

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Amin Ghaziani

JVN Hey, curious people, I'm Jonathan Van Ness. And welcome back to Getting Curious. Okay, you guys, I don't know if y'all have read these articles about the way that gay bars are closing. We want to know why are gay bars closing? And when we look even deeper, how bad is that for us as a community? And I want to find this out. And there's an incredible researcher who's been doing work on exactly this, Amin Ghaziani. Amin Ghaziani is a professor of sociology, Canada, Research Chair in Urban Sexualities and co editor of Contexts, the public facing magazine of the American Sociological Association. Amin has written and edited six books and over 60 academic articles, book chapters, and essays, many of which he has published, and top disciplinary and sub field journals. He's won several awards, including a Lambda Literary Award finalist for Best Book in LGBT studies. Amin's been featured in places like The New Yorker, Time magazine, BBC radio for CBC Radio, and The New York Times, among others. His latest book, "Long Live Queer Nightlife How the Closing of Gay Bars Sparked a Revolution" was published in the United States on March 26th. You can get it now, honey. Today we are asking, why are the gay bars closing and stick around to the end of the episode? Will reflect on what we learned and how we answered the question. Amin, welcome to Getting Curious. How are you today?

AMIN GHAZIANI Oh gosh, I'm thrilled to be here. I feel giddy like a little kid. Thanks for having me, Jonathan.

JVN Before we dive in to queer culture and gay bars, how are you doing? How's pride hitting you?

AMIN GHAZIANI I'm doing really well. I'm so happy. Are you kidding? Just like what's in my book, I try to live my life in a joy centric and joy forward.

JVN Joy, honey, I love introducing people to joy. It's one of our very good friends. She's been elusive a little bit lately. Not wanting to pick up the phone, call back as fast as, and text back quite as fast. But she's still there, you know? Okay. Okay, so let's set the scene. So the history and significance of gay bars, do we know, like do we know the first like low key gay bar in history. Like what what is it. What does history tell us about queer bars?

AMIN GHAZIANI What keepsers are hugely important both historically and today places like Stonewall in New York, Pulse in Orlando, Admiral Duncan London, they've inspired international protest, commemoration efforts, lots of celebrations over the decades in many cities around the world. Gay bars were, and still are today, a radical convention. No matter how much better things become, no matter that our sex is decriminalized and our relationships are legally recognized, knowing that there's a door that you can walk through and be yourself and surrounded by others like you is a source of unending power. There are many wonderful books written about this power of gay bars, but I think we emphasize gay bars in disproportionate measure. To be honest, despite their importance, unequivocally, they are not the sum total of nightlife. And besides, not everyone feels like they belong so easily or so comfortably in these places.

JVN That's an interesting sentence. Do you like, is that more of like a straight thing, or do you think even queer people don't feel comfy in there? Or is it both or just more straight people?

AMIN GHAZIANI Well, I mean, I think there are all kinds of people who don't potentially feel comfortable in gay bars. But for the work that I've been doing about nightlife and how it's changing in underground scenes, I'm actually focusing very much on dynamics within LGBTQ communities rather than straight people, and how they're interacting or interfacing with their spaces in this particular case, right. This is just for us and about us. Historically, it seems to me that gay bars have catered to cis white gay men. That's not to say that everyone else has been actively or explicitly excluded, it's just that cis white gay men have dominated for a long time in terms of the sheer number of spaces that they have available to them, to the voices we hear and the images that we see during annual pride parades. And so, as a result, everyone else feels like a tiny minority in an already marginalized community, and they're hungry to connect in other kinds of spaces. For good reason, I might add. So one study recently found that 80% of queer black respondents, 79% of queer Asian respondents and 75% of queer South Asian respondents reported experiencing racial bias from within the LGBTQ community. So here's one way to think about those numbers. Gay bars provide a refuge from the wider heteronormative and at times homophobic world. But today, Bipoc and other groups sometimes need a refuge from the refuge.

JVN So, I mean, you are like minding your own business. You're a professor, you're researching, and then you're writing a book and you're meaning to write a book about. Gay bars. But then you find this report that between 2006 and 2016. So it's giving like last two years of like Bush to and then like the Obama administration. My brain always does this. I don't it's annoying. I can't help it. 58% 50% of bars, pubs and nightclubs that cater to the LGBTQ community closed in London. What stood out to you about this report, and what other things did you encounter and find similar terms like, oh my God, I got to hate that part again. So when it comes this report and others that you encountered, what did you find as far as like trends go across the world?

AMIN GHAZIANI This is such an important question and I have a lot of thoughts about this jump. So you're first of all, you're right. This book was an accident. I had no intention of coming to London. I had no intention of studying nightlife. And I knew absolutely nothing about the underground scenes that are the stars of the pages of my new book. I came to London on a sabbatical because a friend invited me to join him at the London School of Economics and Political Science, where he's a member of the faculty. And it was only after I arrived, and shortly after I arrived, that I plugged into a conversation that it seemed like everyone was happening, everyone was having. And that's about the closure of gay bars in the capital.

JVN Question not to interrupt. What year was this?

AMIN GHAZIANI I arrived in January 2018.

JVN It's. Sorry, I can't stop talking. I mean, I just feel so at home with you. Okay, but anyway, so you get there in 2018 and you're researching with your friend at that, like, fierce ask board and you're like, honey, there's this. Like, something's going on here with like, nightlife.

AMIN GHAZIANI Oh, I'm not even researching with my friend. Honey, that's not at all what's happening. I just tuned into a conversation that was already happening because, like, a couple months before I arrived, University College London UCL published this report that showed in the first two decades of the 2000, the number of LGBTQ nighttime venues in London, a global capital of finance and culture, declined by 58%, falling from 125 to just 53 remaining venues. Now, the two most common explanations for the closure of gay bars are both economic. The first is redevelopment, which is to say that the land is more profitable than the business. And so a developer comes along, buys the business, raises it, and then puts up something else in its place, usually something like luxury condos. Here we need to keep in mind the gay bars are essentially small businesses. They are commercially viable businesses, but they're not always maximally profitable in terms of price per square foot. And that's why a developer can come in and buy it out and raise it. And we sometimes make this mistake of thinking demand is going down. These bars are not economically or commercially viable. And that's why they're closing. No, no. Know, there's a really important distinction between commercial viability maximum profitability. And that's where things get into trouble in like super gentrifying cities. The second economic explanation here for why gay bars close is failed lease negotiations due to excessively steep rent hikes by greedy landlords. Now, an audit around this time by the mayor's office found that 44% of all nightclubs and 25% of all pubs in the capital have also closed. Which is to say, all night time venues are struggling. But the impact on queer spaces is more dire. It was around this time that Samuel Douek, an architect turned filmmaker, coined the term closure epidemic to describe the scene that was sweeping London, much like cluster ban, which translates to club death, or the club that dies in Berlin, and similar closures occurring in cities all around the world. In the US, 41% of gay bars closed between 2002 and 2019, which is about the same time period as the study that came out of London. So a lot of different numbers floating around here. So there's this journalist whose name is Richard Morgan. He penned a piece for Bloomberg in which he puts this into perspective for us. He tells us that in 1976, there were 2500 gay bars in just the United States alone. Today there are fewer than 1400. World wide. It's astonishing when you think about that. Now, there's a lot that stands out to me about these reports, but the one thing I want to comment on right now is how everyone seems so singularly preoccupied with just one form of nightlife, the bar. And based on the statistics about the closure of gay bars, we tend to make these sweeping statements that all of nightlife is in decline. I want to tell a different story.

JVN To go from 2500. If I heard that right, 2500 venues in the United States. And that you said in the 70s, when was.

AMIN GHAZIANI That 1976.

JVN Has queer visibility has increased? It's like our gathering spaces have decreased. So there's like not necessarily a correlation between like queer visibility and then like queer access to things. And then I also wrote down like consolidation and corporatization like that I feel like must be affecting queer nightlife because as things get more corporate and like. Prices increase. It's harder for like mom and pop in individually owned places to excel in those environments. Is that all right or wrong? Or like I got some right and some wrong.

AMIN GHAZIANI I think I think all of that is right. It's just you're providing a lot of different perspectives and ways for people to think about how to interpret these numbers, and to try to put things into a broader perspective about what's happening as we as a community evolve and grow. What are the implications for the spaces that we have access to? But where I would like to encourage caution is when you say that as time goes by, we're growing as a community, but the number of spaces we have is declining. And this, again, is a kind of it's a style of thinking that I see quite a bit. We're looking at the decline of one type of community format, the gay bar, and those numbers are going down. It is not true that as time goes by and that as we grow and evolve as a community, that the kinds of spaces, the total different kinds of spaces we have access to is also declining. It's actually increasing, but it's diversifying beyond the bar.

JVN Is that like good and bad? Because it's good for like people who are like Sobeys and like don't drink to have. Is it like, is that is that like queer, like football and like queer kickball and like or like? No. Like, what are other things to do in gay life that aren't the bars?

AMIN GHAZIANI We will think about it this way with Gen Z. What we know is that Gen Z is drinking less than prior generations, when among those individuals who do drink, they have their first drink later in life. They consume fewer drinks over the course of a week, and when they do drink in the week, they will consume less quantities of alcohol than prior generations. Now, from that observation, some people are tempted to conclude, see, this is why gay bars are closing. Because Gen Z stopped drinking, so they're not going to the bar. They're not spending at the bar. But again, if I want to look at the other side of the coin and offer a more hopeful perspective, and my response to this would be to say, well, actually it seems unsurprising and quite interesting, quite cool to me that these younger generations are supporting sober parties, which are becoming much more visible and much more popular today. Day raves, which are becoming much more visible and much more popular today in festivals and same kind of trend here. And so these are very different kinds of spaces that we overlook. We don't talk about. And so maybe bars that emphasize drinking alcoholic beverages are going down, but we still have a core fundamental need to belonging and to connect with each other. And we'll find many, many, many other kinds of places to do that.

JVN Gay table tennis club, honey, I bet you like. It's so fun. And like pickleball. Let's go. Okay, so I.

AMIN GHAZIANI Love, love pickleball.

JVN It's so fun. It's so addicting. And also good for the Gen Z. Like, yay for.

AMIN GHAZIANI Them. Yeah, absolutely.

JVN So, would like. Buttmitzfah find Femmetopia be examples of like, are these, like, examples of, like, new, like gorgeous, hopeful examples of like, what future queer gatherings can be. Tell me about those.

AMIN GHAZIANI Yeah. So can I just like, put that into context first and then tell you about those. Is that okay. And then you.

JVN Of course.

AMIN GHAZIANI Eclipse that work okay. So just to figure out like where these parties came from and how they're related to gay bars and I, we're just talking about very different things or what's the relationship. But I want to argue in the book is that the closing of gay bars disrupted the field of nightlife and thus encouraged the visibility of other forms of fellowship, like these underground parties that are called club nights, that are the focus in my book now, the word disruption. It describes an unsettled moment of time, either anticipated or unexpected, that alters our routines and the ideas that we take for granted. Recent examples include economic recessions, pandemics, mass shootings, and natural disasters. Sometimes disruptions exacerbate existing inequalities. But just to say that they make things worse, like racial profiling, which increased following the September 11th attacks in the US. A reaction like this occurs because disruptions feel urgent, and those of us who are affected by them are compelled to respond right away. But the problem with rapid responses is that they often target survival, and they seek a return to what is familiar and what feels safe. So, for example, consider what the mayor said to the media when he was talking about the closure epidemic in London. He said, quote, we can save London's iconic club scene or think about what the nights are, which is the mayor of the night in London said to me personally in my interview with her. Places like gay bars are important, according to Amy LeMay, because they help communities to survive saving and survive. Notice the words? My argument is more hopeful. Loss can also be an invitation to create something new. Yes, we absolutely need to see gay bars, but there's a whole other revolution happening in underground places that very few of us know about and very few of us are talking about. And this includes parties like you mentioned, but mitzvah and others in the book, which I'm happy to talk about now, if you'd like to.

JVN Yes, please.

AMIN GHAZIANI I'll take you party hopping in the book, and I feature seven events really up close. We get the party started at Butt Mitzvah, which is an event that celebrates clear Jewish identities. From there, we go to Femmeopia, a party in a basement whose walls sweat as revelers glorify all varieties of femininity. We then head back outside to a party called the Camper Van, an event in and around a caravan, literally, that the organizer drives around the city and sometimes around the country. This particular party, I think, really captures the model of club nights as being spatially mobile and roving events. They move around from place to place in the city, as opposed to a gay bar, which is fixed in a particular part of the city, in a particular neighborhood, and that you can go night after night. That's not the case with these particular parties. Next comes the Cocoa Butter Club, which is a cabaret that prioritizes black and queer performers of color. From there, we go to Hungama, a party that Vogue India calls an explosive underground scene. Hungama is an Urdu word that loosely translates to a celebratory chaos or commotion. It's a party that centers queer South Asians. Then comes Inferno, a techno rave cum performance art platform that prioritizes trans plus non-binary and queer deejays as it celebrates diverse forms of beauty. And finally, there's Gayzpacho, a wildly fun Spanish themed club night that features flamenco dancing and an onstage tomato wrestling competition as an homage to a Valencian festival called Latam Latina. And we visit a number of parties along the way. With those seven we really take a deep dive into. But there are a bunch of other parties that come up in the book and they have fantastic names like Pussy Palace, which is a party I went to just last night Adonis,

sink the pink Angel House meltdown, Fannie erect. Chapter ten, Opulence Transmissions, Aphrodite and a number of others like gorgeous, beautiful, sexy names.

JVN What economic models are these parties using to disrupt like capitalism? Like, how are they sustaining themselves and like finding they're like finding their way of messaging and like getting themselves out there. And how did you find out about them for researching your book?

AMIN GHAZIANI All right. So components operate using a model called crack capitalism. The idea here is to refuse to think about capitalism as exclusively a system of domination, but to also exploit its structural weaknesses. In practice, this would mean the provisional use of abandoned or disused spaces. Meanwhile, use as an example as a developer waits for licenses and permissions before they can begin doing something with the parcel of land they purchased. Some of these party organizers in London have figured out that they can partner with the developer and throw a party at low or no cost, because it's in the benefit of the developer to not have the piece of land sit empty. So it's a macro economic approach for thinking about how to use spaces that are otherwise sitting empty. And this typically happens further from the city center in the fringes. Hence the the imagery, the cracks in the capitalist city. There are also a number of really powerful microeconomic practices that organizers use. This includes something like tiered ticketing, where what you pay reflects your identity and thus your relative privilege in the community. Pay what you can tickets, which is kind of like a sliding scale model that adjusts for people's differential economic capabilities. Pay it forward tickets where you can actually buy a ticket for someone else who maybe doesn't have the means to support the cost of admissions. There's also a model called progressive redistribution of funds. And so really what this means is that some organizers will throw a party for a particular subgroup in our community that maybe has access to more financial resources, and then they will take the proceeds from that party and throw another party for a different group that maybe doesn't have access to the same amount of resources. But doing this creates. The space for them in a way that may not otherwise occur. All of these are door policies, but we also need to think about the party in a holistic context, right? It's not just what happens at the door or what happens when you're inside the club space. When the party's over, you need to get home. How do you get home safely in a context of escalating anti-hate crimes? And so one particular party, as it's called, they're called pussy power. This is the party I went to just last night. They've, pioneered a practice that's called a taxi fund. And so people who come to the party can donate money that organizers use to put people into taxi cabs so that they can return home safely. I mean, it's genius, you know, and it basically all of these policies, including the taxi fund that I just shared for you, it suggests to me a shift from a capitalist model to, a practice of collective care. Hey.

JVN Hey, how did Covid impact like your research?

AMIN GHAZIANI It's absolutely the case that Covid has affected everything in our life, from the surface all the way down very, very, very deep. It's hard for me to answer this question, because what Covid did for me is that it prevented me from coming back to London. So I was in Vancouver, so far away from London, which was the site of my research and longing to be there, but also longing for lots of things. As I'm in lockdown and enclosed in a really small space in my small little apartment, in a high rise in Vancouver. With all this anxiety

about not touching any surfaces or washing my produce at the time you remember, these are really.

JVN Bleach watering cereal boxes, I definitely did.

AMIN GHAZIANI That was super intense. So, you know, it used my my research. I worried that it may have derailed it completely. And I didn't come back to London until 2022, and then only after London had reopened. As they had it here, people were mostly not wearing masks, although some people were still wearing masks. The bars were open. The parties were happening again. So I did not look at specifically what the effects of Covid were upon my life. There is a pandemic here. A sociologist, a researcher in this market, Cormack, and he's a lead author of a study in which they looked at the effects of Covid on nightlife, and they focus on gay bars. And what they found is that, no gay bars closed during Covid, which is this remarkable thing. And that's because gay bars received access to government support, including funding to help them survive when everything was closed down. And this is actually a really creative policy that a lot of European cities are doing. It's been spearheaded, by Berlin. They're redefining nightlife from an entertainment venue to a cultural institution. Now as entertainment venues, bars are compared with brothels, arcades, things like casinos. But as cultural institutions, they are compared with the opera and museums. And when you make that comparison, suddenly they are eligible for government subsidies, tax breaks especially. So, for instance, the bird kind of very famous club in Berlin, when it was redefined from an entertainment venue to a cultural institution, the value added tax that they paid declined from 19% to 7%. That's no joke, right? This. These kinds of things enable places like gay bars as cultural institutions to be more resilient and to survive. Now, with advice that.

JVN Clever? Yeah.

AMIN GHAZIANI It's so clever. I think it's really smart. The advice that I would give to the night czar, the mayor of the night, which is also this official urban governance rule that exists yet also arrived in the US to New York and other cities in the US is that when we think about cultural institutions right now, as with the rest of our conversation about nightlife, we are focusing quite narrowly only on gay bars. And it's about, again, to repeat what I said earlier, it's absolutely important that we protect and preserve. These spaces are hugely important historically, culturally, politically, for all the reasons. Right. But they're not the sum total of nightlife. So it would be nice if we could find a way to also support these club organizers who are creating these marvelous new scenes so that when the next pandemic comes around them, at least be protected in ways that are similar to how gay bars are.

JVN So you conducted so much research for this book and talk to so many people on the way, like, what were your takeaways? What like what does it feel like to be in these spaces? But what do you really want our listeners to know about your experience in these spaces without spoiler alert? Because I want them to read the book.

AMIN GHAZIANI Oh, gosh, that's a that's a big, tricky question.

JVN I know it's a task, honey.

AMIN GHAZIANI Well, first of all, I should say that the book is based on 112 interviews. I went to a bunch of parties over three years, and in 2018, 2019 and again in 2022, and I looked at dozens of municipal reports from the mayor's office. All of that comes together into a race, into a story about what nightlife is like. And that quality of it having a narrative appeal and being accessible is very important to me. When I wrote this book, and I worked very closely with the publisher to make sure that this is something we can all think about and talk about, rather than, writing in a really jargony way that feels like it's restricted to people. That's not my style, and that's not what's happening in this book. So the vibe at these parties, you know, they're it's exuberant, it's gritty, it's kinetic, and it's very queer. It's nothing like a gay bar with it's cleaned up and often gentrified towns, especially in big cities. At least think of it like off the grid and warehouse like, rather than corporatist, commercial and mainstream. Right. It's a very different feel for what it's like. So like, for instance, one of the most striking things about these parties is the lack of any distinct symbols or iconography on the walls. So it's visual emptiness is what makes it radical because it's adaptable. And that's the queerest thing you can do. Something that's empty is expansive in its possibilities. After all these club nights. They're not about the decor, but something deeper. The symbols don't define the space. It's the people that define it. And about those people, and I may have mentioned this earlier, but club nights prioritize the bodies of people who don't normally get to go to a public space and feel like they're centered. So the way we talk about this isn't in London is through demographic categories like community, Bipoc groups, which stands for individuals who identify as queer, trans, black, indigenous, whereas people of color is a new term I've only just heard about this year. It came from Germany, arrived in London late last year in 2023. And so now there are these Flint parties, apple pie and TPA, which stands for female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans and age gender. It's basically an umbrella term for anyone who doesn't identify as cis male. This isn't to demonize this man at all. No, it's just that sometimes people are seeking community and connection and other kinds of places. And that's what these club nights do beautifully. Of course, if we talk about people, we have to talk about what they're wearing. I mean, fashion really matters. Club nights feature much more experimental sartorial styles and elaborate modes of self-presentation, I would say I would ask listeners to think about the last time they were at a gay bar and then say, oh, how are people dressed? How did you dress? The last time you went to a gay bar? That's what I would call anodyne. You know, club nights are expressed in the same black and white versus color. And finally, there's music. It's less Brittany and more black obsidian or Bollywood ballroom, Afrobeats, garage and soundsystem. I would add that club nights often feature POC deejays, even if the event is run by someone who identifies as white. So this is how you can see the sort of broadly queer ethos of the party, which is not specifically confined to a particular racial category either. It's about creating multiple centers of inclusion for people who really struggled for a long time to feel like they belong at gay bars.

JVN What policies can I get now? And I know will you research London? So I guess it's like we're we're in America and we're just going to like fucking figure it out. It's. But actually they're having a lot of trouble in England. Honey, they got those little Tories. They got their little like Terfs and we got our terfs here. But what policy wise do you think needs to happen for it to be like a more equal playing field or better one?

AMIN GHAZIANI Great question. But before I address that directly, I want to say that while this book is about London, to the parties that I'm describing here in London, what I am talking about and what is happening in the city is far from atypical, but instead it's part of a

global pattern. In Toronto, there's *JerK*, a bi annual party that follows the influence of the Caribbean on club cultures. The organizer, Bambi, describes its origins in ways that remind me a lot of what I heard in London. A big problem, Bambi says, is lack of representation. The people with access to power, money and resources tend to be older, white gay men. And for everyone else, DIY is the way to go. The same thing that's happening in London in LA. There's a nightlife collective that prioritizes queer, Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Q&A is not the first time that the community has organized on behalf of itself. In the last several years, the community has incepted a series of events like Bubble Tea in New York City, new Hope Queen in Toronto, Club Koi in Miami, rice cake in Vancouver. Like whether in LA or London, New York or Miami, Vancouver, Toronto, any of these cities, these parties that I'm describing in this one book, they're part of a long and international history. And it goes way back when we were talking about queer parties and the Adelphi Rooms, which is a boarding lodge in London in the 1920s. We're talking about drag parties in speakeasies during American prohibition in the 20s and 30s. We're talking about rent parties that black lesbians organized in the postwar years, in the 40s and 50s in the US, from the 70s onward, we see the emergence of the ballroom scene in the US, with voguing to house music on the East Coast and whacking to disco on the West Coast. In the 80s. We see the the blooming of British rave scene, 80s and 90s, particularly like 87 to 94 raves were huge, from the late 90s. In the 2000s, we see the emergence and global diffusion of the circuit scene, which is a massive scene that happened in the 2010. Hundreds are now starting to see the popularity of queer techno parties at the Burdekin and a lot of these other kinds of places. So, you know, to locate club nights in London in this list does not make them any less important, but more so because it brings to light a hidden history. Each of these parties use the episodic format, and each demonstrates with particular force that nightlife is a place of resilience, reclamation and renewal. Right. So this is big, big, big stuff that's happening here, not unique to London. So I had to say that now about the policy piece, if I may continue, at least when we think about policies, really what we're trying to do here is to figure out how we can take a set of ideas and put them into practice in some kind of a material way. I mentioned one example, and that one example is about how we define nightlife venues, and the recommendation here is to redefine them from an entertainment venue to a cultural institution. That's one model. Now, there are also qualities that club nights have that we actually can extract and apply much more broadly to any number of LGBTQ spaces. So let me just talk about a couple of these that I think are especially important. Articulated consent is the first club night are direct and explicit about consent. In fact, one of the few things you will see on the walls at these parties are taped fliers of their consent policies. I never see this. And gay bars intentional inclusion is a second quality. Comments are not exclusive, but they're not for everyone. They're powered by marginalized communities who have struggled, as I've said before, to find. In places of belonging in gay bars. This gives them an underground quality, both material in that it's like downstairs somewhere in the basement or off in the spatial margins, and also metaphorical in terms of being experimental or non-normative. A related idea is intersectional queerness. As we've already discussed, Jonathan Club nights prioritize the bodies of people who don't normally feel like they can go to a public space and be centered like racialized, non-binary, and trans plus individuals. It was here in London that I, for the first time in my life, found my way to the center of a dance floor that centered me in return. And that was such a powerful but mind blowing experience. Which brings me to the last quality of club nights that I think is worth mentioning. And that's joy. One person I interviewed, his name is Ben Walters. He said fun. Don't get no respect either from society or from the Academy. I love that line and I think he's absolutely right. Club

nights remind us that having fun and feeling joy is life enhancing and deeply political. Right now, these four qualities consent, intentional inclusion, intersectional queerness, and joy are very much confined to the context of club nights. But as a matter of policy, I see no reason why we cannot apply them to gay bars and other kinds of community places to help them continue in the course of their beautiful evolution and make more of our spaces joyful and inclusive.

JVN I love how you write about joy. I love how you prioritize it. Why is queer joy so important, and how can it be a revolutionary force in our lives?

AMIN GHAZIANI This is a beautiful and important question and I'm so pleased you asked. I have lost count of the number of studies that I have read as a sociologist that focus on suffering and social problems, bigotry and bias, discrimination and inequalities. All of those arguments are accurate and absolutely essential for guiding us toward a more just world. And yet, having fun and feeling joy is what sustains us as we grapple with the tough stuff. Steph Shuster and Laurel Westbrook, both of whom are sociologists, call this a joy deficit. When we singularly focus on what makes life miserable, all the problems and the pain, all the things that make it pleasurable vanish from you, but differently, negative experiences are only part of the picture, never its whole. I think we need to insist on joy not as disconnected from a world in which there is suffering, but as a salve to that suffering. Anything but trivial joy, as I mentioned earlier, is life enhancing and deeply political. When we go out and have fun with our friends, really important things are happening. Those moments create a shared emotional energy that promotes group pride and communal attachments. Joy brings us closer together. And as it does, we model positive relationships with each other. Joy can also bloom into a broader politics that can propel us beyond romances of the negative and toiling, in the end, toiling in the present. Those words I borrow from a performance theorist, Jose Esteban Munoz. We must dream, Munoz says, and enact new and better pleasures. Nightlife is where it is.

JVN In times of disruption. As you were saying. Especially like large cultural public disruption, there's so much widespread like feedback and scrutiny. And I feel like in some ways it's kind of changed me. Like it's given me like PTSD, like a second and third and fourth guess myself. And I actually get like anxiety about sharing things now. Like what? What? How do I navigate that? What do you think?

AMIN GHAZIANI I'm sorry that you are having these experiences. I share them, in my version of them, in my world as an academic over the years. And I just feel so embattled with the constant characteristic of critique that characterizes what we as professors do. We, like, ruthlessly critique each other's work and, tear each other down. And sometimes graduate students are taught that the only way that they can make a name for themselves in the discipline is by shredding apart the work of others. This is not necessary. This is not how it's done. This is not a charitable or, approach that is bereft of kindness, and a kind of politics of collective care and mutual support. I think it's utterly misguided. I think it's important for us to reach across the aisle and to engage with each other's ideas and our perspectives on the world in ways that can help us move mutually toward desirable outcomes. I mean, this is the the beauty of the work that we all do. It lends itself to multiple perspectives. None of us is trying to claim that the one perspective we are putting forward with my new book, for instance, represents the totality of how everyone needs to think about nightlife, or that mine

is the first and last word on club nights. No, let a thousand pieces bloom on this. Let's have many more conversations like this. Let's connect with each other so that we can figure out how to create more solidarity, more coalition, more companionship, more and more and more, not less. I think what I'm working on right now, as I've tried to embody the lessons of joy, this big, beautiful idea in my everyday life is to find the courage to be disliked.

JVN Whoa! Fuck! Shit. I mean, that's hardcore. I - wow - my people pleaser has really big feelings on this. And therein lies the crux of all my suffering. I gotta find the courage to be this disliked. Or I am going to be staying Les Miz!

AMIN GHAZIANI That is my advice to you, Jonathan. Find the courage to be disliked.

JVN Oh my God, am I going to cry? That's - Amin - that's so major that like. Wow. I mean where can we follow you the most. Where are you the most active on the socials that we can say engage with your work.

AMIN GHAZIANI I would be delighted if you followed me on either X or Instagram. My handle is @amin_ghaziani and active on both places. But Instagram is cute -

JVN Amin - Jesus tears in my eyes. That was so good. Stick around to our wrap so we can, explore together, people a little more. But, I mean, thank you so much for coming and getting curious. We appreciate your work so much. And also, get Amin's book. It's available now. Long Live Queer Nightlife: How the Closing of Gay Bars Sparked a Revolution, which came out in March, on March 26th. But get it, it's available now. We're gonna include a link in the description. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

AMIN GHAZIANI Thank you for having me.

JVN Okay, you guys, how gorgeous was Amin? I'm obsessed. Go follow him right now. Did means I bought you around, but I certainly did. So did we learn the thing? Why are gay bars closing while we did? It's it's it's a little bit. Well, it's a lot, a bit economic. But also, I think the biggest thing is, is that when we when we read these articles about the closure of gay bars, it's done with this like narrative of like they're feeling they're going away. Like it means that like our community is like in danger. And while we do need to save, and while we do need to have gay bars and access to gay bars because they do play an important role in our community, there is a larger story that's being not told which amine is telling, and that nightlife and and queer gathering spaces are evolving and everything is an evolution, and we don't get to hear kind of the positive aspects and the inclusive aspects that these, that these clubs are doing. And so it's actually like a more hopeful and larger stories than just like, why are the gay bars closing? But really gay bars closing is sparking like community and a revolution of sorts. And I think that's really interesting. So it's not just that like the nightlife is in total decline, it's that like the scene of nightlife and gay bars is diversifying, which I think is really important. There's so much that I took away from this conversation I thought was incredible. The way that cis white gay men have dominated the gay bar scene through history. Very interesting. And so in this study that Amin was talking to the overwhelming majorities of Bipoc respondents, it was 80% of queer black respondents, 79% of Asian respondents, and 78% of South Asian response respondents reported racial bias. And London, which I thought is really huge. And then also these closure amounts don't apply

equally to all queer groups. We know that lesbian bars are closing at a faster rate. And bars that cater to queer people of color are both closing at a more rapid rate than bars that cater to cis white gay men. Oh, I thought the statistic was also really incredible, but, you know, a little concerning. But still, we're giving hopeful. It's that in 1976, there were 2500 gay bars in the US alone, and today there are fewer than 1400 worldwide. So I thought that's interesting. Also good for Gen Z. They are drinking less than previous generations. Sober parties, day raves and festivals are often overlooked. But these are queer spaces that are in fact, thriving. Oh, and I thought this was one of my biggest takeaways, from this conversation. Is that disruption? Shin is often seen as a bad thing. And I think even when I think about what I went through this year, so much of like. What? My. The people around me who I know love me, have talked to me about is like, how do you respond in a way that like returns things to the way that things once were? And I think that's not what we're looking for. And healing disruption can open new space and new ways for new thoughts that can be even better. And while that's scary, I just I really took that personally, like in a good way. Like disruption doesn't have to be bad. It can actually be really good. And I'm often so scared of what disruption can look like in my life. And honey, I think I got to just just embrace this disruption a little bit. I felt I felt so hopeful from that. And it's not only for me. I think so many of us could just work on framing disruption and, just frame things in a way that offers more hope than more fear, because we've got to work hard to, like, unwired this like threat preceptor and our brain like that fucking amygdala, honey. Oh. I also love the way that these night life parties are taking more responsibility or offering a new model. Rather, for like that, the party doesn't just stop when the party's over. It's about getting people home safely. I think that's really beautiful. oh. Also, I'm this is what I'm really like, curious about. How are queer people implementing change in policy, especially in like, conservative spaces? It's giving me, like Danica Rome in, Virginia, like, what's a blueprint that we can use to implement better policy for queer people? And I know that Danica focuses like a lot on transportation, but even just her being there is, like, inherently political. How can we get better policy and, and gain the self-care and like, resilience to like, fucking get it past the finish line because it is just so hard to stay resilient in a world that is like this right now. Oh, and the fuck. And finding the courage to be just like, well, how the hell am I going to do that? Fuck me. But I mean, I love that. I mean, like, I'm I'm going to work on that. I think we got to have, like, a, like a psychologist on or something. Life coach. Something. Okay. Getting curious. We are going deep. I'm loving these episodes. Go, June. Go, Pride. I love you, sluts. We'll see you next time. I'm Getting Curious.

You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description and follow us on Instagram @CuriousWithJVN You can catch us here every Wednesday and make sure to tune in every Monday for episodes of Pretty Curious which we love. It's our pod pass on all things beauty. Get into it. Still can't get enough and you want to get a little spicy with us. You can subscribe to extra curious on Apple podcasts for commercial free listening and our subscription only show, Ask JVN where we're talking sex relationships are really just whatever is on my mind. That week, our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our editor and engineer is Nathaniel McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure and Julia Melfi with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.