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MAKING SPACE FOR SAFER SEX

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There is much concern about the second wave of HIV infections among gay male youth. Yet qualitative research showing how to produce effective HIV prevention programs for this population are scarce. Traditional models for education are not sufficient. This study uses ethnographic data to illustrate a community empowerment HIV prevention project found to significantly reduce rates of unprotected anal sex among young gay males between the ages of 18 and 29. It seeks to show how safer sex norms among gay youth are produced. Analyses of these data reveal that a sense of *ownership* in a youth space is a critical component of this model. This research should facilitate AIDS educators in their efforts to end the second wave of infections among gay youth by providing a detailed map of how a successful HIV prevention project operates and by stressing the need to make spaces for safer sex education.

Gay men who grew up and came out during the AIDS era, referred to as the AIDS generation, construct and interpret their sexual lives in a social context altered by gay liberation ideology and sexual scripts designed to prevent the spread of HIV. In response to the AIDS epidemic, gay men created the safer sex script that focuses on avoiding risky behaviors (such as unprotected anal sex) while emphasizing the erotic aspects of safer behaviors (such as anal sex with condoms, hot-oil massage, and oral sex). The moralist versus rationalist debate between right-wing officials and the gay community framed early traditional approaches to AIDS education: The moralists pushed abstinence, whereas the gay community eroticized safer sex with a sex-positive approach (Patton, 1996). Although the eroticizing safer sex campaign worked in the 1980s to reduce the amount of unsafe sex among gay men in the gay liberation generation (Ekstrand & Coates, 1990), rates of unprotected anal intercourse (Hays & Kegeles, & Coates, 1990; Lemp et al., 1994) and HIV infection (Osmond et al., 1994) are alarmingly high among young gay and bisexual men who came out during the AIDS era. This second wave of infection indicates that traditional models for AIDS education, focused on information exchange, are not working for gay youth. The AIDS generation of gay youth must deal with the specter of AIDS on top of the web of problems associated with heterosexism, homo-

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phobia, and coming out (Herdt, 1989; Mutchler, 1994). Further, the new treatments made available during the 1990s raise concerns that gay youths no longer view AIDS as a life-threatening specter even though the drugs are often too expensive, difficult to take, and ineffective.

In response to the need for a deeper understanding of gay youth's sexual risk-taking behaviors, one study on young gay men found significant correlations between psychosocial and psychosexual variables (such as sexual communication skills, being in a relationship, and sexual enjoyment) and unprotected anal intercourse (Hays et al., 1990). Gay youth are likely to have sex in order to learn how to do it or bolster their self-esteem, and the learning curve can be both pleasurable and dangerous (Mutchler, in press). Research on gay youth and HIV transmission make clear the need to examine how social, cultural, and situational factors shape their sexual lives (Bloor, 1995; Diaz, 1998). Based on the only HIV prevention model scientifically proven to lower the rates of unsafe sex among this population (Kegeles, Hays, & Coates, 1996), this article examines how a community-based organization successfully produced safer sex values and behaviors among young gay men in one city.

This model is designed to build on and create peer support for safer sex attitudes and behaviors among gay youth by clearing up misconceptions about AIDS, eroticizing safer sexual behaviors, strengthening communication and interpersonal skills, and nurturing gay community bonds in a physical community space for gay youth. It draws on diffusion theory (Rogers, 1983) to propose that the production of safer sex norms among a given population will lead to behavior change when a critical mass of individuals in that population change their attitudes and behaviors. It is theorized that this critical mass can only be reached in the context of a project in which dense networks of the target population are socialized in their own space. Diffusion theory, in this model, is linked with a space. The link is the linchpin for the success of the project since space ownership drives the diffusion process. The Pride Mission space is the place where the innovation, safer sex, is produced and disseminated by and for young gay men. I demonstrate here how the process of diffusion works with space ownership in this model to introduce safer sex ideas and make them an accepted part of community norms and culture for this target population.

The Pride Mission was funded between January 1993 and November 1993 by the National Institute for Mental Health to prevent the spread of HIV among gay and bisexual men between ages 18 and 29 years in Santa Barbara. The project continued to operate until August 1994 when it dissolved due to a number of institutional tensions such as funding and control over ownership; it was later resurrected and named Phoenix Rising. Phoenix Rising, born in 1995, continues to operate as of 2000. My purpose here is to discuss the Pride Mission's scene, functions, and group life in order to provide a rich, ethnographic illustration of what making space for safer sex looks like. Following the project from 1993 until 1998, I describe what happened to the Pride Mission when its research funding and space were lost, and discuss its struggles to survive in an altered form as Phoenix Rising. I argue that the success of this model is contingent upon the existence of a physical community space owned and operated by gay youth. Effective HIV prevention education must provide a place in which safer sex can be produced and adopted by this particular target population. This is a case study exploring how young gay men successfully produced a significant change in safer sex norms and struggled to survive in the "real world" of funding politics and institutional tensions.

METHODS

DATA COLLECTION

This research is a multimethod ethnography. Field notes from on-site observations of the Pride Mission group's social interactions (weekly field notes) were produced and semistructured formal interviews with the individual core group members of Pride Mission (20 interviews, each 60 to 75 minutes long) were conducted. Pride Mission Core Group individuals ranged in age from 19 to 30 years (average age: 24 years), and they all identified as gay or bisexual. This core group included 11 whites, 7 Latinos, 1 black, and 1 Asian man. Informal interviews with five Phoenix Rising Core Group members are also analyzed here. These core group members include three white and two Latino individuals also between the ages of 18 and 29. Results from longitudinal survey data from the Young Men's Survey focused on the Pride Mission model for HIV prevention were used to cross-check data and enhance validity with triangulation (Kegeles & Hays, 1994). These data sources are further supported by informal interviews conducted with the project manager of Pride Mission and the three project managers of Phoenix Rising between 1995 and 1998.

NOTES ON INSIDER STATUS

I became involved with this organization as a core group staff member and was a participant observer consistently from the beginning of the project in January of 1993 until July of 1994 when the project lost its funding and center. I continued to take field notes and to observe the organizational dynamics of Pride Mission during its demise and while Phoenix Rising emerged to replace it. I was interested in how this group went about producing safer sex work on a daily basis. Participant research allows researchers to keep a pulse on the activities of research subjects while reflecting on the data to observe and inquire into social phenomenon on site. My status as a gay man and HIV prevention educator provide me with insider knowledge and experience that enabled me to ask questions more sensitive to the actual experiences of gay male youth and to gain their trust and candor during interviews (Merton, 1971).

Although the "insider" can elicit information from his or her informants that may be considered too confidential or personal to give to an "outsider," there are possible limitations to this approach. For example, Reinhartz (1992) has stated, "Respectful distance is supposed to avoid the danger that the researcher will 'go native' or identify with the people studied" (p. 67). There have been times when being close to the people I study has been difficult in terms of my research process. I grew to value the sense of community at the Pride Mission along with the other core group members, and it was painful to write about a project that is struggling to retain the vision it once had. The close contact I have had with the individuals of the core group has given me greater insights into the character of the community empowerment model and has also enabled me to build intimate relationships with the core group men, which have led to very fruitful informant-researcher interactions. For example, some of the members have given me their frank input about problems faced by the organization as it struggled to survive the initial loss of funding.

Aware of the possible problems associated with my role as an insider/participant observer, I have been careful to remain critical and reflexive when analyzing the data by drawing on all of the interviews and field notes systematically in order to get the whole picture and examine all of the data. Although I did not begin this

project attached to the idea that the Pride Mission would create a sense of community, I did experience this sense as a participant on site. As an AIDS educator, I did enter the site hoping that the work would be effective in terms of reducing the spread of HIV; but this interest on my part does not detract from the validity of the findings in the survey data supporting the efficacy of the model (Kegeles et al., 1996). I have also cross-checked my interpretations of the data by incorporating feedback on my writing from volunteers and employees at the Pride Mission and Phoenix Rising who read it. In the interest of doing a methodologically rigorous qualitative piece of sociological research, I have employed methods of triangulation to ensure that this work reflects the spirit and meaning of the Pride Mission experience as accurately and thoroughly as possible. One important limitation of this work, however, is that it focuses on a microcohort of the AIDS generation and not the whole AIDS generation. Therefore, any generalizations drawn from this research must be made with its limited scope in mind. My purpose has been to closely examine this group in order to characterize it, draw conclusions about the social processes at work within it, and then analyze the ways in which the findings contribute to an overall understanding of HIV prevention and (safer) sexual behavior among gay male youth in a medium-sized city such as Santa Barbara.

DATA ANALYSIS

This research was designed and executed in an inductive, iterative process intended to rigorously record and analyze group dynamics as they developed. The process of data analysis is most closely akin to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data from multiple sources were collected, coded, and analyzed in a systematic, ongoing process. "The Pride Mission scene," "Core group functions and life," "A safer sex community," and "The significance of place" emerged during the analysis as the dominant themes. Data were organized around an axial coding scheme structured by these dominant themes. The research report was written with the intent to highlight and illustrate how this successful project functions on a microlevel, daily basis.

Safer sex is operationalized as any behavior that is considered sexual and safer according to the formal and informal guidelines at the center. In that context, safer sex is sexual behavior that is not high risk for the transmission of HIV and minimizes the risk of blood to blood or seminal fluid contact. Although it may be difficult to study sexual behavior between individuals in the privacy of their own home, the Pride Mission provided a physical space in which it was possible to observe individuals engaging in some kinds of safer sexual play with each other. Interviewees were also asked how, if at all, their sexual behavior changed since the Pride Mission began. The fact that safer sex includes a wide range of sexual behavior is noteworthy because part of the project's goal is to guide young gay and bisexual men into expanding their beliefs about what constitutes erotic sexual activity so that they learn to enjoy safer sex and avoid unsafe sex.

A COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT MODEL

The community empowerment model is best understood when compared to the traditional self-empowerment model for AIDS education (Homans & Aggleton, 1988). The self-empowerment model rests on the theory that educators should provide information to target populations in the context of their everyday lives. In this framework,

AIDS education outreach workers make one-on-one contacts with gay and bisexual men at gay bars and public sex environments and pass out safer sex information and condoms. There are attempts made to engage in dialogue with contacts about safer sex, but these efforts are often brief. The community empowerment model, on the other hand, assumes that education focused on self empowerment strategies is not sufficient in terms of changing behavior, and that people should collectively identify and act on environmental and community-based factors that affect their behavior. Applied to the case of AIDS education, this model suggests that individuals of the target group should work together to make decisions about how to reach their peers with messages about safer sex and gay pride.

The focus here is on the program designed by researchers at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California, San Francisco and developed in Santa Barbara (Kegeles, Hays, & Coates, 1993). The Pride Mission was unique because it was designed to empower its target group by imbuing individuals within it with the responsibility to make decisions about the project and its goals and activities. The Pride Mission structure included a staff of four (program coordinator, outreach coordinator, connections [a safe sex education workshop] coordinator, and graphics coordinator), a core group of volunteers, an advisory board, and two researchers from the University of California, San Francisco. The core group was the critical component of the project. It was the decision-making body and consisted of 20 volunteers from the target group population including the four staff members. The core group was charged with the responsibility to implement creative ways to reach their peers through outreach at ongoing activities (parties, picnics, movie nights, coffee gatherings, bars, etc.) with urgent information about HIV prevention, peer support for safe sex, self-esteem, and leadership skills. The program also included outreach and graphic teams, composed of core group volunteers, who reached the target population with safer sex and HIV testing site information by distributing safer sex materials and condoms to local gay bars, clubs, cafes, and organizations. The connections coordinator scheduled the safer sex workshops.

Having a physical community space is a key element of the community level model approach to HIV prevention education. The model was founded on the belief that it is necessary to have a place where young gay men can socialize, develop long term supportive relationships, and provide peer support for safer sex norms and behaviors in an ongoing, gay-positive social environment. The Pride Mission had an apartment space in which volunteers could learn how to *diffuse* safer sex norms throughout their community by encouraging their friends to create a sense of peer support for safer sexual behavior and recruit new members into the program in a casual, fun environment.

A STORY OF A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT

THE PRIDE MISSION SCENE

The Pride Mission space was conveniently located between downtown Santa Barbara and the University of California with easy access by bus. Santa Barbara is a medium-sized city (population approximately 90,000) on the California coast about 100 miles north of Los Angeles. It is primarily a tourist town; it also has a university and city

college. The office space was on the second floor in a business complex and included a kitchen area, a bathroom, a meeting area, and an office for desks and files. There was a small balcony outside the front door where Pride Mission members could visit, smoke, and gossip. The space felt like a home partially because it was originally designed to be an apartment. The core group decorated it to make it feel like a community space with gay-positive posters (depicting gay families, sexy men, and men with condoms and lube), plants, condoms, a fish tank, couches, a coffee table, a TV, a portable tape player, and other random artifacts such as Barbie and Ken dolls. The center provided a nice space where young gay men could relax, make coffee, read the latest gay magazines, or just work in a very casual environment where new people were welcomed and encouraged to get involved. As Don, one core group member, said, "A big thing is its own space, I think. The space, I think. The space is great; it's very 'homey', you feel like you are part of something when you come to a room as opposed to an office...and there's like always somebody here." The Pride Mission individuals contributed various personal items such as CDs, dishes, games, posters, and magazines with articles about gay culture to make the place feel like a community center distinctively for young gay and bisexual men.

CORE GROUP FUNCTIONS AND LIFE

The core group began meeting weekly shortly after the project started to begin planning social and educational activities. One of the first tasks assigned by the project directors was to plan a big party. The men created a party theme, made decorations and graphics, collected refreshments and music, and created a performance committee. The core group also decided to sponsor regular social events to make use of the space and attract people to it. Movie nights, scheduled every Tuesday night, consisted of watching Roseanne at 9 PM, followed by a gay-themed movie such as *Maurice*, *And the Band Played On*, and *Cabaret*. Movie nights became a regular event in the lives of many young gay men in the community, and provided a venue through which individuals formed relationships centered around the Pride Mission. Over time, guys began to sit closely together, lie down on each other, give each other massages and play with their neighbor's hair while watching movies. The space provided a sense of safety, intimacy, and belonging. As Ari, a regular movie night fan said, "Movie night is a time when we can all group together and relax. We know that it's a time to let go, put other worries or concerns behind, and enjoy ourselves."

Movie nights also provided a pool of potential volunteers for the core group and participants for Connections, the safer sex education workshop. Safer sex outreach volunteers got new names and addresses from movie night visitors. These men were later called by core group volunteers and asked to get involved in the Pride Mission. Between 8 and 10 new visitors came almost every week for the duration of the program. Connections provided these members of the target group with valuable safer sex information, communication skills, and encouragement to build gay pride and community while protecting themselves and their peers from HIV infection. The groups focused on eroticizing safer sex, in brainstorming sessions during which the participants were asked to come up with safer sexual behaviors that do not involve the transmission of blood to blood or seminal fluid. Examples include: massage him with hot oils, wash his body in the shower...everywhere, hugging, slow dancing, spanking, rubbing cocks together, watching each other

jack-off, verbalizing fantasies, biting nipples, and fucking an ass (with plenty of water-based lube and a latex condoms).

Once invited to the center, many of the men became volunteers. Although not everyone became a core group member, many helped out with parties or simply attended events. About 40 volunteers helped make plans for the first party. Some individuals volunteered to chair committees, whereas others simply showed up at the first party, which was called "Masquerave." The party, held at a local cafe that was decorated with masks (made at a preparty arts and crafts workshop), balloons, streamers, and large black sheets on the walls, attracted over 200 young gay and bisexual men and included DJ music, dancing, and a performance piece put on by the Pride Mission core group. Pride Mission volunteers designed performance pieces for each of the four large parties stipulated by the funding agency. These performances were skits involving 8 to 10 members of the core group, who acted out scenes intended to establish safer sex as the norm among their peers. The performance piece, "The Hung and the Breastless," at the second party mimicked a soap opera but conveyed the message of peer support for safer sex behavior. Afterwards, dancing and socializing commenced while core group members collected phone numbers to call the party guests later and invite them to get involved with the center. These initial parties created momentum and excitement about planning more parties.

The core group held smaller parties in addition to the four large ones. "Prideshead Revisited" was held at a local park on a summer day. Everyone who showed up for this "high-tea" event wore white clothes. The event was structured around games such as badminton, croquet, twister, and musical chairs. "Prideshead Revisited" was considered to be very successful because it conveyed gay pride in a very public way. Young gay and bisexual men were hugging, laughing, and playing games together in a public park. At the next event, "Ralph's Cheesecake Party," people came to eat cheesecake but were also instructed to sit in a circle and share something about themselves that no one else in the core group knew. "Ralph's Cheesecake Party" signified that the core group had become a close group of friends. The sharing of personal lives and information symbolized a commitment to group solidarity and the building of group bonds. The core group also held regular social events, such as weekly coffee nights, at which people could get together, meet new friends, and talk about common interests and issues. As one core group member, Mitch said, "People do things together, they go out together, they watch movies together, they have dinners together, they go out to coffee together, they fuck each other, you know all that stuff makes it a community center."

A SAFER SEX COMMUNITY

The combination of individuals working closely together day after day on similar goals in a community space, coupled with the diversity of individuals reflecting the larger population of young gay men, gave the Pride Mission center a sense of community. While the core group individuals worked on projects, they were also developing friendships and a sense of community built around the shared values of safer sex, gay pride, and community membership. Only a few months into the program, it was possible for these young men to spend practically every night together either working on a committee, watching movies, or just hanging out. Over time, the core group individuals

formed deeper levels of connection as they began to work and share their lives together through their work at the Pride Mission.

Group processes at the center exemplify the connection between safer sex work and behavior on site. For example, a few minutes before one core group meeting, some of the men were making Valentine's baskets to sell at a fund-raiser for the Pride Mission. Jose and Robert were sprawled on the floor surrounded by cardboard Valentine's baskets decorated with pictures of birds and hearts, hundreds of assorted condoms and lube, and chocolate candies. People gradually arrived for core group and gathered in groups to socialize. Jon, the project coordinator, started the meeting and everyone shared their days. Most people talked about their jobs and school. This process of "checking in" had become a ritual that served as a social support system. On this occasion, people were being generally silly and making "gay jokes." Ralph, for example, was talking about how the giraffes at the zoo are probably gay because their necks are so long. The gay jokes and welcoming atmosphere at the center made young gay men feel a sense of belonging there.

The social interactions of one individual at the Pride Mission illustrate how individuals affirmed their sexuality through the expression of gay pride and safer sex norms. Robert arrived early to another core group meeting and started talking with Jon, Eric, and myself about reports on the earthquakes in Los Angeles. Robert is a 22-year-old Latino who is very politically aware and particularly concerned about issues of social justice for oppressed people. Don said, "Are we having a meeting?" and then Jon said, "Yeah, it's just kind of relaxed." Robert patted the floor next to him, beckoning for Don to come and sit down. When Don sat down, Robert started playing with his hair. Jon was talking about changing the image of the potluck being planned. He wanted to be sure that people would want to become involved in our group. Robert said, "Yeah, don't forget to bring your 'weenie Delight.'" Everyone laughed. We discussed miscellaneous topics. Robert didn't say much during the meeting but did volunteer to do outreach on the weekend. When the meeting ended, Lance crawled over to the cookies on the coffee table, and Robert climbed on his back and started riding him while spanking his butt. Then Robert sat in Don's lap and started pretending that Don was penetrating him; he was moaning and making erotic facial expressions intended to act out an orgasm. Then he picked up one of our new Connections tickets with two guys kissing on the front, handed it to Frank and said, "Robert Perez: FAG!" He was asserting that being a public and proud fag was his job.

Interviews with the core group individuals confirm the importance of safer sex as a motivation for group involvement. Pedro explained why the validation of safer sex norms is important: "I mean, sex is a part of our every day life, and I think that if we could all talk about it as if we were talking about what kind of coffee you drink, that would make it a lot more comfortable for a lot of people. If we each used the word condom three times a day, then it wouldn't be so hard to walk into the drugstore and buy a pack." Here Pedro makes the connection between safer sex norms and behavior. As the core group individuals began to work together and become closer, they began to express safer sex norms in the form of sexual behavior. For example, Robert and Mike took advantage of break and play times during core group to fool around with the other guys and actually act out safer sex ideas such as spanking and simulated anal sex with the other guys at the center.

The Pride Mission community center provided a space in which the core group promoted safer sex norms and values through a variety of creative projects. The center itself served as a social context in which AIDS education messages and tools (such as condoms and safer sex packets) were made freely available to the community. Men involved with the Pride Mission said that their experiences at the Pride Mission changed their sexual behavior. For example, Steve said, "After going to Connections, I know all the different things that you can do that are much more erotic and satisfying and gratifying that I didn't know before. I'm pretty much secure in that fact that I know I'm safe, I've become more confident in the fact that I'm not at risk because I don't put myself at risk."

The Pride Mission not only gave gay and bisexual men new ideas for safe sexual expression, but it decreased the amount of unsafe sex among the target group. In a preliminary analysis of the Young Men's Survey focused on this group, researchers from the University of California in San Francisco found a 13% drop in the amount of unprotected intercourse between boyfriends when comparing post-intervention results to pre-intervention results (Kegeles & Hays, 1994). This model, studied in Eugene, Oregon, was found to significantly reduce rates of unprotected anal sex among gay male youth in a scientific study using longitudinal survey data (Kegeles et al., 1996).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE

Human beings make their lives, do business, and produce culture in spaces. In fact, as Lefebvre (1991), an analyst of the product of space has theorized, "[Groups]...can not constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as 'subjects' unless they generate...a space." (p. 416). Anthropological research makes explicit connections between ownership of space and the survival of people and their culture. For instance, studies examining how Native Americans were systematically dispossessed of their land by European settlers vividly illustrate how a people suffer when they lose their land (Marks, 1998). Native Americans believe that places are sacred and that land is inextricably tied to the identity and culture of its people. A Creek chief said, "Our lands are our life and breath." Despite their passionate claims about the centrality of Mother Earth to their spiritual and physical lives, the sovereignty of Native American land was not respected by European or American officials; the loss of their land resulted in the decimation of hundreds of thousands of Native Americans in this country. The survivors continue fighting for their lands as part of their struggle to regain their cultural traditions, rituals, and spirit. Geronimo of the Apaches said, "When they are taken from [their] homes they sicken and die."

Gay youth still rarely have a space to call their own, and often have no gay-positive social environments to access at all. As a consequence, low self-esteem and lack of training and support for honest communication about sex have become risk factors for HIV transmission. The community empowerment response to AIDS at the Pride Mission created a cultural space in which young gay men affirmed gay pride and safer sex in an environment designed to facilitate group bonds and self-esteem among this peer group through social and education interactions. In addition, the center provided an arena in which individuals could communicate openly about safer sex and engage in safe sexual behavior and play. These kinds of spaces are necessary in the struggle to protect future generations from the deaths and suffering caused by AIDS.

When the temporary funding for this project ended, the core group lost its original space. Core group members negotiated with the local AIDS service organization (ASO) to become a project under their auspices. However, tensions between the organizations led to a breakdown between original Pride Mission members and the ASO. The organizations agreed that Pride Mission members would raise rent money through fundraising and retain their decision-making power. The members were not able to raise \$1,000 a month for rent (none had ever been trained to do fundraising), and the director of the ASO at the time undermined the group's decision making power by hiring a new coordinator who was not chosen by Pride Mission members. The original core group members declared the end of Pride Mission and cited that the Director of the ASO did not understand the significance of ownership. For many months, very little happened on the HIV prevention front. This conflict made clear the need to educate local community leaders about the links between gay youth empowerment, a sense of ownership over space, and effective HIV prevention education.

Many Pride Mission core group members were extremely disillusioned by the loss of the project's space. After the Pride Mission lost its space, some held meetings in a local cafe. However, the sense of hope for the program had been nearly crushed, and only a few of the core group individuals showed up for the meetings on a regular basis. When asked why they didn't show up, the other core group individuals explained that they thought the program was dead and that it could not survive without a space of its own. Even though Pride Mission was not formally institutionalized, its members continued to meet informally to commiserate over the losses and reaffirm the vision for community driven HIV prevention work. The project coordinator of Pride Mission reflected on the process:

It really lost its cohesiveness and it's purpose. We all worked to make that space happen and whether it was just keeping it clean or keeping it decorated or planning events that were going to go on there, when we didn't have it anymore, it was very much the beginning of the end. I don't know why other people didn't understand the importance of it. The people funding the project afterwards just didn't seem to get it. Everyone kind of gave up after we lost the space because there didn't seem to be anything to work toward. We dealt with so many other challenges that we worked past, but that was one that we couldn't ignore. It was difficult to think that we had to work within the confines of another space. There was no sense of ownership.

Since the ending of Pride Mission, AIDS educators in Santa Barbara County at the county public health department and local AIDS service organizations have worked with original Pride Mission members to re-create the project.

Phoenix Rising, named as such because it rose out of the ashes of Pride Mission, was founded on the principles of the Pride Mission in 1995, but one critical element has always been missing from this project—it's own space. Mike, a young gay man interested in HIV prevention work, and I founded Phoenix Rising with a \$4,000 grassroots grant from the Fund for Santa Barbara. Mike managed the project as a scaled-down version of the Pride Mission. With much less funding, we wanted to provide some of the aspects of the original model, including safer sex workshops and social activities but within realistic budget constraints. Core group meetings for Phoenix Rising were initially planned to meet in coffee shops and in the meeting rooms of a local church. During this period (between August 1995 and June 1996) the manager of the project provided weekly social and educational activities (such as games night,

movie nights, hikes, and Connections). Despite the manager's attempts to elicit involvement among gay youth, the core group was never established. I conducted informal interviews with Mike and other young men who participated in Phoenix Rising activities at this time. These interviews revealed their perceptions that young gay men did not feel comfortable meeting and being themselves in essentially "straight" spaces such as mainstream coffee shops. Trying to meet in a private space owned by a local church group also proved frustrating. As Mike said:

There was no regular place to meet. Meeting in the church, even though they were supportive turned people off [because of the perception that religious people are homophobic]. It was like pulling teeth trying to schedule rooms there anyway. I had to work around the church's schedule and that wasn't convenient for most young men.... People need a place where they can relax without worrying about straight people or being threatened, where no one will judge you.

Mike's struggles to coordinate places for young gay men to gather and run the project were met with serious obstacles. The only spaces he could find for free (besides those in the ASO) were either private, "straight" spaces (like coffee shops) or churches (perceived to be homophobic). In addition, using other peoples' spaces seriously impinged on his ability to schedule convenient times for young gay men. These spaces did not provide gay youth with a sense of belonging or ownership.

The temporary seed money for Phoenix Rising ended in May 1996. In the meantime, Phoenix Rising members and the Director of HIV prevention services at the local ASO resolved their differences and agreed to seek out a space for the project and allow core group members to make decisions regarding educational activities. Phoenix Rising, once again, became a project of the local ASO, but with more funding for staff and events. When a new manager, David (one of the original Pride Mission volunteers), took over the project and began meetings in his home (a gay-friendly apartment), the core group membership rose to 11 individuals on average (between June 1996 and June 1997). Gay youth said they did not want to meet at the local ASO space because it exists in a bleak, industrial setting, but they felt comfortable hanging out in this apartment because they were free to be themselves without the threat of potentially homophobic people invading the space. The new manager attributes this resurgence of core group activity to the fact that gay youth once again had a regular place to go, if only once a week, where they felt safe and empowered to act as they wished. This core group put on a fabulous event to celebrate Madonna's (then) new movie, *Evita*, and over 100 people showed up at David's house. The increase in core group participation was encouraging when compared with the lack of involvement while Phoenix Rising was trying to meet in church and business spaces. However, membership involvement did not reach the 20 mark established by the Pride Mission when it owned its own space. The correlation between a safe space and the revival of participation is strong evidence of the critical role played by space in the community empowerment model. Unfortunately, during the Spring of 1997, it no longer became possible for Phoenix Rising to meet in this apartment because David's roommates no longer wanted the group there. The group also tried to meet in another gay man's apartment, but this abruptly ended as well when one of the youth's homophobic mothers called him and framed his support as "predatory."

Phoenix Rising suffered another morale setback when it lost access to gay-supported spaces due to changes which were, once again, out of their control

(and disempowering). The project moved to meeting at another gay-owned private establishment, but membership immediately plummeted to four or less core group individuals. Eventually, core group meetings there involved only staff members. Efforts to meet at this establishment were hampered by the fact that it served alcohol as well as food, and policies regarding underaged people continually fluctuated. Under the supervision of yet another manager, Bernie (who was also an original Pride Mission volunteer), the project moved to the local ASO in April 1998. Although staff were able to muster support for condom-stuffing events and participation in educational, social activities, they have never been able to attract regular core group volunteers there.

Phoenix Rising spaces have always been owned by other people. Constraints on access and the environmental conditions of these spaces have severely limited gay youths' ability to exercise control over decisions about designing and utilizing a space for themselves. The critical element of the project, *core group ownership*, has not been regained since the Pride Mission space was lost. Project success, in terms of changing unsafe sexual behaviors, is unknown since there is no funding for ongoing longitudinal survey research to measure these outcomes for Phoenix Rising as there was to assess Pride Mission. The positive association of core group members' involvement with the element of spaces for gay youth is clear. There were 20 core group members while Pride Mission owned its own space, 11 core group members when Phoenix Rising met in a gay-friendly apartment, and 4 or fewer core group members whenever Phoenix Rising attempted to meet in spaces owned by other people, including the ASO space.

Informal interviews with all of the project managers point to the same conclusion. All of their discussions about making Phoenix Rising effective involve discourses about securing a central location for gay youth. For the project to effectively produce safer sex norms throughout the target population, a space (that young gay men can call their own, decorate, hang out in at their own leisure, and make decisions about planning and providing social and educational activities for their peers) is required. Making a space for safer sex empowers gay youth to take control of safer sex work and HIV prevention in their lives and their communities.

DISCUSSION

The link between space for gay youth, their empowerment, and safer sexual behavior among them is very strong. The findings in this research suggest that community-level AIDS education programs should be a part of AIDS education policies and widely available to all individuals at risk for contracting HIV. Because of financial constraints and other institutional tensions, most AIDS education programs do not provide target populations with their own community spaces in which to develop a sense of ownership and empowerment. The Pride Mission stands as a hopeful model for creating social change, but it also reveals the need for a long-term vision of how to foster and sustain such programs. HIV prevention community leaders need to mobilize the resources that are needed to provide spaces for the production of safer sex behavior change. In addition to financial resources, there is a great need for gay-positive spaces in which individuals can gather and where they can provide social and educational activities that will attract their peers and produce safer sex norms among them. In the words of the original Pride Mission coordinator:

[Space] gave all the participants a sense of *place*, that it was a hangout, but it was someplace where they would come after work even if they weren't there for a meeting, they would drop by. Even if it wasn't on the way home, it was a social spot. Not having a space doesn't lend itself to becoming socially involved with the problem. It's important to turn the people you are educating into educators themselves and encouraging them to come back and bring their friends because you need that constant flow of new energy and new faces.

Community empowerment cannot happen without a blend of unique individuals, such as the men who composed the pride mission core group, who share a common sense of commitment to community building, a project mission and goals, and a willingness to nurture a project that they care deeply about. These individuals must have the power to make the decisions that affect their lives and the policies which direct community-based organizations. I am convinced that effective and sustainable AIDS education work also needs to be fun and enjoyable. This work needs to retain messages about gay pride and pleasure and foster safer sex.

AIDS educators in Santa Barbara County are now working on obtaining a community space that gay youths can call their own. It is possible that the drop in volunteer participation is due to burnout among gay men or to the perception that the new drug treatments for HIV make education less important. However, individuals do not burn out when they are socially supported, and it is possible to eradicate myths about the end of the AIDS crisis. Some proposals for providing such social support include obtaining a large grant to underwrite the cost of renting a space for gay youth or to seed a gay-owned and operated coffee shop.

Sustaining a space in which gay youth feel a sense of belonging and ownership, within a capitalist system, may require some degree of economic skill building such that gay youth are trained to manage businesses that generate revenue to pay for space. This project also requires the will of community leaders and HIV prevention educators to allow gay youth to make their own decisions, mistakes, and advances in the struggle to end the AIDS crisis. Such work needs to be done at the policy level on local prevention planning boards and committees where decisions about funding and priorities for prevention planning are made. More research on the efficacy of attempts to develop and sustain community-level HIV prevention models and more sharing of struggles such as these explored here are needed to end the second wave of infections among young gay men and other populations infected and affected by the ongoing AIDS crisis. As Lefebvre (1991) noted, ideas that "do not succeed in making their mark on space, and thus generating an appropriate morphology, will lose all pith and become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasie.... The production of space—has nothing incidental about it: it is a matter of life and death" (p. 417).

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