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# Clubbing Criminals: The Hirschfeld Centre and the Emergence of Queer Club Culture in Dublin

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## Abstract

Ireland in the 1970s and 80s was an extremely hostile place for the LGBT community: male homosexuality remained a criminal offence and social, legal and political oppression was the norm. This article documents the emergence of a nascent queer clubbing scene in Dublin in this period and investigates the historical intersection of partying and politics in a DIY translocal music scene defined by the sexual politics of the time. In particular, this research focuses on exploring the social and political importance of Ireland's first purpose built queer club, Flikkers, which opened in the Hirschfeld Centre, Temple Bar on St. Patrick's Day 1979. In addition to addressing the club's pivotal place in the evolution of professional clubbing practices in Dublin, this article explores its social and political importance as space for those who felt their sexual identities did not align with the heteronormative status quo.

## Introduction

This article explores the intersection of gay and lesbian socialisation and political activism in queer club culture in Dublin's first purpose-built gay nightclub - Flikkers - which was housed in the Hirschfeld Centre at no. 10 Fownes Street in Temple Bar in Dublin from 1979 until 1987.<sup>1</sup> The Hirschfeld Centre was established by the Na-

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<sup>1</sup> While commonly known as Flikkers, the club went by different names on different nights of the week, which changed from time to time throughout its eight-year existence. In 1987 the building was destroyed by fire, bringing the club and the community centre that housed it to an abrupt end.

tional Gay Federation (NGF) and was the first full-time community centre for lesbian and gay people in Ireland. Kerrigan (2021: 58) identifies it as one of the primary 'engines for social transformation' for this community in Ireland. Flikkers represented a form of DIY musical club culture unique to its time, geographic location and the culture from which it emerged. While often synonymous with punk scenes, the term DIY embraces 'a range of creative cultural practices' and 'a broader ethos of lifestyle politics that bonds people together in networks of trans-local, alternative cultural production' (Bennett & Guerra, 2019: 7 & 9). Music plays an important role within queer scenes in structuring queer styles, social relations and sensibilities. Queer people often collectively organise around certain styles and genres of music – and since the arrival of queer clubbing culture in Ireland, the music that operates as a social force in these scenes is typically translocal in nature, in that it is also the music of other queer scenes in other places. This was so important for a community that was beset by immigration – as faraway places often represented freedoms of personal expression impossible in conservative Catholic Ireland.

Flikkers was rooted in a translocal club culture of disco, and later house music.<sup>2</sup> It was renowned for its cutting-edge dance repertoire, a mixture of mainstream popular music and less widely distributed dance music mixes. The scene that built up around the club, however, cannot primarily be predicated upon or understood in terms of its participants' collective musical tastes. This club was a site that served the dual purpose of queer socialisation and political activism in a period when any displays of physical intimacy (such as dancing) between men was deemed criminal behaviour. Sexual politics were fundamental to its very existence and informed its mode of operations, and both insider and outsider understandings of this space. Flikkers was overtly anti-hegemonic in its challenge to the prevailing discourses

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<sup>2</sup> A translocal scene is 'oriented around stylistic and/or musicalized associations across geographical borders' (Taylor, 2012: 50). Peterson and Bennet (2004: 8-9) explain that while the scenes are local in nature 'they are also connected with groups of kindred spirits many miles away.'

and practices of heteronormativity in Ireland. Consequently, it was a site that attracted LGBT+ and heterosexual punters to consciously engage in this political work through the act of musicking.<sup>3</sup> Christopher Small (1998: 50) describes musicking as ‘an activity by means of which we bring into existence a set of relationships that model the relationships of our world, not as they are but as we would wish them to be.’

Queer musical cultures in Ireland have played an important role in community and world building for Irish citizens who do not conform to heteronormativity as understood at various times in Irish history. Yet, we know anecdotally and from the stories of those who have experienced the political and social power of these places first hand, that queer musical scenes have played a fundamental role in contributing to social change in Ireland, particularly since the late 1970s.

### **Gay Life in Ireland in the 1970s and 80s**

In order to appreciate the social and political importance of Flikkers as a queer musical space, one must be aware of the social and political context in which this scene emerged. Ireland in the 1970s and 80s was an extremely difficult place for those who did not identify as heterosexual, and the vast majority of the gay community remained in the closet. The threats of physical attack (for both gay men and lesbians), losing one’s job, one’s children, being kicked out of home, becoming victim to blackmail, or subjected to unnecessary psychiatric treatments, social os-

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Small (1998: 9) defines musicking by considering the object music as an action, to music: ‘To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. Small’s work highlights the political aspects that underpin how we pay attention to music, how we participate in a live or recorded performance (either passively or actively) in social settings. He argues that a theory of musicking is ‘an important component of our understanding of ourselves and of our relationships with other people’(13).

tracization or police harassment were just some of the persistent threats that prevented people from coming out. The few who stood forward as public figures did so often at great personal cost.

An already grim situation became increasingly worse in 1982. In January the gay man Charles Self was viciously murdered in his home. The Gardaí treated the murder investigation as an opportunity to gather as much intelligence as possible on members of the gay community: fingerprints, photographs and personal information of an estimated 1,500 gay men were collected (Lacey, 2015: 252). Rose (1994: 19) explains that many of the questions asked 'had nothing to do with the murder... they were asked who they slept with, names and addresses of their gay friends and even what they did in bed.' Around this time an anti-gay vigilante group began targeting men in Fairview Park in Dublin, a well-known cruising area at that time. A number of men were attacked and the Gardaí took no action to prevent the group from committing queer bashings. In August Declan Flynn was chased and beaten to death by this vigilante gang. On 9 March 1983, the *Irish Times* reports that during the court case one of the attackers admitted: 'A few of us had been queer-bashing for about six weeks before and had battered 20 steamers.' The same article quotes the judge's comment that 'the defendants could never have been accused of murder.' All five were found guilty of manslaughter, their sentences were suspended in full and they were immediately released. A member of the gay community recalls that this statement 'combined with the leniency of the sentence gave the impression that it was OK to kill a queer. The injustice of the sentence was highlighted sometime later when a member of the gang received a six-month jail sentence for stealing a car...' (Boyd et al, 1986: 195). The community were outraged and hundreds of people marched in protest from Liberty Hall to Fairview Park. Flynn's murder has been described as Ireland's "Stonewall," a 'moment when the gay community not only began to claim a visible presence in the media and the public sphere but also began to talk back to the state' (Kerrigan, 2021: 1).

This message that gay lives did not matter or deserve equality in law, had recently been supported by the Supreme Court ruling in 1982 against David Norris' case to repeal the laws of 1861 and 1885 that criminalised the sexual activities of gay men. The 1885 Act criminalised '*any act of physical intimacy between two men*' (Boyd et al, 1986: 190, emphasis added). While acts of physical intimacy were not defined, this cast doubt on the legality of an act such as two men dancing together. Set against this backdrop of violence and discrimination, the following description of what it was like to be gay in the 1980s is all the more poignant:

We have never known truly spontaneous gestures of affection or unguarded conversations. ... It is hard to believe that holding hands or kissing at a bus stop is an affront to public decency and liberal tolerance. ... A lethal combination of society's prohibitions and our own self-censorship hides our very existence from the sight of people generally (Boyd et al, 1986: 209).

The LGBT+ rights activist Izzy Kamikaze explains that these anti-gay laws did not just affect homosexual men:

It affected everybody, I mean I think it affected straight people as well... I think if affected the culture, it was about how the culture saw sexuality and there wasn't anything about choice or identity or anything that came from yourself. It was all about kinds of patterns of behaviour that you were supposed to conform to, and Ireland was a very difficult place for anybody who didn't do that. The alternative... was emigration. And so many gay people emigrated. When I think of the people I met in those first couple of years, I would say a majority of them went away (Panti, 2018).

### **The Emergence of a Club Scene**

The emergence of queer clubbing culture in Ireland prior to the decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1993 is closely linked to the shifting currents of LGBT activism, its sites of action and its participants. Perhaps then, it is not surprising that a number of gay rights activists have been prominent DJs or entertainers within this scene. Such figures include Joni Crone, Tonie Walsh and Izzy Kamikaze, who were all DJs. Joni Crone is a co-founder of Liberation for Irish Lesbians (LIL),

which was established in September 1978. At that time she was a writer, DJ, and playwright, and in 1980 she was the first Irish lesbian to appear on Irish television on the *Late Late Show*.<sup>4</sup> Tonie Walsh is a former chair of the National Gay Federation, which took over from the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) in 1978.<sup>5</sup> He is co-founder of Ireland's longest running LGBT publication, *Gay Community News (GCN)*, and the founder of the Irish Queer Archives. He was a renowned DJ in the Irish clubbing world up to his retirement in 2007. Kamikaze was a prominent figure in organising Dublin Pride in the early 1980s. She DJed women's discos in the Hirschfeld Centre and at the Dublin Resource Centre, which was also based in Temple Bar (on Temple Lane South). Kamikaze relates that 'in the early days... the drivers of the [lesbian and gay clubbing] scene [were] the local queer activists – who [were] the only people prepared to do it at that point' (Walsh et al, 2020a).

In an era of legal, social and political oppression, businesses rarely wanted to associate with the LGBT community, and this meant that a commercial scene was slow to develop. Early queer clubs were peer-mediated spaces, where most often money raised at the door was used to fund community services. In this period there was no state funding for any LGBT related activity. The most prominent queer nightclub spaces in Dublin in the 1970s and 80s were the Phoenix Centre (1975-8), Flickers (1979-1987), Sides (1985-1987) and Hooray Henry's from the late 1980s in the basement of the Powerscourt Townhouse. Regular dedicated club nights in this period included The Good Karma (c.1976), Lolas's (1977),<sup>6</sup> Sita's (in the Parliament Inn from 1980), and J.J. Smyths (from 1981 onwards). The latter two were both women's discos held in gay-friendly bars. The Good Karma was Dublin's first homosocial club: it was privately run, and short-lived. Mixed gay or

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<sup>4</sup> Páraic Kerrigan conducts an in-depth analysis of this interview and the appalling way in which she was treated in his book *LGBT Visibility, Media and Sexuality in Ireland* (Oxon: Routledge, 2021): 62-67.

<sup>5</sup> My sincere thanks go to Tonie Walsh for engaging in almost four hours of semi-structured exploratory interviews for this research over the course of two sittings in February and April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Lola's was Ireland's first transgender club. It ran from 1977 to the late 80s.

women-only discos and tea dances regularly took place in the Phoenix Centre in Parnell Square. The Phoenix Centre was Ireland's first gay community centre and it was run by the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) on a part-time basis from 1975 until 1978. In the 1970s Joni Crone DJed the women's disco nights there, and later in J.J. Smyth's and Sita's.<sup>7</sup>

As previously mentioned, Flikkers was a community dance club located in the basement of the Hirschfeld Centre, a community centre run by the NGF. While it had a commercial imperative to support the activities of the centre, it was non-commercial in nature and it marked a distinctive shift in the nature and quality of queer clubbing nightlife. It was the first purpose-built dedicated clubbing space for the LGBT+ community in Ireland. Six years following the opening of Flikkers, Sides became the first commercial gay club to open in Dublin.<sup>8</sup> Sides is considered to have brought the clubbing scene to a whole new level in Ireland, in terms of the aesthetics of the venue, the quality and professionalism of the lights, sound and décor and its sonic focus on house music. With the exception of Flikkers and Sides all of these clubs were quite amateur in their set up with basic sound equipment, and sometimes the space did not have a dedicated dancefloor. Kamikaze describes dancing on 'sticky carpet' at women's discos in the Parliament Inn. Nevertheless, she fondly remembers:

it was fabulous, it was home from home, it was freedom... quite a considerable number of the women who went there lived with their parents, and everyone was in the closet, and for many people the only time they were out was when they went out on a Saturday night and so the energy in that room was extraordinary (Walsh et al, 2020a).

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<sup>7</sup> Crone named the latter club night after the title of the book *Sita's* by the prominent lesbian feminist writer Kate Millet. Millet visited Ireland in October 1980 (Connolly & O'Toole, 2006: 178).

<sup>8</sup> The importance of Flikkers and Sides in the evolution of clubbing culture in Dublin is addressed in the documentary *Notes on Rave* (2017). It can be viewed here: [https://youtu.be/\\_jYBVXYo1H4](https://youtu.be/_jYBVXYo1H4)



While the list of queer clubs in the 1970s and 80s may be short, these spaces had a profound impact on the lives of the countless gays and lesbians that attended them in the era before decriminalisation. In a 2018 podcast Ireland's well-known drag queen and queer icon Panti Bliss recalls the first time she entered the doors of a gay club in Dublin (Hooray Henry's) and the feelings evoked by this experience:

He would not have recognised my amazement when they led us up the steps to a door that I had passed a thousand times and he wouldn't have recognised my excitement being on that dancefloor under those swirling lights surrounded for the first time in my life by people like me, nor would he recognise my relief at the realisation that these dancing defiant queers were laughing, sweating proof that I wasn't the only one (Panti, 2018).

Panti's final comment about the feeling of relief highlights the importance of queer spaces in countering social isolation and sexual repression and oppression. Queer clubs were sites where doing ordinary things was extraordinary and highly politicized: kissing, dancing, holding hands. What happened at the Stonewall Inn in New York in 1969 reminds us that the activities of partying and protesting are not as far removed as one might assume:

Same-sex couples, two men and two women and their trans brothers and sisters were dancing together, which was considered not only socially taboo, but actually illegal in 1969. ... I have to take a moment to remind myself of the power of socialization, in sort of fuelling political agitation, and political awareness, ... these dance clubs and bars ... provided so many opportunities for us to meet our own kind as they still do, ... but they were inherently about actually ... creating a peer-mediated space where people then can imagine brighter things, and can embolden themselves for a more fabulous future (Walsh interview 2, 2020).

### **Flikkers and the Hirschfeld Centre**

Pramaggiore argues that globalisation and cosmopolitanism 'has always been an aspirational feature of queer Irish identities' (cited in Kerrigan 2021: 141-2). This argument certainly holds weight in relation to the way the NGF managed the Hirschfeld Centre, and its inhouse discotheque. The centre was named after the

gay Jewish German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, an advocate for gay and transgender rights in the early twentieth century until the Nazis stopped his work. The centre's international outlook was also reflected in the contents of its library, which subscribed to LGBT literature from across the globe, and allowed those who used it to keep up to date on LGBT movements and events in other parts of the world. Moreover, the cinema showed movies and documentaries from other countries. The centre engaged frequently with the national media in order to promote the visibility of lesbian and gay lives, and to call for public support for the provision of more rights for gay people in Ireland. It advertised social activities like the women's disco in *The Irish Times*, and on occasion invited the national broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) to report upon the centre and its social and political work. In a gesture of social outreach the Hirschfeld Centre allowed RTÉ's cameras in around 1981 for the programme *Ireland's Eye*, which I will return to shortly.

The club's name Flikkers is the Dutch for the homophobic pejorative 'faggot,' and its provocative name was indicative of the queer politics that underpinned the club's conception and its management. As it was based within a community centre one of its primary roles was to bring in much needed revenue at a time when no government entities would fund gay community projects. Flikkers was the 'cash cow on which the whole edifice [of the centre] was built' (Walsh interview 2, 2020) and important social and political projects depended upon its success: it paid the mortgage for the building, funded a range of services including the phone support line Tel-A-Friend and the Lesbian Line, and the publication of *Out* magazine and *Identity*. The Hirschfeld Centre was run entirely by volunteers, including the club, which had a pool of about ten volunteer DJs that included Vincent Hanley, Paul Webb, Tonie Walsh, Liam Fitzpatrick, Izzy Kamikaze and Paul Edwards. The club operated a members only policy and no alcohol was served until its final years due to strict licencing laws in Ireland. As the club pre-dated the commercialisation of the club scene, club goers would often dance until the small hours of the morning.

On special occasions, such as the annual Halloween Balls or St. Patrick's Day, the disco would run until eight in the morning.

### **Music & Sound**

Flikkers was Dublin's first electronic music venue and marked the genesis of a new form of club culture in Dublin, a more outward looking and professional set up than what had been the norm to that point. Tonie Walsh credits two things with making Flikkers stand out: the quality of its sound system and the music collection at the DJs' disposal. In addition to high quality Djing equipment, that included 'a set of Techniques turntables, a Yamaha tape deck (with playback, record, pitch control and speed control (+-10%) and a graphic equalizer)', 'the sound system's speakers were arranged to promote stereo separation and surround sound for dancers, with two bass stacks and Bose tops in each corner' (Walsh interview 1, 2020). The NGF set aside a generous budget of £50 per week to spend on records which facilitated 'possibly the most eclectic representative and complete... vinyl collection of pop music and dance music in Ireland' (Walsh interview 1, 2020). The NGF signed up to DJ subscription services and labels in the States and elsewhere, including Disconnect, Hot Tracks and WestEnd. This meant Flikkers' DJs had access to limited edition releases and early access to commercial releases, that were typically DJ friendly long edits or dub versions, months before the tracks were released to the public. Beat mixing was a highly valued skill amongst the Flikkers DJs, a number of whom went on to have successful careers within the newly emerging Irish commercial dance club scenes of the 1980s and 90s.<sup>9</sup> Flikkers regularly published top-twenty records lists in *InDublin* magazine which also helped to establish the importance of this club for its ability to curate cutting edge dance playlists and

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<sup>9</sup> These DJs included Liam Fitzgerald, Paul Webb and Tonie Walsh. Liam Fitzpatrick was headhunted by the owners of Sides disco – John Nolan and Cyril O'Brien – when it first launched to become their resident DJ.

in promoting its own sonic identity. Walsh compares the 'tunes that I would consider iconic, classic Flikkers records, to be redolent of the sound you would have heard in the Saint in New York ..., which was like a gay version of Studio 54' (Walsh Interview 1, 2020).

Taylor (2012: 42) argues that through music

people construct their identities, enact their political and social values, and live their lives in particular times and places. Concomitantly, to understand both the musics of queer subjects and how queers have coalesced around particular musics can tell us much about sexual agency, advocacy and the stylistic modes of queer resistance and survival.

In the early days of Flikkers, disco music was particularly important. Walsh highlights Donna Summer's "McArthur Park", Viola Willis' 'If You Could Read my Mind', and Geraldine Hunt's "Can't Make the Feeling" as being particularly important to him in understanding his sexual identity. He argues that gay men could find 'black women singing about their own oppression' an 'easy vehicle for their own awareness and identity' (Panti, 2018). Disco acts Odyssey and Viola Willis performed at the Hirschfeld Centre in the 1980s and Sylvester was booked to perform the year following the fire that destroyed the building.

The Flikkers' disco sound graduated towards house music throughout the 1980s. However, depending on what night of the week you attended, the music could differ somewhat and club nights evolved over the course of its eight years. For instance Wednesday nights were usually an indie-pop night called The Cage, with music that ranged from Hugh Masekela to electro synth pop/new wave like Depeche Mode and The Pet Shop Boys (Walsh interview 1, 2020). Kamikaze notes the importance of music in coming out and in achieving a place of belonging within the gay community. This sense of belonging often came through understanding the coded nature of gay life in Ireland at this time. She recalls that in the early 1980s the gay scene was 'hidden in plain sight, everything was very coded. ... Nothing was very upfront. Then you found it, and it was like Alice going mad, you found yourself in this completely different world' (Panti, 2018). She notes that two of her

favourite tracks to play were “Last Night a DJ Saved My Life” and “Small Town Boy” by Bronski Beat. She explains that when you listen now to the latter song ‘it’s so obvious it’s a young gay coming out... [but] it was on *Top of The Pops* every week back then without anyone mentioning anything... when you came out all the code was revealed’ (Panti, 2018).

### **Queer Socialization**

In addition to identification of the self within the music heard at Flikkers, the management of the club space promoted a form of social freedom and acceptance not then possible in mainstream society and its social spaces. For many lesbians and gay men, the Flikkers’ dancefloor afforded them an opportunity for intimacy with someone of the same sex outside the domestic setting. The slow set was particularly important in this regard. For some punters it facilitated a temporary escape from the pretence of a heterosexual life. A spokesperson for LIL explains in an article for the *Irish Times* in 1984:

We often get married women who just come in to our disco in the Hirschfeld Centre on a Thursday night and meet other women or maybe even a particular lover and then creep back and live the rest of the week with their husbands and families. The vast majority of married lesbian women just endure their situation because otherwise they feel they’d lose their kids (Walsh: 11).

Flikkers was a space where privacy would be respected. Walsh describes the club’s code of *omerta*. It was:

a place where not only can you be yourself, where you can do it, even you can get mad off your tits and fall flat on your face and somebody is going to pick you up with some kindness and compassion and not talk about it to the newspapers the next day, or not talk about it to their heterosexual friends, or talk about it in a way outside the building that is going to compromise the fact that you’re still in the closet or the fact that you’re snorting cocaine or whatever (Walsh interview 2, 2020).

Brian Black’s report on the Hirschfeld centre for the RTÉ programme *Ireland’s Eye* in 1981 provides us with a snapshot of this club space where cameras of any kind

were rarely permitted.<sup>10</sup> This brief report presents shots of the dancefloor in between snippets of interviews with volunteers who discuss the centre's services and talk about what it is like to be a gay man in Ireland. A small group of men dance to disco tracks that include Phyllis Nelson's "Don't Stop the Train" and Power's "Say it Again Sam." This is certainly a staged scene, however, it allows us to experience a snapshot of the sounds, gestures and space of Flikkers.

The dancefloor scenes do not present the glam or camp excess associated with disco in a queer clubbing scene – one of the dancers is wearing his school uniform. It is all quite ordinary. While Flikkers utilises the music of the translocal disco scene, it does not exhibit the stylistic exuberance that one associates with disco in a cosmopolitan centre like New York. However, this does not detract from the social and political power of this video. As Jacques Attali argues, the value of music's function is located in its potential 'to facilitate disobedience and affect the central ideologies that govern society' (Taylor 2012: 130). In this case disobedience is primarily demonstrated through dance, and its challenge to the masculinist and associated heteronormative *status quo*. Here dancing is a political statement. As McClary (1991: 153) notes, 'the mind/body-masculine/feminine problem places dance decisively on the side of the 'feminine' body rather than with the objective "masculine" intellect.' Within Irish society at this time, this presentation of men on the dance floor represented gender trouble as this was a space that was understood as feminised and the genre of music playing in the background was widely known to be 'gay music'.<sup>11</sup>

The volunteer running the bar reveals that it is not just gay clientele that frequent Flikkers. An article on the club in the *Irish Independent* in 1985 reports on the at-

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<sup>10</sup> The report, first broadcast on 24 November 1981, can be viewed via the RTÉ online archive: [RTÉ Archives | Society | Hirschfeld Centre National Gay Federation \(rte.ie\)](https://www.rte.ie/archives/society/hirschfeld-centre-national-gay-federation).

<sup>11</sup> In the late 1970s the RTÉ programme *Tuesday Report* filmed shots of gay and lesbians dancing at the IGRM's Phoenix Club disco. See an analysis of this in Kerrigan (2021: 44-5).

tendance of 'straight' punters, and simply credits their presence to the 'great music'. However, the Hirschfeld Centre attracted queer communities that represented a diversity of subjectivities in regards to gender and sexuality. Flikkers was frequently attended by 'Queer heteros,' people who felt that the heteronormativity that was on view to them at that time was not something they could ascribe to (Walsh et al, 2020b).

Queer is a politicised identity that is 'available to anyone who aims to subvert hegemony, ... [anyone] marginalised owing to their desires and/or because of their inability to locate themselves within a specific fixed identity category' or within 'the moral codes and normalising regimes imposed by dominant society' (Taylor 2012: 35 & 36). Walsh describes the disco at the Hirschfeld Centre as an egalitarian place that accommodated a range of sexual and gender subjectivities:

[Flikkers] just didn't differentiate between people on the basis of gender or income or age or ethnicity. You could be on the dance floor, you know, with some rent boy on one side of you stoned off his head and then a junior high court judge or something or an off-duty copper, you know, or somebody, a school teacher or, you know, a lesbian sex worker. Sundays was known as the day when all the prostitutes came in, the sex workers came in. That was their night off (Walsh interview 2, 2020).

On the disco dance floor, this blurring of 'identity and social distinctions' that felt 'solid and immutable' elsewhere is a feature noted in contemporary queer dance-floors in the United States (Echols, 2010: 18).

## **Conclusion**

This is only a partial history of Flikkers and its importance within Irish LGBTQ+ cultural history. Space does not permit an exploration of the prominent tensions and divisions that existed within the LGBT community at this time that were fuelled by differences in political world views, class, and gender. Suffice to say, the clubbing world did not meet the needs of everyone and this did lead some to seek what they needed socially and politically elsewhere. There were persistent issues with

catering to the needs of women within the community.<sup>12</sup> However, for the 700 plus attendees of the club nights each week, the Hirschfeld Centre was a lifeline, a respite from the oppression of heteronormativity.

Sarah Ahmed (2019: 219) argues that for queer communities ‘the stories of the exhaustion of inhabiting worlds that do not accommodate us, the stories of the weary and the worn, the teary and the torn are the same stories as the stories of inventiveness, of creating something, of making something.’ This ‘making of something’ is informed by a queer worldview that is born out of struggle and extraordinary oppression and repression. In the 1970s and 80s in Ireland it was channelled into creating a variety of peer-mediated spaces where queer club culture could emerge and become an established presence within Dublin city’s nightlife. It would take until 2015 for a much more inclusive and accepting (though still incomplete) reality to materialise for the LGBTQ community in Ireland, and on the journey to this point the nature of queer musical cultures evolved to adapt to the changing social and political needs of the community. The role of queer musical spaces cannot be underestimated in their importance within this evolution and they have contributed to Ireland achieving a more ‘fabulous future’ for its LGBT community.

## **Interviews**

Walsh, Tonie. Interview 1 with author. 13 February 2020, Leinster House, Dublin.

Walsh, Tonie. Interview 2 with author. 24 April 2020, online.

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<sup>12</sup> Some of these issues are mentioned in the ground-breaking publication *Out for Ourselves* (1986: 201-202), produced collectively by the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men’s Collectives.



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### **Multimedia**

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