

BA THESIS SYMPOSIUM

WALKING TOWARD RECOGNITION: PERFORMANCE, EMBODIMENT, AND THE PURSUIT OF REALNESS WITHIN THE CHICAGO HOUSE AND BALL SCENE



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THE HOUSE SCENE

"I deal with a community of people who don't have their real [biological] mothers in their life. So I use the resources that I have to make sure they have the things that they need: if they're hungry, I'll feed them; if they need training, I'll train them . . ."

SYLVESTER SUMMER

THE BALL SCENE

ORDER OF CATEGORIES:

REALNESS:
MR/MS/MX EXECUTIVE: BEST SHOWCASE YOUR BRAND/SERVICE/PRODUCT!
SCHOOL BOY/GIRL: BE REAL & BRING YOUR LGBTQ+ HISTORY HOMEWORK!
PRETTY BOY/GIRL: CAMPAIGN FOR CPS TO ALLOW CONDOM DISTRIBUTION!
MALE/FEMALE FIGURE BANGI: hardcore w/ PEP/PEP PILL UNDER EYE!
WHO'S ZOOMING WHO?! COUPLES FOR SEXUAL HEALTH IN MATCHING LOOKS!

FACE:
BQ: IN AN ARMED FORCES EFFECT SERVING YOUR FACE FROM THE BACK!
FEMALE FIGURE FUTURISTIC: PAINTED INTO A WHOLE NEW DIMENSION!

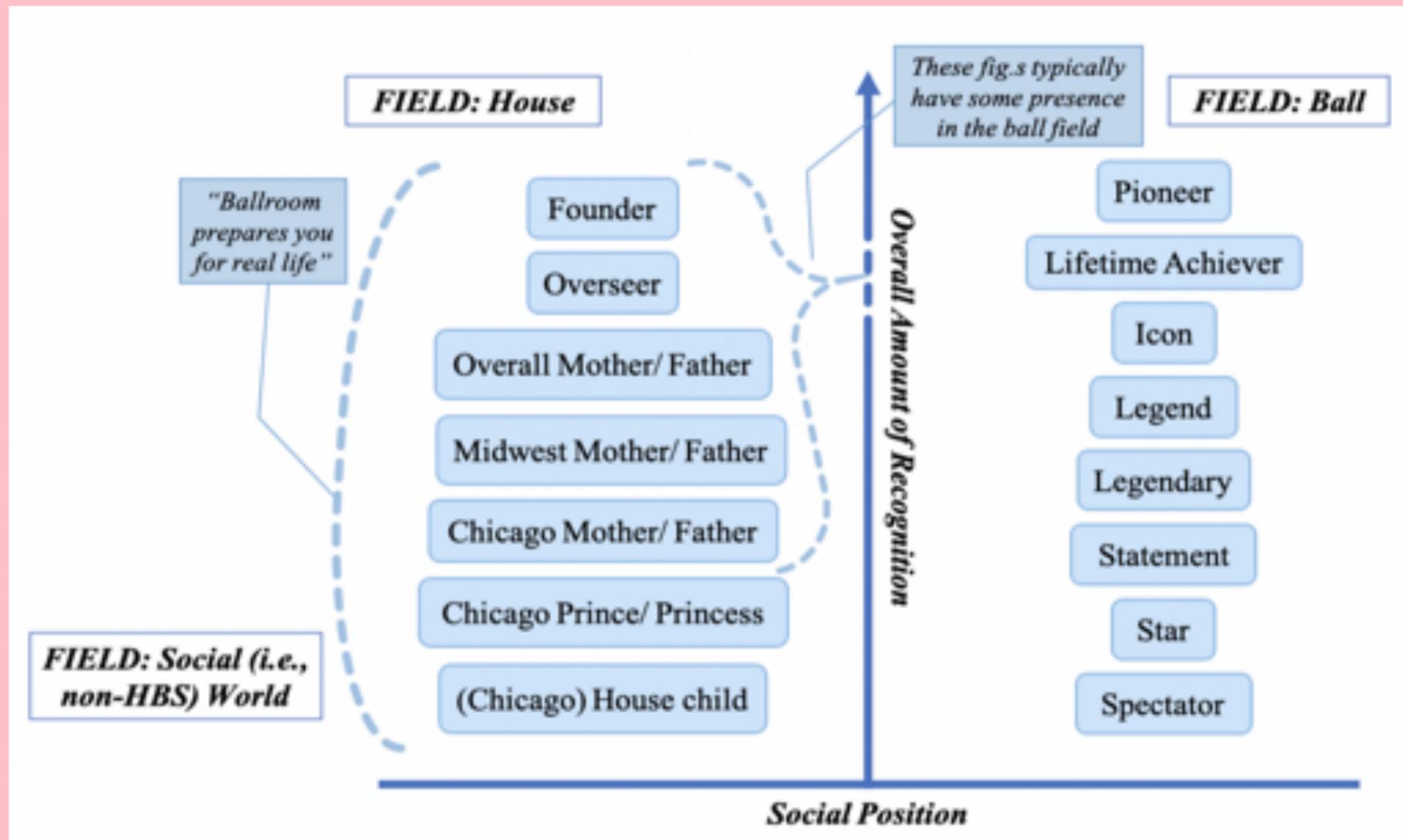
PHYSIQUE:
OTA BODY: COVERED IN +, -, & = SIGNS FOR HIV EQUALITY; HIDE PRIVATES!
OTA SEX SIREN: INC. U=U OR I=I INTO A SEXY, BUT CONSERVATIVE EFFECT!

FASHION:
OTA BEST DRESS: DONE FROM DOOR IN AN EFFECT FOR HIV AWARENESS!
OTA THE LOOK: FASHION FORWARD GLITZ & GLAMOUR DONE HEAD TO TOE!

OPEN TO ALL:
MC VS MC: FOR 10S PREPARE A PG13 CHANT & THEN BATTLE FROM THERE!
BIZARRE BAZAAR: IN AN EFFECT THAT BRIDGES TWO POLAR OPPOSITES!

RUNWAY:
UP IN PUMPS: W/ OVAH CHURCH LADY HAT & DEADLY CLOSED TOE PUMPS!
BQ: IN AN OVAH BRONZED EFFECT FOR THE BRONZEVILLE WALK OF FAME!
FEMALE FIGURE: BRING IT AS A TEACHER IN ALL RED, BLACK, & GREEN!
AMERICAN RUNWAY: BRING IT W/ A TOY GUN TO PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS!

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS



- No two ball houses are the same
- The house and ball scene have intricate hierarchy systems
- "Recognition"—a unique symbolic capital

**What motivates
members of the house and
ball scene to affiliate and
retain membership?**

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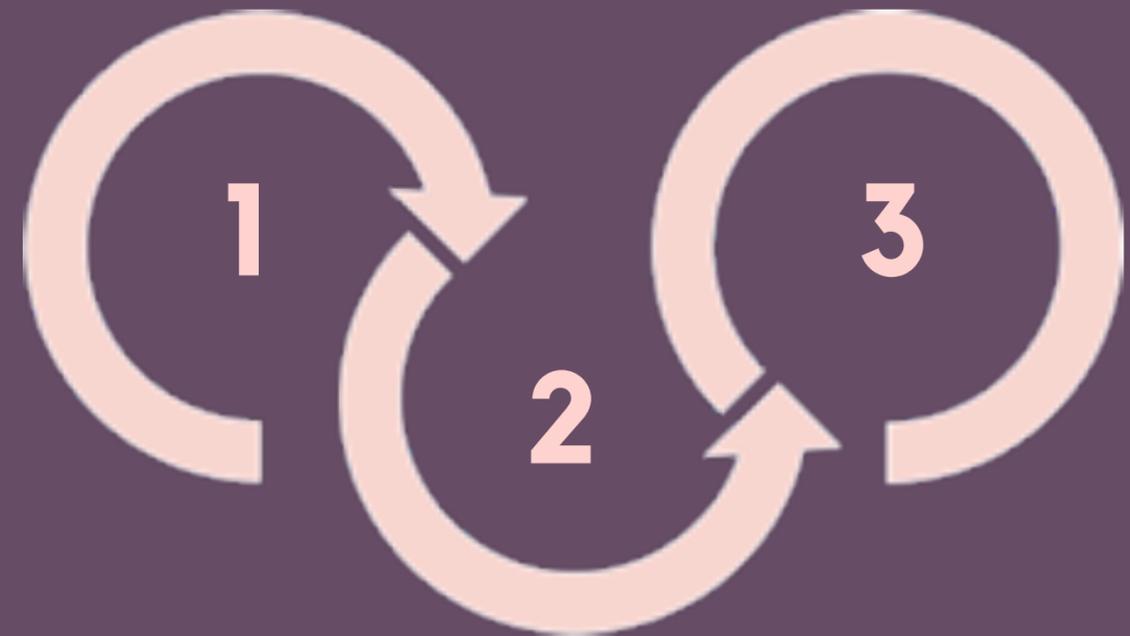
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

○ GOFFMAN (1959)

○ BOURDIEU (1987) AND THORNTON (1996)

○ VAIL (1999)

- Affinity
- Affiliation
- Signification



METHODS

- 75+ HOURS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA
 - BALLS, WEEKLY PRACTICES, HOUSE MEETINGS . . .
- 13 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS
 - 10 MEMBERS FROM THE HOUSE OF ROBICHAUX
 - 3 MEMBERS OF OTHER HOUSE COMMUNITIES

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WHY JOIN THE HOUSE AND BALL SCENE?

"The ballroom scene consists of a lot of homeless youth—you get what I'm saying? To come together and build a bond with a lot of strangers that you don't know, it's amazing. When you create these bonds, outside of a ball it's like not like, 'oh, we're just in a house together and I don't see you.' I let them all know we together. We checking in on each other on a daily basis."

GLORIA ROBICHAUX

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WHY JOIN THE HOUSE AND BALL SCENE? (CONT.)

"Being able to connect with people who look like you and who have a similar path of circumstances—it can be liberating and healing. This comes from the trauma aspect that we experience as people of the LGBT community. Now, I get a chance to step into this realm where everything about me that was compartmentalized is celebrated. It's empowering to be in a setting where, what the real world doesn't like about me—I can be this fantasy, and everybody loves and appreciates it."

SYLVESTER SUMMER

THE CHICAGO HOUSE OF ROBICHAUX

"Amii's a transgender woman and she's Puerto Rican. He's butch queen . That's mother Donna— I'm really excited to have her as mother 'cuz she's an African American and she's a transgender woman so now maybe we can recruit more trans women. He's . . ."

BARRY ROBICHAUX

"The family bond we have is what's keeping me here— we can go zero-to-100 like [snaps] that, but at the end of the day we can bring it right back to where it's all love and peace. That's what I appreciate about this house, it's just really more family oriented."

GLORIA ROBICHAUX

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SIGNIFICANTION

"I came in quiet. I did my own thing. And then they was like, I can [walk] "school boy." And then I started kind of leading the mandatory meeting . . . At first [the Robichauxs] wasn't showing up to balls together and then walking in together, there was more like, one come in then two come in . . . and I'm like, 'that's not what the ball community is about.' You want to come in together so you can have a presence. So I kind of put that into like, stereo."

BILL ROBICHAUX

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SIGNIFICANTION (CONT.)

"In real life I have to have alligator skin; being a African American homosexual male, out here in this time and day, if you don't have that skin they're gonna break you easily like a toothpick. When you vogue, you just bring all that energy to the floor—don't carry it back with you. Just bring that weekly problem that you had you take it to the ball on Saturday and say, 'bitch, I'mma let it out on the floor bitch and I'm gonna carry and I'm gonna cut up'"

GLORIA ROBICHAUX

CONCLUSION

AFFINITY

Conditioned by geosocial circumstance; rooted in experiences of injury (Ralph 2014)

AFFILIATION

Selecting a house is thus a two-way street: the house and the member must be compatible

SIGNIFICATION

"Ballroom prepares you for real life."

BARRY ROBICHAUX

REALNESS

Achieved via embodiment of recognition-worthy skills, sincere + authentic community engagement

Acknowledgements

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