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The Sociology of Queer Nightlife

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ABSTRACT

Queer nightlife is receiving increasing recognition in a growing field of nightlife studies, yet its insights have been largely mined by humanists. In this introduction to a subfield-defining special issue, I blend arguments from the social sciences about “dirty work” with humanistic notions of “disidentification” as a survival strategy to amplify a sociological point of view. What theoretical opportunities arise from working on and against the conservative tendencies of the discipline, neither abandoning queer nightlife for something perceived as more legitimate nor refusing entirely to engage with other sociologists? A review of select multidisciplinary works distills three expressions of disidentification used by researchers to negotiate novel arguments. I describe these as conceptual renovations, deconstructive reframings, and epistemological affirmations. From this baseline, I classify special issue papers into additional clusters that articulate sociology-specific interventions that neither uncritically embrace nor strictly oppose normative standards but transform them from within, what I call reorientations, relational work, and regulated improvisations. These themes together contribute to a knowledge platform about queer nightlife that conveys both shared theoretical frameworks and disciplinary distinctions.

KEYWORDS

Dirty work; disidentification; sexualities; social theory

Queer nightlife is having a moment. Prominent works published in the past 5 years include Kareem Khubchandani’s examination of South Asian aesthetic performances in *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife* (2020); the 25-essay anthology *Queer Nightlife* (2021), co-edited by Kemi Adeyemi, Kareem Khubchandani, and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera; Jeremy Atherton Lin’s memoir *Gay Bar: Why We Went Out* (2021); Kemi Adeyemi’s ethnography *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* (2022); Lucas Hilderbrand’s panorama *The Bars Are Ours: Histories and Cultures of Gay Bars in America, 1960 and After* (2023); Greggor Mattson’s travelogue *Who Needs Gay Bars? Bar-Hopping through America’s Endangered LGBTQ+ Places* (2023); the sonorous scenscape *Together Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the Dancefloor* (2023) by Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispireta; McKenzie Wark’s slim-in-pages though hefty-in-theory *Raving* (2023); Ben Campkin’s heritage account of licensed venues in *Queer Premises: LGBTQ+ Venues in London Since the 1980s* (2023); my own foray into underground parties in *Long Live Queer Nightlife: How the Closing of Gay Bars Sparked a Revolution* (2024); and David Tenorio’s take on play in *Queer Relajo: Feeling the Nightscape of Mexicanidad* (2025).

For so much and already such vital work to have been published in the past few years alone indexes an intellectual movement that is impossible to ignore. (And these are just the books; the number of articles is much higher.) With this special issue, *The Sociological Quarterly* affirms the rapid growth of scholarly conversations about queer nightlife and advances them by presenting empirically grounded approaches enriched by the sociological imagination. What do we have to say that other disciplines overlook or omit? That is, what unique contributions can sociologists make to an expanding interdisciplinary exchange?

Dirty Work/Fun Work

The night illuminates untreaded terrains of social theory, including an understanding of DIY ethics (Schilt 2004), youth cultures (Anderson 2009), authenticity politics (Hidalgo 2023), and culture industries (Conner and Dickens 2023) as emerging from music scenes (Bennett and Peterson 2004) and other qualities of local places (Silver and Nichols Clark 2016). Researchers have also traced the effects of anonymity (Simmel 1903) and sexual competition in commercial hotspots (Grazian 2008), alongside the transformation of cities from centers of blight and crime to community (Jacobs 1961) and capital investments (Halle and Tiso 2014; Lloyd 2006; Zukin 1995). Others highlight the development of cooperative networks in creative industries (Clark 2011; Currid 2007), the rise of luxury leisure services in the backdrop of a global distribution of wealth (Mears 2020), the use of dress codes to exercise racial discrimination (May 2018), and the role of Black nightclubs as counter-sources of support (Hunter 2010).

That I still feel compelled to insist that queer nightlife is impossible to ignore highlights an implicit baseline on and against which many of us, including myself, work—and that baseline is a particular history of disavowing the legitimacy of projects that elevate sexuality as a focal point for inquiry. Despite arguments that sexuality is neither silenced nor repressed (Foucault 1978), researchers still encounter dismissals in patterned ways, from homophobia thinly veiled as a critique of the work to passive aggressive portrayals of it as “me-search” or “activist” rather than serious and scholarly. The stigma is sweeping: sexologists from the 19th century (Krafft-Ebing 1886), labeling theorists in the mid-20th century (McIntosh 1968), the script theorists who followed (Simon and Gagnon 1984), social constructionists (Seidman 2003), queer theorists (Stein and Plummer 1994), and contemporary sociologists all take, or have taken, professional risks by doing “queer work in a straight discipline” (Schilt, Meadow, and Compton 2018: 2).

Characterized by some as an ideologically conservative discipline (Gouldner 1970), sociology can reproduce in practice the same hierarchies critiqued on the page (Bourdieu 1990a), excluding from the inner circle of celebrated theoretical contributions insights emerging from the social margins (Collins 1992). This tendency makes the study of queer nightlife, similar to the sociology of sexualities, a stigmatized enterprise—or dirty work (Hughes 1962): socially distasteful yet recognized as necessary. Irvine (2014) locates the concept in sexualities scholarship: “On the one hand, venues for academic research have expanded over the last decades, many people are eager for the knowledge that sexuality researchers produce, and in some circles the field is respected, even trendy. On the other hand, sexuality researchers have attempted for over a century to establish academic legitimacy in the face of deep cultural anxieties about their subject of study” (633).

Patterns of institutional devaluation persist today alongside demonstrable progress, which can make the mark of dirty work more difficult to discern. In 2015, Paula England was elected president of the American Sociological Association. She selected “Sexualities and the Social World” as the theme for the entire annual meeting—a historic first. The final program provides an example of the friction between professional disapprovals and positive developments. England (2015) writes:

Sex usually occurs in private and is seen as deeply personal, yet it is also profoundly social. Cultural norms and social institutions . . . all affect what we do sexually with whom. These social forces also affect *what is seen as beyond the bounds of legitimacy*. Indeed, contemporary politics are full of *contentious debates* about abortion, sex education, same-sex marriage, pornography, sex work, sexual harassment, systematic rape as a weapon in wars, and female genital cutting. Given *the importance of sexuality in people’s lives, and its relevance to many areas of sociology*, I selected it as the theme for the 2015 annual meeting of the ASA. (1, emphasis added)

At the interface of dirty work and disciplinary recognition are situated, like flowers in concrete, literatures on queer nightlife, a blanket term that describes scenes similar to what we might find at a gay bar, for example, a case I imagine comes to mind first for many readers (Armstrong and Crage 2006; Hilderbrand 2023; Mattson 2023). Anything but singular in culture or composition, even these bars have been diverse and differentiated from their earliest days (Achilles 1967). In addition to commercial establishments are separate social constellations (Giesecking 2020) for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women (Brown-Saracino 2011; Forstie 2021; Kennedy and Davis 1993), like private house parties (Thorpe 1996). Other scholars have approached queer nightlife by examining anti-capitalist spaces (Ghaziani 2024b) that cultivate an ethos of resistance and racial solidarity for Black (Johnson 2021), Latine (Valencia 2024), and queer people of color (Ghaziani and Abrutyn 2024). Also available are an array of academic writings on drag parties, from Prohibition (Chauncey 1994) to the present (McCormack and Wignall 2022; Rupp, Taylor, and Llana Shapiro 2010).

The list of nightlife forms is long—and getting longer as the literature flourishes. From emplaced bars and licensed venues to episodic events and unlicensed parties, scholars often approach queer nightlife from a position of conceptual plurality (Ghaziani 2024a). Influential pieces examine boarding lodge (Houlbrook 2017) and ballroom events (Bailey 2013); the dancefloor as a place of intimacy between strangers (Garcia-Mispireta 2023); Zoom parties (Duguay, Trépanier, and Chartrand 2023); queer raves (Avis-Ward 2022; Wark 2023) and techno clubs (Andersson 2023); “guerilla-style” (Rosenthal 2021: 49; Stillwagon and Ghaziani 2019: 885) takeovers of straight bars and BIPOC takeovers of gay bars (Greene 2022); circuit parties that began as HIV/AIDS fundraisers (Ghaziani and Cook 2005; Mansergh et al. 2001); and work that champions nightlife as a cultural asset (Campkin 2023; Ghaziani 2019). Out of this collection of exciting writing emerges a portrait of queer *nightlives*—the singular now seems unfitting—operating as social infrastructure: material, affective, and associational “forms of life” (Berlant 2016: 393) that bind us to each other and the worlds we make.

With so much published work available that cannot be easily denied or dismissed, the expressions of disavowal are changing in subtle ways. If dirty work is too strong a descriptor, then how to better capture contemporary gatekeeping practices? What comes immediately to my mind is Adeyemi’s (2022) study about parties in Chicago for

Black queer women. In the very first sentence of the preface, she calls people out for how they respond to her research:

People who don't work on nightlife love to comment that my research must be so *fun*, a comment that often doubles as a suggestion that nightlife research isn't really research at all. This suggestion often comes with the ancillary assumption that people who participate in queer nightlife are also not doing anything of interest or consequence—they're all just partying, just having a good time. (ix, emphasis in original)

The sociology of queer nightlife requires us to grapple with a cultural logic of what I, riffing off Hughes and Irvine, call *fun work*. The perception of scholarly work as “fun,” the same word others have also said to me on many occasions, mischaracterizes it as recreational rather than as real research. Yet studying queer nightlife is in fact a form of labor, for both researchers and for some revelers (Khubchandani 2020). It is hard work, disrupting sleep patterns and demanding physical endurance, that can lead to exhaustion and burn out (Adeyemi 2022; Garcia 2013). Like the companion concept of dirty work, fun work also constitutes a brazen attack on an entire area of scholarship, dismissing it as “beyond the bounds of legitimacy,” to revisit England's (2015) earlier remark. Some researchers respond by rejecting legitimacy. “Queer nightlife does not need the perceived legitimacy of scholars to be legible or to thrive,” Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera (2021: 10) declare. For others, the sense of the work as “unconventional and low prestige” (Garcia-Mispireta 2023: x) is harder to shake.

Whether in the sociology of sexualities or the sociology of queer nightlife, the dismissals of dirty work and fun work both stem from a common core of discomfort, a feeling that concedes something constitutes labor without acknowledging its more serious aspects, including the cognitive effort that underlies its production and the findings that contribute to our understanding of the social world. In meditations on being included in the institutional life of universities, Ahmed (2012: 41) writes, “Discomfort involves the failure to fit.” Borrowing Puwar's (2004) image of space invaders, she describes the feeling of being an outsider as “invading the spaces reserved for others. We might even experience ourselves as space invaders, a way of experiencing spaces as if they are not reserved for us” (Ahmed 2012: 13).

From conferences to colloquia and special collections like this volume, queer nightlife researchers locate our work in an array of broader debates, including about state regulation, social movements, gentrification, art markets, cultural and institutional change, digitalization, interaction rituals, collective memory, placemaking, international migration, social inequality, and intersectionality, among others. We are not always expected in these spaces—yet we arrive. And when we do, we are noticed in ways that can make us feel like outsiders, as interloping space invaders.

But what if I ask you to reimagine discomfort not as a barricade but a catalyst? Collective discomfort signals that something previously taken for granted by a scholarly community is now visible, articulable, and open to critique. Rather than stifle or suppress, I see discomfort as an invitation to generate new knowledge, an opportunity to create something at the limits of disciplinary orthodoxies. By interrupting habituated thinking and intellectual comfort zones, queer nightlife researchers experience the world differently, noticing things that others may overlook. This outcome requires disidentification, a standpoint relative to dominant conventions.

Disidentification

One strategy for surviving as space invaders involves what Muñoz (1999) calls disidentification. The concept describes how marginalized groups disrupt normative spaces through a performative intrusion. That performance neither accepts and aligns with dominant systems, which would constitute identification (or “fitting in” and “falling in line”), nor does it reject them, which would produce counter-identification (“I want nothing to do with it”).

Disidentification is a hybrid approach that works “on and against” (Muñoz 1999: 11) mainstream expectations: neither abandoning queer research for something seen—incorrect in my view—as more legitimate nor refusing—ill-advised, I think—to speak to your discipline. As space invaders, queer nightlife researchers transform from within by remixing and reworking disciplinary standards and the pressures to conform to them. Think of it like this: “I see the problem, but I’ll use it, not fear it, to achieve my own ends.”

More than an academic abstraction, disidentification is a tactical action for survival. With it, we can ask more pointed questions about the development of academic fields (Abbott 2000). How have nightlife researchers disidentified with disciplinary norms that invalidate their work? What strategies do they use to move on and against disciplines, neither accepting nor rejecting the norms but altering them from within? And how does all of this produce new knowledge?

Early projects used foundational concepts to provide entry points, signaling that nightlife is as an object of serious academic study. In *Club Cultures*, Thornton (1996) draws on Bourdieu’s (1984) cultural capital to propose the nightlife-specific subcultural capital. Her revised formulation specifies the insider knowledge required to participate in raves, for example, which resist the “obscene accessibility of mass culture” (187). Thornton neither applies Bourdieu’s framework exactly as it is nor does she reject it. Instead, she remakes Bourdieu’s ideas about tastes and competencies on her own terms to theorize status and distinction in nightlife. By working on and against the social sciences, Thornton’s strategy involves what I call a *conceptual renovation*, or making situated adaptations from within the context of nightlife in order to articulate theoretical extensions from that space.

A second approach comes from *Everynight Life*. Delgado and Muñoz (1997) rethink nightlife as a site of cultural production, identity formation, and politics, not reducible to leisure or escape, especially for Latine and queer communities. The title is a wordplay on “everyday life,” a popular theoretical concept (Crook 1998; Goffman 1959). The shift from the diurnal and ordered to the nocturnal and rebellious challenges hierarchies that privilege the day as a normative site for theorizing. Delgado and Muñoz engage in disidentification via *deconstructive reframing*: a critical transformation of dominant social theories. By shifting from the presentation of a regulated self in the day to the performance of resistant selves at night, Delgado and Muñoz unsettle the presumed singularity and universality of social life.

Some years later, Buckland (2002) published *Impossible Dance*, showing how club cultures support a project of “world-making” (4), or building “queer lifeworlds” (6) in heteronormative societies.¹ As they dance, individuals use their bodies to imagine new worlds, embodying queer alternatives through dress, movements, interactions, argots, and gestures. Buckland’s approach represents an *epistemological affirmation*. She positions the queer dance floor as a response to deficit-based frameworks of denied access to social

institutions like the state, church, and media. Buckland equally refutes the analytics of nightlife as a “frivolous activity” (136), not worthy of serious intellectual pursuit, or as pathologizing, anomic, and deviant. She works on and against these stigmas to affirm queer nightlife as an anticipatory force of an embodied public sphere.

moore (2018) blends all three multidisciplinary modalities of disidentification.² Queer nightlife is a site of worldmaking, where the performance of a defiant style—what they conceptually renovating Veblen (1899) call “fabulousness” (viii)—is used by Black and Brown queer people not to fit into the mainstream but to claim their own spaces on their own terms. Fabulousness is a “queer aesthetic” (xii), moore argues in a reframing move. It is “largely (but certainly not only) practiced by queer, trans, and transfeminine people of color and other marginalized groups” (8) whose bodies are constantly surveilled and denied value. Instead of waiting for things to get better in a world structured by racism and homophobia, “fabulous people imagine an alternative universe right now,” moore mentions to *The New York Times*. If, as they say in the same interview, “you don’t need a camera to notice you if you can be your own flash,” then being fabulous requires neither embracing nor challenging dominant cultures. It is a survival strategy that epistemologically affirms “all forms of beautiful eccentricity” (moore 2018: 16).³

All these studies meet the moment that nightlife, and specifically queer nightlife, are having—but humanists are leading the way. While sociologists are often at the front lines of public debates and academic theorizing, we are some steps behind others who are already identifying new directions in the area (Andersson and Hakim 2024). This is not for a lack of interest on our part, however, as my call for papers received 39 submissions from 12 countries. Now, then, is the time to ask the question: What practices of disidentification can come from sociology?

Queer Nightlife presents an ensemble of empirical cases, conceptual tools, and theoretical engagements. The special issue is impressive in its broad coverage of gender, race, asexuality, diaspora, global and transnational experiences, the impacts of COVID-19, neoliberal economic restructuring, mainstreaming, drag as both culture and labor, affect, sex and collective pleasures, kink, leather, activism, and artmaking practices. I organize the articles into three clusters, synthesizing some of the ways that sociologists who study queer nightlife work on and against the conservative tones of the discipline, neither rotely subscribing to them nor abandoning core insights without care or concern. I describe these efforts as *reorientations*, *relational work*, and *regulated improvisations*. Each represents an ideal-typical approach of sociological disidentification. In other words, the dismissal of, and discomfort with, queer nightlife as dirty work or fun work is met by researchers with a tactical response that leads to theoretical developments in the discipline.

Reorientations

For more than 100 years, sociologists have taken inspiration from DuBois (1903: 2) who asked a defining question: “How does it feel to be a problem?” Scholars have answered by considering the conditions of minority groups located at the social margins. In his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Morris (2022) emphasizes subaltern agency, or the capacity for constructive resistance among disenfranchised groups. “Despite its crippling effects, domination is always contested. Thus, subaltern agency constituted an enduring aspect of

modernity” (6). Yet Morris remains unsatisfied by the response from the discipline. “Mainstream sociology failed to sufficiently analyze the lived experiences of subalterns” (Ibid.).

In queer nightlife, subalterns also speak, but they do more than just contest domination or attempt to shift the center of social life. To propose something like “recentering” as a mode of disidentification would comprise a reactionary response, of only working against the dominant grain, not at all on it. *Reorientation* strikes me as a more apt analytic assessment. It captures the struggle among subalterns to determine where they are located relative to shifting power-laden environments, yet without a presumption that any single center is the most desirable place (for an extended discussion, see Ghaziani 2024b). Queer nightlife answers Du Bois’s question in a particular and powerful way. The subaltern does not cocoon itself in a single alternative, but rather, it reorients into multiple centers, plural places of their own fabrication and freedom. As a form of constructive resistance, efforts to reorient social life do not just negate or reject it; they transform social life from within by creating new lifeworlds.

Gathered under this theme, three articles detail a variety of social reorientations that set the stage for theoretical advancements. In each case, the authors show how reorientating practices work on and against normative expectations by offering a “reverse discourse” (Foucault 1978: 101) about how it feels to be a problem and a reverse demonstration of how subalterns find ways of being and belonging through worldmaking practices.

We hear first from Watufani Poe, who uses theories of placemaking to examine “festevivência,” or parties that animate the present realities and aspirational worlds of Black and Brown individuals. Based on an ethnography of feminist-focused parties in Brazil (Batekoo in São Paulo) and the United States (Ascendance in New Orleans) that provide a reoriented format for collaborative experimentation, Poe shows that queer nightlife is a vehicle for continual self-making, the self-fashioning of corporeal freedom, and the reimagining of lived experiences through a disidentified notion of “worlds within walls.”

Next comes a study by Mark McCormack and Fiona Measham, who use census data, focus groups, and interviews to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on queer nightlife in London. By reorienting research on queer creatives, who are marginalized in mainstream arts institutions, they propose “multiple mainstreams,” a concept that disentangles the benefits of mainstreaming (e.g., eligibility for municipal funds during lockdowns) from its damages (e.g., shifting responsibility from institutions to individuals). McCormack and Measham work on and against a tendency to overgeneralize nightlife as a form of either leisure or inequality.

The final article is penned by your special issue editor. Humanists recognize queer nightlife as an artistic project, while social scientists favor frameworks of criminology, policing, and social harms. I conceptually renovate these ideas to propose that nightlife is more than an art form; it is a “cultural field.” The Bourdieusian shift from form to field makes the object of study more capacious and allows me to reorient nightlife into multiple analytic centers. Drawing on more than 100 interviews, I work on and against theoretical tendencies to reduce nightlife to a single institutional form (the gay bar) while overlooking its associations with art and activism.

Relational Work

Individuals make ongoing efforts to manage their relationships. Zelizer (2005: 35) calls this “relational work.” In *The Purchase of Intimacy*, she challenges the separation of economic transactions from personal relationships by providing examples of their interconnections, like tipping a friend who is also your bartender. The discomfort locates you at the intersection of a market transaction and a personal relationship, both of which are occurring at the same time. In more general terms, relational work involves establishing symbolic boundaries in our networks, distinguishing and suppressing qualities that might become confused while repairing social ties should they become damaged (Mears 2015; Zelizer 2012). In this section, three papers highlight how individuals create a sense of place and community by grappling on and against the competing demands of different social groups.

In the first essay, Tyler Baldor asks how nightlife establishments can straighten in clientele while maintaining reputations as authentic queer spaces. Drawing on theories of interaction rituals and collective consumption, he argues that queer spaces can create temporary social realities that are interactively accomplished through the copresence of different social groups who share a mutual focus of attention. In this ethnographic study of a piano bar in Philadelphia, queer and straight patrons work to repair their differences by consuming, performing, and “culture talking” about showtunes from the Great American Songbook and Broadway. This type of relational work enables straight patrons to contribute to the bar’s queer reputation by playing into the camp sensibility of the effervescent scene.

Next comes Ashley Green, who works on and against male-dominated gay bars in search of LGBTQ+ women. Linking theories of place attachment with interviews in Tampa Bay, Florida, Green shows how gay bars and broad ideas about “community” are conflated, leading LGBTQ+ women to feel like they lack places of significance where they can connect. Social differences between gay men and LGBTQ+ women are often suppressed in gay bars, limiting the expression of subjectivities to predetermined sexual scripts: going out only to “pick up chicks,” as one respondent said. Green shows the importance of relational work through its failures. Queer women are routinely rejected by straight women whom they had anticipated as queer based on their presence in what is supposed to be a community space.

Canton Winer rounds out the section with an interview-based, national U.S. study about asexuality and queer nightlife. Asexuals work on and against an unsettling sense of being neither welcome nor unwelcome in queer spaces. One respondent remarks, “I wouldn’t say I’ve felt or seen anything that directly said ‘no aces allowed’ or anything like that. But I also wouldn’t say I’ve felt or seen anything that said we are allowed. It’s an ambiguous situation.” That ambiguity can make some asexuals feel like space invaders in nightlife settings. “It makes me feel like there’s a possibility I’m seen as an intruder in a space where maybe I don’t belong.” This leads some to avoid queer parties, while others advocate relational work to repair their sense of “uncertain belonging.”

Regulated Improvisations

Bourdieu’s (1990b: 57) notion of “regulated improvisation” provides a unifying theme for the final set of papers. The way individuals structure their interactions is neither free nor predetermined. It is situationally conditioned, Bourdieu argues, guided by a social autopilot called the *habitus*, or an internalized disposition

acquired over years of socialization. A feel for the situation enables individuals to act from moment to moment in seemingly spontaneous ways that are, in fact, socially structured. Learned-though-largely-subconscious habits, like an embodied inclination to think, feel, and move in certain ways, are durable (they last a long time) and transposable (they apply across social contexts), situationally fluid though still interpretable.⁴

The theory of regulated improvisations allows for creativity and constraint—or, to draw a through line in my discussion, a working on and against social norms and structures without having to consciously think about them, strictly obey them, or flagrantly defy them. That effort sometimes uses a reorienting logic to explode the baseline into multiple centers, as the authors demonstrate in the first cluster of papers. At other times, it involves grappling on and against the competing demands of different social relationships, as the authors show in the second section. In this final group, three papers illustrate how a similar effort occurs on multinational scales, temporal registers, and in labor markets. Rather than always following rigid scripts, individuals improvise, drawing on elements of their *habitus* to respond to fluctuating situations and circumstances.

Locating his work in theories of international migration, Ryan Centner offers an ethnography of expatriate gay men in Buenos Aires and Dubai. Conceptually reworking and reorienting Simone's (2022) concept of the surrounds, Centner characterizes the Global South as comprising "many Souths," each with a distinct socio-legal context that requires comparison. The empirical expressions of queer nightlife in this study are "inconsistent and incomplete," requiring individuals to "maneuver in an eternal errancy that can be exhausting but also enables creative practices." The unsettled qualities of queer nightlife, or "improvisational lives and situations," as Centner says, invites gay men to work on and against social structures by partying flexibly in ways that create community while circumventing criminality.

Jorge Ochoa rescales the conversation to considerations of time and temporality. Based on an ethnography of Chicago's kink scene, Ochoa offers the historiographical concept of a "cultural palimpsest" to understand nightlife forms. Palimpsestic places like Touché, the city's oldest leather bar, have accumulated layers of history. They permit of-the-moment expressions while preserving traces from the past. This temporal duality works on and against erroneous claims like "queer nightlife has no history" or that it is "relatively new." Ochoa shows that queer nightlife is both "elaborative" and "retentive."

The final piece comes from Blaine Smith, who works on and against neoliberal economic restructuring to rethink drag, which has been integral to queer nightlife yet inadequately accounted for within recent sociological scholarship. In this Boston-based, mixed-methods study, Smith examines drag as a form of labor and performers as gig workers in informal labor markets where, in the face of constraints like the absence of employer-sponsored benefits, chronic work instability, and the lack of labor protections, they still find ways of surviving. Returning us to where we began with dirty work and fun work, one respondent remarks, "New performers have to be seen by certain queens and by certain management in certain venues. They need to like audition without formally auditioning; it's like putting your resume out there. It's a lot of work—a lot of unpaid work." The sentiment is disruptive as it flips the dismissal of fun toward labor and then waves away not the work itself but those who refuse to recognize it.

When people, places, and moments converge in the service of creating something, there arises a rhythm. As editor of this state-of-the-art special issue, my objective was to amplify the beat of sociology in scholarship about queer nightlife. That momentum is building, but we are still far from a crescendo. We have only to watch and see the response to the provocations for theoretically driven disidentification that the authors here offer: approaches for working on and against the discipline in the service of producing new knowledge in a fast-growing field.

I am indebted to Jonathan Coley, editor of *The Sociological Quarterly*, for entrusting me with this task. *TSQ* is a leading generalist journal, and one of its strengths is a commitment to publishing research that is relevant for all areas of inquiry. To work on and against disciplinary elisions, a curious interface between collective denials and collective recognition, requires insisting that sociologists have a say while celebrating achievements in the humanities. In this spirit, I am pleased to anchor the issue with a cross-disciplinary forum aptly titled, “The Night Is Still Young.”

Imagined and curated by Lucas Hilderbrand, the roundtable brings together 10 leading researchers in the humanities and social sciences to reflect on the unprecedented attention queer nightlife has recently received. Hildebrand locates current work in a longer legacy of projects published by sociologist Nancy Achilles, psychologist Evelyn Hooker, and anthropologist Esther Newton. He then invites scholars from ethnomusicology, gender and women’s studies, geography, film and media studies, performance studies, religion, and sociology to exchange ideas and investments with the goal of learning from each other and teaching others about this area of essential research. While participants have their own disciplinary vantage points, personal histories, and intellectual priorities, they come together to render a percussive portrait of queer nightlife as “rigorous, capacious, and imaginative”—then, now, always.

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Notes

1. The first use of queer worldmaking comes from Muñoz (1996), where he argues that “doing queerness” and “making queer worlds” (12) are formative elements of “a queer worldmaking project” (6). Muñoz (1999) elaborates queer worldmaking as “the ways in which performances—theatrical and everyday rituals—have the ability to establish alternative views of the world . . . Oppositional counterpublics are enabled by visions, ‘worldviews,’ that reshape as they deconstruct reality. Such counterpublics are the aftermath of minoritarian performance . . . Worldmaking performances produce these vantage points by slicing into the facade of the real that is the majoritarian public sphere” (195–196). For others, worldmaking is less about performance and more about intimacy, or how counterpublics are “organized around sex” (Berlant and Warner 1998: 547).
2. Buckland also blends multiple modalities of disidentification. Her arguments about the dance floor as a “public sphere” conceptually rework Jürgen Habermans’s model of the theater as an arena of political participation and deliberation about “common affairs” (3).
3. moore’s quotes about an alternative universe, the camera, and flash come from *The New York Times*. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/08/books/madison-moore-fabulousness.html>.

4. I borrow the concept of situational fluidity from Holmes and Ghaziani (2025), who first coined it to describe how LGBTQ+ individuals adopt multiple labels for their gender and sexual identities, adjusting those labels depending on the interactional demands of a particular moment.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on Contributor

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