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# ***RESEARCH BRIEFS***

## **The Rave Scene in Houston, Texas: An Ethnographic Analysis**

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# The Rave Scene in Houston, Texas: An Ethnographic Analysis

Rave is a form of dance and recreation that is held in a clandestine location, has fast-paced and high-volume music, is open to people all ages, offers a variety of high-tech entertainment, and often incorporates the use of hallucinogens and other substances into the dance experience. This study discusses the emergence of rave in the Houston area, and explores the role that illicit drug use plays in the rave scene.

In addition to music and mind-altering substances, raves offer a variety of attractions such as moonwalks, antigravity orbs, interactive art, and virtual reality displays. Rave participants fall into four basic categories: ravers (those who structure their life and philosophy around the rave), weekenders (those seeking an alternative to the club scene), kids (youth 13–16 for whom raves serve as an initiation into dance, dress, and drugs) and spectators (curious people of all ages who just want to see what a rave is). Not all rave participants use psychoactive drugs, but the opportunity does exist for all present, including preteens, to acquire alcohol, LSD, and ecstasy.

The unique aspects of today's youth—the first generation raised by the Woodstock generation, facile with technology, and accustomed to computer-driven entertainment—make them particularly attracted to the rave scene. Parents and educators should realize the potentially negative effects of speaking too fondly of the drug-using culture of the sixties, establish alternative recreation for youth that incorporates the positive aspects of raves, and be aware of the need for play among these adolescents to whom the atmosphere of the rave greatly appeals.

## BACKGROUND

“Rave” is becoming an increasingly fashionable form of dance and recreation for youth in the United States. The rave phenomenon began in England approximately five years ago, and the movement has spread to the United States via Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Chicago.<sup>1</sup>

By general consensus, the term “rave” refers to a dance held in a clandestine location, open to all ages, and marked by a sound track of high-volume and fast-paced (120 beats per minute) synthesized dance music. Folklore holds that early promoters would simply break into a warehouse and tap into the electrical circuit to power the turntables, laser lights, film loops, and other easily mobile equipment. The party typically continued on until four or five in the morning, but everyone would be gone before sunrise. Folklore also holds that promoters never publicly advertised the dates or locations of raves. Notification of a pending rave was passed along by word of mouth to aficionados, adding to the excitement and exclusivity of the event and one's attendance.<sup>2</sup>

Some say that young people are attracted to rave because it belongs to them and not adults. Indeed, the promoters of rave parties are not mainstream executives, and tend to be 20–21 year-old college dropouts. Young people in the rave scene celebrate the rebuff of adult, corporate rock and roll as a testament to their separate identity and authenticity as a youth culture, much like “the summer of love” and punk rock were to their respective generations.<sup>3,4</sup>

Although the ideology of rave appears to include remnants of the past, it remains very much a 1990s phenomenon in its expression of what critics call “cyberpunk culture.” Cyberpunk represents the melding of cybernetics (the science of communication and control theory) with punk (an outlaw or rebel attitude).<sup>5</sup> Within this cyberpunk culture, high-tech gadgetry and machinery are used in nontraditional ways. Cyberpunk culture has forged an alliance between the technical world and the pop culture underground. The product of this melding of high-tech and pop culture is the rave.<sup>6,7</sup>

## PROBLEM

Moral critics of rave point to the dark side of the alliance between high tech and popular culture. They argue that smart drinks (fruit-juice based vitamin drinks), laser-light extravaganzas, gyroscopes, and virtual reality machines—which all play significant parts in the rave scene—exist solely to accentuate the drug highs and music experiences of participants.<sup>8</sup> What occurs at rave parties is the effective exploitation of the information age in a drug and dance setting.

Critics of rave have also emerged from the world of medicine. According to articles in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *Lancet*, the activities at rave parties have occasionally been lethal.<sup>9,10</sup> Since 1990, over 15 British youth have died as a result of ecstasy use at rave parties. Ecstasy users would either fall unconscious on the dance floor or begin to violently convulse. When taken to an emergency room, these ecstasy victims presented temperatures as high as 110 degrees, racing pulses and falling blood pressures. Despite aggressive treatment, death followed 2–60 hours after admission. The deaths associated with ecstasy use were probably not the result of overdose. Instead, most victims died after dancing for hours and not consuming enough water, which created a potentially lethal “boiler-house effect.” In rave fanzines (i.e., local journals published for rave fans), articles are written to explain what ecstasy is, how it is made, what happens if you are caught with it, and to warn ravers about the risks of imprudent ecstasy use. One article clearly tells kids to “stay cool while taking E. Don’t dance nonstop, drink plenty of water and wear light clothes.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite these rave detractors, the general tone of mass media and cultural portrayals of the rave movement are positive. Rave is portrayed as exciting (e.g., the stuff of *Time* cover articles) because of its nostalgic qualities and its ties with technology.

Nevertheless, rave shares one key aspect with other forms of youth culture: recreational drug use. The mystique of rave likely masks the extent and consequence of drug use on the scene, and for young fans (i.e., preadolescents) the scene may well function as their introduction to the teenage world of dance, sociability and drugs.

The purpose of this study is to document the emergence of rave in Houston and to explore the role of illicit drug use in the local rave scene. Houston is a useful location for this study because it represents the spread of the movement beyond its points of origin on the east and west coasts and Chicago.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were collected through a participant observation and interview-based study of the rave scene in Houston, Texas. Observations were conducted at seven rave parties and several other settings where rave fans congregate, such as record stores which specialize in techno dance music. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants, promoters, DJs, and other individuals providing services to the scene. Data collection extended from March through June, 1993.

The observational team consisted of the principal investigator, an M.A. trained research associate, and a graduate research assistant. Researchers observed activities and conversed with approximately 80 participants at eight rave parties in Houston (listed on following page).

These respondents comprised a convenient sample who appeared to be representative of rave participants in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and style of participation (e.g., whether they were dancing, standing around, playing games, or simply talking to friends). Formal interviews were conducted with two promoters, a DJ, and a major spokesperson for the rave movement in California.

## EIGHT RAVES IN HOUSTON, MARCH-JUNE 1993

<i>PARTY NAME</i>	<i>ATTEND.</i>	<i>APPROX. DATE</i>
Delirium	300	3-06-93
Schizophrenia	400	3-20-93
Save the Rave Forest	200	4-16-93
Dimension X	500	4-24-93
The Untold Story	250	5-01-93
Amnesia	100	5-07-93
The Ozone	150	5-29-93
Sensory Circus	800	6-12-93

Also conducted were off-site group interviews with two different types of rave fans. One group consisted of four young people ages 17–21 who construct an entire lifestyle around the rave movement. The second group consisted of three male community college students ages 20–21 who view rave as a weekend recreational and social activity. In addition, the owner of a techno music record store and a local entertainment newswriter were informally interviewed.

The data in this study were analyzed inductively.<sup>12</sup> The themes highlighted and described below emerged from the data, and represent the most important features of the scene according to both researchers and participants. The only predetermined theme explored was that of drug use, given the overall purpose of this study.

### **FINDINGS: THE ORGANIZATION OF RAVE**

The rave scene in Houston has existed for approximately two years. It has evolved into a complex phenomenon that reflects many of the key elements of rave present on the coasts, yet one that has adapted to the particular urban personality of Houston. For example, rave parties are often held in warehouses in Houston, as is typically the case in the east. But these warehouses are likely to be relatively new, single-story, prefabricated buildings since Houston does not have an extensive, old warehouse district per se, a situation which detracts a bit from rave's clandestine aura. Most rave parties in Houston share certain basic features, which are described below.

#### ***Promoters***

People who organize rave parties are known as promoters, and there are two types. The first type

are individuals who are closely associated and identified with the rave scene. They are personally involved with the music played at rave parties, with experience either as rave or alternative music store owners or managers, as DJs, or as musicians themselves. They eagerly seek information about the history of rave, and try to keep up with national and international trends in the scene. In general, they demonstrate commitment to the philosophy and politics of rave. The second type are individuals who simply see rave as an easy way to make a lot of money. Their prior experience in the entertainment industry may consist of throwing underground parties, like keg parties for college kids, or working in the regular club scene. Three or four promoters usually pool their limited resources to establish a production company. They give catchy names to their companies (e.g., The Matrix Crew), and then go into business.

### *Setting*

After the promoter is established, the next step in throwing a rave is to determine the scope and location of the party. The general trend in Houston now is to throw large parties for upwards of 1,000 participants, and to include many attractions. Promoters try to differentiate each party from the last by continuously adding attractions. In addition to obvious economic considerations (i.e., rent), location is also relevant to newness. Participants indicate that they enjoy going to different locations for rave parties because of the excitement of the unexpected. Promoters must also locate venues that are sufficiently large to keep the crowd comfortable, since many rave fans will not attend raves thrown at small venues.

In general, successful raves are thrown in safe and easily accessible locations. Underage participants need parents to drive them to parties. The parents interviewed in this study would not drop their

children off at an abandoned warehouse in a dark and seedy neighborhood. Questionable locations also present the risk of additional security problems.

A building with an adjacent, fenced-in outdoor area is extremely desirable. This allows promoters to hire a second DJ or a live band and to stage other attractions. Additional space also provides participants a change in atmosphere, a break from the loud and intense music inside, and better traffic flow. Participants who do not dance may feel uncomfortable just standing around (i.e., “wall-flower”), so they can go outside and do other things, including smoking marijuana.

### *Advertising*

Once a party has been planned, it must be advertised. The original method of announcing a party by word-of-mouth is impractical in Houston, which does not have the kind of extensively developed, cohesive rave scene that could depend completely on informal marketing. Yet, ravers have been reluctant to commit to a party advertised in the mass media for fear of commercialization. The compromise has been the development of a fascinating art form, the rave flier. Fliers are approximately 5-by- 8-inch pieces of heavy paper which have become conversation pieces and collectibles. Each party has its own distinctive flier. Basic information about the party (e.g., location, promoters, attractions, ticket prices, a rave telephone hotline number, sponsors, and hype statements about the party) are printed on one side. A computer-generated, psychedelic graphic is printed on the other side.

### *DJs*

A rave typically has two or three DJs working. DJs are the “personalities” in rave. Their artistic persona is derived largely from the intricate role

### **\*Rusty's Smart Drinks\***

**Rusty's Power Elixir** The ultimate Smart Drink EXPERIENCE! A POWERFUL combination of Fast Blast, Memory Fuel, Thermogen Tea & PowerMaker II. That will most definitely give YOU the ENERGY to DANCE. . . all night long!!

**Conscious Party** The favorite drink among RAVERS and those all night partiers! I've combined Fast Blast, Memory Fuel & Thermo Tea to create a HIGHER AWARENESS along with MENTAL STIMULATION that will for sure offer YOU a CONSCIOUS PARTY!! (1 is a Party, 2 are a BASH & 3 ARE A RAVE!)

\*Not recommended if you are pregnant or lactating\*

DJs developed for themselves in hip hop music. There are several features to their talent. The best DJs have good reputations for "mixing," the ability to move the dance crowd smoothly from one song to the next while maintaining a continuous beat. This allows the crowd to dance continually for hours without stopping to wait for a new song.

#### ***Smart Bar***

Promoters contract for a number of services they themselves are not able to provide. The most well-known rave service is the Smart Bar, a booth that sells the nonalcoholic drinks which are an integral part of the worldwide rave culture. The ingredients in the drinks include protein, vitamins, and other stimulants such as caffeine. The smart drink is made by mixing the selected powders, purchased legally at health food stores, with fruit juice.

Smart drinks are promoted as being able to increase the ability to dance for long periods of time and to enhance the psychedelic experience. These drinks have been available for years, but have become popular through the rave culture. Several alternative music clubs in Houston also sell smart drinks, which is an indication of the dissemination of rave into the more general popular culture.

Boxed above is "information" about smart drinks from a flier distributed at a rave.

In addition, smart bar operators have begun to sell "smart drugs." Blast Capsules, for example, contain phenylalanine and caffeine and are described on a flier as "convenient brain food for fast energy" that "fire up your brain naturally and jump-start your day." It is interesting to note that the flier also claims a Blast Capsule benefit that would appear to contradict the "naturalist" philosophy of rave: "BLAST CAPSULES also work to provide dietary appetite satisfaction."

In any event, the Smart Bars are not very profitable. Most customers are first timers who are curious about the drinks. Veteran ravers shy away from the smart bars because the drinks are expensive (i.e., \$3-4) and there is a wide range of effects. Some ravers report no perceived effects at all, while other others say smart drinks make them feel "like they are on something fierce." Regardless, the Smart Bar is an inherent feature of the scene, and a significant symbol that helps define otherwise disparate and nondescript settings as rave parties.

### *Alcoholic Beverages*

Every party observed in Houston had an alcoholic beverage bar. Since production companies are in no position to apply for liquor licenses, nor do promoters want the hassles and responsibilities that accompany liquor licenses, they contract with licensed caterers to provide drinks. Most alcohol bars sell hard liquor and mixed drinks, along with keg beer. The popularity of hard liquor is illustrated by the fact that lines for mixed drinks are usually much longer than the lines for beer. Usual precautions are followed for controlling underage drinking (e.g., wrist bands), but young ravers have little trouble getting older ravers to buy drinks for them. Since parties are large and occupy large spaces, avoiding surveillance by security is easily accomplished.

### *Attractions*

Promoters continue to increase the carnival atmosphere of rave parties. Again, depending on space and financial resources, promoters have contracted for the following attractions: lighting (laser and laser-like equipment); sideshows (petting zoo, moonwalk, camel rides, antigravity orb, "chill" area, tarot and palm readings, temporary and permanent tattoos, candy store, and interactive phosphorescent art); and visual stimulation (film loops, participatory virtual reality, immersion virtual re-

ality, hidden image interactive 3-D art, computer-generated fractals, and indoor, low-lying cloud generator).

The attractions function several ways. First, they provide an alternative to dancing, either for those ravers who need a break from dancing or for those ravers who do not want to dance. Second, they contribute to the feeling that rave is not just another form of teenage dancing, but rather a way of life. The party becomes an utopian, integrated and comprehensive alternative reality. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the attractions create the atmosphere of play. Like a carnival, rave provides young people the opportunity to engage in playful physical and mental activities. This feature is especially relevant to the youngest ravers who are trying to make the difficult transition from childhood to adolescence.

### **FINDINGS: THE PARTICIPANTS**

The mass media portray rave parties as being on the cutting edge of hip. Participants are seen as youngsters who appreciate the state-of-youth culture issues such as environmentalism, technology, and computer-generated art. The young people who actually attend rave parties in Houston, however, are more heterogeneous than this. The table below is a typology of participants generated on the basis of their commitment to and experience of the

<b>RAVE PARTICIPANTS: FOUR TYPES</b>			
<u>Ravers</u>	<u>Weekenders</u>	<u>Kids</u>	<u>Spectators</u>
25%	40%	25%	10%
Age: 17-21	Age: 19-22	Age: 13-16	Age: 17-40s
Heavy Drugs	Moderate Drugs	Exp. w/ Drugs	Few Drugs
Little Alcohol	Heavy Alcohol	Little Alcohol	Moderate Alcohol
Philosophy Yes	Philosophy No	Philosophy N/A	Philosophy N/A
Attractions Yes	Attractions No	Attractions Yes	Attractions N/A



rave movement. The category titles are imposed, since the participants themselves do not generate consensual labels for each other.

### ***Ravers***

There are several terms used in the scene to designate those young people most committed to rave: “the core,” “cyberpunks,” and so forth. The term “ravers” is used for the sake of simplicity. Ravers are the insiders to the scene, comprising approximately 25 percent of participants at any given rave party. Ravers are those participants who maintain the style, philosophy, and excitement of rave. They are the rave junkies. They attend all the parties and, unlike all other participants, listen to rave music at home or in the car. They are distinguishable from other participants at parties in three significant ways: dance, dress and drugs.

Ravers dance in the distinctive rave style. They learn the “proper” dance style simply from experience in the scene. Rave dancing is not seen on MTV nor in clubs. The philosophy of rave maintains that the scene should accept any peaceful form of personal expression. However, rave dancing is distinctive because of its lack of sensuality. Rave dancing is an individualistic experience conducted within a group context on the dance floor. Ravers lose themselves in the music and the drugs, and do not use dancing to relay any sexual messages to other dancers.

Ravers dress in the distinctive rave style. Rave wear consists of oversized clothes and clunky shoes, topped off with a knit cap or old fashioned night cap. Males wear the largest pants possible that do not fall off, hip hop style, with unhemmed cutoff bottoms. Shirts are either rave t-shirts covered with an appropriate print (such as the rabbit from the Trix breakfast cereal ads, with the logo changed to “Trips are for kids”) or a casual t-shirt with close, horizontal stripes.

A key feature of the raver ideology is to be critical of the rave scene in Houston. Ravers are critical of promoters (i.e., they are amateurs or are in it for the money); other rave participants (i.e., they are clubbers simply on the hunt for drugs and pick-ups); the music (e.g., too much “house” music and not enough true rave music); and the drugs (i.e., the quality of ecstasy in other cities is always better than in Houston). Ravers adhere to utopian visions of rave, claiming that the scene in Houston is primitive compared to that in New York or Miami. Those ravers who have actually attended rave parties in other cities inevitably draw self-esteem from their experiences, built on the predictable claim that they were privileged to witness these “awesome” parties.

### ***Weekenders***

Weekenders are those participants who see rave as just another kind of club experience, and they comprise approximately 40 percent of all participants. Weekenders dedicate two to three nights a week to clubs, and choose their clubs based on drink specials, day of the week, presence of members of the opposite sex, music and fashion. For some, rave becomes a diversion from the more routine and predictable club scene.

Weekenders do not listen to rave music outside of rave parties. Instead, they listen to more popular forms of music like rap and grunge at home and while driving. Weekenders who attend rave parties on a regular basis are attracted to rave’s version of dance, dress and drugs, not the ideology nor the philosophy of rave. In fact, weekenders tend to be very critical of rave’s political pretensions. Tim, a 19-year-old white male, argued that rave features, such as environmentalism, the practice of distributing tree seedlings, and carnival attractions “were nothing but gimmicks.”

Weekenders attend rave parties in groups. They come with their own friends, since the prospects of meeting others in a positive or constructive way are seen as minimal. Kevin, a 20-year-old white male, noted that “You don’t go to meet girls because they’re too tranced out and scary looking. They’re really messed up and spinning around [from acid].” Weekender groups consist of men and women. Because weekenders do not meet new people at rave parties, they rarely become committed insiders to the rave scene.

### ***Kids***

Kids are the youngest rave participants. They comprise approximately 25 percent of all participants. Rave parties are these kids’ initiation into dance, dress and drugs. They are too young to go to clubs, so the party-like, carnival aura of the rave fits their needs well. Most kids usually come in groups, transported by parents who probably view the party-like aura of rave as a safe alternative to clubs and concerts. Of course, some kids make it to rave parties on their own, in the same way they manage to function relatively independently in other aspects of their lives.

Much of what kids anticipate about rave (e.g., dance and dress) comes from MTV. Most of the time, kids appear to play among themselves, chasing each around the warehouse, just hanging around, or dancing in the popular hip hop style.

The youngest kids do not drink alcohol. The kids using acid or ecstasy are probably using it for the first time. An inducement to drug use is the kids’ belief that most if not all the older people at the rave are on drugs. To the kids, drugs appear to be a normal and acceptable feature of rave that everyone else is doing. There appears to be significant cigarette and marijuana smoking among kids.

Ironically, some of the kids introduce sensuality into the rave setting. As mentioned earlier, rave

dancing is itself quite asexual. The youngest female kids often dance in the sensuous hip hop style they see on MTV, and the most precocious eagerly dance in front of the DJ area, or in the 1960s-style Go Go cages that are occasionally located in front of the DJs. The youngest female kids also often dress most seductively, following the “retro” (i.e., 1970s disco) style of dress they see on MTV, Beverly Hills 90210, and other television programs. They wear very short shorts or skirts, blouses with long, mesh sleeves, and clunky platform shoes.

The kids are not committed to the rave philosophy. In fact, they are quite oblivious to the culture of rave, probably due to their young age. They go to rave parties because they are fun, something to do, the place to be in the eyes of their peers, and a place to learn how to be a teenager. The kids do, however, utilize the attractions as much as any group present. They especially enjoy the playground/amusement park attractions such as the moonwalk and the antigravity orb.

### ***Spectators***

Spectators are those rave participants who are curious about rave and want to see what all the hype is about. They comprise approximately 10 percent of all participants. The age and social identity range is very wide in this category. At one end of the continuum are teenage gang members, especially Asian and Hispanic, who are anxious to see who the girls are at rave parties and what other gangs are represented there. Surprisingly, perhaps, researchers observed no gang-related problems at the raves.

At the other end of the continuum are those older people who have seen the intriguing ads for raves in the local entertainment newspapers. They are the club clientele who go to raves for the same reason they would investigate a new club. They are aware of the rapid changes in styles and locales in the club scene, and approach rave accordingly.

The spectators do not ordinarily attend rave to get drugs, although they will drink. The philosophy of rave is irrelevant to them, since they are attracted to rave for what they perceive as the features rave shares with other music/dance venues.

#### **FINDINGS: DRUGS AND RAVE**

Drug use is a common feature of the Houston rave scene. This is not to say that all rave participants, or even all dedicated ravers, use drugs while they are at a party. Nevertheless, drugs are a part of the culture of rave, and virtually all participants expect drugs to be present at rave parties.

The most preferred drug is MDMA, also known as ecstasy, E or X. The popularity of ecstasy in Houston can be traced at least as far back as the 1980 all-ages club scene. For several years, ecstasy was widely, freely and legally distributed on the dance floors in clubs such as *6400* and *NRG*. The mythology surrounding ecstasy says that the original rave parties held in other cities and early on in Houston provided high quality ecstasy. Current ecstasy is reported to be of low quality, and most ravers believe that the substance being marketed as ecstasy now is really some combination of B12, caffeine, and methamphetamine.

Ravers are aware of ecstasy's reputation as an aphrodisiac, but are more interested in its ability to enhance face-to-face interaction and sociability. Ravers also claim that ecstasy complements rave music. As Chris noted, "the music is generated to get you off on X." Ravers do not categorize ecstasy as a hallucinogen, but see it more closely related to methamphetamine but without the speed frenzy. A tablet or capsule of ecstasy costs \$20–25 on the dance floor. Tablets are preferred because they are less likely to be cut or contaminated.

The most commonly used drug, however, is LSD, which is also known as acid, pig, orange

Buddha, Jetsons, pink turbos, yellow baby domes, and so on. These names reflect the image stamped on the acid paper. The mythology surrounding acid says that it complements the high technology of the rave scene very well. The retail cost of acid, which is generally reported of good quality, is \$3–5 a dose (hit). A sheet, which consists of a hundred doses of acid, can be purchased wholesale for approximately \$150. Respondents note that the Houston market is flooded with high quality acid. Ravers ordinarily do not ingest just one dose of acid, since the acid available today is reported to be only a fraction of the strength of acid used during the 1960s. Young ravers claim to be able to control the depth and length of their acid trips by moderating the amount of acid they take. One average dose will last two or three hours, allowing a young raver to "trip" yet return home appearing normal to parents.

Judging by the length of the lines at the bars and the opinion of bartenders, alcohol is very popular at rave parties. Beer and hard liquor are both available, but wine is conspicuously absent. Jello shots are becoming increasingly popular at rave parties, which is an indication of the dissemination of college culture to the rave scene.

Interest in marijuana (pot) and psychedelic mushrooms ('shrooms) is increasing. Ravers indicate that these drugs are popular because they fit the rave philosophy's value on natural experiences. Most marijuana appears to be grown in Texas. Psilocybin is grown locally in southeast Texas. Ravers say that one need only drive out of Houston about ten miles to areas where cattle grazed to locate the mushrooms. The smell of marijuana at rave parties is increasingly common.

Purchasing drugs at rave parties is not difficult. All respondents noted the widespread availability of acid and what passes for ecstasy. Nevertheless, there are rules governing the acquisition of drugs intended to protect both the buyer and seller, and

to enhance the easygoing ideology of rave. The first rule is to get a friend or someone you know to initiate the process by asking “Hey, know anyone selling?” or “Hey, know anyone who has some?” (one should never ask someone directly if he or she is dealing). The affirmative response is, “I can get it for you.” The acquisition overall consists of a chain of contacts and requests to obscure who the real dealer is, although insiders can get a pretty good idea who that is.

The role of promoters in drug dealing is unclear. Given the widespread availability of acid and the ease of distribution by amateurs at parties, the profit potential of dealing for promoters is probably low. Like the marketing of marijuana in the 1960s and early 1970s, the distinction between the roles of dealer and buyer in rave are blurred. It remains to be seen if the marketing of acid and ecstasy gain value when and if rave becomes institutionalized.

## DISCUSSION

The rave movement is of interest because it represents the most recent evolutionary period in the history of the relationship between rock and roll and drug use. Rave participants are some of the children of the first generation of Americans raised exclusively on rock music. For the first time in our history, a generation of young people is growing up in a youth culture that is essentially the same as the youth culture their parents grew up in. These parents either implicitly or explicitly lend credence to their children’s rock music experiences and related activities, such as drug use. During the course of this study, most of the young people we talked to had parents who themselves experienced and enjoyed the youth culture of the sixties. These parents generally look back on these experiences with positive recollections, and frequently describe the sixties to their children in glowing terms.

Although the vast majority of these parents do not instruct or encourage their children to replicate the parents’ drug activities, a nostalgic endorsement of the sixties may inadvertently endorse drug use for youth seeking to relive the romanticized simplicity, community, and spirituality of the psychedelic counterculture.

Rave participants also represent a generation of children raised on MTV, Nintendo, and Six Flags amusement parks. Like all generations since the Second World War, they are learning their dress, dance, and drugs within the context of their specific historical period. These young people arrive at the rave party already knowing how to manipulate reality through artificial means. Psychedelic drug use may not be caused by the virtually virtual reality of Nintendo games, but this drug use certainly complements the Nintendo version of reality.

Finally, the rave participants are members of a first generation familiar with parties involving high-tech games and entertainment, yet many have been deprived of “the dance.” Due to concerns over legal liability, fear of violence and simple inconvenience, community institutions (e.g., churches, civic organizations and schools) are reluctant to run teen dances anymore. The demise of the evening sock hop resulted in the effective end of adult supervised social activities, unless off-duty police security guards are considered chaperones. Events like rave dance fill the void to some degree by giving young people a place to meet each other and to play like adolescents.

Yet a potentially insidious aspect of rave is the way it fails to differentiate between reality altered through electronic, technological means and reality altered through recreational drugs. Psychedelic drug use loses its distinctiveness in this kind of setting. Some of the youth we talked to often had difficulty differentiating between everyday reality and drug-altered reality. The relatively weak acid

and ecstasy ingested by the young people do not leave the residue of the hangover or the stomach ache to remind them dramatically of the difference between “being high” and “being straight.”

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of rave is the way potentially self-destructive behaviors can be masked by a subculture containing many other attractive, even positive, elements. Environmentalism, world peace, and high-tech toys do not compensate for the fact that more alcoholic drinks are served than smart drinks and that some very young teenagers are learning to take LSD.

The question remains as to what proportion of rave participants use psychoactive drugs. The author does not believe that the overwhelming major-

ity of teenagers at a rave are “tripping.” Some young people used the technology and rave dancing as substitutes for drugs, especially for the frenzy of cocaine use. In the utopian world described by psychedelic proponents like Timothy Leary in the 1960s, technology would eventually displace drugs as the preferred mechanism for altering reality.

Given the considerations outlined in this paper, we offer some policy recommendations in the table below.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Health educators, both public and school based, should continue to instruct adolescents and preadolescents on the risks of LSD, ecstasy, and alcohol.
- Parents should be instructed to use caution when speaking to their children about growing up in the sixties. If nothing else, parents should be reminded that most drug experimentation in the sixties took place in late adolescence, not in early adolescence as it is today for many young people. Furthermore, even in the sixties there were many casualties of stimulants and hallucinogens, since the actual dosage and content of these were unknown and some people were more at risk than others for adverse reactions.
- Adults should consider establishing alternative drug-free recreational locations for youth, where the positive features of rave can be provided (e.g., virtual reality, dancing, moonwalks, and so forth).
- Adults should be reminded that adolescents are sufficiently close to childhood to still enjoy play. Play should be encouraged. The availability of play is one of rave’s strong points.
- Adults should be instructed on the symptoms and care of drug problems emanating from rave-related activities.
- Parents should remember that they share a lot more with their children than may be apparent on a day-to-day basis. They both grew up on rock and roll, including dance versions of it. This shared experience should be the basis for parent-child dialogue on the implications of LSD, ecstasy, and marijuana use, as well as positive aspects of rave culture.

## Endnotes

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5. Elmer-Dewitt, Phillip. 1993. Cover story. *Time* (February 8).
6. Flick, Larry. 1991. 'Techno-Rave' has labels dancing. *Billboard* 103:42 (October 19).
7. Anonymous. 1992. All the rave. *Economist* 323:7761 (May 30).
8. Erlich, Julie. 1992. Brain gain: drugs that boost intelligence. *Omni* 14:12 (September).
9. Randall, Teri. 1992. Ecstasy-fueled 'rave' parties become dance of death for English youths. *JAMA* 268:12 (September 23).
10. Henry, John. 1992. Cover story. *Lancet* (August).
11. Anonymous. 1992. Ecstasy info update. *U.S. Rave* (September).
12. Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Free Press.