

Review symposium on *There Goes the Gayborhood?*[†]

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Introduction

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Gays come to the city; this is an old story. But how they come and what happens next, that is a newer story and one that informs Amin Ghaziani's *There Goes the Gayborhood?* For urban scholars, those schooled in the classics of urban sociology in particular, the case of the gayborhood goes against the inherited analytic grain—in ways taken up with wide-ranging intelligence by a group of critics whose remarks follow this introduction.

The distinctive demographic and cultural texture of a particular group has transformed the meaning of places and their occupants. Before there were gay people, there were “homosexuals” relegated to the “zone of transition”—the city's social dumping ground where investments ceased while awaiting the higher and better uses to come. Granted some degree of refuge through this neglect, gay people's beings could not be discussed much less be featured in urban analysis. The muck of deviance was residual.

What a flip! In the new model of urban dynamism, gays come to be branded as creative heart. The ethnic groups and remaining subalterns may continue the trudge across the concentric rings and into the suburban sectors, but their distinctive potential dissipates as inter-mating and cordiality take their toll. There is, of course replenishment through the new migrants from around the world, sometimes celebrated for their “energies” (or at least cheap labor). But settlements of the other Americans—the great white washed—have become dynamically useless.

The opinion surveys reveal that for no other group has public attitude so shifted as toward gays and lesbians—in an overwhelmingly positive direction. Indeed, the stigma system has almost been turned on its head: gays (the *men* in particular) are where it is happening. Good economic and networking cred comes from associating with their lifestyle, whether as gayborhood resident, once resident, or just part of the alliance.

Of course, as Ghaziani notes, the US is not free of gay oppression, and some of it is systemic and violent. But the gayborhood, as it exists and is widely interpreted, sits as shining beacon: the ghetto on the hill not only for those whose sexuality makes them dream of such a place, but for anyone who dreams that powerful shifts in social and political life are possible.

[†]Amin Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gayborhood?* Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2014, 349 pp. ISBN: 978-0-691-15879-2, \$35 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper). These essays are based on presentations at an “Author Meets Critics” session at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, 24 August 2015, Chicago, IL, USA.

If it can happen with gays, maybe, just maybe, it can happen with other realms like economic democracy, environmental reform—or, here’s a big one—racism.

There Goes the Gayborhood?, alas, betrays the progress not made. The African American version of the ghetto persists too much like it has long been, its denizens neither moving on up as in the classic model nor made into the heartthrobs of consultants and politicians. African Americans have been “out” in what is now the US since before there was a US.

In themselves, gayborhoods provide a diversity to celebrate. But we do not know, as Ghaziani acknowledges, if even they will endure. More importantly, we do not know, and for this we surely need further analysis, how this radical shift can act as precedent for progress and inclusion across the metropolis.

Cultural templates and situated relationships in neighborhood public identity

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The neighborhood study is a sociological genre that dates back to the early 20th century. It addresses the social, spatial, and cultural subsets of larger municipalities, where groups, political and community organizations, commercial districts, networks, and other distinguishing social forms converge and cluster. The public identities of neighborhoods have typically been understood in spatial and relational terms, as places among other places, where people take part in certain activities, purchase certain kinds of items, get jobs in distinct occupations, see local cultural sites, interact with types of people, speak particular languages, worship in distinctive ways, perform ritualized celebrations, and take part in emerging forms of politics and nightlife.

Amin Ghaziani's *There Goes the Gayborhood?* adds sexuality onto the mapping of the changing relationships between groups and places. Yet unlike the neighborhood study genre, this book takes an explicitly cultural approach that transcends specific coordinates on a map. In this way, it broadens the scope of the neighborhood study beyond the spatial ecosystem and conceptualizes place representations as a cultural template. This method has benefits and limitations for our understandings of how groups and places change. It makes for an interesting case to refine the relationship between the two approaches and see what each offers to the other.

A cultural template exists independent of the group and place, and therefore it can be externally applied to various locations (and potentially to various groups). Ghaziani's approach locates patterns across contexts through a range of methods, which has the advantage of showing how macro-patterns become mirrored in the representations of groups in many different places. The gayborhood stands in as a type of place imaginary that Ghaziani decodes using a wide range of data: more than 600 newspaper articles, observations in many different cities, 125 interviews with Chicago residents, and demographic data from the 2000 and 2010 US Censuses about same-sex households. *There Goes the Gayborhood?* brings readers to such locations as New York's West Village, D.C.'s DuPont Circle, L.A.'s West Hollywood, and San Francisco's Castro, while multiple chapters more fully delve into Chicago's changing gay neighborhood landscape, from Boystown to Andersonville.

One of the key patterns Ghaziani discovers is that the historical representation of gayborhoods as "islands of meaning" for those excluded from the wider social and political environment is shifting along with changing ideologies about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) identities. Residential options are expanding for gay residents beyond the urban gayborhood into suburban towns and rural areas, while gentrification is bringing more straight people into the gayborhood. A cultural convergence is taking hold by cohort. Individuals regardless of sexual orientation seek out homes with better performing schools, more affordable housing with more space, and quieter surroundings. Meanwhile, straight people are increasingly attracted to established gayborhoods in a new era of increasing tolerance about sexual orientation.

Secondly, Ghaziani argues that the changing relationships between ideology, group representations, and demographic patterns alter the visibility of gay collective life. The new clusters of same-sex households beyond the urban core lack the same institutional visibility of historic gayborhoods, while the visibility of urban-centered gayborhoods continues mainly through commercial life and political commemorations rather than through concentrations of inhabitants identifying as gay. This new era of social inclusion of older cohorts of gay residents

in cities, suburbs, and rural areas alike complicates the situation for younger cohorts. LGBTQ youth, facing turmoil and violence in their hometowns, continue to look for safe spaces like those experienced by previous generations. They turn to the urban institutions and symbolism of enduring gayborhoods as cultural anchors for their attraction even as older cohorts move out and the identities of gayborhoods weaken.

By locating patterns across contexts, *There Goes the Gayborhood?* transcends localized and regionalized relationships and puts forth an approach to understanding group and place representations as national or even global phenomena. But it also raises an important point: how do we know that the transformation of group-themed places is caused by changes in the representation of groups? It is an interesting dilemma for urbanists and raises three additional questions: (1) what role do situated neighborhoods play in producing power dynamics between new and old groups; (2) how should we think about the historical trajectories of proximate neighborhood spaces; and (3) what do comparisons between different urban and regional locations allow us to see that is distinct from an approach to group-themed places as a cultural template?

In neighborhood studies, the relationship between the macro and micro focuses on the situated social and spatial processes and the relative autonomy of local conditions as sites of cultural production in response to macro changes. In the early 1900s, when US urban sociology was in formation, cities like Chicago were experiencing massive population growth, with over a million inhabitants by the turn of the century. Chicago served as the basis for thinking about the emergence of neighborhoods, their social, political, and economic functions, and their relationships to the physical organization and infrastructure of the city. Macro changes like industrialization, a spreading economic division of labor, and waves of European immigration and Black migration from the South allowed sociologists to observe how the local sorting of groups and places took form. Neighborhoods were seen as actively putting together what became familiar group identities: Italian, German, Polish, Irish, Bohemian, or Black spaces.

Yet the meanings and uses of neighborhoods almost always change over time. The ideology about group representation is certainly part of the process, as are the arrivals of new groups into the landscape, changing dynamics between racial, ethnic, and class-based groupings, and changing forms of commercialization. New interest groups have coalesced, new reified categories—like “Asian” and “Latino”—have emerged, new political and economic alliances have formed in the name of redevelopment, and new ethnic, cultural, and commercial zones have materialized—Koreatown, Little India, and Little Ethiopia are some examples.

Neighborhood studies concerned with situated space prioritize how actors take those macro changes and localize them in specific organizations, interactions, and conflicts and how neighborhood durability and change unfold as dialectical processes. This approach locates the power struggles between groups within neighborhoods as important to the transformation process. As an example, we can see this kind of process at play in a different story about place representation in Watts, L.A.’s most famous Black neighborhood. Watts—like Black neighborhoods all over L.A. and indeed in some other cities as well—has been transformed by international immigration, posing questions about how group power dynamics influence place representation. In its coverage of the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Watts Riots, *The Los Angeles Times* reported:

“Fifty years ago next week, when rioters set Watts on fire, the neighborhood was nearly all black. Today, Latinos make up more than 70% of the population. They fill schools, churches and clinics, and their colorful minimarkets dot the streets. Yet for all of Latinos’ presence, their political power remains nearly nonexistent. Just about every organization, committee and board is headed by African Americans. When the Christmas parade marches down Central Avenue, it features high steppers and gospel singers, never folklorico dancers. Watts, in the view of many outsiders, is still black, even decades after

many black families left for the Inland Empire and the high desert in search of better lives. ‘It’s like we’re a phantom community,’ said Maricela Bañuelos, a resident of 16 years. ‘No one knows or cares to know we’re here.’” (Burmudez and Esquivel, 2015)

When we shift the focus to the relationships between groups in a neighborhood, the explanation about what factors influence the identities of places also changes. Like Ghaziani’s analysis, this approach also locates the relationship between the macro and micro. Yet it reveals additional social mechanisms about how, amidst broader population flows, groups become reconfigured in space. These new intergroup relationships reveal power dynamics that open up another social form that transcends local conditions, and, potentially, transcends even the specificity of the groups in question. In this regard, it produces different points of comparison and a rethinking of the cultural template. Are there similarities and differences in the neighborhood power dynamics that take place between straights and gays, Latinos and African Americans, Chinese and Italians, or hipsters and Orthodox Jews, just to name a few emerging neighborhood intergroup configurations?

The arrangement of macro and micro raises a second point about the dynamics “between” neighborhoods: the issue of spatial adjacency. The idea of spatial adjacency speaks to how a local ecosystem of interdependent neighborhoods changes. The transformation of one neighborhood potentially impacts the transformation of others in close proximity. It has recursive effects: the more the ecosystem changes, the more it absorbs other nearby neighborhoods into the process and reinforces the overall changes. Most cities have various ecosystems in which visibly distinct neighborhoods, despite their themed identities, are politically, economically, and socially intertwined with each other.

We see it vividly in Manhattan. The West Village was once the center of gay New York life, but that representation is changing along with the transformation of its surroundings. SoHo, for example, is no longer the center of New York’s art scene, which, like New York’s gay scene, has concentrated most fully in Chelsea, at least in terms of gallery density. The once abandoned meat packing plants of the Meat Packing District are now filled with restaurants, retail, and tourism. The Bowery is no longer a rooming board area and skid row, replaced in recent decades by upscale residential and retail locations. The Lower East Side lost its identity as a Jewish ghetto long ago, but a tenement museum remains to commemorate it. Italians have also pretty much moved on from Little Italy but its commercialization continues. A combination of Chinatown and the fashionable “East Village” are spreading, overtaking what was previously a Jewish and Italian section.

Here we have six geographically contiguous neighborhoods, all historical sites of some type of group and spatial exclusion and then major residential, demographic, and commercial changes. Comparisons within and between adjacent neighborhoods refocus the analytical inquiry about how neighborhoods change. Together, these dynamics speak to an emerging politics of space impacting the urban ecology. This approach finds micro-conditions localizing, configuring, and circulating macro-processes. To this end, it reveals varied motives, complex group dynamics, and both intended and unintended consequences.

Looking within and between neighborhoods also raises a third issue: whether intercity inquiries identify patterns across contexts or need closer scrutiny of the situated relational conditions? Some authors have described ghetto conditions as commonplace across contexts and have used Chicago’s Black neighborhoods as representative of the US ghetto. However, Mario Small has noted that the South Side is not emblematic (Small, 2014). In fact, we can think about the case of L.A.’s Watts in comparison to Harlem or Chicago’s South Side. The historical reorganization of Watts is quite different in terms of population changes, intergroup relationships, and the politics of new and old groupings. Watts reveals how segregation

and immigration shape new spatial conflicts, whereas Chicago's South side reveals the relationship between segregation and gentrification. Situated dynamics alter comparisons across cities. It could be that emerging dynamics in the gayborhoods of Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Chicago, L.A., and N.Y., among others, are different. Such cities and regions have distinct trajectories of political machines, urban and regional development, and population distributions that need closer scrutiny. The New York region might have more in common with Los Angeles in terms of the diversity of its population; Chicago might be more like Philadelphia in its history of racial politics; and places like Washington, D.C. or Vancouver are much smaller cities, both raising questions about the politics of scale.

There goes the gayborhood? It is a wonderfully complex question and opens up a range of responses into how cities, neighborhoods, and groups endure and change in relationship to each other. Slight shifts in analytic approaches can alter what mechanisms we see as influencing these dynamic relationships. Ghaziani's contribution to the study of the gayborhood brings sexuality to the surface of the classic map of group and place representations, highlighting cultural approaches to place identity. This work raises additional questions for urban studies about whether the changing gayborhood is a distinct phenomenon or part of a new age of a more general openness toward dense urban life, which has in turn created new conflicts over neighborhood belonging. How such cultural approaches and situated spatial approaches influence each other is part of the necessary conversation that can hopefully continue to move urban studies forward.

Three reflections on *There Goes the Gayborhood?*

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Amin Ghaziani's *There Goes the Gayborhood?* is an important book. It is timely; it provides reasoned grounds for any future discussion of a momentous social transformation; it adds an important case for the armamentarium of future urbanists; and it is deeply politically consequential. This much, I think, is clear. Rather than talking about what the book explicitly does, however, I would like to focus on what happens in the text almost by accident: the important insights and questions that *There Goes the Gayborhood?* raises when we squint at it from an angle. Doing so, I raise three issues: (1) the theoretical importance of the book's tone; (2) the importance of actors' claim on space as a way to understand the everyday phenomenology of belonging, and; (3) the conceptualization of a neighborhood as the spatially located intersection of biographies.

I

One of the most important features of Ghaziani's book, both narratively and theoretically, is in some ways orthogonal to its substantive arguments. Instead, it is found in its narrative tone.

Sociologists (like everyone else, for that matter) take sides. We are incensed by injustice; we root for the downtrodden. Despite some assertions of scientific neutrality, sociology is a humanistic endeavor. As well it should be. But, too often, our sympathies color the narratives we tell in monochrome. This is the case with studies that narrate change in slightly futuristic optimism; but this is most markedly the case when our sense of injustice is overlaid with a nostalgia for better times, when a tone of longing and sadness pervades over the text. Thus, one of the oldest tropes of sociology is that of the loss of face-to-face community and its replacement with cold and distanced contractual relations.

Faced with this tradition of longing, it is remarkable that Ghaziani manages to keep the tone of his book ambivalent. At times he mourns the loss of the gayborhoods he once knew; at other times he is palpably excited about the new possibilities and selves that are now open to LGBTQ people in the United States' major cities. Rather than being either victorious or critical, he oscillates between them. In doing so, Ghaziani brings to mind the kind of ambivalence that was the mark of some of the most exciting work of urban thought.

For Simmel, of course, ambivalence was the name of the game. The money economy was both incredibly exciting as it translated the world into the language of pure potential, while it simultaneously destroyed quality with its translation in quantity. The modern city was both a space of incredible freedom and of blasé-like alienation. But this is also the tone that makes one of the most important precursors to Ghaziani's book—Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto* (1928)—such a classic work. For, in Wirth's telling of the Ghetto, the Jews who leave the Chicago ghetto often found themselves in a world they could never truly be a part of—a world that accepted them nominally, but never deeply. They ended up both lamenting their freedom and celebrating it. Some rediscovered their Judaism, others tried in vain to blend in. Social transformations, as Ghaziani reminds us, are never politically or existentially clear-cut. It is this ambivalent sociological telling that allows *There Goes the Gayborhood?* to so powerfully capture our attention. It is this existential overtone of the book that raises the next two points.

II

Like all academic books, authors need to choose a method. Ghaziani's choice of interviews, media, and statistical work is a worthy one. Still, a reader is always burdened by the proclivities and the sensitivities of the author's method of choice. As a phenomenologically tinged interactionist, there were whiffs of observations in the book that sent my imagination racing. These are things that researchers could conceivably get from interviews, but usually do not—what does it feel like for someone gay to walk through a gayborhood? How does the felt ownership of space play out in the fleeting moments of everyday life?

A first hint of the importance of the ownership of space comes from Ghaziani's own reminiscing about his days in Chicago's Boystown neighborhood. As he describes the seemingly inexorable invasion of double strollers into his gayborhood, he tells of the little ways that he and his friends tried to signal to the straight people moving in that they were not on their own turf: "...we deployed a stealth micropolitics of street-level resistance by staring at straight men with all the carnal lust we could muster" (Ghaziani, 2014: 5).

Similarly, in an extended episode Ghaziani borrows from another ethnographer, he tells of a moving interaction in which a gay couple kissing in a gay parade in a gayborhood is asked not to kiss for the sake of the tender soul of a straight man's daughter. The episode is memorable, especially since another straight observer deigns to tell the gay couple (as they argue that they can do whatever they want on their turf) that they should be grateful that straights allow them their freedom. As they are on their turf, the gay couple stand their ground, and the straight dad and his children are the ones who move away.

These episodes open up a question that future ethnographers of the gayborhood may find important. Despite growing acceptance, what is the micro-interactional price that LGBTQ people pay for moving from a space that is experientially owned, to one that belongs to the unmarked American? Although they are nominally able to be simply "the neighbors next door," would they resist if someone asked them not to kiss "in front of the kids?" Would they even feel comfortable with public displays of affection?

Ghaziani cannot be held accountable to questions he does not ask, but there is an important existential arena that he fleetingly uncovers. Although acceptance of same-sex relationships is on the rise, it does not go very deep. If this is the case, the micro-threads in the fabric of everyday life would show the strain. If the shifting structure of American gayborhoods is part of an ongoing emancipatory political project, then these small moments are worth more of our attention.

III

Lastly, the book is notable in another way—in its choice of the blocks from which the processes he narrates are built. Ghaziani attributes changes in neighborhood structure in places like Boystown, the Village, and the Castro in part to rising general acceptance and changes in technology. And whereas the identification of these social transformations may not be entirely novel, the author does so in a concrete way that is often curiously absent in other scholarship. Rising acceptance and the advent of the internet age are not general coordinates, but things that are firmly located in people's patterned biographies.

This biographical shift comes from both ends of residents' "neighborhood careers," from the young and from the old. Young people come out of the closet earlier than they ever did, and with fewer repercussions—they often stay at their parents' home; they may even be voted "prom queen" in their schools. Similarly, with the advent of dating applications such as Grindr, the bars of old are increasingly replaced with virtual hangouts, pick up places that can materialize without the need to go to specialized locales. In short, then, young people do not need the neighborhood in the same way that they did before—the cocoon is not as necessary, and the spaces of sociability are dispersed in cyberspace.

At the other end, based on the interviews he collected, Ghaziani shows that as LGBTQ individuals get older, their identities become more complex. Yes, they are gay; but they are so many other things as well. Being gay, then, does not need to be existentially conceived as the primary master status they live through. As some gays in their 30s and 40s start thinking about raising a family, for example, they find that the rising acceptance practically means that they can leave the gayborhood for the suburbs and become not just the gay neighbors next door but simply the neighbors next door.

In leveraging a biographical method to understanding neighborhood life, Ghaziani's book is paradigmatic of what can be termed a biographical shift in the understanding of space. Stripped to its theoretical bones, Ghaziani defines a neighborhood as the predictable intertwining of biographical moments, along with their pragmatic and existential concerns. These biographies do not simply inhere in space but give space its meaning. The disruption of the gayborhood occurs through the ways in which larger societal and technological shifts change biographical patterns. Without the biographical patterns that sustained them (in many places, though not all of them, as Ghaziani is careful to note), these safe havens slowly disintegrate.

This is not a completely novel idea. As urban ethnographers such as Jack Katz, Michael DeLand, and David Trouille point out, thinking biographically is a powerful way to analyze social scenes. What Ghaziani's work does, however, is to go well beyond well-bounded scenes to think about large-scale social changes through the patterning of biographies. And though connecting personal biographies to sweeping historical changes has long been the essence of the sociological imagination, using biography as an analytical tool in such a way is a much rarer, and important, way of thinking of the social.

What is it that *you want*?

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A straight man from Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood commenting on the integration of the gayborhood "aggressively waved his index finger in [Ghaziani's] face and said, 'This is what *you* wanted. *You* wanted equality. *You* wanted your rights. This is it!'" (Ghaziani, 2014: 91). Similarly, a straight woman in Chicago's Boystown neighborhood commented: "Isn't that what gays have always wanted? People are moving into a space that you originally carved out, and now it's just okay. You're accepted. We're all in this together. You don't need to have a segregated space anymore" (p. 88).

While *There Goes the Gayborhood?* is rich with the voices of gay men and lesbians in Chicago and across the country, my comments focus on the voices of the "straights" in the book, like the man and woman quoted above. I argue that Ghaziani presents their viewpoints but does not answer their question. "Isn't that what gays have always wanted?" the woman asks, referring generally to residential integration. "This is what *you* wanted," the man rants in defense of his decision to move into the gayborhood. Both of these comments reflect Ghaziani's finding that heterosexuals feel a growing "cultural sameness" between themselves and gays and lesbians, and they see their residence in gayborhoods as an important indication of their tolerance. Still, they sense resistance to their presence in the gayborhood, which confuses them and motivates their somewhat dismissive, somewhat insistent inquiry: "What is it that *you want*?" This unspoken question lurks throughout *There Goes the Gayborhood?* but Ghaziani never responds.

I have an answer. I'm not a lesbian, I don't live in a gayborhood, and I don't study LGBTQ communities. Instead, I'm Black, I live in a Black neighborhood, and I study Black communities. And Black people get asked the same question: What is it that *you want*? The situation for the Black and LGBTQ communities is definitely not the same, but I could not help but read the gayborhood through the prisms of racism, racial residential segregation, and the Black political positions that arise in response. So, I take the question to be directed at a range of groups that experience marginalization, discrimination, and violence in neighborhoods and beyond.

What is it that *you want*? What is it that *we want*? We want visibility and invisibility, we want high expectations and low expectations, we want to be able to love out loud and keep our business to ourselves, and, finally, we want freedom to move and freedom to congregate. These are obviously contradictory pairs, but that is exactly what "you" get, and we want it too.

We want visibility and invisibility. Boystown in Chicago is marked by 20-foot-high metallic pylons adorned with the rainbow flag and marked with tributes to pioneering gay figures. Many businesses also don the rainbow flag. We want visibility in the built environment. We also want to be bodily visible. We want our lesbian-ness, our gayness, our queerness, our trans-ness, and/or our Asian-ness, our Black-ness, our immigrant-ness to be seen. "One of my best friends is gay, but I don't really see him like that" is not a compliment! "She's Black, but she's just, like, normal" is not a progressive statement! "They're from a poor neighborhood, but you'd never know it," is not cool! It's a fake invisibility anyway. The fact that the first part acknowledges that you see a particular part of our identities makes the second part about not noticing a lie. We want visibility. Gay and..., Black and..., Poor and....

Yet many of Ghaziani's straight interviewees went in precisely the opposite direction, grumbling about gay people's visibility. "If I'm being frank with you," said one straight man, "...I would like to see the [gay pride] signs taken down" (p. 91). Another favored the name change of a local gay bar from the more explicit Manhole to the less descript Hydrate. He

said, “You don’t have to call it Manhole to prove the point” (p. 90). In other words, just be quiet about your gayness. Be a little less visible. Nope, we want visibility.

We also want invisibility. Don’t stare, don’t gawk, don’t whisper, don’t beep, don’t hoot, don’t recoil, don’t sigh, don’t spit, don’t eye-roll, don’t double-take, don’t look away, don’t stutter, don’t clinch, don’t mimic, don’t giggle, and definitely do not touch! One of Ghaziani’s straight interviewees described her friends visiting her in Boystown from the Chicago suburbs. She said, “Most of the people that I’m friends with are straight, and they don’t really understand a gay lifestyle and automatically judge it. It’s a cultural shock” (p. 172). That’s your cultural shock, not ours, so keep it to yourself. We want to be unremarkable while we grocery shop, pick up our dry cleaning, get coffee, interview for a job, work out at the gym, and drop our kids off at school. When I say unremarkable, I don’t mean that we’ve erased, subdued, or hidden our markers of difference. That difference is our phenomenal-ness. As Maya Angelou says: “It’s in the reach of my arms/The span of my hips/The stride of my step/The curl of my lips. I’m a woman/Phenomenally./Phenomenal woman,/That’s me” (1995: 3). In other words, we *are* remarkable. We just do not want you to remark on it as we go about our daily business.

We want high expectations and low expectations. The desire for high expectations is especially relevant for Blacks and Latinos, and all women, but I suspect that gays and lesbians also get the skeptical side eye when trying to excel in fields that rest upon rigid conformity to gendered and sexed scripts and ideologies. That is nonsense and ugly homophobia. Gay men can be great Boy Scout leaders. In general, expect that we are competent, and often even expert. We can get good grades. We can write. We can spend good money in stores. We can run a bank, a university, a military, a city, a tech company, a sports team, a scientific research project, the world.

On the other hand, please lower your expectations of us. We cannot speak for all (*fill in your preferred minority group here*, e.g., South Asians, bisexuals, undocumented immigrants, first generation college students, West Indians, transmen, etc.). We do not know all of the lyrics to every Diana Ross song. Do not expect women to do the emotional labor in the office, Blacks to be your basketball stars, or gays to decorate your new condo. We are just as likely to be ordinary, fallible, flat, boring, clumsy, colorblind, or insensitive as anyone else. Maybe if you think of us that way, you would not overrun our neighborhoods. Ghaziani reviews the literature on the attention that gayborhoods are currently receiving by pundits, politicians, and real estate investors. City boosters and tourism campaigns promote gay neighborhoods as the center of a “geography of cool.” The promotion of gayborhoods and ethnic enclaves feeds on outsiders’ high expectations to see something different, curious, and maybe even bizarre. C’mon people, lower your expectations. We aren’t *that* interesting.

We want to be able to love out loud and to keep our business to ourselves. One of the most upsetting stories in *There Goes the Gayborhood?* comes from the fieldwork of another urban ethnographer, Theodore Greene, in Washington D.C. The incident goes as follows:

“On the last Tuesday of every October, hundreds of straight and gay people crowd the sidewalks of 17th Street in DC in order to cheer on approximately fifty drag queens racing in stiletto heels from P Street NW to R Street NW. As the drag queens paraded along the street, taking photos with the spectators, and hamming it up to the audience, a young gay white couple began lightly kissing each other on the lips. A 30-something white man with a young girl hoisted on his shoulders pats one of the gay men on the shoulder and asked him if the young men would refrain from kissing in front of his daughter. One of the gay men responded by asking... why he feared his daughter watching two men showing affection ‘in their neighborhood’.... As the argument escalated, another straight couple jumps into the argument, saying that the father meant no real harm, and reminds

the gay couple how lucky they should be that this event has the support of straight people (p. 253)

We want to be able to love out loud, not just in our own neighborhoods, but in every neighborhood. This event also speaks to the other things we want: We want to be invisible, especially with respect to a mundane act like a light kiss. We want low expectations. Do not come for the drag show and then have high expectations that we will conform to some strict code of Victorian restraint that shuns all forms of public displays of affection. You must understand each of the other things that we want in order to accept us loving out loud and in person.

At the same time, however, what we do behind closed doors is our business. Ghaziani argues that there is a strong position emerging among those who might be called post-gays, one that relegates sexuality strictly to “a private matter related to how I spend my evenings” (p. 248), not a social, public, or political identity. That is the side of us that wants to keep our business to ourselves.

Finally, we want the freedom to move and the freedom to congregate. Ghaziani concludes that the gayborhood might be changing, moving, transforming, being revived elsewhere or multiplying into smaller, more identity-specific communities, but it is neither dead nor dying. Consider Ghaziani’s summary statement about the residential choices of gays and lesbians:

“The post-gay era is undoubtedly reconfiguring decisions that individual gay and straight people make about where they wish to live.... [G]ays swing between disfavoring gay districts, articulating the variety of arguments that we have already heard, yet still seeking some semblance of a community that is based in a specific, identifiable part of the city. (p. 133)

On the one hand, then, we want the freedom to move. Ghaziani’s analysis of newspaper articles uncovered the following quote to this effect: “Why should we be in a gay ghetto? No way. Why shouldn’t we be in a mainstream community where it’s beautiful?” (p. 47). In order to feel welcome and safe in such neighborhoods requires an end to antigay bias. Ghaziani reports that 27% of respondents to a Gallup poll in 2006 said they would not want gays as neighbors, and that same-sex couples are 25% more likely than opposite-sex couples to be rejected by landlords. This discrimination constrains our freedom of movement.

We also want to congregate. We want the freedom to build neighborhoods that are safe, affirming, welcoming, comfortable, affordable, accessible, and nurturing. We can turn *segregation* into *congregation* (Lewis, 1993; Lipsitz, 2011). But we do not want our congregation to be your excuse to dump on us or, alternatively, to treat our neighborhoods as destinations for your field trips.

“What is it that *you want?*” While the answers I have offered come from Ghaziani’s own data, I can understand why he avoided tackling the question head on. In *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Du Bois ([1903] 2015) wrote: “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question... How does it feel to be a problem?” (p. 3). The slightly exasperated question “What is it that *you want?*” similarly conjures the problematic nature of marginalized communities in the eyes of the privileged and, consequently, the problematic nature of the former’s political demands. Du Bois rebuffed such questions. “I answer seldom a word,” he wrote. Perhaps Ghaziani’s intent was to also invoke this righteous silence.

The radical potential of post-gay politics in the city: A reply to Molotch, Deener, Tavory, and Pattillo

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What a wonderful opportunity to be in conversation with Andrew Deener, Harvey Molotch, Mary Pattillo, and Iddo Tavory about the social life of the gayborhood. I thank them for their careful comments.

Two observations motivated my research. First, I was responding to a series of media reports and community forums that asked whether gay neighborhoods are becoming culturally obsolete in an era of acceptance. Is it possible, as the *New York Times* declared on its front page (Leigh Brown, 2007), that “Gay Enclaves Face Prospect of Being *Passé*?” Soon after, I learned about an urgent roundtable session that the GLBT Historical Society of Northern California organized in the late 2000s: “Are Gay Neighborhoods Worth Saving?” they asked (Brigham, 2006).

All neighborhoods change, of course. This is not a novel observation. But I am convinced that the “cultural template” of the gayborhood, as Deener calls it in his remarks, is changing in unique ways as the long arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. Hence, the questions that motivate the narrative trajectory of my book: How does greater social and political acceptance of sexual minorities affect their geographic expressions? What are the urban effects of liberalizing attitudes toward homosexuality? I tell a story about how the spatial expressions of sexuality have shifted from a “social dumping ground” to “the ghetto on the hill,” as Molotch noted in his introduction to this symposium.

Demographers who analyze the US Census show that zip codes associated with gayborhoods are deconcentrating (Spring, 2013). Fewer same-sex households lived in them in 2010 than in 2000. In fact, same-sex households now reside in 93% of all counties in the country (Gates and Cooke, 2011). This forces us to ask whether the public identity or collective visibility of a neighborhood depends on its residential portfolio (Deener, 2010; Greene, 2014). Take Seattle as an example. The number of same-sex households in that city increased in every single neighborhood—with one notable exception: its most traditionally gay neighborhood of Capitol Hill. There, the number of gay and lesbian households plummeted by 23% (Balk, 2014). Meanwhile, in Philadelphia, what was once officially branded as the “Gayborhood” is now being actively rebranded as “Midtown Village” (Kruger, 2014). On the other hand, Chicago became the first city in the United States to use tax dollars to municipally mark its “Boystown” gayborhood by installing art deco-styled rainbow pylons along North Halsted Street (Johnson, 1997). And cities like Austin, Key West, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, and West Hollywood have installed permanent rainbow crosswalks in their respective gayborhoods (Rivas, 2015).

How do we make sense of these disparate trends? What mechanisms contribute to the cultural distinctiveness of an urban area? And which ones undermine it?

To figure this out, I collected more than 600 newspaper articles that reported on 27 urban, suburban, and rural areas of the country and spanned 40 years of coverage, from 1970 to 2010. I used this data to zoom out and get a birds-eye view of trends across the country. I also wanted to walk the streets of gay neighborhoods, of course, to look at life up close. So, I also interviewed 125 Chicagoans, gay and straight, residents and business owners, from two neighborhoods: Boystown, the city’s historically gay district, and Andersonville, located to the north of Boystown. In recent years, more straights are moving into Boystown, and more

gays are moving into Andersonville and other parts of the city. Finally, I looked at opinion polls, like Gallup and Pew, and Census data.

By only counting coupled households, the Census underestimates the size of the nonheterosexual population. It excludes those who are not partnered [about a quarter of gay men and two-fifths of lesbians are in relationships at any given time (Gates and Ost, 2004: 15)], those who do not live with their partner, those who are unwilling to identify the sex of the other member of their household (or to identify the individual as something other than a roommate), those who self-identify as bisexual, and those who self-identify as transgender (Hayslett and Kane, 2011). But still, the Census is one of the few probability samples we have about the gay and lesbian population, and it creates an opportunity to exploit the unique advantages of qualitative research, which can identify the mechanisms of urban change.

This brings me to my methodological objective in the book. Demographic statistics obscure motivation and the texture of personal experiences. When “phenomenologically tinged interactionists,” to borrow a phrase from Tavory’s reflection, encounter interview data like mine, they wonder about the situated nature of social life. What does it actually feel like to be in a gay bar that has a significant number of straight patrons? Or to walk along rainbow-lined streets next to straight couples holding hands? Interviews can capture this if researchers ask about concrete personal experiences, specific and memorable situations, groups of people, and the interactions among them—even if we were not around when the action occurred.

What, then, did I find from all of this? Some gays are being priced out, while others are evolving out. Let’s think about each idea. Consider some statistics. First, areas of the city with large concentrations of gay and lesbian households experience greater increases in housing prices compared to the national average. More specifically, in areas where male same-sex households comprise more than 1% of all households (which, incidentally, is three times the national average), we see a 13.8% price increase. In areas where female same-sex households comprise more than 1% of all households, we see a 16.5% price increase. The national average is 10.5% (Kolko, 2013). Basically, “the gayer the block, the faster its values will rise” (Abraham, 2014).

Second, despite the myth of gay affluence, gays and lesbians are more likely than heterosexuals to be poor. According to a June 2013 report produced by the Williams Institute that analyzed ACS data, 11.9% of same-sex households (male and female) are living in poverty, compared to 5.7% of married, opposite-sex households (Badgett et al., 2013). The average household income for same-sex couples raising children is \$15,000 less than straight families with kids (Burns, 2012). Poverty rates are even higher for certain subgroups, such as African Americans and women in same-sex partnerships.

Finally, straights will always outnumber gays. According to the most recent statistics from a US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey, 1.6% of the population identifies as gay or lesbian, and an additional 0.7% identifies as bisexual (Ward et al., 2014).

These numbers pose some puzzles. Gay neighborhoods experience greater increases in housing costs, yet gays and lesbians, who comprise a small proportion of the population, earn less than heterosexuals. These districts are not residentially sustainable, therefore, unless gays never move out, or if they own their home, they only sell to other gay people. Neither is plausible.

This conversation alludes to my theoretical objective. I wanted to show how economics-based interpretations of gayborhoods are valid but overstated for several reasons. First, gentrification arguments emphasize black-to-white and poor-to-affluent transitions. They say little about gay-to-straight shifts beyond folding them into existing frameworks. But sexuality

is epistemologically distinct from race and class (Sedgwick, 1990), and so knowledge built by race and class will have an imperfect bearing on sexuality.

Second, economic statistics are often packaged in theoretical arguments about the “creative class” (Florida, 2002). This perspective is designed for a “neoliberalized terrain” (Peck, 2005: 764), one that exploits gay neighborhoods as urban amenities that straights can consume while performing an identity as cosmopolitan and tolerant—without the backing of political action. Ask a straight person who lives in a gay neighborhood whether she supports gay rights. Then follow-up and also ask if she has ever donated money to an LGBT charity, wrote a letter to a political official, or marched in a demonstration. This gap, which I call *performative progressiveness*, reminds us that gay people live in a world that accepts us “nominally, but never deeply,” as Tavori wrote so hauntingly.

Third, social class analysis cannot fully explain residential turnover anyway since class diversity is a documented aspect of contemporary gay districts. There is “a gayborhood for (almost) every pocketbook” (Kolko, 2013), in the words of the former chief economist at Trulia.

Finally, economic approaches risk being historically myopic when they overlook what I believe is a crucial insight: gay neighborhoods are “a spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression” (Lauria and Knopp, 1985: 152). When the nature of oppression changes, so too should the spatial response.

In short, we need to keep the theoretical agenda open, as Molotch advises (Molotch et al., 2000), by including all relevant variables, including the economic (things like prices and poverty), the cultural (the role of sexual meanings), and the political (the effects of laws and public opinion).

Consider that gay neighborhoods formed following World War II, and they flourished during “the great gay migration” (Weston, 1995: 255) of the 1970s and 1980s. Gays and lesbians invested in these areas “at a financial and social cost that only ‘moral refugees’ are ready to pay” (Castells, 1983: 161).

We now live in a time characterized by an unprecedented societal acceptance of homosexuality. In fact, gay life is now so open in places like Canada, the UK, and the US that it’s moving “beyond the closet” (Seidman, 2002). This new era, one that some people call “post-gay” (Collard, 1998a, 1998b), contributes to the “de-gaying” (Ruting, 2008: 260) of gayborhoods in two ways. First, the assimilation of sexual minorities into the mainstream expands their residential imagination beyond the bounded streets of a gayborhood to the entire surrounding city. “San Francisco is the Castro,” for example. Or “the entire island of Manhattan is gay.” I call this *the gay city effect*: we are moving away from gay neighborhoods toward gay cities.

In addition, as sexual orientation recedes in centrality in everyday life, many residents say that they do not really care if a person self-identifies as gay or straight. Nate Silver is a great example. Silver rose to fame for predicting the outcome of the 2008 presidential election with stunning precision. In 2009, *Time* magazine named him as among “The World’s 100 Most Influential People,” while *Out* magazine selected him as their “Person of the Year” in 2012. During his interview with the editor of *Out*, Silver said something that stuck. He described himself as “sexually gay but ethnically straight” (Hicklin, 2012). This is no small statement. The shouty, “We’re here! We’re queer! Get used to it!” from the prior generation is being replaced by a whispery post-gay apologia. As one reviewer of my book remarked, “Maybe Dorothy doesn’t need Oz anymore” (Munt, 2014).

This brings me to my most ambitious intellectual objective. I think the meanings and material significance of sexuality are changing in fundamental ways. Indicators include: (i) changes in public opinion that show a dramatic liberalization in attitudes toward homosexuality (Loftus, 2001; Twenge et al., 2015); (ii) legislative changes that came to a

crescendo with the Supreme Court's recent *Obergefell* decision; (iii) network effects: the number of Americans who have a close friend or family member who is gay or lesbian has increased by a factor of three over the last two decades, from 22% in 1993 to 65% today (Jones et al., 2013); and finally, (iv) the average age of coming out has declined from 37, for those in their 60s, to 21 for those in their 30s and 17 for Millennials (Williams, 2010).

I use the term post-gay to reflect the fact that some gay men and lesbians have the freedom to define themselves beyond their sexuality—and thus live and socialize in places beyond the gayborhood. But let me be clear: post-gay does not mean post-discrimination. What it tells us is that scholars can no longer be content with the isolated case study that happens to incorporate gay districts or with casting gay people as nothing but gentrifiers. We cannot reduce the relationship between sexuality and the city to its economic expressions, nor can we neglect the cultural and political drivers of urban change in the context of gay neighborhoods.

Now, this entire conversation represents just the first part of my book. There is a reason why I put a question mark at the end of the title. What do we learn about queer lives when we look at them through the lens of a gayborhood? What is it we ultimately *want*? Pattillo uses her remarks to think deeply about this powerful question. “We want visibility and invisibility,” she writes. “We want high expectations and low expectations, we want to be able to love out loud and keep our business to ourselves, and, finally, we want freedom to move and freedom to congregate. These are obviously contradictory pairs, but that’s exactly what ‘you’ get, and we want it too.”

As I was trying to understand how and why gayborhoods are changing, I encountered a number of surprises, which formed the basis for a type of abductive theorizing (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). One of my most striking findings pertains to the unexpected emergence of new spatial clusters for same-sex couples with kids, LGBTQ people of color, lesbians, and aging gays and lesbians.

Clearly, the notion of decline is oversimplified and overstated. Plurality is the name of the new game. To claim that there is only one gayborhood—and then critique it for being homogeneous—is to miss this important point (e.g., Hunter, 2015).

We can even think about Grindr, with its GPS-enabled mobile technology platform, as offering “virtual hangouts” that obviate the need for a material “cocoon,” as Tavory observes. The Internet serves up creative and protean proxies for queer space wherever a user happens to be at the moment he logs on, provided there is a critical mass of others in the same area, regardless of whether that’s in a formally recognized gayborhood.

These groups teach us to maintain a critical eye on the exclusions and inequities that gayborhoods create. But they also challenge a triumphalist reading of integration and inclusion. Much like Pattillo’s arguments about race (Pattillo, 2014), I think that sexual integration rests on an unstated “problem” of homosexuality. Celebrating integration and straight inclusion in gay neighborhoods as evidence of equality valorizes heterosexuality as a symbol for the normal and the moral. This makes me deeply uncomfortable. Integration may be a means to achieving equality, but it cannot be the substance of equality, which must include things like employment nondiscrimination, closing the sexual orientation wage gap, addressing escalating anti-gay hate crimes, and redressing housing discrimination.

You see, we want to share our common humanity with heterosexuals *and* celebrate what makes us beautifully distinct—and quite unlike you, I might add. Only after we reimagine the meaning of sexual integration will we realize the radical potential of post-gay politics in the city.

I’ll close by simply saying that it’s time for us to elevate the status of gay neighborhoods—and queer spatial expressions more generally—as a central node for intellectual inquiry.

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