Chapter 3

3.8 PHILOSOPHY OF RAVES

People would hardly take drugs because they want to subject their bodies and family to the pain that drugs cause. Many people take drugs in order to escape life or to find more meaning in their present existence. Young people are searching for love, belonging and acceptance. Pivotal to understanding the experimenting with, and use of, both alcohol and drugs is the human need for excitement and adventure, and of warmth and friendship (Hoy 1998:05). Hoy (1998:05) believes that modern society offers few real possibilities for risks, excitement and for challenge which can develop one's own limitations. There are also too few opportunities to get to know one's own body, and to release aggression and satisfy the need to explore.

An important ideal for all humans is that of warmth and friendship. It is possible that a Rave environment – which seems negative to the adult society due to the use of drugs – can be experienced as including, accepting and warm by adolescents. It might be that 'decent' youth environments can seem dismissing and excluding. One could think that a ‘yes’ to try Ecstasy is experienced as a ‘yes’ to warmth and friendship (Hoy 1998:06). At a Rave, a

Figure 3.11 ‘Brothers and sisters’
raver will include all and exclude none. In fact, it is an environment where one can be who one is, without having to change one's views.

When a raver was asked to tell why he had chosen Raves (a negative youth environment) over church (a decent youth environment), he replied as follows:

Why should I go to church when I'm not accepted there? I want to go where I am accepted, not where I'm told what I look like and what I'm doing is wrong. I have finally found a place where I fit in. I am not judged because I may not be wearing suitable clothing or what I think of a particular subject, or don't agree with those around me. Every Rave I have attended, I have been surrounded by love. I am not afraid to go up and talk to people because they make me feel welcomed. We are one big happy family where we all understand, or try to understand each other. It is a huge release.

3.8.1 Peace, love, unity and respect (PLUR)

A fundamental Rave ideology expressed by the acronym PLUR was coined as the Rave 'anthem' and became an organising principle for the scene in 1992 and 1993 (http://1996:01). It was an ideological statement that included people's feelings about Rave. To some participants Rave feels like a religion (Reynolds 1998:xviii). PLUR is a general ethic found in most religions and is thus an important part of Rave culture, since it provides hope and love in a world that is often characterised by despair. PLUR forms a foundation for the constantly emerging relationships in the Rave community and is the basis for much, but not all, of the vibe that many people refer to when discussing Raves (http://1996:01). RaveSafe (1997:36) explains PLUR as follows:

Peace (P): 'Is the core of energy found within ourselves when we let go of all our fears. We have a loss of interest in judging ourselves and others around us. We think and act spontaneously, enjoying each moment, as we appreciate everything and smile through the eyes from the heart.'

Love (L): 'We all long for love, understanding and acceptance. We can only truly give and receive love once we have gained acceptance and peace within ourselves. Our actions of love towards others all stem from the love we have for ourselves.'

Unity (U): 'Is what happens when a whole lot of people who have peace, experience their love for themselves and each other, creating a oneness of self with the group.'

Respect (R): 'The attitude you reach because of peace, love and unity, which allows an environment of freedom and choice. You allow yourself the
freedom to be yourself, as you allow others the freedom and space to be themselves.'

New ravers tend to get caught up in the unity aspect as they are overwhelmed by the sense of solidarity among the many different people with whom they find themselves dancing (Brown & Behlendorf 1995:11). While PLUR is important ideologically to Rave culture, it has become, for many people within the Rave community, something to cling to as the dynamics of the earlier scene has begun to dissipate. PLUR is also an important part of the Rave scene because it provides a loose guideline for people who are new to the scene as well as a lifeline for those who see that the scene is changing (http://1996:01). (See Section 3.10 for a detailed explanation.) PLUR is the rigid format to which Raves subscribe. Aggression, judgementalism, racism, sexism, homophobia and any other form of negative energy are not tolerated.

PLUR also functions as a mechanism by which people can come together without the pretence and hostility that are experienced in everyday life. PLUR provides a way for people to live out their values and openly encourage a certain type of behaviour in an increasingly contentious, competitive and egocentric society. It is a means by which people may reach out to one another without fear of a hostile response (http://1996:02). Some ravers are so committed to PLUR and the Rave scene that they believe Raves are instruments of social change. They believe the positive effects of raving are spreading into the lives of all involved and, in turn, the people who come into contact with ravers are also affected in a positive manner (Brown & Behlendorf 1995:11). Consider the following quotes from some ravers, for example:

Teach people (who are new to the scene) about PLUR by being a living example of it. They are not going to give peace, love, unity and respect to us if we do not give it to them (http://1996:02).

Treat others the way you want to be treated. That is the only route towards the positivity that will unite us all. The next time someone gives you a hard look, do not resort to a negative response because that will only create more negativity. Smile, let the goodwill flow and they will follow the new direction (Tito in Lowe 1996:01).

No matter what happens in popular culture, you keep the vibe alive. This isn't specific to our little scene. PLUR in all aspects of life, no matter where you are. When you are walking down the street, do the same thing for strangers that you would at a Rave. When you are at work or school do the same thing there. And then instead of the mainstream changing our culture, our culture is changing the mainstream ... isn't that the point of a movement, to affect the world? (Demmon in Stiens 1997:13).
3.8.2 New Age philosophy

One can say that the New Age philosophy is present in Rave culture. Penell (1990:136) maintains that the New Age is a holistic philosophy, which presents the planet or world as an interlinked structure. This means that anything one does has a profound effect on the rest of the planet. In the light of this, consider the following Rave flyer (in Reynolds 1998:293) entitled ‘House Music & Planetary Healing’:

> When used with positive intention, Group energy has the potential to help restore the plan of Love on Earth … When you open your heart, and trust the whole group you dance with; when you feel love with everyone, and they return it, a higher vibration can be reached. This happens when a crowd is deep into the vibe of House music … In the true sense of rhythmic movement, the effect is to align the physical, mental and emotional bodies with the Oneness of All that Is … Help push the consciousness another level into Enlightenment … Don’t put out negative energy and feelings. Leave the old ways behind. Throw yourself into the winds of transformation and sow the seeds for a new world – one where the human family is together again. Where people respect and care for each other as a community-organism. It’s up to us to spread the vibe. Spread the Peace!

The New Age movement is generally a collection of Eastern-influenced metaphysical theologies, hopes and expectations held together with an eclectic teaching of salvation, ‘correct thinking’ and ‘correct knowledge’. It is a theology of ‘feel-goodism’, ‘universal tolerance’ (permitting other people to do and say as they like) and ‘moral relativism’ (there are no specific requirements as to morality, belief and behaviour) (Slick 1998:01). ‘Sin’ and ‘evil’ are simply part of the cosmic law of cause-and-effect, which both Hinduism and the New Age typically label as karma. Good and bad are cosmically balanced, with good actions resulting in positive energy and bad actions in negative energy (Barker 1998:03).

The New Age revolves around the central belief that humans are capable of shaping reality and establishing truth (Barker 1998:01). Man is central and is viewed as the hope for future peace and harmony. The term New Age refers to the Aquarian Age which, according to New Age followers, is dawning. It is supposed to bring in peace and enlightenment, and reunite humans with God (Slick 1998:01). The New Age deals with issues of planetarisation and ‘universal consciousness’, the emergence of an awareness that we are all one people living in one world sharing a common destiny. The basic goals of the New Age movement are peace, unity, economic fairness, global society, religious harmony, one world government and environmental consciousness (Hoy
All this will eventually lead to advancing everyone into an 'Aquarian Age of togetherness'.

The New Age is nothing new, but has entered people's lives at a time when they are seeking answers and meaning to life. Lottering (in Hoy 1998:09) asserts that despite technological progress and the idealism and activism of their parents, young people face a world that seems to be getting worse ... rather than ... better. Disillusionment is increasing. Young people are looking for answers but all the traditional places are not providing those answers. While the church is no longer reaching the youth and fewer young people are responding to the traditional religion of their parents, the Rave environment is attracting more participants.

Rave positivity, drawing on diverse sources, led the way to the nineties Zeitgeist that focused on caring and sharing, a return to quality of life over standard of living and environmental awareness. The 'anti-social' self-importance of the eighties was transcended by a shift from 'I' to 'we' and from materialism to idealism (Reynolds 1998:83). Needless to say, the 'loved-up' Rave scene was a fertile environment for the spreading of New Agey ideas. Raves were likened to an 'Age of Aquarius-style utopian togetherness' (Hoy 1998:08). Ecstasy turned young people who normally behaved in a loud and violent manner into gentle, friendly individuals. For Reynolds (1998:46) this was proof that Ecstasy was indeed a 'wonder drug' and the instrument of a spiritual and social revolution. Overwhelmed with idealism and a will to belief, many ravers embraced ideas about spirituality and the New Age, and felt truly 'converted'. However, for most ravers the 'back to the sixties' and 'dawning of the Age of Aquarius imagery' was tongue in cheek, a cover for pure hedonism (Reynolds 1998:47).

3.9 SPIRITUALITY

Dance cultures have always been driven by a kind of extreme hedonism, but Raves introduced the greatest amount of spiritual, pagan and extraterrestrial or alien 'desires' into popular music culture since the psychedelia of the 1960s (Davis 1998:01). Music styles began using religious imagery to cloud the distinction between cult and culture. Rather than looking for individual sexual encounters, most ravers sought trance-like states and a sense of communion (Davis 1998:01). DJs were treated as 'digital shamans', 'priests' or 'channellers of energy' (Behlendorf 1995:09) while Hindu gods, aliens, unidentified flying objects and computer-generated 'trippy' graphics appeared on CD covers, posters, T-shirts, and the walls of Rave clubs. According to Davis (1998:04), the
alien phenomena suggested the collapse of 'traditional' religion while simultaneously feeding a keen desire for spiritual experience on a cosmic sense of scale.

Davis (1998:02) maintains that 'today's younger spiritual seekers pride themselves on a more anarchic and diffuse world view, one that refuses distinctions between spirit and body and between the sacred and the pop profane'. One popular Rave T-shirt is an ideal example, featuring a Buddha with a circuit board and the slogan 'Spirituality Through Technology' (Reynolds 1998:290). Compared to the hippie generation's serious embrace of the I Ching (Chinese wisdom), the Upanishads (Hinduism) and mantra (transcendental meditation), today's young people seem less interested in teachings or traditional practices than in raw experience: altered states, ritual and Ecstasy (Davis 1998:02).

The 1990s spurred the 'huge' return of psychedelics to alternative culture. While Raves grew in popularity, ravers and others explored entheogens (from the Greek, meaning 'god-inducer') such as Ecstasy and LSD (Davis 1998:03). With the rise of marijuana and acid (LSD) being 'fashionable' amongst young people, drug culture took on ritual and utopian connotations.

### 3.9.1 Rave as a spiritual event

The Rave culture, seen as purely hedonistic by the establishment, is frequently regarded as a spiritual event by those involved. Raves are likened to trance-like tribal rituals where ravers celebrate their unity and shared uplifted state, giving and receiving freely from one another (Saunders 1997:183). Unlike the traditional religions where there is a distinct leader, Rave as a 'religion' has no such claim. Raves are nevertheless comparable to the New Age, Eastern and tribal religions that embrace altered states of consciousness and mysticism. Pertinent to these religions are self-discovery and enlightenment. According to Morrison (1998:01), to be enlightened is simply to be 'absolutely, unconditionally intimate with the present moment. No more. No less.' Enlightenment focuses on the 'here and now', and encompasses the conception of one's body and soul as energy. Eastern and tribal religions also emphasise the oneness and connectedness of us all, which is of significance when considering the PLUR 'mantra', dancing and the group collective energy that flows at the Rave.

Raves have been termed technoshamanism by some – a term that denotes that it is the music and culture itself that will introduce or lead one into a deeper awareness of the spiritual dimension of life (Hoy 1998:07). The combination of electronic dance music, computers, designer drugs and cultural idealism rekindled interest in what used to be called 'techniques of ecstasy by hippie anthropologists' (Davis 1998:01). Repetitious sound in the form of techno
and ambient music accompanied by dance, light (lasers and strobes) and psychotropic drugs produces trance states arguably similar to those induced by shamanistic chants, drums and dances that still exist amongst primitive people such as the American Indians (Davis 1998:01).

Griffin (1995:57) maintains that Rave takes people back to one of the original meanings of music; to the root experience of ‘trance and dance’: transcendence. One could say that Rave rediscovered the ritual significance of dance. The Rave of today still resonates with this ancient ritual power.

### 3.9.1.1 The ‘archaic revival’

The exploration of music and drug-induced trance states at Raves was only one element of what McKenna (1998:01) called the ‘archaic revival’ which ‘sought to remove social constructs and packaged identities in order to discover a primal realm of ecstatic intensity and tribal identification’ (Davis 1998:03). The ‘archaic revival’ also crossed over with scenes devoted to piercings (an ancient practice in Eastern countries), tattoo and sadomasochism. Pierced faces, tongues, nipples and navels as well as tattooed bodies are prominent amongst ravers. Though these subcultures are not overtly religious, Davis (1998:03) maintains that they nonetheless ‘speak to a desire for intense rites of passage, secret practices and primitivist allegiance’.

The ‘archaic revival’ paradoxically shared the stage with modern technology. Rave culture is a very spiritually aware culture which centres on an altered state of consciousness or awareness caused by music, dance, lights and in many cases the ingestion of drugs (Saunders 1995:02). To stretch the ‘religious’ metaphor, DJs are the high priests of the Rave ceremony, responding to the mood of the crowd, with their mixing decks symbolising the altar, the only direction in which the ravers consistently face. Dancing at Raves may be construed as the method by which Ravers ‘worship’ the god of altered consciousness (Newcombe in Saunders 1995:01). As Griffin (1995:59–60) explains:

> When the music, the setting and the people gel, when a critical mass of collective energy and euphoria is reached, then the raver enters a state called ‘enthusiasm’ or ‘revealing the god within’ … what can happen in a Rave is that you temporarily get a sense of oneness with your mind, body and the people dancing around you. It’s like a mainline to a state that is theorised about but difficult to achieve. With dance and music, temporary neuroses get suspended – it is like a sustained glimpse of a higher state of being.

Many ravers allude to the ‘higher state of being’ as a mystical or religious experience.
Categorised as an ‘ism’, mysticism is usually defined by dictionaries as being a spiritual discipline developed to make contact with the divine. While this definition is frequently correct, there have been many people who have never followed a special discipline who have had mystical experiences. Also, there have been many people who have followed a set of spiritual practices carefully and for a prolonged period who have never contacted the divine (Goodwin 1999:01). Goodwin (1999:01) describes the mystical event as a personal experience during which one feels as though one has touched or has been touched by some higher or greater truth or power.

This may occur inside or outside of a religious setting, within or outside a religious tradition and may occur spontaneously or as the result of deliberate activity – for example during the practice of rituals, meditation or at a Rave. A Zen Buddhist monk, Bertrand (in Saunders 1997:188), likened raving to walking meditation: ‘These people are meditating, only they do not realise it. They are in the same state. They are completely in the “here and now”, moving spontaneously without thinking about it. Everyone is totally aware yet absorbed in their dance, without self-consciousness or internal dialogue.’ According to Bertrand (in Saunders 1997:188), this is the very essence of meditation.
Pahnke (1971:01) derived nine universal psychological characteristics from a study of the literature of spontaneous mystical experience reported from almost all cultures and religions. When subjected to a scientific experiment, these characteristics proved to be identical for spontaneous and psychedelic mystical experiences. Pahnke studied psychedelics extensively in clinical settings and concluded that when a psychedelic drug was used in an appropriate setting and with appropriate intent, experiences that closely resembled classical mystical experiences would occur.

He formulated a nine-point description of these psychedelic-induced experiences (Pahnke 1971:02):

1. **Unity** – a sense of cosmic oneness.
2. **Transcendence of time and space** (timelessness).
3. **Deeply felt positive mood**.
4. **Sense of sacredness**.
5. **Noetic quality** – a feeling of insight or illumination.
6. **Paradoxicality** – a person may realise that he or she is experiencing, for example, ‘an identity of opposites’, yet it seems to make sense at the time.
7. **Alleged ineffability** – a sense that one cannot adequately describe the richness of this experience.
8. **Transiency** – the experience passes.
9. **Persisting positive changes in attitudes and behaviour**.

Many characteristics of the mystical experience are reminiscent of the Ecstasy and Rave experience. In the Rave context, the overall feeling of positivity created by Ecstasy can spread into a collective mysticism. Rave theorists talk of ‘an empathy that shades into the telepathic’ and a sharing of similar emotions (Reynolds 1998:xxvii). (Telepathic refers to the direct communication of thoughts and feelings between minds at a distance.) Ravers feel a sense of understanding and oneness with one another. Ecstasy elicits feelings of emotional warmth, well-being and satisfaction. There is a sense of closeness and perceived insight – seeing the world in a fresh way, as if for the first time. Language is unable to capture the intensity of the event. Many participants of Rave are not able to describe their experience as anything other than ‘absolutely unbelievable, there was nothing like it’, ‘great’ or ‘this is not dancing, this is a religion’ (Rietveld in Redhead 1993:63). Although transient, the experience is ‘relivable’. Many ravers claim that the positive energy or insights gained from Raves have been integrated into their ordinary lives to make worthwhile changes in their attitudes and interactions with others.

Nevertheless, Reynolds (1998:289) asserts many people had these life-changing experiences, but they did not necessarily dress them up in cosmic significance by saying they had been touched by some higher power. Most
people enjoyed them as simple ‘shifts’ in their modes of self-expression and the way they related to friends and strangers.

3.9.1.3 The vibe

There is a tangible energy that goes along with dancing to extremely loud beats with hundreds of other people. Race, gender, age, sexual preference and everything else on which society places so much emphasis simply disappear into the background (Stiens 1997:12), creating an atmosphere of love, acceptance and belonging. This is the essence of the ‘vibe’ so commonly talked about in groups of ravers.

People are normally inhibited from expressing love, moving freely and enjoying themselves because of fear (Saunders 1997:48). One of the fundamental effects of Ecstasy is to remove fear, hence the breaking of social boundaries uniting professionals and hooligans alike on the same ‘loved-up’ vibe. A culture emerged which was not about taking control but about letting go, and allowing the music and movement to take control (Henderson 1997:49). This is an experience that many young people are looking for; one that appears to be very alive in South Africa.

3.9.1.4 The experience

According to Thermos (in Glyptis 2000:170), religiosity is continually becoming alienated from the authority of the traditional churches and is becoming an improvised search for spirituality. The gap between traditional ‘truth’ on the one hand and personal experience on the other has never been wider. ‘Spirituality’ nowadays signifies spiritual experience. Hoy (1998:06), in agreement with Thermos, maintains that spirituality in a post-modern society is reduced to what one can feel. It is no longer important to know what one believes or why one believes it but rather that ‘I experience what I believe. It is this experiencing that makes one feel alive. As a purely psychological event, the search for spirituality is not so different from the experience of drugs or sexuality, where the individual believes that s/he is alive though the stimulation of emotions and desires (Thermos in Glyptis 2000:170).

Stiens (1997:12–13) perceives Rave culture as a ‘religion’ based on shared experience where individual religious beliefs are integrated into the larger, unified experience. At a Rave, there is a certain kind of ‘ecstasy’ one can find only by losing oneself in a mass of ravers. In many senses PLUR is the dogma in which ravers believe. It is the belief that for one night a community can be created that does not function for the same reasons that larger society does. It is the belief that peace and love are worth trying to bring back into a society that nowadays seems so devoid of them.
Table 3.1 – adapted from Bennett (1992:10–13) – indicates the significance of Raves to young people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Rave culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Significance to the individual</td>
<td>1. Will learn something about herself/himself from taking part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Intimacy</td>
<td>(a) The physical, mental and spiritual experience; an all-round sensual experience shared with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Security</td>
<td>(b) A chance to lose oneself in the experience with those around one and a feeling of sharing the same experience; a feeling of not being alone and understanding where other people are through experiencing the same phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The group</td>
<td>2. A chance to meet up with fellow ravers; no barriers – ‘this is the real church’ (a quote from a Ravegoer); all in it together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The challenge</td>
<td>3. New heights of experience; to dance all night; get higher than ever before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Attitude of the outsiders towards ravers</td>
<td>4. The ravers are weird, they are dangerous, they are stupid, they are mindless, they are frightening and antisocial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Attitude of ravers towards outsiders</td>
<td>5. PLUR. Keep the peace, be friendly, be keen to share, be interested and open.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.9.1.5 The separate space

Rave is certainly a culture of escape from the reality of mainstream society into a utopian world for a few hours. It is the creation of a ‘separate space’ where there are no rules or laws, only positive emotions and idealism. Beyond this culture of escape is a culture based on hope. The core of this separate space is the knowledge that it is a temporary separate space (Stiens 1997:13). After the Rave you have to come home. There is knowledge that ‘tomorrow I will work on homework or study and Monday I will go to work or school, but right now, I am going to play’. There is an emphasis on the focusing of energy and PLUR,
and the belief that what happens during this Rave is positively affecting all of the energy on the planet.

However, not all people who go to Raves are on a spiritual quest. Some have expressed reservations about the New Age and Eastern philosophies. Most people at Raves are not worrying about Mother Earth, the ozone layer or touching crystals to feel positive energy. They are just out for a good time and climbing on the Rave bandwagon. As far as the sterner pop culture critics are concerned, Rave culture is escapism pure and simple (Reynolds 1998:47). 'Kids are having a good time ... Just like kids have always done ... All this bollocks about the E culture, it is just people projecting their ideas on to something that's always been there: mindless hedonism' (London in Reynolds 1998:47).

3.10 THE COMEDOWN

The preceding sections have dealt with the most favourable, philosophical and idealistic views of Raves and have in a sense 'defended' what the Rave scene wants to be. The closing section is a comedown to reality. There is no idealism, no PLUR, no archaic revival, no ecstatic dancing – except in small amounts and optimistic outlooks. What follows is commercialisation, a feeling of loss of the sacred and the ruination of the 'vibe'. This part of the chapter deals with overdoses, hedonism and aspects that society fears from the Rave scene.

In the early years the Rave scene existed as an underground movement which was labelled deviant by those in the mainstream. The very reason why people could escape to it and set up their own value system, morality and own rules or lack thereof was because Rave existed as separate from mainstream society (Stiens 1997:19). However, its growth in popularity inevitably attracted commercial and police attention. Nowadays, one hears techno music in everything from drink commercials to sport reports, and tickets to Raves or dance festivals are sold at Computicket or fashion outlets. Rave fashion has invaded store shelves. The Rave scene has gradually been appropriated into mainstream culture.

Stiens (1997:19) believes this is the best defence that society could ever have used against the Rave scene, but most ravers agree that attempts by the music industry to commercialise the Rave, have begun to dilute the social ideals of PLUR connected with the parties (Morgan 1998:01). The Rave ideals of PLUR are being replaced with the ideals of consumerism. Raves have increased in price from R30 a ticket to R180. Lights have gone from being a couple of lasers and strobes to spectacular set-ups that cost thousands of rands. DJs are demanding very high fees. The use of high-technology computerised
equipment has become the norm. Each Rave strives to be bigger and better than the previous one.

On the one hand, there are the young people who participate in Raves merely to ‘do drugs’, to be trendy or just to see what the latest rage is. On the other hand, there are those people who have bought into the Rave philosophy, who will insist that there is a meaning to Rave and that it is a social movement in which they are participating, not just a party. Many ravers feel there has been a loss of the ‘sacredness’ that goes along with the Rave scene. Ravers’ warm, friendly smiles are being replaced with sour, cheated expressions – their Ecstasy pills no longer achieve the desired effect, probably because they had over-indulged so heavily the past few years that the old ‘buzz’ simply cannot be recovered.

The growth in Rave popularity has seen fewer people creating a temporary loving space and more people getting ‘wasted’. There seems to be a moment inherent in any drug culture when the scene crosses over into the ‘dark side’. ‘Getting high’ degenerates into ‘getting out of it’. Suddenly the clubs are full of ‘dead souls, zombie eyed and prematurely haggard’. Instead of outstretched arms and all-accepting extroversion, there is unsmiling emptiness, robot-like body movements and complete self-absorption (Reynolds 1998:191). What started off as ‘life-affirming’ fun begins to suggest desperation. Ravers’ drug stories become repulsive and more shocking: someone threw up and then picked the half-digested Ecstasy pills out of the vomit and swallowed them again; teenage girls hold onto their friend as she retches over a toilet seat having taken too many pills on an empty stomach (Reynolds 1998:191).

The buzzwords of ravers are telling. On a good night, ravers would get ‘fucked’ (damaged), ‘shitfaced’, ‘comatosed’ (go into a coma), ‘cabbaged’ (into a vegetative state), ‘smashed’, ‘annihilated’ or ‘wasted’. Good tunes were referred to as ‘mental’, ‘wicked’ or ‘kick-ass’. Dedicated to getting severely ‘cabbaged’ many headstrong youth resort to ‘stacking’ – taking from three to six pills per session (as opposed to one or two pills which are usually taken), and sometimes between ten and twenty Ecstasy pills over the course of a three-day weekend (Newcombe in Reynolds 1998:113).

These ravers quickly become lodged in a cycle of overdoing it, then paying for it with a severe mid-week comedown. This depression can only be overcome by the thought that Friday would soon come around, presenting the opportunity to do it all again. Unwilling to face the Saturday morning ‘crash’, these young people would pop more pills in order to stay awake right through until Sunday. Lacking the patience to wait the hour it takes to ‘come up’ on Ecstasy, they eagerly assume that they have bought a ‘dud’ pill and hastily take another one (Reynolds 1998:113). This is certainly an unbeatable recipe for disaster. Some will crush up two or three Ecstasy pills and snort them because nasal ingestion is a faster-acting method of administration (Reynolds 1998:113).
Young people sitting against the walls of clubs sniffing poppers, passing a joint around the ‘chill room’, going into the toilets in pairs or groups to snort cocaine or speed (anything to heighten the intoxication) is a regular occurrence. Polydrug use is gradually establishing itself as the norm amongst ravers. In the ‘chill room’ one may find some RaveSafe drug education leaflets written in such a way as to engage young people on their own level. In the paramedic support area, young people suffering the effects of impure or adulterated ‘E’s’ or overindulgence, huddle wrapped in blankets with plastic ‘puke’ pots on their laps (Reynolds 1998:264). Outside, the ambulances wait for possible overdoses or adverse drug reactions.

Rave culture is, after all, a drug culture and the key drug it is based on elicits emotions – it does not enhance cognition. For the few hours that Ecstasy lasts, the user is the happiest person on earth. For a generation of stressed-out young people, Ecstasy is a very seductive form of escapism. However, the effects wear off over time and one’s body becomes tolerant to the drug. No high ever matches those initial highs, and eventually one has to take more and more just to feel anything at all – which in part explains the fall of the Rave and the ruination of the ‘together vibe’.

### 3.10.1 The fall of the Rave

With continuous use, Ecstasy stopped working. Ravers turned to speed, marijuana, LSD, cocaine, ketamine, even heroin: vicious cocktails that are not conducive to the ‘together vibe’ that has made Rave meaningful to so many people (Brown 1998:04). Originally, Ecstasy was the catalyst for people reaching out to one another. Strangers would actually come up to one, smile and say ‘hallo’. However, amphetamine (speed) closed down the open-hearted extroversion replacing eye contact with empty stares (Reynolds 1998:304). Speed was lethal to the Rave scene’s good vibe. Polydrug culture has destroyed the synergy effect that occurs in Rave scenes during the ‘honeymoon phase’ of Ecstasy use where ravers, all relatively new to the drug, ‘buzz’ on the same pure Ecstasy. Now many ravers are on different trips. According to Heart (in Reynolds 1998:308), the Rave scene was ruined when the pills were replaced with powders (referring to cocaine and speed). The Raves simply splintered into different vibes. Adding to the dissipation of that vibe was a diligent police force, who made it their duty to raid many Raves.

The truth is that there has always been a dark side to Rave culture. Almost from the beginning, the blissful experience of dance and drugs was clouded by anxiety. ‘Losing it’ is a pleasant release from the confinement of identity, but there comes a point at which the relief of abandoning self-consciousness and self-control develops into a fear of being controlled by the drug technology.
interaction (Reynolds 1998:201). Amidst all positivity and idealism, the ‘nihilism latent in Rave’s drug-driven utopianism is always lurking, waiting to be hatched’ (Reynolds 1998:190).

Like most utopian movements, the first wave is the freshest and the collective ‘bubble’ in which the original ravers were was destined to pop (Brown 1998:05). Rave still exists, of course, and the attraction of young people to the scene will continue as long as there are anxious, despondent adolescents. However, Rave in its ‘unadulterated’ form is gone. The following leaflet, which was circulated at a Rave, was a heartfelt plea for a return to the lost innocence of Raves (in Reynolds 1998:300):

Why are you at this event? The Rave scene is not just about techno. This scene is not just about drugs. This scene is not just about fashion. It is something special about unity and happiness. It is about being yourself and being loved for it. It should be a harbor from our society. But our scene right now is disintegrating! Old style ravers – remember when everybody hugged all the time – not just to say hello and goodbye? Remember when people just said hi for no reason except to be your friend? Remember how good it felt? Why don’t we do it anymore? Newcomers – you are wanted and you should know that this scene is about openness. We all share a bond – the desire to groove to a good beat all night long. And no man is an island, everyone needs friends and the outside world is tough enough. We don’t need fronts and attitudes in our scene. Open your hearts and let the good feelings flow … Ravers unite and keep our scene alive!

Rave’s growing popularity indicates that it will not die out any time soon. In fact, it is becoming a driving force behind new fashion, new music and a post-modern way of living. This post-modern age is a time of social upheaval. In the midst of unprecedented affluence and technological progress, many people struggle with low self-esteem, occupational stress, familial disintegration and increasing types of physical complaints (Barker 1998:01). These problems, together with a growing distrust of organised religion, are creating a spiritual vacuum which Raves seem to be filling. Concerned educators should respond to, rather than react against, any future growth in the Rave constituency. While Raves undoubtedly expose adolescents to drugs, they also provide them with an environment of social acceptance and belonging.

Young people today are searching for meaning and purpose in life. ‘Who is God? Why am I here? Who am I? How can I give my life meaning? How do I get faith?’ (Nouwen in Hoy 1998:11). These are questions being asked by many young people in one form or another. It is hardly surprising then that organised religion has noticed the way Rave culture provides ‘the youth of today’ with an experience of collective communion and transcendence. Just as the early Church co-opted heathen rituals, there have been attempts by evangelists
literally to 'rejuvenate' Christianity by integrating elements of the Rave experience: dancing, lights, mass fervour, and demonstrative and emotional behaviour (Reynolds 1998:409). Rave-style worship has become prevalent amongst young people. While Rave behaviour is a little 'offensive' to the orthodox Churches, it fits in nicely with the more ecstatic and gesturally demonstrative strains of Christianity such as Pentecostalism, Gospel and Born-again Christians.

Raves are symptomatic of the growing hunger among young people for relational connections and spiritual direction (Hoy 1998:11). It is imperative that educators understand young people's need for identity, purpose, belonging, relationships and meaning in life.

Figure 3.13 Dancing

3.11 CONCLUSION

It is risky to theorise about Rave culture. It takes many forms and has sides that are 'pseudo', commercial, boring, cynical, self-destructive and tragic. It can be
no more than a pretext to take drugs or a refuge from an unbearable reality; a
world that young people find tedious and worryingly unstable. Yet it is also a
place of confinement where children ‘rave’ harmlessly, where they release all
their anger and get it out of their systems instead of directing it against the
system (Reynolds 1998:273). Not everybody has a good time at Raves, but
perhaps as Griffin (1995:58) rationalises: ‘that is all part of Rave’s alchemy. It
takes the private energies, negative and positive, sorted and unsorted, co-
ordinated and unco-ordinated, and transforms them into a whole, infinitely
greater than the sum of its parts.’ You give up the ‘self’ to become part of the
collective ‘we’ in a place where ‘nobody is, but everybody belongs’. (See Figure
3.12.)
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF QUESTIONNAIRES ON RECREATIONAL ECSTASY USE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The research for this book was primarily aimed at investigating the nature of Ecstasy (MDMA) use in Durban Rave clubs with a view to determining the mode and context of the drug's use. The subjective effects of Ecstasy, namely the primary psychological and physical effects, side-effects and after-effects were also investigated and recorded. The issues of tolerance and dependence versus problematic recreational use are also explored.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The type of study adopted was an idiographic study as opposed to a nomothetic approach. A qualitative research design was considered most suitable for this study, since it allowed insight into the perceptions of adolescent recreational drug-takers. Field research was undertaken within the context of nightclubs and Raves.

4.2.1 The sample

The main aim in obtaining a sample for this study was to try and ensure, as far as possible, that the sample was an accurate reflection of the Ecstasy-using population, so that inferences made about the sample could be validly generalised to the said population. To obtain a sample, convenience sampling was used and various Rave clubs were approached with the intention of obtaining subjects. The criterion for inclusion in this study was 'anyone who had ever tried Ecstasy'. As in the Solowij, Hall and Lee (1992:1163) study of MDMA users in Sydney, Australia, it was decided against setting a criterion
such as use of more than three times for fear of neglecting to reveal possible extreme reactions to first-time use of Ecstasy. In order to ensure that the sample was reasonably representative, both male and female subjects were selected at random. Despite there being an age restriction of 18 for entry into these clubs, it is important to note that not all club or Rave-goers are over the age of 18. This allowed for the availability of younger subjects. The sample consisted of 50 subjects mainly from the inner city: 29 males and 21 females, ranging in age from 15 to 26 with a mean age of 21,22 (SD = 3,03).

Eighty-two per cent of the sample had used Ecstasy more than three times and will be termed multiple-time users, consisting of 26 males and 15 females, aged 16 to 26 with a mean age of 21,8 (SD = 2,35). Eighteen per cent of the sample had used Ecstasy three times or less and will be termed one-to-three-times users, consisting of 3 males and 6 females, aged 15 to 22, with a mean age of 18,55 (SD = 2,36). The average reported age at which Ecstasy was tried for the first time was 18,86 (SD = 1,97, range 11). The longest duration of use was 7 years. At the time of data collection, 38 per cent of the sample were employed full time, 4 per cent were unemployed, 44 per cent were students and 14 per cent were scholars. The white ethnic group predominated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
<th>Number of males</th>
<th>Number of females</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Mean age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple-time users</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to three-times users</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15–22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 **MEASURING INSTRUMENT**

The focus on the individual and the aim of including experience as well as behaviour within the scope of the inquiry led naturally to the decision to use the structured interview as the main method of gathering data. In this way, views from the respondents could be explored and motives and feelings investigated. A questionnaire regarding recreational Ecstasy use was constructed based on the literature review and using Solowij, Hall and Lee's (1992) Sydney, Australia, study as a guideline. Like Solowij, Hall and Lee (1992:1163), it
was believed that worthwhile information could be obtained not only from subjects who enjoy Ecstasy and have consequently used it repeatedly, but also from those who possibly do not enjoy Ecstasy or have made a conscious decision not to use it again after the first few uses. It also made sense that some questions such as those concerning long-term effects were dependent upon substantial use of the drug. For this reason, the constructed questionnaire was divided into three sections: one to be answered by all respondents, one for one to three-times Ecstasy users and another for multiple-time Ecstasy users. (A full copy of the questionnaire is available from the author on request.)

**4.4 procedure**

Informed consent was obtained from each subject. The meetings with the subjects regarding their prior or present Ecstasy use were held at one of the Rave clubs - a neutral place where they would feel at ease. Permission was obtained from the club owners to use an office (where one could be free of possible distractions) for interviewing. Subjects were told how useful and valuable their information would be. Time was taken to explain the aims and background of the research. In order to ensure that all topics were covered, the author completed the questionnaire by marking the subjects' responses and jotting down any interesting comments provided by that subject. An explanation was given as to what would happen to the information once it was in the author's care and it was emphasised that all information was protected by a confidentiality rule.

**4.5 data analysis**

The subjects' responses were marked and grouped into various categories. Data obtained from the different groups namely all respondents, multiple-time Ecstasy users or one to three-times Ecstasy users, were coded using various symbols (shapes). Significant comments were also grouped into the categories. A number of sub-categories within each main category were then identified. Relationships between the main and sub-categories were recognised, and reflected as themes. The scores were ranged from highest to lowest to produce a raw score distribution. It was decided to convert the questionnaire raw scores to percentages, as percentages are easily calculated and understood. In this
instance, the percentage is therefore an indication of the group's responses pertaining to a particular question. It is important to bear in mind that since the subjects were permitted to select more than one response applicable to the given questions in the questionnaire, the calculated percentages do not always add up to one hundred.

### 4.6 RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

#### 4.6.1 A subjective evaluation of Ecstasy based on the subjects’ personal experience

**4.6.1.1 The evaluation of one- to three-times users**

The one- to three-times users in this study were mostly experimental drug users who tried Ecstasy and found that either it did not match their expectations or they have not had a chance to take the drug again. The most recent use of Ecstasy in this group ranged from 1 week to 3 years ago, with a mean of 23.2 weeks. Seventy-eight per cent said that they would use Ecstasy again as they had found their experience to be ‘fun’ and pleasurable. Twenty-two per cent reported the experience as overrated, ‘a waste of time’ and ‘definitely not worth the money’, while 11 per cent described it as unpleasant. One subject felt as though his ‘head was going to explode’ and that his ‘brain had been fried’. He described adverse reactions such as a severe headache, vomiting, mild hallucinations, panic attacks and paranoia together with a number of side-effects such as bruxism, dehydration, and hot and cold flushes. These episodes were not reported as prolonged, but only for the duration of the active effects of the ingredients of the tablet.

**4.6.1.2 The evaluation of multiple-time users**

Eighty per cent of the multiple-time users (those who had used Ecstasy more than three times) continue to use or intend to use Ecstasy. Last use within this group ranged from 1 day ago to 3 months ago, with a mean of 2.5 weeks. The most frequently reported reasons for not continuing to use by the remaining twenty per cent were that they had become aware of the dangers involved in using Ecstasy, had grown out of it, and that Ecstasy had lost its allure and had become ‘boring’. Having ‘used it too much’, financial reasons and becoming a parent were also given as reasons for no longer taking it. Last use within this group ranged from 2 weeks to 12 months ago, with a mean of 23.72 weeks.
4.6.2 Ecstasy initiation

The most common method of introduction to the drug included being offered it by a friend (74%), by a drug dealer (14%) and by a family member, that is, a sibling or a cousin (12%). Others went out and found it themselves commenting on the easy availability of the drug at nightclubs, Raves, bars, restaurants and even in schools. Ecstasy appeared to be obtainable almost anywhere. Favoured times for taking Ecstasy were on weekends (96%), usually in the late evening (90%), normally if one did not have to study or go to work the next day. Twenty four per cent had used Ecstasy in the day while 10 per cent had used Ecstasy during school hours.

4.6.3 Reasons for trying Ecstasy

The most frequently reported reasons for trying Ecstasy were curiosity (to see what it was all about) (70%), peer pressure (all my friends do) (36%), and for ‘fun’ and enjoyment (26%). Fourteen per cent of the sample tried Ecstasy as an escape from problems and others as a result of not feeling good about themselves or feeling spiritually empty. Additional reasons included sociability and risk, ‘because it is illegal’. Two subjects tried Ecstasy as an alternative to drunken driving in response to the zero-tolerance campaign.

4.6.4 Ability to have fun without Ecstasy

Although 78 per cent of the respondents believed they were able to go out to a nightclub or a Rave and have fun without taking Ecstasy, the remaining 22 per cent believed the dance scene to be drug-orientated. For them, Ecstasy provided the energy to keep going, and gave the music and visual effects ‘clarity’. Subjects referred to a Rave as a false reality: an escape from everyday stress for a few hours. In a similar manner, respondents alluded to drugs as an escape, hence the Rave and Ecstasy synergy. One subject commented that a large part of the ‘peaceful vibe’ at the Rave is created by Ecstasy, and if people were not on the drug it simply would not be the same.

4.6.5 Reasons for Rave participation and significance of Raves

Reasons for Rave participation included dancing (74%); the music and visual effects (50%), drug-taking (46%), a stress release (44%), an escape from problems or reality (42%), meeting people (30%) or simply being in with the crowd (16%). Having a good time and the fact that their friends attended were
cited by small proportions of the sample. One respondent specified dealing drugs as his motivation for Rave attendance. For many subjects Raves signified a shared collective experience (54%), a big party (50%) and a sense of belonging or fitting in (42%). PLUR (28%), acceptance (26%) and spirituality (22%) were also nominated.

![Graph showing reasons for Rave participation](image)

**Figure 4.1 Reported reasons for Rave participation**

### 4.6.6 Word associations linked to Ecstasy

When asked directly what sort of words they associated with Ecstasy, responses grouped largely into the following two types: (1) peace, closeness, happiness and love, and (2) fun, party, energy and freedom.

The following is a poem composed of respondents’ associations with the word Ecstasy.

**ECSTASY**

When asked to rate how ‘hard’ a drug Ecstasy was perceived to be on a scale of 0 to 10 where marijuana was placed at 1 and heroin at 10, the mean response was 4.86 (SD = 2.27).

4.6.7 Dosage and mode of use

The most frequently reported forms of Ecstasy available were pills followed by capsules. Methods of taking Ecstasy included swallowing (100%), ‘snorting’ (14%), as a suppository (10%) and smoking it with marijuana in a ‘joint’ (4%). The effects of one dose or tablet were reported to last anywhere between 2 and 12, with a mean duration of 5.3 hours. The usual doses per occasion were reported as follows: less than one pill (6%), one pill (38%), two pills (28%), three pills (14%) and more than three pills (12%). One subject reported one-and-a-half pills as being her usual dose. The smallest quantity tried by respondents was half a tablet. The maximum number of tablets reported as the usual dose per occasion was ten.

4.6.8 Patterns of use

Many respondents (48.7%) claim that their pattern of use since their initial Ecstasy experience has decreased (following an initial increase) over time. Twenty-two per cent claim that it has increased, 19½ per cent report no change over time and nearly 10 per cent claim that it varies depending on their cash flow, frequency of Raves and their personal choices to do so. Twelve per cent commented on experiencing the strongest effects the first time they ever tried Ecstasy.

4.6.9 ‘Staggering’

Fifty-four per cent of the respondents reported ‘staggering’ the multiple doses they take by waiting until the effects of the first dose have worn off before taking the second in order to prolong the experience. Successive doses were described as being shorter lasting (73%) and less intense (31.7%) than the first dose taken on each occasion, with reduced pleasurable effects (31.7%) and increased side-effects (31.7%). This may reflect the development of tachyphylaxis, that is, the rapidly decreasing response to a drug after the administration of a few doses. Other subjects, however, seemed to experience successive doses as being more
intense (26.8%), longer lasting (12.9%) with increased pleasure (7.31%). This may reflect the differences in pill quality and strength.

4.6.10 Frequency of use

The present rate of Ecstasy consumption of multiple-time users is as follows: once a month (34%), once a week (19.5%), every three months (17%), fortnightly (10%), on special occasions (9.75%) and every few days (4%). Seven per cent stated their frequency of use varied depending on the occurrence of organised Raves and their cash flow. Most subjects (51%) reported their highest rate of consumption to have been once a week followed by every few days (26.8%). One subject reported initially using Ecstasy every day because it was freely available.

Table 4.2 Comparison between highest and present rate of consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest rate of consumption (% of multiple-time users)</th>
<th>Present rate of consumption (% of multiple-time users)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every three months</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On special occasions</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varied use</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.11 Maximum reported doses

Twenty-two per cent of the multiple-time users had experimented with relatively large doses, that is, 10 or more tablets on one or more occasions. Several respondents had tried between 10 and 20 tablets at a time. The maximum dose reported by any respondent was 24 tablets on one occasion, that is, Saturday night at a Rave inclusive of Sunday at the after-party.
The effects experienced by Ecstasy users

Positive psychological and physiological effects

Positive mood state or an overall sense of well-being, perhaps the most consistent effect of Ecstasy, was reported as being experienced by 94 per cent of the sample. Other positive psychological and physiological effects that were reported comprised the following: a feeling of intimacy (84%), enhanced auditory and sensory perception (84%), loss of appetite (80%), activation or increased energy level (74%), talkativeness or increased communication (68%), euphoria or 'rush' (64%), heightened sensuality (44%), greater emotional self-insight (42%) and spiritual awareness (26%).

Negative psychological and physiological effects

Negative psychological and physiological effects experienced by the sample include the following: an elevated heart rate (70%), jaw clenching and grinding of teeth (64%), hot and cold flushes (60%), nausea (58%), rolling or flickering of the eyes (nystagmus) (56%), sleeplessness (56%), dehydration (32%), feeling of heavy legs or 'no legs' (as though some muscles resist the drug's demand to let go) (30%), desire to urinate but being unable to do so (24%), vomiting (18%), visual hallucinations (14%), anxiety (panic attacks) (8%), paranoia (increased self-consciousness) (8%) and muscle hypertonicity (stiffness) (8%). One subject reported blindness for 30 seconds.
Chapter 4

4.6.12.3 Effects of taking larger doses

Eighty per cent of multiple-time users noticed a difference in the effects of Ecstasy when taking larger doses than usual. The effect of taking larger doses was reported as generally more hallucinatory (41%) with increased side-effects. It was longer lasting and more intense (76%), with a stronger rush (54%). Subjects reported nystagmus (71%), jaw clenching (66%), nausea (59%), muddled thought (56%), feeling jittery (39%), paranoia (34%), loss of control (27%), panic attacks (27%), vomiting (24%), unpredictable mood (17%) and erratic behaviour (10%). Memory loss was described by 10 per cent of the respondents who maintain that they ‘can’t remember parts of the evening’.

4.6.13 Dependency

Ninety per cent of multiple-time users did not think their Ecstasy use was problematic, while the remaining 10 per cent admitted to problematic use. Out of the 10 per cent, only one subject had sought professional help. Reasons given by respondents for not seeking help included the fact that Ecstasy is an illegal substance, they did not know where to go and that their parents would...
EFFECTS

Findings of questionnaires on recreational ecstasy use

Hallucinatory
Longer lasting/More intense
Stronger rush
Nystagmus
Jaw clenching
Nausea
Muddled thought
Feeling jittery
Paranoia
Loss of control
Panic attack
Vomiting
Unpredictable mood
Erratic behaviour
Memory loss

PERCENTAGE OF MULTIPLE-TIME USERS

Figure 4.5 Effects of taking larger doses

‘freak out’ if they knew about their drug problem. Seventy-eight per cent of the respondents felt that one could become dependent on Ecstasy. Most subjects (54%) associated a psychological dependence rather than a physical dependence (5%) with Ecstasy. Dependence on Ecstasy was described as a need to take it in order to enjoy oneself (85%) (the idea that one cannot go out and have fun without it) and the need to take it in order to cope every day (24%). There was also mention of taking increasingly large doses, an indication that some subjects had developed tolerance.

4.6.14 Tolerance

Sixty-three per cent of the subjects reported the need to take more Ecstasy to produce the same effects. This was equally attributed to either tolerance or the gradual decrease in the quality of pills over time. Seventy-eight per cent reported having noticed variations in the effects of Ecstasy over time, especially reduced pleasurable effects (68%). Many respondents alluded to the reduction of the ‘loved-up’ feeling (feelings of being loved and being loving), ‘less rushing’ and that ‘pills these days aren’t as good as they used to be’. Once again, mention was made that subsequent experiences were not quite as good as the
4.6.15 Perceived risks

Only 78 per cent of the respondents had heard of, or read about, risks involved in using Ecstasy. The remaining 22 per cent had not. Fourteen per cent believed that death was not a very realistic danger and stated that the 'chances of dying were minimal' purporting Ecstasy to be 'largely a safe drug'. Respondents reported the following as the most dangerous perceived risks: neurotoxicity (17%), death (12%), unknown composition of pills claiming to be Ecstasy (7%), dehydration (7%), reduction of serotonin in the brain (5%), risks to general physical health (5%), overhydration (5%), overdosing (2%), cognitive deficits (2%) and dependence (2%). Despite these concerns, users continue to take Ecstasy believing in the myth of their own invulnerability. Ten per cent saw none of the above-mentioned risks as dangerous, maintaining that nothing had been proved as yet and therefore Ecstasy remained 'pretty safe'. A further 10 per cent believed an uneducated user to be the most dangerous risk pointing out that one needs to know what to expect from the drug and what to do should one experience a negative reaction. One subject referred to being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>Percentage of Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uneducated user</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown pill composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain damage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehydration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of serotonin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General physical risks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive deficits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential overdose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overhydration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being caught by the police</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
caught by the police with her night's supply of pills on her as being the most dangerous risk.

### 4.6.16 Other drugs used by multiple-time users

Eighty-three per cent of the sample disclosed use of marijuana, 78 per cent reported occasional use of LSD, and 68 per cent claimed to be social users of amphetamine (speed) and amyl nitrate (poppers) respectively. Sixty-six per cent of the respondents had used cocaine socially. Twenty-four per cent had experimented with diet pills, 22 per cent with herbal Ecstasy, 17 per cent with ketamine (an animal anaesthetic) and 10 per cent with rohypnol. A small proportion of multiple-time users had tried heroin, crack and GHB (liquid Ecstasy). Only one subject had experimented with temazepam, a hypnotic. Current use was mainly defined as social or occasional use rather than regular or frequent use.

#### 4.6.16.1 Concurrent drug use

In order to determine to what extent any reported effects were specific to Ecstasy itself, subjects were asked about their use of other substances in
combination with Ecstasy. Seventy-one per cent of multiple-time users had used other drugs in combination with Ecstasy, while the remaining 29 per cent had not. Fifty-nine per cent drink alcohol while on Ecstasy. Alcohol was described as dulling the effects of Ecstasy, inducing nausea and vomiting, and making one feel more dehydrated or 'thirsty'. Forty-one per cent used Ecstasy with marijuana and reported it as both a 'pick me up' and 'bring me down'. Many smoke marijuana on the 'coming down' stage of the experience, seeking to prolong the 'high' or to try and cancel the stimulant properties and overcome sleeplessness. Thirty-nine per cent used amyl nitrate (poppers) for an increased or stronger 'head rush'. Thirty-two per cent used cocaine, which was reported to neutralise the effects of Ecstasy, and LSD (acid) which respondents claim gave Ecstasy more of a 'spiritual' or 'trancey' feel, and increased energy and hallucinogenic properties. The combination of Ecstasy and LSD is known as a 'candy flip'. Twenty-seven per cent used Ecstasy together with amphetamines (speed), which increased the stimulant properties of the drug, provided extra energy for dancing and prolonged the experience. However, it reduced the warmth of MDMA.

### 4.6.17 Influences on life in general

Sixty-three per cent of users believe Ecstasy has influenced their life in some way. Many respondents (46%) regarded the influence as positive rather than negative. Positive influences included improved relationships or social interactions (36,5%), gaining of self-insight (24%) and enriched personal growth (17%). Three subjects claimed they had become less aggressive and more 'relaxed'. Negative influences comprised depression (12%), being generally 'run down' (9,75%), more susceptible to colds (9,75%), more fatigued (7,3%) and a lowered immune response to infection (7,3%). Two subjects
mentioned a general decline in their attitude involving a lack of motivation, laziness and moodiness.

4.7 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study provides a thorough investigation of the ways in which Ecstasy is used, with its primary findings regarding the nature of the effects of Ecstasy as experienced by its users. As most subjects were recruited from Rave clubs, concerns arise about the possibility of the respondents supplying descriptions about MDMA's effects which are biased through myths held in the Rave subculture about the effects of the drug. These are clearly points that necessitate caution when interpreting the data. Nevertheless, this author does not believe these factors to nullify the findings. The present data replicates much of the existing literature regarding the effects that Ecstasy elicits. In this section, findings from the present research are discussed and references to sources that agree with these findings are given in brackets.

‘Nightclubbers’ whose main reason for using Ecstasy is to have ‘fun’ were found to be the most prevalent users of Ecstasy. Ecstasy is only one of the popular dance drugs and although Rave promoters and club owners deny it, the supply of drugs and Ecstasy in particular is essential in providing an atmosphere conducive to raving. The ingestion of MDMA at a Rave, resulting in that wonderful ‘high’ followed by a ‘low’ (as previously indicated in Chapter 2) seems to predispose an adolescent or young adult to participate in Raves repeatedly. It may be an emotional or psychological dependence following this simulated ‘bipolar’ condition. This pronounced ‘mood swing’ was indicated by Solowij, Hall and Lee (1992:1169) a decade ago and was supported by the more recent findings of Jansen (1997:125).

Psychological dependence (mentioned as a possibility by 54% of the subjects) is a condition that is characterised by an emotional and mental preoccupation with the effects of Ecstasy and an unremitting craving for these effects (Gillis 1994:108). It develops when drug use becomes far more important than other things in a person’s life. Some ravers or clubbers ‘crave’ Ecstasy and feel compelled to keep on using it. They feel that they cannot have fun or enjoy themselves without it. Drug users should not underestimate the ‘power’ of psychological dependence. Psychological dependence is usually much stronger and more difficult to overcome than physical dependence. The body can eliminate a drug and return to normal within days or weeks, however, the mind and the emotions can take a lot longer (Australian Drug Foundation 1998:01). The fact that the majority of the respondents (78%) maintain that
they would take Ecstasy repeatedly in the future seems to be a precursor to emotional dependence.

Ecstasy (MDMA) produces a state of heightened positive mood, well-being and increased emotional sensitiveness (Greer & Tolbert 1986:323; Solowij, Hall & Lee 1992:1169; Vollenweider et al. 1998:241). It enhances intimacy, self-insight and allows for direct, loving and honest verbal communication (Eisner 1989:35; Greer & Tolbert 1986:321; Beck & Morgan 1986:293; Elk 1996:352, 354). Although MDMA has been labelled an aphrodisiac, Ecstasy is generally described as sensual (feeling sexy or attractive) rather than sexual (Beck & Morgan 1986:293). Buffum and Moser (1986:359) too concluded that due to the increased feelings of emotional closeness, Ecstasy serves to enhance the sensual aspects of sex. Other perceived positive psychological effects included a sense of euphoria, elevated self-esteem and feelings of spirituality (Elk 1996:352; Greer & Tolbert 1986:320).

The most frequently reported, positive physical effect is that of increased energy or stimulation; wanting to be in constant motion (Greer & Tolbert 1986:321; Elk 1996:352). Following the stimulant effects were enhanced visual and auditory perception (Elk 1996:352; Vollenweider et al. 1998:241). On the whole, Ecstasy is seen as 'perfect' for the Rave scene. Zealous dancers sometimes bypass the emotional effects of MDMA by taking small 'boosters' (half-a-tablet) at regular intervals throughout the night to obtain the stamina to dance for hours on end. However, expectations do play an important part in all drug effects. There are many who wish to dance because they have been conditioned to associate this with Ecstasy, irrespective of the actual content of the pill they have swallowed, just as many will declare their love to others present for the same reason (Jansen 1997:117).


The desire to urinate but having difficulty in doing so mentioned by 24 per cent of the South African sample was the only area in which reported effects differed. This may reflect lowered salt (sodium) concentration of body fluids as
Findings of questionnaires on recreational ecstasy use

...a result of excessive drinking of water. Sodium has the remarkable quality of holding water in the body's tissues. It is possible that the sodium is sweated out or urinated out in higher than normal quantities (Jones 1997:203). The primary stimulus for water ingestion is thirst and MDMA is known to induce thirst. White, Bocher and Irvine (1997:117) maintain that high doses of amphetamine derivatives induce repetitious behaviours in animals and humans. It is possible that the combination of thirst and repetitive behaviour patterns, such as dancing at a Rave or club, leads to excessive fluid intake.

To maintain a steady body fluid balance, water intake must equal water excretion. The increased water ingestion and impaired renal excretion may result in hyponatraemia (Singer & Brenner 1998:01). Hyponatraemia comprises lowering the ionic strength (sodium/salt concentration) of the body fluids which results in less-effective circulating arterial volume, leading to increased thirst and increased arginine vasopressin (AVP) (formerly antidiuretic hormone) secretion. This results in impaired water excretion due to AVP's action in the kidney (Singer & Brenner 1998:05), hence the desire to urinate but not being able to do so. The clinical manifestations of hyponatraemia are related to osmotic water shift leading to an increased intracellular fluid volume, specifically brain cell swelling or cerebral oedema. Accordingly, the symptoms are primarily neurological and their severity is dependent on the rapidity of onset and total decrease in plasma sodium concentration (Singer & Brenner 1998:06).

Simply put, when the sodium concentration is lowered due to unrestricted water intake, water is lost into the fabric of the body's tissues causing swelling. This does not present so much of a problem for most tissues, but it presents the brain with real difficulties. The brain, encased as it is by the skull, cannot swell excessively. It becomes compressed as a result of an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the brain tissue and puts pressure on the brain stem, which controls heart and breathing functions (Jones 1997:203). This results in cerebral oedema and can eventually lead to death (van Aerts 1997:93). When thirsty while on Ecstasy, it is therefore more sensible to drink isotonic fluids instead of only pure water, which will help replace some minerals such as sodium and preserve the balance of fluids in circulation.

Although side-effects can be uncomfortable, only a few users find that side-effects spoil the Ecstasy experience. Adverse sequelae during the following 24 hours include lack of energy and appetite, feelings of restlessness, occasional difficulty concentrating, and moodiness (Vollenweider et al. 1998:249). Given the congruity of reported effects in this study with those of previous research, it would appear a reasonable assumption to make that the Ecstasy being sold in the clubs in Durban was primarily MDMA. According to Doblin (1998:04) in the *High Times*, the tested Ecstasy samples sent from South Africa contained only one psychoactive ingredient - a very substantial dose of...
MDMA. Although it appears that Ecstasy pills sold in the clubs are largely MDMA, the safety of MDMA pills and capsules cannot be determined with certainty.

In a 1985 study of MDMA users, Siegal (in Beck & Morgan 1986:297) maintains that the most common patterns of use are ‘experimental’ (ten times or less in a lifetime) or ‘social recreational’ (one to four times a month). He also said that ‘compulsive patterns marked by escalating dose and frequency of use have not been reported with MDMA users’. However, it certainly appears that this is no longer the case. The present study indicates a distinct change in the pattern of Ecstasy use. Escalating doses appear to have become quite common as individuals try and ‘get more out of it’ — some taking ten pills as their usual dose per night while others have tried between ten and twenty tablets on some occasions. According to McGuire and Fahy (1991:697), the use of almost any substance may become compulsive and excessive in some individuals.

In rapport with other studies, the findings of this study suggest that the negative effects of Ecstasy are dose-related in that their severity correlated with both the total number of doses consumed and with frequency of use (Solowij, Hall & Lee 1992:1170). Users from this sample report that the quality of the MDMA experience eventually begins to drop as the number of MDMA experiences increases. While this may be due to a long-term neurochemical process, it could also be due to the loss of novelty of the experience or some kind of learning-based tolerance. According to Doblin (1995:04), this frequent loss of quality of the experience over time serves as a kind of built-in antidote to long-term compulsive use, as does the increase in the ratio of unwanted side-effects to desired effects that accompanies the attempt to take increasingly larger doses.

Since the ‘loved-up effect’ from Ecstasy wanes with repeated use, some users will fruitlessly be attempting to re-experience the original ‘positive’ mental state. However, with multiple exposure to the substance this becomes impossible due to neurochemical changes in the brain and concomitant psychological changes resulting from repeated use (Jansen 1997:125). This may partially explain escalating doses in recent years. Other reasons for increasing dosage may be the considerable drop in price that has occurred because of the increased demand for Ecstasy. It was once believed that Ecstasy would be free of any dependency risk because of the loss of the empathogenic ‘loved-up’ effect with repeated use. However, while loss of this effect may lead to dwindling use in an older group who take Ecstasy for its empathogenic qualities, younger users in the Rave culture may come to appreciate the more amphetamine-like qualities and have different expectations (Jansen 1997:126).

Many people (63%) reported long-term psychological benefits resulting from their use of Ecstasy. Such influences included belief changes that continued long after MDMA sessions and resulted in a more positive frame of
mind about themselves, individually or socially. In agreement with a 1986 study by Greer and Tolbert and a 1994 study by McCann and Ricaurte (in Doblin 1995:04) – where MDMA users exhibited less hostile and impulsive personality traits – three subjects in this study claimed to have become less aggressive and more easygoing. Although most respondents regarded the influence of the drug as positive, some negative long-term physical and psychological influences were reported.

It was evident that most people (71%) who take Ecstasy also use other drugs, some of which are clearly associated with a risk of mental health consequences. Polydrug use and experimentation with different drug concoctions appear to be commonplace amongst ravers. This is an important factor to bear in mind when conducting research in this area. Despite the fact that most Ecstasy users sometimes ingested other drugs together with MDMA, these experiences were distinct enough from the original MDMA experience to ascribe the effects reported in this study to Ecstasy itself. Additional research is certainly required to investigate the various drug interactions, both legal and illegal, before the consequences of these can be fully understood (Solowij, Hall & Lee 1992:1 168).

Amongst ravers, the view that MDMA is a relatively safe drug prevails. Accurate knowledge of the toxicity of Ecstasy and the risks involved with the use of Ecstasy is lacking amongst its users. Misinformation concerning the drug is the greatest danger. According to Rosenbaum (1999:08), a general belief amongst many educators, policy makers and parents is that if adolescents merely understood the dangers of drug experimentation, they would abstain. However, in striving to foster abstinence, risk and danger messages are sometimes 'inflated' and at times even completely untrue. Consider the following comment by a 16-year-old boy in the tenth grade at a Durban high school:

My parents told me that Ecstasy causes brain damage and that I would probably end up in a coma and be a 'vegetable' if I tried it. At school, my guidance teacher told me that Ecstasy makes you major depressed and that you would become suicidal after the first time you took it and it's really not like that. You hear all that negative stuff ... then you go to a Rave and try it anyway and you realise, 'Man, they bullshitted me! I seriously had a wicked time on E.'

When such information is given, students discredit both the message and the messenger, because these false messages clash with their actual observations and experience. They see their friends and themselves as people who have used Ecstasy without any of those damaging effects. Consequently, adolescents lose faith in what we, as parents and teachers tell them and are thus less likely to turn to us as credible sources of information (Rosenbaum 1999:8–9).
Chapter 4

Rosenbaum (1999:9) asserts that the problem with delivering false messages is that students will not take drug education seriously. When students repudiate warnings, it is not to be taken lightly. An alarming outcome of misinformation is that they will ignore warnings altogether and put themselves in real danger. Take, for example, a scholar who did not believe the negative claims about Ecstasy. He downgraded the school’s message and ‘free-based’ crack. Nowadays, increased availability, inconsistency in pill ‘strength’ and adulteration of pills (indicating quality and dose control issues), combined with the adolescents’ rejections of warnings they do not trust, have resulted in increased risk of acute intoxication or fatal overdose (Elk 1996:351).

4.8 CONCLUSION

Young people are more than capable of seeing through incongruities and are far less worried about the legality of activities than are adults who understand the implications of breaking the law. It is not enough to tell students they must refrain from certain drugs because they are illegal. Young people often do not care and are sometimes attracted to drugs because they are illegal. Furthermore, they will use or reject a given substance for reasons having to do with its effects or reputation (Rosenbaum 1996:11). Ecstasy (MDMA) produces a positive mood state, a generalised feeling that all is right and good with the world. People on MDMA often describe feeling ‘at peace’ or primarily experiencing a ‘happy’ feeling and emotional closeness to others. Personal communication barriers are also broken down. The feeling of unity and shared joy at a Rave can be overwhelmingly wonderful. These effects are appealing to adolescents, particularly those with a poor self-esteem who are not at ease talking to others and who long to be accepted. If using Ecstasy at a Rave is perceived as ‘cool’ by their peer group or as the ‘in thing’ to do, adolescents will try it. Honest and therefore accurate drug education is imperative. It can save lives and reduce the harm that drugs can cause.

Existing drug education programmes have been based on the idea that drug use can be prevented or at least reduced through tougher law enforcement measures and educating young people into saying no to drugs. The only flaw in this seemingly obvious strategy is that contemporary drug policies have been unsuccessful. Williamson (1997:65) points out that there has been a continual rise in the number of people taking illegal drugs, drug-related offences and drug-related deaths. While the abstinence-only approach is well intended, it is nevertheless misdirected. The idea that adolescents, at a time in their lives when they are most receptive to risk taking, will be deterred from
experimentation with mind-altering substances and altered states of consciousness is unrealistic at best (Rosenbaum 1999:09). The latest figures, according to the South African Narcotics Bureau (May 1999), indicate that one in three, and in the higher grades, one in two school going youngsters, are experimenting with drugs. This suggests that drug use is definitely on the increase, especially with the younger age group.

Drugs have always been, and are likely to remain, part of youth culture. Adolescent experimentation with drugs continues despite drug-prevention efforts. The recent escalation in adolescent drug use is proof that the ‘just say no to drugs’ programmes have failed. Rosenbaum (1999:09) points out that after the warnings to abstain from drugs, the lessons end. There is no additional information on how to minimise risks, avoid problems or prevent abuse. Abstinence is seen as the only test of success and the only acceptable teaching option. The ‘abstinence-only’ approach leaves teachers and parents with nothing to say to the 50 per cent of students who say ‘maybe’ or ‘sometimes’ or ‘yes’ to drug use, the very adolescents educators need to reach most (Rosenbaum 1999:10).

Goode (1993:334) asserts that ‘almost all drug education programmes strive for prevention as their ultimate goal. It is possible that this goal is unrealistic with current experimenters and users. Perhaps moderate or wise use is a more realistic goal.’ Drug researchers Botvin and Reniscow (in Rosenbaum 1999:10) maintain that ‘although controversial, programs that include messages of responsible use may be more credible, and ultimately, more effective ... The primary goal of substance abuse prevention programs should, it could be argued, be the reduction of heavy use and abuse rather than limiting experimentation among individuals unlikely to become frequent users.’

Since total abstinence is not a realistic goal, educators need to embrace a practical rather than moralistic view toward drug use. Like adolescent sexual activity, drug use will occur and that is what educators need to recognise. Instead of becoming morally ‘enraged’ and disciplinary, educators should assume the existence of drug use and strive to minimise its negative effects and dangers (Rosenbaum 1996:12). Rosenbaum (1999:10) proposes a ‘safety first’ or harm-reduction strategy for drug education which demands reality-based assumptions about drug use and drug education. Whether one likes it or not, many adolescents will experiment with drugs. Others will use drugs more regularly. At the same time that abstinence is stressed, a fallback strategy for risk reduction should also be provided. This would provide students with information and resources so that they do the least possible harm to themselves and those around them.

All drug use in adolescents should not be labelled as abuse. Adolescents who use Ecstasy despite their parents’ and teachers’ warnings to abstain need to understand that there is a huge difference between use and abuse, and
between occasional and daily use or addiction. If they continue using Ecstasy, adolescents need to know that they can and must control their use by using in moderation and limiting their use (Rosenbaum 1999:12). Amongst educators, a knowledge of which drugs are available in the illicit market and the toxicity of each is imperative. Differences in individual susceptibility to MDMA-induced acute toxicity must also be investigated as it is currently impossible to predict which users will be most likely to experience such effects (White et al. 1997:117).

Guidelines for Ecstasy use should be considered. These should include recommendations on the provision of suitable environments at venues where the drug is likely to be taken. Raves and clubs should offer free, unrestricted access to drinking tap water, adequate ventilation and entry to 'chill' areas to cool down and relax after dancing. They should also have someone on site trained in the effects of taking drugs or perhaps a paramedic in attendance (RaveSafe 1997:33). Other guidelines need to address educating users about appropriate fluid intake, advisable dosage, the dangers of combining Ecstasy with other drugs, both illegal and prescribed, and the warning signs of toxicity (White, Bochner & Irvine 1997:117). White, Bochner and Irvine (1997:117) assert that the last-mentioned is particularly important, as obvious signs of acute toxicity have been ignored in several cases possibly through ignorance or concern about risk of arrest for possession of an illegal substance.

Since it is not a realistic expectation that ravers will stop using Ecstasy en masse, the best educators can hope for in place of total abstinence is responsible use based on informed decisions – a result of the following underlying message to adolescents: 'Say NO... and if you can’t say NO... say KNOW.' It is our duty as educators to take on students and furnish them with credible information so that they can make responsible decisions, avoid drug abuse and remain safe. (See Chapter 5 for more detail on harm-reduction drug education.)
Figure 4.8 If you cannot say NO, say KNOW