of chosen family.	Greater community awareness, social support for BIPOC LGBTQ+ groups, celebration of Ballroom culture.	Concerns about negative dynamics and compromising authenticity as it gains popularity.	Community values creativity and inclusivity, seeking broader awareness while fearing loss of authenticity in the face of growing popularity.
ARIZONA BALLROOM SCENE	Vibrant, evolving community with inclusivity, growth, and dynamic energy.	Growth, recognition, flourishing of the scene in Arizona.	Cultural appropriation, internal discord, barriers to authentic expression.	Aspires to growth and recognition amid challenges of appropriation and discord, emphasizing the scene's dynamic and inclusive nature.
THIS PROJECT	Platform for storytelling, community focus, educational contributions, and positive visibility.	Positive representation, significant impact on elevating the Arizona Ballroom scene.	Fears of exploitation, inaccurate representation, negative impact on the community.	Project viewed as a vital storytelling and educational tool, with hopes for positive impact alongside concerns about potential exploitation and misrepresentation.
THEIR KIKI HOUSE	Nurturing environments, familial bonds, support, excellence, fostering individual talents.	Growth, recognition, maintenance of unity and love within the house.	Strong sentiment against losing core values, unity, and the essence of their house.	Houses are seen as supportive families aiming for growth and recognition, with strong concerns about preserving core values and unity.
THEMSELVES WITHIN THE BALLROOM	Connection to empowerment, self-expression, personal growth, acknowledgment.	Accurate storytelling, acknowledgment in the scene, authenticity.	Misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and negative portrayals.	Individuals seek personal growth and acknowledgment, concerned about misrepresentation and longing for authenticity in their narratives.
THEIR HOUSE MEMBERS	Unique identities, creativity, valued diverse talents.	Experience, recognition, personal growth, respect within the community.	Ensuring respect and dignity, avoiding manipulation and exploitation, accurate representation, emotional safety, equitable treatment.	Members are appreciated for their diversity and talents, aspiring to recognition and growth amidst concerns for respect, safety, and equity.
THE RESEARCHER	Advocate, documentarian, educator prioritizing authentic representation and community support.	Positive representation, accurate storytelling, advocacy for the Ballroom scene.	Passive engagement, negative impact, lack of full understanding.	The researcher is expected to be an engaged advocate and accurate storyteller, with concerns about potential passivity and misunderstandings.

The results demonstrate the myriad of communal values, ambitions, and apprehensions within the Arizona Ballroom scene. Participants unanimously celebrated the scene's vibrancy, inclusivity, and dynamic energy, emphasizing its unique ability to foster a sense of community and chosen family. Aspirations centered on achieving

greater recognition, growth, and fostering a nurturing environment that maintains unity and love. The community expressed a collective desire for positive representation and impactful storytelling through the project, underscoring a longing to elevate the scene's visibility while preserving its core values and authenticity.

However, the study also uncovered clear concerns regarding the potential erosion of authenticity, the uncertainties of commercialization, and the worry of internal discord. Participants expressed fears of exploitation, misrepresentation, and the negative ramifications of a project that might not fully grasp the nuanced realities of Ballroom culture. Concerns were particularly pronounced regarding the preservation of dignity, equitable treatment, and ensuring the emotional safety of house members.

Navigating these complex dynamics, participants emphasized the need for a collaborative, community-centered approach that prioritizes the voices and experiences of those within the scene. They called for a project that could celebrate the beauty and resilience of the Ballroom community while also honestly grappling with its challenges and tensions. Ultimately, their aspirations and concerns reflected a profound love for the scene and a deep commitment to ensuring its vitality and authenticity for generations to come.

Discussion

The themes from our findings resonate with overall Ballroom culture's historical roots as a space for marginalized identities, emphasizing community, creative expression, and resilience. The findings highlight the importance of acknowledging the Ballroom scene's rich heritage, ensuring respectful and authentic representations, ensuring communities receive the tangible benefits they desire, and addressing the community's

apprehensions about mainstream appropriation, white-washing, and its potential impact on cultural integrity.

Social Support and Authenticity

Ballroom culture embodies a complex network of social support, particularly evident in the House system. This support provides hope, resilience, and empowerment to marginalized Black and Latino LGBTQIA+ communities. The sense of community and solidarity in Arizona's Ballroom scene highlights its role not merely as a physical gathering place but as an essential emotional and social support network for its members. One participant aptly captured the essence of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene, stating, "The only place in Arizona for Black and Brown queer people to express themselves. Accepting for all ages and walks of life."

Thus, the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community surpasses traditional support networks, evolving into a multifaceted social environment that not only offers hope, resilience, and empowerment but also serves as a vibrant space for cultural preservation, health advocacy, and socio-political mobilization. Another participant described the Ballroom community as embodying "Friendship, chosen family, creativity, community." These elements are vital for nurturing individual growth and collective empowerment, and they challenge societal exclusion. Our study reinforces the findings of Arnold & Bailey (2009) and Garçon & Shelton (2021), demonstrating the critical role that Ballroom culture plays in providing emotional and financial support, while also emphasizing its function as a dynamic arena for cultural preservation, health advocacy, and socio-political mobilization.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of the Ballroom community in providing a space where they could be their authentic selves, express their creativity, and find acceptance and support. The recurring themes of chosen family, love, and unity in participants' responses underscore the profound emotional and social bonds that are forged within the Arizona Ballroom scene.

The focus on communal solidarity within the Ballroom scene, coupled with a history of exploitation by white outsiders, has understandably led to concerns among community members about cultural exploitation and the whitewashing of a space created and sustained by Black and Latinx queer people. These concerns are rooted in the fear of misrepresentation and erasure that could undermine the authenticity and ownership of the Ballroom community by its rightful stewards. This is evidenced by participant concerns about the scene becoming "viral or too commercialized, white-washing, lack of community." Another participant expressed worry about LGBTQ+ clubs and bars appropriating the culture by hosting "fake events without the sense of community connection from the scene."

These apprehensions echo a historical struggle against the commodification of cultural expressions, a discourse that scholars such as Hilderbrand (2013) and hooks (1992) have well-documented. This struggle extends beyond merely protecting cultural practices; it is deeply connected to recognizing each participant's unique identity and lived experience. As such, authentic representation becomes a critical issue, calling for a portrayal of Ballroom culture that not only respects its historical depth and celebrates its diversity but also honors the legacy of its pioneers.

Expression and Empowerment

The transformative power of voguing and performance art within Ballroom culture, highlighted by our findings, exemplifies the community's use of artistic expression as a tool for empowerment, resistance, and identity affirmation. Participation in the categories at ball events allows individuals to play with makeup, clothing, movement, and other factors to define and portray themselves in a way that adds value, meaning, and joy to their lives. A participant shared the view ballroom as an "Open expression of queer artistry and talent, community building and togetherness, resilient culture." Reaffirming the work of Edwards et al. (2023) and Baker-Pitts & Martin (2021), these performative acts serve as a medium for challenging societal norms, redefining gender constructs, and articulating a narrative of resilience and defiance of hegemonic systems. Voguing, in particular, as explained by Smith et al. (2020) and Kerman (2020), represents an embodied form of storytelling that not only allows for the expression of individual and collective identities but also functions as a powerful critique of oppressive structures. Members of the community value this art form and want to share it with others; they also want people to know that their house members are creatives and cultural producers, "I want my house members to be seen as artistic intellectuals."

The preservation of Ballroom culture's historical legacy is integral to the focus on expression and empowerment. Participants' desire for positive representation and their fear of cultural dilution highlights the importance of maintaining and honoring the connection to Ballroom's roots. This desire expands past the preservation and documentation of the Arizona Ballroom scene; it is a statement to honor the revolutionary Black LGBTQIA+ individuals who established Ballroom culture as a sanctuary for

people marginalized by multiple intersections of identity. Integrating an intersectional lens, as advocated by Esposito & Evans-Winters (2022), and employing participatory action research methodologies (Budig et al., 2018), enables the understanding of the necessity of approaches that not only champion the resilience and creativity of the Ballroom community but also actively involve its members in shaping the narrative and direction of their cultural legacy.

Tangible Benefits

Members of the Ballroom scene have often had their narratives erased, culture disrespected, and have not received tangible benefits for their intellectual contributions and labor. Thus, a central theme that arose from participants was the tangible benefits that had been discussed when establishing the research collaboration. Digital archives for each house will be established in collaboration with house members. Both houses have requested digital archives to document their history and educate the public on Ballroom culture in Arizona. Individuals also desire a community outreach showcase to center and document house members' lived experiences as captured through this project. The community outreach showcase is expected to be a ball event, which also serves to show people unfamiliar with Ballroom what a ball is like. However, it is important to note, that while participants wanted tangible benefits, they primarily wanted control and ownership over their narratives. Thus, the benefits, such as funding, would be a way they could ensure they have the resources to tell their stories authentically.

Safeguarding Cultural Ownership

In the face of increased visibility, safeguarding the authenticity and ownership of Ballroom culture is paramount. Approaches to protect this cultural heritage include

establishing clear guidelines and boundaries around participation and representation, ensuring that those who contribute to and participate in Ballroom culture retain control over its depiction and evolution. Concerns about white-washing and cultural exploitation, as discussed by hooks (1992) and Hilderbrand (2013), highlight the importance of vigilant stewardship over Ballroom culture. This stewardship involves actively resisting commodification and ensuring that the community's voice remains central in narratives about Ballroom, preserving its rich history and the contributions of its pioneers.

Cultural Documentation as a Double-Edged Sword

The community's aspirations for positive representation and the concerns over potential misrepresentation highlight a critical paradox inherent in cultural documentation projects. On one hand, such initiatives offer a powerful medium for cultural preservation, empowerment, and education, serving to validate and celebrate marginalized cultures (Smith, 2022). On the other hand, the fear of exploitation and misrepresentation underscores the risks associated with external narratives imposing their interpretations on culturally nuanced practices. This duality echoes debates within cultural anthropology and heritage studies regarding the ethics of representation and the balance between visibility and commodification.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The synthesis of themes of social support, authenticity, expressive empowerment, connection to a historical legacy, and community agency can contribute to a more nuanced and respectful discourse surrounding Ballroom culture. This study reaffirms and further builds upon the findings from the broader literature, emphasizing the need for ongoing engagement, recognition, and support for the Ballroom Kiki scene. The findings

of this study contribute to several theoretical frameworks and methodological interventions within anthropology and social justice advocacy, particularly emphasizing the role of community-led research in preserving/documenting cultures or communities that are historically or continually marginalized by society. The study reaffirms the significance of safe spaces for marginalized identities, illustrating how the Ballroom scene acts as a counter-narrative to mainstream cultural appropriation and a platform for self-expression and resistance. The findings demonstrate the importance of authentic representation in documenting cultural histories and individual personal stories. This suggests that policymakers, researchers, and community leaders must engage with communities to ensure their narratives are preserved and respected. This study demonstrates how researchers can safeguard the important history of the Ballroom scene but also can serve as a model for documenting other underground communities, advocating for a methodology that is inclusive, participatory, and sensitive to the nuances of each community's experience.

Unique Context of the Arizona Ballroom Scene

The Arizona Ballroom scene, established in 2020, represents a new frontier in the geographic and cultural expansion of Ballroom and Kiki cultures. Unlike scenes in metropolitan areas like New York or Los Angeles, which have long histories and established infrastructures (Bailey, 2013), Arizona's scene emerges in a context relatively unfamiliar with the traditions and practices of Ballroom culture. This nascent status presents both unique challenges and opportunities—ranging from building community awareness to fostering a supportive environment for expression and growth.

The development of the Arizona Ballroom scene is particularly significant given the state's socio-political climate, which has often been hostile towards LGBTQ+ individuals and communities of color. Despite these challenges, the Arizona Ballroom community has managed to carve out a space for self-expression, solidarity, and resistance, demonstrating the adaptability and resilience of Ballroom culture in the face of adversity. The emergence of this scene in Arizona underscores the universal need for inclusive and empowering spaces among marginalized LGBTQ+ populations, regardless of geographic location.

The Arizona scene's development also reflects the transformative potential of youth leadership and community organizing within Ballroom and Kiki cultures. The young leaders driving the growth of the Arizona scene face the dual challenges of establishing a new cultural space while also navigating the complexities of community building, resource acquisition, and cultural education. Their efforts to create a vibrant and supportive Ballroom community in Arizona speak to the enduring power of these cultures to inspire and mobilize marginalized individuals towards collective action and empowerment, a sentiment that is reminiscent of the history of Ballroom (Bailey, 2013; Tucker, 2021).

Unique Obstacles Faced by the Arizona Community

The establishment and development of the Arizona Ballroom scene are not without significant challenges. Primary among these is the issue of visibility—not just in terms of gaining recognition within the broader community but also in educating potential members and allies about the culture's depth and significance. Unlike areas with a long-standing presence of Ballroom culture, such as New York or Chicago, Arizona's

scene must cultivate awareness and appreciation from scratch, a task compounded by the limited resources available for event hosting, community outreach, and educational programs. Participants all share a desire for more community awareness and education, which was the purpose of this project. Below is a selection of different participant's responses when asked what they hoped this project would do,

“Bring more people, Letting people know it's safe.”

“I hope it will shed light on our scene. I hope it contributes to growth and longevity.”

“Reach an audience interested in Arizona ballroom specifically help to grow our scene, get Liam his degree”

“Give accurate and correct knowledge about Arizona Ballroom and future opportunities.”

Additionally, the necessity for cultural education presents a unique challenge; imparting the rich history, values, and practices of Ballroom to a new audience requires dedicated effort and resources, particularly in an environment where LGBTQ+ expressions are still fighting for acceptance and understanding. This challenge is further exacerbated by the lack of institutional support and funding for BIPOC LGBTQ+ initiatives in Arizona, which can limit the community's ability to organize events, workshops, and outreach programs. Furthermore, Arizona currently only has a Kiki scene that is centered on the youth, making it more difficult to spread awareness and gain resources when Arizona is politically hostile towards transgender youths and efforts to create safe spaces for them. Despite these obstacles, the Arizona Ballroom community

has shown remarkable resourcefulness and determination in creating spaces for cultural exchange, mentorship, and community building.

The dynamism of youth leadership, while a potent force for innovation and growth, also necessitates a learning curve in managing community dynamics, fostering cohesion among diverse members, event planning, and securing the scene's sustainability and growth. In the context of the Arizona Ballroom scene, this challenge is compounded by the lack of intergenerational knowledge transfer and the absence of established networks of support common in spaces like New York City. Despite these hurdles, the leaders and community members of the Arizona scene have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resourcefulness in building a strong and supportive community that prioritizes mentorship, skill-sharing, and collective growth.

The evolution of the Arizona Ballroom scene underscores the resilience and creativity inherent in Ballroom culture. As it continues to navigate the dual imperatives of growth and authenticity, the Arizona community stands as a testament to the transformative power of Ballroom, not just as a cultural practice but as a movement that fosters belonging, affirmation, and empowerment for marginalized identities. The challenges faced by the Arizona scene, from issues of visibility and cultural education to the complexities of youth leadership and community dynamics, reflect the broader struggles and triumphs of Ballroom communities across the globe, especially as Ballroom becomes more popular through mainstream media and greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities across the globe. As the Arizona Ballroom scene continues to grow and evolve, it offers valuable insights into the future of Ballroom culture and the enduring importance of community, creativity, and resistance in the face of adversity.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

This study's community-led approach, while one of its strengths, also introduces specific limitations that are important to acknowledge. First, the participatory nature of this research meant that certain topics, questions, or demographic details were omitted or modified in accordance with the community's preferences and sensitivities. Such adjustments, while essential for maintaining trust and respect within the community, may limit the breadth of data collected and potentially influence the findings' generalizability. Additionally, the focus on Arizona's Ballroom Kiki Scene, though providing in-depth insights into this specific community, may not fully capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives present in the broader national or international Ballroom scenes. It should be noted, however, that generalizability was not an aim of this study. The use of semi-structured interviews and participant observation also means that the findings are influenced by the subjective experiences of those who chose to participate or could not participate due to not being a member of the House of Majestic or House of Paragon, which might not represent the entire spectrum of views within the community. Additionally, this study only interviewed participants who were at least 18 years old; thus, many people in the youth-centered Kiki scene could not participate, and thus, their perspectives are lacking in this study.

Future Research

Future studies with the Arizona Ballroom Community could use the emergent themes found within our study to situate research that aligns with the community's

priorities and build upon the codebook as themes that emerge can help future studies shift to focus on those themes.

Further research can expand the scope of study to include more diverse geographic locations and a broader range of participants within the Ballroom community could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the cohesiveness of desires and concerns about research/documentation. Future studies can use alternative methodologies or methods that could complement the community-led approach, such as digital ethnography or photovoice, to gather different perspectives of different aspects of the community.

Additionally, there is a significant opportunity to explore the impact of mainstream appropriation on the Ballroom scene, examining not only the community's apprehensions but also potential strategies for safeguarding cultural integrity. Future research could also examine the long-term strategies and effects of community-led research and documentation efforts on the preservation of cultural heritage and identity within marginalized groups.

Conclusion

This study's exploration into the House Ballroom Scene in Arizona has illuminated the critical role of community-led documentation in safeguarding cultural integrity and fostering empowerment among marginalized Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities. The findings reveal a collective desire for representation that transcends mere visibility, advocating for documentation practices that respect the scene's rich history, embrace its diversity, and acknowledge the unique challenges faced by its members. The research underscores the importance of participatory approaches in

capturing the essence of the Ballroom scene, ensuring that the narratives of those within it are recorded with authenticity and sensitivity. Furthermore, the study's insights into the aspirations and concerns of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene's members underscore the broader implications for cultural documentation, advocacy, and the ongoing fight against discrimination and erasure. As the Ballroom scene continues to evolve, this research serves as a foundational step towards creating a comprehensive archive that not only celebrates the community's achievements but also preserves its legacy for future generations. This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between creative expression, identity formation, and community solidarity, offering a template for future studies in cultural documentation and community research. Lastly, it demonstrates the need for researchers to honor communities and participants and also provide tangible benefits to support the community and its members.

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CHAPTER 4

"IT'S GIVING EMPOWERMENT": APPLYING COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHODS WITH THE ARIZONA BALLROOM KIKI SCENE

Abstract

This paper presents findings from a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project that explored the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's desires and concerns regarding collaborating on a study to document their emerging scene. Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of Paulo Freire, Kurt Lewin, and Sol Tax, I discussed the ethical and practical considerations of conducting research with marginalized LGBTQIA+ communities. Key methodological decisions included collaborative questionnaire development, purposive sampling, and participant-driven focus groups. Through thematic analysis of four focus groups, authenticity, empowerment, and tangible community benefits emerged as central desires, while exploitation, misrepresentation, safety threats, cultural erasure, and inclusivity challenges were primary concerns. The findings underscored a collective aspiration for the Arizona ballroom scene to be accurately represented, acknowledged, and supported both internally and externally. Top desires included community growth, historical documentation, enhanced connectivity and support, raising awareness of Ballroom culture, and concrete project deliverables benefiting the community. The apprehensions emphasized safeguarding the scene against the aforementioned risks and highlighted the importance of an empathetic, inclusive approach respecting ballroom culture. Connecting heavily with the theoretical frameworks, the results contributed to discourses on cultural preservation, underground

community emergence, inclusivity, and participatory methodologies' transformative potential in empowering marginalized communities. I reflected on lessons learned, positionality dynamics, and implications for research with underground communities.

Introduction

The House Ballroom scene, cultivated by Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities, has long provided a vital haven for creative expression, kinship, and resilience against systemic marginalization. In recent years, the Kiki scene has emerged as a youth-oriented subculture of ballroom, becoming instrumental in offering safe and affirming spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth of color. Amidst Arizona's sociopolitical landscape, where LGBTQIA+ identities, particularly those who are transgender, face legal discrimination, Kiki houses navigate complex intersections of identity, community-building, and artistic performance. Recognizing the importance of documenting and celebrating their histories, the Arizona Kiki community expressed interest in a collaborative research partnership. This paper examined the application of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and participatory action research (PAR) approaches in a study engaging the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene. I explored the community's aspirations and concerns regarding the research process and discussed the theoretical, methodological, and ethical dimensions of conducting participatory research with marginalized communities.

Origins & Commitments: Community-based Participatory Research & Participatory Action Research

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) are research approaches rooted in the principles of social justice, collaboration, and empowerment. These methodologies seek to bridge the gap between research and action by actively involving community members in the research process and working towards meaningful social change. This section examines the philosophical underpinnings, historical context, practical applications, and critiques of three key traditions within CBPR and PAR: Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," Kurt Lewin's "Northern Tradition," and Sol Tax's anthropological approach.

Paulo Freire and the "Southern Tradition"

Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire's seminal work, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970), laid the foundation for the "Southern Tradition" of participatory research. Freire's approach emphasizes the importance of critical consciousness (conscientização) and dialogue in empowering marginalized communities to challenge oppressive social structures. He argues that traditional education systems perpetuate inequality by treating students as passive recipients of knowledge, rather than active participants in their own learning and liberation. Freire's methodology involves a process of "problem-posing education," in which community members and researchers engage in a dialogic process to identify and analyze the social, political, and economic issues affecting their lives. This process aims to develop a critical understanding of the root causes of oppression and to inspire collective action towards social transformation. Practical applications of Freire's approach have been widespread, particularly in the fields

of education, community development, and social work. For example, Freire's ideas have informed the development of popular education programs in Latin America, which aim to empower marginalized communities through literacy and political education (Kane, 2001). However, critics have argued that Freire's approach may be challenging to implement in contexts where communities are not fully ready or willing to engage in a process of critical reflection and action (Blackburn, 2000). Additional critiques of Freire's approach highlight issues with the dichotomy of oppressed and oppressor in contexts outside of extreme social deprivation and question the universal applicability of his pedagogical ideas across all academic disciplines and settings (Weiler, 1996).

Kurt Lewin and the "Northern Tradition"

Kurt Lewin, a German-American psychologist, is widely regarded as the founder of the "Northern Tradition" of action research. Lewin's approach emphasizes the importance of integrating theory and practice through a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Lewin, 1946). He argues that social change can be achieved through a collaborative process in which researchers and community members work together to identify problems, develop interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness. Lewin's action research methodology has been applied in a variety of settings, including organizational development, education, and community psychology. For example, Lewin's ideas have informed the development of participatory action research projects aimed at improving workplace conditions and promoting social justice in schools (Greenwood & Levin, 2006). However, critics have argued that Lewin's approach may be limited by its focus on small-scale, localized interventions, rather than broader structural change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Additionally, some have

questioned the extent to which Lewin's methodology truly empowers community members, given the inherent power imbalances between researchers and participants (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Sol Tax and Applied Anthropology

Sol Tax, an American anthropologist, pioneered the concept of "action anthropology" as a means of conducting research that benefits both the community and the researcher. Tax's approach emphasizes the importance of collaboration, reciprocity, and respect for community knowledge and expertise (Tax, 1958). He argues that anthropologists have an ethical obligation to use their skills and resources to help communities address their own needs and priorities.

Tax's action anthropology methodology has been applied in a variety of indigenous and marginalized communities around the world. For example, Tax's ideas have informed the development of community-based resource management programs, in which indigenous communities work with researchers to develop sustainable strategies for managing their natural resources (Stapp & Burney, 2002). Despite its valuable contributions, action anthropology has encountered criticisms related to potential paternalism and the balance between research objectives and community service (Foley, 1999). These critiques highlight the importance of mindful application of participatory methodologies to avoid unintended consequences.

Application and Addressing Limitations in the Current Project

In the current project, I aimed to draw on the strengths of these three traditions while also addressing their limitations. I drew from Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue and the development of critical consciousness as means for

the oppressed to gain agency and effect social transformation (Freire, 1970). This aligns with the methodological framework that prioritizes the voices and experiences of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki Community, recognizing them as co-creators of knowledge. I also drew on Lewin's cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection to develop and evaluate interventions that are responsive to the community's needs and priorities. This iterative process resonated with an engagement with the community, where their findings and actions were continuously informed by the community's feedback and evolving needs. Finally, I used Tax's emphasis on collaboration, reciprocity, and respect for community knowledge to ensure that the research was ethical and beneficial to the community. This principle of mutual benefit guided the research ethics and practice, ensuring that their work contributed to the empowerment and well-being of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki Community.

To address the limitations of these approaches, I strived to balance the need for localized interventions with a broader focus on structural change. I also worked to minimize power imbalances between researchers and community members by emphasizing collaboration and reciprocity throughout the research process. This involved providing community members with opportunities to take on leadership roles, helping to develop their research skills, and ensuring that they had a voice in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, I prioritized the dissemination of research findings back to the community in accessible and meaningful ways. This involved working with community members to develop culturally appropriate and engaging dissemination strategies, such as hosting a community showcase ball event. By drawing on the strengths of these three

traditions and addressing their limitations, I aimed to conduct research that was both rigorous and relevant to the needs and priorities of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community. I believed that this approach had the potential to generate meaningful social change and to contribute to the empowerment of marginalized communities.

Community-Driven Research with LGBTQ+ Communities and Intersectionality: Approaches & Key Cases

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), examines the interlocking systems of oppression and how multiple social identities shape lived experiences. Intersectionality is crucial for understanding the diversity within LGBTQ+ communities and the impacts of racism, classism, ableism, and other forms of marginalization (Bowleg, 2012). Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) argue that authentic community-based research with LGBTQ+ populations requires intersectional and anti-oppressive praxis centering the voices and leadership of those most marginalized, including LGBTQ+ people of color, transgender folks, and people with disabilities.

The application of CBPR and PAR methodologies within LGBTQ+ communities has been instrumental in addressing health disparities, promoting social justice, and fostering community empowerment. Groundbreaking examples include:

ACT UP and HIV/AIDS Prevention

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was a grassroots political action group that formed in the 1980s in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. ACT UP's approach to activism and research was deeply rooted in the principles of CBPR, with an emphasis on community mobilization, direct action, and participatory decision-making (Crimp & Rolston, 1990). ACT UP's participatory research initiatives were instrumental in

challenging the biomedical establishment and advocating for more rapid and equitable access to HIV/AIDS treatments. For example, ACT UP members worked with researchers to develop and implement community-based clinical trials that prioritized the needs and experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS (Epstein, 1996). The success of ACT UP's participatory research approach has been well-documented, with studies showing significant improvements in HIV/AIDS treatment access, clinical trial design, and community engagement in research (McElhiney et al., 2020).

CBPR for LGBTQ Aging

CBPR has also been applied to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ older adults, who often experience social isolation, discrimination, and health disparities. For example, Fredriksen-Goldsen and colleagues (2015) conducted a CBPR study with LGBTQ older adults to identify and address their health and aging needs. The study involved a partnership between researchers and community organizations, with community members actively involved in all phases of the research process. The study's findings highlighted the importance of social support, community engagement, and culturally competent healthcare in promoting the health and well-being of LGBTQ older adults (Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2014). The study also led to the development of a community-based intervention to reduce social isolation and improve quality of life among LGBTQ older adults (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2015).

Trans PULSE and CBPR for Trans* Populations

The Trans PULSE project, led by researcher Greta Bauer, is a CBPR study that examines the health and well-being of trans* individuals in Ontario, Canada. The project involves a partnership between researchers and community organizations, with trans*

community members actively involved in all phases of the research process (Bauer et al., 2009; Travers, 2013). The Trans PULSE project has been instrumental in identifying health disparities and social determinants of health among trans* individuals, as well as in developing community-based interventions to address these disparities. For example, the project has led to the development of a peer support program for trans* individuals, which has been shown to improve mental health outcomes and reduce social isolation (Bauer et al., 2015). The success of the Trans PULSE project has been widely recognized, with the project receiving numerous awards and accolades for its innovative and participatory approach to research with trans* communities.

POSSE Project (Promoting Ovah-ness through Safer Sex Education)

POSSE Project (Promoting Ovah-ness through Safer Sex Education), a CBPR project aimed at addressing HIV prevention among black gay and bisexual men in Toronto, Canada (Husbands et al., 2020). The project was a collaboration between academic researchers, community organizations, and community members, and employed an intersectional framework to understand how factors such as racism, homophobia, and socioeconomic marginalization contribute to HIV risk among this population. Through a series of community consultations and focus groups, the project developed a culturally-tailored HIV prevention intervention that addressed the specific needs and experiences of black gay and bisexual men.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PAR is a research approach that emphasizes the active participation of community members in all phases of the research process, from problem identification to data analysis and dissemination. PAR has been widely used in LGBTQ+ contexts to address a

range of issues, including homelessness, violence, and discrimination. For example, Shelton and colleagues (2018) conducted a PAR study with LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness to identify and address their unique needs and challenges. The study involved a partnership between researchers and community organizations, with youth actively involved in all phases of the research process. The study's findings highlighted the importance of safe and affirming spaces, community support, and access to resources in promoting the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness (Shelton et al., 2018). The study also led to the development of a community-based intervention to provide support and resources to LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness.

Problems of Community-Driven Research with LGBTQ+ Communities

Despite the potential of CBPR and PAR to promote more equitable and empowering research practices with LGBTQ+ communities, there are also significant challenges and limitations to these approaches. One major issue is the persistence of white-centered practices and perspectives in LGBTQ+ research, even within community-driven projects (Bowleg, 2017; Muhammad et al., 2015). This can manifest in various ways, such as the prioritization of research questions and methods that align with dominant cultural norms, the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ people of color in research teams and advisory boards, and the failure to adequately address issues of racism and colonialism within LGBTQ+ communities. As a result, the knowledge produced through these projects may not fully capture the diverse experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ communities, particularly those who are most marginalized.

Another challenge is the potential for tokenism and exploitation within community-driven research processes. LGBTQ+ community members may be invited to participate in research projects without being given meaningful decision-making power or compensation for their time and labor. This can lead to a sense of disillusionment and mistrust towards research institutions, as well as a perpetuation of power imbalances between researchers and communities. There are also ethical concerns around the ownership and dissemination of research findings, particularly when working with communities that have experienced a history of research abuse and exploitation. LGBTQ+ communities have often been the subjects of pathologizing and stigmatizing research practices, and there may be understandable hesitancy to share personal experiences and information with outsiders. Researchers must be transparent about their intentions and commitments to the community and ensure that research findings are shared in accessible and meaningful ways that prioritize the needs and interests of LGBTQ+ communities.

To address these challenges, it is crucial for researchers engaging in community-driven research with LGBTQ+ communities to center intersectionality and anti-oppressive practices throughout the research process. This involves actively recruiting and supporting leadership from LGBTQ+ people of color, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups within LGBTQ+ communities. It also requires a willingness to confront and dismantle white supremacy and other systems of oppression within research institutions and practices. Researchers must also prioritize building trust and reciprocal relationships with LGBTQ+ communities, recognizing that this is an ongoing process that extends beyond any single research project. This may involve investing time and

resources in community events and initiatives, being transparent about research goals and limitations, and being accountable to community feedback and concerns.

Finally, researchers must be willing to challenge traditional notions of objectivity and expertise, and embrace a more collaborative and participatory approach to knowledge production. This requires humility, flexibility, and a commitment to ongoing learning and unlearning in partnership with LGBTQ+ communities. By centering the voices and experiences of those who have been most marginalized within LGBTQ+ research, we can work towards a more just and liberatory approach to community-driven research.

Methods

This study represented a collaborative endeavor with the Arizona Ballroom Community, emphasizing participatory research methods to ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance. In developing the study design and methods, I engaged directly with community members, incorporating their insights and feedback. Prior to implementation, all study procedures were reviewed by local House leaders. This collaborative approach was crucial to confirm that the methods would not disrupt community activities and were tailored to the needs and preferences of the target population; this included a focus on community-building rather than "trauma-mining" or "stereotypical stories" of marginalized people. Consequently, certain demographic details such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, employment status, and education level were omitted to respect community preferences and sensitivities. See the Appendix for the Questionnaire and Consent Forms. The study was approved by ASU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) under ID: STUDY00017886.

Community Intellectual Collaborators

The House of Paragon | (represented by a diamond icon)

“The Kiki House of Paragon was established as “Arizona’s first Kiki House” in May 2020. As underground ballroom culture is not native to the Arizona communities, Paragon has been a huge pillar for building ballroom culture in the state. Founding Mother Rylee Paragon moved to Philadelphia and appointed Elle Paragon to be the new Mother for the AZ chapter. Rylee expanded the house to create a Philly chapter, which officially debuted in October 2022. Both chapters uphold the mission of Paragon, which is to strive to be a model of excellence in and outside of the Kiki Scene.” – Rylee Paragon

The House of Majestic | (represented by a crown icon)

“The House of Majestic is a Kiki House formed in July 2022 in Phoenix, Arizona, by Deandre Taylor, also known as “Big Blue Majestic.” We are a group of individuals who chose one another to form a family that competes in competitions called Balls within the LGBTQIA+ community. We are a house comprised of gay, lesbian, non-binary, cis-gendered women, transgender men and women, and drags. Our house’s morale is built on having or showing impressive beauty and dignity.” – Big Blue Majestic

Positionality

I am a queer/trans/non-binary, white, military veteran, first-generation college student, and prior homeless person from a poor working-class family. Although I do not identify as disabled, I have chronic health issues. I am also a Ph.D. student with a large social support network and in a place in my life where I currently have stable housing and resources. While I have existed in queer spaces for over 15 years, I have only entered the

Ballroom Kiki scene within the past year. I recognize that my desire to be in this space was because of the expansive gendered performances and liberatory ways of being I witnessed at my first vogue event. At this event, I feel I witnessed the sacredness of this community, and I feel I have a strong responsibility to prioritize the needs/wants of the community, including if they desire my exclusion.

Based on my positionality, I felt I had a responsibility to ethically gatekeep this community from those who do not fully engage with anti-racist and liberatory praxis. It is a gift, not a given, to be allowed in these spaces and to work with the Arizona Ballroom Community. I am invested in the community, the people that make up the community, and the future goals of the community (in whatever way they define that.) I did not believe that the ABC needed “saving” or help from me. I deferred to them as they are the experts, and their knowledge, experience, and skills are valid and cannot be fully understood or claimed by me. Based on my personal experience, I aimed to be flexible and accommodating to the needs of ABC members as health issues, work, families, politics, systematic barriers, stress, and other factors may limit people’s capacity or ability to engage. I recognized that my presence and the project are invasive and extractive, regardless of if I focus on community-led efforts. I recognized Ballroom and voguing are spaces and practices created to survive a violent white supremacist cis-heteronormative society; thus, I felt a responsibility to honor this space and confront my own biases and internalized phobias that I have learned and enforced due to the dominant hegemony. I also recognized that as a masculine-presenting person who takes testosterone that Ballroom celebrates femininity and softness. While I do not believe that masculinity and femininity are binary/opposed/or mutually exclusive, I aimed to refocus

my thinking on “working softer” and prioritizing feminine perspectives. I also aimed to validate the various ways of knowing about the world, which have often been dismissed by the academy.

I aimed to be proactively and consistently critically reflexive in the ways that my interpretations, framings, and representations impacted peoples’ lives. I believed, prioritized, and honored people’s critical feedback, and recognized that my role is one of service to the community. I was accountable and took thoughtful and meaningful rectification when I made mistakes or unintentionally caused harm. I also reflected on how the future may look back at this project. As addressed in the consent section below, I recognized that as a researcher, I provided financial benefits and that the research provided benefits or created a means for organizational and scholarly legitimacy that helped procure grants, status, networking opportunities, protection, etc., and that these may have influenced ABC members to participate in the project even when they felt it did not completely align with their needs/wants/goals; thus, I aimed to give the majority of power in the direction of the project to the community and also developed a research collaboration agreement that established clear goals, expectations, outcomes, intellectual rights, and provided accountability. See the Appendix for the draft research collaboration agreement template.

Consent

The House of Paragon and House of Majestic have told me that their biggest challenge is getting funds to sponsor balls and travel to balls in other states. I recognized that funding from the research project and some of the things I offered on the project pitch may have influenced people to participate due to circumstances rather than full

enthusiastic consent. I communicated that I was happy to do the things I offered on the project pitch (i.e., help them write grants or volunteer my time to help set up events, etc.), regardless of if they participated in this research project. I communicated that I could not offer funds if they did not participate in the research project (as I do not have thousands of dollars), but (if they wanted) I could try to help them find other funding sources. Additionally, we discussed their wants/goals/desired outcomes for the project, modified the research questions and methods to fit their priorities, and discussed our expectations for each party to ensure this project was something that we could feasibly do, and that is something they *wanted* to do. This information and more was written in the research collaboration agreement so everyone had a clear idea of the project. The document also provided accountability of the researcher as participants in *Paris is Burning* felt that Jenni Livingstone did not honor her agreements with the community.

I communicated that they do not need to participate in the project whatsoever, and I also stated that if they chose to work on the project, then at any time, they can decide they no longer wish to be a part of the project, and that is totally okay. Intellectual rights, data usage, and accessibility were outlined in the research collaboration agreement prior to collecting data.

Recruitment and Sampling

The sampling strategy was purposeful, leveraging the leadership within the Arizona Ballroom Community to ensure engagement was reflective of the community's structure and dynamics. Recruitment presentations were coordinated through House leadership and given to community members, along with a link to the consent form and a link to a page for anonymous feedback related to the project. Eligibility criteria required

participants to be over 18 years old, residents of the Phoenix Metro area, and active members of the Arizona Ballroom Community, specifically affiliated with the House of Paragon or the House of Majestic. The study excluded individuals under 18, those active in the scene but not affiliated with these houses (i.e., "007"), and members residing outside of the state. Individuals who had completed the individual interview were invited to participate in the focus group. Focus Groups were held at convenient locations for participants, including dance studios in Phoenix, AZ, and the Arizona State University Tempe Campus. Each focus group lasted around 30 minutes, with participants receiving \$17 as compensation.

Ethnography and Participant Observation

I aimed to be reflexive and engaged in the history and current use of ethnography, especially among vulnerable populations (Pacheco-Vega & Parizeau, 2018). “Using intersectionality as her analytical framework and narrative inquiry as her methodological tool, the Black feminist researcher teaches that (a) embedded in the process of inscribing other people’s lives, which is what we ultimately are doing in ethnography and narrative inquiry, is the risk of not always precisely portraying the characters or their lives in the same way that the participants see themselves and (b) there is an understanding in narrative inquiry that researchers are interested in patterns of shared stories and the meanings that individuals give to the stories” (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022, pg. 68).

Participant Engagement and Data Collection

Data was collected through participant observation from June to November 2023. Observational research took place at various community events, including balls, practice sessions, and gatherings throughout the metro Phoenix area. From July to October 2023, I

conducted semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews with 16 members of the Arizona Ballroom Community (House of Paragon n=9; House of Majestic n=7; Total n=16). The individual interviews explored participants' perceptions, aspirations, and concerns across seven distinct areas: (1) the overall Ballroom scene, (2) the Arizona Ballroom scene, (3) this project, (4) their Kiki House, (5) themselves within the Ballroom community and this project, (6) their House members in the Ballroom community and this project, and (7) the researcher within the Ballroom community and this project. Following each individual interview, focus groups comprising approximately four participants each were formed to list and rank the community's top three desires and concerns regarding the project. This was to ensure the community's wants were prioritized in the data analysis and narrative. Focus group interviews followed the Morgan and Keueger (1998) focus group tool kit. Four focus groups were conducted, two from each participating house, and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Focus groups were given 10 minutes alone without the researcher present to further discuss their desires, concerns, and other thoughts with their group without feeling judged by the researcher. It was the researcher's hope that the time to discuss without the researcher present would allow participants to be more honest and discuss topics such as concerns about the researcher that could be awkward in the researcher's presence. The researcher would leave the room and close the door to wait in a separate room, after 10 minutes had elapsed the researcher knocked on the door to see if they needed more time. If so, the researcher went back to waiting and would follow-up in another 5 to 10 mins. If the focus group did not need more time, the researcher came in and thanked the group, informed them of the next steps, answered questions, paid participants, and gave them contact

information to follow-up if desired. One member from each focus group wrote the group's top 3 desires and top 3 concerns on a piece of paper seen by all other group members during the time the researcher was not present. The researcher did not know who wrote the responses or which group members most strongly prioritized which items, ensuring anonymity. The handwritten responses were transcribed by the researcher to a Microsoft Word document and analyzed using MAXQDA software. The transcribed Word document was an exact copy of the handwritten responses.

Data Analysis

Interview data were qualitatively analyzed using a keywords-in-context (KWIC) approach to identify recurring patterns and develop a thematic codebook (See codebook located in Appendix). This method facilitated the systematic identification, documentation, and interpretation of themes across the dataset. The codebook was informed by both existing literature and insights unique to the Arizona Ballroom Community, allowing for the nuanced exploration of participant experiences and perspectives. This method involved an iterative process of data immersion, theme identification, and refinement, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the participants' narratives while also drawing on existing literature for comparative and interpretive depth. Each theme was meticulously documented and supported by direct quotes from participants. This comprehensive approach ensured that the analysis was both rigorous and reflective of the community's diversity and complexity.

Results

The thematic analysis revealed a complex interplay of desires and concerns regarding the research partnership. Key themes centered around authenticity,

empowerment, and tangible benefits as central community priorities. Focus Group

Responses are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Raw Data from Each of the Four Focus Groups

Focus Group	Top 3 desired outcomes from this project	Top 3 concerns about this project
A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach targeted audience 2. Expand the scene; keep the scene going/growing 3. Keep supporting each other 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Too commercial 2. “Miss the mark”; not reach targeted audience. 3. White-washed
B	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To be recognized by other communities to create new connections that create accessibility to new resources 2. Acknowledge and spread correct history of Paragon and the greater AZ Ballroom community (in archive/photos/etc.) (and writing) 3. An event signifying the development of the community with the project (Desert Diamond #2) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be portrayed in a negative manner or misinterpreted or inauthentic to what we see true. 2. There isn’t a contingency plan if there were to be backlash from this project, especially if you leave, who pays the repercussions? 3. Exploitation
C	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community growth for Arizona Ballroom and the history of the community 2. Protecting the Arizona Ballroom community space 3. Raising/promoting awareness of ballroom culture to the non-familiar 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Safety and Protection of the space, Proper security. 2. Protecting Individuals in ballroom from exploitation, i.e., white-washing, artistic expression. 3. No fabrication/Paraphrasing for sense of dramatics from individuals' stories that shared
D	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To highlight why ballroom was created and why it still continues. 2. To demonstrate queer creativity of everyone in the scene. 3. An archive of our history from the past and future. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For this to not be a Paragon centered project or Ballroom centered. 2. For any uncomfortable questions or experiences to be shared or forcibly answered. 3. For our words to be censored, watered down, or white-washed. P.S. forgetting that our message is POC centered queer, and not for everyone.

Focus Group Insights

- Top Desires: Positive accurate representation, community growth, acknowledgment and sharing of history, recognition, and tangible support of the ballroom scene.
- Top Concerns: Fear of misrepresentation, exclusion, exploitation, white-washing, safety concerns, and loss of focus on the Ballroom community.

The focus group responses highlight the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's desire for the project to contribute to their community's growth, recognition, and accurate

representation. They want the project to help expand their scene, raise awareness about Ballroom culture, and create an archive of their history that demonstrates the creativity and resilience of their community. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of community support and empowerment, hoping the project will highlight the significance of Ballroom culture and its ongoing impact.

However, the community also expresses significant concerns about potential misrepresentation, exploitation, and appropriation. They fear that their stories and experiences might be misinterpreted, censored, or whitewashed, leading to an inauthentic portrayal of their community. The responses underscore the need for the project to prioritize the safety and protection of the community, both in terms of physical security and safeguarding against cultural appropriation and exploitation.

Another key insight is the community's emphasis on centering the project around their specific experiences and perspectives as queer people of color. They want the project to focus on the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene rather than the broader ballroom culture and to ensure that their message is not diluted or made palatable for a general audience.

These findings suggest that community-based research projects in the Ballroom Kiki scene must prioritize the community's desires for growth, recognition, and accurate representation while actively addressing concerns about misrepresentation, exploitation, and safety. Researchers should work closely with the community to develop strategies that amplify their voices, preserve their history, and protect their cultural integrity.

Furthermore, the focus group responses highlight the importance of creating tangible benefits for the community, such as events that celebrate their development and archives

that document their history. Researchers should collaborate with the community to design project outcomes that align with their needs and aspirations, ensuring that the research process is empowering and supportive.

In conclusion, the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's responses emphasize the need for community-based research projects to be grounded in principles of authenticity, safety, and empowerment. By centering the community's desires and concerns, researchers can contribute to the growth and recognition of the Ballroom Kiki scene while protecting against misrepresentation and exploitation.

Discussion

The themes and insights that emerged from the focus group interviews with the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community align with and expand upon the existing literature on House Ballroom communities and the Ballroom Kiki scene.

The desire for community growth, recognition, and accurate representation expressed by the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community resonates with the findings of previous studies. Researchers have highlighted the importance of ballroom culture in providing a space for marginalized LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those of color, to build community, express themselves, and find support (Arnold & Bailey, 2009; Bailey, 2013). The Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's emphasis on expanding their scene and raising awareness about ballroom culture reflects a similar desire to strengthen and celebrate their community.

The concerns about misrepresentation, exploitation, and appropriation raised by the focus group participants are also consistent with the critiques and challenges documented in the literature. Scholars have criticized mainstream representations of ballroom culture,

such as the documentary "Paris Is Burning," for sensationalizing and commodifying the experiences of queer people of color (Hilderbrand, 2013; hooks, 1992). The Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's apprehensions about their stories being misinterpreted, censored, or whitewashed echo these critiques and highlight the ongoing struggle against cultural appropriation and exploitation.

The focus group responses also emphasize the need for community-based research projects to prioritize the safety, protection, and empowerment of ballroom communities. This aligns with the principles of participatory action research and community-based research, which stress the importance of collaboration, mutual benefit, and social justice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Israel et al., 2006). The Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's desire for tangible benefits, such as events and archives that celebrate and document their history, reflects a similar emphasis on research that empowers and supports the community.

Furthermore, the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's emphasis on community support and empowerment through the research process suggests a more proactive and transformative role for community-based research in the Ballroom Kiki scene. Beyond documenting and analyzing the experiences of Ballroom communities, research projects can actively contribute to their growth, recognition, and resilience by creating spaces and resources that amplify their voices and celebrate their histories.

Pragmatically, the findings offer several key lessons for partnering with Ballroom Kiki communities through participatory research:

1. Center community leadership in all phases to ensure authentic representation.
2. Provide tangible benefits and resources to support community development.

3. Implement safeguards against cultural appropriation and misrepresentation.
4. Ensure ethical protections around privacy, consent, and data ownership.
5. Practice reflexivity and cultural humility to navigate positionality dynamics.
6. Engage the community's intersectional identities and needs equitably.
7. Disseminate findings in accessible, creative formats to reach key audiences.

In conclusion, the themes and insights from the focus group interviews with the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community both reinforce and expand upon the existing literature on House Ballroom communities and the Ballroom Kiki scene. The findings highlight the importance of community-based research that prioritizes the desires, concerns, and empowerment of local Ballroom Kiki communities while attending to the ongoing challenges of misrepresentation, exploitation, and appropriation. By collaborating with communities to create research projects that are attuned to their specific cultural contexts and that generate tangible benefits, researchers can contribute to the growth, recognition, and preservation of the Ballroom Kiki scene.

As the first study on an emerging Kiki scene in Arizona, this project provides novel insights into the priorities and tensions involved in the establishment of a research partnership. The strong resonance between community emphases and CBPR/PAR principles underscores their relevance and urgency in this context. The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the desires, concerns, and aspirations of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community as they engage in a participatory research partnership to document and support their emerging cultural scene. The themes that emerged from the focus groups underscore the community's profound yearning for authentic representation, empowerment, and tangible benefits from the research process, while also highlighting

their apprehensions about exploitation, misrepresentation, safety threats, cultural erasure, and inclusivity challenges.

The strong emphasis on authenticity, empowerment, and tangible community benefits aligns closely with the core principles and values of CBPR. The Arizona Kiki community's desire for their experiences and perspectives to be accurately represented and validated through the research resonates with CBPR's commitment to centering community voices and knowledge. Their aspirations for the research to support community growth, historical preservation, enhanced connectivity and support, and increased public awareness of ballroom culture reflect CBPR's goals of strengthening community capacity and promoting social change.

Moreover, the community's concerns about potential risks and harms associated with the research, such as exploitation, misrepresentation, and cultural appropriation, echo well-documented ethical tensions and challenges in conducting research with marginalized communities. The fear of the Kiki scene being co-opted or misrepresented for commercial gain, individual and collective identities being compromised, safety being jeopardized, cultural roots being erased, and inequitable engagement or exclusion of members all speak to the historical legacy of research as a tool of oppression and colonization for many communities of color and LGBTQIA+ communities.

The community's emphasis on safeguarding their cultural integrity, sovereignty, and well-being through the research process reflects the central tenets of decolonizing and transformative research paradigms that have emerged from Indigenous, critical race, and queer studies scholars. These paradigms prioritize community ownership, self-

determination, and benefit in the research process, and challenge the inherent power imbalances and extractive tendencies of traditional Western research.

Theoretically, the themes that emerged from the focus groups resonate strongly with the foundational frameworks of participatory research. The community's desire for empowerment through critical consciousness-raising and historical reclamation reflects Freire's (1970) emphasis on confronting oppression through dialogical praxis. Their vision for the research to catalyze community development and mobilization aligns with Lewin's (1946) integration of research and action for social change. The prioritization of community benefit and reciprocity in the research partnership echoes Tax's (1958) principles of action anthropology.

Furthermore, the intersectional concerns raised by the community around identity, safety, inclusion, and equity in the research process highlight the relevance and urgency of intersectionality theory for CBPR (Bowleg, 2012; Crenshaw, 1991). The Arizona Kiki community's experiences and perspectives are shaped by the intersections of their racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and class identities, as well as their specific cultural context as an emerging ballroom scene in a conservative state. Attending to these intersectional dynamics is crucial for developing a research approach that is culturally responsive, ethically grounded, and socially just (Cardenas & Crenshaw, 1991; Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022).

The findings also contribute to the growing body of literature on Ballroom culture and its significance as a site of resilience, resistance, and creativity for Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ communities. The Arizona Kiki community's desires for recognition, support, and preservation of their history and culture mirror the themes of cultural

affirmation, kinship building, and collective empowerment that have been documented in studies of other Ballroom scenes (Arnold & Bailey, 2009; Bailey, 2013).

Their concerns about cultural appropriation, commodification, and misrepresentation also reflect the tensions and contestations that have emerged as Ballroom culture has gained increasing mainstream visibility and attention in recent years (Bailey, 2011). As scholars have noted, the mainstreaming of Ballroom culture through popular media representations such as *Paris Is Burning*, *Pose*, and *RuPaul's Drag Race* has brought both opportunities for greater recognition and resources for the community, as well as risks of cultural exploitation, dilution, and displacement .

In this context, the Arizona Kiki community's aspirations and apprehensions about engaging in a research partnership to document their scene can be understood as part of a broader struggle for cultural autonomy, self-determination, and survival in the face of ongoing marginalization and appropriation. Their desires for authentic representation, community empowerment, and tangible benefits reflect a vision of research as a tool for cultural preservation, mobilization, and transformation, rather than extraction or objectification.

At the same time, their concerns about the potential risks and harms of research participation underscore the need for researchers to approach these partnerships with deep humility, reflexivity, and accountability. As Muhammad and colleagues (2015) have argued, CBPR with marginalized communities requires researchers to confront and dismantle the power imbalances and privileges that are inherent in the research enterprise, and to cultivate a stance of cultural humility and allyship. This involves not only acknowledging and respecting the community's knowledge, expertise, and

sovereignty in the research process, but also actively working to challenge and transform the institutional and structural barriers that perpetuate their marginalization and exclusion (Chavez et al., 2008). It requires researchers to be transparent about their own positionalities, motivations, and limitations, and to be accountable to the community's needs, priorities, and visions for change.

The findings from this study offer several key lessons and implications for researchers seeking to engage in participatory research with Ballroom Kiki communities and other marginalized LGBTQIA+ communities of color.

First and foremost, they underscore the importance of centering community leadership, voice, and expertise in all stages of the research process, from problem definition and study design to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. This involves not only consulting with community members and incorporating their input and feedback, but also creating opportunities for them to take on leadership roles and decision-making authority in the research. It may require researchers to re-envision traditional research roles and power dynamics, and to cultivate more collaborative, equitable, and reciprocal partnerships that value and leverage the strengths and assets of both academic and community partners.

Second, the findings highlight the need for researchers to prioritize tangible benefits and resources for the community as integral outcomes of the research process. This may include providing financial compensation for community members' time and expertise, offering training and skill-building opportunities, developing community-driven interventions and programs, and advocating for policies and structural changes that address the root causes of their marginalization and oppression. It also requires

researchers to be mindful of the potential for research participation to place additional burdens and demands on already under-resourced and over-extended communities, and to work to mitigate these risks and ensure that the benefits of the research outweigh the costs.

Third, the findings underscore the importance of implementing robust safeguards against cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and exploitation in the research process. This involves developing clear protocols and agreements around data ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP), as well as intellectual property rights and research dissemination. Researchers need to be vigilant about the potential for their own biases, assumptions, and agendas to shape the research process and outcomes, and to continually engage in reflexivity and cultural humility to mitigate these risks. This may involve seeking guidance and input from community elders, leaders, and cultural brokers, as well as cultivating a stance of openness, flexibility, and adaptability in the research process (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022).

Fourth, the findings highlight the critical importance of attending to the intersectional identities, experiences, and needs of community members in the research process. This involves recognizing and valuing the diversity and complexity of the community, and developing research approaches that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to their varied social locations and lived realities (Bowleg, 2012). Researchers may need to adapt their methods and measures to be culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and accessible to community members with different abilities, literacies, and backgrounds (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). It also requires researchers to be attentive to the potential for research participation to exacerbate existing disparities and

power imbalances within the community, and to work to mitigate these risks through inclusive and equitable engagement strategies.

Fifth, the findings suggest the need for researchers to develop and implement robust ethical protections and protocols that prioritize the safety, sovereignty, and well-being of community members in the research process. This involves ensuring that research participants are fully informed about the potential risks and benefits of the study, and that their consent is freely given and ongoing throughout the research process. Researchers need to be responsive to the community's concerns about confidentiality, privacy, and data security, developing protocols that not only safeguard sensitive information but also protect participants from potential harms or retribution (Israel et al., 2006). This may involve working with community partners to identify and mitigate potential risks, as well as developing safety plans and support systems for participants who may face increased vulnerability or marginalization as a result of their involvement in the research.

Beyond these foundational responsibilities, researchers must also carefully consider the narratives they construct from the data they collect. It is crucial to ascertain whether the story being told aligns with the desires and perceptions of the community itself. This involves a commitment to what might be termed "story sovereignty," a concept that, while not formally recognized, encapsulates the idea that communities should have control over how their stories are told and disseminated. Often, there is a tendency for researchers to prioritize their own interpretative frameworks or the novelty of a finding, potentially at the expense of the community's preferences or best interests. To truly honor the participants and their experiences, researchers must engage in ongoing

dialogue with the community, ensuring that their work does not just minimize harm but also resonantly and respectfully reflects the narratives the community wishes to project. This may require researchers to step back from their initial motivations and critically evaluate whether their work serves the community's needs or merely advances their own academic or professional goals.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of researchers cultivating a stance of cultural humility, reflexivity, and accountability in their work with marginalized communities. This involves acknowledging and confronting the power imbalances and privileges that are inherent in the research enterprise, and actively working to dismantle the systemic barriers and inequities that perpetuate their marginalization and exclusion (Muhammad et al., 2015). Researchers must be transparent about their own positionalities, motivations, and limitations in the research process, and to be open to feedback, critique, and transformation from community partners. It also involves a commitment to ongoing learning, growth, and self-reflection, as well as a willingness to cede control and ownership of the research process and outcomes to the community.

Ultimately, the findings from this study suggest that participatory research with Ballroom Kiki communities and other marginalized LGBTQIA+ communities of color requires a fundamental re-imagining of the research enterprise itself. It calls for a shift away from extractive, deficit-based, and culturally decontextualized approaches, and towards a more collaborative, strengths-based, and community-driven paradigm that centers the voices, experiences, and aspirations of those most impacted by social inequities. It requires researchers to embrace a stance of cultural humility, critical reflexivity, and solidarity with marginalized communities, and to work towards

dismantling the structural barriers and oppressive systems that perpetuate their exclusion and erasure. It also demands a commitment to research as a tool for social justice and transformative change, rather than an end in itself.

As the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community's experiences and perspectives make clear, participatory research has the potential to be a powerful vehicle for cultural preservation, community empowerment, and social transformation, but only if it is grounded in authentic partnerships, equitable practices, and a deep respect for the knowledge, resilience, and sovereignty of marginalized communities. By centering the voices and visions of these communities in the research process, and working in solidarity towards their liberation and self-determination, researchers can help to build a more just, equitable, and affirming world for all.

Conclusion

This study breaks new ground in understanding the desires, concerns, and visions of an emerging Ballroom Kiki community in partnering with research to document and support their cultural movement. Through participatory methods centering their 'voices', the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene illuminated key themes of authenticity, empowerment, and mutual benefit as foundations for an ethical and transformative research alliance. While navigating tensions around safety, representation, and equity, they expressed a profound commitment to developing their community through the research. Theoretically, the study affirms the relevance and urgency of CBPR and PAR frameworks to meaningfully engage marginalized LGBTQIA+ communities. It reveals the deep resonance between participatory research principles and the counter-hegemonic values and praxis of Ballroom cultures. Pragmatically, it charts pathways for scholarly-

community collaborations to advance health equity and cultural resurgence. As the community's insight makes clear, research partnerships must go beyond the edges of what is considered allyship and community involvement to profoundly reimagine and transform the processes of knowledge production toward liberatory ends. By anchoring in cultural humility and authentic engagement and care, CBPR researchers can strive to transcend parasitic extraction and achieve symbiotic elevation with our communities.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has presented a community-based participatory research project with the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene, exploring the complexities of identity, culture, and resistance within this vibrant underground community. Through a series of three interconnected studies, this research has sought to center the voices, experiences, and aspirations of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community, and to collaborate with them in documenting and analyzing their own cultural practices and histories.

The first study, an autoethnographic exploration of the author's experiences as a white, transmasculine nonbinary individual immersed in the predominantly Black and Latinx LGBTQIA+ House Ballroom scene in Arizona, highlighted the transformative power of the Ballroom community in affirming and celebrating diverse gender expressions. At the same time, it grappled with the complex dynamics of privilege, allyship/accomplice-ship, and accountability that arise when conducting research as an outsider in this space. This study underscored the importance of critical self-reflection, cultural humility, and an ongoing commitment to dismantling oppressive power structures in the research process.

The second study focused on establishing a community-driven documentation of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene, in collaboration with members of the House of Paragon and House of Majestic. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this study explored the community's perceptions, aspirations, and concerns regarding the research process, and sought to develop a collaborative framework for documenting and archiving the history and culture of the scene in a way that prioritizes the community's

needs and interests. The findings revealed a deep desire for authentic representation, community empowerment, and tangible benefits from the research, as well as concerns around cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and exploitation.

The third study delved into the methodological dimensions of applying CBPR and PAR approaches with the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community, with a particular focus on the desires and concerns expressed by the community regarding the research partnership. Through a series of focus groups, this study examined the key themes of authenticity, empowerment, and mutual benefit that emerged as central priorities for the community, as well as the apprehensions around safety, representation, and equity that were raised as potential risks of engaging in research. This study affirmed the relevance and urgency of participatory research frameworks for meaningfully engaging marginalized LGBTQIA+ communities and highlighted the deep resonance between these principles and the counter-hegemonic values and praxis of Ballroom cultures.

Synthesizing the key themes and lessons learned across these three studies, several overarching insights emerge. First and foremost, this research underscores the profound resilience, creativity, and agency of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community in the face of ongoing marginalization and oppression. Despite the challenges of navigating a hostile sociopolitical climate, the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene has created a vibrant and affirming space for queer and trans youth of color to express themselves, build kinship networks, and resist dominant narratives of gender and sexuality. The community's deep commitment to cultural preservation, intergenerational transmission, and collective empowerment is a testament to the transformative power of Ballroom cultures in the face of adversity.

Second, this research highlights the critical importance of centering community voices, leadership, and expertise in the research process. By collaborating with the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community as co-researchers and cultural experts, this project sought to challenge traditional academic hierarchies and prioritize the knowledge and experiences of those most impacted by social inequities. The participatory methods employed in this research, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and focus groups, allowed for a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of the community's lived realities, as well as their hopes and fears around engaging in research.

Third, this research reveals the complex dynamics of power, privilege, and positionality that arise when conducting CBPR with marginalized communities, particularly as an outsider to the community. The autoethnographic study in particular grappled with the author's own identities as a white, masculine-presenting researcher in a space that centers femininity and Blackness, and the ongoing work required to dismantle internalized biases and build authentic solidarity with the community. This research underscores the importance of critical self-reflection, cultural humility, and a willingness to be transformed by the research process, as well as a deep commitment to redistributing power and resources to the community.

Fourth, this research highlights the urgent need for more ethical and equitable approaches to research with underground and marginalized communities, particularly those that have been historically exploited and misrepresented by academic institutions. The concerns raised by the Arizona Ballroom Kiki community around cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and exploitation are a stark reminder of the harm that can be done when research is conducted without meaningful community involvement or

benefit. This project seeks to model an alternative approach grounded in the principles of CBPR and PAR, including equitable partnership, co-learning, capacity building, and social transformation.

Finally, this research underscores the broader significance and potential impact of participatory research with Ballroom and Kiki communities, both within academia and beyond. By amplifying the voices and experiences of queer and trans youth of color, this project seeks to challenge dominant narratives and stereotypes about these communities, and to contribute to a more nuanced and affirming representation of their lives and cultures. At the same time, by collaborating with the community to develop a sustainable framework for ongoing research and archiving, this project aims to support the long-term preservation and self-determination of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene.

Looking forward, there are four key implications and directions for future research that emerge from this dissertation. First, there is a need for more participatory and community-driven research with Ballroom and Kiki communities across different geographic and cultural contexts, in order to capture the diversity and complexity of these scenes. Such research should prioritize the leadership and expertise of community members themselves, and seek to build long-term partnerships that benefit the community beyond the scope of any single project.

Second, there is a need for more critical and reflexive scholarship on the role of researchers, particularly those from privileged backgrounds, in engaging with marginalized communities. This includes a deeper interrogation of the power dynamics and ethical dilemmas that arise in participatory research, as well as a commitment to ongoing self-reflection and accountability to the community.

Third, there is a need for more interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to studying Ballroom and Kiki cultures, drawing on fields such as critical race theory, queer studies, performance studies, and cultural anthropology. Such approaches can help to situate these communities within broader histories of resistance and resilience among queer and trans people of color, and to illuminate the complex ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and class intersect in shaping their lived experiences.

Fourth, and finally, there is a need for more research that directly benefits and empowers Ballroom and Kiki communities, whether through capacity building, resource sharing, or policy advocacy. This includes collaborating with communities to develop culturally relevant interventions and programs that address their specific needs and interests, as well as working to dismantle the structural barriers and inequities that perpetuate their marginalization.

In conclusion, this dissertation represents a small but significant step towards a more ethical and transformative approach to research with underground and marginalized communities. By centering the voices and leadership of the Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene, and collaborating with them to document and celebrate their culture, this project seeks to contribute to their ongoing struggle for visibility, dignity, and justice. At the same time, by grounding the research in the principles of CBPR and PAR, this project aims to advance a more liberatory and humanizing vision of scholarship, one that challenges oppressive power structures and works towards the empowerment and self-determination of all communities.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EXEMPTION GRANTED

Cindi SturtzSreetharan
 CLAS-SS: Human Evolution and Social Change, School of (SHESC)
 480/965-6170
 Cindi.Sturtzsreetharan@asu.edu

Dear [Cindi SturtzSreetharan](#):

On 6/13/2023 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	An Examination of Ballroom/Kiki Culture and Gender in Arizona
Investigator:	Cindi SturtzSreetharan
IRB ID:	STUDY00017886
Funding:	Name: SHESC-IHO Faculty
Grant Title:	
Grant ID:	
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual Draft Research Collaboration Template 10 05 2023.pdf, Category: Other; • Consent form for people in photos 10_06_2023.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Consent_script_10_06_2023.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Focus Group Questionnaire 10 06 2023.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Gleason - Research Award Summer 2023.pdf, Category: Sponsor Attachment; • Individual Questionnaire 10 06 2023.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Partnership Agreement from the Community Research Collaborative 10-05-2023, Category: Other; • Recruitment_methods_email_10_06_2023.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Recruitment methods verbal 10 06 2023.pdf,

	Category: Recruitment Materials; • v2Serving Realness IRB Social Behavioral Protocol 10 06 2023.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;
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The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk) on 6/13/2023.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Lea Gleason
Lea Gleason
Cindi SturtzSreetharan

APPENDIX B
SHORT CONSENT SCRIPT

I am a Liam Gleason (they/them), a graduate student under the direction of Professor Cindi SturtzSreetharan (she/her) in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to document the growing Arizona Ballroom Kiki scene and explore how the Ballroom Kiki houses function and find meaning and community in Arizona.

You are invited to participate in this project which has three phases. Phase one involves being observed while at practice sessions and ball events. Phase two involves participating in three interview sessions (two focus group interviews and one individual interview.) Phase three involves participating in a collaborative photovoice workshop. You must be 18 or older, currently reside in Arizona, and an active member of the Arizona Ballroom Community to participate in the study. You will be paid a total of \$210 if you participate in all three interview sessions. Each interview session is expected to be three hours in length.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in this study. Your responses will be confidential. There are no anticipated risks to the participant observation aspect of this project. You may experience minor inconveniences from allocating your time to complete the interview sessions. You may experience unanticipated feelings when sharing your experience or hearing the feedback of others during the collaborative photovoice workshop; thus, you can complete this portion anonymously or withdraw from it without any consequences. While we will do our best to prioritize you and others' privacy during the focus group sessions and photovoice workshop, we cannot guarantee that other participants will respect the confidentiality of the group. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

For the three interview sessions (two focus group interviews and one individual interview):

I would like your permission to audio record these interviews. The interviews will not be recorded without your permission. Only the research team will have access to the recordings. Please let me know if you do not want the interviews to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. Audio from the interviews will be transcribed using Otter.ai, which will put your transcript and voice into the cloud to further train their ai system. If you do not want Otter.ai to transcribe your interview, let me know and I will manually transcribe it. The recordings will be deleted immediately after being transcribed and any published quotes will be anonymous. To protect your identity, please refrain from using names or other identifying information during the interview. Let me know if, at any time, you do not want to be recorded and I will stop.

De-identified data collected from this project will not be shared with others (e.g., investigators or industry partners) for future research purposes or other uses.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team: Liam Gleason, lgleaso6@asu.edu or Cindi SturtzSreetharan, cindi.sturtzsreetharan@asu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. By signing below you are agreeing to be part of the study.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX C
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Ballroom

What are some themes that you associate with overall Ballroom culture?

What do you want for the future of Ballroom overall?

What do you NOT want in Ballroom?

What are some concerns or issues that you have about Ballroom overall?

Arizona Ballroom

What are some themes that you associate with Arizona Ballroom?

What do you want for the future of Arizona Ballroom?

What do you NOT want in Arizona Ballroom?

What are some concerns or issues that you have about Arizona Ballroom?

This Project

What are some themes that you associate with this research project?

What do you want for the outcome of this project?

What do you NOT want in this project?

What are some concerns or issues that you have about this project?

The House of Paragon

What are some themes that you associate with the House of Paragon?

What do you want for the House of Paragon as an outcome of this project?

What do you NOT want for the House of Paragon?

What are some concerns or issues that you have about the House of Paragon in relation to this project?

You, as an individual within Ballroom

What are some words that describe how you want to be highlighted in the project?

What do you want as your role in this project?

What do you NOT want, or how do you not want to be treated in relation to this project?

What are some concerns or issues that you have relating to you specifically and this project?

Your House Members

What are some words that describe how you want your house members to be featured in the project?

What do you want as your house members' role in this project?

What do you NOT want for your house members, or how do you not want them to be treated in relation to this project?

What are some concerns or issues that you have about your house members in relation to this project?

Me (Liam Gleason), as a researcher

What are some words that describe what you want of my role in the project and in Arizona Ballroom?

What do you want for me at the end of this project?

What do you NOT want me to do in relation to this project?

What are some concerns or issues that you have about me and my role as a researcher?

Participants discuss and work together to rank the top three wants and the top three do NOT wants from the project.

APPENDIX D

DRAFT RESEARCH COLLABORATION TEMPLATE

Project Overview and Scope

What is each partner's mission or goal and how does this partnership help them reach it?
Approach and values

Desired outcome from the project

Start/End dates of collaboration and milestones

Roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each party (researcher, House leadership, and House members; clarify titles/names/logos)

Channels of communication, frequency of communication

How often will partners review how the partnership is going and make changes if needed?

Decision-making, conflict management, and opt-out process

Allocation of funds

What other supports do partners need to fulfill their roles?

Intellectual property, access to data, research dissemination
Who owns the data? How will it be protected and kept confidential? How will authorship look on conference talks or publications, etc?

Risk management plan