

Exploring Euphoria

Exploring Euphoria: Delineations of Raving Morality, Collective Effervescence, and
Therapeutic Culture in the Halifax Rave Scene.

By

Eleanor N. Waite

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Abstract

Increasing commercialization of the underground rave scene has led to a decline in so-called “authentic” raves around the world, and an increase in licensed bar and festival-based EDM events, which do not share the same ethos as underground raves. Using a mixture of semi-structured interviews and observation at raves, I explore the unique resurgence of raving as an underground practice in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Whereas previous scholars have found delineations of insiders and outsiders to rave scenes, I instead found participants constructed ideal types of moral versus immoral ravers. I argue that the shared sentiment of moral ravers is what contributes to feelings of collective effervescence at raves and that this experience of collective effervescence is made sense of through the lens of therapeutic culture.

Keywords: raves, collective effervescence, therapeutic culture,

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Table of Contents

A RENAISSANCE: SITUATING THE HALIFAX RAVE SCENE	5
SONIC SCHOLARSHIP: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF “THE RAVE”	6
COMMUNITY AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY	8
TRANSFORMATIONAL CONNECTION	9
COVERT POLITICAL RESISTANCE.....	11
THERAPEUTIC CULTURE	14
RAVING LITERATURE, IN SUM.....	15
METHODS	16
DATA COLLECTION	17
<i>Semi-Structured Interviews</i>	17
<i>Raving Observations and Sensory Ethnography</i>	17
DATA ANALYSIS	18
ETHICAL CONCERNS.....	19
ANALYSIS / FINDINGS.....	19
THE MORAL RAVER VERSUS THE IMMORAL RAVER.....	19
RAVING REVELRY	24
<i>Being in community</i>	25
<i>Emotional Intensity</i>	26
<i>Transgressive Connection</i>	27
<i>Symbolization</i>	31
<i>Revitalization</i>	32
THE THERAPEUTIC LENS: HOW RAVERS MAKE SENSE OF EFFERVESCENCE	33
CONCLUSION	35
REFERENCES.....	37

A Renaissance: Situating the Halifax Rave Scene

In the anthropology of nightlife (Tutenges, 2022) scholars disagree about whether or not raves still exist (T. Anderson, 2009; St John, 2004c). Raves emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, and were characterized as “grassroots organized, antiestablishment, unlicensed all-night dance parties, featuring electronically produced music (EDM)” (T. L. Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007, pg. 500). Increasing commercialization of these parties, for example licensed clubs hosting them or the emergence of mainstream, EDM mega-festivals, has led to the notion that rave is “over” or has merged with clubbing culture (T. Anderson, 2009; Bennet, 2001; Bennet & Peterson, 2004; Bennett, 1999; Malbon, 1999; Thornton, 1996). Many scholars now use the term “post-rave party” (St John, 2004c; 2009) to demarcate events that follow similar forms to raves, but that are commercialized and no-longer fit the bill for an ‘authentic’ rave. Similarly to this global trend, Halifax had a thriving rave scene in the 90s, which went into decline in the early 2000s. After this decline, most EDM-centered events in Halifax only took place at licensed establishments such as nightclubs. One participant described these bar and club events as “soulless” (Caleb, a raver and DJ in his early 40s), with financial motivations often sacrificing the music and the culture in favor of alcohol and profit.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, however, Halifax’s underground rave scene has seen a resurgence. Halifax once again has a consistent roster of grass-roots, private dance parties, focusing on house and techno music, which emulate the raves of the 1990s (T. Anderson, 2009). The promoters and creators of these raves, situating themselves on both the physical and cultural periphery of the mainstream nightlife culture, are motivated “from a place of music, just a cultural place” (Caleb). My research centered on these raves and the people who frequent them. I asked the question: what do these events, which now exist in a completely different world to their predecessors, mean to their attendees today?

To attend to this research question, I conducted 10 interviews with self-identified “ravers”. Their ages ranged from early 20s to mid 40s and the sample included seven men, two women, and one non-binary person. I supplemented these interviews with ethnographic observations at six rave events, two of which were commercial raves, that is, took place at licensed establishments, and the rest of which were unlicensed underground raves. My research follows a tradition of ethnographic fieldwork centered on nightlife (Tutenges, 2022). My methods and theoretical perspectives are informed by anthropologists who have studied raves (T. Anderson, 2009; St John Graham, 2009; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003) as well as those who have studied more traditional nightlife scenes (Malbon, 1999; Tutenges, 2023). Many scholars globally have attended to raves in their research. In Canada, the research has been focused on bigger cities (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Wilson, 2002) and is close to two decades old. My research therefore attends to an important geographical and temporal gap in the research, addressing Halifax’s unique scene.

In setting out to understand this small Atlantic Canadian rave scene, I tried to understand not only the experience of raving itself but also the way participants constructed meanings around the practice. Consequently, I reviewed not only literature on collective effervescence, but also literature on raves and nightlife as political participation and, after my fieldwork was complete, on therapeutic culture, which surprisingly offered a suitable framework for understanding the meaning participants assigned to raving. This thesis seeks to better understand the practice of raving in Halifax, amidst the city’s raving renaissance, but it also seeks to understand the webs of significance (Geertz, 1973) ravers draw on to comprehend their experiences. The findings of this study present ravers’ complex delineations of belonging, support the notion that raves are places of collective effervescence, and disrupt blanket criticisms of therapeutic culture as an individualizing force.

Sonic Scholarship: A Literature Review of “The Rave”

Raving emerged in Britain and the US around the 1980s (T. Anderson, 2009). Its emergence is related to the rise of electronic dance music (EDM) in New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Britain, as well as Britain's core holiday destination, Ibiza (Wilson, 2006, pg. 40). This spike in popularity of EDM and increased use of the drug "Ecstasy" or "MDMA" is what gave rise to what we now call "raves". These early raves defined their identity on an MDMA-induced ethos of "PLUR", which stands for "Peace, Love, Unity and Respect" (Hutson, 2000; Reynolds, 1999; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). This ethos was, in some cases, viewed as an approximation of an ideal society, and it is this ethos to which I refer in the section on political participation. This ethos was a reason why courting and sexual conquest were not valued in early rave culture (T. Anderson, 2009; T. L. Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007).

In contrast to the highly unregulated, typically illegal 'authentic' rave, clubbing has an organized and government-regulated economy surrounding it, requiring a different approach to a 'night out' (Malbon, 1999). Despite the differences between these two experiences, however, there are common elements (group dancing, drug consumption, electronic dance music) that allow us to apply scholarship on clubbing to raving.

Scholars (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Wilson, 2002, 2006) have shown how the history of raving in Canada differs to that of the UK or USA, where most of the raving literature discussed in this paper is from. Wilson notes that this different history may mean we need to conceptualize raves differently in Canada, where it emerged in different relationship to power and culture (Wilson, 2006, pg. 19-20). The literature on Canadian raving is decidedly sparse, and what literature exists is limited to the larger cities such as Toronto (Wilson, 2002, 2006) as well as Montreal and Ottawa (Olaveson, 2004b; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). It is to this paucity of research on the Canadian rave scene, and on modern iterations of raves in general, that my research will attend, questioning whether the utopian realities of early rave can be found in present-day rebirthings of the movement in Halifax.

Many scholars have been dismissive of raving's political and social potential, they relegate raving to a practice of hedonistic deviance and meaningless escapism (Knutagard, 1996; Melechi, 1993; Redhead, 1993, 1995; Reynolds, 1999; Rietveld, 1993). However, I will focus here on the literature which sees rave as meaningful, as recent literature is in agreement on the fact that raves have meaning for their attendees beyond mere hedonism (T. Anderson, 2009; T. L. Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007; Bennett, 1999; Malbon, 1999; Olaveson, 2004b; Riley et al., 2010; St John, 2004c, 2004a, 2004b; St John Graham, 2009; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Wilson, 2002, 2006). The meanings I focus on in this literature review, and this thesis more broadly, are threefold. Firstly, I attend to the meaning of "the community" in raving, looking at the ways other scholars have found ravers define their community. Then, I elucidate scholarship on collective effervescence, and consequently scholars that have used this – or similar concepts – to argue that raves could be viewed as a form of religion. Subsequently, I offer perspectives of scholars who have argued that raving is an act of political participation. Finally, I trace the literature on therapeutic culture and come to the conclusion that it has clear applicability to raving, but research on raving has not yet adequately – if at all – taken it into account, a task which this thesis hopes to accomplish.

Community and Collective Identity

My research, being geographically bounded in Halifax and focused on the culture around a select few recurring events, will analyze this local 'scene' (T. Anderson, 2009) as a social group with a distinct culture. Rave culture is routinely touted to be very accepting (Olaveson, 2004b) as the 'PLUR' ethos mentioned above would suggest. As Weir (2000, p.1844) noted, often raves were places where societal misfits could find refuge. This might be why previous studies of rave culture did not pay much attention to what defines in-group membership, but some researchers have documented delineations of scene-insiders and scene-outsiders.

Both Tammy Anderson (2009) and McKenzie Wark (2023) have offered typologies of ravers, delineating insiders and outsiders. Separating rave-scene-insiders into categories such as “loyalists” (T. Anderson, 2009; p. 56) or specifying rave-scene-outsiders as “punishers” (Wark, 2023; p.92-93). While these types all included certain behaviors, their underlying similarity was always in the intention of the individual. For example, Wark’s (2023) delineation of insider versus outsider has to do with whether or not someone *needs* to rave.

The above are all ideal types (Weber, 1994) in that while faithful versions of them may be difficult to find empirically, they are a tool we can use to make sense of the confusions of reality. Indeed, participants’ implicit nods to insiders and outsiders were often contradictory, and also deviated from the ideal types presented by scholars such as Wark (2023) and Anderson (2009). While my research confirmed that there were demarcations of insiders and outsiders, these were based on parameters that are, as I will argue further below, culturally specific to this moment in the Halifax rave scene.

Transformational Connection

Durkheim (1995b) argues that a group of people gathering together can be a “powerful stimulant” (p. 218). They offer a contrast to the “dispersed state” in which people find themselves which makes everyday life “monotonous, slack and humdrum” (p. 217). Furthermore, gatherings of people, when they become excited, can reach a state of *collective effervescence*. Durkheim thought that this state could progress to such an intensity that it could evoke “outlandish behavior” (p. 218).

Whereas most scholars saw collective effervescence as something reserved for special circumstances—such as the whole community gathering after a period of dispersal – Randall Collins (2004) maintains that collective effervescence can be experienced in everyday interactions as well. Collins argues that there is a co-creation of collective effervescence, that a shared experience between two or

more people can intensify into a state of “heightened intersubjectivity” (p.35). Collins outlines four “ritual ingredients”, which are required for the state to take place and four “ritual outcomes” (p.48) which result from the state being experienced. The ritual ingredients include group assembly, barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention and shared mood. The results of the experience are group solidarity, emotional energy in the individual, symbols or sacred objects and standards of morality. Collins’s work adeptly builds on Durkheim’s concept to more closely define the way that collective effervescence initiates and the effect it has on a given group.

Sébastien Tutenges (2023) further developed our understanding of collective effervescence in a recent book on young people’s practices of intoxication. Whereas Collins developed a framework for understanding the commencement and consequences of collective effervescence, Tutenges focused on the very experience of effervescence. In doing so, he attended to what is a surprising paucity of research on the phenomena itself. Tutenges’ phenomenological approach to the study of collective effervescence outlined five elements of the experience: 1) A feeling of “connectedness”, a feeling of being part of a common group, 2) Intense emotions which “carr[y] people outside of themselves” (p. 6), 3) transgressive urges, the desire to transgress social boundaries, 4) these energies being actively channeled into symbols, and 5) the experience elicits feelings of “purpose, vitality and solidarity that [make] life worth living” (p. 6).

Durkheim’s theory of collective effervescence has been judiciously applied to the rave dance floor to explain the sensations of collective dancing, typically in an altered state of consciousness (Malbon, 1999; Olaveson, 2004b; St John, 2004c, 2004a; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). Takahashi and Olaveson (2003) use an experiential anthropological approach to describe raving as consisting of seven themes: “connectedness, embodiment, altered states of consciousness, spirituality, personal transformation, utopian models of society and neotribalism” (pg. 72). Many of their participants characterized their

experiences of rave as religious or spiritual. Takahashi and Olaveson conclude that the seven themes of rave listed above are all core elements of new religious movements, and therefore argue for studying rave as such a movement (pg. 90). Methodologically, they argue that anything less than an experiential anthropological method will produce only a superfluous analysis of raves' fundamental aspects. Takahashi and Olaveson's work is part of a wide ranging body of scholarship that uses the lenses of religion and spirituality as ways to understand raving (Fatone, 2004; François Gauthier, 2004; Fritz, 1999; Hutson, 2000; Olaveson, 2004a; Partridge, 2006; St John, 2004b; Sylvan, 2013; Tramacchi, 2000b, 2000a).

This thesis takes a step back from the foregoing literature to better understand the experience of collective effervescence when raving and the way participants make sense of this experience. I will detail below, Tutenges' framework proved the most useful for analyzing not only the stories of my interviewees, but also my experiences in the field. I also found some value in the scholarship on political participation, and upon returning to the library after fieldwork, on therapeutic culture.

Covert Political Resistance

Many scholars who have written on rave as resistance or at the very least, political participation, draw on De Certeau, who argues that popular culture, formed in resistance to power, is continually changing to avoid being engulfed by elites but that this resistance is rarely overt (de Certeau, 1984). A crucial element of de Certeau's thinking for the following scholars' work is that place is critical to resistance, that finding space "outside of the practices of domination" (Pile, 1997, pg. 15) is in itself resistance.

Building on De Certeau, Angela McRobbie (1994) applied them to rave dance floors in Britain, looking at resistance as enacted through a "mundane" (pg.162) level of everyday practices. McRobbie notes, for example, the explicit lack of an "aggressive" political agenda as could be seen in earlier punk subcultures (McRobbie, 1994, pg. 168). This lack of agenda has been criticized by some scholars as

emblematic of the rave scene's mindlessness and lack of meaning (Thornton, 1996) but others took up McRobbie's ideas more favorably. Writing years later, Maria Pini (2001) applied McRobbie's perspectives to a study of women in the club and rave scene. Elsewhere, Pini (1997) notes that raves were spaces where physical and emotional pleasure could be openly shown and yet there was a lack of a patriarchal eroticization of the space (pg. 167); in other words, Pini urged us to understand raves as spaces where typical social norms and patterns are subverted, a notion other scholars support (Bennet, 2001; Bennet & Peterson, 2004; Bennett, 1999, 2002; Greener & Hollands, 2006; Riley et al., 2010; St John, 2004c, 2004b; St John Graham, 2009; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Wilson, 2002, 2006; see Thornton, 1996 for an exception).

Ben Malbon's work on clubbing (1999), mentioned earlier, also built on de Certeau and McRobbie to argue that his own concept of playful vitality (see below) could be resistance. While adopting de Certeau's ideas of resistance as somewhat covert, he rejects the dualism of power and resistance or less powerful vs. powerful (pg. 147), instead building on Steve Pile's conceptions of power. In this vein, the resistance we are discussing is in relationship not only with traditional authority, but also with a different, non-conventional conception of power, one which sees power in experience, perhaps even elements of participants' own identities (Pile, 1997, pg. 3).

Maffesoli's neo-tribal sociality also provides an important base for Malbon's thinking. Maffesoli's theory (1996) is a concept of how everyday life has changed in our post-modern reality. No longer are we united under dominant western institutions; we are now dispersed into micro groups he calls "neo-tribes", which are significantly more fluid than the traditional notion of a tribe. Coherence of neo-tribes is achieved by his collective rituals, and the "Dionysian Principle" in which ecstatic, communal celebrations create a quasi-sacred aura around the temporary neo-tribe (Maffesoli, 1996; Michael Gardiner, 1997). The energy, micro-power and vitality that this experience brings forth is referred to by Maffesoli as

puissance, and it is from this notion of *puissance* that Malbon's more specific and applicable concept of *vitality* emerges.

Malbon's notion of *playful vitality*, it is the alternate world ordering and imaginings that play enables (1999, pg. 147) which can be seen resistance. Malbon's ideas of resistance are, however, limited to the individual, to ideas of clubbing as resistance through enabling different conceptions of self (pg. 146). Others have followed similar lines of thinking but conclude that these imaginings are a group experience, a potential group utopian imagining. Graham St John (2004c) describes the "rave imaginary" (pg. 24) as discourses of consciousness expansion and metamorphosis which take place in the (hetero)utopian space that St John conceptualized the rave to be. He describes this as "catalyzing new self and social fictions" (2004c, pg. 40). That is, raves can be seen as a "difference engine" (pg. 40) enticing the imagining of alternatives to current hegemonic structures and discourses.

Wilson (2002, 2006) draws from Malbon and Maffesoli to investigate the political potential of rave, specifically in the Canadian context. Through his ethnographic work on raves in Toronto, he concluded raves weren't political, noting that they don't have a social change agenda. This contrasted Greener and Hollands' work around the same time, who through a qualitative survey of "psy-trance" (a subgenre of electronic dance music) enthusiasts concluded that living the lifestyle surrounding psy-trance has a social change agenda, the lifestyle itself being a potential tool for social change (2006).

Leaning heavily on Maffesoli's theory, Riley, Griffin and Morey argue that Wilson's insufficient application of the theory of neo-tribal sociality is the reason for his conclusion that raving cannot be seen as political (Riley et al., 2010). They contest the idea that having a political change agenda is a critical element of political participation, drawing on scholars who have argued for leisure as political participation (Giddens, 1964, 1991; Harris, 2001; Harris et al., 2001). Through a two-year study on social and political identities related to electronic dance music, they argue that by engaging directly with

institutions of power, we run into the problem of not only validating the existence of such institutions, but also ordering ourselves into a subordinate position to them (Harris, 2001 quoted in Riley et al., 2010, pg. 347). A solution that they propose to this problem is to “create one’s own spaces in which to live out alternative values, shifting political participation to the ‘everyday’ individual or informal group level” (Riley et al., 2010, pg. 347). We can hear the echoes of de Certeau (1984), McRobbie (1993, 1994), Malbon (1999) and St John (2004c) in this assertion. It is along these lines that leisure and raving are argued to become political participation, through existence outside of the dominant systems of power.

My thesis responds to Wilson’s plea for more research on the unique Canadian raving reality and takes into consideration the fact that the Canadian rave scene emerged emulating the international phenomenon, instead of organically out of social dysphoria in Canada (Wilson, 2002, 2006). Building on Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010), and their more complex application of neo-tribal sociality, I consider whether or not simply partaking in leisure activities could be political participation and whether this seems to be the case for Halifax ravers.

Therapeutic Culture

From the early 19th century to the present day, we have witnessed the emergence of psychotherapy and psychology as some of the most culturally defining disciplines of our time. One of the first scholars to write on the effects of these disciplines on society was Philip Rieff, in a book titled “The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of faith after Freud” (Rieff, 1966). Rieff argued that the traditional authority of religion had been supplanted by therapeutic ideas promoting personal well-being and happiness. Maintaining that these had become ends in themselves, Rieff saw therapeutic culture as drawing attention away from the public sphere and towards the self, decreasing individuals’ contributions to society.

Christopher Lasch continued this line of thinking with his own book (1979) in which he also maintains that a therapeutic culture has led to a swelling obsession with the self, and, by extension, a disengagement with politics in favor of a concentration inward. Similar critiques have been raised by more recent scholars such as Nikolas Rose (1996) and Frank Furedi (2004), the latter adding that therapeutic culture tends to individualize problems which are, in fact, social. Such critiques of therapeutic culture, while perhaps justified, tend to gloss over not only social complexity, but also individual agency in selectively applying therapeutic culture to their lives (Eramian et al., 2023). Scholars such as Robert Bellah (1985) and Eva Illouz (2008), disagree with the sweeping statements offered by Rieff, Lasch and Furedi, instead reasoning that individuals can navigate commitments to self and commitments to others. In my research, the participants were clearly navigating a contradictory task of self-focus at raves, while also contributing the collective experience.

Seeing therapeutic culture in my data entailed analyzing participants' interpretations of their experiences, to discern whether they drew on therapeutic cultural resources (Swidler, 2001, p. 25) to explicate the effects of those experiences. Swidler views culture as set of resources - symbols, traditions and rituals - which people draw on to guide their actions and interpretations of the world. Thus, therapeutic culture can be seen as a set of cultural resources derived from the psy-discourses (Rose, 1996), which people can draw on to interpret their lived experiences. In my thesis, I maintain that these resources helped participants make sense of their experiences in the rave environment, something previous literature on raves has not addressed, tending instead to focus on raves' healing potential (Hutson, 2000; Olaveson, 2004a), rather than the cultural discourse participants draw on to come to such a conclusion.

Raving Literature, in sum.

Since the turn of the century, there has been a drastic decline in the amount of scholarly study of raving as a cultural practice. This may be related to the commonly agreed upon opinion that 'raves' in their traditional form are largely a bygone practice, either replaced by or merged with contemporary club culture (T. Anderson, 2009; T. L. Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007; Bennet, 2001; Malbon, 1999; Thornton, 1996). Therefore, literature has focused more on club and other nightlife. The rave scene that my research focusses on, however, seems to meet the same criteria that Anderson & Kavanaugh (2007) outline for an event to be an 'authentic' rave, and therefore necessitates a contemporary application of the concepts and theories that were being used to understand raves during their peak, in the mid-1990s. Notably the majority of the literature on raving took place about twenty years ago, in the US and UK. Whether the raves of today, and of Halifax specifically, take on the same meanings as raves of the US and UK in the nineties and early 21st century, is a central question of this dissertation. Previous scholars have argued both that raving is 'merely' hedonistic and others have argued that it is in fact an act of political participation. This thesis seeks to place ravers and their experience within the webs of present-day therapeutic culture to understand how this pleasurable experience or connectedness is made sense of by those who engage in it.

While I sought to understand the meanings of raving to ravers in Halifax, these meanings did not fit neatly into one of the categories outlined here. I believe that the different theories outlined above were in complex conversation with one another, and it is simply the cadence and tone of these conversations in that I hoped to tease out.

Methods

I attended to my research questions through an ethnographic method. Ethnographic methods have been widely used by researchers studying raving (T. Anderson, 2009; Fritz, 1999; Malbon, 1999;

Olaveson, 2004a; St John Graham, 2009; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Wilson, 2006). I used a mixture of semi-structured interviews with participants and ethnographic observation at raves.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

The first method I used was semi-structured interviewing. Such interviews have also been used by many researchers looking at the subject of raving (T. Anderson, 2009; Malbon, 1999; Wilson, 2006), and will allow me to better understand not only my own experience of raving, but participants' subjective experiences at raves. I interviewed only those who see themselves as "regular ravers", and my definition of this was anyone who self-identified as such and has attended more than one of the raves on which this project is focused. My interviewees were recruited through social media posts (see appendix A) on the social media account of one of the rave organizers. Interviews focused on many topics surrounding the rave experience, for example how the participant began raving and what keeps them coming back, I also asked about the subjective experience on the dance floor (see appendix B for in-depth interview guide).

Raving Observations and Sensory Ethnography

I used observation at raves as a method, following the experiential anthropology which is outlined by Takahashi and Olaveson (2003), who argue it is crucial to understanding what raves mean to their interlocutors. They argue this method is critical in part because the activity of raving is a highly embodied one (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003, pp.73-74), therefore understanding raving is not seen as something that can be done by merely speaking about it. It's widely understood by scholars of raves that trying to understand it "vicariously" is ineffective (Fritz, 1999, p.199). This is why my study of raving necessarily included attending raves. The ethnographic method I engaged in can be further specified as sensory ethnography, in that it sought "to know places in other people's worlds that are similar to how they are

known by those people” (Pink, 2015, p. 26). By placing myself in the environments that my participants spoke about, I sought a clearer understanding of “what their sensory and embodied experience involves” (Pink, 2015, p. 26). In my research, I understood that the physical experience was not something to be reflected on by the mind, but itself a source of embodied knowledge which contributed to my understandings of participants’ experiences.

I attended six rave events during the course of my research (see appendix D). Four of these were underground raves, and two were commercial events at licensed establishments. Following the example set by Anderson in her long-term ethnographic study of raving (2009), during these events I paid particular attention to the setting, the demographics and behaviors of those present. In addition to this, I engaged as fully as possible with the practice of raving and dancing, hoping to facilitate a “personal engagement and embodied knowing” (Pink, 2015, p. 50) as informed by the approach of sensory ethnography. For two events I completed detailed field notes after the fact, but for the rest I simply allowed them to contribute to my understandings of participants’ experiences.

Data Analysis

I analyzed my data using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVIVO. I used an inductive coding method, allowing themes to emerge from in depth reading of my transcripts and notes. As Kristin Luker explains in her book, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences* (2008), these codes emerged when I reached a point where I was seeing similar things in all of my interviews. From there, I developed sub-codes and built my analysis from these codes. Andersen (2009), specifically regarding raving, worked in a similar way, writing extensive interview notes and fieldnotes, then coding them. She emphasized the importance of analyzing your data throughout the data collection phase. I approached my data collection and analysis through coding from a grounded theory approach, emphasizing the “constant comparison of data to elaborate and extend” the codes I use (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

Ethical Concerns

My research didn't pose any greater risk to participants than they already experienced in attending raves. It actually posed less risk than attending the raves, since the interviews were completely anonymized, and I did not collect names or identifiable information from participants. Although illicit drug use occasionally came up over the course of the interviews, this was focused on the experience of being on the drug, which, in itself, is not illegal. Furthermore, I asked for verbal consent instead of written (see appendix C), so as to protect any participant from connection to potential illicit activities. Observations at the raves never contained any identifiable information either.

Analysis / Findings

My interviews revealed three striking findings. First, all interview participants implicitly delineated rave community in-group members and outsiders based on moral judgments about individuals' intentions, rather than their identities. This always remained implicit, likely due to the popular idea among my participants that raves are places of radical acceptance. Second, interviewees' perspectives and experiences suggest that the community seeks to create and experience moments of collective effervescences at raves, a phenomenon I interpret using Tutenges' (2023) phenomenological perspective. Finally, participants made sense of these experiences of effervescence through the lens of *The Therapeutic*, that is, various idioms and practices that have diffused into popular culture from the psy-professions (Eramian et al., 2023). This mode of making sense of their experiences seemed to supplant ideas of political participation, replacing them with ideas of personal growth.

The Moral Raver versus the Immoral Raver

Participants *implicitly* delineated between what they thought were moral raving practices and those they thought were immoral. When this theme emerged in the data, my first instinct was that

interviewees were indirectly defining what community membership was based on, implying that those who engaged in the practices of an immoral raver were not part of the rave community. However, no participants sought to actively exclude those who engaged in these practices. People who engaged in the practices of the immoral raver appeared not to be ostracized from the rave community, but there were clear moral judgements on the part of the participants.

I offer these types (M. Weber, 1994) to understand the complex webs of morality in which ravers find themselves. It is likely that you would not find a completely “moral raver” or completely “immoral raver”, these are merely ideal types which help us understand the morality at work in this community. Moral ravers were defined by an accepting attitude, an intention to contribute to the collective experience and a deep enjoyment of dancing and listening to EDM music. This was reflected in practices such as choosing drugs which increased empathy, caring for other ravers and seeking to contribute to the energy of the collective. Immoral ravers were defined by goals of sexual conquest, drug selection which boosted ego and the centrality of the self, and no desire to contribute to the collective experience. Here, I further define the practices of the moral and immoral raver, by outlining differing intentions and attitudes of acceptance.

Intentions became a clear distinguisher between moral ravers and immoral ravers. All my participants talked about contributing to the collective experience of everyone at the rave as an important intention. This was expressed in many terms, for example a culture of collective care, contributing to other’s dancing experience and through drug selection.

The culture of collective care was touched on by all interviewees. The idea that “people are extra caring for one another at raves more than just a normal show” (Julie, raver in her late 20s) is widespread throughout the Halifax rave community. Nine of my participants explicitly noted how people at raves are more likely to stop and help someone “having a bad time” at a rave. Nyx explained that while contributing

to the collective experience wasn't his primary intention, it was one of them: "It's nice to know that you're having a great time and that's also contributing to other people having a good time." This was echoed by Bennet, a raver and DJ in his late 20s, who talks about the ability of people having a great time around you to contribute to having a great time yourself:

Say you're not, like, completely sold on going out that night. But maybe you go there and everyone's just like having such an awesome time. That it might give you the jolt that you need to kind of be on the same page as everyone else.

There was an awareness amongst participants that their enjoyment of the night is contributing to the enjoyment of the whole, and that this was placed within a philosophy of caring for one another.

We can also analyze opinions on drug selection to understand how contributing to the whole is valued. Four participants explicitly devalued cocaine as a rave drug. This might come as a surprise to those who view raves as spaces of purely hedonistic drug consumption, but the sentiment is a logical one when placed within the wider ethos of contributing to the collective. Consider Sam's opinions on using cocaine at raves:

Coke makes you completely unempathetic. And, like, you can't think about another person's experience if you're on coke because you're just [...] in a world where no one else exists and other people's experiences are so, like inferior to yours.

Cocaine, and those who take it, were not considered to be living the values and ethos of the community. Rather, drugs such as "Molly" (MDMA) were more highly valued *because* of their ability to make their consumers more likely to contribute to the collective. After explaining how alcohol makes people more aggressive, Peter used MDMA as an example of the kind of substance that fits better at a rave:

And the effects that it has on you are very different than alcohol and usually much more positive way. I never known anyone that beat the shit out of anybody when they were high on M. I don't think it's ever happened... at least not on my watch. [the combination of Molly and trance-like music] creates whole like, hive mind feels kind of everyone's in that same kind of rhythm.

Although it was reiterated to me by seven participants that they have raved sober and that this is also widespread, the sentiment that there were drugs which were more acceptable than others at raves were echoed by all participants. There appeared to be a hierarchy of drugs based on how much they will make the user feel connected to the collective. MDMA and psilocybin (magic mushrooms) usually topped the hierarchy, with alcohol and cocaine the most dismissed by participants as not eliciting the correct behavior or mindset for raves. Indeed, Weir (2000) and Weber (1999) both similarly found that alcohol use at Canadian raves is low, generally because of the aggression it can create. In the case of the Halifax underground rave scene, we can place this hierarchy of substances within the context of participants valuing an intention to contribute to the collective over an intention to privilege the self.

We can also perceive this value of contributing to the collective expressed through my participants' insistence that sexual conquest was not a part of rave culture the same way it is in clubbing culture or other forms of nightlife. People whose intentions were sexual in any way were disparaged as having "the wrong intentions". This ranged from those committing sexual assault to those simply trying to "find someone to go home with".

*Like you definitely see people are out there just to like hook up or whatever. And it's like, I've got nothing against wanting to hook up. It's just to me, that's not really what the rave scene is about. Like it's not about like ogling people on the dance floor or like, you know, a lot of guys just do this like, floating and around thing that's like, just makes me feel uncomfortable – **Noah***

*If you go there with an intention to try to find someone to go home with, people will kind of be able to tell, even without like words because you move through space differently when you're acting like that. I think it's easier to tell if someone's kind of on the prowl. Rather than like, just say to dance and have fun. – **Nyx***

Eight out of my ten participants independently brought up a lack of courting culture in the rave scene. Noting that while such behavior wasn't entirely absent at raves, they didn't view people with those intentions as there for the right reasons, implicitly creating a moral judgement that this behavior was wrong at raves.

*I feel like people aren't... In those sorts of situations like aren't as willing to like, for lack of a better word, like get fucked by the beat, like submit to the beat and just like dance, they're more kind of worried about like, oh, do I look okay for this girl? I want to have sex with like, who I wanted to take home or whatever – **Sam***

Sam's thoughts on this issue reflect a common theme, that the individual is expected to 'submit' themselves to the higher power that is the music and the collective experience of dancing. The expected contribution to the collective is nothing less than the self. The moral raver is considered to prioritize dancing and the experience of the collective over sexual conquest and substances which strengthen the ego.

Despite spending some of their interview offering judgments on immoral raving practices, interviewees described the rave scene in Halifax as "free of any sort of judgment", "a place to just be free and be a freak [...] a safe haven". They described it as "a radically inclusive environment", "a place for your expression and acceptance". When telling me about one of the things that kept bringing her back to raves, Naomi said "just the open acceptance of all genders all sexual orientations". Sam, a queer-identifying raver said that in his experience at Halifax raves, "I haven't been ostracized I guess, and it feels like it's for the most part an okay place for queer and trans people to be."

While the data thus far may seem to be contradictory – with raves described as inclusive and judgment-free, but ravers definitely having a sense of moral and immoral raving—upon close examination it becomes clear that morality of ravers was not based on a "type" of person in terms of appearance or identity, rather morality was based on *intentions*. This is summarized well by Bennet:

I don't think it's more so like the right type of person I think it's more of like mindset or just like a person has to be like kind of accepting of others and non- judgmental. I think you can run into like, you know, people who might at first glance you might be like, "Oh, this guy is like a gym bro" or something, or you know, this other person looks like super alternative [...] but like if they bring the same thing to the table mentally and like their vibe you know, I think that's the most important thing.

People who rave in order to appreciate the music, to dance, to connect with a collective, while accepting all types of identities were considered moral ravers. On the contrary, those who were there for personal gain, for sexual conquest or inflation of their own ego were immoral ravers. And yet, due to this distinction being based on (mostly) invisible elements such as intention and acceptance of others, an immoral raver is not ostracized from the rave community. Thus, raves are still inclusive because anyone can, in theory, adopt and maintain the 'right' intentions.

My experiences in the field led me to believe that my participants' perceptions of rave-insiders and outsiders deviated from the clear-cut typology put forward by Anderson (2009) and Wark (2023). Immoral ravers are still part of the rave scene, and therefore my findings differed slightly from those of Wark and Anderson. The interviewees didn't deem anyone participating in these practices as an outsider of the scene per se, merely labelled them as having the "wrong intentions" (Sam).

A mutual focus of attention is a key factor contributing to the creation of collective effervescence (Collins, 2004, p.48). Perhaps this is why the morality of ravers was so present in my interviews. The more ravers are present with similar intentions, and ideas of morality, the more likely collective effervescence to emerge. Indeed, Tutenges (2023, p. 55) explicitly states that collective effervescence can be exclusive, accessible only to a distinct in-group. While the interviewees do not distinguish immoral ravers as an outgroup, they may be less likely to have access to the experience of collective effervescence analyzed below.

Raving Revelry

Moral raving practices are likely important because they focus the intentions of the gathered group, perhaps allowing collective effervescence to occur. Tutenges' reading of collective effervescence provides a useful framework through which to analyze the experiences of my participants. Based on a phenomenological study of collective effervescence, he argues that there are 5 main elements of the

experience of collective effervescence: unity, intensity, transgression, symbolization, and revitalization (Tutenges, 2023). Below, I analyze my interviewees experiences of each of these elements to argue that they are seeking out experiences of collective effervescence by attending raves

Being in community

Tutenges' (2023) first "experiential building block" (p. 23) of collective effervescence is unity, which he defines as "connecting and coalescing with other people" (p. 23). Throughout my fieldwork, I heard a chorus of "*community*". My participants fundamentally saw themselves as part of a collective of people who enjoyed raving. One participant described the importance of community to the experience of raving:

"There's a lot of, like, social cohesion that you can find in a space and on a dance floor. [...] I think community is the biggest aspect of things. Like, you could have the coolest looking venue or like, some crazy DJs or, like, crazy music and stuff but the one thing that can really ruin it is a sour crowd." - **Bennet, raver and DJ in his late 20s.**

Bennet describes the feeling of being in community as something that can make or break the experience of attending a rave. Another raver told me about his perceptions of unity within the Halifax rave scene:

You see the same people going on the same roller coaster weekend after weekend and going "Woaaa" together like it's...it is very unifying. The collective experience definitely... Yeah, it's unifying." – **Caleb, Raver and DJ in his early 40s.**

Caleb is expressing the feeling of community that emerges from experiencing the highs and the lows of a rave together with fellow ravers. Experiencing the music together is a unifying experience. Below, David describes finding what he felt was "[his] community", after finally finding a place to listen to a genre of music he liked alongside other people who shared his appreciation for it.

For the first time I'm with all the people that listen to the same music as me. Because there's a lot of music that is just not commonly played publicly that you hear at raves. Stuff that I'd be listening

to on my own, with nobody to share with. Now, all of a sudden, we're all in the same place. – David, raver in his late 20s.

Durkheim wrote about the power of simply being gathered and existing in community (1994, p.183). He wrote that this could give people “a quality of life to a degree unknown to them as individuals” (p.183). The experience of “being together and doing things together” (2023, p.50) is seen by Tutenges to be a key element of collective effervescence. This being and doing together is an autotelic phenomenon, that is, it is simply enjoyable for its own sake and not because it contributes to any larger goal in life.

So, it's important because it's medicinal, and community, dancing within community sharing a rhythm in a room of sweaty people, the endorphins and just the collective energy, the field of energy...it's medicinal. – Naomi, a raver in her late 30s.

First and foremost, it feels so good. I think it's almost indescribable. The feeling of dancing at a rave. [...] Dancing with other people and like being able to feel like, really intense, nonsexual intimacy with sometimes, like, 50 people in a room that are all feeling the exact same thing as you at the exact same time. And that is... I find that really, really special. And just like, it's so beautiful to share that experience with so many people at once. – Sam, a raver in his 20s.

Descriptions like this show that my participants undoubtedly experienced feelings of unity at raves with their fellow ravers and perceived community members and that, as Tutenges (2023) says, their “exploits are collective; they are performed with, for, and because of the group” (p. 63). My findings also align with Olaveson’s (2004) study in central Canada, which found that ravers experience feelings of “connectedness”.

Emotional Intensity

The second building block to which we must attend is that of emotional intensity, “an abundance of engrossing conversations, lively movements, strong sensations and vivid emotions” (Tutenges, 2023, p. 23). During my fieldwork, I learned that raves are spaces of intense emotion. One

interviewee described “getting chills”, being “so happy” and that is was a “powerful experience”. Others used terms like “in heaven” and “more at home than usual”. One participant describes:

The highs were also really high, because you're... when you're in a space with that many people who are sharing your energy, and so excited, then it's like, it's like a hashtag high on life moment. And it can just be really beautiful to connect with whoever and just like feel the music so loud all around your body – Sam.

Most participant expressed that their emotional states were intensified at raves, in comparison to their everyday lives. Quotes such as those of the participants above illustrate the magnitude of this emotional high that is available in the right circumstances at a rave.

Tutenges believes that the revelers in his study did not just happen to experience intense emotions, but rather were *in search of* a level of emotional intensity in their night life. He discusses varying degrees of intensity. High intensity experiences are defined as “experiences that involve a strong emotional involvement in the perception of or participation in events” (p.64). My finding that participants had experiences of extreme emotional intensity at raves, is supported by adjacent literature. For example, Olaveson (2004b) thinks the experience of unity at a rave is an ‘intensely emotional one’ (p. 91).

Transgressive Connection

The element of collective effervescence that Tutenges (2023) terms “transgression” (p. 23), refers to changes in an individual’s subjectivity which may cause them to think, feel and act differently. The term transgression encompasses an attitude of being more open to “risk taking, deviance or crime” (p.23). The most obvious form of transgression that took place at the raves I studied was the consumption of illicit substances. I have already discussed the hierarchy of substance use that exists within the rave community, but I argue here that a different form of transgression takes place in the Halifax rave scene; a transgression I term *transgressive connection*. Consider these quotes from my interviewees:

[At a rave] it's so much easier to connect and sometimes you're gonna get right into it, like, some people will get into it. Talk about their, like, life experiences. [...] you're like well, I guess I

can talk about this too, if I want to. Like, it feels more... it's more of an open environment to be able to have conversations you wouldn't normally. – Quinn

[Something that's normal at a rave is] like, probably just having a deep conversation with this random person that you might like meet in the hall or like in a side room or something. – Bennet

Only two of my interviewees brought up deep conversations with strangers as a normal element of raving, but I can confirm from my experiences in the field that this is a known occurrence in the community. For example, at one rave I attended, two friends emerged from a side room after being in there for an extended period. One of them came over and looked at me, eyes wide. She let out a sigh and said, "Peter and I just soul-bonded". She proceeded to explain how they had just unpacked many of each other's past "traumas". Discussing deeply embedded traumas or complex life stories may not seem like a typical night life experience. Since raves are places of heightened emotions, it seems that engaging in deeper conversations with both friends and strangers is more acceptable, transgressing social norms at play in non-rave environments which may limit intense connection in every day life.

This transgressive connection may not be limited to the socializing on the sidelines however. My participants often described a feeling of intense intimacy with strangers on the dance floor as well.

There are times it's with complete strangers, we'll lock eyes and then we'll like, we'll dance close to each other and like, we don't, I don't know who the other person is, but we're just we're just like building off one another's energy and the other's like and just like creating such a positive interaction through dancing, like no words need to be said because we both know we appreciate this music and we appreciate what we're doing and that for me is so fulfilling. Because it's like, we don't need to speak, we don't need to, like have a conversation, we just have this, like, this understanding between each other that like dancing in a good time, we're building up one another and I love that. – Quinn

Dancing with other people and like being able to feel like, really intense, like non-sexual intimacy with sometimes, like, 50 people in a room that are all like, feeling the exact same thing as you at the exact same time. And that is, I find that really, really special. And just like, it's so beautiful to share that experience with so many people at once. – Sam

This transgressive connection is also shared on the dance floor, with feelings of intimacy that can spread to fellow dancers. This is a key difference between the alcohol-imbued revelry that Tutenges discusses and the rave scene in Halifax. The alcohol-infused transgressions he recounts (for example stealing, being disrespectful or initiating violent encounters) harbor a lot more danger than, say, being a lot more open to hugs. One participant explained the difference between the two:

The party drugs are a big part of that scene. And the effects that it has on you are very different than alcohol and usually much more positive way. I never known anyone that beat the shit out of anybody when they were high on M. I don't think it's ever happened... at least not on my watch.[...] Maybe giving an aggressive massage? – Peter

MDMA consumption leads its users to feel more compassionate and empathetic, engaging in activities such as the “cuddle puddle”, a platonic form of intimacy where a small group of people cuddle together (Anderson, 2009; p.29). On a broader scale, rave culture owes much of its ethos and behavioral norms to the mentality brought on by MDMA (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008), hence the norm of deeper conversations and intense connection possible at raves. The question becomes, is the fact that these behaviors still take place today, so long after the advent of rave-culture, still a product of the drugs? Or could this transgressive connection simply be a norm that the environment elicits on its own?

There is evidence in my interview data to suggest that, indeed, drugs are no longer necessary to achieve this transgressive connection. As mentioned above, sober raving or raving with very little inebriation, while not necessarily the norm, was not at all stigmatized and occasionally practiced by 7 of the 10 participants. Consider the following excerpts from my interviews:

You know, my friends asked me like, how do you stay up all night? Are you taking lots of drugs? And I'm like, actually, no, like, I might smoke some weed here and there. But if I go into a room, and the music is stimulating, I have infinite energy until the music stops. – Caleb

I've gone sober too like, because over time, like, I thought maybe it's just like, the substance I'm thinking they're, like, elevating. But no, it's like, but it's, it can be that and

also the environment that just, like, lifts me up. And I find like, I, it doesn't matter whether I'm a substance or not, I feel safe, and I feel happy. – Quinn

As evidenced by Quinn's quote, people expressed having the similar experiences of joy and unity at raves when they went sober. Takahashi (2003) explained this as the effects of "neural tuning": essentially, the nervous system, after having experienced an altered state of consciousness brought on by a substance such as MDMA, in tandem with so-called "drivers" (p.153) such as the lights and music of a rave, is more likely to bring on that same experience when the individual once again experiences those drivers. This means that people could experience a similar "high" just from the environment of a rave, without drug consumption. It is beyond the scope of this research to determine whether or not participants experienced this phenomenon, but it would be an interesting explanation for sobriety's rising popularity in the rave scene.

I would be remiss here to not talk about the specificity of the Halifax underground rave scene when it comes to this topic. In my fieldwork, the transgressions I observed most were transgressions in terms of gender norms, heteronormativity and social norms. In the six different events I attended, I didn't once observe violence or other behaviors which would be considered grossly disrespectful. Despite the fact that, as I will continue to argue, people regularly experienced collective effervescence at these events, rarely did this shift into the danger of "outlandish behavior" (1995; p. 218) that Durkheim warned it could. I am unable to speak to this pattern at raves in other areas, and six events is not enough to prove a rule, by any means, but this observation was confirmed by interviewees, none of which reported violence at the raves I was profiling. However, it did seem that this lack of violence and danger wouldn't be applied to raves generally, just to this specific Halifax scene; interviewees like Naomi intimated that raves elsewhere were not as peaceful as those in Halifax. "I mean, our raves are mild," she said. "Our raves are mild, and they're definitely music centric. So I'm not mad about that."

In this section I argued that transgression exists in this rave scene in more ways than just illicit substance use. Instead, my participants experienced transgressive connection at raves, that is, levels of intimacy with friends and strangers that may not be within social norms outside of the rave space. I argued that this transgressive connection in the past was influenced by drug use, but that in this scene drugs are not necessary to experience transgressive connection, due to the existing culture allowing it.

Symbolization

Durkheim argued that symbols could be imbued with the special energy of the collective during effervescence, which could be held “perpetually alive and fresh” (Durkheim, 1995; p. 222) Symbolization of effervescent experiences can aid individuals in connecting with past effervescent experiences. Tutenges (2023) cites the stories his interlocutors tell of their nightlife antics as their way of collecting effervescent symbols. In my fieldwork, this came to light as the so-called ‘debrief’, the discussions with one’s friends post-rave where they shared stories of their personal experiences of the night.

I love the debrief, because also, I [...] love it when we all go on little, like quests, side missions. And my favorite thing is like hearing all like, everyone's side missions. It's so, so fun. – Quinn

Once the nights over, say we're all like staying at the same place we're gonna, like, stay up for, like, an hour or two and just chat about the night. – Bennet

Because you're, like, post catharsis in this like, afterglow of so much energy and if it was a good night, then you're like, filled with, like, love and community and this like, really, really warm feeling of a few who you're just around and like reminiscing the times that you just shared together. – Sam

My observations in the field confirmed these experiences. Often, when weather allowed, we would walk home from a rave, discussing events that had just transpired the whole way home. In discussing the events just passed, creating stories of their night, my interlocutors infused new life into their potentially effervescent experiences, bonding with their friends and re-living the euphoria of the night’s events. In this way, they crafted symbols of their effervescent experiences.

Revitalization

Durkheim (1995) wrote that after an experience of collective effervescence, its participants leave with more vitality for life,

“Not only because we have placed ourselves in contact with a higher source of energy, but also because our own capacities have been replenished through living, for a few moments, a life that is less tense, more at ease and freer” (p. 386)

The experience of collective effervescence has been argued throughout anthropological literature to be a necessary human experience, due to its invigorating qualities. Most of my interviewees expressed that they needed raving for their mental health, eight participants expressed similar sentiments to Sam, when he told me:

I think it's like some sort of mental catharsis because if you do imbibe in in any substances then you're like, having this like huge rush of dopamine and like incredibly intense, intimate feelings with yourself and with others so like it aren't part of the norm. So just like that, that break from monotony can be really rewarding and like kind of allow you to get back to monotony and feel fine with it, I guess. Because you did have that. This kind of release of built up tension.

What participants expressed is a sense of renewal. A sense that they can go and face their everyday lives with more energy after the “cathartic,” “cleansing,” and “nourishing,” experience of a rave. Indeed, Durkheim’s original conception of collective effervescence was that individuals could emerge from the experience with new insights that one could apply to every day life (Durkheim, 1995b, p. 213). As Quinn’s experience demonstrates, participants are experiencing this element of collective effervescence as well.

The foregoing evidence of transgression, revitalization, symbolization, transgression, emotional intensity and feelings of unity supports the hypothesis that ravers in Halifax experience collective effervescence at raves, in ways that are shaped by the local context. But what also emerged in the interviews was the curious way participants made sense of their experiences. Specifically, instead of

mobilizing it into something political, as extant rave research suggests they might, they articulated collective effervescence in *therapeutic* language.

The Therapeutic Lens: How Ravers Make Sense of Effervescence

In this section, I argue that my participants made sense of their experiences of collective effervescence by drawing on *The Therapeutic*. That is, they used the “cultural resources”(Swidler, 2001; p.25) available to them, diffused into society from what Rose (1996) calls the ‘psy’ professions (psychotherapy, psychiatry etc.) to communicate their experiences and the role of this effervescence in their lives.

The therapeutic, that is “an assortment of idioms, ideals, and practices including authenticity, communication, self-knowledge/realization [...] and self-care” (Eramian et al., 2023), was widely discernable in my interviews. Each participant at some point drew from ideas of the therapeutic to explain their experience of raving during our interviews. I am detailing only a select few here to illustrate what was a trend without exception.

One example of the therapeutic attitude was Quinn’s interpretation that he learns things about himself while raving.

Like, it's amazing what you can discover about yourself, just like dancing to it, these beautiful beats and being in that environment being on your own and not like, I've learned so much about who I am through raving and through being in that environment, because I think that the ability to feel accepted and safe like has allowed me to dig deeper into myself.

He later detailed a story about a realization he had while dancing. He said that surrounded by so much acceptance, the only thing holding him back was himself. And with that, he realized that he hadn’t fully accepted himself. Quinn uses therapeutic idioms regarding self-knowledge to make sense of his experience that night. He is describing raves as, among other things, a means to self-improvement. Naomi

expressed similar experiences, noting that “you’ll learn things about yourself that you didn’t know” and “my agenda is to meet myself that night [...] but that can’t be done if it’s not for the collective.” These conceptions of self, that it exists in a way where one can come to get to know it better, is a direct result of the proliferation of psy-discourses into society. Illouz (2008) describes the process through which therapy’s goal has increasingly become “to help one realize one’s own authentic self” (p. 159). What’s interesting in Naomi’s case is that, for her, the therapeutic power of a rave lies in the collective.

A very similar example is that of Noah, who upon entering the rave scene began to question his sexuality, eventually leading him to realize he’s attracted to all genders and to come out to his family as a queer man.

*I think [raving] can help you find yourself. It helped me find myself. You know, I had an identity that society had assigned to me until I started going out dancing. [...] So I understand the power of accepting yourself and dare I even say like labels, labels not so much, but the language to put to your identity and who you are like, that's been so important to me. Because like otherwise, you're just like, you're whatever society tells you you are. – **Noah***

In this case, we can observe the therapeutic logic of the importance of self-realization and a journey towards living as – or finding – your “authentic” self, exposing similarly therapeutic notions of self-hood. Noah also explicitly cited his self-realizations as being owed to “the community” he found when he started raving, again pointing to a tension between self-focus and collective-focus at raves.

Eight participants directly referred to the experience of raving as therapeutic or cathartic in some way. In using this language, my participants were unknowingly drawing on therapeutic discourses to present the practice of raving as a therapeutic practice. Consider the following interview excerpts:

*I think it's also like, a form of release of some form of energy or the other, whether it is purely just physical energy of like some kind of spiritual or emotional energy. – **Nyx***

*If you have a good night at a rave it can be very cleansing. – **Bennet***

I work a really demanding job and to have the ability to go and release at the end of that week, and share with that music... it's so nourishing. – Naomi

The above participants are describing not only a release of tension, but a release of tension that leaves them feeling better afterwards. This is perceived as a therapeutic practice in itself, but it is also contributing to my participants "maximization of self-fulfillment" (Rose, 1996; p. 164).

The experience of collective effervescence is likely somewhat foreign to young people in an increasingly secular and atomized culture. I have argued here that my participants seek to experience collective effervescence at raves and that one way they make sense of this transformative experience, is through the lens of *the therapeutic*. In our interviews, all participants utilized the various cultural resources which the therapeutic provides, to explain their experiences at raves. In doing so, they pointed to the notion that "[p]leasure can no longer exist for pleasure's sake and pleasure, to be legitimated, becomes medicalized." (Lee Davis et al., 2015, p. 312) The pleasure of raving, within an anti-hedonic western culture, may be expounded by my participants as therapeutic to legitimize a pleasure-seeking practice which faces ample criticism from outsiders. Clearly, the experience of collective effervescence at a rave is pleasurable, and in a culture where many practices must be instrumentalized towards self-fulfillment (Bellah et al., 1985; Illouz, 2008), it is understandable that this pleasure is explained through the lens of the therapeutic.

Conclusion

Critics of therapeutic culture have cited it as individualizing and depoliticizing (Furedi, 2004; Lasch, 1979; Rieff, 1966). Moral ravers, however, constantly negotiated the relationship between individual and collective experiences at raves. Naomi, for example, attends raves to "meet" herself, but also notes that the collective is involved in this. Both Noah and Quinn showed examples of heightened self-acceptance, a classic therapeutic goal, being informed and influenced by the accepting nature of the community. While

participants drew on therapeutic cultural resources to make sense of their practices of raving, this didn't result in raving practices that were solely focused on the self. Instead, participants oscillated between a focus on the collective and a focus on the self. Focus on the collective informed the exploration of the self and vice versa. This finding contradicts blanket critiques of therapeutic culture as an obsession with the self, at the cost of contributing to a collective good.

Early critics of raves, similar to critics of therapeutic culture, have criticized its hedonistic and apolitical stance (Knutagard, 1996; Melechi, 1993; Redhead, 1993, 1995; Reynolds, 1999; Rietveld, 1993). However, there is an argument to be made that engaging in hedonism in an anti-hedonic culture is an act of rebellion (Lee Davis et al., 2015). Indeed, Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010) would agree with such an interpretation of recreation as resistance, as would other scholars who argue that political participation does not require a social change agenda (Giddens, 1964, 1991; Harris, 2001; Harris et al., 2001). In attending to their practices through a therapeutic lens, ravers can legitimize their pleasure and resist "the anti-hedonist bias [...] of Western middle-class culture" (Lee Davis et al., 2015. P. 312). In this way, my participant's experiences of raving are hedonistic, politically potent and therapeutic simultaneously.

Participants' experiences and the way they made sense of them were, in a way, highly contradictory, undertaking what many deem a deviant practice in a moral way, as well as focusing both on the self and the collective in one's pursuit of pleasure and fulfillment. However, if we accept that the webs of significance on which we draw to make sense of our reality will always be contradictory, we can begin tease out the nuances of these contradictions.

This study found that therapeutic culture shapes the way ravers make sense of their experiences of collective effervescence. This intersection between the anthropology of nightlife and the anthropology of therapeutic culture requires further research to fully flush out its complexities, the beginnings of which I have attended to in this thesis.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Materials: Social Media Posts



CALL FOR RAVERS

DO YOU RAVE AND ARE OVER 19? I'D LIKE TO INTERVIEW YOU ABOUT WHY YOU RAVE!

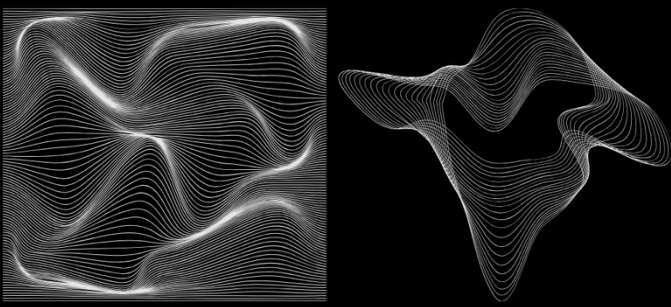
I'M CONDUCTING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON THE MEANINGS OF RAVING.

INTERVIEWS AND ALL INFORMATION WILL BE DEIDENTIFIED.

ELEANOR WAITE
ELEANOR.WAITE@DAL.CA
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
APPROVAL: 2023-6963



Swipe next →



This study will be trying to understand what raving means to people in Halifax.

We'll be looking at things like:

- the role raving plays socially, spiritually or politically
- your experiences on the dance floor
- How you got into raving, why you enjoy it

Swipe next →



I am looking for people who have been to more than one rave (either Rhythm and Colour or Exploria) to tell me about their experiences and opinions on raves.

You'll be asked to participate in semi-structured interview about your experiences raving. This usually takes around 45-90minutes, depending on how much you want to say.

If you have any questions please reach out to me!

 eleanor.waite@dal.ca



Appendix B: Research Instruments

Interview Topics

- Getting into raving
- The appeal of raving
- Whether there's an ethos around it, if there's a particular culture.
- "steps" or phases of the night
- experience on the dance floor
- Social Life of Raves
- fitting in, difference between raves and other areas of life.
- Questions of subtle resistance to status quo, but this won't be asked directly.

Potential Questions

- Getting into raving
 - o Tell me about how you got into these raves
 - o What is the definition of a rave for you?
- The appeal of raving
 - o What do you like about them, why do you go this often/this infrequently?
 - o What specifically makes one rave more enjoyable than another?
 - o What do you dislike about them?
 - o Are there things that make them different from other nights out, like going downtown?
 - o How would you describe the "vibe" of these raves?
- Whether there's an ethos around it, if there's a particular culture.
 - o Are there certain actions/interaction you can think of that would be deemed normal at a rave, but weird in other places?
 - o Are there some things that you wouldn't consider 'normal' to do at a rave?
 - o How would you tell if a rave was a good rave, vs a bad rave?
- "steps" or phases of the night
 - o Say you're planning on going to a rave one night, is there a typical way a night like that would play out? What do you do before/after?
 - o What are the key ingredients that make for a great rave?
 - o How do you experience time while at a rave? Does it go by quick?
 - o When do you decide it's time to leave a rave?
- experience on the dance floor
 - o Are there typically any interactions between you and other ravers on the dance floor, either those that you came with or others?
 - o Is your dancing experience more personal or more social?
 - o Do different music genres dictate whether your dancing is social or individual?
 - o When dancing, what are you focussed on?
 - o How would you describe the relationship between dancers and DJs?
 - o How does it feel physically to be dancing at a rave? What are the sensations?

- When you are dancing, are your eyes closed or open? What are you seeing?
 - How would you describe the feeling of the music physically or visually?
 - Are there specific smells or tastes that you associate with raving?
- Social life
 - Do you typically go to raves with friends or alone?
 - Do you meet new people at raves?
 - Do you see/interact with people you know from raves outside of raving?
 - Would you say socializing is a large part of raves, or is it more focused on other things?
- fitting in, difference between raves and other areas of life.
 - How does your emotional state at raves compare to your emotional state in other aspects of life, other time and places, even other forms of night-life?
 - How do you feel before a rave?
 - How do you feel after a rave?

Themes for **observation**:

- Mapping of the space, how are different areas of the venue used? Which behaviors are typical of each space?
- What kinds of music or visuals are playing in each space? What are sound levels, light levels, vibration level?
- Are people using the different spaces in the way that organizers may have intended?
- Are there any patterns in the way that people interact?
- What refreshments are on offer and what are people consuming?
- How are people dispersed on the dance floor? What directions are they facing?
- Are people dancing in groups of friends, do they appear more inwardly focused?
- How does the music impact people's movement?
- What are interactions with the security guards like?

Appendix C: Consent Form / Oral Consent Script

CONSENT FORMExploring Euphoria: An Ethnographic Study of Halifax's Rave Renaissance

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Eleanor Waite, an undergraduate student in Social Anthropology, as part of my Honours degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to interview Halifax ravers to understand the meanings that raving has to them. I will write up the results of this research in a paper for my class, called the Honours thesis. Participation is limited to self-defined "regular" ravers, who are over the age of 19.

As a participant in the research, you will be asked to answer a number of interview questions about why you chose to attend raves, what experiences you have at raves, and what role they play in your life. The interview should take anywhere from 45 – 90 minutes and will be conducted in a quiet location of your choice. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. If I quote any part of it in my Honours thesis, I will use a pseudonym, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so until up to two weeks after the interview. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I will have completed my analysis, but the information will not be used in any other research.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized, which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only the Honours class supervisor and I will have access to the unprocessed information you offer. I will describe and share general findings in a presentation to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department and in my Honours thesis. Nothing that could identify you will be included in the presentation or the thesis. I may keep anonymized information so that I can learn more from it as I continue with my studies, but there will be no identifiable information attached to it. It will be stored in a secure, password protected file.

The risks associated with this study are no greater than those you encounter in your participation in raving. I want to reiterate that there is no obligation to discuss any illicit activity, but that should you chose to I will abide by complete confidentiality. You can take a break, skip a question, or end the interview at any time if any topic makes you uncomfortable.

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on the meanings of raving in Halifax. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my Honours thesis after April 30.

If you have questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or the honours class supervisor. My contact information is Eleanor.Waite@dal.ca, or (782) 882 1608. You can contact the Honours class supervisor, Dr Martha Radice, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6747, or email martha.radice@dal.ca.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email ethics@dal.ca

Participant's consent, script for verbal consent:

"I confirm that I have read the consent form related to this research and have had my questions answered. I consent to being interviewed, as well as to an audio recording of the interview. I also consent to my data being used in this study, and my direct quotes being presented in the final project under a pseudonym."

Appendix D: Fieldwork Data Collection Summary

Interview #	Age	Interviewee
1	20-25	Nyx
2	20-25	Quinn
3	35-40	Naomi
4	20-25	David
5	40-45	Caleb
6	26-30	Julie
7	26-30	Bennet
8	30-35	Noah
9	25-30	Sam
10	40-45	Mark

EDM Events Attended October 2023 - March 2024		
Date	Underground/Commercial	Event
10/28/2023	Underground	Rhythm & Color
11/18/2023	Underground	Exploria
12/15/2023	Commercial	Not a Boiler Room V4
12/31/2023	Underground	Rhythm & Color
2/10/2024	Commercial	SLURP
3/1/2024	Underground	Rhythm & Color