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From Disco to Daybreaker: Neoliberal subjectivity and hierarchy at sober morning raves

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Rose Dwyer

Committee in charge:

      Professor Sarah Hankins, Chair
      Professor Amy Cimini
      Professor Ameeth Vijay

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The Thesis of Rose Dwyer is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California San Diego

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

From Disco to Daybreaker: Neoliberal subjectivity and hierarchy at sober morning
raves

by

Rose Dwyer

Master of Arts in Music

University of California San Diego, 2019

Professor Sarah Hankins, Chair

Little research has been done on sober early morning raves, yet their mixture
of neoliberal wellness ideology with club culture aesthetics make them a rich site of
study for scholars interested in club cultures, neoliberalism, and contemporary
culture. I examine the NYC-based Daybreaker, asking what ideological and aesthetic
losses emerge in the move from original dance music club cultures – originating in

queer and person of color (QPOC) communities – to Daybreaker. Through an

analysis of Daybreaker videos, interviews with CEO Radha Agrawal, and literature on

disco, techno, and rave, I argue that even as Daybreaker emphasizes community as

a core value, it ultimately reneges on QPOC club culture's ethics of community,

which relied on practices that destabilized subjectivity and hierarchy in order to blur

the boundaries between self and other. Rather, Daybreaker supports the production

of neoliberal subjectivity and neoliberal and bio-moral configurations of hierarchy,

upholding these boundaries. Linking QPOC club culture's practices to queer failure

and Afro-pessimist refusal, I show that Daybreaker's support for neoliberal

subjectivity and hierarchy amount to an emptying out of early club cultures'

subversive ideals, using aesthetics of resistance to promote submission into

neoliberalism. I argue that by supporting neoliberalism and bio-morality, Daybreaker

supports material and ideological systems that disproportionately harm queer people

of color.

INTRODUCTION: START YOUR DAY WITH ENERGY AND INTENTION

On a boat in the New York Bay, silhouetted against the Manhattan skyline, five partygoers dressed in athletic gear and whimsical costumes smile, raise their hands in the air, and move their bodies to the beat. The pastel blue color of the sky above tells us it is early in the morning. A woman in her late twenties to early thirties, clad in yoga pants and top, holds her water bottle in the air, grinning triumphantly. To her left, a man in jumbo blue-framed sunglasses, head peaking out of a shark-themed onesie, moves his arms and dances exuberantly. His friend to the left wears a gold lamé cape. As the camera pans backwards, the presence of the cityscape in the frame grows. In the final moments that they fill the frame, the five partiers look at the camera, demonstrating that they are wide awake, happy, and ready to start their day – to head back into the city where their workday awaits them. The text overlaying this moment reads: "At Daybreaker, we bring together a community committed to a lifestyle of wellness, dance, music and mischief."[1]

From here one, we are presented with various scenes of the Daybreaker party in quick succession: A birds-eye view scene of the interior of the boat: at least fifty people crowding around the dance floor; blue and white streamers hanging from the upper deck of the ship; balloons scattered on the floor. Six partiers on mustache-emoji-themed bouncy balls, bounding through the isle of a high-end department store, framed by glittery makeup and jewelry stalls; open-mouthed smiles on all of

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[1] *Daybreaker Moments of Magic // About Us,* 0:1.

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their faces. An expansive, dimly lit nightclub filled with people on yoga mats, holding their feet in their hands. A crowd of partiers, clapping and gathered in a circle around a break-dancer, spinning around the circle. A shot of a performer hugging someone else onstage; a shot of partiers dressed in American themed outfits, paired off and hugging each other. The closing text reads:

> The next 4 years are about more love, more belonging, more dancing and more friendships. No substances needed. We choose to be happy. We choose to say yes. We choose to wake up & dance. It's a beautiful thing to be alive, huh?[2]

<div align="center">---</div>

What I have just described are scenes from the Daybreaker promotional video featured on Daybreaker's "About Us" page. Daybreaker is a sober morning dance party, co-founded by Radha Agrawal and Matthew Brimer in 2013. Currently active in 25 cities across the globe, Daybreaker puts on ten or more events per month, with 5,000 attendees on average per month.[3] Although not the first morning dance party – Morning Gloryville, based in the UK, began hosting parties a few months before Daybreaker – I choose to focus on Daybreaker because it has a wider reach than Morning Gloryville, and because I am interested in looking at US club and neoliberal culture.

In this paper, I argue that Daybreaker is a dance party that illustrates core paradigms of neoliberal subjectivity and culture. What is interesting about this is that it relies on tropes that originated in queer person of color (QPOC) club scenes to do this. In this paper, I put Daybreaker into conversation with these original club culture

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[2] *Daybreaker Moments of Magic // About Us,* 0:39.
[3] "Daybreaker Fact Sheet."

scenes, asking: what ideological and aesthetic losses emerge in the move from original QPOC dance music club cultures to Daybreaker? Ultimately, I argue that even as Daybreaker emphasizes community as a core value, it reneges on QPOC club culture's ethics of community, which relied on practices that destabilized subjectivity and hierarchy in order to blur the boundaries between self and other. Rather, Daybreaker supports the production of neoliberal subjectivity and neoliberal and bio-moral configurations of hierarchy, upholding these boundaries. Linking QPOC club culture's practices to queer failure and Afro-pessimist refusal, I show that Daybreaker's support for neoliberal subjectivity and hierarchy amount to an emptying out of early club cultures' subversive ideals, using aesthetics of resistance to promote submission into neoliberalism. I argue that by supporting neoliberalism and bio-morality, Daybreaker supports material and ideological systems that disproportionately harm QPOC.

In chapter one, I focus on subjectivity. I argue that Daybreaker reneges on the anti-subjective experience central to QPOC club cultures, instead promoting conventional neoliberal subjectivity. I draw from literature on disco, techno and rave to build my argument that particular practices at dance parties enabled the experience of anti-subjectivity. I connect this anti-subjectivity specifically to practices of failure endorsed by queer failure and Afro-pessimist refusal. In contrast to this anti-subjectivity, I argue that Daybreaker upholds subjectivity at the event, supporting the creation of an ideal neoliberal subject. Embodiment is central to this discussion: I argue that the way in which subjects inhabited their body at QPOC clubs was conducive to an anti-subjective experience; whereas Daybreaker retains the mind

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over body hierarchy that characterizes the workweek. I show that anti-subjective practices created a communal space, whereas the upholding of subjectivity at Daybreaker maintains the individualism of everyday neoliberal society.

In chapter two, I focus on the ways that Daybreaker sustains hierarchies. I argue that whereas QPOC club cultures dismantled hierarchies, thereby creating forms of community outside of the norms of the everyday, Daybreaker retains them by upholding hierarchical audience performer relationship, supporting a bio-moral logic that stigmatizes bad feelings, and embracing the neoliberal rhetoric of the war on drugs. In all cases, Daybreaker's support for hierarchical reasoning renders the event individualist, even as it, ironically, frames itself as communal. I close my thesis with a sustained analysis of Daybreaker's rejection of drugs and alcohol, tying it into the neoliberal war on drugs and showing how it contributes to rhetoric that stigmatizes and has been deadly for marginalized groups.

In this essay, I sometimes use rave culture as an example when talking about QPOC club cultures. Although rave was primarily heterosexual and white, I argue that in their material and ideological practices, they embody similar ethics as the original QPOC club cultures (in this essay, I focus on disco and techno). For rave, the ethics of failure and refusal did not work towards liberation from race or sexuality-based oppression but instead from notions of bourgeoisie success and western moral bases. I argue that it is useful to include a discussion of rave in this essay to demonstrate how the ethics established by QPOC cultures are salient in other cultures too. Ultimately, all club cultures I look at challenge normative ways of which stifle a range of groups.

Methods and theoretical frameworks

My work contributes to the field of club culture studies. I use a media-critical lens, analyzing videos on the Daybreaker website, interviews with founder Radha Agrawal, and magazine articles on Daybreaker. I use a few key theoretical frameworks to situate my analysis: neoliberal culture and subjectivity, and Afro-pessimist and queer theories of failure – which I will briefly describe here.

The theory of neoliberal subjectivity is based on the premise that the prevailing mode of subjectivity associated with post-Enlightenment culture – which views the subject as having needs outside of the market – no longer applies in the age of neoliberalism. The precursor to this scholarship begins with Foucault's work on neoliberalism in his 1979-1978 lectures at the College de France; in these lectures, Foucault proposes that neoliberalism has produced a new kind of human – a "*homo œconomicus*," – defined as an "entrepreneur of himself."[4] A more recent body of work on neoliberal subjectivity has emerged this century; most are oriented around the idea that under neoliberalism, the private sphere dissolves and the subject's needs and desires become framed in terms of the market.[5] In this essay, I work closely with Michael Feher's definition of the neoliberal subject. Feher argues that the neoliberal subject thinks of itself as human capital – as a portfolio of skills and experiences that can always be improved. As a result, the neoliberal subject sees every action in life as an opportunity to self-appreciate, or build its portfolio of human

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[4] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.
[5] Wilson, *Neoliberalism*, 22-23.

capital.[6] Feher's argument that the subject is naturally driven to work harder through the drive to self-appreciate echoes Foucault's comment in his lecture that a key trait of the homo œconomicus is that they "work" by themselves.

I use the concept of neoliberal subjectivity and self-appreciation to argue that Daybreaker supports the production of the neoliberal subject by targeting the drive to self-appreciate through its promise of self-improvement. I use Nikolas Rose's definition of the traits of enterprise— "energy, initiative, ambition, calculation and personal responsibility."[7] —to articulate specific traits the neoliberal subject strives for.

Jack Halberstam's theory of queer failure and Afro-pessimist refusal are also central to this study. Both argue for an ethics that goes against a status quo harmful to marginalized groups. To fail to embrace or to refuse the status quo is to take an ethical stance against the harm that it causes. Whereas queer failure aims to empower a large swath of people marginalized by cultural norms, Afro-pessimism advocates for black liberation, specifically.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam argues that inhabiting ways of knowing and being outside of conventional notions of success – which she defines as oriented around heterosexual norms of reproduction and wealth accumulation – can offer "more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."[8] By embracing a lifestyle of failure, we can "poke holes in the toxic positivity of

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[6] Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital."
[7] Rose, "Governing the Enterprising Self," 6.
[8] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2.

contemporary thinking."[9] If conventional success if premised on gaining, succeeding, accumulating and knowing, a lifestyle of failure is premised on "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing."[10] Halberstam does not explicitly link queer failure to rejecting neoliberal subjectivity; I argue that this is the case. The ideal neoliberal subject is defined by the drive to accumulate and succeed – she is constantly building her human portfolio, self-appreciating, aiming for success. To embody the neoliberal subject is to be seen as successful in society. Thus, to embrace a lifestyle of failure is to both fail to live up to the traits of self-appreciation and enterprise that define the subject, as well as fail to embody the paradigm of success.

Afro-pessimists embrace a politics of refusal similar to the ethics of queer failure. Arguing that anti-blackness underlies the construction of race and modern society itself, Afro-pessimists reject a politics of reform, claiming that the only true possibility for black liberation will emerge through refusing the entire system. As the editors of *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction* state: "we choose, following Afro-pessimism, to understand Black liberation as a negative dialectic, a politics of refusal, and a refusal to affirm; as an embrace of disorder and incoherence; act of political apostasy."[11] Important to this line of thought is a refusal to accept the category of the human. Afro-pessimists argue that the framework of the human is always coded white, and depends on the non-human—i.e., black subject--to give it meaning: "it is Blackness, and more specifically anti-Blackness that gives coherence to categories

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[9] Halberstam, 3.
[10] Halberstam, 2.
[11] *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction,* 11.

of non-Black—white, worker, gay, i.e., "human."[12] Thus, there can be no positive

affirmation of blackness without an acceptance of the framework that produces anti-

black violence. Human here refers to a Euro-centric white understanding of the

human as bounded, rational, and white – which is synonymous with the idea of the

human as a subject. Thus, to reject the human is to reject this framework of

subjectivity.

In this thesis I link the anti-subjectivity and anti-hierarchy practices at QPOC

club cultures and raves to a broader ethics of failure and refusal, in line with queer

and afro-pessimist critique. For disco and techno – parties run and attended by queer

people of color – these ethics were specifically tied into the practice of anti-harm and

for marginalized people. For rave – founded and run by a white, heterosexual, middle

class culture – the ethics of failure and refusal did not work towards liberation from

race or sexuality-based oppression but instead from notions of bourgeoisie success

and western moral bases. However, even though the aims of the failure and refusal

differed between these cultures, I argue that it is useful to examine these cultures

together because they ultimately embrace an ethics that seek to challenge normative

ways of being that are oppressive to multiple groups.

Other literature

This study is the first thesis-length work on the early morning dance party

phenomenon. However, Carl Cederström and Andre Spicer discuss Daybreaker's

competitor Morning Gloryville in the final chapter of their book *The Wellness*

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[12] *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction,* 8.

Syndrome. I will briefly describe their argument here and explain how my argument will expand on theirs.

In *The Wellness Syndrome,* Cederström and Spicer argue that wellness – defined as the maximization of health and pleasure – has become a moral demand that has invaded all aspects of our lives. However, rather than make us happier or more enriched, it provokes "a sense of guilt and anxiety"[13] when we fail to live up to its impossible demands. Further, in its insistence that the individual is in control of her fate and that health and happiness are a choice, it makes us blame ourselves when and if we fail to be happy and healthy.

Cederström and Spicer use Morning Gloryville as an example in their closing argument that to turn every activity in a wellness exercise is to forgo important human experience. They argue that Morning Gloryville is a space that turns the excess and indulgence of the nightclub into a contained and organized fitness and health ritual, and thus cannot offer the feeling of joy that a night of abandon can bring. They use an anecdote from Zadie Smith's article "Joy" to exemplify their point: Smith argues that one of the few times in her life that she felt joy – which she defines as a "strange admixture of terror, pain, and delight"[14] – was while on ecstasy at a London nightclub. At Morning Gloryville, however, participants forgo the possibility of joy. Rather, they engage with "measured pleasures"[15] – safe, comfortable, yet unable to deliver the kind of catharsis that emerges from less predictable, more risky environments.

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[13] Cederström and Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome*, 6.
[14] Smith, "Joy."
[15] Cederström and Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome,* 129.

I agree with their analysis that there is a fundamental loss in the move from the nightclub to the morning sober rave. They accurately depict the way that the neoliberal drive to self-appreciate makes us want to turn our every activity into an exercise in improving ourselves, with distinct losses involved. My study expands on their work because it is concerned not only with the "losses" in terms of human experience, but in terms of the losses specifically from the QPOC club culture cultural forbearers to Daybreaker. In this way, my study is situated within the field of club culture studies and seeks to contextualize Daybreaker as dance culture phenomenon. Further, I am more concerned with the ways in which Daybreaker reneges upon features that were specifically important to marginalized groups. Thus my angle also takes into consideration how the losses at Daybreaker are felt differently for different groups.

Daybreaker: Start your day with energy and intention

According to Agrawal, the creation of Daybreaker was inspired by frustrating experiences at night clubs – filled with "mean bouncers, drunk people and no one dancing"[16]. Along with co-founder Matthew Brimer, she conceived the initial Daybreaker event as a "social experiment," which asked the question: what would happen if we turned all the negatives of the nightclub into positives? The idea was that Daybreaker would offer a healthy, inspirational, energizing alternative to the

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[16] Of course this narrative of spontaneous inspiration is called into question by evidence that Morning Gloryville's first event occurred three months prior to Daybreaker's. Nonetheless, the true backstory is less important to my analysis than the story Daybreaker tells its customers.

nightclub: rather than take place at night, it would take place during the day; rather than serve alcohol, it would serve green juice and coffee; rather than leave the dance party feeling depleted, partygoers would feel invigorated by their workout and focused through a closing intention-setting ceremony.

If you were to attend a Daybreaker party, your morning would look something like this: you would arrive at the venue – typically a nightclub, bar, or event venue – and first encounter the "hugging committee," Agrawal's answer to "mean bouncers." A member from the committee would embrace you and welcome you into the club.[17] When you enter the main room of the venue, you would set down your mat and wait for instructions from the yoga instructor, who would lead you through one hour of yoga set to deep house music. Yoga would end with a meditation session.

Then the two-hour dance party and food bazaar would begin: the DJ would start spinning—strictly positive music; no "dark techno"—rather, deep house, soul house, funk house, with top 40s pop mixed in.[18] As the DJ played music, the MC would communicate the message of health, positivity, and acceptance: "drink water, hydrate!"[19]; "stop-judging!" "this is a safe-space!"[20] During the dance party, a theme-appropriate surprise prop would surface on the dance floor; props at past parties have included bubbles, Jellyfish puppets affixed to poles, and a blow up guitar.

Meanwhile, hungry or thirsty attendees could head to the "food bazaar," where they'd find kombucha, green juice, coffee and tea, and breakfast snacks by hemp

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[17] Agrawal, "Daybreaker Redefines Morning Life with Radha Agrawal," 5:20.
[18] Agrawal, 9:57.
[19] Rice, "I Went To A 7AM Sober Dance Party & Loved It."
[20] Agrawal, "Daybreaker Redefines Morning Life with Radha Agrawal," 9:23.

brand Manitoba Harvest. Off the dance floor, they'd bump into other surprises:

perhaps an Acro Yoga performance, a "free haiku" poet, or entertainers dressed in

vegetable costumes – eggplant and broccoli are common[21] – or a serenade from a

slam poet or break-dancer.[22]

At some point, the live performance would begin: most likely a live horn

section, and perhaps a violinist, singer, or other local talent. At this point dancing

would mostly stop, as attendees would stand or sit and watch the performer. As the

clock reached towards 9 AM, the MC would announce that it is time for the intention-

setting ceremony. Employees would begin to distribute cards with an inspiring

question: "Where will you find your happiness?"[23] "What rooftops will you explore?"[24]

Someone would read an inspirational quote over the loudspeaker. After setting

intentions, you would pick up your things and leave the venue; if you are like most

attendees, you would head to work.

In this rundown of Daybreaker activities, we see that the traits of QPOC club

cultures that enabled a subversion of subjectivity and hierarchy have been rejected in

favor activities that make us better neoliberal subjects: more healthy, more motivated

for the work day, and more productive at work because of it. The opportunity to heal

has been replaced by the opportunity to self-appreciate: why choose beer if we can

have a health-boosting green juice? Why choose pre-gaming with alcohol if we can

pregame with yoga instead? Further, Daybreaker denies the type of healing that

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[21] Rice, "I Went To A 7AM Sober Dance Party & Loved It."
[22] Agrawal, "Daybreaker Redefines Morning Life with Radha Agrawal," 10:06.
[23] Taylor, "WTF: Daybreaker."
[24] Daybreaker, "Our New Years Wish," 0:1.

comes from acceptance of bad feelings. At Daybreaker, positivity and motivation are required. Boredom and apathy are eliminated through the framework of the event: there is no downtime, ensuring that partygoers will never experience boredom or apathy. As I will show, this is undergirded by bio-morality, an implicit refusal of apathy and bad feelings, which is characteristic of our contemporary cultural moment.

In the move from QPOC club cultures to Daybreaker, it is also important to note that the demographics of Daybreaker are quite different than early QPOC club cultures. Daybreaker attracts city-dwellers between the ages of roughly 25 to 45 years old[25]; its clientele is roughly 68 percent women and 32 percent men.[26] Although I was not able to find any statistics on race, it is clear from the images and footage I've viewed that the event skews white, as well. The early morning hours, and the emphasis on using the event as a space to increase motivation for work, suggest that the crowd that shows up is made up of young professionals working nine-to-five office jobs. Thus, our prototypical Daybreaker attendee is a white, female urbanite with an office job, between the ages of 25-45.

That the event caters to women should not be surprising, given the link between neoliberal subjectivity and gender. Feminist theorists have shown that young women are positioned as ideal neoliberal subjects; Christina Scharff argues that "transformation" – key to neoliberal self-appreciation – is already coded feminine (we see this played out in the way women are supposed to transform and conquer their body); further, neoliberal empowerment is expressed through consumption – a

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[25] Holder, "To Find Community, Wake Up Early and Dance."
[26] "Daybreaker Fact Sheet."

category historically associated with the feminine.[27] That these women work in corporate professions and are positioned to achieve middle to upper middle class lifestyles also fits neoliberal ideals of femininity. Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine argue that the ideal neoliberal femininity is bourgeois femininity, and it is contingent on abjecting working class femininity. Central to this form of femininity is to be both an object and subject of desire and consumption, and to have awareness to reinvent the self.[28] Daybreaker provides the opportunity to get fit – be an "object" of consumption – as well as take a part in a culture of consumption, through engaging with food brands and promoted products during the event. Further, it is based on transformation of one's fitness and social life. It thus is an ideal opportunity for the performance of ideal neoliberal femininity and subjectivity.

Co-founder and CEO Radha Agrawal also fits this profile of an upper-middle class entrepreneurial woman. Her career background firmly solidifies her in the neoliberal wellness world. A Cornell graduate who got her start working finance in Manhattan, today Agrawal runs among a growing movement of entrepreneurs who describe themselves as "social entrepreneurs," or entrepreneurs who aim to tackle social and cultural issues.[29] In 2008, with her twin sister, also an entrepreneur, Agrawal co-founded THINX, a company that makes "period-proof" panties, framing it as a feminist brand that shatters menstruation taboos. In 2009, she founded SUPER SPROWTZ LLC, a children's nutritional education program that uses web content

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[27] Scharff, "Gender and Neoliberalism: Exploring the Exclusions and Contours of Neoliberal Subjectivities."
[28] Ringrose and Walkerdine, "Regulating The Abject."
[29] Garone, "The Woman behind the Morning Dance Party Craze."

and interventions in schools to encourage children to choose healthier foods and stay active. Since Daybreaker, Agrawal has co-founded "Live It Up," a self-help subscription service, that offers lesson plans targeting "life skills" – such as nutrition, creativity in business, and financial success – delivered by influential people in business, through the medium of text message and video.[30]

Agrawal's business profile indicates her embrace of the neoliberal reasoning that social issues are best addressed by private industry. Like other self-described social entrepreneurs, she portrays herself as using capitalism for good. Daybreaker is a continuation of that reasoning: Agrawal frames Daybreaker as a solution to the problem of loneliness and isolation in contemporary society. Arguing that people today are lonelier than ever, she says that Daybreaker offers a real solution to this problem; she gives TedTalks and speaks at conferences on the subject of community building, using Daybreaker as an example of how she bulit her dream community. In 2018 she published *Belong,* a self-help guide that details her work with Daybreaker and promises to help readers build their own "dream community" from scratch. Thus, with Daybreaker, Agrawal attempt to harness private industry to address the problem of loneliness. By doing so, she reifies the neoliberal system that makes us lonelier and more isolated.

Cultural context

Wellness culture

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[30] Agrawal, "Radha Agrawal."

Daybreaker is a brand associated with the "wellness movement"– a trend in neoliberalism characterized by the promotion of health, fitness, and self-care as moral virtues. The extent to which wellness culture has become widespread today is evident in the popularity of juice bars, mindfulness apps, soul-cycle, and meditation retreats; and the implementation of "wellness programs" in colleges, prisons, and corporate offices.[31] According to Carl Cederström and Andre Spicer, wellness culture has reached a peak level of importance in the last few decades; they pin in it on a neoliberal "transformation in contemporary culture where individual responsibility and self-expression are morphed with the mindset of a freemarket economist."[32] Thus, wellness culture is directly correlated with the neoliberal drive to self-appreciate: we strive to be healthier not for the sake of it, but for increased productivity and a competitive edge in the market.

By turning the space of a dance party – traditionally a space of leisure, relaxation and altered states of mind – into a fitness routine, Daybreaker promotes what Cederström and Spicer call the "wellness imperative," which refers to the way that wellness – defined as the maximization of health and pleasure – has become a moral demand that has invaded all aspects of our lives, demanding that every activity become an exercise in wellness. Cederström and Spicer argue that, in its insistence that the individual is in control of her fate – that health and happiness are a choice – wellness culture provokes "a sense of guilt and anxiety" [33] as we struggle to keep up with its demands. Similarly, I will argue that although Daybreaker might seem to

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[31] Blei, "The False Promises of Wellness Culture."
[32] Cederström and Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome*, 4.
[33] Cederström and Spicer, 6.

make attendees feel happier or more-connected in the moment, by supporting the ideological framework that frames health, happiness and community as a choice, it ultimately does harm rather than good.

<u>Work and leisure in neoliberalism</u>

In its mixture of wellness, fun, and ethos of productivity, Daybreaker aligns with greater trends in neoliberalism that blur the boundaries between work and leisure. Scholars have pointed out that in neoliberalism, the boundaries between what was traditionally thought of as leisure and work blur. On the one hand, workplaces have introduced the concept of "playful work" – epitomized by the silicon valley-style firms with Ping-Pong tables and draft beer.[34] On the other hand, even our moments of leisure have become work – exemplified by Daybreaker.

Cederström and Spicer note that bohemian culture of the 1960s has been incorporated into corporate culture, such that the traits traditionally associated with artists and capitalist critique are now celebrated by offices and the office is portrayed as a space in which to hold and nurture these values: "The artistic critique against capitalism – that corporations make us inauthentic – is now inverted and used by firms to launch their new cultural ideal, based partly on artists and their presumed creativity, entrepreneurial ability and countercultural edge."[35] Daybreaker represents the other side of this coin: an activity traditionally associated with leisure and self-expression has been retrofitted to embrace the values of the office.

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[35] Cederström and Spicer, 19.

Daybreaker's connection with Burning Man, the annual art and music festival in which attendees create their own society off of the grid, illustrates this mixture of bohemianism and capitalist work ethics. Agrawal, an avid Burning Man attendee, has said that Daybreaker was influenced by burning man;[36] puppets made by a Burning Man artist are ubiquitous at Daybreaker events; and Daybreaker held an event at Burning man in 2016.[37] Further, Agrawal prefers to recruit employees who attend Burning Man: the job description for "Event Producer and Community Catalyst" states "Ideally (but not required), you are a Burning Man participant."[38]

As Fred Turner describes, Burning Man is characterized by "New Age religious inclinations, a celebration of amateur art and a rejection of consumerism."[39] Even as it has become increasingly intertwined with the capitalist ethos of Silicon Valley, it "serves as a key cultural infrastructure for the Bay Area's new media industries."[40] One of Burning Man's core values – radical self-reliance – refers to bringing one's own water and food at Burning Man; yet as Turner points out, this self-reliance ethos became necessary for those technology industry workers during the precarious '90s neoliberal landscape. In the same way, Daybreaker's ethos of positivity, motivation and determination are not merely useful for personal betterment but necessary to compete in today's precarious neoliberal job market.

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[36] "Meaningful Human Connection in the Digital Age," 7:42.
[37] Daybreaker, "Sunday, August 27, 2017."
[38] "Daybreaker Event Producer & Community Catalyst // DENVER."
[39] Turner, "Burning Man at Google," 75.
[40] Turner, 73.

Conclusion: Leisure and Neoliberalism

In this paper, it becomes clear that Agrawal's aim is less about improving nightlife than it is about offering a solution to the problem of leisure under neoliberalism. If Agrawal truly wanted to improve the nightclub, she could intervene in these scenes: for example, establish her own nightclub with exciting DJs, open-minded front door policies, or new strategies to create an inclusive dance floor. Yet it's clear that for Agrawal, to simply introduce community or excitement into the club would not be enough. Characteristics fundamental to the nightclub – namely, taking place at night, alcohol, drugs, and messy moments – must be thrown out. What connects the characteristics she rejects, I argue, are their ability to make partygoers feel that they are in a state in which they can detach from the demands of the work week; a state of leisure. At Daybreaker, aesthetics of the nightclub remain, but nothing that resembles leisure is allowed. This, of course, illustrates the way that for the neoliberal subject, every activity must be directed towards growth and improvement of the self.

That the dance party – an event once reserved for leisure – has been transformed into a space where individuals come together to become more productive and efficient exemplifies one of the ways that state control takes place under neoliberalism. Dardot and Laval point out that whereas the subject of classic liberalism was governed through disciplines that coerced subjects into submission – through institutions ""intended to train bodies and shape minds through

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compulsion,"[41] – for the new subject, compulsion is not necessary. Rather, already

eager to increase efficiency and work harder, the subject is compelled to shape itself

into a productive and disciplined citizen all by itself. Control over citizens comes not

through coercion but in directing the innate drive to self-appreciate into particular

avenues. [42] In this case, the message to be healthier and more productive doesn't

come from the institutional channels of the the state. Rather, it comes from a fun new

experience-economy brand. That this exercise in fitness and health strikes customers

as genuinely fun—to some, even more fun than the nightclub—exemplifies how

these subjects are driven to work by themselves.

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[41] Dardot and Laval, "The New Way of the World, Part I: Manufacturing the Neoliberal Subject."
[42] Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital."

CHAPTER ONE: SUBJECTIVITY AND EMBODIMENT

At a Daybreaker event in Manhattan, just after the boat leaves the harbor, the post-yoga meditation ends, and the DJ begins playing, partygoers hear a voice they will become familiar with over the next two hours: the voice of the MC. "Hydrate, drink water! Hydrate, drink water!" As they dance, their experience is shaped by the MC's proclamations: "We're on a boat!" As the boat docks and intention-setting begins, the MC slips into a more-somber tone: "Get out your phones and text someone right now and tell them you love them!"; "the world is in a dark place right now and we need your positive energy and unconditional love."[43]

The attendees listen to the MC and send text messages to their friends. They follow the MC's instructions to set intentions for the future.

The MC comes to every Daybreaker event; she is trained to hype the crowd, encouraging positivity and open-mindedness. Agrawal explains: "We have an MC that we train that we say look you know this is your opportunity to not just tell people to get low or tell people to move left or move right but really help people let go of their judgment. So our MCs will say 'stop judging yourself, this is a safe space, let go here"[44]

How might the sound of the MC imploring you to be positive, open minded, and healthy impact the experience of the dance floor, in the move from QPOC club

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[43] Rice, "I Went To A 7AM Sober Dance Party & Loved It."
[44] "Meaningful Human Connection in the Digital Age," 9:22.

cultures to Daybreaker? At original QPOC dance parties, the dance floor was a space to loose the self – to let go of concerns about how to live one's life now or in the future. The experience was primarily an embodied one: partygoers let go of everyday concerns, experiencing the movements of their body. At Daybreaker, the experience on the dance floor is quite different: the sensation of being in the body is broken up by the sound of the MC, bringing you back into your mind. Listening to the MC, you engage with language and conceptual frameworks; perhaps you respond in your head. The MC's comments – which urge that you become a better, more positive and healthy person – bring the focus back onto yourself as a subject.

As I will show, the experience on the dance floor and the MC's role in it is just one of the ways that Daybreaker reneges on the experience of anti-subjectivity promoted at QPOC clubs. Building on work that has already been done in club cultures, I argue that QPOC club cultures create a space of anti-subjectivity. I connect this anti-subjectivity specifically to practices of by Afro-pessimist refusal and queer failure. In contrast to this anti-subjectivity, I argue that Daybreaker upholds subjectivity at the event, supporting the creation of an ideal neoliberal subject.

Neoliberal subjectivity is crucial to the system of neoliberalism, which, as scholars have shown, disenfranchises poor people of color the most. What we see then, in the move from the original club movements to Daybreaker, is the transformation of a culture that was empowering to marginalized, POC communities, to a culture that supports systems that ultimately harm them.

Introducing the neoliberal subject

Because this chapter relies so heavily on neoliberal subjectivity, I will describe

the concept in depth before returning to the rest of our discussion.

Under neoliberalism, many of the assumptions we held about society and

personhood that presided in the age of classic liberalism have fundamentally

changed. Julie Wilson points out that in classic liberalism, society was divided into

distinct public and private spheres: the public sphere was that of politics and the

state, and the private sphere that of the home and economy. Although the private

sphere was still important to the market, in the way that it provided rejuvenation and

spiritual support to create better workers, there was still agreement that some human

needs could not be satisfied by the market. Under neoliberalism, that changes: public

and private spheres collapse into the single sphere of the market economy, and

humans are no longer thought of as having emotional and spiritual needs outside of

the market.[45]

With the market infiltrating all areas of life, human subjectivity begins to

change. Michael Feher frames the shift of subjectivity from liberal capitalism to

neoliberalism as a transformation of Marx's free laborer to human capital. Whereas

the free laborer of liberalism was a split being, pulled between "spiritual aspirations

and the pursuit of material interests,"[46] the neoliberal subject is unified: spiritual

aspirations and material interests are one in the same. This has to do with the

relationship between oneself and capital: whereas the free laborer had the freedom

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[45] Wilson, *Neoliberalism*, 22-23.
[46] Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," 29.

to dispose as she pleased with her own capital and labor power, thus ensuring a separation between who she was and what she owned, the neoliberal subject is the capital that she can sell on the marketplace; there is no separation between who she is and what she owns. Thus, the free laborer is replaced with human capital. Feher points out that the term "human capital" has become commonplace in our contemporary era, but he argues that rather than being superficial slang it reflects a deeper condition of neoliberalism.

Because we want to increase our human capital, we strive for things and experiences that will appreciate our value; everything we do is seen as contributing to the "the maintenance or the deterioration of" our "human capital."[47] This expands far beyond job training for a particular line of work. Rather:

> the return on human capital… now refers to all that is produced by the skill set that defines me. Such that everything I earn — be it salary, returns on investments, booty, or favors I may have incurred — can be understood as the return on the human capital that constitutes me.[48]

Thus, even outside of work, our lives become "a strategy aimed at self-appreciation"[49] and all of our activities are "liable to cause the subjects either to appreciate or to depreciate themselves"[50]

Importantly, Feher argues that, just as the neoliberal economy is defined by "capital growth or appreciation rather than income" and "stock value rather than commercial profit,"[51] so too the subject is more interested in growing her human

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[47] Feher, 26.
[48] Feher, 26.
[49] Feher, 28.
[50] Feher, 28.
[51] Feher, 27.

capital than she is on receiving any tangible returns. Thus, the mission is more about growing than it is about obtaining. It is not the profit or return on our investment that so preoccupies as is the constant drive to "value or appreciate ourselves."[52]

Dardot and Laval add that the neoliberal subject, replicating the enterprise logic of the neoliberal market, is driven by competition in all areas of her life. The "productive" subject of liberal capitalism is thus replaced with the "competitive" subject of neoliberalism. For Dardot and Laval, it is not only that the neoliberal subject must constantly be working on herself, it is also that the neoliberal subject must be constantly competing against others as she does so, envisioning herself as her own private enterprise competing with other enterprises.

For this new subject, the time she spends outside of work takes on a fundamentally different meaning than it did during the era of liberal capitalism. First of all, skills and knowledge not directly utilizable on the market are no longer important. Second of all, because the subject must constantly be concerned with building her human capital, the subject comes to see every activity in terms of how it will appreciate or depreciate her human capital. Finally, spiritual and emotional pursuits are no longer thought of as important or nourishing for the human – the only pursuit that is valuable is the kind that will directly boost human capital, and build skills for the market.

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[52] Feher, 27.

QPOC club ethics of anti-subjectivity

As I noted in the introduction, Jack Halberstam's theory of queer failure and Afro-pessimist refusal reject the notion of the subject. Queer failure advocates for a refusal of neoliberal subjectivity: if the neoliberal subject is oriented around success, attainment and goals, embracing a queer lifestyle of "failure" is to embrace "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming." [53] This, Halberstam argues, can lead to more creative, communal, and inspiring ways to be in the world.

Afro-pessimists argue that the framework of the human subject is always coded white, and depends on the non-human (i.e., black) to give it meaning. The editors of the Afro-pessimism reader explain: "it is Blackness, and more specifically anti-Blackness that gives coherence to categories of non-Black—white, worker, gay, i.e., "human."[54] Human is defined against what it is not – which is blackness. This means that for Afro-pessimists, there can be no positive affirmation of blackness without an acceptance of the framework that produces anti-black violence. They embrace a "politics of refusal, and a refusal to affirm."[55]

I argue that practices at QPOC club cultures embraced the experience of anti-subjectivity, in line with queer failure and Afro-pessimist refusal. At early seventies discos, Tim Lawrence argues, participants experienced a "non-dominant" experience of the body, as "not bounded and distinctive, but rather permeable and connected."[56] "Technologies" of the dance floor enabled this experience. In marathon dance

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[53] Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure,* 2.
[54] *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction,* 8.
[55] *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction,* 11.
[56] Lawrence, "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor," 239.

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sessions, the physical was prioritized over the rational. Further, loud sound

penetrated the body—Lawrence uses Julian Henrique's "sonic dominance" theory,

which claims that Jamaican sound systems enabled an experience where the aural

was more prominent than the visual and the body was penetrated by sound."[57] Low

lighting encouraged dancers to exceed everyday restrictions, altering the version of

themselves that they knew in the outside world. Although not necessary to

experience a loss of self, drugs helped: Lawrence argues LSD aided in the

experience in which the body formed a "connected alliance with sound,"[58] deepening

the loss of a bounded self.

The queering of the body at disco created a uniquely communal space.

Lawrence explains:

> In these settings, dancers engaged in a cultural practice that did not affirm
> their maleness or their femaleness, or their queer or straight predilections, or
> their black, Latin, Asian or white identifications, but instead positioned them as
> agents who could participate in a destabilizing or queer ritual that recast the
> experience of the body through a series of affective vectors.[59]

The embodiment and the dismantling of subjectivity—which enabled boundaries of

self and other to blur—made categories of difference less relevant.

Although primarily white and heterosexual, raves continued the tradition

established by disco, dismantling norms of subjectivity to create a more-communal

space. Daniel Martin points out that at raves, dancers do not dance for external

display—which is common in other kinds of social dance—but rather to "loose

themselves." He argues:

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[57] Lawrence, 239.
[58] Lawrence, 239.
[59] Lawrence, 233.

the aim of the dance could be identified in a new interpretation of Foucault's "Omnes et Singulatum," in that one becomes all, or rather the distinction between one and all disappears. It is a dance for the self. In that it is a dance to lose the self. But it is also a communal loss-a loss of self that occurs in the setting of the rave.[60]

The bounded self was also challenged by the eschewal of the narrative of the individual in techno: Martin argues that western ideas about art circle around the founding narrative, where art is conceptualized as something produced by an inspired individual, and praising music involves fetishizing the individual behind it. Yet techno music disrupts this narrative: built off of sampling and remixing of other music, the question of the original creator becomes murky. When the DJ performs, she makes her own mark on the track – adjusting the tempo, mixing it with other music, and adding effects – further complicating the question of which artist the track should be attributed to. Further, the DJ is relatively anonymous, evading the narrative of "glorified subject."[61] While listening to the DJ, the audience is not thinking about the individual behind the music as they might be at a traditional concert. Thus, while dancers listen to the music, their experience is not colored by individuality; the boundaries between self and other and themselves and the DJ are more fluid than they would be in a traditional concert.

Disrupting the boundaries of mind and body have greater connotations, as James Landau correctly points out: these characteristics are analogs to other dichotomies that are more problematic for people of color and women. Landau argues that primarily embodied experience of ecstatic raving undermines "mind/body

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[60] Martin, "Power Play and Party Politics," 93-94.
[61] Martin, 92.

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lateral associations (e.g. masculine/feminine, active/passive and reason/emotion),"[62] which he notes have historically been most harmful to marginalized groups. Thus, through the embodied experience that challenges such hierarchies, raves were able to create a radical community in line with disco.

In *More Brilliant than the Sun,* Kodwo Eshun portrays techno as a way for the subject to expand past the boundaries of the human and take on traits of the machine, thereby challenging subjectivity. Writing on the Roland 808 rhythm composer, he says: "This 'humanly impossible' time, this automatization of rhythm which is rhythmatics, opens up the posthuman multiplication of rhythm: the rhythm synthesizer's spastic pulses seize the body, rewiring the sensorium in a kinaesthetic of shockcuts and stutters, a voluptuous epilepsy."[63] Here, Eshun connects the relentlessly machinic sound of techno to an opening up of possibilities for new ways to experience the body. Similar to the loss of self described by Martin and Lawrence, the way the listeners perceives the body is fundamentally altered – the sensorium rewired, the pulses of one's heart fundamentally changed. However, this is a transcendence that is pertinent for the creation of a better future for people of color, specifically.

More Brilliant than the Sun also shows how the experience of anti-subjectivity is desirable for those who have been marginalized by dominant notions of the human and the subject. Many scholars have called it a Black Accelerationist text. McKenzie Wark defines Black Acceleration as promoting an ethics of "a willful pushing forward

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[62] Landau, "The Flesh of Raving: Merleau-Ponty and the 'Experience' of Ecstasy," 107.

[63] Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun*, 79.

which includes as part of its method an attempt to clear away certain habits of thought and feeling in order to be open to a future which is attempting to realize itself in the present."[64] One of the most important habits of thought and feeling is the idea of the human subject – a construction which Afropressimists have shown is based on a dichotomy of a white human and a black non-human. Thus, the western concept of the human and subjectivity is something that needs to be willfully rejected in order to create a progressive black future. Eshun's move to "positively value the figure of Blackness as close to the machine-like and remote from the fully 'human'"[65] enacts this.

Wark argues that black acceleration occurs "mostly but not exclusively" through music. Thus, techno culture is a way of imagining an alternate future, particularly for groups who have been harmed by normative designations of human and subject.

It is important to note that strategies of challenging the subject and hierarchies were directly related to the challenges attendees of QPOC cultures faced in the outside world. New York discos served as a refuge for queer people of color during a time that their identifies put them at risk of violence; they comprised a diverse mixture of people who were marginalized or allied with the marginalized.[66] "Queering" the body fought against the hegemonic norms that called certain bodies or expression of gender and sexuality wrong or unsightly.

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[64] Wark, "Black Accelerationism."
[65] Wark.
[66] Garcia, "An Alternate History of Sexuality in Club Culture."

In rave culture, practices of anti-subjectivity were a way of refusing hegemonic western norms. Yet because the early UK rave scene was predominantly white and working class, the significance of anti-subjective practices at raves is different than disco and techno. Rave descended from the white, middle class tradition of Acid-House; by the time it turned into a global movement in the late 1980s, it attracted a white, middle class, young, straight and suburban crowd.[67] Rave did not address race or sexuality: as Garcia Manuel-Luis explains, "rave culture touted "love" and "freedom" as core values, but tended to leave traditional gender roles and sexualities undisturbed."[68] Because the crowd was white, race was lost from the prominent part in the conversation it had in early electronic dance music. However, even though the aims of the failure and refusal differed between these cultures, I argue that rave embraced similar ethics as QPOC club cultures. Although these ethics were not specifically used for marginalized people to experience deeper forms of community, they were used to take a stand against social norms that disenfranchise QPOC people the most but still affect the working class suburban whites that were attracted to raves.

Daybreaker and the neoliberal subject

Whereas QPOC dance clubs enabled partygoers to experience a loss of subjectivity and a blurring between self and other, the Daybreaker dance floor maintains the hierarchical relationship between mind and body that undergird a

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[67] Garcia.
[68] Garcia.

sense of subjectivity, as well as retain the relationship between self and other by making participants think about themselves as an individual, distinct being. First, I will discuss the subjective experience of the dance floor, and the ways that it upholds subjectivity, using the concepts of Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic domains and Foucault's heterotopia. Then, I will argue that Daybreaker's ideological message of self-improvement targets the drive to self-appreciate, thus upholding the neoliberal subject specifically.

Subjectivity through language and the rational mind

Language, as the anecdote that began this chapter shows, is central to the experience of the dance floor at Daybreaker. However it reaches beyond the dance floor into other areas of the event: surprise performances by poets and slam poetry artists; requests from the MC in the closing moments like "Text someone right now and tell them you love them!"[69]; and of course, the intention-setting ceremony at the end of the event. At all turns, these activities require that participants articulate in language what they are motivated and inspired by.

Although at disco, techno and rave, partygoers had moments off of the dance floor in which they would communicate in traditional ways with one another, it is clear that the communication through dance and movement was the most central way that communication that took place in these spaces. Julia Kristeva's symbolic and semiotic framework is useful to theorize how participants' engagement with language, specifically, retains a traditional form of subjectivity at the event.

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[69] Rice, "I Went To A 7AM Sober Dance Party & Loved It."

To relate to the world through embodiment is to inhabit what Kristeva calls the "semiotic": the register of the body, unconscious drives and affect.[70] We can say that at the QPOC clubs I described, the semiotic realm was inhabited more than what is normal in our everyday lives. In contrast, Daybreaker participants operate similarly to the everyday, in the realm that Kristeva calls the "symbolic": the realm of rationality and attempts to communicate clearly. Kristeva argues that the symbolic is the domain through which subjectivity is created; she argues that it is through language and rational communication that we consider ourselves subjects (however, the semiotic domain is always disrupting the symbolic in unconscious ways).[71] Thus, operating primarily in the symbolic at Daybreaker ensures that participants inhabit their typical notions of themselves as a subject who is rational and can communicate clearly.

Kristeva argues that we aim to suppress the semiotic in order to preserve our understanding of ourselves as bounded, rational beings; in embracing the symbolic and disparaging the semiotic, the Daybreaker exemplifies this principle. At Daybreaker, participants aim to suppress the realm of the semiotic – to communicate clearly and to understand themselves as subjects with goals for the future: foggy and unclear states of mind are explicitly and implicitly disparaged on the website and by Agrawal in interviews. For example, Agrawal says: "At night, people go to events with completely different levels of energy, but in the morning, it's so clean. It's so pure. It's so clear. It's so lucid."[72] The argument is clear: having a clear and lucid mind is better

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[70] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1984.
[71] Kristeva.
[72] Gardiner, "Why People Are Waking Up for Sober Morning Raves (Instead of the Gym)."

than having a foggy mind; an event at which people are foggy-minded is morally suspect. Accordingly, Daybreaker is engineered to support a clear, lucid mind: it switches nighttime for morning, drunkenness for sobriety, and encourages everyone to be mindful.

The mindfulness rhetoric also ties into ideologies from corporate culture that attempt to train the mind to be more rational and productive. Although mindfulness comes from Buddhist traditions that embrace detachment from one's notion of the self—arguably disrupting notions of the subject—the way that mindfulness is employed in corporate offices and in wellness brands today has turned mindfulness into a productivity-boosting tool.[73] Whereas Buddhist mindfulness emphasizes self-restraint, ethical behaviors, and optimal well-being for both the self and others,[74] Daybreaker's version of mindfulness is paired with a competitive mindset and emphasis on accumulation, making clear that it is closer to what critics call "McMindfulness." Ron Purser and David Loy argue mindfulness is attractive to corporations because "it conveniently shifts the burden onto the individual employee: stress is framed as a personal problem, and mindfulness is offered as just the right medicine to help employees work more efficiently and calmly within toxic environments."[75] This form of mindfulness mimics the larger project of neoliberalism that frames failure or success as a matter of personal will and choice, putting pressure on the individual and invisibilizing the way that social forces shape our situation.

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[73] Purser and Loy, "Beyond McMindfulness."
[74] Purser and Loy.
[75] Purser and Loy.

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Finally, Daybreaker keeps participants in the realm of the mind by maintaining, and even strengthening, the traditional top-down relationship of mind over body that characterizes the workweek. Whereas at QPOC club cultures, partygoers danced for an embodied experience, at Daybreaker, attendees dance as a form of exercise: not as a means to experience embodiment, but rather a means to master the body through neoliberal regimes of fitness. A healthy body is an important characteristic of the ideal neoliberal subject, because it is essential to building human capital. This has gained importance in recent years, exemplified by the rise of fitness programs in corporate offices, treadmill desks, and the common wisdom that health boosts productivity.[76] Today, as Cederström and Spicer point out, there is "a strong and compelling connection between the fit employee and the productive employee"; and "people who smoke, are overweight or sedentary are automatically seen as inactive and unproductive."[77] Thus, health is ultimately tied up in one's own marketability in the neoliberal marketplace. At Daybreaker, we dance to shape the body into an ideal of a neoliberal body; our body is something we work on in order to boost our human capital.

Subjectivity through the maintenance of homotopia

Central to the enabling of alternate modes of subjectivity at original QPOC dance cultures was the creation of spaces that subverted everyday norms. These events established what Foucault calls "heterotopias," defined as spaces that have a "curious" relation to all the other sites in the way that they "suspect, neutralize, or

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[76] Cederström and Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome,* 35.
[77] Cederström and Spicer, 38-39.

invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."[78] QPOC

club cultures did just this. Staging the events at nighttime instead of the day was one

way. Lawrence points out: "The practice of staging parties late at night became the

founding premise of a culture that aimed to invert the priorities of a society organized

around daytime work"[79]; thus, the staging at nighttime was a form of rejecting

dominant paradigms of society. Further, staging the parties at night "enabled

disenfranchised citizens a level of expressiveness they rarely enjoyed during the

day."[80]

Daybreaker, in contrast, deliberately stages its event in the morning – that time

of the day that people who work 9 to 5 jobs engage in the typical rituals of the

workweek as they prepare for the office. Thus Daybreaker's "temporal strategies"

support the maintenance of the workweek experience. Whereas QPOC club cultures

"queered" workweek values by holding events late at night, Agrawal deliberately

hosts Daybreaker events early in the morning. One reason for this is to challenge

participants to perform motivation – to resist the urge to sleep and come to the event,

where they are then congratulated for their feat. Another reason is that Daybreaker

prepares you for work – by hosting the event in the morning, the endorphins and

other benefits of the exercise can be utilized in the office. Thus, in inverting the dance

party from the nighttime to the morning, Daybreaker has effectively also inverted the

means of dissolving subjectivity to supporting it: not only is the "workweek" brought

into the dance experience through simply hosting the event during the day, the

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[78] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 3.
[79] Lawrence, "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor," 238.
[80] Lawrence, 238.

motivation demanded by the early morning hours – and the intention to make you more motivated for work – support neoliberal subjectivity.

It is also temporally in line with workweek values in another sense: it asks you to make plans for your future throughout the event, through the intention-setting ritual, through the MC who encourages you to improve, and through the implication of the display of fitness and healthy eating, which encourage you to think about how you can change your lifestyle. This embraces the western heteropatriarchal concepts of time, as Halberstam explains: focused towards progress and goals.

Finally, in contrast to original QPOC club cultures, Daybreaker takes place at legal and institutional venues. This setting further establishes Daybreaker as a homotopia, departing from the heterotopia established by QPOC club cultures. Daniel Martin argues that raves, for example, were radical because they existed off the map: they were hard to detect and in abandoned places not regulated by the police. He explains: "these "wild zones" (disused warehouses, empty fields, carparks, or any other large, open space in which a sound system can be set up and people can dance) are the re-appropriation and subversion of rational space and also alternative spaces where other discourses can be articulated." [81] Being in an alternative space, then, aided in the experience of differentness from the everyday, and the experience of anti-subjectivity.

Ideological reinforcement of neoliberal subjectivity through self-appreciation and traits of enterprise

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[81] Martin, "Power Play and Party Politics," 83.

Daybreaker supports the formation of the ideal neoliberal subject by targeting the drive to self-appreciate through its promise of transformation and accumulation of new experiences.

New experience is essential to the self-appreciating subject, who must be constantly striving to add novel accomplishments and experiences to her portfolio. Accordingly, Daybreaker promises new experiences – both in the new "lifestyle" it represents, and at the experience of the party, in which a variety of novel experiences are presented to partygoers: two of the six core features of the event promise surprise – the "2 hour dance party with epic surprises" and the "secret concert"[82] – and the promise of surprise is reiterated in emails about the event and at the ticket checkout. The event follows through on these promises, as attendees engage with performers and other activities that are novel: examples include "haiku poets"[83] at one New York event, and pass-around jellyfish puppets at a number of other events. Through the action of setting intentions at the end of the event, the Daybreaker experience keeps attendees focused on new experiences to come in the future.

Transformation of the self is also key to self-appreciation. Accordingly, rhetoric on the website and statements made by Agrawal in interviews hint at the transformation that takes place at Daybreaker through the term "self-expression." Agrawal argues that she founded Daybreaker out of a desire to create a space where people could "self-express" and let their "hair down." This was the impetus behind

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[82] "Daybreaker.Com."

[83] Rice, "I Went To A 7AM Sober Dance Party & Loved It."

forming the brand: "We found that in New York when we came back from this wonderful radically self-expressed place [Burning Man], there was nowhere to let our hair down."[84][85] That she chooses self-expression over other aspects of the club – for example, music – clearly emphasizes the self as a primary site of importance in a dance party experience. However, even as it sounds like Agrawal is endorsing the idea that people should behave how they feel, she clearly doesn't mean this, given how intolerant she is of behaviors like rudeness and apathy that could represent one's genuine feeling. Rather, Agrawal uses the word "self-express" strategically to imply that a positive change will take place within the self at Daybreaker. Both "self-express" and "let your hair down" indicate a way of being that is different than the everyday: it is something we don't do at work, but reserve for a particular time and place. It is through these behaviors that we transform from one way of being to another. Thus, in its description of what takes place on the dance floor, the event promises a positive transformation of the self, essential to the goal of self-appreciation.

The practice of setting intentions, central to the experience, offers a microcosm of the way self-appreciation works here. In one video on the website, the

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[84] "Meaningful Human Connection in the Digital Age," 7:42.

[85] Just as Agrawal's critique of the nightclub places the emphasis on the individual as the primary site of importance, so does her creation of the neologism "self-express"—a verb form of "self-expression." Self-expression is a noun defined by the OED as " the expression of your thoughts or feelings, especially through activities such as writing, painting, dancing, etc." The new "self-expressed" is an adjective – it moves the emphasis from a thing that the self creates, to an attribute that the self has. Now, "self-expressed" is a way of being, and thus something that we can incorporate into our project of self-appreciating individualism.

opening scene fixates on a shot of a hand, holding a square card with graphic and text. Behind it, a mass of grey buildings – the Manhattan skyline – sit slightly out of focus. The close-up of the card invites the viewer to consider the question: "What rooftops will you explore?"[86]

The symbol of rooftops frames the future as the acquisition of new experiences within the realm of bourgeois city living. In Williamsburg, where the event took place, and Manhattan, where the image is focused, rooftops are a privileged space: penthouses are the most expensive and elite kinds of homes; rooftop bars represent an urban chic that is accessible to those with expendable income and the right kind of background to feel like they fit in. The hotel that this event took place at — the William Vale Hotel in Williamsburg Brooklyn — is no different: it is an "independent boutique hotel" located in Williamsburg, which today is arguably a metonym for gentrification. In this way, it demonstrates the formula of neoliberal self-appreciation: one must appreciate experiences that increase their human capital — associating with wealth, going to the fancy bars, and urban living.

Conclusions: From resistance to intensification

Keshun theorized that techno music was a way to transcend humanity – to become non-human through becoming the machine. In contrast, Daybreaker aims to preserve humanity as usual, and to push it towards the most conventional and productive form: the neoliberal subject.

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[86] *Our New Years Wish,* 1.

At Daybreaker, the music and cultural traditions originating in QPOC communities are experienced by a mostly white and majority female audience, which has come to the event to engage in the ritual of self-appreciation, to fantasize and speculate about what they can become. In this way, music of the other is used to enter into a state in which we fantasize about a new form of subjectivity. Roshanak Kheshti has argued that women are drawn to world music through the opportunity to lose themselves in the aural other. She retools what Barthes calls "Signifiance," defined as the "means through which listeners are relieved of the burden of subjectivity by inversion into a space of subjective loss,"[87] arguing that that such a loss can take place through listening. Similarly, at Daybreaker, music that emerges in black communities is used as an inspiring soundtrack to the creation of a new subjectivity. A crowd of mostly white women lose themselves in the aural other – the sound of happy house, soul, and funk – narratives of love, happiness, and resilience. This was music that was once played at underground clubs as part of a larger project to refuse norms of subjectivity that were harmful to marginalized groups. At Daybreaker, they are the soundtrack to the intensification of these norms.

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[87] Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear*, 80.

CHAPTER TWO: HIERARCHY, BIO-MORALITY, AND DRUGS

"The next four years are about more love, more belonging, more dancing and more friendship. No substances needed."[88]

These sentences appear in the closing moments of the Daybreaker "About Us" video. Overlaid on scenes of Daybreaker attendees dancing, hugging and smiling, they would appear to most viewers to blend in seamlessly with the positive rhetoric of the brand. Yet closer look at that closing line – "no substances needed" reveals an implicit critique.

There is so much contained in that line: "no substances needed." There is the assumption that sobriety is de-facto better than intoxication (hence the placement of "no substances needed" alongside other statements obviously meant to be positive), an assumption that will no doubt go unchallenged by acolytes of wellness culture. There is the way that it is phrased – not as a positive but a negative: we celebrate something that we don't need. The implication is clear: although some people need substances to have fun while dancing and to engage with strangers, we have the willpower to do it without. The extent to which the event congratulates its attendees for putting in the effort to show up and dance sober indicates that having the willpower to do without alcohol makes one superior to those who don't.

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[88] *Daybreaker Moments of Magic // About Us,* 0:39.

In this chapter, I focus on the ways that Daybreaker sustains hierarchies. I argue that whereas QPOC club cultures dismantled hierarchies, thereby creating forms of community outside of the norms of the everyday, Daybreaker retains them by upholding the hierarchical audience performer relationship, supporting a bio-moral logic that stigmatizes bad feelings, and embracing the neoliberal rhetoric of the war on drugs. Central to this discussion is the concept of community and individualism. In all cases, Daybreaker's support for hierarchical reasoning renders the event individualist—even as, ironically, Agrawal promotes community as the most important offering of the Daybreaker brand.

Because Daybreaker's identity as a sober event is so central to the brand, I close this study with a sustained analysis of its stance on drugs and alcohol. Bringing my narrative back into present day, I show how Daybreaker's messages about drugs and alcohol supports a deadly system that hinders one's ability to access help and continues to harm people today. Finally, I show that, as a dance party that stigmatizes apathy and bad feelings, Daybreaker represents the antagonist from which the people who took refuge in rave, disco and techno parties were fleeing.

QPOC club ethics of anti-hierarchy

A communal rather than hierarchical relationship between individuals was central to QPOC club culture's form of anti-harm and healing. Lawrence points out that, through the queering of the body at raves, attendees engaged with each other in a uniquely democratic way: sex, race, and gender identities ceased to differentiate the crowd: participants "attempted to create a democratic, cross-cultural community

that was open ended in its formation."[89] Importantly, they came together not as their

various identifies of race sex and gender but as individuals who were all equally

having a queer experience of the body.

Scot Hudson argues that raves enabled an "anti-structure" where differences

between one another are eliminated, through drugs dance and music. Although

hierarchies structure the subculture before the event begins, "remaining differences

are slowly eliminated through dance, drugs, and other rituals that transform

structures of subcultural capital into antistructure."[90]

This dismantling of hierarchy was demonstrated particularly clearly in the

relationship between the audience and the DJ. Lawrence argues that at discos, the

DJ's presence as being "heard but not seen" allowed audience members to think of

themselves not as audience members watching a performer but rather part of a

"collectively generated musical assemblage."[91] In this assemblage, there was a

symbiotic relationship between audience and performer: the audience responded to

the music, and their affects were read by the DJ, who in turn selected a record

suitable to the mood.

Martin arrives at a similar conclusion in his analysis of the rave DJ, arguing

that the specific musical practices of techno disrupt the performer as a glorified

subject. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, techno eschews the "founding narrative" central

to western ideas about art: its original sound material often comes from someone

other than the producer of the track; when the DJ plays a track, he or she will adjust

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[89] Lawrence, "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor," 233.
[90] Hutson, "The Rave: Spiritual Healing in Modern Western Subcultures," 44.
[91] Lawrence, "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor," 236.

the speed and other settings, altering it more. Thus, the work changes hands a couple of times before the audience receives the finished product; the "founding narrative" and glorified subject becomes hard to identify. In this way, "techno decenters the subject, refusing the pop star or the cultural icon as the glorified subject."[92] Thus, the traditionally hierarchical relationship between the glorified subject performer and the regular subjects in the audience is disrupted, creating a de-hierarchical space.

The concept of "technoshamanism," which was popular in 90s rave culture, also demonstrates this non-hierarchical relationship. Technoshamanism refers to the way that the DJ acts as a "harmonic navigator." A '90s-era rave website explains that the technoshaman "senses when it's time to lift the mood, take it down, etc.,just as the shaman did in the good ol' tribal days."[93] Thus, the audience and the DJ contributed collectively to the musical experience: the audience responded to the DJ, the DJ would respond to the audience, and the audience would respond to the DJ again.

Daybreaker's maintenance of hierarchy

Music

The presence of the MC and live performing artist reneges on the non-hierarchical relationship between performer and artist that characterized QPOC club cultures. During live performances at Daybreaker, participants don't feel that they are

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[92] Martin, "Power Play and Party Politics," 93.
[93] Schnieder, "Technoshaman Definitions."

contributing to the musical assemblage, but rather that they are watching and cheering on a performer of special status.

Performers are meant to align with the inspirational mood; the website touts "inspiring live performances."[94] Thus the performing artist is presented as someone to be inspired by, making us think about ourselves in relation to the performer as we watch. To be inspired by another individual is to recognize her as on some level superior; we are inspired by traits we want to incorporate for ourselves. Thus, the act of being inspired reinstates a hierarchy.

Finally, Daybreaker reinstates the hierarchical structure between DJ and the event promoter, through the policy that employees instruct the DJ on what music to play. Agrawal says that she instructs DJs to eschew dark techno and play positive music, such as happy house, funk and soul.[95] This relationship between DJ and promoter replicates the hierarchy that was in place before disco parties opened up more creative and communal pathways for DJs: Tim Lawrence explains that before disco, DJs thought of themselves as "subservient waiters who served up music prepared elsewhere, or as puppeteers who could manipulate the dancers"; it was not until disco that DJs were afforded artistic freedom.[96] Thus Daybreaker reneges on an important milestone in dance party culture that created a horizontal, communal environment.

Bio-morality

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[94] "Daybreaker.Com."
[95] "Meaningful Human Connection in the Digital Age," 9:22.
[96] Lawrence, "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor," 235.

The Daybreaker brand is undergirded by the ideology that those who have the willpower and adventurous spirit needed to attend Daybreaker are superior to those who do not. We can see this best in Agrawal's description of the nightclub in the purported backstory behind Daybreaker's founding. In this scenario, bad feelings abound: there are "mean bouncers, drunk people, and no one dancing"[97]; there is "depletion," "everyone on their cell phones" and "no one actually connecting."[98] People at this club fail to live up to the demand of happiness and positivity: the bouncer is mean, presumably acting out at the patrons; everyone is on their cell-phones and not dancing, signaling that they are disillusioned or bored. Partygoers also feel bad physically: they are drunk, too groggy or out-of-it to even take part in the dancing. There is depletion: the body in a state that is antithetical to the healthy, vigorous, vital body.

This nightclub is full of the kind of people that Agrawal would criticize as "shoulder shruggers" – the opposite of the motivated, positive individual who comes to Daybreaker – and who Agrawal calls the "Fuck Yeah Friend." She explains the difference between the two:

> "You don't want to hang out with shoulder-shruggers, people who are like, 'Yeah… sure .... you know.' I don't want that in my life. I want people who are like 'Fuck yeah, I'm in! You want to go there, wake up at 6 AM? Fuck yeah, lets do that!' So those FYFs – it's a mentality, right? So if we could live life a little bit more like that, we'd all be so much happier."[99]

Delivering the shoulder-shrugger line, Agrawal hunches over, speaks into the microphone with a slow, lazy drawl, letting her voice trail off at the end; she imitates

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[97] "About."
[98] Agrawal, "Daybreaker Redefines Morning Life with Radha Agrawal."
[99] Agrawal, 8:24.

someone who is slow-moving and apathetic. It is clear that the shoulder-shrugger inhabits her mythical nightclub: the shoulder-shrugger is the one who sees the dance floor but doesn't dance, who looks at her phone instead of meeting new people, and who gets drunk rather than being alert and motivated at the event.

In this way, the Daybreaker logic aligns with what Alenka Zupancic calls bio-morality: the axiom that "a person who feels good (and is happy) is a good person; a person who feels bad is a bad person."[100] Bio-morality supports a hierarchical relationship between ourselves and others because it stigmatizes those who fail to live up to the standard of happiness and health. It hinders our ability to recognize the way external circumstances, systemic injustices, and other socio-cultural factors contribute to health and happiness. If empathy and understanding is important to non-hierarchical relationship, bio-moral logic strips us of empathy for those who are suffering, because it frames suffering as a sign of poor character.

Agrawal's response to the shoulder shrugger—to excommunicate them – perfectly exemplifies bio-moral reasoning: shoulder-shruggers are bad people. Her move to found Daybreaker continues this logic: it is a dance party into which no shoulder-shruggers can enter. Agrawal says:

> And I hate to say this, but it's kind of a filter for douchebags. When you come to Daybreaker, you're setting your alarm. You're intentionally getting dressed in costume. You're coming to a party in the morning, before going to work, and you're sober. It's a very specific awesome, adventurous human that's going to do that, right?[101]

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[100] Zupančič, *The Odd One In,* 5.
[101] Gardiner, "Why People Are Waking Up for Sober Morning Raves (Instead of the Gym)."

The douchebag and the shoulder-shrugger are those people who lack ambition and motivation. Daybreaker celebrates all of the qualities antithetical to the shoulder-shrugger – affirming that feeling good is a choice and a better way to live.

The logic of bio-morality also expresses itself in the ostentatious celebration of good feelings at the event. At the door, participants are asked to show affection towards another person when greeting the hugging committee. Through yoga, meditation, and intention-setting exercises, participants affirm the values of being in good health and thinking positively. Health is promoted at every turn of the event: the bar turns into a juice bar, the dance party turns into an exercise, the pregame turns into yoga. On the dance floor, the MC hypes the crowd with language that encourages positivity and less-judgmental behaviors. Not only are good feelings encouraged, but negative feelings like apathy and boredom are made impossible: a constant stream of activity eliminates downtime and ensures participants exert themselves all morning: at least six different activities take place in the frame of three hours—yoga , the "food bazaar," freeform dance, live performances, surprise artists, various surprise performers, and intention-setting.[102]

The moral virtue of feeling good is also central to the Daybreaker website— which I argue plays a role in the overall experience by giving participants a way to frame the experience. For example, the closing text on the "About Us" video reads: "We choose to show up. We choose to say yes. We choose to be happy. It's a

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[102] "Daybreaker.Com."

beautiful thing to be alive, huh?"[103] In this quote, the value of happiness is aligned

with that of motivation and ambition, linking bio-moral ideals to neoliberal subjectivity.

The prototypical Daybreaker attendee – the FYF friend –exemplifies what

Nikolas Rose calls the traits of enterprise: "energy, initiative, ambition, calculation

and personal responsibility."[104] Daybreaker is framed as something that's "hard to do"

– who would want to wake up earlier than she has to, face a dance party while barely

awake, and dance sober? Mental and physical energy are needed to wake up and

commit to the event. Initiative and ambition are needed to grasp the moment and

commit to something challenging. Calculation is needed to be organized enough to fit

Daybreaker into one's schedule; this is not an event for the absent-minded or the

flaky. Finally, to engage in this challenging activity is a testament to the power of the

individual's will—a testament to one's personal responsibility.

Daybreaker's promotion of good feelings as a virtue and shaming of bad

feelings contrasts QPOC night club ethics, where states of depletion and feeling out-

of-it were ways that QPOC clubs offered healing. Further, these practices helped

dancers to enter into an altered form of consciousness, enabling boundaries between

self and other to dissolve, and a more-communal environment to emerge.

Drugs

Daybreaker's insistence on sobriety is another way that it upholds neoliberal

values of hierarchical reasoning. In this closing section, I focus on Daybreaker's

emphasis on sobriety, contextualizing it as a continuation of the neoliberal rhetoric of

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[103] *Daybreaker Moments of Magic // About Us*, 0:47.
[104] Rose, "Governing the Enterprising Self," 6.

the war on drugs. Arguing that states of intoxication enabled healing for QPOC club cultures, I show how Daybreaker's rhetoric on drugs again refuses a vital form of community and healing important to early club cultures. In closing, I bring my discussion into present day, showing how the war-on-drugs logic directly leads to the dismantling of community efforts, by turning the problem of drug use into an individual rather than social problem and destroying the pathways through which people can receive help for drug overdoses.

Daybreaker's message on alcohol and drugs

The Daybreaker rhetoric about drug use and self-responsibility is underlined by the same logic of the neoliberal war on drugs. On the Daybreaker website, most statements imply that Daybreaker's sober status make it morally superior to events that allow alcohol and drugs. For example, the alcohol-free status of the event is plastered across a number of pages: a "No alcohol served" badge sits on the front page next to other praiseworthy characteristics of the brand, such as "woman owned business" and "multigenerational community."[105] On another page, an inspirational video introducing customers to the brand features footage of happy, dancing people overlaid with the text: "We don't need alcohol."[106] The nightclub isn't referenced here, but the implicit comparison to the nightclub is what gives these statements their noteworthiness and which justifies their being emphasized. Without the nightclub comparison, this statement is not particularly of note: there is nothing interesting

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[105] Daybreaker.com.
[106] *Daybreaker Moments of Magic // About Us*.

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about an early morning wellness event serving coffee and tea only. It is only interesting because it contradicts what we typically associate with a dance party.

In contrast to these implicit dismissals, sobriety is openly embraced on the Daybreaker website. A quote from a Mind Body Green article is featured prominently on the Daybreaker campus page says, "Sobriety is not just beneficial, but a prerequisite to finding and fulfilling our purpose... as evidenced by the popularity of events like Daybreaker."[107] Daybreaker's status as alcohol-free is promoted on the front page in the form of a badge – "alcohol free" – which sits next to other praiseworthy tokens such as "women owned business" and "multi-generational community."[108] There is no explanation for why it is better to be sober. It is simply assumed as common wisdom.

Agrawal also links the lazy and apathetic seamlessly to drug users. In an offhand comment to a journalist, she says, "I went to a nightclub last weekend… just because I hadn't been to one in a while, and it was, like, a bunch of sad tweakers in the dark."[109] Her view that drug users are morally corrupt is shared by at least some at the event. One customer told a reporter: "When you go to bars and clubs, there are a lot of people standing against the wall, and the people who are dancing look like they're strung-out and stuff," he said. "I'll still go out and party all night, but this is more fun."[110]

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107 "Daybreaker Campus."
108 "Daybreaker.Com."
109 Drew Magary, "My Morning Ravers."
110 Marikar, "The Rise of Early-Morning Dance Parties."

The logic that disparages drug users as lazy and lacking self-responsibility traces back to the neoliberal war on drugs. The war on drugs framed drug addiction as a result of moral ineptitude and insufficient self-control and directly targeted impoverished person of color communities. Framing drug use as a sign of indulgence, it was crystalized in Reagan's racist "welfare queen," a black woman who leeched off state resources and lived a lavish, lazy and indulgent life. [111] This framing of the drug crisis supported a crucial neoliberal goal, which is to dismantle public resources. When drug use is framed as a problem of laziness, it follows that increasing welfare benefits for drug users will only make them lazier. Thus, rather than invest in schools and community resources, welfare must be cut. Even as Daybreaker's rhetoric about sobriety is framed as community-forward, this neoliberal logic promotes the opposite: the implication is that the community can't help those in need and that those who struggle can only improve by sheer will and determination of the self.

Drugs and healing

Daybreaker's insistence on sobriety is another way in that it upholds neoliberal values of hierarchical reasoning and thereby overlooks and refuses a vital form of anti-harm and self-care, utilized by participants at QPOC clubs. I want to discuss the ways that drugs and alcohol—contrary to the way they are framed by Daybreaker— can be healing. Obviously, Daybreaker rejects the possibility that drugs and alcohol can be in any way therapeutic or beneficial to those who take them. In this sense, the

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[111] Wilson, *Neoliberalism,* 38.

Daybreaker message rejects the potential of experiencing relief from the challenges of the working week.

Jock Young's "Subterranean values and the world of play" argues that consuming drugs facilitates the transition between "formal work values" and "subterranean values"; or rather, from the normative world to the world of play. Showing that Matza and Sykes's theory of "subterranean values" is nearly identical to the definition of "play" by various scholars, he defines subterranean or "play" values as emphasizing "expressivity, hedonism, excitement, new experience and non-alienated activity"[112], and formal workday values as restraint, self-control, and work. Play "occurs when man steps out of the workaday world, beyond the limitations of economic reality as we know it."[113]

Drawing from Marcuse, Young argues that the world of subterranean values, or play, has a psychological basis in the joys of "free play" that one has to give up when entering the adult world of economic responsibility. He says: "the bifurcation between formal and subterranean values has a parallel in the distinction between pleasure and reality principles."[114]; that is, the child has to give up pleasure and immediate gratification for toil and delayed gratification.

The figure of the child is relevant to Halberstam's work on failure, too. It almost seems we could replace her definition of failure with play when she says:

> Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods.

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[112] Young, "The Subterranean World of Play," 74.
[113] Young, 75.
[114] Young, 75.

Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers.[115]

This indicates that play is just as much about non-productive, non-economic forms of being as it is about non-normative forms of being. Halberstam argues that ways of being traditionally considered failures can offer surprising, creative ways of being that go against the capitalist, heteropatriarchal norms of society.

How war-on-drugs logic is harmful to community today

To conclude, I will bring my discussion of QPOC ethics into the present day, showing how Daybreaker's war-on-drugs rhetoric is harmful to community and goes against the ethics established at early QPOC club cultures.

Daybreaker's no-tolerance-for-alcohol message comes at a time when the war-on-drugs logic still shapes the way we think about drugs and dance parties. In 2003, following a couple of high-profile MDMA-related deaths at raves, US congress passed the R.A.V.E (Reducing American's Vulnerability to Ecstasy) Act, which aimed to reduce drug use by making it illegal for venues or people running parties to "knowingly" profit from a venue in which the purpose is for people to do drugs.[116] This was an expansion of the first "war on drugs"-era law, a 1986 law that sought to address the crack cocaine epidemic.[117] With this new law, venue owners or promoters could be prosecuted if it seemed like their venue was meant to be a space where controlled substances could be used. This had the effect that drug safety

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[115] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure,* 3.
[116] Reducing Americans' Vulnerability to Ecstasy Act of 2003.
[117] Anderson, "Molly Deaths and The Failed War on Drugs."

measures like free water bottles, cool down rooms, or information about drug safety could be grounds for prosecution. As a result, the R.A.V.E. act has not helped the situation but worsened it[118] – just as the "war on drugs" ruined more lives than it saved. The R.A.V.E. Act continues to perpetuate the logic created with Reagan's war on drugs: rather than offer community resources to improve human wellbeing, we should cut resources and criminalize bad behavior.

Thus, Daybreaker's approach to alcohol replicates two failed solutions that, rather than helped people, stigmatized them. In all cases, the equating of alcohol and drug use with a lack of self-responsibility has lead to less empathic, more severe measures. It sends the message that people who use drugs and alcohol should not seek out support from their community but solve the problem themselves. This message contradicts Daybreaker's purported mission to create a judgment free space and to bolster community.

In contrast, underground club scenes today are rejecting neoliberal values of competition and personal responsibility is in their attitude of empathy and care towards illegal drug use. DanceSafe is an organization that provides information and drug testing kits to raves and venues. Founded in 1998 by Emanuel Sferios, a "drug positive" "harm reduction advocate,"[119] it aims to reduce harm from drug misuse, using peer-based educational programs. Volunteers for this group show up at raves and nightlife events and distribute drug testing kits and pamphlets, offering an unbiased explanation to the side effects and risks associated with a range of drugs.

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[118] Anderson.
[119] "Emanuel Sferios."

They aim to provide "a non-judgmental perspective to help support people who use drugs in making informed decisions about their health and safety."[120] DanceSafe represents a community-oriented network that rejects the neoliberal rhetoric of self-responsibility and the toxic "war on drugs" perspective, working instead with an ethics of care and empathy in its approach to drug use and safety.

Conclusion

In this paper I argued that even as Daybreaker emphasizes community as a core value, it ultimately reneges on QPOC club culture's ethics of community, which relied on practices that destabilized subjectivity and hierarchy in order to blur the boundaries between self and other. Rather, Daybreaker supports the production of neoliberal subjectivity and neoliberal and bio-moral configurations of hierarchy, upholding these boundaries. Ultimately, I showed that Daybreaker empties QPOC club culture traditions of their radical potential, turning the dance party into a space in which to acquiesce to dominant neoliberal norms, rather than resist them.

It is worth noting that the consequences of Daybreaker go beyond the aesthetic affront they pose to original dance cultures. By supporting the ideologies of neoliberalism, Daybreaker supports a system that has played a large role in the devastation and criminalization of communities of color. The ways that neoliberal policy have harmed poor people of color the most is well documented: dismantling the welfare state has increased poverty, and gone hand in hand with increased criminalization and incarceration in these communities. Given that Daybreaker

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[120] "About DanceSafe."

represents the empathetic, social-justice minded strain of neoliberal culture, it would likely come as a surprise to anyone who attends that this exercise in positivity and health could have anything to do with a social issue of this caliber. However, neoliberal policies are justified and gain popular support first and foremost by ideologies that frame the problem of who is worthy of help and who isn't. In promoting the idea that success and happiness can be attained by the strength of the will alone, and that people who are unhappy or struggling are personally responsible for their misfortune, Daybreaker plays into the neoliberal ideology whose logical conclusion is that poverty emerges out of a lack of responsibility, which welfare only enables.

The demographic that attends Daybreaker, mostly white and middle to upper middle class, are less affected by the kind of material devastation that neoliberalism has wrought on poor people of color communities. However, they too are harmed by the entrainment into the neoliberal ideology engrained in Daybreaker, albeit in different ways. Agrawal rightly argues that people today are lonelier than ever. However, beyond the rise of social media, she doesn't address the ways that the current cultural injunction is contributing to this loneliness. Neoliberalism is certainly a factor: it makes us view others as competition,[121] eschew social support, prioritize our work over our friends and family, and view self-reliance as a virtue to strive for. As a company that supports neoliberal ideologies, Daybreaker can be framed as what Lauren Berlant calls "cruel optimism": "when something you desire is actually an

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[121] Wilson, *Neoliberalism*.

obstacle to your flourishing."[122] Although participants might genuinely experience

feelings of inclusion and community at the event, they still come away with the

neoliberal message that true happiness can only be found through focusing on the

self.

Ultimately, the event plays into an implicitly exclusionary rhetoric that harms

both groups. Agrawal and the Daybreaker brand make it clear who this event is for:

the person who is down for anything, who is never too tired or unhappy to jump out of

bed at 5:30 AM, who is never too uncomfortable or insecure to dance with a crowd of

strangers. For those who are too tired to wake up, for those who are too unhappy to

appear positive, in short – for those whose life is hard – a reality disproportionally

born by the poor, queer, POC – but which affects all people – the invitation to engage

in this fantasy of community and happiness is not extended. Missing from the

conversation is that to have some level of optimism about the world, enabling the

performance of happiness and affirmations of positivity, is a privilege in itself. For

many, pessimism is a rational response to life. Daybreaker establishes a dangerous

precedent by implying that the joys of community and creativity should be reserved

only for those who have the social or material resources needed to be positive. The

problem with Daybreaker is the problem with the wellness movement generally: it

refuses entry to those who are negative, no matter how legitimate that negativity may

be.

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[122] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* 1.

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