Understanding the youth and young adult perspective of raving in Alberta

Technical report

AADAC
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
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RESEARCH SERVICES

Understanding the youth and young adult perspective of raving in Alberta

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Prepared by

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)

AADAC Research Services:
Colette Fluet-Howrish, Susan Hutton, Z'Anne Harvey-Jansen

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Executive summary

> People have often asked me what drew me into the rave culture. In the beginning, it was curiosity. I wanted to know what they were like, what went on. It was like a strange secret society that I wanted to experience. What kept me going back was the sense of community. There was so much talent to watch and learn from at raves...Everyone was always so open and eager to share his or her knowledge. Every party was a huge celebration, an event to look forward to. (Alberta raver)

Purpose of study

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) conducted this qualitative study to answer the broad research question, "What is the youth experience of the rave scene in Alberta?"[1] Researchers sought to gain an understanding of the rave scene in Alberta from the perspective of the youth who attend raves. The insights obtained in the study would help practitioners to refine services to youth.

Methods

AADAC used a qualitative research approach to learn about the culture of the rave scene in Alberta from a youth perspective. Data was collected for this research primarily through participant observations (48 reports from 16 events), and in-depth interviews (21 interviews). The transcriptions from the participant observations and interviews were analyzed to identify major themes. As well, this study draws on survey data collected by Rave Safe, a harm reduction group in Edmonton, and document analysis of relevant newspaper articles.

What is a rave?

One common definition is that raves are all-night dance parties attended by youth who dance to repetitive electronic music played by celebrated DJs (disc jockeys) on mobile sound systems at clandestine venues, often involving the liberal use of drugs but usually no alcohol use. Raves are distinct from regular bars and clubs in the type of music played (techno or dance music), and in the atmosphere or "vibe" of parties.

This study found that the rave scene in Alberta has evolved and no longer includes only the classic notion of raves set out in the above definition. As the scene grew in popularity and later became regulated by city bylaws, rave events spilled into the regular and after-hours club settings, and attracted corporate sponsorship. Some rave events feature the music but lack the culture's philosophical ideals of peace, love, unity and respect (PLUR), while other events include both.

[1] We are using the term "youth" in a generic sense in this report to refer to people in their early teens to mid-20s.

Who raves?

Raves attract mainly middle-class people, in their mid-teens to late twenties. The average age of people at most of the rave events attended for this study was 18 to 25 years. The average age of ravers is said to be increasing now that the scene is past its peak of popularity and younger teens are being drawn to other entertainment venues.

Why rave?

The most important aspects of the rave scene to participants in this study were the music and the vibe. Participants described raving as an intense physical experience, largely because of the power of the music. Rave music—with the heavy bass pounding at anywhere from 130 to 220 beats per minute, played at top volume for hours on end—has an undeniable physical impact on the dancers.

> You're not hearing the music; you're not processing it through your ears as much as your body...When you're touching the ground, you're feeling it [the sound waves] coming through the ground, you're feeling it in your shoes, you're feeling your feet, you're feeling your legs, it's up in your bowels, and it's actually...manipulating your body. (Interviewee, insider)

In addition to the physical intensity of the experience, participants described raves as a unique social space of acceptance and connection that positively affected their life.

> It probably changed my life for the better, actually. Before I got into the whole rave scene, I can honestly say I was probably a much more bitter person...It opened my mind up a lot and [I] met a lot of new people and it changed the way I look at things, and...it just changed my entire life pretty much. (Interviewee, insider)

Participants saw the rave scene as an alternative to the regular bar and club scene, and felt that the absence of alcohol at most rave events accounted for the different atmosphere in the two settings. In particular, participants said that raves lacked the sexual tension, and fights or aggression generally witnessed in bars or clubs.

> I was attracted to it [raves] for the community that was created. People who were interested in Peace, Love, Unity and Respect, not aggressiveness and power, and it was an alternative to alcohol and the bar scene and all the nasty, angry, out-of-control things that go along with that environment. (Participant observer, insider)

Substance use and raves

The rave scene is a setting where drug use is generally accepted. While no participants in this study said taking drugs was necessary to enjoy rave events, several participants said that use of certain drugs, like ecstasy, can

enhance or intensify the exhilaration one feels when listening to music at a rave and the sense of connection one feels to other ravers. Some ravers party sober (that is, without using any substances); others have the attitude that responsible drug use in moderation is OK, but drug abuse is not. For a third group of ravers, drug use moves beyond moderation to harmful use and dependency.

Most participants in this study reported having used drugs before entering the rave scene, although raves may have provided them access to "harder" drugs, that is, drugs other than marijuana and mushrooms. As well, most participants spoke of using drugs in settings other than raves.

Most rave attendees who responded to the Rave Safe survey had tried numerous drugs at least once. Alcohol and marijuana were the drugs that the highest proportion of respondents had *ever* tried (98%, 94% respectively), followed by tobacco (88%) and ecstasy (88%).[2] Responses to the survey also show that a substantial number of respondents used marijuana (44%) and tobacco (77%) on a *daily* basis, speed/crystal meth (29%) on a *weekly* basis, and alcohol (44%), ecstasy (35%), ketamine[3] (25%) and mushrooms (56%) on an *occasional* basis (less than monthly but more than once).

Respondents of the Rave Safe survey were much more likely to have ever tried various drugs than were the students participating in The Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2002. However, rates of use from the Rave Safe survey are comparable to data on substance use of ravers in Quebec (Gross, Barrett, Shestowsky, & Pihl, 2002), and one study found no significant difference between substance use of rave attendees and bush party attendees (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002).

Ravers viewed heroin, crack cocaine, and speed/crystal meth as the most harmful drugs. Heroin and crack cocaine were also considered "dirty" and "unattractive" drugs by interviewees. Marijuana and mushrooms were considered the least harmful substances, even rated as less harmful than alcohol and tobacco by Rave Safe survey respondents.

Generally speaking, fewer respondents of the Rave Safe survey had tried the drugs that were viewed as most harmful. However, two drugs did not match up in terms of their risk rating and level of usage: speed/crystal meth and cocaine/crack. Respondents rated both drugs as quite harmful and yet almost half the respondents had tried these substances at least once.

Participants in AADAC's study and respondents in the Rave Safe survey reported on various **perceived positive effects of their drug use**, including

- being more tolerant/open-minded
- being more outgoing and sociable

[2] Survey results are based on a small, convenience sample of ravers, and may not be representative of the entire population of ravers at the event.

[3] Ketamine is a general anesthetic used on animals and humans.

- being more relaxed or at ease
- letting go of their inhibitions and fears

Participants also reported on various **perceived negative effects of their drug use**, including

- low motivation/lethargy
- weight loss and/or loss of appetite
- tiredness/fatigue
- decrease in physical health
- emotional instability
- lowered immune system

Participants in AADAC's study spoke of various **factors that they felt led to increased drug use**, including

- belonging to a peer group that uses
- hanging out in settings where drugs are accessible (like raves)
- starting to experiment with drugs at an early age
- having independence from one's parents at an early age, such as owning one's own car or moving out on one's own

Participants also spoke of **factors they felt limited their drug use**:

- belonging to a peer group of non-users
- having interests outside the rave scene

As the rave scene boundaries become blurred with those of the bar and club scene, the use of alcohol appears to be becoming more prevalent. Tobacco use also appears to be high at some rave events, particularly those whose sponsors are linked to tobacco companies.

Prevention and harm reduction in the rave scene

This study provides information about the actions ravers take to keep themselves and others safe while using drugs, including the work of volunteer-run harm reduction groups in the scene. Most ravers appear to be taking active steps to reduce the harm of their drug use. Some of the general harm reduction guidelines they follow are

- using drugs in moderation, but not abusing them
- researching substances before they try them
- knowing the source and origin of their drug
- planning their drug use rather than making spontaneous decisions

Participants also said it was important for youth to know that "you don't have to do drugs to rave." Participants also suggested that prevention and harm reduction workers should place the decision of whether to use or not in the hands of the youth, and work to be non-judgmental about the youth's decision to use or not.

Volunteer-run harm reduction groups have been active in Alberta, as in most other rave locations across Canada and throughout the world. These groups provide information on how to use drugs more safely, as well as on safer sex. They appear to be viewed favourably by ravers, who see the information they provide as more balanced than information that only promotes abstinence.

This study gives important insight into how this population views various harm reduction or prevention approaches. Ravers are dismissive of information that they perceive as biased, that is, information that only talks about the negative effects of drugs, or that uses "scare tactics." Similarly, participants in this study thought there was a significant gap in information as some information sources suggest abstinence as the only way to avoid harm, without providing any information on safer ways to use drugs for those who are going to choose to use them anyway. Participants viewed harm reduction as the best approach for this population, as they felt that abstinence messages would be ineffective.

Conclusion

This study will help youth service providers understand the attractions to the rave scene from a youth perspective, as well as substance use attitudes and behaviours in the scene. From the perspective of participants in this study, raves are a positive space where youth can develop their identities, relationships, and skills, much as other youth do in more traditional settings like youth groups or sports teams. Drug use is common at rave events, but at the same time, being part of the rave scene has been a profoundly positive experience for many participants in this study. Prevention and harm reduction strategies for youth that rave will be most effective if they balance addressing concerns about drug use in the rave scene with acknowledging and building on the positive aspects of this youth phenomenon.

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People have often asked me what drew me into the rave culture. In the beginning, it was curiosity. I wanted to know what they were like, what went on. It was like a strange secret society that I wanted to experience. What kept me going back was the sense of community. There was so much talent to watch and learn from at raves. I loved to watch how freely people would dance and move. People would spin glow sticks or fire or flags. The DJs would amaze me with their creativity, music production, track selection and energy... Everyone was always so open and eager to share his or her knowledge. Every party was a huge celebration, an event to look forward to.

Participant observer, insider

I. Introduction

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) conducted this qualitative study to answer the broad research question: "What is the youth experience of the rave scene in Alberta?"[4] A team of researchers, prevention/treatment practitioners and Alberta youth worked together to learn more about raves and raving from the point of view of ravers (See Appendix I for a list of Rave Advisory Committee members).

This research was initiated in the fall of 2002, a time when media were reporting concerns about ecstasy use in Alberta. In anticipation of The Alberta Youth Experience Survey, which would provide information on prevalence of use of ecstasy and other drugs, AADAC Research Services wanted to learn more about raves since these events were generally thought to be a common setting for ecstasy use.

Raves were the subject of intense media attention in Alberta in 2000-2001, with much of the media coverage focused on negative incidents such as alleged drug overdoses and other hazards at events. Information about raves and drug use at raves was also available from major stakeholders such as municipal government and police sources, reflecting these institutions' respective mandates. However, these sources failed to capture the youth perspective of this global phenomenon that has attracted thousands of young Albertans and has been called the most significant post-war youth subculture (Merchant & Macdonald, 1994). There appeared to be a discrepancy between the public perception of raves as dangerous drug havens, and the fact that so many youth were attracted to the scene. Understanding the youth experience of raves is necessary to have a more balanced view of the rave scene.

Prior to this study, AADAC published a Developments article titled, "Ecstasy and Raves" (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission [AADAC], 2000), that provided background information about raves and ecstasy. Also in response to growing awareness and concerns about youth involvement in raves, AADAC developed information sheets for parents and teens. However, in order to better inform practitioners and enhance services to this population, AADAC wanted to deepen its understanding of the rave scene *from the youth perspective*.

This report describes rave events and presents information on ravers in Alberta. It also discusses the main attractions to the scene for youth, namely the physical intensity of raving and the positive social aspects, such as feeling accepted and connected, of the scene for ravers. Finally, it presents findings on substance use by ravers, as well as on prevention and harm reduction efforts in the rave scene.

By exploring raving from the youth perspective, this study will allow readers to better understand the rave scene and will assist youth service providers in providing more effective services to this population.

[4] We are using the term "youth" in a generic sense in this report to refer to people in their early teens to mid-20s.

II. Methodology

AADAC used a qualitative research design to learn about the culture of the rave scene in Alberta from a youth perspective. The research methodology drew heavily from ethnography, since this approach is particularly useful to better understand the meaning or nature of the experience of persons who are members of a particular group, to identify new trends, and to obtain detailed understanding about phenomena such as "feelings, thought processes, and emotions" that are difficult to learn about through quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). As well, ethnographic approaches are commonly used to gain an understanding of a social or cultural issue from the insider's perspective (Fetterman, 1998) and have been used to explore Canadian youth cultures generally (Baron, 1989) and rave culture specifically (Weber, 1999; Wilson, 2002; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003).

Data collection

Data was collected for this research primarily through participant observations, and in-depth interviewing. As well, this study draws on survey data collected by a harm reduction group in Edmonton, Rave Safe, and document analysis of relevant newspaper articles.

Participant observation

Jorgensen (1989) suggests there is an important difference between being an "insider" versus an "outsider" to a culture, and if viewed only from the outside, the phenomena may be obscured from view. Participant observation, where the researcher both participates and observes in the setting, is one method to gain insight into the "insider's" view of a phenomenon. Thus, in order to gain the greatest insight into the youth experience in the Alberta rave scene, it was important not only to observe but also to participate.

Jorgensen (1989) also suggests that participant observation is best carried out by individuals who match the age and stage of typical participants in the rave scene. Members of the culture will likely be more willing to interact and share their experience of the scene with these researchers. With this in mind, AADAC staff recruited a number of Alberta youth and young adults to assist with participant observations.

The level of involvement of participant observers ranged from passive participation, where individuals were present in the scene but did not participate or interact with people to any great extent, to complete participation, where some individuals were studying a situation in which they were already ordinary participants (Spradley, 1980).

Participant observers were recruited by AADAC staff through word of mouth and received a $30 cash honorarium for their involvement and written report of their observations. Details of the task, including date for submitting observation report, were negotiated prior to attendance at the event. In all cases, observers agreed to abstain from the use of any mood-altering substance prior to and during the event and while writing their reports.

A total of 27 people provided 48 participant observation reports from 16 events throughout Alberta for a total of 213 hours of observations (See Table 1). Multiple observers attended and submitted written reports for all but three events.[5] Seven participant observers worked for AADAC or its funded agencies as researchers, or prevention or treatment staff (seven female; average age 29, age range 22 to 42; no previous involvement in rave scene for any staff). The other 20 participant observers were Alberta youth and young adults (12 female, eight male; average age 23, age range 18 to 38; half were familiar with the rave scene with anywhere from one to five years of involvement in the scene).

Initially, researchers instructed participant observers to write about whatever observations they felt were important. As the project progressed, researchers provided the following guidelines for participant observations:

1. How did you participate in the scene?
2. What was the experience like for you (e.g., did it change over time? what was your degree of comfort?)?
3. How did this event compare to other clubs/raves you have attended?
4. How did you interact with others at the event?
5. What was the physical setting of the event like, both inside and outside?
6. What activities were available at the location (e.g., dancing, playing pool, eating)?
7. Describe the music, show, and/or performances at the event.
8. Describe your arrival experience (e.g., greeting, security, ticket taking, etc.).
9. Describe any substance use behaviours you observed (e.g., illegal drugs, “pushing” of alcohol, prevention messages).
10. Describe people’s interactions (e.g., groupings, “cliques,” dancing styles).
11. Describe the people at the event (e.g., range of ages, style of dress, etc.).
12. Additional comments.

[5] One event in Edmonton was attended by a researcher and her husband. Another participant observer attended events in Toronto and the UK with friends while she was on a personal trip.

Observers attended rave and club events at various locations throughout Alberta. They also sat in on a meeting of a harm reduction group, and visited rave record and clothing stores. Insiders to the rave scene participating in the research guided the selection of events to be attended for participant observations. Rave/club events included after-hours clubs that played rave music, clubs that played rave music as well as clubs that did not (for comparison),[6] large rave events (1000+ attendees) and small to moderate size events (up to 1000 attendees). Event observations took place at various times, ranging from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

In-depth interviews

Because the focus of this research was to understand the youth experience of raves, in-depth, unstructured interviews were used to collect data, which created "the opportunity to understand research participants' views of their worlds as described in their own words" (Mayan, 2001, p. 14).

> With unstructured, interactive interviews, the researcher first assumes a listening stance and learns about the topic as she or he goes along. Thus, once the researcher has learned something about the phenomenon from the first few participants, the substance of the interview then changes and becomes targeted on another aspect of the phenomenon. Importantly, unlike semi-structured interviews, all participants are not asked the same questions. Participants are used to verify information learned in the first interviews and are encouraged both to speak from their own experience and to speak for others. Each interview may overlap with the others but may also have a slightly different focus and different content. (Morse, 1997, p. 446)

Interviewees were recruited using a snowball sample, where the sample starts from contact with a few individuals who are knowledgeable about the phenomena being studied and "snowballs" as these initial contacts suggest other potential interviewees. A total of 21 in-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with 23 individuals, 21 of whom who were familiar with the Alberta rave scene, and two participant observers who were not (See Table 1).[7] Seven interviewees were identified as key informants/cultural experts for the rave scene,[8] having worked in or been affiliated with the scene for a number of years.

Most interviews were conducted with a single interviewee, while four interviews were conducted with pairs of people, either couples or friends. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. Six interviewees were also participant observers in the research.

[6] Though not a major part of this study, observing at non-rave bars and clubs helped researchers understand the difference between the rave scene and the regular bar and club scene from the perspective of ravers.

[7] The interviews with the two people who were not familiar with raving were to follow up on their participant observation reports.

[8] Key informants/cultural experts are individuals, often opinion leaders or valued members of a group, who can provide insight into a question or issue being studied. Ideally, key informants will be well informed about the culture being studied, be a member of the culture, have a thorough understanding of the etiquette, norms, unspoken rules, language, rituals/traditions of the culture, be articulate, be willing to share and not censor their story too much.

The sample of 23 interviewees had the following characteristics:

- **Gender**: 12 female, 11 male
- **Age**: Range = 17 to 34 years, Average = 23 years, Median = 22 years
- **Occupation**: Half students, one-third employed, one-sixth neither employed nor students
- **Place of residence**: six from Red Deer and area, eight from Calgary and area, nine from Edmonton and area

A number of interviewees had moved to Alberta and brought with them comparative experiences of raving in other Canadian cities. Nine interviewees volunteered with and/or worked for groups or agencies that provided harm reduction information about substance use (five volunteered with harm reduction groups specific to raves and clubs).

Involvement in the scene began as early as 15 years of age for some interviewees and as late as 26 years for another (Average = 18 years, Median = 17). The length of involvement in the rave scene ranged from two to over 10 years (Average = 4.8 years, Median = 4 years). The degree of involvement often varied over time for individuals, from intense involvement, where they might attend anywhere from two to six raves per month, to less intense, where they may only attend one or two events a year. The majority of interviewees were involved in the Alberta rave scene during its peak years from 1998 to 2001 (see Appendix II for timeline of participants' involvement in the rave scene).

Four AADAC staff conducted the interviews. The interviews took place in locations that were chosen by the researcher and interviewee and deemed safe for both. All interviews occurred in public areas, and/or in areas that afforded enough privacy to conduct the interviews with minimal interruption (e.g., libraries, restaurants, meeting rooms in a hotel, AADAC offices).

At each interview,

1. The researcher explained the research project and process to the interviewee using an information sheet that listed information about the project and researchers, how the interviewee's information would be kept confidential, and that participation in the research was voluntary (see Appendix III). The interviewee was offered a copy of the information sheet to keep.
2. The interviewee completed a dated but unsigned consent checklist (see Appendix IV), marking any of the following items that applied to them:
   - I agree to participate in the research project.
   - I understand that I will receive an honorarium, which will be given at the end of the interview.

- I agree to be contacted for a follow-up interview if necessary.
- I agree to allow my voice to be used in sound bites in Web-based reports.
- I would like to receive a copy of the report when it is finished.

3. Once the interviewee gave consent, the interview was conducted.
4. Interviewees who wished to receive a copy of the report or who agreed to be contacted after the interview provided their contact information on a sheet of paper. Contact information was kept separate from the consent checklist to avoid the possibility of connecting individuals with specific sets of responses.[9]

Interview length varied from half an hour to two and a half hours, with most interviews being approximately one hour in length for a total of 25 hours of interviewing. Participants received a $30 cash honorarium as compensation for their time. Interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed into text documents. Interviewers wrote field notes (their comments or observations) after each interview, which were also analyzed as part of this study.

Table 1: Participants in AADAC study

	Interviewee only	Participant observer only	Both interviewee and participant observer	Total number of people
Familiar with rave scene	17	6	4	27
Not familiar with rave scene	0	8 Non-AADAC 7 AADAC staff	2	17
All participants	17	21	6	44

Numerous verbatim quotations are included in the findings of this report with the intent of providing the reader with enough information to "determine whether the [researcher's] interpretations and conclusions are warranted" (Fetterman, 1998, p. 124). Where quotations are used, the source of the quotation is identified as interviewee, participant observer, or both; and as "insider" or "outsider" to the rave scene. Quotations or observations from staff of AADAC or an agency funded by AADAC are identified as such. All interviewees and participant observers will be referred to generally as *participants* in this research.

[9] The unsigned consent forms and the separation of the consent forms and contact information were both measures to ensure confidentiality of interviewees. The consent forms were unsigned so that there was no chance that an individual could be connected with research on raves (clearly labelled on the consent form) in the rare case that the consent forms were viewed by anyone other than a researcher on the project. The contact information sheet did not have the title of the project on it and thus could not be used to link individuals with raves.

Survey data

AADAC Youth Services had connections with harm reduction groups working in the rave scene prior to this research. One of these groups, Rave Safe in Edmonton, had been collecting survey data at rave events before this study began. AADAC was allowed to use Rave Safe's survey data in exchange for conducting data analysis and providing Rave Safe with a copy of the analyzed data. Descriptive summaries of the Rave Safe data are included in this report.

Data was collected at seven rave events between 2000 and 2001. The size of each event is not known, though estimates suggest that most had around 1000 attendees, with one party having a few thousand attendees. Harm reduction group volunteers who attended events administered the surveys. A convenience sampling method was used where volunteers handed out a survey to any event attendee who volunteered to complete it. While this data is not generalizable, it provides demographic information about people attending these events, and insight into their patterns of drug use.

Survey questions varied slightly from event to event, and the total number of respondents for each question varied. The maximum number of respondents for a question was 394, while the minimum was 48 when a question was asked at only one event.

The surveys contained questions on the following topics that are relevant to this research:

- personal information (respondent's age, gender, what area they came from, occupation, and education level)
- frequency of respondent's use of 19 listed drugs
- risk ratings of 19 listed drugs from 1 to 5 (1 least harmful, 5 most harmful)
- experience of long-term, positive and negative side effects of drug use (respondents checked off items from a list of 27)
- drug use of friends (common or not)
- view of own drug use (problem or not)
- mixing drugs (if so, what combinations)

Document Analysis

Newspaper articles on raves from the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald*, two of Alberta's main daily newspapers, were also reviewed as part of this study to assess the level and nature of media attention given to the rave scene in Alberta since 1990 and for key articles that further informed this study. Edmonton's weekly entertainment magazines, *See Magazine* and *Vue Weekly*, were reviewed during the course of this study to help select events at which to observe and to see advertisements for and commentary on the rave scene in Edmonton.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms assigned to protect participant confidentiality. Transcripts of the interviews, participant observation reports and researchers' field notes were reviewed to correct spelling and punctuation, and to ensure any personal identifying information was removed (e.g., names of interviewees or their associates). The documents were then entered into a qualitative software program (Atlas-ti 4.2©) for analysis. Coding and analysis was an iterative process. Quotations of text were selected and assigned a specific code. After documents were coded, quotations under a specific code were analyzed for major themes. Major themes were discussed with the Rave Research Advisory Committee, which included five researchers, three members of the rave scene and four prevention practitioners.

To establish the authenticity of the findings, interviewers asked questions to clarify the meaning of statements made by interviewees and participant observers either during the original interview, in a follow-up interview, or by e-mail. Interviewers in some cases asked interviewees to comment on the statements of previous interviewees to further explore the shared meaning of the idea. The researchers also asked numerous participant observers to expand on their reports either for clarification or to address a specific aspect of the event.

The use of multiple methods of data collection in this study—participant observation, interviews, survey data, a review of newspaper articles—was a form of triangulation, which also contributes to verifying the authenticity of the findings (Fetterman, 1998). Where gaps of information or partial knowledge existed in one data source, other sources often filled in the missing pieces, in some cases validating the findings, and in some cases revealing a contradiction that indicated further research was necessary.

Ethics

The ethical considerations of this project were peer reviewed by experienced research staff in AADAC Research Services. The ethical considerations centred on the protection of and respect for rave event attendees, event promoters, venue owners, interviewees, and participant observers.

The rave event attendees, promoters and venue owners of the events attended are primarily protected by the absence of any identifying information of individuals, events, or venues in these findings. In the research proposal for this study, we suggested that the researchers could best hear ravers' experiences if they connected with them directly, without going through any gatekeepers such as promoters, venue owners, or any harm reduction groups. As a result, researchers also did not solicit interviews in a formal way at any rave events and wrote their participant observations after leaving the event. Members of AADAC's management team approved this approach.

The safety of participant observers at events was ensured by several methods, which were also discussed with AADAC management. Participant observers

- always attended events in groups of two or more
- had cell phones (either their own or one provided by AADAC)
- informed someone not attending the event (who had agreed to the confidentiality measures) of the itinerary for the evening

Researchers attending events also had the home phone number of the AADAC Research Unit manager, whom they could call if any serious incident arose.[10]

To ensure the anonymity of both interviewees and participant observers, researchers assigned pseudonyms to participants for the purpose of data collection. The pseudonyms were later removed in the final report to ensure comments could not be used to identify individuals. In the report, pseudonyms are only used for the profiles of types of drug users and in no way link those individuals with other information in the report.

Limitations

While this ethnographic research affords a unique view into the world of Alberta ravers, it also carries certain limitations. The size and nature of the sample of this study, including the Rave Safe survey data, does not allow for accurate estimates of drug use by Alberta youth.[11]

As well, the findings of this report are specific to the time at which the research was conducted. Findings in this research suggest rave culture is constantly evolving and thus caution is urged against generalizing these research results to all time periods.

The association of the research with AADAC and the recruitment of participants by AADAC staff and/or AADAC funded agencies may have affected the findings. In order for interviewees and participant observers to be able to give informed consent, all participants were made aware that the research was being conducted by AADAC, an organization known in Alberta for providing information, prevention and treatment for problems related to gambling and the use of alcohol and other drugs. As Kelly (2001) notes, "their varying degrees of illegality render [drugs] extremely difficult topics to discuss at the same casual level of, say, fashion" (p. 70), perhaps even more so when discussions are with people associated with AADAC.

[10] We did not anticipate any serious danger in attending events as people attend raves regularly with most experiences being completely safe. We believed that we were in no greater danger than any other attendees by simply attending and informally observing these events. These assumptions of safety were confirmed as the research was completed without any safety incidents.

[11] AADAC's recently completed The Alberta Youth Experience Survey (AADAC, 2003) provides data on drug use of youth in grades seven to 12. The Alberta Youth Experience Survey (TAYES) revealed that while youth do engage in drug use, the rate of "club drug" use (defined as ecstasy or crystal methamphetamine in TAYES) is relatively low at 5.3% (AADAC, 2003).

However, there was a wide range of drug use histories among participants recruited for the study and, in almost all cases, participants in this research provided detailed information about Alberta raves as well as drug use, either their own or perceptions of use in the community.

Despite these limitations, this study is important because it provides information about Alberta rave culture and those who participate in the rave experience from the perspective of youth, shedding light on positive aspects of the rave scene as well as the risks associated with drug use in the scene. The province-wide collaboration of Alberta youth, and AADAC researchers, field staff and funded agencies in data collection and report writing worked well to gain access to the rave scene and learn about this youth phenomenon. This information about what attracts youth to raves, their experiences at raves, and how the scene continues to change will improve services for those associated with or affected by the rave scene.

III. Overview of the Rave Literature

The findings from the interviews and participant observations from AADAC's study are compared with findings of previous rave research. A literature review was conducted after the data collection in accordance with the choice of methodology. Reviewing the literature after collecting data allowed researchers to take in the information from cultural informants—in this case, members of the rave scene—with fewer preconceived ideas of what the culture is about. Reviewing the literature before data collection may have entrenched researchers in concepts found in previous research (Patton, 2002). The review of the literature after data collection provided important information, in many cases confirming or reflecting AADAC's findings, and in others, revealing how the findings of this research differ from previous studies.

Literature abounds on drug use at raves or by ravers, and on drug policy or harm reduction issues regarding raves (Forsyth, Barnard, & McKeganey, 1997; Tossmann, Boldt, & Tensil, 2001; Anderson, 2000; Lenton, Boys, & Norcross, 1997; Lenton & Davidson, 1999; Adlaf & Smart, 1997; Hammersley, Khan, & Ditton, 2002). Cultural, youth, resistance and spiritual perspectives are also common approaches to understanding raves (Redhead, 1993a; Klein, 2000; Champion, 1998; Brabazon, 2002; Malbon, 1998; Weber, 1999; Reynolds, 1998; Hier, 2002; Nencini, 2002; Hutson, 2002).

The literature review for this research focused on Canadian studies. Several Canadian studies explore rave or dance culture using methodology similar to the AADAC research (Weber, 1999; Wilson, 2002; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Kelly, 2001). Others focus specifically on youth drug use at raves (Weir, 2000; Gross, Barrett, Shestowsky, & Pihl, 2002; Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002; Rieder, 2000). Findings from this literature are detailed throughout this report.

With the exception of one Edmonton study (Kelly, 2001), all of the above mentioned Canadian studies were based in Ontario or Quebec (see Appendix V for a list of Canadian studies, methodology and timelines of research). While these studies provide important information about raves and youth drug use in some parts of Canada, they may fail to capture regional variations, such as "the utilization of space, the selection of music, social and interpersonal atmosphere and communication patterns, the participants' dress, and the selection of psychoactive drugs available" (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003, p. 77). In addition to their regional limitations, these studies occurred from 1995 to 2001. Given the evolutionary nature of the rave phenomenon, this AADAC research provides a unique and timely Alberta perspective.

Because Kelly's (2001) research focused on the Edmonton rave scene, this report frequently draws on his findings. For his Master of Arts thesis in ethnomusicology, Kelly studied the Edmonton electronic dance music experience, based on his participation and observations in the scene from 1999 to 2001. Though his primary focus was on the music and dance experience in the scene, his observations on other aspects of the rave experience are used to inform this report.

IV. Rave events in Alberta

What is a rave? A note on terminology

In order to provide a context for this research, it is necessary to define the phenomenon being examined. Many AADAC staff who had questions about raves wanted to know, "What is a rave?" This is a fair question because, despite all the media attention raves have received, a definition of a rave can be elusive.

One standard definition is that raves are all-night dance parties attended by youth who dance to repetitive electronic music played by celebrated DJs on mobile sound systems at clandestine venues, often involving the liberal use of drugs but usually no alcohol (Weir, 2000; Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002; Gross et al., 2002). While the above definition captures the essence of early rave events, it does not adequately describe some more recent events that are part of the evolving rave scene. This study found, for example, that the rave scene in Alberta had diffused into a number of types of events, which we refer to collectively as rave events: typical raves, events featuring a DJ, regular bar or club nights featuring rave music, and after-hours club nights. The characteristics of these events are listed in Table 2 below.[12]

[12] While we have chosen to refer to all of these events collectively as "rave events," we note that others would disagree with this label. One respondent in this study insisted that any event that was held in a bar or club, and/or that served alcohol would not be considered a rave.

Table 2: Typology of rave events

Typical Rave	
	• One-time or annual party
	• Size ranges from small (under 100) to a few thousand
	• Generally held in non-club venues such as community halls, arenas, warehouses, or outdoor venues
	• Generally features several DJs, depending on the size; larger raves generally have well-known headliner DJs
	• Generally multiple rooms featuring different sub-genres of music, including a “chill” room with downtempo music
	• Alcohol may or may not be served
	• Event goes until 6 a.m. or later
	• May be all ages or have age restrictions
	• An after-party may take place after the rave ends, lasting until noon or later and held either in an after-hours club or a private residence
Event featuring a DJ	
	• One-time event; may be one in a series of events put on by a promoter
	• Generally held in a bar or club
	• Features a well-known DJ brought into the city for the event; one or two other DJs may play before the headliner
	• Generally only one room
	• Alcohol may or may not be served
	• Event would generally end at regular bar’s closing time
	• May be all ages or have age restrictions
Regular bar or club night featuring rave music	
	• Occurs regularly
	• Features rave or techno music (as opposed to top 40, hip hop or other music)
	• May have one or several local DJs play in one night; may bring in a well-known DJ from out of town on a given night
	• Alcohol would generally be served
	• Event would close at regular bar hours
	• Patrons must be over age 18
After-hours club night	
	• Occurs regularly
	• Features rave or techno music
	• May have several local DJs play; may bring in a well-known DJ from out of town on a given night
	• Alcohol would generally not be served
	• Event would typically start late (1 a.m.) and go until 6 a.m. or later
	• May be all ages or have age restrictions

Most participants in the AADAC study indicated that people in the rave scene no longer use the term "rave," and instead favour the more general term "party." This was both because media use of the term warped its meaning by explicitly linking raves with drug use, and because the scene itself changed and current parties no longer resemble an original rave which, in the words of one insider participant, "is a bunch of kids breaking into a warehouse and bringing their own generator and stuff and going crazy." Promoters are also hesitant to have the word "rave" associated with their productions anymore because of the negative publicity raves received in the media.

Common elements of all of these events are the music experience, the vibe or atmosphere of a party, and the general acceptance of drug use at most events. Technology also plays a key role in the scene.

Music Rave music has heavy bass, pounding at 130 to 220 beats per minute, with minimal lyrics. Ravers may dance for hours on end to the constant beat, generally dancing alone (that is, without a partner) but as part of the entire group of dancers, which may be a few thousand people at a large party. Dancers typically face the DJ.

Vibe One participant explained the vibe of a party as the following:

> The vibe was the feeling that the crowd gave off, whether it be friendly, energetic or happy. It referred to the sense of connectedness partygoers would feel, how comfortable everyone was. Some parties were more laid back and chill. A party with a bad or angry vibe would usually be considered a bad party. (Participant observer, insider)

The vibe of a rave is generally very accepting and supportive, with an absence of aggression, violence, or sexual tension. Participants generally reported that the vibe element of the rave scene is most strong at typical rave events and least present at regular club nights featuring rave music. Participants often contrasted the vibe of raves against that of regular bars and clubs (that do not play rave music).

Drug use at rave events Many ravers have liberal attitudes towards drug use and several participants in this study said that use of certain drugs, like ecstasy, can enhance or intensify the experience of raving. While drug use is common at raves, substance use by ravers ranges from total abstinence to moderate use to abuse. As well, many participants suggested that going to raves for the primary purpose of using drugs was inappropriate.

The music experience, the vibe of rave events, and substance use by youth who attend raves will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.

Technology Technology also plays a key role in the rave scene. As one insider to the scene said, the rave scene is like a "resurgence of the peace and community movements of the 1960s with a new interesting [technological] twist." The technological twist included the synthesized music and powerful

light shows, the on-line connection among members of the rave community,[13] and the instant, Internet access to information about events, DJs, and drugs (Wilson, 2002).

Where do rave events take place?

Rave events, as outlined above, take place in a variety of locations.

Non-club settings

Typical rave events are usually held outside of club settings in spaces that are "made up" for the event such as community halls, arenas, warehouses, or outdoor venues (Kelly, 2001; Wilson, 2002). One participant in this study reported attending raves in "basements of restaurants, storage warehouses, skateboard parks, parkades, movie theatres...sports arenas...on tops of mountains...in a farmer's field, [and] in large storm drain tunnels underneath major roadways." Participants in this study also said that some people have small, private raves featuring local DJs in their homes.

Participant observers in this study attended five typical raves: one in the basement of an office building, one in a large sport complex, one in an outdoor venue, and two in a club. Tickets for these events ranged from $20 to $60.

Club settings

Nightclub spaces can be divided into regular nightclubs and after-hours clubs.

Regular nightclubs Events featuring a DJ, regular club nights featuring rave music, and, occasionally, typical raves, may all be held in regular nightclubs. Regular nightclubs are regulated by liquor licenses requiring patrons to be ages 18 years[14] or older and that the venue close at 3 a.m. Recent issues of Edmonton's *Vue Weekly* magazine list "Flashback Saturdays" and "Sonic Eclipse" as examples of regular club nights that feature rave music.

For this study, participant observers attended events in 11 different bars or clubs that played rave or dance music at least some nights of the week in at least one room of the venue. Participant observers also attended events in nine bars or clubs that played top 40, alternative, blues or country music for comparison.

After-hours clubs After-hours club events are held in nightclub spaces on a regular basis, either every night, or only on weekends. The key difference between regular clubs and after-hours clubs is that the latter open at 11 p.m. or later and stay open until early morning (6 a.m.). Several participants in this study said that they would go to regular bars in the earlier part of

[13] Two examples of on-line rave discussion boards are www.etownravepage.com and www.waysofthewikkid.com.
[14] Current legal drinking age in Alberta.

an evening and then go to an after-hours club after the regular bar had closed to continue dancing until 4 or 5 a.m. These spaces may also host typical raves and after-parties. After-parties are events that take place after the rave ends, sometimes lasting until noon the next day or later. Promoters may advertise these events in conjunction with a typical rave. They may also be held in private residences. Some participants in this study indicated that the after-parties were intended to give those who had been using drugs a place to go while they were coming down off their high or sometimes to take more drugs.

Participant observers in this study attended events at three different after-hours clubs in Alberta. The cover charge for these venues ranged from $6 to $15.

Most insider participants viewed the after-hours scene as a diluted form of the rave scene because there is a mixing of people from the regular bars with those from the rave scene since after-hours clubs are more accessible to anyone looking for something to do for the weekend (i.e., not a committed raver).

How has the rave scene evolved in Alberta?

In the beginning...

The origins of rave go back to Chicago, Detroit and New York, where Acid House, techno and garage music respectively evolved (Rietveld, 1993). The dance party format developed in the UK and other European countries, and then spread back to North America (Rietveld, 1993). Much has been written about the origins and global evolution of the rave scene (for an overview, see Redhead, 1993b). This section focuses on the rave scene's development in Alberta, which started in the early 1990s.

According to insider participants of the AADAC study, DJs were usually the promoters for the early rave parties in Alberta. Tickets cost a nominal fee, for example $5. Advertising was done by word of mouth or by flyers, which were sometimes only two inches by two inches with just a phone number on them. People would call the number and be told to show up on the day of the party at a certain store, where they would receive a map for the location of the rave. Raves at this time were held at a wide variety of locations, from basements of restaurants to storage warehouses to farmers' fields. This treasure hunt experience to find the secret party was part of the allure of the experience:

> A huge part of the fun was finding these obscure locations. It was an adventure to meet at a map point, obtain the map to the party and head off to find the event. (Participant observer, insider)

This low-profile advertising also allowed the scene to regulate itself because newcomers would be introduced to the scene by someone already familiar with the culture.

Several participants indicated that the scene in these early days was more unified than it is today, both in terms of a shared music experience and in terms of the ethics and values shared by the ravers. While participants reported that drugs were available at early raves, some participants indicated that drugs played a less central role to the scene in the early years:

> We were just there to be there, and the drugs were just sort of a nice thing on the side. You know, you'd even wait until way later in the night [to take anything]...and it wasn't as excessive. (Interviewee, insider)

Several participants reported that the drugs available at these early parties were more pure than they are today.

The peak of the rave scene in Alberta

From the middle to late 1990s, the rave scene in Alberta began to change. The music became popular in mainstream venues, being heard in television commercials, on the radio, and in music stores. One participant's comment reflects how this commercialization of rave music was a double-edged sword:

> This whole corporatization of the rave scene I guess is a good thing because, like I said, I do love the music and I do love the advancement of the music....But I don't like the idea of just having a party to make a lot of money or to be trendy. (Interviewee, insider)

The popularity of the music and the scene in general resulted in an increase in the frequency and size of parties. Insider participants suggested that promoters started to realize that they could rent large facilities, like the SportEx in Calgary or AgriCom in Edmonton, for a party and draw a few thousand people. Ticket prices also started to go up, from the nominal fee of $5 to anywhere from $20 to $80. Advertising for parties was now mainstream and moved into the realm of the Internet and popular weekly entertainment guides, like Edmonton's *Vue Weekly* or Calgary's FFWD (Kelly, 2001). More than one event might take place on the same weekend. All-ages events became more common, and participants reported that the average age of ravers began to drop, a finding similar to that of other studies (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002; Weber, 1999).

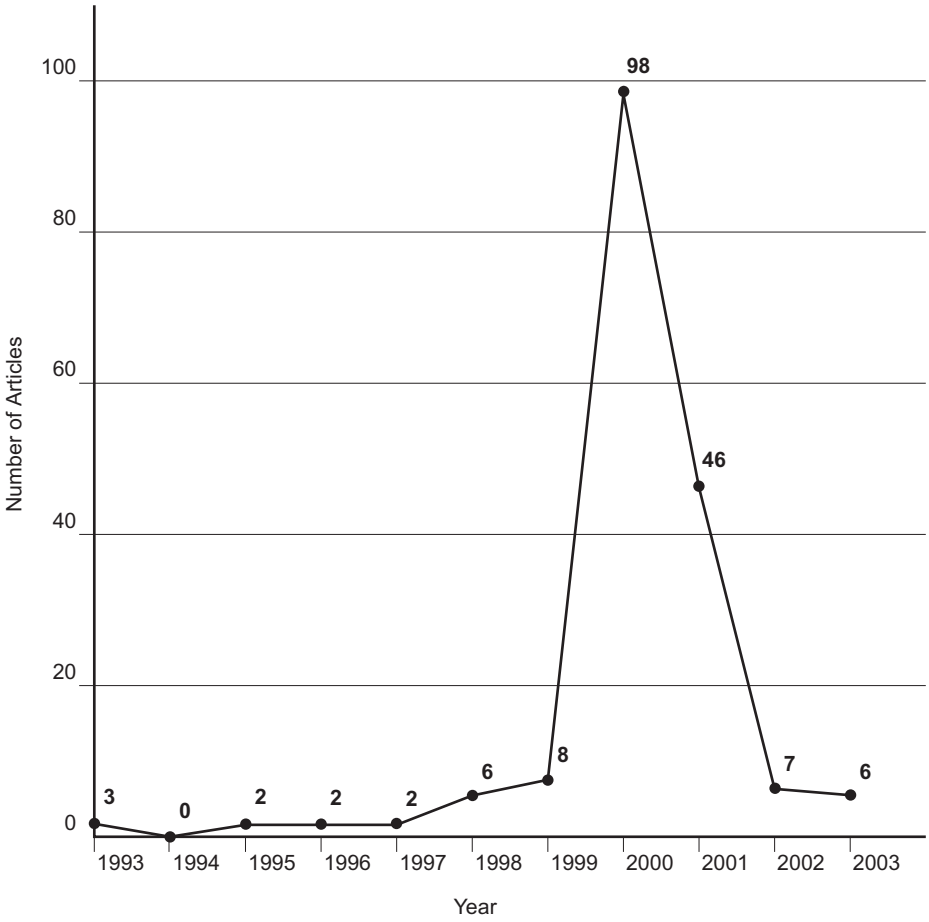
Participants reported that 1999 and 2000 were the peak years for the rave scene in Alberta in terms of popularity.[15] During this time, dance-related fashion and music stores opened in Alberta, such as Foosh, Feroshus, DV8 and Colourblind (Kelly, 2001). One participant reported that DJs at this time could play three or four nights a week. The Ascension party in April of 2000 was apparently the largest party in Alberta with 5000 people. This was also the party where several people collapsed after experiencing strobe-light induced seizures after taking ecstasy. The headlines following this event—for example, "Hospital Admits at Least Six From Rave" (Journal Staff,

[15] One participant noted that in terms of the vitality of the scene, the peak years were 1994-1999.

2000)—marked the beginning of intense public scrutiny of raves and sparked discussion over the need for bylaws as a means by which to regulate raves.

Media coverage in the *Edmonton Journal* and *Calgary Herald*, Alberta's largest cities' daily newspapers, increased dramatically following the Ascension party in April 2000 (see Figure 1). Following this event, dozens of articles were published discussing the hazards of rave scenes and the bylaws that were being proposed by the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. Media coverage of raves fell off by half in 2001 and has been minimal in the last two years, though in January 2004, Edmonton's after-hours club scene became the focus of attention again when Mayor Bill Smith announced that city bylaws may be changed to force after-hours clubs to close at the same time as regular clubs (O'Donnell, 2004).

Figure 1: "Rave" articles in the Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald, 1993-2003



Some participants in this study felt that the great influx of people into the rave scene during its peak diluted rave culture.

> It [the rave scene] was fairly tight...It was a bit sacred and you didn't really want to let people know a lot about it...And so when it started getting more and more popular...I couldn't help but feel sort of cheated, that it was...getting wrecked. Just like everything else that gets cool and you know about it before everyone else does—it gets destroyed because it just gets saturated. (Interviewee, insider)

Newcomers were said to enter the scene with the media message that raves are a place to do drugs and were not necessarily attracted to the music or aware of the philosophy behind raving. Other participants indicated that turnover of ravers became faster during this time as well, with individuals staying in the rave scene for shorter periods of time, which hindered the passing on of rave culture.

Beyond the changes to the scene resulting from the influx of "uncultured" attendees, one insider participant asserted that the role of ravers changed from active participants to passive consumers. The collective sense of responsibility for an event was lost, as people were hired to carry out specific tasks, such as playing the music, cleaning the venue, and providing security. This participant suggested this meant patrons had more of an attitude of demanding the services and goods for which they had paid. These changes were attributed in part to the fact that DJs were no longer the primary promoters of events:

> The minute the DJ stopped being the promoter or the promoter was no longer interested in the music on a personal level, it [raves] started to become a business. (Interviewee, insider)

Ironically, rave culture's philosophy of acceptance may have led to its own downfall. While underground, the rave scene was informally regulated by the fact that advertisement was primarily through word of mouth and experienced ravers initiated newcomers into the culture of raving. Once parties became mainstream, there was no boundary to control the influx of newcomers in the scene and the transfer of its cultural components became more difficult.

After the peak

The rave scene in Alberta changed significantly after the implementation of bylaws in Edmonton and Calgary. Calgary passed its rave bylaws in July 2000 and Edmonton followed suit in August 2001.

Part of the intention of the bylaws was to ensure that facilities provided free, fresh, running water,[16] and had proper ventilation. As well, they were

[16] One participant in this study stated that the idea that raves were unsafe before the bylaws is a myth, and that there were only a couple incidences in the late 1990s where promoters turned off the water in order to make money selling bottled water.

intended to address concerns about overcrowding and age limits for those attending events. These same issues were the focus of bylaws implemented in other cities as well (Weber, 1999; Weir, 2000).

The bylaws restricted the size of events and required promoters to obtain permits for dance events that met the criteria of "extended dance event,"[17] as Calgary called raves. Promoters also had to pay for on-site police and paramedics, an additional expense that resulted in promoters having to increase the size of parties, and thus advertise outside of rave circles, and/or charge higher prices for tickets to cover expenses. Several participants indicated that city officials were free to use their own discretion when deciding whether or not a party could go ahead, which made obtaining the necessary permits for parties an unpredictable process. With big parties involving a $30,000 to $50,000 investment, many promoters were not able or willing to take the financial risk. As a result, in Calgary, most promoters chose to throw parties with fewer than 250 attendees in order to avoid having their event classified as an "extended dance event."[18] Now, instead of multiple events on a single weekend, participants reported that there may only be eight or nine large rave events a year, or less.

The trend for raves to move into club venues accelerated after the implementation of the bylaws, in part because clubs already had the necessary licenses to host events, and in part because clubs recognized the popularity of the music. DJs also turned to clubs as a place to play their music, now that the opportunities to play at raves had dwindled. The movement towards fewer large raves and more nightclub events was seen in England in the early 1990s and made its way across North America, including Vancouver and Toronto before arriving in Edmonton and Calgary. A review of club listings in *Vue Weekly*, a weekly entertainment magazine in Edmonton, showed that on average in 2003 Friday and Saturday nights featured six to eight events with rave music. All other nights of the week featured three events or less, with some nights having no events featuring rave music.

Some participants in this study indicated that even club events have died back since the peak of the scene, with various clubs closing in Edmonton in the last few years, and fewer people attending rave music nights. Some suggested that clandestine parties are starting to take place again in an attempt to escape the intense scrutiny publicized events receive. For example, in conversation with a local DJ, one participant observer learned of a party that was being held on Crown land outside the city that was by invitation only and not publicly advertised. Insider participants felt that these parties captured the culture and community aspect of raves that had been lost in club settings and large parties.

[17] An extended dance event, as defined in the City of Calgary Bylaw Number 34M2000, is a gathering of people for the primary purpose of listening to or dancing to music which lasts for more than five hours and includes events which may commonly be referred to as "raves" (City of Calgary, 2000).

[18] A recent newspaper article in the Calgary Herald indicated that Calgary's bylaws may be amended to make them less restrictive (Semmens, 2003). For example, the size limit of parties requiring promoters to hire police officers for the event may be raised from 250 to 800.

In addition to club events and clandestine parties, corporate events, sponsored by promoters with ample funding (e.g., cigarette companies) are also part of the rave scene, reflecting a different vein of the now fragmented rave culture. One participant observer who had been involved in the rave scene from 1995 to 2000 said the following of one such corporate event:

> The "rave" was a very corporate and contrived experience for me [because of] the influence [the promoter and venue] were exerting over what once was an underground scene. The overt advertising and manipulation of the target audience by the [promoter], and the disrespect with which the bar handled its customers astonished me. I suppose I should not have expected any better had I investigated the sponsors prior to the event! (Participant observer, insider)

At the time of this writing in 2003, one rave-related store had just closed, possibly another indication of the decline of the rave scene in Alberta (Lewis, 2003). On the other hand, a new dance club had just opened in Edmonton, presenting itself as a martini/dance lounge (Prodaniuk, 2003). Pitched at an older crowd, the club reportedly had "plenty of beats" but in a "more relaxed and elegant environment." The marketing strategy of this new club demonstrates how the scene continues to evolve from its warehouse roots.

Most participants indicated that the average age of ravers is now increasing. Interviewees reported that more university-aged people than youth in their early to mid-teens are now interested in the rave scene. Recent news articles indicate that the popularity of the rave scene with youth is diminishing, with one local DJ saying, "Dance music just isn't as cool as it was a few years ago. What was dangerous and rebellious three years ago now seems dated; all the kids are listening to emo[19] now" (Stuffco, 2003; Lewis, 2003).

Clearly, though the popularity of the rave scene in Alberta has dropped off since its peak, the scene continues to evolve. The popularity of the scene, media exposure, and the implementation of bylaws all had significant impacts on the evolution of the scene. The current rave scene in Alberta consists of a variety of events, some that feature dance music without the cultural underpinnings, and some that contain both. Other Canadian studies had similar findings, citing that the rave scene in various cities evolved from "underground to mainstream to fragmented" (Wilson, 2002).

[19] "Emo" is short for "emotional" and refers to a broad range of emotionally-charged punk-rock (fourfa, 2003).

Summary

It is clear from these findings that there is no single definition of raves and no simple understanding of what it means to rave. The rave scene has evolved and no longer includes only the classic notion of raves as all-night dance parties held in warehouses. Rave events have spilled into the regular and after-hours club scene. Some events feature rave music but lack the culture's philosophical ideals of PLUR (peace, love, unity and respect), while other events include both. There are now fewer large parties and more corporate-sponsored club events. Though past its peak in Alberta, the rave scene continues to evolve as a core group of followers promotes the music and ideals of rave.

V. Understanding who raves and the experience of raving

The intent of this study was to understand the rave scene from the raver's perspective. This section looks at who ravers are, and what they said about the experience of raving.

Who raves?

Raves have attracted more youth than any other post-war subculture, according to Merchant & Macdonald (1994). In 2001, a study of Ontario students found that almost 20 % of students surveyed had attended a rave (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002). Ravers are predominantly white, middle-class youth, though variations in age, ethnicity and class are apparent at various events.

Age

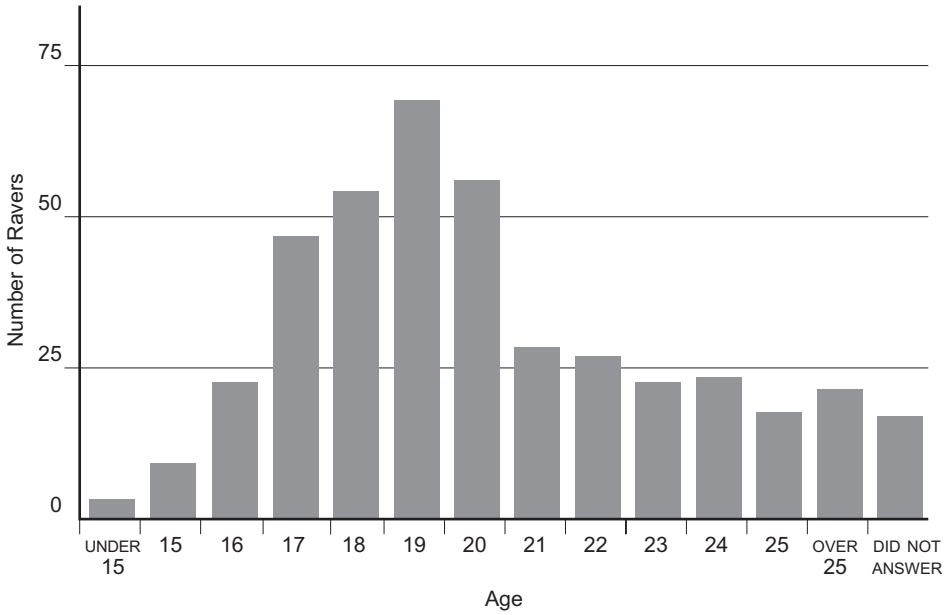
Average age of ravers The average age of people at most of the rave events attended for this study was 18 to 25 years, with some people in their 30s, 40s, or even 50s. Participant observers and interviewees noted that the average age of people at after-hours clubs (18 to 20 years) was lower than the average age of those at rave events. At one event in a club that featured an internationally renowned DJ, the crowd was noticeably older, with most people appearing to be in their mid-20s to early 30s. At some events, there were a few individuals who appeared to be as young as 12 or 13 years of age. One insider participant suggested that, typically, the greatest age range is at large, outdoor events that older people attend with their children along with the many 18- to 25-year-olds. These age estimates are based on multiple participant observation reports.

Participants of this AADAC study reported that the age of their first involvement in the rave scene ranged from 15 to 26 (see Appendix II).

The observations in this research are supported by the survey data collected at Alberta raves in 2000 to 2001 by Rave Safe. Figure 2 shows the age of respondents who completed surveys at seven events.[20] The average age was 20 years, and the age range was from under 15 (1 person) to over 25 (21 people). Although the majority (82%) of respondents were adults, one in five respondents was under the age of 18. The age range of ravers in the AADAC study was also similar to that found in other studies (Wilson, 2002; Weir, 2000; Weber, 1999).

[20] Survey results are based on a small, convenience sample of rave attendees, and may not be representative of the entire population of people at the event.

Figure 2: Age of respondents who completed Rave Safe survey, N=394



Source: Rave Safe data

Young teens and raves

Some of the concerns about raves raised in the media were about young teens attending rave events. According to participants, early raves in Alberta did not allow entrance to minors. It was only as the scene became more popular in the mid-1990s that all-ages events became common. Several participants believed that although Edmonton's bylaws set a minimum age limit of 16 years for admission to raves, it was still very easy for youth under the age of 16 to gain entry to 16-plus events.

There are after-hours clubs in Alberta that allow entrance to minors.[21] In some cases, youth under the age of 18 are only permitted in a certain area until after bar service closes. Nevertheless, participant observers in this study expressed concern over how youth under age 18 or 16 would be influenced by an atmosphere where older people are using alcohol, and where messages may be targeted for a more mature audience. One example of this last concern was a rave where there were banners with images of a scantily clad woman in bondage.

On the other hand, several participants argued that there are very few places for young teens to hang out, particularly now that the smoking bylaw has made some cafés 18-plus. These participants suggested that all-ages raves may provide a safe place for teens to go provided the promoter is responsible and there is good security:

> Y'know, parents are like, "Well, y'know who's there looking out after my kid?" Well, who's looking out after your kid at school, and at a bar?

[21] In March 2004, an Edmonton City Council committee proposed that the age limit for after-hours clubs in Edmonton be raised to 18. According to one news report, this amendment to the rave bylaw would only affect Friday nights at one of the two after-hours clubs in the city (Gerein, 2004).

> Like, nobody. Whereas, when you're going to a rave, the entire community's looking out after your kid. (Interviewee, insider)

As stated earlier in this report, the average age of ravers appears to be increasing now that the scene is past its peak of popularity and younger teens are being drawn to other entertainment venues. Thus, concerns about younger teens in the rave scene may lessen over time.

Gender

The rave scene was characterized by participants as valuing gender equality and generally lacking the sexual aggression common to the regular bar and club scene. Weber (1999) noted that participants in his study described ravers as an androgynous group and suggested that gender and sexual orientation do not matter in raves. Ravers were said to dress in baggy, androgynous clothing which tends to "diminish distinctions based on physical attractiveness and sexual orientation" (Weir, 2000, p. 1844; Weber, 1999) and indicate a lack of pretension and an acceptance of self and others. Baggy clothing is also more appropriate for the intense physical activity of dancing.

However, some observations from this study and others indicate that rave clothing styles can range from androgynous to sexual, or from "baggy clothing to bikinis," as Kelly (2001) put it. Other observations suggested that there are exceptions to the claims about equal participation of women in the rave scene. In terms of attendance at raves, the Rave Safe surveys found that more males than females filled out the survey (58% versus 41%), a finding that matches other studies which found male participation in the rave scene to be slightly higher than that of females (Kelly, 2001; Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002).

Apart from attendance at events, women "appear to be less involved in the cultural production of rave, from the flyers, to the events, to the DJing, than their male counterparts" (McRobbie, 1994 as cited in Tomlinson, 1998), a trend that has been noted in many other youth and/or music subcultures. As well, images used on rave flyers, for rave decorations, and on rave-related Internet chat sites may depict women in a sexualized manner that counters the claims that women are not marginalized in rave culture. One respondent suggested these discrepancies could be understood as mainstream cultural values and norms regarding women mixing with the ideals of rave subculture. While this study does not look explicitly at gender roles in the rave scene, this would be an interesting area for further research.

Ethnicity

Several participants noted that the majority of attendees were white, though some participants reported that there was a range of ethnic backgrounds at events. Many observers and interviewees noted that ethnic groups, for example, Asian or East Indian people, tended to stay together at events.

At one event, a participant observer noted there were several Aboriginal people. These findings matched those of other studies (Weber, 1999; Kelly, 2001).

Though the majority of observations indicated that people of different ethnic backgrounds did not tend to mix at rave events, other comments suggested that race or ethnicity was not a dividing factor at the events they attended. These observations are in keeping with the ideal of inclusiveness within rave culture but must be balanced with the many countering observations of ethnic segregation at rave events.

Class

Ravers tend to be middle-class (Weir, 2000; Weber, 1999; Rieder, 2000; Kelly, 2001), particularly now that ticket prices for events have gone up. One respondent indicated that there would have been a greater range of socioeconomic backgrounds at early raves, when tickets might cost as little as $5. In addition to ticket price, some ravers may spend anywhere from $10 to $40 on drugs per night (Weir, 2000) and spend money on clothing and other paraphernalia. Altogether, raving can be an expensive pastime, which in part explains the predominance of middle-class youth in the scene (Weir, 2000).

Beyond being ravers

Outside of their involvement in the rave scene, participants in the AADAC study were typical of other people their age. Half of the 23 interviewees were students in college, university, or high school. A third were employed in such settings as a university, hair salon, theatre, or family business. Several participants were either currently or had previously been involved in DJing or producing rave events. A sixth of the interviewees were unemployed; most of these were actively looking for work at the time of the interview. Because of the open-ended nature of the interviews, additional profile information on participants was not requested.[22]

Profiles of three ravers

These three profiles are composites of various stories of participants in this study. Together they present common themes as to how participants entered and participated in the scene, and whether or not they eventually left the scene.

Dragon

Dragon had always liked high-paced dance music. At 19, he started working at a club and eventually started going to raves with co-workers. There were no large raves in the small city he lived in, so Dragon would travel to other cities to attend raves and go to the local after-hours club on other weekends.

[22] As Gamble and George (1997) point out, it is “both a strength and a weakness” that open-ended research “encourages the respondents to explore their own agenda rather than follow the agenda determined by the research worker” (p. 344).

Before he started working in the club, he had not used alcohol or any drugs. During his time in the rave scene, he experimented with different drugs in moderation, always researching their effects beforehand. Beyond loving the music, Dragon appreciated the rave scene because it was accepting of his bi-sexuality. After a few years in the rave scene, Dragon took his love for the music to a new level and started DJing himself. He travelled to numerous cities in Canada to DJ when the scene was at its peak, but has found it harder to find work as a DJ in the last couple of years.

Mercury

Mercury was involved in the punk scene in his early teens. When he was 16, he went to an outdoor rave with some friends who had started attending raves. He said at this first party, "I was blown away by the sense of community, by the energy, by what I perceived as a very positive vibe." Mercury found raves to be a much more positive atmosphere than the punk scene. He would often drive several hours with a group of friends to attend a rave in another city or an outdoor rave. He has experimented with a variety of drugs, both before he ever attended raves and during his time in the rave scene. Mercury is not currently involved in the rave scene because he is busy with school and has other interests.

Harmony

Harmony saw a flyer for a rave in a music store and decided to go with a friend to celebrate her fifteenth birthday. She recalled that she and her friend "just wandered around and met so many people and just took so many pictures" at her first rave. They both liked the fact that they did not know anybody there. Her parents would let her stay out until 3 a.m., provided she took the cell phone with her and called them between midnight and 1 a.m. Harmony went to parties every weekend for about a year. She became known as a "party kid" at school and even dressed like a "candy-kid" (see description under Why Rave?, Feeling free to be childlike) for her graduation. She later grew out of this style but continued to go to raves. Harmony had only used marijuana before going to her first rave. During her rave years, she tried ecstasy, but later started to rave without using any substances. She also started volunteering with a rave harm reduction group. The vibe of raves was always the main draw for Harmony, even over the music. Harmony only attends a few annual events now and has largely withdrawn from the rave scene. She said, "I looked around and realized that few of my friends were still involved and most of the ravers around me were my younger sister's age." Raves now felt "fabricated and superficial" to her and she found herself drawn to other activities.

Why rave? Understanding the experience of raving

One of the guiding questions of this research was, "Why do youth rave?" What is it about the rave scene that has attracted so many youth? The two

main attractions to the scene are discussed in this section. First, participants spoke of the intensity of raving, which was attributed primarily to the music experience. Second, participants talked about the positive social aspects of the rave scene, which were largely attributed to the vibe of rave events.

1) Feeling alive: Raves as an intense experience

Participants described raving as an intense experience, largely because of the music experience, but also because of the visual effects and late hours of events.

Several participants said their first experience at a rave was the most intense:

> The first time you go there's nothing, it's like nothing you've ever seen before. It's really, it's very exciting, it's quite a show. (Interviewee, insider)

> So, first party in [city] and I was just enthralled. I was blown away by the sense of community, by the energy, by what I perceived as a very positive vibe associated with the rave scene. (Interviewee, insider)

> My first experience was probably the most moving one and it was just, I don't know. There was something so captivating about the whole thing, just thousands of people just getting off dancing and just going off their rocker. (Interviewee, insider)

Other participants described their first experiences as "earthshaking," "mind-blowing," "overwhelming," "enthralling," and "intense."

The intensity of the rave experience can begin days before the actual event, as the following description of pre-event anticipation illustrates:

> I remember...all week I'd just be like "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm going to go to a party on Saturday" and I'd get all excited and Friday night I'd go to bed early, wake up, and I'd just pretty much spend the whole day packing all the things I needed and then I'd go off. (Interviewee, insider)

The visual effects of events also contribute to the intensity. Rave locations are often decorated with lights and a variety of other elaborate festival decorations such as giant inflatables or screens that play film loops (Kelly, 2001). One participant observer described the visual effects of one event attended in this study:

> On either side of [the main] stage, there were two or three large canvases painted with psychedelic images in fluorescent colours. There were black lights that made these colours stand out even more once it was dark. A little ways into the dance floor from the main stage, there were two towers covered in white cloth with coloured lights inside. There was also a large screen behind the DJ and two smaller screens in front of the stage onto which psychedelic images were projected once it got dark. The images were of lots of shapes and designs moving, some of people dancing. All in all, it was a very visually stimulating set-up. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

The late hours of rave events also make for an intense experience that is out of the ordinary. One participant described how she enjoyed emerging into morning light at the end of a party:

> Walking out into the bright sunshine in the morning and saying my goodbyes to everyone at the party has always been a fun experience. It was neat to drive home with the music still pounding in my head, ringing in my ears. You would drive past other people on the road, people heading to work while you were only now going home to bed. (Participant observer, insider)

Many participants seemed to take pride in their ability to stay up the entire night, and to dance for long periods of time.

The intensity of raving is most strongly linked to the music and dance experience.

Music at rave events Several participants in the AADAC study said that music was the main attraction to the rave scene for them.

> I loved the music, the music is great...it's almost like you, you could get high just off the energy of the place. (Interviewee, insider)

Some participants recounted how they had heard the music either in a music store, in a club or even in a movie, and were drawn into the scene because it was the only place to hear techno or rave music. This was because rave music was initially underground or non-commercialized and was not played in mainstream media (Weber, 1999).

One participant described dance music as the following:

> It's definitely not verse-chorus-verse type of format. It's very wide and evolving and there's a lot of nuances in dance music that maybe you don't pick up unless you listen to it a lot. (Interviewee, insider)

Music at raves is loud and "is the one activity that never stops" during a rave (Wilson, 2002, p. 393). While other types of music often involve lyrics with the intention to communicate something from the artist to the listener, rave music often has no lyrics. Kelly (2001) points out that this is a new kind of experience, where instead of verbal or physical communication between the artist and audience, dancers are participating in a "dance music world" (p. 24).

Rave music became more mainstream during the scene's peak years, appearing in television and radio commercials and being sold on CDs. In this proliferation of rave or techno music, numerous sub-genres developed, such as house, trance, techno, breakbeat, jungle, hardcore and downtempo. Multiple variations of some sub-genres exist. For example, house music includes progressive house, deep house, nu energy, funky house, and hard house. Each sub-genre of rave music has its own distinct style and group of followers in the scene (See Appendix VI for a description of some of

the main sub-genres of rave or techno music and a list of sub-genres noted in this study).[23]

Typical raves have more than one room or stage (Wilson, 2002); for example, headlining DJs might play on a main stage, while other DJs would play in smaller rooms. There is generally at least one room at an event for slower paced music, which is referred to as the "chill" room (Wilson, 2002). It is common for patrons to move back and forth between these various spaces. These observations of music at typical raves are similar to that of other research (Kelly, 2001).

DJs at rave events Music at raves is played by DJs, an elite group in the rave scene who are said to have a role of power and influence over ravers. This role is evident in the fact that ravers dance facing the DJ who is physically located at the head of the dance floor (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Kelly, 2001; Wilson, 2002; Weir, 2000; Weber, 1999).

While non-rave clubs and events may also have DJs, they differ from rave DJs because, as one interviewee said,

> [Rave DJs are] not just playing a tape or a CD, they're spinning it, they're putting it together as they go. (Interviewee and participant observer, outsider).

As well, regular club DJs will introduce songs and make announcements about drink specials (Wilson, 2002), while rave DJs generally do not speak at all when they are performing. A regular bar DJ may be likened to other bar staff working in the venue, whereas a rave DJ would be likened to a rock star performing in the venue:

> What people who aren't involved in the rave scene don't understand is that certain DJs are like certain pop stars. Within the community, they're huge. They command huge amounts of money...When you see a rave flyer and you see Tall Paul, or...Paul Oakenfold, or John Digweed...that's the same as seeing Mick Jagger. (Interviewee, insider)

Some DJs are internationally renowned and are in high demand to play at events all over the world.

Rave DJs spin vinyl records on turntables with no breaks between tracks, which creates the effect of "continuous sound" (Kelly, 2001, p. 46). One participant described how the turntables work, as she was shown by a DJ at a record store:

> He said that you could spin a record without breaking the turntable because the record and its base was the only moving part and the rest was static. The record was moved by electromagnets. There were really cool lights on the side that showed the DJ how to line up the tracks

[23] See http://www.di.fm/edmguide/edmguide.html for descriptions and samples of the many sub-genres of rave music.

> properly...In between the two turntables was a mixer that could manipulate the treble, bass of each record and fade between the two tracks. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Some DJs use computers to assist in mixing music.

Often several DJs will play sets at one event, with a variety of sub-genres of rave music being played in one evening. The music at an event may play from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., with DJs playing for varying lengths of time:

> They have slots-hour, hour and a half, two hours. Big headliners might, if they are really big, might get three or three and half hours. (Interviewee, insider)

Participants in this study said that the longer they were in the scene, the more they came to appreciate the skills and talents of DJs, realizing that it takes a lot of practice and hard work to become a skilled DJ. When asked what makes a good DJ, one participant replied,

> The flow, in one word, it would be the flow of the music like interchanging from song to song, building up the crowd, building up your set... like starting off slower and slowly raising the tempo and the speed and the energy in the room...like keeping the crowd into it, that's about it. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Several participants mentioned that they knew particular DJs, indicating that the DJ circle is a prestigious one. "Knowing the DJ," in some cases, meant having free access to an event or being allowed to hang out with the DJs in a special area reserved for DJs and promoters at an event.

Dancing at rave events One participant described the rave dance experience as follows:

> You're not hearing the music, you're not processing it through your ears as much as your body...When you're touching the ground, you're feeling it [the sound waves] coming through the ground, you're feeling it in your shoes, you're feeling your feet, you're feeling your legs, it's up in your bowels, and it's actually...manipulating your body...You know what's gonna happen next because...your unconscious has processed the patterns...You're not anticipating...and reacting to what's happening, so much as you're...synchronized...Two thousand kids know when the music is building up, and when it's about to skip a measure and then go off really hard. Everybody throws down with complete intensity for the next five minutes...close their eyes, feeling it, and just going with it....It's like no other experience. (Interviewee, insider)

As the above quotation illustrates, rave music—with the heavy bass pounding at anywhere from 130 to 220 beats per minute, played at top volume for hours on end—has an undeniable physical impact on the dancers, particularly because the dancers' "bodies are actually moved, vibrated," by the music (Kelly, 2001, p. 26; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003).

Participants in this study described the experience of dancing to the same beat with hundreds or thousands of other people as an intense, collective experience. This experience is apparently even more special because it is not something one can do by oneself; it can only happen when all the other people show up and dance. Thus, the dancers feel a strong sense of unity. They feel they are part of the group at the same time that they are dancing by themselves (that is, without partners). This style of dancing appeared "egocentric" to some observers in this study who were outsiders to the rave scene:

> It's not like a normal club where you see people dancing in a group. They [the ravers] dance on their own and...there's not that much talking going on and it's just more they're listening to the music and they're completely in their own space, they're oblivious to other people around them....The overall effect was egocentric in my view. (Interviewee and participant observer, outsider)

This perception contrasted insiders' descriptions of rave dancing as a collective experience.

Ravers have a distinct style of dancing, which differs from club style dancing:

> Everyone is dancing facing the DJ and they are dancing usually by themselves. (Interviewee, insider)

> The club sort of style, it's a lot more hip and a lot less feet movement. With the rave style, it's almost like a walk—a lot more fluid movements of the arms—a lot of spinning and that sort of thing. But with the club people, it's very shake your butt. (Interviewee, insider)

There are some specialized styles of rave dancing, such as "liquid" dancing, which was described by one insider participant as when "you throw on a pair of white gloves, so you look like Mickey Mouse and you make them [your hands] move in really strange, fluid motions and it looks like a stream of light." Two other dance styles are "flagging," where people twirl flags on short sticks in various patterns, and dancing with "pois," where people swing glowsticks, ribbons or fireballs attached to strings in intricate patterns. These dance styles create a visual experience for the dancer and those around them (Kelly, 2001).

Apart from these identifiable dance styles and characteristics, there are no set steps or styles to dancing at rave events, and abilities in dance movement vary dramatically among the dancers (Kelly, 2001).

2) Feeling connected and accepted: Raves as a positive social space

> This friend that I went with had been on anti-depressants and after going to the parties and starting to go to clubs and stuff with me she ended up stopping them because all of a sudden she had like a feeling of fitting in and a feeling of being surrounded by great people and a feeling of sort of like being able to be herself instead of trying to avoid being herself. (Interviewee, insider)

> As an individual in the punk rock scene, I was generally very negative and very cynical...My involvement in the rave scene sort of reflected a very changing shift in my attitude—not only towards the world but towards myself and towards my peers, I guess, in the world. I hadn't noticed that—like I was very angry person. (Interviewee, insider)

> It probably changed my life for the better, actually. Before I got into the whole rave scene, I can honestly say I was probably a much more bitter person...It opened my mind up a lot and [I] met a lot of new people and it changed the way I look at things, and—I don't know, it just changed my entire life pretty much. (Interviewee, insider)

As the above quotations illustrate, many participants felt that the rave scene had a profoundly positive impact on their life, particularly through the powerful experience of feeling accepted and connected at raves. Many participants in this study described raves as a safe haven where youth could go to have fun; where people were seen to be friendly and willing to talk to strangers without "attitude" or pretense; and where people felt welcomed, connected, and not judged on appearance, dancing ability or sexual orientation.

The vibe of a rave The positive aspects of the rave scene are largely attributed to the "vibe" or atmosphere of rave events, which is often contrasted with that of regular bars or clubs. According to participants, the vibe of a party refers to the atmosphere or the feeling the crowd gives off at a party. It is the collective feeling of energy at raves that some say can only be physically experienced rather than understood in words (Weber, 1999; Wilson, 2002; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). In addition to the music elements of the rave scene, the "vibe" of events was the other most distinguishing aspect of rave subculture and a major draw for participants to the scene.

Whether a rave has a positive vibe or a negative vibe depends on a number of factors such as music, venue, or level of drug use. The vibe may also depend on how many people at the event are "committed ravers," as participants suggested that the introduction of "outsiders" to the rave community who do not understand rave philosophy may negatively affect the vibe at a rave. Other research noted the impact of "outsiders" on the vibe as well (Wilson, 2002).

In the mid-to-late 1990s, the vibe of raves came to be captured by the acronym of PLUR, which stands for Peace, Love, Unity and Respect. These ideals have been identified as important aspects of the interpersonal connection among ravers that evoke a sense of community and safety that may not be found in traditional nightclubs. The following quotation illustrates this point:

> I was attracted to it [raves] for the community that was created. People who were interested in Peace, Love, Unity and Respect, not aggressive-

> ness and power, and it was an alternative to alcohol and the bar scene and all the nasty, angry, out-of-control things that go along with that environment. (Participant observer, insider)

Other research notes similar findings regarding the ideals of PLUR in the rave scene (Wilson, 2002; Weir, 2000; Hier, 2002; Weber, 1999; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003).

Participants talked about various elements of the vibe of raves, including feeling accepted, feeling connected, feeling supported, feeling cared for, and feeling free to be childlike. Participants also noted the absence of sexual tension and of fights or aggression as part of the vibe of raves.

Feeling accepted

The following quotation illustrates how the rave scene embraces diversity:

> The rave scene prides itself, even to this day, on almost unconditional acceptance. You could be gay or straight, you could be young or old, you could be beautiful or you could be not so beautiful, you could be sick or you could be healthy, you could have tons of make-up or none at all, you could have your jeans and T-shirts or you could actually dress up in a funky club clothes with all the flashy stuff. It embraces diversity, like no other entertainment or avenue that is out there for the kids that age. (Interviewee, insider)

Several participants commented on how important the experience of acceptance in the rave scene was to them.

Participant observers at events also experienced this feeling of acceptance as they were welcomed by other attendees. One participant observer had the following experience when she was learning some dance moves at one event:

> I started very awkwardly and slowly improved until I was dancing sort of in rhythm to the music—which, keep in mind, was very fast and a bit discordant. I was having fun and laughing while I learned beside M. There was a young couple dancing in front of me—who both were very good at the dance moves. When they saw me on the dance floor—they gave me a "thumbs-up" and gave me big smiles. I felt quite self-conscious about my awkward movements but was also quite encouraged by their support. I could see how "outside" people could feel like they belonged in such a venue. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

Another participant observer had this experience while waiting in line at the washroom:

> While waiting in line, one young woman asked me if I was enjoying myself. I said that I was...and said that this was my first rave. There was a spontaneous outbreak of clapping in the stalls and from the young woman in the bathroom and some random words of encouragement for

> my attendance at the rave. I felt welcomed and somehow quite pleased by their approval. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

Feeling connected

Participants in this study reported that they thought of raves as a community or even a family, where they felt connected to other ravers. This feeling of connection is attributed to the suspension of social norms within a rave event that allow for more and deeper interactions between people than one would experience in normal, everyday settings. Some participants suggested that this aspect of the rave scene was particularly valuable to youth who may not have healthy relationships with their family or who feel disconnected from the rest of the world.

> Maybe you could say that all of us got attracted to it because we're the "needy kids," needed to be loved, or whatever, you know. (Interviewee, insider)

The feeling of connectedness was often something participants experienced at their first rave, possibly even having been told to expect it by friends who had already been to raves. For example, one participant recounted what an older friend who introduced her to the rave scene told her:

> "Be yourself—everyone's going to be so nice to you—don't worry about it, just whatever goes, goes...You're going to find people and you're just going to talk to them and they're going to talk back to you." (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Some participants felt this aspect of the rave scene was particularly valuable because opportunities for connection elsewhere seem to be missing as the following quotation demonstrates:

> I've met so many wonderful people and there is such a sense of community amongst my friends—it's something that is missing from a middle-class suburban childhood...There is something really comforting and secure feeling and genuine in a community where you can go up to almost anyone and begin a totally interesting conversation at any time. Where you can introduce yourself to people just on the basis of having "seen them around," much like neighbours ought to do but don't seem to do anymore, at least not in the middle-class areas where I've grown up. (Participant observer, insider)

It is important to note that while some participants saw raves as a place to form community and longer-term relationships, others spoke of connection as a temporary experience, limited to the time frame of the party. These participants said that there was something exhilarating about connecting with dozens if not hundreds of strangers at an event, even if long-term relationships did not develop. This type of interaction is not typical of day-to-day life, and is another example of how raves are intense spaces where one can escape from societal norms.

Feeling supported

Participants in this study also described the rave scene as a place where they found support.

> There's a sense of "you can do it," right? It isn't a scene where it's trying to drag you down, it's not like, y'know "you won't succeed." It's more of a scene that says, "you can do it, if you can dream it, you can do it." (Interviewee, insider)

Several participants recalled conversations at raves where someone helped them discover what they wanted to do for school or work, or where they helped someone come up with concrete steps to explore career options.

> And if I wanted to do something with school, I had the support of these people. They were like "Well, have you thought of this? Have you thought of that?" So it was a collaborative brainstorming effort in a lot of ways. Right?...It was a sounding board...It was very empowering for me. (Interviewee, insider)

Feeling cared for

Participants also talked about an ethic of care in the rave scene, where people watch out for each other, whether they are strangers or friends. For example, some participants said that if it is someone's first time taking a drug or if someone is having a bad trip, more experienced ravers would check in with that person, get them water, stay with them and help them through the experience.

> Probably about six months ago was the first time I did E [ecstasy] and I remember like I was just absolutely gone. And I bet you probably ten people an hour came up and said, "Are you OK, do you need anything?" Didn't even know them, no idea who they were and I couldn't even remember their faces but, like, that's just the way it is. (Interviewee, insider)

Some participants in this study suggested that this aspect of the rave scene made it safer for youth than regular bars or clubs.

Feeling free to be childlike

Another distinct aspect of the rave scene is the space it creates for ravers to take on childlike roles and just be plain silly without being judged by other people.

> Many people brought toys with them to play with and to share, a return to the innocence of childhood. (Participant observer, insider)

One participant in this study spoke of seeing 30-year-old people wearing things like a beanie with a propeller at raves. Other participants recounted how people might go around at a rave slapping happy face stickers on people's foreheads or asking them, "Do you need a hug?"

Raving has been described by other researchers as an opportunity to escape reality, forget stressors, and take a mini vacation, allowing youth to act in a happy carefree childlike manner (Weber, 1999). The stereotypical "candy-kid" raver—who wears very wide "phat" pants, bright colours, plastic jewelry, and pigtails, and may have toys, soothers, and candy in a backpack that is stamped with colourful cartoon characters—is a clear example of this element of the scene.

Absence of sexual tension

Many participant observers noted that the rave events they attended lacked the sexual tension typical to the nightclub scene, as in the following quotation (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003):

> I was not able to gauge sexuality either. This contradicts the assumptions I had about raves prior. I believed that a rave is a place for at least sexual expression, if not exploration. Here there are no outward signs of expression or exploration, nor the opposite of repression or control. Sexuality seemed to have no relevance; most people were there to dance. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

Participant observers reported far more displays of sexual behaviour at regular bars and clubs than at rave events. The absence of sexual tension at raves has been noted previously in other research (Weber, 1999).

The level of sexual tension did vary from event to event, sometimes with participant observers having different perceptions of the same event, as the following two quotations illustrate:

> As I walked upstairs the first thing I saw was an 18- or 19-year-old man sitting on a large chair with three young women and was preceding to make out with all of them. It became very apparent that the atmosphere was very sexual...As I continued to make my way around the bar I could not help but notice a huge banner of an almost naked woman. This woman was partially covered by a sheet in a bondage type position with her hands tied above her head with rope. This banner seemed to be the centerpiece of the room and went together with the sexual vibe of the crowd. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

> I notice affection between men and women, women and women and men and men, but nothing beyond fleeting kisses, hugs and friendly caresses. I think back to the sadomasochistic poster and contemplate about how disconnected that image seems with this crowd. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

Absence of fights and aggression

The rave scene is also noted for the general absence of fights, violence or aggression. Participants in this study who were insiders to the rave scene took pride in the fact that fights were rare at raves or in the after-hours club scene.

> You always felt safe. Like you knew there was no goons in there like at a club just getting really drunk and wanting to get rowdy. There was never any feelings of hostility. It was always, "How ya doin? I've never met you but here we are together." (Interviewee, insider)

Participant observation reports of this study support this claim; most observers noted they witnessed no fights at the event(s) they attended and generally felt the atmosphere was a lot less aggressive than the typical bar.

> By the end of the event I am impressed that I have witnessed no aggression. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

This was the case for after-hours clubs and raves in Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton. The absence of violence and aggression at raves has been noted in prior research as well (Weber, 1999).

One participant observer witnessed a fight at a large rave. This observation was consistent with comments from participants that fights were more common at very large events because there are more people who do not know the principles of rave culture at those events. An insider participant indicated that it was possible more gangs were attending raves, and that these gangs may be fighting over who has the right to sell drugs at the events. These participants felt that these rare instances of violence disrupted the vibe of the party.

The absence of sexual tension and violence or aggression at rave events was contrasted with the vibe at regular bars and clubs. The difference in vibe between rave events and regular bar or club events was attributed in part to the absence of alcohol at most rave events which contrasts with the heavy use of alcohol in regular clubs. Other studies also reported on the difference between rave events and regular bar and club events (Weber, 1999; Weir, 2000; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Wilson, 2002).

Exceptions to the vibe

While the above comments illustrate what is typically considered the vibe of rave events, there were certainly exceptions to these norms found in this study and in other Canadian studies of the rave scene (Weber, 1999). The most common exception to PLUR attitudes and behaviours in this study and others was found in insider participants' comments about "bar stars" or "chachis," a derogatory description of people who participate in the regular bar or club scene and dress in trendy or provocative clothing. While some ravers acknowledged this contradiction to PLUR values in the scene, others denied that this was a contradiction to PLUR values.

While most of the participant observers in this study reported that they felt accepted at the events they attended and that they could see the appeal of such an open and accepting community, this was not the experience for all participant observers, as the following comments illustrate:

> I got the same feeling I do when I go to clubs, never really fitting in. (Participant observer, outsider)
>
> It just left me with a heavy feeling; I couldn't wait to leave. (Participant observer, outsider)

One group of observers felt they were intentionally excluded from an after-hours club when the door person told them the cover charge was, what they consider to be, an unreasonably high amount:

> We all feel judged, as though she doesn't want our type there. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

As well, even though the feeling of connectedness is a major draw for some ravers to the rave scene, paradoxically, raves are also seen as a place where one can escape and be anonymous. The connection with masses of other ravers may feel intense during the party but ravers generally have minimal commitment to other ravers outside of the event, with the exception of their circle of friends. For example, one insider participant spoke of seeing a woman she recognized from a rave at a bus stop and neither acknowledged the other. This is in keeping with the idea that raves are a temporary escape from one's reality; as one insider participant put it, it is difficult to form real relationships with people who are trying to escape reality.

In general, some comments from participants indicated that they felt the PLUR ideals were becoming less central to the rave scene, leaving music as the main focal point. For those participants who identified primarily with the vibe of raves, this was seen as a great loss to the scene. For others whose primary connection to the scene was music, the diminishing role of the PLUR philosophy in the scene was seen to be less important. In general, typical raves were seen as having the strongest rave vibe, followed by after-hours clubs, and then events held in regular bars or clubs.

Why stop raving?

Other research has found that involvement in the rave scene is often a passing phase for many youth, with the "shelf life" of the average raver being about two years (Weber 1999; Rieder, 2000). Insiders to the rave scene in the AADAC study had been in the scene for anywhere from two to over ten years, with an average length of involvement of just over three years. Four of the 27 insiders had stopped raving by the time of this study, and five were less involved than they previously had been. Wilson (2002) stated that ravers sometimes move through stages in their involvement in the rave scene, moving from "'neophyte' (sometimes 'try-hard'), to 'authentic' (and more comfortable), to 'mature/experienced' (often cynical)" (p. 399). Participants in this study called ravers in this last category "old schoolers" and said these people frequently lament about how much worse the scene is than it was when they first started raving.

Some of the participants in this study who were no longer raving offered various explanations for why they moved out of the rave scene:

- realizing that most of the people at events were younger than they were
- seeing excessive drug use at events, particularly by very young teens
- feeling that the experience was not as authentic as it was when they first started and that it had become more about the drugs than the ideals behind the culture
- being able to attend regular bars now that they were legal drinking age
- focusing on responsibilities like school and family

Some of these participants said that they still attend some of the annual parties or very special events.

The intensity of raving and the late hours of events suggest raving is a tiring pastime that would only fit with certain lifestyles. Non-ravers in this study found attending raves to be very disruptive to their normal lifestyles, as the following quotation, written by an AADAC staff person after returning home from a rave, illustrates:

> I reflect on how long it has been since I sat down with a friend to share food. At AADAC we often speak about major life areas and how they can be affected by harmful involvement with alcohol and other drugs. I haven't been involved with consuming substances, only the culture, and yet I feel like my major life areas have been altered. Travelling out of town to visit my family has not happened in weeks, Saturday morning brunches have been postponed repeatedly, I have a pile of bills to attend to and going to the gym on a weekend has not happened since I started attending these events. I think about how holistic a creature I am and how little this rave lifestyle fits with mine and laugh—I am exhausted and sleep for 10 solid hours. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

In reviewing this report, two insiders to the scene pointed out that the lifestyle of raving is tiring for ravers as well—even if they are not using drugs—and that ravers have to balance their involvement in the scene with the other demands in their life. Otherwise they will burn out.

Summary

Raves attract mainly middle-class people in their mid-teens to late twenties. The average age of people at most of the rave events attended for this study was 18 to 25 years, with some people in their 30s, 40s, or even 50s. The average age of ravers is said to be increasing now that the scene is past its peak of popularity and younger teens are being drawn to other entertainment venues.

The most important aspects of the rave scene to participants were the music and the vibe. The pounding beat of rave music, combined with the visual effects and late hours of raves, makes for an intense physical experience. As well, participants described raves as a unique social space of acceptance and connection that had a positive effect on their lives. Raves were seen as an alternative to the regular bar and club scene and were attractive because of the absence of alcohol, which participants felt resulted in the corresponding absence of fights and sexual tension.

VI. Substance use of youth in the rave scene

Findings regarding substance use of youth in the rave scene[24] are presented in this section of the report. One drawback of not having these findings integrated into the other sections of the report is that it may give a dichotomous view of the rave scene: on the one hand, raves are about music and the vibe, and on the other, raves are a common place to use drugs. This method of presentation is not intended to create this impression. Rather, this study suggests that raves are both a place where the music and vibe are fundamental, and where drug use is common. Though not the most important aspect of the rave scene to participants in this study, drug use is part of the rave scene, and is of particular interest to AADAC given its mandate.

Alcohol use

> Some of the feelings throughout the rave community is that alcohol just turns things bad immediately...You go to a party [rave] and there's no violence, there's no aggression, there's no, you know, negative feelings and emotions...In comparison, if you go into a bar—I mean the violence and aggression that you see there is one hundredfold in comparison when you go to a party, for sure. (Interviewee, insider)

Several insider participants in the AADAC study asserted that the absence of alcohol is a key difference between rave events and other music or entertainment events, as was found in other research (Weber, 1999; Weir, 2000; Wilson, 2002; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). A major attraction to the rave scene for many ravers is the lack of alcohol, which results in a corresponding absence of "drunken behavior," including fights and sexual tension. Many ravers see raves as a safer environment than bars because of the absence of alcohol (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003).

However, as the rave scene boundaries become blurred with those of the bar and club scene, the use of alcohol appears to be becoming more prevalent. For example, two of the five raves attended for this study served alcohol (one was held in a regular club/recreation venue, the other in an after-hours club). As well, although alcohol was not sold at the outdoor rave, participant observers noted that attendees had brought their own alcohol and it was common to see people drinking in open view. One of the three after-hours clubs also served alcohol. All of the regular bars and clubs attended in this study served alcohol.

Nearly all (98%) respondents of the Rave Safe survey reported ever having tried alcohol (N=320). Notably, though, nearly half (44%) of the respondents at one event indicated that they only used alcohol "occasionally" (less than monthly but more than once) (N=48). Though these findings pertain to alcohol use of ravers, and not necessarily use in the rave scene, this relatively infrequent use of alcohol corresponds with the perception that alcohol plays a minor role in the rave scene.

[24] These findings on substance use are generally of ravers, and not limited to use in the rave scene.

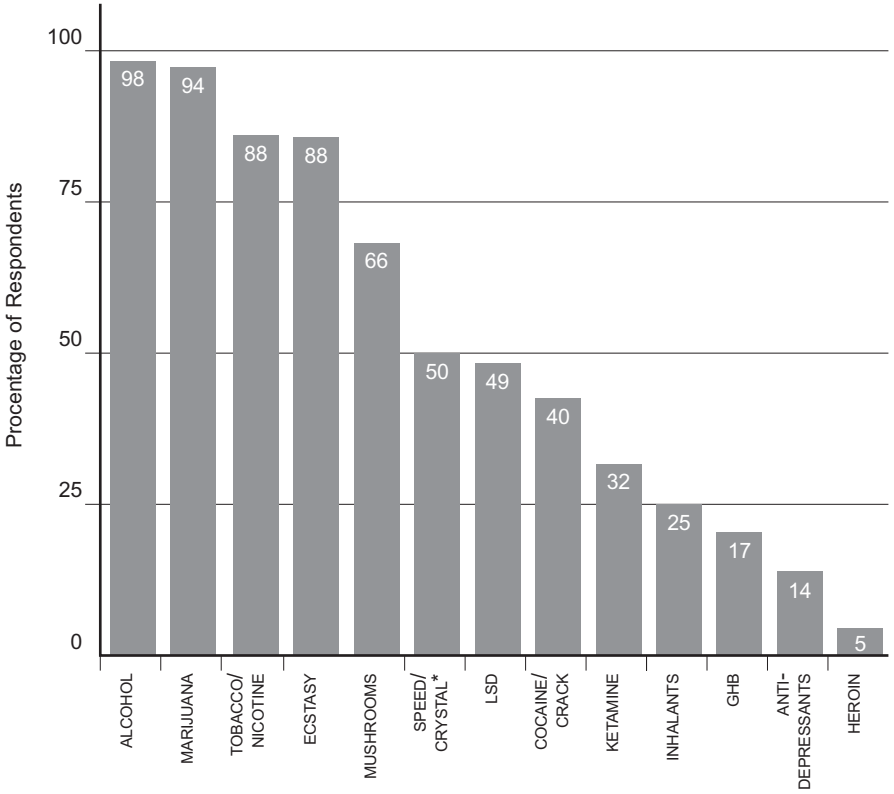
Drugs use

While alcohol has not been a major part of the rave scene, drug use is common.

Drugs used by rave attendees

Most rave attendees who responded to the Rave Safe survey had tried numerous drugs at least once. Figure 3 shows the percentage of survey respondents who reported ever trying various drugs. Alcohol and marijuana were the drugs the highest percentage of respondents had ever tried (98%, 94% respectively), followed by tobacco (88%) and ecstasy (88%). Survey results are based on a small, convenience sample of rave attendees, and may not be representative of the entire population of people at the event.

Figure 3: Substances ever tried by Rave Safe survey respondents, N=320



* Crystal is short for crystal methemphetamine. Speed/Crystal were grouped together on the survey.
Source: Rave Safe data

Notably, 85 percent of respondents at one event reported mixing drugs (N=48). Ecstasy was most frequently mixed with other drugs, including speed/crystal meth, marijuana, LSD or ketamine.[25] Marijuana was also frequently used in combination with other drugs, including ecstasy, alcohol, and LSD.

[25] Ketamine is a general anaesthetic used on animals and humans.
[26] GHB, or gamma hydroxybutyrate, is a sedative hypnotic that was originally developed as a sleep aid.
[27] Speed/crystal meth were also reported to be used on an occasional basis by several respondents (23%).
[28] Ecstasy was also used on a weekly (31%) or monthly (23%) basis by a substantial amount of respondents.
[29] Several respondents reported using ketamine on a weekly basis (21%) or only once (19%).

Participants in this study reported that the purity of ecstasy started to deteriorate when the popularity of the scene exploded in 1999-2001. Other participants reported that, in recent years, cocaine and crystal meth have become more common in the scene. These findings are similar to Weber's (1999) findings that early raves in Toronto featured cannabis and purer forms of ecstasy, drugs that had a positive effect on the vibe of raves, while later raves saw greater availability of drugs such as crystal meth, ketamine and GHB,[26] drugs that were said to negatively affect the mood at parties.

Frequency of use

Findings from the Rave Safe survey also reveal that frequency of use differed by substance (see Table 3). For example, daily use of tobacco (77%) and marijuana (44%) was common among Rave Safe survey respondents. Almost a third (29%) of respondents reported using speed/crystal meth[27] on a weekly basis. Respondents reported using alcohol (44%), ecstasy (35%),[28] ketamine (25%),[29] and mushrooms (56%) occasionally (less than monthly but more than once). Most respondents did not report frequency of use for the other substances listed. While this information is from a very small sample (N=48) and cannot be generalized to all ravers, it provides a snapshot of patterns of drug use by rave attendees.

Table 3: Percentage of respondents reporting various frequencies of use, N=48

	Daily use %	Weekly use %	Monthly use %	Occasional use %	One use only %	Did not respond* %
Alcohol	8	23	19	44	2	4
Cocaine	4	6	0	27	13	50
Crack	2	0	0	2	17	79
Ecstasy	4	31	23	35	2	4
Ephedrine	2	4	6	23	17	48
GHB	0	13	8	15	13	52
Heroin	0	0	0	0	13	87
Ketamine	2	21	10	25	19	23
LSD	0	0	0	33	27	40
Marijuana	44	17	8	23	6	2
Morphine	0	0	2	2	17	79
Mushrooms	2	4	8	56	8	21
Opium	0	0	0	2	13	85
Poppers	0	0	4	8	21	67
Ritalin	2	0	2	2	17	77
Rohypnol	0	0	2	0	13	85
Speed/Crystal meth	2	29	17	23	13	16
Tobacco	77	2	0	2	2	17

* This category of respondents may never have used the substance or may simply have chosen not to respond to the question.

Source: Rave Safe data

Comparing drug use of rave attendees to other populations

It is hard to compare the drug use reported by ravers in this survey data with other statistics on drug use because many estimates are for students (adolescents or youth) (aged 14 to 19), and not for young adults (aged 19 to 30). Young adults are often overlooked in this type of research even though they are also a segment of the population who are at high risk for substance-related problems (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2001).

Comparing rates of use of ravers to that of the general population is illustrative to a degree, but a more fair comparison would be with another party environment (bush parties, clubs, etc.). For example, one study found no significant difference between the use of drugs by rave attendees and bush party attendees, suggesting, "It is likely that [such] recreational venues...tend to attract adolescents who use alcohol and other drugs" (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002). In general, according to Canadian research, those who attend raves are more likely than non-rave-attendees to take drugs, to consume greater quantities of drugs and/or to experiment with a variety of drugs (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002; Gross et al., 2002).

Table 4 compares Rave Safe data findings with those of Gross et al. (2002) and The Alberta Youth Experience Survey (TAYES). Gross et al. (2002) randomly surveyed 210 rave attendees at three large rave events in Montreal prior to 2002. TAYES surveyed 3,394 Alberta students in grades 7 to 12 in the fall of 2002. Rave attendees who responded to the Rave Safe survey were more likely to have ever tried all drugs listed than were the students participating in TAYES, but showed similar rates of having tried the various drugs as those survey respondents reported in Gross et al. (2002).

Table 4: Comparison of percentage of respondents who had tried substances

	Rave Safe %	Gross et al. %	TAYES %
Alcohol	98	90	75
Marijuana	94	91	42
Ecstasy	88	65	N/A
Tobacco/Nicotine	88	64	25
Mushrooms	66	70	15
LSD	49	56	N/A
Cocaine	40	35	5
Ketamine	32	14	N/A
GHB	17	19	N/A
Heroin	5	4	2
Club drugs (ecstasy or crystal meth)	N/A	N/A	8
Hallucinogens	N/A	N/A	6

Note: The sample from Gross et al. (2002) consisted of 80 women, 126 men, and four respondents who did not indicate their sex; ages ranged from 16 to 32 years, with a mean of 21.4 years. The presented data are the percentage of respondents who reported ever having used the drug. The Alberta Youth Experience Survey data are the percentage of Alberta youth, grades 10 to 12, who had used the substance at least once in the 12 months before the survey.

Similar to the Rave Safe findings, other research found that marijuana was the drug used most often by ravers, despite the strong association of ecstasy use with raves (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002; Gross et al., 2002; Weber, 1999; Luciano, 1999). Other research also found that a wide range of other drugs is used by ravers including ecstasy, LSD, mushrooms, amphetamine, GHB, ephedrine, ketamine, cocaine and crystal methamphetamine (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Weir, 2000; Weber, 1999). Gross et al, (2002) also identified the following order of first drug use for their survey respondents: alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, LSD, psilocybin (mushrooms), amphetamine, cocaine, MDMA, GHB, ephedrine and ketamine.

Drug use and the rave experience

While no participants in this study suggested that taking drugs was necessary to enjoy rave events, several participants said that use of certain drugs, like ecstasy, can enhance or intensify the exhilaration one feels when listening to music at a rave and the sense of connection one feels to other ravers. The following quotation from an interviewee is one example of reports of the positive effects of drug use in the rave setting:

> I've seen the positive influences of drugs, where people have used drugs then all of a sudden woken up in the morning and gone, "Wait a second, I really do like myself." Y'know, because that's one of the components of why kids use ecstasy, they come to these realizations that they're human and people like them and y'know they're beautiful creatures. (Interviewee, insider)

Kelly (2001) reports on his own use of ecstasy at a large rave:

> It was such an amazing experience for me. One that really brought my understanding of raves, and almost my understanding of myself, to a new level. It was so non-threatening, non-sexual, honest, beautiful, friendly, all of the things I like about life. It put me in that headspace for the rest of the week. It was such a generous experience. (pp. 73-74)

Kelly (2001) suggests that the use of ecstasy at raves "created a culture of friendly interested, excited, and almost childish dancers, unafraid to dance, to meet new people, to wear interesting clothes and try new adventures" (p. 71). These findings on the enhancement of the rave experience with the use of drugs are similar to those of Takahashi and Olaveson (2003).

Several participants in this study noted that "experienced ravers" may no longer need drugs to enjoy the music or to achieve the same connected feeling. This echoes findings in other research (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). Some participants said that they realized the closeness they felt to people while on drugs did not come from the drugs but from something inside themselves. Once they learned how to produce or allow those feelings of closeness on their own, they were not dependent on the drugs to be able

to connect with other people at events. In Better Living Through Circuitry,[30] a documentary film about rave culture, one commentator used the metaphor of a key and a door to explain this progression: drugs may be the key to unlock the door, but once the door is open, one no longer needs the key.

Several participants made the distinction that although drug use may be common to the rave scene, it is not integral to the rave experience. In fact, many participants believed that going to raves strictly for drug use is inappropriate, as was found in other research (Weber, 1999).

Participants in this study also pointed out that the use of some drugs actually detracts from the rave experience because they do not give you energy to dance, and overuse of other drugs can actually make you unable to dance. Other participants suggested that drugs like crystal meth and cocaine make a person feel isolated, rather than connected to those around them, contrasting the vibe of the rave scene.

Three types of ravers

Drug use of participants in AADAC's study ranged from total or near abstinence; to moderate, "educated" drug use; to heavy use or abuse of drugs. Other than abstainers, most participants in this study held liberal attitudes towards various drugs, with the exception of heroin, as was found in other research (Weber, 1999).

Sober ravers

Several participants in this study raved without using any drugs, either all the time or most of the time. For most in this category, this included abstaining from alcohol and tobacco as well. Some of these participants had always raved sober, while others had used drugs for a time and then decided to stop. Kelly (2001) also found that many people attended clubs or raves without taking drugs.

One sober raver saw drug use as a "waste of time, money and brain cells." In his words:

> Life is a better experience through reality not through some distorted reality of drugs. (Interviewee, insider)

Another insider participant said that she grew up thinking drugs were for "losers" and that she does not use because she likes to be in control of her body and emotions. Some respondents who raved sober viewed the use of drugs as a shortcut to understanding the music and to feeling connected to other partiers. Sober ravers seemed to take pride in their ability to enjoy the music and the setting without using drugs:

> Lots of people do drugs at the party [rave] just to feel high and, for me, the music gives you a high that you can't achieve through any drug.

[30] Better living through circuitry: A digital odyssey into the electronic dance underground. (undated). [Music Video Distributors]. B. McNelis, & S. Swezey (Producers), & Jon Reiss (Director). Oaks, Pennsylvania, USA: Music Video Distributors Inc.

> It just makes you feel amazing. And it's the atmosphere of the party. You don't need to do drugs. (Interviewee, insider)

Several comments from participants who did not use drugs at raves indicated that they found themselves to be role models for others who did not want to use all the time. Below are profiles of three participants in this study who rave sober.

Lark Lark has been involved in the rave community for nearly a decade and has used very few drugs in that time. He considered himself a "pillar of the community" for a long time and felt it was his responsibility to show that drugs were not an essential part of the rave scene. He tried ecstasy for the first time a few months before his interview for this study and said he did not have the euphoric experience everyone associates with the drug.

Willow Willow started using drugs, mainly mushrooms, in junior high. When she started raving, she used ecstasy but was "oblivious" to a lot of the other drugs that were being used at parties. Her friends started to use drugs all the time at parties but Willow was afraid of becoming dependent on drugs to feel happy. Willow limited her drug use to large events and became even more particular about which pills she would take after she started volunteering with a harm reduction group at raves. She eventually quit using drugs altogether and became known among her friends as a sober raver. These friends often called her up if they wanted to go to a party without using drugs. After she quit using drugs, the circle of friends she partied with changed from one of heavy users to one of sober partiers. Willow said she has no interest in taking drugs anymore and she takes pride in the fact that she is able to dance and enjoy the music at raves without drugs.

Storm Storm's first introduction to drugs was when her mom showed her how to smoke a joint at the age of 13. She was fairly "heavy into the drug scene" by the age of 15, having experimented with marijuana, mushrooms, speed and LSD. Storm tried crystal meth when she was 17. Her parents eventually moved her to another province out of concern that the crowd she was hanging out with was doing harder drugs. She believes if she had not moved at that time she would have likely gone on to do harder drugs, like snorting and smoking cocaine, and using chemical drugs on a regular basis, though she probably would not have tried heroin. After the move, Storm decided to only use "natural" drugs like marijuana and mushrooms. She found it easier to not use drugs because her new group of friends did not use drugs. Storm currently does not use any drugs and only drinks once a month, consuming only two or three drinks in an evening.

Drug users, not abusers

Several participants in this study used drugs in a way that they said enhanced their experience at raves but tended to look down on those they felt were abusing drugs. Weber (1999) found similar "drug use, not abuse" attitudes among ravers. One participant in this study articulated this attitude as follows:

> From my experience at raves, drug use was accepted; however, drug abuse was frowned upon. No one wanted to see someone really sick or out of control. Friends would watch out for each other, make sure they had water when they needed it etc....Drugs had given raves a very bad reputation in the media and to the public in general...With many ravers, there seemed to be a concerted effort to avoid this type of bad press. If you were going to use drugs, that was your business, but it seemed to be expected that you would use responsibly and watch out for your friends. (Participant observer, insider)

The use of the term "e-tard" by participants in this study is evidence that drug abuse is not encouraged in the rave scene. One insider participant explained that this term was sometimes used in a joking manner among friends, but was often a derogatory comment used to refer to people who used ecstasy too much or too often. It was also used to describe anyone who was obviously very high.

Many of the participants in this category reported researching drugs before trying them to find out how to use them more safely. They considered themselves "educated" drug users. Below is a profile of one raver who fit into this category.

> **Ocean** When Ocean first started going to raves, he had already been experimenting with marijuana and mushrooms. He started using these drugs when he was 16. For the first year that he was involved in the rave scene, he was not very interested in drugs, but in his second year, he started to use mushrooms, marijuana and LSD more often. Ocean had also tried ecstasy. Ocean believes that "in order to be a successful drug user you have to be an informed drug user." Ocean did extensive research on the Internet for all the drugs he tried before taking them. He does not use drugs very often anymore.

Heavy drug users/drug abusers

Other participants in this study reported heavy drug use or drug abuse at some point in their lives. Several participants reported that their drug use escalated from what they considered lower level drug use (e.g., mushrooms and marijuana) to mid-level drug use (e.g., ecstasy) to higher level drug use (e.g., cocaine and crystal meth).

Participants in this study noted that problems with drug use do not only occur with higher level drugs, but can occur with "softer" drugs like ecstasy as well. Wilson (2002) similarly reports that "many experienced ravers

explicitly described the process of 'getting involved' in ecstasy use and other drug use, becoming caught up in the drug, and then becoming disillusioned with the problems associated with overuse" (p. 392).

It is interesting to note that while the use of some drugs, like ecstasy, is associated with getting into the scene, the use of other drugs, like crystal meth, is associated with moving people out of the scene. Participants noted that people who use a lot of crystal meth "have a hard time dealing with the outside world" and typically stop coming to parties. This is an interesting contrast to ecstasy, a drug that is said to make the user feel close to others.

Below are the profiles of two participants who reported heavy drug use or drug abuse.

Star Star started using drugs at the age of 14. Initially, she experimented with marijuana and mushrooms. A couple years later, when she started going to raves, she tried ecstasy. She went through a progression of increasingly stronger drugs, using LSD, GHB and ketamine, and then cocaine and crystal meth. She said that her acceptance in the group of friends she attended raves with was based on her continued drug use. At one point, after an overdose on GHB, she tried to cut down her drug use and found that her friends criticized her and eventually shunned her for her choice. She eventually got in trouble with the law and after spending some time in a young offenders centre, moved provinces. She was sober for a while after the move but was reintroduced to the rave scene by a new acquaintance, and repeated her progression from using what she considered "lower level drugs" to the "higher level drugs." She began to experience extreme paranoia to the point of not knowing whom she could trust anymore even among her group of friends. At this point she decided to leave the rave community. At the time of this study, she had not been part of the rave scene for a year and she does not listen to rave music anymore because she says it reminds her too much of her past and is not helpful in her process of building sobriety. This participant now volunteers to give presentations in junior and senior high schools in the hopes of preventing others from going through her negative experience with drug use.

Shadow Shadow started using marijuana when he was 14. He got access to the drug through a friend who was using. After high school, Shadow joined the military and did not use any drugs for a long time because he was afraid of what would happen if he got caught. Through a friend, he was introduced to the club scene and eventually to cocaine when he was in his mid-20s. He began using cocaine from that point on, first snorting it, then smoking it. He described the high from smoking cocaine as "fast and furious" but said that coming off was the "nastiest, loneliest feeling." He had done ecstasy in home settings before he was part of the rave scene. Shadow would go to "sketch parties," or after-parties, after the rave or club had closed, where there was always a dealer.

> He would take more pills, sometimes doing 10 to 12 pills in a weekend. Shadow started working all night in an after-hours club, thinking that this would help him stay sober as he was not allowed to use when he was working. However, he started using speed to stay up all night. Shadow really likes the "high," or mind-altering feelings, that drugs give him but feels shame and guilt because he "has issues around drugs." He is currently struggling to maintain sobriety and is attending a support group to that end. Listening to rave music can be a trigger for him wanting to use drugs again.

Phases of drug use in the rave scene

The above categorizations of drug users or non-users can be linked to various phases of drug use participants said ravers may move through. These phases of drug use are similar to progressions of drug use in other settings as well, from non-use, to experimental use, to social use, to harmful use and, finally, dependency (AADAC, n.d.). As stated earlier, some ravers choose to rave sober and thus do not experience these phases. As seen in the examples above, individuals may move forward or backward through these phases.

First time at a rave Several participants indicated that "first-timers" at raves may not take drugs as they are already extremely stimulated by the music, dancing, and interactions with people. This was the case for several participants who said they had no idea drugs were part of the scene when they first started going, and that it was not until later that they realized some people at the events, even some of their friends, were using drugs.

> I was very, very naïve. I didn't realize the people that were on the drugs were on the drugs then. I thought everybody was like me—a goody-goody—two-shoes who just wanted to have fun. (Interviewee, insider)

Participants suggested that newcomers may use marijuana for their first few raves as it is likely that they already had used it in other settings. Some participants reported that they took ecstasy for the first time at their first rave, while others said they had taken ecstasy in a private setting before they used it at a rave. The majority of participants in this study had used drugs before they entered the rave scene, with the age of first drug use of respondents ranging from 12 to 19 years of age.

Experimental phase Participants said that newcomers to the scene may go through a phase of a half a year or so of more intense drug use, experimenting with different drugs. Participants saw the experimental phase as a period of time during which a person may use quite heavily, after which they would reduce use.

> They can go through an experimental phase and do drugs really hard. Like, do a lot of drugs in a short period of time. (Interviewee, insider)

For others, experimentation is more controlled and involves researching drugs before trying them.

> I have always said that in order to be a successful drug user, one has to be informed. And I think that is why I have always researched what I had done beforehand. (Interviewee, insider)

The participants' definition of experimental drug use differs from AADAC's definition. For AADAC staff, the term "experimental use" refers to an individual using a substance once or twice to see what it is like.

Shift of focus away from drugs to the scene Participants indicated that most people move out of this experimental drug phase after the music and culture of the scene become the core of the experience for them. At this point, ravers may take on the role of teacher in the rave scene, passing on knowledge to newcomers and taking care of people at raves.

Burnout Other participants indicated that after the experimental phase, instead of reducing the amount of drugs they use, some ravers may move on to harder drugs such as LSD, GHB, and ketamine. Ravers who engage in heavy drug use for a sustained period of time were said to eventually burn out and leave the scene. Several participants indicated that most people who continue with heavy drug use tend to have difficulties with their relationships with family and friends, to struggle in school or at work, and to have poor health.

The phases discussed above would indicate that ravers who use drugs either manage their drug use or burn out. Participants suggested that ravers who stay in the scene for more than a couple of years are likely to move into the elite circles of DJs and promoters. Some participants reported that drug use is heavier in these elite circles, while others said that ravers in the elite circle had most likely gone through a drug use phase and were now either sober or occasional drug users, while still others said that ravers in the elite circles had always been sober. Some participants pointed out that in order to be a long-term contributor to the scene, like a DJ, individuals need to stay healthy, which would necessitate either minimal or no drug use.

Participants' perceptions of drugs and their effects

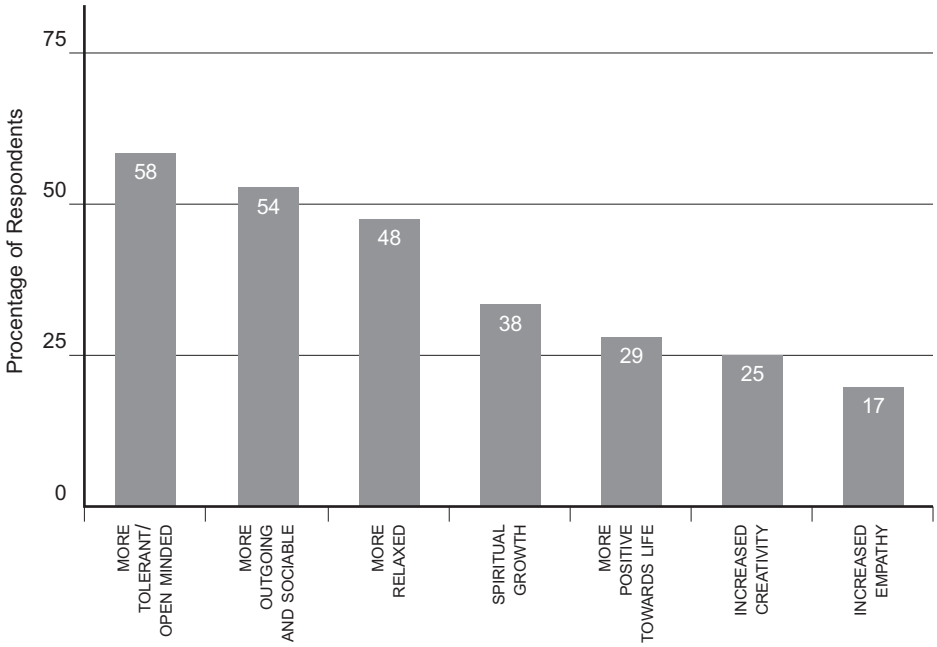
Positive effects of drugs

Participants in the AADAC study spoke about their perceptions of the positive effects or benefits of drug use.

Findings from the Rave Safe survey showed that around half of survey respondents reported being more tolerant or open-minded (58%), being more outgoing and sociable (54%), and being more relaxed (48%) as positive effects of their drug use (see Figure 4).[31]

[31] Respondents were asked "Do you notice any LONG TERM side effects of your drug use?" and marked all that applied from a list of 27 items, 7 positive and 20 negative. Survey results are based on a small, convenience sample of rave attendees, and may not be representative of the entire population of people at the event.

Figure 4: Long-term positive effects of respondents' drug use, N=48



Source: Rave Safe data

Participants interviewed for AADAC's study also reported that drugs helped them feel at ease, and helped them to let go of their inhibitions and fears. Some participants felt using drugs was a form of mind expansion (particularly LSD) and that it relieved social pressure.

Participants also made the following comments about the short-term positive effects they experienced from using specific drugs.

Ecstasy Participants reported that ecstasy makes the user feel wonderful, like they are "on top of the world," or that they are "living in a fairytale." The drug makes the user feel like they love everything and everybody, and gives the user a lot of energy. As well, some participants reported that ecstasy took away their inhibitions, so they did not feel shy or worried about anything. Participants also spoke about the sensory experience of being on ecstasy, saying that all one's senses are heightened while on the drug and even showering while high on the drug feels wonderful.

> Well at first I think it was the MDMA in the E that gives you a really nice feeling. Like you love everything. You can look at that table and chairs and it's just the most amazing-est thing. It's like you stepped into some kind of fairy land and it's like, wow look at that. And it's just unbelievable...It gives you so much energy and you feel on top of the world. (Interviewee, insider)

Crystal meth Participants said that crystal meth gave them lots of energy and made them feel like they could "talk about anything with anyone." Participants felt more in control of themselves on crystal meth than on LSD, for example.

> To do crystal meth, you feel like you can talk about anything, you feel you can talk to anyone, you have a lot of energy and it was just, it was a lot of fun for us. I think that's one of the reasons I really liked it 'cause we had a lot of fun, 'cause we just wanted to go and we wanted to do things. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Marijuana Another participant reported that using marijuana helps her to stop "questioning and analyzing everything" and puts her in a mode of experiencing instead. Marijuana was not discussed much by the interviewees of this study.

LSD Other participants suggested that using LSD can be "mind-expanding":

> Most psychedelic experiences impart genuine, like, life change upon people...and really like LSD reprograms your whole way of looking at the world after. (Interviewee, insider)

Negative effects of drugs

Drug use can affect many life spheres such as financial, emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, and physical. Short- and long-term negative physical and medical effects are well documented in the literature (Baggott, 2002; Anderson, 2000; Weir, 2000).[32] The information gathered in this AADAC study provides insight into the negative effects of drugs on life spheres other than physical and medical.

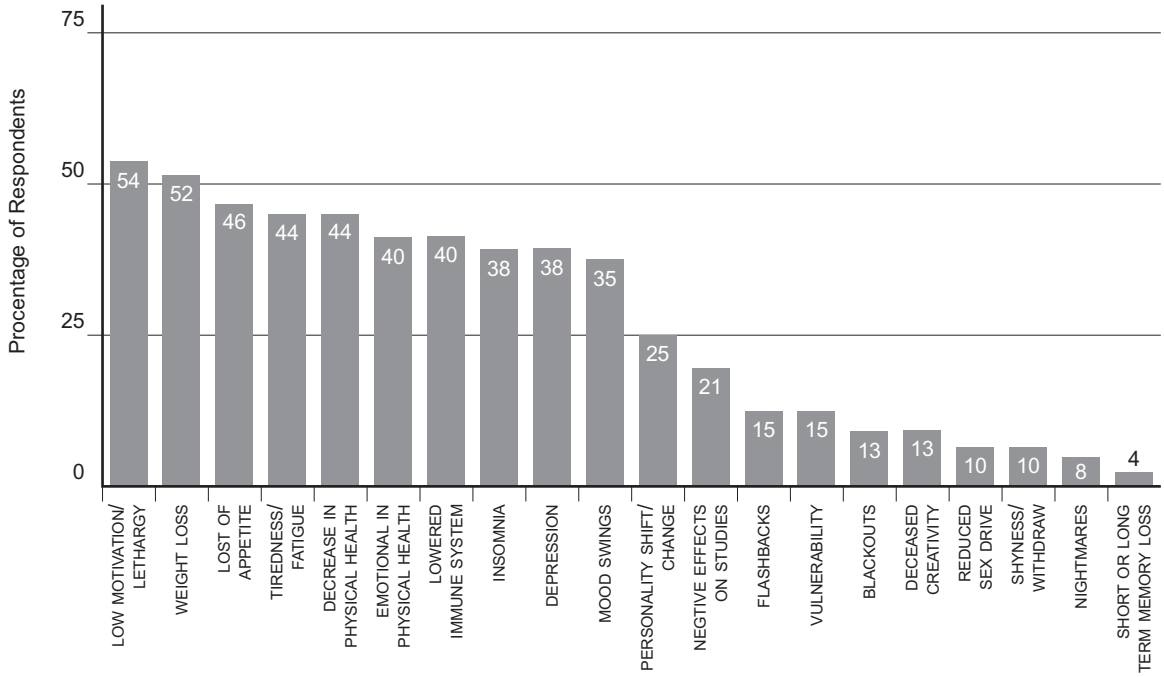
Rave Safe survey data provide information on numerous negative, long-term side effects of drug use reported by survey respondents (see Figure 5).[33] Over half of the respondents reported low motivation/lethargy (54%), and weight loss (52%) as negative long-term side effects of their drug use.[34] Other common negative side effects were loss of appetite (46%), tiredness/fatigue (44%), decrease in physical health (44%), emotional instability (40%), and lowered immune system (40%).

[32] See also the following websites:
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) www.aadac.com
Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) www.ccsa.ca

[33] Survey results are based on a small, convenience sample of rave attendees, and may not be representative of the entire population of people at the event.

[34] Respondents were asked "Do you notice any LONG TERM side effects of your drug use?" and marked all that applied from a list of 27 items, 7 positive and 20 negative.

Figure 5: Long-term negative side effects of respondents' drug use, N=48



Source: Rave Safe data

Participants in AADAC's study spoke of drug-specific, negative side-effects.

Ecstasy Several participants reported experiencing negative effects after extended ecstasy use. One participant said that she began to experience confusion when using the drug as well as suicidal feelings mid-week after using ecstasy on the weekend. During these times, the participant said she would not want to talk to anyone and she hated herself. Another participant also reported that ecstasy put him in a "really deep funk" or depression for a couple days. He said it became harder and harder to break out of the low feeling.

Crystal meth Numerous participants indicated that using crystal meth can lead to depression and difficulty in "dealing with the outside world." One participant said he would experience a deep depression after using crystal meth, as well as horrible headaches and a general feeling of "sketchiness," where he felt his brain was not working very well. Participants suggested that crystal meth makes a person feel unworthy of friends, which makes it even more difficult to stop using the drug. Cocaine has a similar isolating effect on the user, according to participants.

Participants also spoke generally about the long-term negative impact of drug use on various aspects of their lives.

Negative impact on finances Several participants commented on the impact of their drug use on their financial situation. Several participants regretted

the amount of money they had spent on drugs. One participant said that she reevaluated her drug use after realizing the financial impact it was having on her life:

> I knew that after spending $52,000 of my mother's money and still not having anything to show myself for it, or to show my mother for it, that it's a nowhere. (Interviewee, insider)

Negative impact on employment School Participants also talked about their inability to function at school or work during the week after attending a party on the weekend. This was especially true for those who attended after-parties:

> Come, let's say, Sunday morning, we'd go to this house...sometimes I would do drugs all day, all Monday and I'd get home Monday night and then back to school for Tuesday, Wednesday, which was pretty tough. (Interviewee, insider)

Negative impact on relationships Relationships were another life area where participants said drugs had a negative impact:

> I can't regret the past, but sometimes...the people I've lost, friends, [because of] my drug usage. That's a big factor. The family that I've hurt, I think that's a huge impact. (Interviewee, insider)

Some participants said that either they or their friends had stolen money from friends and family to buy drugs. One participant said that she had to sever her relationship with a friend who was addicted to crystal meth because this friend had lied to her and stolen money from her.

Negative impact on mental health Several participants spoke of mental health effects of drug use, including paranoia and depression. One participant called the days following a weekend of drug use "blue Mondays" and "suicide Tuesdays" because of the low she would experience after the high.

"Bad trips" Many participants also told stories of "bad trips" they had either witnessed or experienced themselves, indicating that drug users are likely to eventually witness or experience severe, negative, short-term effects of drug use.

Several participants said that they quit using a particular drug after experiencing a very bad trip.

> I had quit doing LSD as a personal choice, 'cause I had a very, very bad trip with a friend of mine and I was, I was scared of it. And I said no more, I've done this for two years straight now, enough's enough. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

> I don't do pot anymore because I had a really bad experience with that one time and it was at a house party and we had a box of about 11 grams and just went overboard. And I greened out horribly, got really sick and haven't touched it for three years. (Interviewee, insider)

> The last time I did E, which was years and years ago, I had the worst experience. I went MIA[35] for three days, blood from the mouth for at least two days straight. Bled everywhere, cuts, scrapes, burns, bruises. I don't know, I don't even know what happened. I didn't realize three days had gone by. That kind of experience. (Interviewee, insider)

Participants recounted stories of witnessing someone experience a bad drug trip, such as this story about a participant's friend who was on ketamine:

> He did so much K that night and he couldn't remember his name and he was like, he couldn't even move, he was taking like little steps like this. And his eyes looked like cat's eyes, like it was like glazed over or something. And it was freaky, really freaky, it was bad. (Interviewee, insider)

Another participant described a friend's overdose on GHB:

> It was the nastiest thing I've seen. He started convulsing, he started having, like the foam, not blood, but the foam coming out of his mouth...And that really, really tripped me out. (Interviewee, insider)

Another participant spoke of a 14-year-old boy at his first party who used ecstasy, marijuana, coke, LSD and alcohol on the same night and was freaking out. This same participant also saw someone convulse and nearly die at a party after using crystal meth. Several other participants reported having seen people collapse at parties, or seeing people so "messed up on drugs" that they were lying on the floor.

Most participants who raved and used drugs experienced both positive and negative effects of their drug use.

Participants' risk ratings of drugs

The Rave Safe survey data as well as comments from interviewees of this study provide insight into how ravers viewed various drugs in terms of how safe or risky they are to use. Rave Safe's survey data show that, on a scale of one to five with one being "most safe" and five being "most harmful," [36] survey respondents rated heroin (4.83), cocaine/crack (4.53), and speed/crystal meth (4.31) as the three most harmful drugs. Marijuana (1.85) and mushrooms (2.42) were rated as the safest drugs by most respondents; notably, even safer than alcohol (2.99) and tobacco (3.11) (see Figure 6).[37]

When compared with the survey data on respondents' use of these drugs, alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy, tobacco and mushrooms match up as the five most commonly tried drugs and the five drugs considered most safe by respondents. Likewise, most respondents had not tried heroin, corresponding to its rating as the most harmful drug. Two drugs that did not match up in terms of their risk rating and level of usage were speed/crystal meth and

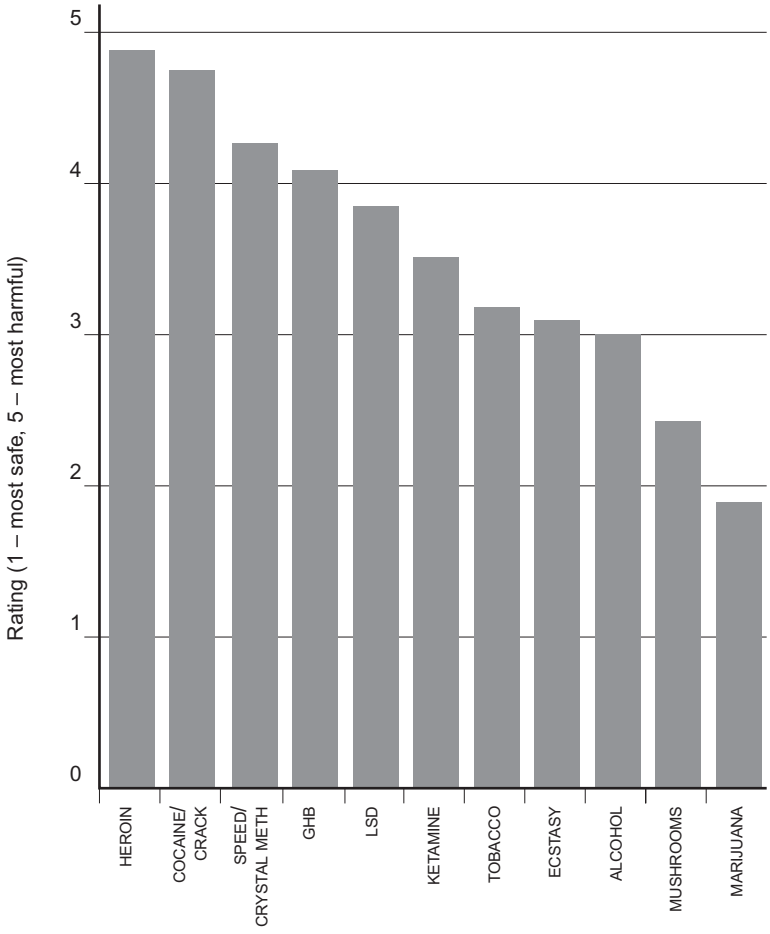
[35] Missing in action.

[36] 1= Most safe, 2=Somewhat safe, 3=Neither safe nor harmful, 4=Somewhat harmful, 5=Most harmful

[37] Survey results are based on a small, convenience sample of rave attendees, and may not be representative of the entire population of people at the event.

cocaine/crack. Cocaine/crack had been tried by 40 percent of respondents and 50 percent of respondents had tried speed/crystal meth despite these drugs being rated as the second and third most harmful drugs respectively.

Figure 6: Drug risk ratings by survey respondents, N=173 to 226[38]



Source: Rave Safe data

Interviewees in AADAC's study gave most of these drugs ratings similar to those of the Rave Safe survey respondents. For example, marijuana was considered to be a low-risk drug while ketamine received a medium-risk rating from interviewees. Heroin, cocaine and speed/crystal meth received high-risk ratings from most participants, as illustrated in the following quote:

> I would never try coke, crack in any other forms, heroin, anything like that I would never even begin to think of trying. Wouldn't ever try crystal meth. (Interviewee, insider)

[38] The number of respondents varied for each substance as not all respondents chose to rate all the substances. The fewest number of respondents rated antidepressants (N=173) while the greatest number of respondents rated marijuana (N=226).

Several drugs received different ratings from different interviewees. For example, mushrooms, LSD and GHB received both low- and medium-risk ratings, and ecstasy received low-, medium- and high-risk ratings by participants.

Although heroin, cocaine, and speed/crystal meth all received high-risk ratings, heroin and crack cocaine were also considered "dirty" and "unattractive" drugs by interviewees:

> You think of someone on heroin...shooting up, right. Then they lay there for 15 hours and are just done...And it's just completely, it's so unattractive to see someone do that. (Interviewee, insider)

Interviewees generally disapproved of injection drugs, findings similar to those of other research where drug administration by injection was seen as taboo (Merchant & Macdonald, 1994).

Factors that increased participants' drug use

Participants spoke about several factors that led to increased frequency or intensity of their drug use.

Peer group Several participants said that their peer group influenced their drug use, as in the following example:

> The first time I did LSD, I didn't want to do LSD but my friends were doing it and I figured, I don't want to deal with a bunch of stoned people, so I'm just going to get stoned too, and just be part of the group. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Another participant said that she received a lot of criticism and was actually shunned by her friends when she tried to reduce her drug use. Most drug users in this study reported that their friends also used drugs. In fact, only one participant in this study said that although he used drugs, his friends generally did not.

Most participants said it was through friends that they were first introduced to drugs. One participant said the following regarding how she learned to use ecstasy:

> I learned from my friend. She actually taught me how to use it properly. She said just do half a pill first and then wait until that one goes on and then if you're still OK, then take more, if you're comfortable with it. So I had a really good teacher. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Interestingly, a small number of participants said they would not help a friend do drugs even though they held liberal attitudes toward drug use.

> I won't ever start someone on a drug because they ask me to or anything like that. You can go and find your own. Like, I'm not going to help you do drugs. (Interviewee, insider)

Another participant felt really bad that she had introduced two girlfriends to marijuana and now they are chronic smokers.

Accessibility of drugs Linked to the issue of peer group is the issue of accessibility of drugs. Being around people who use drugs makes drugs more accessible, and accessibility in itself may be enough for some people to try the drug. As one participant put it, "Because I was around it, it was there, I did it." Several participants said that they first gained access to drugs through friends who were already using. One participant said her parents smoked marijuana and it was her mother who first introduced her to the drug when she was thirteen.

Drugs were generally said to be very accessible in the rave scene in Alberta.

> I know when I got ecstasy, I was at the [name of club] with a girlfriend and basically we just asked somebody, we said, "Do you know where we could get something?" So he went and found the person for us. He came and said he could give us anything that we wanted, anything. And we said OK, we want two tabs of ecstasy, he gave us the price and said he'd be right back. I think half an hour later we had ecstasy. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

One participant who worked in the club industry said working in the scene gave him easy access to drugs. Some participants said they simply asked someone at a party for whatever they were looking for, though they noted that obtaining drugs at a party is not wise. Another insider participant said that dealers will hang out outside a party, asking partiers if they need anything as they go in. Participants also said that dealers also attend after-parties, supplying bingeing partiers with drugs. Many participants said that drugs were available in many other venues as well, such as schools, regular clubs, concerts, etc.

Some participant observers in this study noted the ease of access to drugs as well, reporting that they were offered drugs at the event they attended.

Age of involvement Most participants in this study suggested that very young teens were most at risk for making bad decisions about drug use because they are most susceptible to peer pressure and the least able to make informed, responsible decisions. This is because, one participant said, young teens are at an age where "nothing's OK" unless your friends think it's OK.

> Part of the problem I see, especially with the younger kids, is they get drawn in and maybe sort of hooked on—Like, there's remnants of the good things still there [in the rave scene], but it's so easy to fall into the traps...There's the younger kids that I think you have to really pay the most attention to in my opinion because they're the ones making the decisions earlier and earlier that are going to affect the decisions they make later. And I wouldn't want to be a kid at 17 with a meth habit, because boy oh boy...(Interviewee, insider)

Participants recounted stories of seeing girls as young as 13 doing nitrous oxide or "completely drunk" at parties. One participant recalled meeting a 14-year-old boy at a party who had come with a group of older friends:

> He informed me that he had been drinking before, he had smoked some pot, he said he did a rail of coke and then he had just dropped acid. And this is his first rave, he is 14 years old, he came with a bunch of his 18-year-old friends from the school that he went to. And it absolutely broke my heart that this is like, "Have you ever done this kind of drug before?" and he is like "No, it's my first time on everything except for pot." And I was absolutely like destroyed by it. (Interviewee, insider)

Interestingly, one insider participant thought that really young teens were using drugs in the rave scene to try to fit into the image of raves presented in the media. In other words, young teens thought they were supposed to do drugs at raves, so they did them to fit into their perception of the scene.

Early independence Several participants said their drug use increased when they gained early independence, either by moving out of their parent's home, or having their own vehicle. Two participants said that they moved out on their own at 16 or 17 which gave them more freedom and opportunities to go out to raves and to use drugs. Another participant said that she bought a car, which allowed her to travel into a nearby city on weekends. Hanging out with older friends was also cited as a factor that led to early involvement in the rave or club scene and to drug use. One participant said she was very sexually active in her early teens and started going to clubs at this age when an older man took an interest in her.

Factors that limited participants' drug use

Participants talked about various factors that they thought helped them avoid excessive use and negative impacts of drug use.

Support network of non-users The most important factor that kept participants from engaging in high-risk drug use or helped them to reduce or stop their drug use was to have a strong support network of friends or family who did not use drugs. One participant noted that she started partying with a group of non-users, which resulted in a network of mutual support for not using drugs:

> I think it pretty much saved me, like, being kind of supported by people who needed support to not take that pill. (Interviewee, insider)

Participants also commented on how hanging out with friends who did not use drugs usually resulted in decreases in their own drug use. One participant recounted how her parents actually moved her from one city to another when she started "to get into a crowd that was doing harder drugs." In the new city, she said, "I hung out with a lot of people who didn't smoke pot or do any drugs. So that made me not want to do it any more, because I wasn't

in situations where I needed to take drugs or where there was any drugs available for me." (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Having a role model who is clean and respected in the scene was also said to be important. Several of the participants in this study saw themselves as this type of a role model.

> I did the best I could, try to lead by example, that you can have fun and be clean...I'm very vocal about it too! (Interviewee, insider)

Interests outside the party scene Participants also controlled their drug use by maintaining interests outside the rave scene.

> My friend and I, we had almost, like, a fall back. We had other lives... I like to read, I like to hike. But I found sometimes in the scene some of these kids or some of these people, that's it, that's all it ever is. (Interviewee, insider)

For some participants this outside interest was their education, which they said limited the amount of time and money they were willing or able to spend partying. Others cited sports or other hobbies as an interest that kept their involvement in the rave scene balanced with other aspects of their lives.

Participants also cited the following factors as having helped them control their drug use:

- having respect for oneself and one's personal health
- entering the rave scene at a later age and thus being more able to make decisions about one's drug use
- having a child, which created an incentive to live a clean life

Tobacco use

Though not a focus of discussion in interviews, tobacco use was observed to be prevalent at two rave events (one held in an after-hours club, the other an outdoor event), an after-hours event, and an event featuring a DJ that was held in a club/recreation venue. However, most participant observers noted that smoking was less common at these rave events than at non-rave club events. Two typical raves were non-smoking. At one of these events, participant observers saw police in the security line confiscating cigarettes from anyone who could not produce ID showing they were at least 18 years old.

At one event held in a club/recreation venue, cigarettes were actively promoted through an intense marketing scheme as described by a participant observer:

> Throughout the venue, there were five or six cigarette dispensing stands. Accompanying each cigarette stand was a young woman, dressed in a glittery gold halter top, a tight black short skirt or tight black pants, and thin-strapped high-heeled sandals. The women were tanned, wore heavy

> makeup, and had long, styled hair. They stood by the cigarette stands the entire night to sell cigarettes to the patrons. There were also two young women, similarly dressed, who walked around the venue the entire night carrying trays of cigarettes on one hand above their head. The trays and the dispensing cases were both very classy looking, specifically designed to showcase the cigarette packages they held. (Participant observer, AADAC staff)

This event was an example of several club events sponsored by tobacco companies before federal legislation banning tobacco sponsorship came into effect in October 2003 (Nuttall-Smith, 2003). Two Canadian cigarette companies sponsored a series of events and ran websites to advertise upcoming events. Canada's Tobacco Act banned cigarette company sponsorship, bringing an end to these club series.

Data from the Rave Safe survey show that the great majority (88%) of respondents had tried tobacco (N=320), with 77 % of respondents at one event reporting daily use of tobacco (N=48). These figures are higher than those found in other studies of rave attendees, such as Gross et al. (2002), who reported that 64.3 % of the rave attendees they sampled had ever used tobacco. There is an even greater contrast between these figures and those found for the general population for this age group (see Table 5).

Table 5: Smoking status for Albertans, Canadian Community Health Survey 2000/2001

Age Group (in years)	Ever Smoked %	Daily Smokers %
12-19	32.0	12.5
20-24	74.1	28.0
25-34	73.6	28.7

Source: McKinnon, Naidoo and Marko, 2004

Summary

The rave scene is a setting where drug use is generally accepted. While no participants in this study said taking drugs was necessary to enjoy rave events, several participants said that use of certain drugs, like ecstasy, can enhance or intensify the exhilaration one feels when listening to music at a rave and the sense of connection one feels to other ravers. While some ravers party sober, others have the attitude that responsible drug use in moderation is OK, but drug abuse is not. For other ravers, drug use moves beyond moderation to harmful use and dependency.

Most participants in this study reported having used drugs before entering the rave scene, although raves may have provided them access to "harder" drugs, that is, drugs other than marijuana and mushrooms. As well, most participants spoke of using drugs in other settings than raves.

Most rave attendees who responded to the Rave Safe survey had tried numerous drugs at least once. The vast majority of respondents had tried alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and ecstasy at least once.[39] Marijuana and tobacco were reported to be used on a daily basis by 44% and 77% of respondents respectively. Speed/crystal meth was used on a *weekly* basis by 29% of respondents. Alcohol (44%), ecstasy (35%), ketamine (25%) and mushrooms (56%) were used *occasionally* (less than monthly but more than once). Most respondents did not report frequency of use for the other substances listed.

As the rave scene boundaries become blurred with those of the bar and club scene, the use of alcohol appears to be becoming more prevalent. Tobacco use also appears to be high at some rave events, particularly those whose sponsors are linked to tobacco companies.

[39] Survey results are based on a convenience sample of ravers, and may not be representative of the entire population of ravers at the event.

VII. Prevention and harm reduction in the rave scene

Participants' suggestions for content of harm reduction messages

Interviewees in the AADAC study discussed ways they stay healthy and safe when using drugs. The following are harm reduction guidelines participants spoke about in this study, and do not necessarily represent AADAC's position.

"OK to use, just don't abuse"

Several participants in this study believed that using drugs in moderation was OK, but that abusing drugs was not.

> I think a little bit here and there is not going to ruin your life. Of course when you take anything to the extreme, that's where the problem lies. (Interviewee, insider)

Participants suggested that any drug used in moderation would not "ruin your life," but overuse of anything, "even marijuana, alcohol, or caffeine," according to one insider participant, would likely lead to problems. In terms of phases of drug use, most of these participants were not concerned about experimental or recreational drug use. They would, however, begin to question habitual use of substances and would see drug abuse or dependency as harmful. One exception to this approach to drug use was heroin, for which most participants felt there was no safe level of use.

> I will never touch that [heroin] 'cause...I think once you're going that far to try those type of things, you know you need help, you know. You're doing it just for the sake of doing it, not doing it as part of socializing with other people. (Interviewee, insider)

"Do your research"

Several participants who considered themselves "educated" drug users advocated researching a drug before trying it:

> I did the research on it. Sounds kind of funny, but I'm an educated person who did it, you know. You look it up, you talk to the doctors. It's on the Internet, you look it up—what the effects are, what the proper dosage is. And a lot of people do that, a lot of people are educated drug users. Yeah, because they don't want to hurt themselves. They just want to have a little fun. (Interviewee, insider)

Another insider participant suggested that by researching a drug's side effects, both positive and negative, he rarely had a bad trip because he felt "in control" of the experience.

"You don't have to do drugs to rave"

Some participants felt youth should know that one does not need to use drugs to rave and that there are people who have been in the rave scene for years who have never used drugs. They felt that it was important to counter the image put forth by the media that raves are synonymous with drug use, and create a norm of non-use. Some participants in this study acted as role models of "clean" ravers in the scene:

> I know that, for some of the kids, I've been told that I am probably the reason why they're clean, because they see somebody who's fairly valued in that particular culture that's clean. So it gives them permission to be clean, and not be looked down upon, because the peer pressure is so incredible. (Interviewee, insider)

"Know the source of your drug"

Other participants noted the importance of knowing the source (dealer) of the drug one was taking. Several participants said that they would only buy drugs from a dealer that they knew very well and trusted; some went so far as to use the term "ethical drug dealers":

> One thing that I found with dealers within the rave scene is they tend to be—and this is going to sound really funny, but ethical drug dealers, y'know? There's a couple of drug dealers within [name of city] who test their pills. So...they can't tell you what's exactly in the pill, but they can say, "OK this has got MDA in it, this has got MDMA in it, this has got a mixture," y'know. And I know one drug dealer in particular, who, if he thinks you're using too much, he's not gonna sell it to you. He says, "Y'know, like, look I think you're using too much, why don't you take a break?" (Interviewee, insider)

> It's almost like, it's funny to say, but it's almost like it's ethical drug dealing....Everyone looks out for each other because no one's looking to make money, everyone's looking to just once in a while go out and have fun. (Interviewee, insider)

However, some participants pointed out that even the dealer may not know the origin of the drug and therefore one is always taking a risk, even when buying drugs from a trusted source:

> I don't even think a lot of the drug dealers know. They're given the drug and then they sell it. (Interviewee, insider)

> Were you there when that pill was made? Like you don't know what was in it. It's scary stuff. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

> One thing that I think older people can teach younger people within the scene is just that it's stupid to take drugs that you don't know what they are. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

The contamination of drugs poses a risk to users who may think they are purchasing one substance without knowing it contains other substances as well (Luciano, 1999; Rieder, 2000). As well, given the varying tolerance levels of users, a drug that may have very little effect on an experienced user may result in a very bad trip for a newcomer. Thus, while knowing your dealer may seem to be good advice, the risks associated with the use of any drug are affected by its ingredients and the characteristics of the user, including tolerance.

"Don't chase the high"

Several participants commented on how drug use can get out of control if one gets hooked on the high and forgets that it is only a temporary state.

> Realize the experience is going to be temporary. To chase after it is looking for harm, that's when you start abusing things. (Interviewee, insider)

Some people may use drugs frequently to induce the high feeling again and again, and may eventually move to harder drugs to try and recapture how they felt when they first used a drug, before they had built up a tolerance to its effects. One insider participant suggested that it is the people who are using drugs as an escape that are in danger of moving from drug use to drug abuse. He suggested that harm reduction efforts would be most effective if there were some way to identify these people and target messages to them.

"Safer drug use is planned, not spontaneous"

Most participants suggested that safe drug use was usually planned drug use, where drugs were obtained from a known source after researching the effects of the drug and taken in an appropriate setting among people they could trust. Some participants noted that they sometimes made spontaneous decisions about drug use that often led to bad choices:

> You just get so caught up in what's going on that evening that you don't really make healthy choices for yourself and then you regret it the next day. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

In addition to the above, participants also provided the following suggestions for harm reduction messages:

- Start with low doses.
- Know what your limits are.
- Never do drugs alone; there should always be one sober person in the group.
- Set and setting[40] are important. Choose an environment appropriate for the effects of the drug you are taking, and make sure it is a place in which you feel safe and comfortable.

[40] Set refers to the expectations, attitudes, mood and motivations the person brings with them to the experience. Setting refers to the physical and social environment that the person is in.

- Mixing drugs, particularly with alcohol, is dangerous.
- Drugs are drugs. Whether you are using poppers, marijuana, or cocaine, you are ingesting chemicals.

Participants' suggestions for format of harm reduction messages

In addition to the suggestions from participants regarding content of harm reduction messages, the following suggestions referred to the style or tone of messages.

"Place drug use decision in the hands of the raver"

Several participants spoke of the importance of leaving the decision up to the person who is considering doing drugs and not telling them what they should or should not do. These participants believed that youth are going to do what they want to do anyway, and telling them not to do something might actually be counterproductive.

> And nobody will really make a decision solely based on someone else's input. It's always gotta be based on your experience. (Interviewee, insider)

Instead of telling youth what to do, these participants recommended connecting them with information about drugs and encouraging them to do research to make an informed, responsible decision.

"Be non-judgmental"

Other participants spoke about the importance of having people in their lives that were not judgmental about their drug use. One participant said that she was happy when she moved out of her parent's house because she did not like the feeling of being "caught" when she went home after using drugs. She said this made her feel guilty, which, when compounded with the negative feelings she might be having coming off of the drugs, made for an unpleasant experience. She said that after she moved out on her own, she really enjoyed having roommates who understood what she was experiencing and with whom she could speak candidly about what she was feeling. Another respondent spoke of a friend who seemed judgmental of her choice to do drugs:

> I find her quite judgmental of...my choices, but that doesn't make me want to do them less or do them more. It just makes me hide it from her. (Interviewee and participant observer, insider)

Other respondents who worked with harm reduction groups echoed these sentiments:

> Our whole position was that we were just offering information unbiasedly. Not judging anyone's choices or what they're doing. Just, "Here you go." (Interviewee, insider)

"Don't glorify drug use"

One insider participant felt that the materials of one harm reduction group were "glorifying" ecstasy. This participant thought that the messages should demote drug use more. He feared that too positive a message might "put the thought in people's heads" who otherwise would not have tried drugs.

Participants also suggested the following:

- Messages should focus on the drug's long-term detrimental effects to offset the drug user's knowledge of the short-term positive effects.
- Messages should not focus on the very rare risks (such as acute allergic reactions) but instead on the more common risks that drug users face.
- Messages should be based on current research as new information is always coming out on drugs.
- Messages should be targeted to younger teens so they are prepared to make responsible decisions before they are faced with an opportunity to do drugs.
- Messages should be appropriate for the age group at which they are directed. For example, one insider participant suggested that teens are not going to respond well to a message such as, "Just say no and turn around and walk away."

Again, the above suggestions were from participants in this study, and do not necessarily represent AADAC's position.

Other research promotes a harm reduction approach for drug use in the rave scene (Weir, 2000; Weber, 1999). Weir (2000) suggests that, "For most youths, rave attendance may simply be the collective rite of passage of a generation spurning individualism and materialism in pursuit of empathy and euphoria" and that physicians should "offer support and advice necessary to reduce the potential of harm" (p. 1848).

Observations of harm reduction in the AADAC study

Participant observations indicated that only eight out of 22 locations visited for this study had any form of harm reduction or prevention messages. The most common harm reduction messages observed at events were posters warning against drinking and driving. Other examples of harm reduction messages were televisions at one event that flashed "Don't drink and drive" messages throughout the night, and wristbands at another event that had "Party Safe" printed on the back. Harm reduction groups, clearly a much stronger harm reduction presence at events, were observed at three of the five typical raves attended for this study. Apart from the events where harm reduction groups were present, participant observers generally felt that there were a great lack of harm reduction messages at most events they attended.

Harm reduction groups in Alberta

Six of the participants in this study (five interviewees and one participant observer) were volunteers with various harm reduction groups in Alberta. These volunteer-based groups have been active in Alberta since 1999-2000, formed spontaneously by ravers who saw a need for harm reduction information in the rave scene:

> We had all...got into it because some of us had maybe had bad experiences or knew people that had had bad experiences and found that there's so many things that information could have helped prevent. (Interviewee, insider)

According to participants in this study, harm reduction groups neither promote nor condone drug use, but provide information so that those who choose to use drugs will be able to make informed decisions. These participants believed that there is a huge gap in information available to people who choose to do drugs, as most official or government websites do not provide information on how to do drugs safely. Participants said harm reduction groups were a credible source of information because they were offering information in an unbiased manner, without judging anyone's choice to use or not use:

> The message is the most important thing and it's that message of tolerance and not judging and honesty. (Interviewee, insider)

Harm reduction groups have formed in most major cities where raves have become popular (Weir, 2000). Harm reduction groups generally set up display booths at various rave or club events where they hand out pamphlets or candy with messages attached that provide information on different drugs, and sometimes safe sex practices. The colourful, well-designed pamphlets handed out by these groups were familiar to participants in this study who were insiders to the rave scene.

At large raves or outdoor raves, these groups will set up a "safety tent" where people go to feel safe if they are experiencing negative effects from drugs. Some groups conduct surveys at parties to gather information on drug use by those attending the event. The Rave Safe data come from one such survey. Harm reduction groups also have websites, which are important in information dissemination.

Several participants in the AADAC study who volunteered with harm reduction groups felt that they were well received at events, and that hundreds of partiers might come by their booth at a large party. These participants also spoke of experiences where someone they had helped through a bad trip at a party contacted them afterwards to thank them for the care they provided. Other participants who were not involved with harm reduction groups also spoke highly of the service these groups provide.

Participants in this study generally indicated that harm reduction groups are

most needed at large or massive raves, where thousands of people may be in attendance, many of whom are inexperienced ravers:

> There you'll see the types of things that really show us we are needed. There will be kids dehydrating, having bad trips, taking too large a dose, mixing drugs with alcohol, just getting really wigged-out. (Interviewee, insider)

At some smaller parties, particularly where the promoter is known for throwing clean raves, there may be less drug use. One insider participant indicated the harm reduction group was not really even needed there.

Some harm reduction groups have sold drug-testing kits or provided drug-testing service at events. To get a drug tested, the raver may bring it to the harm reduction booth, where a volunteer takes a scraping for testing. Some harm reduction groups ask the owner of the drug to do the scraping him or herself. The volunteer then applies the reagent. A reaction indicates the presence (not the purity) of MDMA[41] (the substance in ecstasy pills), ketamine, speed, or GHB. If there is no reaction, then all that can be concluded is that the substances in the drug are unknown. Testing drugs at events is not done very often because it puts both the harm reduction volunteer and the raver at risk of being charged with possession or trafficking. Instead, most harm reduction groups make drug-testing kits available for sale at a reasonable price.

Harm reduction group volunteers are not allowed to do drugs while they are working at the booth:

> We're not allowed to do drugs when we're working the booth, but...whatever happens after we close the booth at 3 in the morning is your own prerogative. As long as you're not like, "Look at me, I'm high, I was working for [name of harm reduction group] today." (Interviewee, insider)

Other respondents who worked with harm reduction groups said that they rarely or never use drugs anymore because they want to set an example for others that ravers can party without drugs.

Harm reduction groups are vulnerable to the usual ebbs and flows volunteer-based groups experience. At the time of AADAC's study, one harm reduction group was in transition, with several key members having moved on to other things. The group's future was uncertain.

Participants in this study spoke of the relationship between harm reduction groups and other groups in the rave scene. One participant said the harm reduction group he was part of eventually came to be recognized as a credible source for information about the rave scene, receiving calls from the media to comment on various rave-related events. Some of these groups

[41] Methylenedioxymethamphetamine

also participated in meetings held by city councils when developing their rave bylaws. One participant also said that their group tries to work with paramedics at parties as he feels their group has knowledge about the effects of these drugs that paramedics may be lacking:

> The EMTs came to us with that girl and asked us what to do with her. They asked if a drug was a stimulant or depressant. They don't know. People in the health care profession don't know what to do. They don't have the training or knowledge base to really know that kind of stuff. (Interviewee, insider)

As well, one participant from a harm reduction group said they have developed relationships with some other agencies that deal with youth. They feel that building connections between these agencies gives their harm reduction message a better chance to be heard. This same participant said that their group had been interested in doing presentations in schools:

> We always wanted to do sit-down sessions in schools, where you go in and you talk about these drugs openly and honestly. Not with the policeman sitting there going, "Mm-hmm that kid there, he's asking a lot of questions. We're gonna go talk to him later." Someplace where they feel...they can just talk and not be judged. (Interviewee, insider)

Participants also said that harm reduction groups sometimes disagreed with other groups in the rave scene, such as police and promoters. One participant said their group clashed with the police officers because they take a harm reduction stance and the police take an abstinence approach. He said that one police officer told them that he thought their group was "just a front for a bunch of pill heads or party people" who wanted to make themselves feel better or get into parties for free. From the police perspective, Kent (2000) reports that at least one Alberta police officer was "frustrated with harm reduction groups...which simply hand out literature about rave drugs" (p. 1864). This officer said, "Idealistic ravers don't understand the increasing presence of drug dealers jockeying to control the flow of drugs at raves, and the growing potential for gang violence" (p. 1865).

Comments from participants in this study indicated that the relationship between harm reduction groups and event promoters varies depending on the groups or promoters involved and the particular event. In general, participants suggested that promoters of smaller events were happy to have harm reduction groups at their events, even inviting them to attend. Participants said that promoters of large events were less welcoming to these groups and that bar owners were even less receptive to harm reduction groups. Two insider participants noted that some promoters do not want harm reduction groups at their event because they did not want to be seen as acknowledging that drug use occurs at their event. As well, after the negative publicity about "raves," some promoters tried to distance themselves from anything that would associate their event with raves, including harm reduction groups.

Other comments in this study suggest that the tension in the relationship between promoters and harm reduction groups may lie in their different goals. Harm reduction groups want to protect ravers from the adverse effects of drug use while promoters want to make a profit from the event. Harm reduction groups would like promoters to provide them with water bottles to hand out to ravers, while promoters would rather sell the water. One participant also said that their group was asked to stop selling glow-sticks at an event, as their price was lower than the price the promoter was charging.

Participants' views of credible sources of drug information

Participants in this study spoke about their perceptions of the credibility of different sources of drug information. Most participants said they felt most official or government sources of information were biased and not credible, while they felt that information from harm reduction groups was more balanced and credible. Similarly, Gamble and George (1997) found that drug users favoured information from other users or ex-users while non-users gave more credence to "professional" sources of information, such as general practitioners.

Participants in the AADAC study made the following comments about government sources of information, particularly those that take an abstinence approach to drugs:

> When I was younger, they told me marijuana would kill me, right? And when it didn't I was like, "What else are they lying about?" Right? So they lost all credibility with me. And the "Just Say No" campaign, in my mind, didn't work. But the harm reduction comes from a "Just Say Know," K-N-O-W, right? (Interviewee, insider)

> Kids know when they're getting the wool pulled over their eyes or where they're trying to just say, "No, no don't do it 'cause it's bad. Trust us." Well, no, I took it. I lived. It was great. What are you talking about?... The way they just pound it was like propaganda. You know, "Here's all these bad drugs, bad things"...It was always negative. There was never any mention that you might have a good experience. You might come out of this feeling great and that's normal too. There are bad things, there are neutral things, and there's good things that could be taken out of any drug experience or decision in life. (Interviewee, insider)

The rave community is very Internet literate, as demonstrated by the numerous rave-related chat rooms and harm reduction sites that have been created around the world (Sullivan, 2000). Some researchers question the quality of the drug information found on Internet sites, suggesting that the "plethora of anecdotal information on the Internet...can prompt the naïve user toward 'irrational' rational drug use based on partial information and misinformation" (Weir, 2000, p. 1847).

Comments from participants in this study indicate that they trusted information coming from people who were recognized as members of the rave scene, particularly older people or those who acted as role models in the scene. Participants from harm reduction groups believed it was important that ravers felt that volunteers were "one of them." First-hand experience with a substance also added to a source's credibility. One participant who worked with a harm reduction group said their information must resemble a raver's own experience or the experiences of their friends or it will not be trusted.

Despite these many comments about trusting information from those within the scene, there were also comments indicating questionable quality of information circulating in the scene. For example, one participant reported he had been told never to take blue or pink ecstasy pills, but only grey or white ones. Because new batches of pills are always circulating, choosing a pill based on colour is not safe. Another had heard that ecstasy drains one's spinal fluid but he was fairly certain this was not true (it is not true). These comments show that drug information obtained in the scene is not necessarily reliable either.

Summary

Most ravers appear to be taking active steps to reduce the harm of their drug use. Some of the general harm reduction guidelines they follow are

- using drugs in moderation, but not abusing them
- researching substances before they try them
- knowing the source and origin of their drug
- planning their drug use rather than making spontaneous decisions

Volunteer-run harm reduction groups have been active in Alberta, as in most other rave locations across Canada and throughout the world. These groups provide information on how to use drugs more safely, as well as information on safer sex. They appear to be viewed in a favourable light by ravers, who see the information they provide as more balanced than information that only promotes abstinence.

This study provides insight into how this population views various harm reduction or prevention approaches. Ravers are dismissive of information that they perceive as biased, that is, information that only talks about the negative effects of drugs, or that uses "scare tactics." Participants in this study also thought there was a significant gap in information because some information sources suggest abstinence as the only way to avoid harm, without providing any information on safer ways to use drugs for those who are going to choose to use them anyway. Participants viewed harm reduction as the best approach for this population, as they felt that abstinence messages would be ineffective.

VIII. DISCUSSION

This study addressed both the positive aspects of raves, particularly from the point of view of ravers, as well as drug use in the scene that has been the focus of concern in media reports. Both aspects of the rave scene are discussed below, as well as the findings on prevention and harm reduction.

Participants in this study saw the rave scene as an alternative to the regular bar and club scene where they could freely enjoy dance music in an open and supportive social atmosphere. Participants felt that the absence of alcohol at raves, in contrast to bars and clubs, was the reason for the absence of sexual tension and aggression at rave events. The difference between the rave scene and the regular bar and club scene was important to ravers, as evident from the use of the terms "bar stars" and "chachis." Ravers sometimes use these terms to label people from mainstream bar and club culture as non-ravers, even though rave culture stresses acceptance and unity.

Participants in this study felt the rave scene had been unfairly targeted with negative publicity by the media. Many of them appreciated the opportunity to have their voices heard because they felt media reports often overlooked what they felt were the most important aspects of the rave scene: the music and the vibe. Indeed, in the interviews for this study, many participants focused more on the music and cultural components of the rave scene, and less on the role of drugs. This may have been either to counter media portrayals of the scene, or because the presence of drugs in the scene was of minor importance to these individuals.

Raves were a positive social space for many participants in this study. Similar to other youth settings, like sports teams, drama clubs, and religious youth groups, raves were a place where youth developed skills, identities and relationships (both positive and negative). Like other settings, raves met youth needs for "physical activity, development of competence and achievement, self-definition, creative expression, positive social interaction with peers and adults...and meaningful participation in authentic work" (Quinn, 1999, p. 103).

The rave community provides opportunities for youth to participate in the production of rave events, by distributing posters and flyers, decorating and setting up venues, working security, or assisting with sound production for events. While not all ravers become involved in event production—and it may be argued that with the commercialization of the rave scene, involvement of youth has diminished—several participants in this study spoke of the skills they learned and the sense of accomplishment they felt in helping put on events. In this way, the rave scene resembles an informal version of youth development programs like the All Stars Project[42] in the U.S., which

[42] The All Stars Project takes a "performance-learning" approach to foster the "emotional and social development of young people" (All Stars Project, 2004). The Project involves young people from the poorest neighbourhoods in a given city in auditions, rehearsals, talent shows and development workshops.

provides youth with an opportunity to be involved in music and dance productions as an alternative to hanging out on the streets.

Concerns about drug use in the rave scene are not unfounded since raves are a setting where drug use is generally accepted. However, it is no more accurate to say that raves are primarily a place to use drugs than it is to say that drug use has nothing to do with the rave scene. Not all ravers use drugs or approve of drug use and no participants in this study said taking drugs was necessary to enjoy rave events. This again illustrates the diversity within the rave scene and how the stereotype of all ravers as drug users is inaccurate.

Part of the motivation for this study was concern about ecstasy use in Alberta. Ecstasy was one of the top four substances rave attendees had ever tried (after alcohol and marijuana, and equivalent to tobacco). In terms of illicit substances, marijuana had been tried by more Rave Safe survey respondents, and was used on a more frequent basis than ecstasy. In addition to ecstasy and marijuana, rave attendees reported having tried a range of other illicit drugs.

This study also found that rave attendees are using drugs, including ecstasy, in other locations, and that many of them had used drugs before they entered the rave scene. Raves, then, appear to be one of many settings in which some youth choose to use drugs. The patterns or phases of drug use of rave attendees are similar to that of other youth (AADAC, n.d.). As well, the factors identified in this report as leading to or limiting drug use of rave attendees are similar to risk and protective factors identified in the literature (George, Dyer, & Levin, 2003).

The findings on prevention and harm reduction in the rave scene if acted on can contribute to the improvement of prevention strategies for this population. This study found that on an individual basis, many ravers are taking active steps to reduce the potential harms of their drug use. As well, volunteer organizations like Rave Safe provide harm reduction services to help other ravers make informed and, hopefully, healthier choices regarding their behaviour including drug use at raves.

While existing harm reduction norms and initiatives can be built upon, there are other opportunities for prevention and harm reduction in the rave scene and with the 18- to 25-year age group generally. The 18- to 25-year-old population should be of concern to prevention workers since late adolescence, particularly the transition year from high school to college or work, is another high-risk time for increased substance use. Levin and George (2003) found that this risk period is “characterized by a sharp increase in tobacco and drug use for those adolescents who had not previously experimented with them, often progressing to abuse or binge drinking” (p. 26).

There is an opportunity for prevention messages at rave events, given the general absence of such messages at events observed in this study

(apart from the messages of volunteer harm reduction groups). This is particularly the case as rave events move into bars and clubs where the presence of alcohol increases the likelihood of attendees mixing alcohol and drugs. Ravers appear to be a sophisticated population of relatively informed users who would benefit from prevention and harm reduction messages appropriate to their knowledge and experience level.

This study explored the youth perspective of raving, presenting a view of raving that differs from media reports of the scene. These findings suggest that while concerns about drug use at raves are not unfounded, they should be balanced with recognition of the positive aspects of the rave scene experienced by many youth.

IX: Conclusions

This study provides information about 1) the rave scene from the point of view of ravers; 2) substance use behaviours and attitudes of youth who attend raves; and 3) prevention and harm reduction actions and opportunities in the rave scene.

Youth perspective on raves

- For participants in this study, the most important aspects of the rave scene are the music and the vibe, not the drug use.
- Participants described raves as a unique social space of acceptance and connection that had a positive effect on their lives.
- Raves were seen as an attractive alternative to the regular bar and club scene because of the absence of alcohol, which participants said resulted in the corresponding absence of fights and sexual tension.
- Raves provide youth with a place to develop their identities, relationships, and skills, much like other more traditional youth settings like youth groups or sports teams.
- As rave scene boundaries become blurred with the bar and club scene, some of the positive aspects of raving may be diminished.

Substance use of youth in the rave scene

- Drug use is generally accepted in the rave scene, though substance use by ravers ranges from abstinence, to moderate use, to abuse.
- Rave attendees reported having tried a wide range of substances, most commonly alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and ecstasy.
- Most ravers in this study spoke of using drugs in other settings as well and said that raves were not the setting of their first experience with drugs.
- As rave events move into bar and club settings, alcohol use is becoming more prevalent.
- Tobacco use appears to be high at some rave events, particularly those whose sponsors are linked to tobacco companies.

Prevention and harm reduction in the rave scene

- Most participants appeared to be taking active steps to reduce the harm of their drug use.
- Volunteer organizations like Rave Safe have been providing harm reduction services in the rave scene to help ravers make informed decisions.

- Participants viewed harm reduction as the best approach for the rave scene; they felt abstinence messages would be ineffective.
- Ravers appear to be a population of relatively informed drug users who would benefit from prevention and harm reduction messages appropriate to their level of knowledge and experience.

This study allows "outsiders" to understand the rave scene from the youth perspective, and will help youth service providers offer more effective services to this population. Drug use is common at rave events; at the same time, being part of the rave scene has been a profoundly positive experience for many participants in this study. Prevention and harm reduction strategies for youth that attend raves will be most effective if they balance addressing concerns about drug use in the rave scene with acknowledging and building on the positive aspects of this youth phenomenon.

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APPENDIX I: Rave Advisory Committee Members

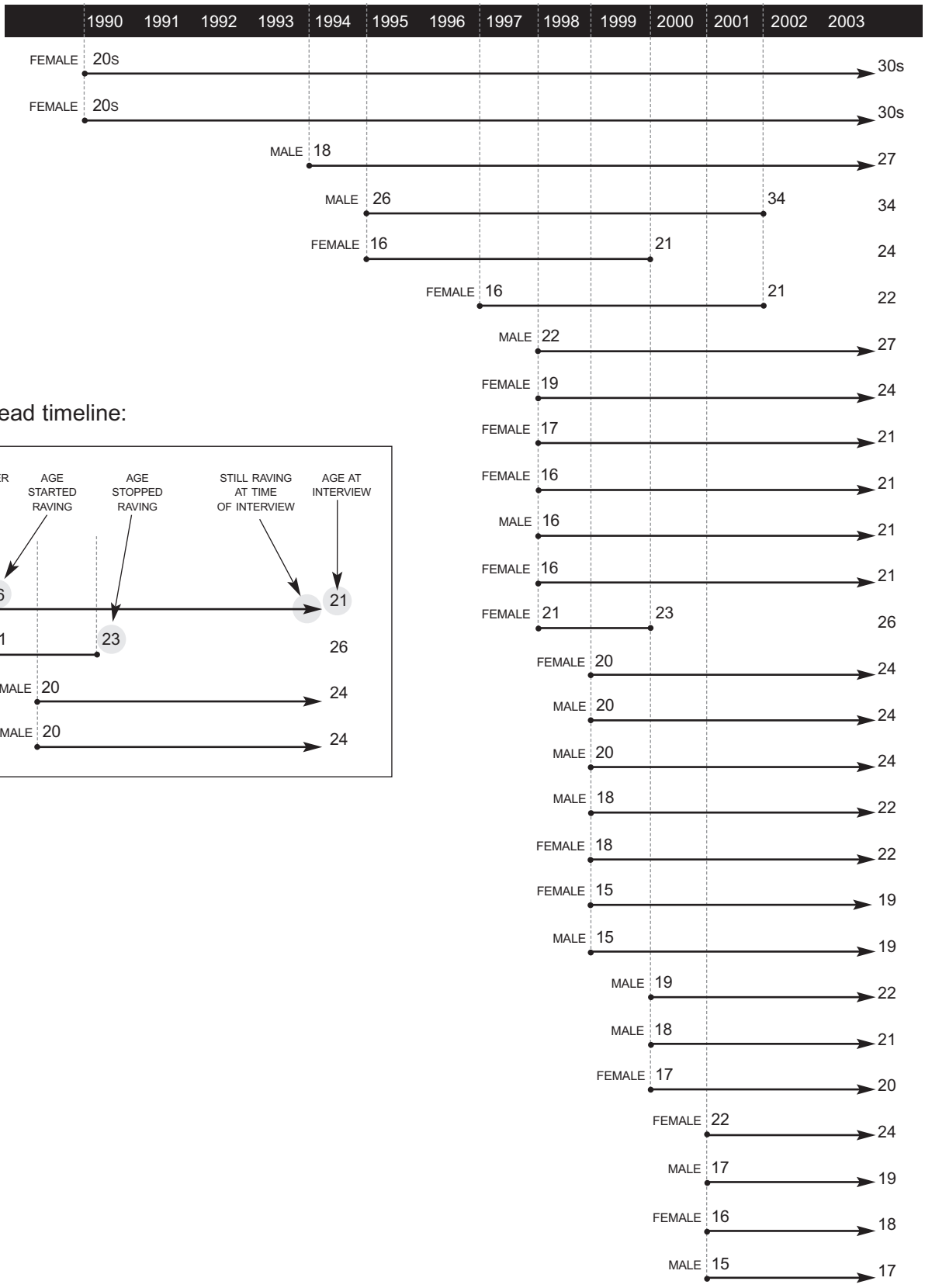
1. Z'Anne Harvey-Jansen[43]	Lead researcher (Dec 2002-Mar 2003, Dec 2003-present) Research officer, AADAC Research
2. Susan Hutton[44]	Lead researcher (Mar-Nov 2003) Research officer, AADAC Research Services (Mar-Nov 2003), AADAC Policy & Business Planning (Dec 2003-present)
3. Colette Fluet-Howrish[45]	Research officer, AADAC Research
4. Donna Chovanec	Research officer, AADAC Research
5. Jan Taylor	Addictions counsellor, Seconded to AADAC Research
6. Art Dyer	Manager, AADAC Research (until Mar 2004)
7. Susan Hart	Manager, AADAC Research (Apr 2004-present)
8. Crystal Anderson	Research assistant, AADAC Research
9. Erin Skocylas/ Colleen Milne	Addictions counsellors, AADAC Counselling and Prevention Services, Red Deer
10. Theresa Hermary	Community programs consultant, AADAC Youth Services, Calgary
11. Stacey Theriault	Addictions counsellor, AADAC Youth Services, Edmonton
12. Jaimie Geddes/ Claudia Cannales	Youth program coordinator/Public education coordinator, Distress Centre, Calgary
13. Kiann McNeill	Marketing consultant, AADAC Communications and Resource Development
14. Susan Larcombe	Rave community member, Harm reduction association volunteer
15. Renzo Koornhof	Rave community member
16. Laura Raboud	Rave community member
17. Lucie Vlach	Rave community member
18. Brian Wilson	Assistant Professor, University of British Columbia

[43] Z'Anne Harvey-Jansen is a Research Officer II with 13 years experience with AADAC Research Services. She has a Master of Science (1990) in Family Life Education and a Bachelor of Science in Honours Psychology (1988).

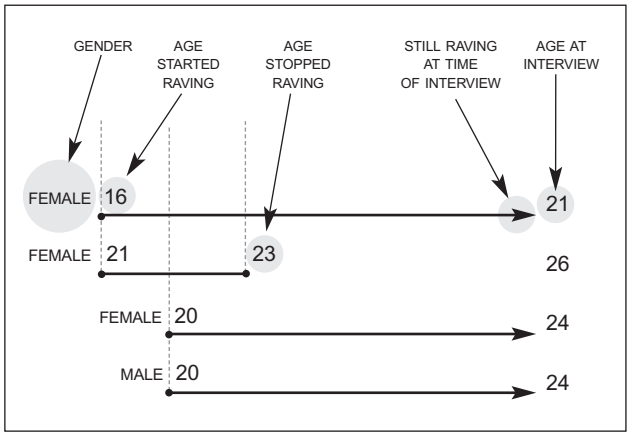
[44] Susan Hutton is currently a Research Officer I with AADAC Policy and Business Planning. Susan has a Master of Arts (1995) in Sociology and a Bachelor of Arts in Honours Sociology (1993).

[45] Colette Fluet-Howrish is a Research Officer I with AADAC Research Services. She holds a Master of Science (2003) in Rural Sociology and a Bachelor of Arts in English (1999).

APPENDIX II: Timeline of insiders' involvement in the Alberta rave scene



How to read timeline:



APPENDIX III: Letter of information

Name of Research Project: The Club and Rave Experience

Names of Researchers: Z'Anne Harvey-Jansen and Susan Hutton
Research Services
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
6th Floor, 10909 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, AB
phone (780) 422-2216 (Z'Anne)
phone (780) 422-9722 (Susan)

Date:_____

Dear Participant,

What is the purpose of the research?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. AADAC's new club and rave scene research will help us understand more fully what it is like to participate in the club and/or rave scene. We will hear your stories about the club and rave scene. The project is important because at AADAC the health of youth and young adults is a priority, and we would like to understand how to provide better information, treatment, and prevention services.

How is information being collected?

We are using a research approach called qualitative inquiry. This means that we ask a broad research question, and then you, the person being interviewed, will lead us to what is most important for us to know. The interview today will last between 1 and 2 hours. We will tape record the interview so we can listen attentively to what you say. At the end we will ask if we can call and interview you further if the need arises in understanding your story accurately. Also at the end of the interview, we would like to give you an honorarium for participating.

How is my information kept confidential?

Your name will not be disclosed at any time during this research nor used in the resulting report(s) and presentation(s). After you are finished this interview the person interviewing you will label the tape with a code. Only the project coordinator will know which code is yours. The information we will keep to contact you for follow-up will be kept secure and separate from your interview.

Any information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of the research study. The exception is that according to the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act, we must report abuse or risk of abuse to children or if you or someone else is in imminent danger.

How is my information reported?

Although you will never be identified in the study, your words may be used, as quoted, in the report. As well themes from a number of people interviewed will be reported so others can learn from you. Your words may also be used as sound bites in Web-based report presentations if you agree. If you would like a copy of the final report from AADAC (Research Services) please let me know and I will add you to our mailing list.

Is this research voluntary?

Participating in this research is purely voluntary. You can quit or refuse to answer a specific question at any time, without any impact.

Thank you so much for sharing your experience with us.

This research information is collected under the authority of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act. If you have any questions that cannot be answered by staff, please call the Research Manager at AADAC TOLL FREE by dialing 310-0000, then enter (780) 422-1249.

APPENDIX IV: Consent checklist

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Having read the Letter of Information, I consent to the following items:

(*Check only those that apply*)

- ❒ I agree to participate in the research project
- ❒ I understand that I will receive an honorarium, which will be given at the end of the interview
- ❒ I agree to be contacted for a follow-up interview if necessary
- ❒ I agree to allow my voice to be used in sound bites in Web-based reports
- ❒ I would like to receive a copy of the report when it is finished

APPENDIX V: Timeline of Canadian Research on Raves

Takahashi, M., & Olaveson, T. (2003). Music, dance and raving bodies: Raving as spirituality in the central Canadian rave scene. *Journal of Ritual Studies, 17*(2), 72-96.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Ontario and Quebec

TIMESPAN OF DATA COLLECTION: Prior to 2001

METHODOLOGY: Experiential anthropology, Participant observation at 16 events, Survey of 121 ravers, Interviews, Document analysis

KEY FINDINGS: Rather than a meaningless and hedonistic escape from reality, raving is demonstrated to be a meaningful and spiritual experience for some participants. Seven central themes emerged from the research: connectedness, embodiment, altered states of consciousness, spirituality, personal transformation, utopian models of society, and neotribalism.

Wilson, B. (2002). The Canadian rave scene and five theses on youth resistance. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 27*(3), 373.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Ontario

TIMESPAN OF DATA COLLECTION: 1995-1998

METHODOLOGY: Participant observation at 13 events; Interviews with 37 ravers

KEY FINDINGS: This study reports on results from an ethnographic study of the rave subculture in southern Ontario conducted from 1995-1998, and analyses the findings drawing on both traditional and contemporary perspectives on youth, which Wilson presents as “five theses on resistance.”

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2002). Rave attendance stabilizes among Ontario students. Vol. 13. Toronto, ON: CAMH.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Ontario

TIMESPAN OF DATA COLLECTION: 1995-2001

METHODOLOGY: Longitudinal survey data of school students

KEY FINDINGS: Rave attendance had stabilized among Ontario students.
The average age of students who had attended raves had slightly declined between 1995 and 2001. Rave attendees’ use of drugs was similar to those attending other activities, such as bush parties.

Gross, S. R., Barrett, S. P., Shestowsky, J. S., & Pihl, R. O. (2002). Ecstasy and drug consumption patterns: A Canadian rave population study. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 47*(6), 546-551.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Montreal

TIME OF DATA COLLECTION: Prior to 2002

METHODOLOGY: Random survey of 210 rave attendees at three large rave events (80 women, 126 men, 4 respondents who did not indicate their sex; Ages ranged from 16 to 32 years, mean 21.4 years).

KEY FINDINGS: Sequence of first drug use follows identifiable pattern. Drug consumption levels were substantial in this “rave” population, particularly with respect to recent use of MDMA, amphetamine, cannabis, and alcohol.

Hier, S. P. (2002). Raves, risks and the ecstasy panic: A case study in the subversive nature of moral regulation. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 27*(1), 33-57.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Toronto

TIMESPAN OF DATA COLLECTION: 2000

METHODOLOGY: Document analysis

KEY FINDINGS: Despite the fact that concerted efforts were made on the part of a host of "moral entrepreneurs" to extinguish raves held on city-owned property, Toronto's rave communities were able to subvert the moralizing discourse designed to characterize them "at risk," simultaneously manipulating the same discursive technique to amplify the risks associated with terminating "legal" raves in the city of Toronto.

Kelly, R. (2001). *Physicality and the Edmonton electronic dance music experience.* Master of Arts thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Edmonton

TIMESPAN OF DATA COLLECTION: 1999-2001

METHODOLOGY: Participant observation, Ethnomusicology

KEY FINDINGS: Kelly examines three aspects of a dance experience: sound, physical context, and state.

Weir, E. (2000). Raves: A review of the culture, the drugs and the prevention of harm. *Canadian Medical Association Journal, 162*(13), 1843-1848.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Canada

TIMESPAN OF DATA COLLECTION: N/A

METHODOLOGY: Literature review

KEY FINDINGS: The rave culture in Canada and the drugs commonly used at raves are reviewed, and strategies and initiatives for harm reduction are discussed.

Weber, T. (1999). Raving in Toronto: Peace, love, unity and respect in transition. *Journal of Youth Studies, 2*(3), 317-336.

SETTING OF RESEARCH: Toronto

TIMESPAN OF DATA COLLECTION: 1996

METHODOLOGY: Participant observation at 8 events; 75 Interviews

KEY FINDINGS: People defined raves and were attracted to the parties because of the interesting venues, to be with friends, and to enjoy the music. While drugs were also mentioned as one of the appealing aspects of parties, those who attend raves only to use drugs were not felt to be attending for the right reasons.

APPENDIX VI: Rave Music

Dance music genres

Name/genre	Timbre/kind of sound	Speed of beat	Kind of beat
Downtempo (refers more generally to slower music)	Slow house, Often more sustained sounds	Slower–under 100 BPM[1]	Steady 4/4, Sometimes hip hop-style slower syncopations
House	Most closely related to Disco sounds, Samples from soul, funk, Often with sung or spoken words mentioning dance, groove, and body	Up to 130 BPM	Steady 4/4
Trance	Sustained sounds, Melodic lines, Synthesized strings, Often with sung or spoken words mentioning beauty, life, nature and love	Up to 145 BPM	Steady 4/4
Techno	Intentionally 'computerized' sounds, Not melodic	Up to 150 BPM	Steady 4/4
Happy Hardcore	Much faster, again, similar to house, Sometimes with MC[2]	Up to and over 180 BPM	Steady 4/4
Drum and Bass/ Jungle	Syncopated beats, Sometimes with MC,[3] Usually not melodic	Depends on which beats one counts, the quarter note of hip hop as fast as 200 BPM	Syncopated 4/4 of hip hop but over twice as fast

[1] "BPM" stands for "beats per minute." It is the standard measure of tempo in dance music.

[2] "Master of Ceremonies," a rapper similar to those in hip hop music.

[3] There are also occasionally singers (e.g. Edmonton's Sync and Lady J) who sing 'over' jungle tracks played by a DJ.

Adapted from: Kelly, 2001.

Sub-genres of dance music mentioned by respondents or seen on rave flyers in this study

Acid Jazz
Acid Techno
Ambient
Ambient Trance
Break Beats
Deep Breaks
Deep House
Deep Progressive
Disco Funk House
Drum and Bass
Eclectic Beats
Electro
Epic Trance
Four-Four Garage
Funky Breaks
Funky Hard Tech
Funky House
Gangsta Boogie
German Techno
Goa Trance
Happy Hard Core
Happy Progressive
Hard Acid
Hard Core
Hard Dance
Hard House
Hard Progressive
Hard Trance
Heavy Techno
House
Housey House
Industrial
Jungle
Nu Energy
New School Breaks
Ponder House
Progressive Trance
Progressive House
Progressive Progressive
Psy-Trance
Psy Breaks
R&B
Retro
Retro House
Speedcore
Speed Garage
Sub Trance
Techno
Techno Funk
Trance
Trance Breaks
Tribal Techno
Two-Step Garage
Uplifting Trance

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
An Agency of the Government of Alberta

For more information, contact your local AADAC office,
call 1-866-33AADAC or visit our website at www.aadac.com

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