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*Phenomenology and the dance culture: Women's perception of ecstasy use, clubbing and the body.*

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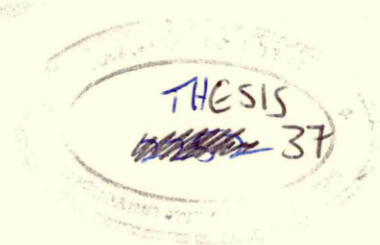
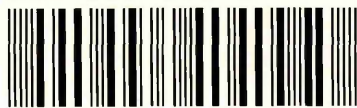
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Phenomenology and the Dance Culture:  
Women's Perceptions of Ecstasy use,  
Clubbing and the Body

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements of Sheffield Hallam  
University for the degree of Doctor of  
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## Abstract

In-depth interviews were conducted with women who use ecstasy for recreation, mainly in the context of the dance event. The aim was to discover the meaning of ecstasy use, and its surrounding culture, for women in the late 1990s. A further endeavour involved disclosing how the body was experienced at the dance event and what this meant to the women.

Existential phenomenological analysis led to the following key conclusions. The dance event is experienced as a social space that allows women to be themselves and find a strong sense of belonging. There may be apparent dependence upon the experiences surrounding ecstasy. But, the journey of ecstasy use allows alterations in attitude, and transitions in life, to be experienced, which the women view positively. The women use ecstasy for pleasure, believe themselves to be independent in their use, and do not view their actions as deviant.

These findings are important to scholarly literature on female drug users because they redress the gender balance by presenting the specific experiences of women. They also have implications for social policy and health service provision, in the sense that this description of a social world enables understanding, enhances communication and, thus, betters education.

# Acknowledgements

To John and Tom

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who have helped me throughout this research. First of all, the women for their willingness to take part in the study and for sharing their experiences: this thesis would not have been possible without their valued contributions. Also, thanks to those who took the time to share their stories with me, informally. I cannot express my appreciation enough to Peter Ashworth for his invaluable input on existential phenomenology, Karen Dunn for inspiration and reassurance, and Alison McCamley for keeping me 'on track' with drug cultures. Furthermore, for their wisdom, encouragement and guidance. I would also like to thank my mum and dad for supporting me in ways too many to list, and my friends for their eternally optimistic outlooks (in particular Aileen, Emma, Caroline, Cheryl and Goff). Lastly, thanks to the Centre for Health and Social Care Research at Sheffield Hallam University for funding this work, and to Anne Parry and staff from Social Science and Law for encouragement.

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## Preface

My interest in psychology began in my teenage years and focused upon a curiosity with how the mind worked. I was particularly interested in the abnormal field, especially altered consciousness and perceptions as a result of mental illness or the use of psychoactive drugs. Prior to commencing an undergraduate degree in psychology I worked voluntarily with MIND which enabled me to understand something of how mental illness was ‘experienced’ whilst gaining practical experience of working in this context. My curiosity into altered minds was characterised by an overarching question: what is happening to ‘cause’ people to be like this? and why did some people suffer whilst others did not?.

The empathy I felt as I witnessed the sufferers’ distress and the difficulties they encountered when trying to subscribe to a ‘normal’ way of life had a profound affect on me. My desire to *find explanations* was gradually overcome by a desire, albeit idealistic, to ‘help’ these people. I felt exacerbated by a recognition of the personal battles they faced everyday given the stigma which surrounds them in society and thus, my interest in abnormal psychology became more ‘humanistic’ and less ‘scientific’.

As my study of psychology advanced, my interest in mainstream explanations of mental illness faded and I found myself venturing down a different path, instigated by personal experience and my discovery of R. D. Laing’s existential views on ‘madness’. Laing emphasised the social context of mental illness and his approach exemplified the beginning of my interest in social psychology. This centrality of context from which to observe events or investigate experiences altered my feelings towards mainstream theories even more. Because psychology had traditionally neglected experience as a source of knowledge, many questions had been left unanswered or misunderstood and I saw a need to gain insight into phenomena by connecting with the lives of those involved.

When I was introduced to qualitative methods of research and feminism I realised that both ‘fitted’ the questions I was beginning to ask, and in a complementary way. They clearly demonstrated gaps within traditional psychology, as above, in the sense of

questions that could not be answered by using certain research methods, and the implications that arose when these methods were used to 'explain' what it meant to, say, be female. (The issue of femininity had thrust itself into my consciousness since my introduction to feminist thought.) When I reached the stage of completing an undergraduate thesis, I proposed to investigate the female relationship with the body in contemporary society. This meant that my initial interest in abnormal psychology was retained (but in a new, social, context) as altered bodily perceptions can plague how a woman feels about her body.

From personal experience I knew that a woman's relationship with her body was a complexly fascinating area, forming pleasure and glee, sadness and sorrow, and often fluctuating somewhere along these extremes. Through reading the literature on women and their bodies I came across the feminist author Susie Orbach who argued that societal values placed upon women played a large part in their dissatisfied bodily perceptions. I saw connections between this perspective and the socio-cultural theory of body image dissatisfaction, which I drew heavily upon in my undergraduate thesis. My interest in feminist argument fuelled as I identified with the experiences I was reading about (for example how women would wear certain items of clothing to hide body parts from scrutiny) and felt strongly that society had a likely affect on how women perceived their bodies. This approach seemed to answer my question about why I, like the majority of my female friends who were also from a 'non-clinical' population, was not happy with my body and how this depended on many things such as the context in which I lived. Investigating this area enlightened me to many aspects about myself as a young woman who had developed through adolescence in the latter part of twentieth century western society.

My findings from semi-structured interviews with women about their bodily perceptions supported many of the arguments of socio-cultural theorists. For example, the women described feeling guilty after eating chocolate (the forbidden pleasure), avoiding going to the swimming pool because others could look at their semi-revealed bodies, wearing long tops which covered their behinds if they felt their bottoms were large, and feeling an increase in dissatisfaction after watching television programmes where thin and beautiful women paraded around. The issues that arose from my

research had a strong affect on me, mainly because I realised it was not 'my fault' that I was often unhappy with my bodily shape and size. Body image dissatisfaction was not an inherent female condition, rather it seemed to be a consequence of being female in a society that valued beauty, and beauty equalled thinness.

So, my interest grew as I progressed through academic study and it meant that I moved away from traditional explanations of abnormal issues in psychology to a more critical perspective. I felt 'at home' with feminist arguments as many seemed to fit with my perceptions: the questions asked and answered had personal relevance. Perhaps most revelatory was that as a psychology student I had been affected by my own study. This experience exemplifies the connection between oneself and one's research, and is an aspect which, unfortunately, tends to be neglected in the teaching of psychology.

Prior to beginning my Ph.D. I came across a report in The Guardian called 'The E-Plan Diet' (Herbert, 1995) which highlighted the relationship between drug use and dieting. The central concern was directed towards women who used stimulant drugs as part of their evenings out socialising, but who also had the intention to lose weight. One emphasis was on the dance culture with its use of illegal drugs and its bodily revealing styles of club-wear. The link was made between this somewhat glamorous recreation and the societal ideal of beauty as it was recognised that by using ecstasy a path to reaching this body ideal was more easily forged. The argument contained within this article excited me as it combined two of my interests (altered perceptions and the female body) within a psycho-social context. However, I also felt concerned about this simple way of controlling weight, hence I worried that many women may take up and remain with this recreation for this reason. Consequently, I formed my initial doctoral proposal: to investigate links between stimulant drug use and weight loss, with a focus upon body image (and its disturbance) in the dance culture.

This central focus upon body image however became less prominent as my research began. Through pilot investigations with women who were regulars on the dance scene I found it more suitable to use the general term 'the body' as my focus because this allowed the discussions to incorporate more bodily issues. The reasoning behind my decision was the result from what the women disclosed in the interviews, as they

indicated there was more to the body in the dance context than just how they perceived it in relation to appearance. The participants referred to their bodies a lot, and an instance given entailed the experience of ecstasy when it had been absorbed bodily which seemed to intertwine with the music during the dance (an aspect which may have been overlooked if my focus had remained on body image and related issues). This alteration in perspective is discussed in more depth in chapter three (page 38).

I had a further interest in this area of study, again a personal one, and related to my witnessing the emergence of the dance culture in British society. The impact of ecstasy (or MDMA; the drug linked with the culture) which was said to produce feelings of warmth and happiness in the user interested me enormously. The way people spoke about the drug and the culture fuelled my interest in this altered way of being. “You can’t beat drinking, laughing and taking Class As” is something a friend said in relation to ecstasy use which has etched itself in my memory. The culture appeared to be ruled by fun and, I feel, this quote exemplifies much of the attitude towards the drug at that time. I observed people become almost addicted to the lifestyle, and noted the concern from society and the government. This was the first time I had seen a drug enter society and with such force. And as currently witnessed the dance culture has longevity. It was perhaps unexpected when the culture first began in Britain, given the comparatively short life-spans of other ‘sub-cultures’, that it would have such an impact on our society. Its influence has filtered everywhere (particularly in music and fashion) and it is now considered to be part of mainstream culture.

As my informal and formal investigations progressed I became interested in other aspects of the dance culture experience. For example how, through using ecstasy, the person may find she or he has undergone an alteration in perspective that is perceived as beneficial. This resonated with what users of LSD in the 1950s and 60s had described: insights appeared to be gained whilst under the influence of psychoactive drugs which had an affect on sense of self, perception of others, and beliefs about the world. Did this mean that consciousness was altered on a longer term, perhaps permanent, basis? viz. that we would witness a new social unity as many ‘ravers’ and some researchers believed? The sense of belonging at the dance event that people described was a reality

for the women in my pilot interviews, and a reassurance of a bond which transcended time and space.

I'm in a totally new place, don't know anyone, it's just nice to go to a club, have an E just feel totally relaxed again and be able to mix with people 'cos you know, everyone else is on it as well and everyone's talking to each other, relating to each other... it's just nice to feel that real friendly, and to be a part of that real thing you get when you're on an E, you're just at one with everyone though that's a bit of a cliché  
(Kate)

Furthermore, the descriptions of the dance event from a female perspective seemed new and exciting. A quote from Jayne (another interviewee from my pilot investigation) may elucidate:

we're a group of females and we all know each other very well, we're very close friends and we just take it because we know that we're just having that nice feeling and we're going to be awake all night. It's just really the dance side of it, just being in a nice group of females that you've grown up with and you're all happy together... we're just actually enjoying the dancing, the sweating and the non-stop activity. You come back and then you're back to reality so it's just nice to take yourself out of that every so often

It was an environment which appeared to offer women freedom in many forms, and a way of being which they had not experienced in traditional night-clubs. As a woman with much experience of the latter context I could not help but experience a fascination and curiosity of this night-time recreation. Clubbing was definitely an area for feminist investigation, especially as it entwined with the use of an illegal drug which was particularly controversial when women were the users (see the Introduction chapter).

### **Myself and My Research**

As a female researcher investigating femininity my main concern was to listen to what women had to say and to understand the meanings they gave to their experiences. I wanted to give women a voice. The meanings of women's experience have been under-represented in psychology per se but especially in this area of study. Given the nature of the topic as sensitive, and the traditional representations of female drug users in academic research (and beliefs in wider society) which were disparaging, I wanted to use a method of exploration and analysis which would do justice to these women's



lives. I believe that existential phenomenology, for human science enquiry, addressed my concerns because it retains the participants' perspectives therefore their voices (see discussion in chapter two). This method has a small history of use in the context of feminist social science (Reinharz, 1992), perhaps more so in the United States, and as such it falls outside mainstream feminist methods. But the aims and goals, in relation to the researcher, are retained: in a broader sense, to work at producing a world free of oppression (Banister et al, 1994). The thrust of the thesis reflects the 'central assumption' in Gilligan's research that "...the way people talk about their lives is of significance... and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act" (1993:2).

This thesis is a phenomenological and feminist project, and it aims to discover the meanings of ecstasy use, clubbing and the body for women in the late 1990s. As such it does not neglect the social context of drug use, and the women's experiences are represented and retained in line with the phenomenological spirit. The thesis should be read as a study of what it means to be a woman participating in the dance culture and taking drugs for recreation.

Considering the audiences for this text there will be, in no doubt, those unsympathetic to women who use drugs for whatever reason, perhaps especially when it is for pleasure. I understand that this research may not erase or reduce the stigma attached to female drug users but I hope that by their voices being heard it will enable understanding for those with a more 'open' ear to actions they observe from a position of ignorance. A central concern (and contribution) of the thesis is to locate women in the related literature. And this point reflects my values in that I hope this research will be in some way effective in changing, through the insight it gives, how female drug users are looked upon. My values have remained constant throughout, though be them fuelled and made more intense as I listened to the women's stories. Thus, the ending of this thesis (chapter twelve) perhaps reflects the more personal side I set out with, and it is in that section that the implications for social policy, health practice and academic knowledge are discussed.

It is perhaps appropriate that I should include a section here which indicates to the reader how the thesis is presented. However, I feel this inclusion to be unnecessary as the chapter titles give enough indication about their contents. A final comment relates to the area of study as a controversial and topical one. I feel it is important to note that this thesis is neither a vindication of, nor an attack on, drug use. In true phenomenological spirit this and the question of legality are bracketed in order to reveal the life-world of the participants.



Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument... We transport it without instruments as if by magic, since it is ours and because through it we have direct access to space. For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression of the world, the visible form of our intentions. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:5)

## **The Body**

The female body, as experienced in the context of the dance event, is the focus of this thesis. It is through the body that we experience the world, and it enables us to traverse and inhabit social worlds. One social world is that of the dance event which allows the body to be experienced in different ways than usual: it grants a release from what can be considered the restraints of everyday living. For example, the adornment of the body to present an appearance that differs to that of daytime, the movement of the body (and its expression of emotion) during the dance, and the use of the body to absorb drugs for purpose of recreation. As will be demonstrated in the forthcoming discussion, the body occupies a particularly central position at ecstasy related dance events.<sup>1</sup>

The use of dance drugs<sup>2</sup> is forefront at dance events (though they are not the exclusive focus). When absorbed by the body, ecstasy is described to give feelings which refer to elation, increase in energy, relaxation and calmness (Davison and Parrott, 1997). The general ecstasy experience is not one of mind altering hallucinations, rather an awareness of surroundings and actions is retained.

Ecstasy does not provide a psychedelic experience. You remain grounded and aware in the same state of consciousness as normal, yet with some extra awareness. It removes the fear which normally inhibits our behaviour and allows us to open up. It allows us to indulge in pleasure, or to look deep into ourselves. Later, the experience can be recalled and insights applied to everyday life. It is an excellent teacher. (Saunders, 1997:2)

Thus, ecstasy allows the body to be experienced in an altered way. And in the setting of the dance event ecstasy is said to complement the music, which in turn complements the drug (McDermott, 1993; Collin, 1997). This most prominently demonstrates the relationship between dance events and ecstasy, though the rest of the setting (lighting,

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<sup>1</sup> The term ecstasy related events encompasses dance clubs and free parties. Hence, from hereafter, when I refer to the dance event it means that related to ecstasy use. However, when there is mention of the dance *club*, it refers only to that and not free parties.

<sup>2</sup> Dance drugs refer to ecstasy, amphetamine, LSD and cocaine.

lay-out and decor) is constructed in order to "...create a 'fit' between the drug and the environment... between the internal and external environments" (McDermott, 1993:213). In this way, the dance environment presents the ideal opportunity to experience the drugged body.

### *The body and dance*

Experiencing the special relationship of music and ecstasy occurs most prominently in the dance. Here the drugged body is taken higher by the music. When dancing, revellers get 'lost' in the harmonic flow of sounds and there is feeling of the body being controlled by the music, where mind-body dualism is not an issue (Pini, 1997). Though the ecstasy experience is one of remaining in control (Merchant and MacDonald, 1994), an allure of the dance culture involves letting oneself go rather than taking control (Henderson, 1997:49). It has been argued that the dance culture experience is one of 'abandonment' (McRobbie, 1994) and 'escapism' (Richard and Kruger, 1998), as though revellers dance their worries away. Thus, it is a form of 'time-out' from the pressures of everyday life. As the music engrosses the mind and body of the dancer, the dance may be described as spiritual: an individual state of trance and a group celebration described as tribe-like (Saunders, 1997).

While dancing on ecstasy, I enjoyed an extraordinary closeness between myself and everyone around. It was as though we were members of an exclusive tribe celebrating an ancient ritual with our hearts wide open. There was an uplifted spiritual quality, a feeling that our group experience was on a higher plane than normal where openness and honesty replaced superficial behaviour. It was as though we had rid ourselves of corrupt cultural pressures and were allowed to express our true selves. (Ibid.:2-3)

Despite the ecstasy using context being one of fun and not particularly self-seeking enlightenment, a spiritual feel is often encountered at dance events. Spirituality is a concept which is very much person dependent. However, Saunders<sup>3</sup> discovered a central theme was that these experiences were profound, outside of everyday life, and encompassed a feeling of 'rightness'. Such feelings were brought about from 'within

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<sup>3</sup> There is no date given for this survey on spiritual experiences through drug use though I remember the call for responses, so believe it to be around 1997. The address is [www.csp.org/nicholas/spirituality.html](http://www.csp.org/nicholas/spirituality.html). Though the survey was small scale and conducted via the internet, thus potentially prone to problems related to self-disclosure, I feel it is adequate to demonstrate intersubjectivity in the understanding of spirituality.

oneself' and had a transformation element. The spiritual experience in the dance club stems from the sense of unity with others and surroundings (Saunders et al, 2000), aided by ecstasy (classed as an entheogen, which refers to a category of drugs used for spiritual purpose; Saunders, 1997). Therefore, spirituality at the dance event is related to the holistic experience, as Gore (1997:53) states, dancing and hearing music can "...alter the chemistry of the brain and... transform consciousness".

Enhancing group celebration is the use of non-verbal communication which primarily succeeds that of the verbal during dance (Pini, 1997): individual revellers make eye-contact in the crowd and share the ecstasy of dancing to the music. Thus, the body is experienced as the main form of communication at dance events and adds to taking the mind to a different level of consciousness (Ibid.). When this is experienced as a group, McDermott (1993) refers to it as a 'collective consciousness' and believes it may reflect a new form of social cohesion within wider society.

Revellers are bodily expressive in the dance which, for women, can be quite sensual. However this does not entail the associations it would in conventional clubs as looking is based on oneness and incorporation rather than sexual objectification (Pini, 1997). This freedom allows women to explore their sensuality, and sexuality, and is also related to an alteration in how men act: both sexes no longer feel the need to get drunk and search for a partner as the night comes to a close (Henderson, 1997). Thus, new ways of being are encountered at the dance event. The club scene, though more specifically house, is promoted as sensual with the emphasis upon pleasure of the 'Mind, Body and Soul' (Henderson, 1993a, 1996, 1997). This pleasure is derived mainly in the dance, and it appears that the ability to lose oneself in the music whilst remaining in control of one's actions has had a liberating influence on women. They experience an independence and assurance when dancing whereas in previous sub-cultures dance was a privilege (McRobbie, 1994). This is illustrated by the observation that women dance alone in the crowd, and are rarely part of a pair or group as in conventional clubs.

### *The body and others*

As has been mentioned, the setting of the dance event is important in allowing women to express themselves freely in the dance, and it has been touched upon that this is related to people relations at such events. Henderson (1997) has argued that the dance

culture offered new relationships between and amongst the sexes when it first began, due to a lack of drunkenness and aggression, and an increase in communication and friendliness. Almost all research findings have shown that intentions for sexual relations are not primary concerns at dance events as they can be in traditional night-clubs (Saunders, 1995 feels this may be related to the key drug ecstasy allowing the expression of 'non-sexual love' which in turn may explain its popularity). Henderson (1993a, 1993c, 1994) also found that women in clubs were not looking for a man, not feeling self-conscious nor felt as though they must stay close to intimate friends. Indeed, in contemporary society women are experiencing a new found confidence in their femininity, where identity is not related to being male dependent (McRobbie, 1994). It has been argued that women feel sexually safe when men are on ecstasy (Henderson, 1993a) and McRobbie (1994) believes that men have become more sociable through this type of dancing as they embark on a new relationship with their bodies, one which is not focused on fulfilling sexual desire.

Related to the difference in relations between the sexes at dance events, where women are free from male attention and sexual objectification, is the wide-spread finding of freedom, independence and confidence this recreation has offered women (especially Henderson, 1993c). The dance environment offers security for women, and when participating they have a chance to discover themselves through the holism of the club experience (Pini, 1997): dance and the new relationship encountered with the body, open communication with strangers, and a feeling of ease. Hence, it has been argued that relations between the sexes are more egalitarian than those found in conventional clubs (Merchant and MacDonald, 1994; the authors go on to say it is possible that gender identities have taken on a new form by ecstasy use and clubbing, which is a further impact upon society).

Experiencing the body in new ways at dance events is particularly appealing to women for reasons relating to the contrast of experience to alcohol club leisure (Henderson, 1997; Pini, 1997). The dance scene can be inviting to women who feel disillusioned with the 'dance-around-your-handbag' routine and male machismo (Henderson, 1997). And they do not need to be on guard from sexual pick-up. Conventional pubs have tended to be a male domain, where women without men may be seen as promiscuous (linked to Victorian times when pubs were places to 'pick-up' female prostitutes). It has been argued that this representation has 'lingered' in

contemporary society as women in pubs are viewed to be immoral and lacking respect (Hey, 1986) and potentially available for sex (Green et al, 1990). Humorous jesting and torment towards women in alcohol pubs is perceived as an acceptable show of masculinity and forms social control, because if the act was reversed it would have provocative connotations (Smart and Smart, 1978). These examples clearly demonstrate the contrasting atmosphere between the two night-time recreations, and the foregoing discussion of the attraction of dance events to women. Considering this discussion, the main motivation discovered for female clubbers is the music and socialising (Release, 1997), and one study even found that sex and retaining fitness came lower down in ratings of life pleasures than dance, music and ecstasy (Henderson, 1993c).

Thus, with an absence of sexual attention plus the experience of ecstasy on an individual and group basis, enjoyment takes on a different meaning to that of conventional clubs. It is a new form of pleasure through drugs, music, dance, communication and loving, though sensual as opposed to sexual. Some descriptions of the ecstasy experience refer to increased communication, intimacy, self-esteem and an aid to interpersonal relationships (Solowij et al, 1992), and one can see how these possibly relate to the environment of the dance event, giving it an happy, empathic and friendly atmosphere. Indeed it is both the communal love and overall feeling of goodness (Merchant and MacDonald, 1994) that are argued to have played a central role in defining the dance culture (Henderson, 1993a).

### *Bodily adornment*

Despite a lack of sexual attention, sexuality can have an high profile in dance clubs. Around the time of rave crossing into the mainstream, when it merged with night-club culture, club fashion changed from asexual to body conscious and revealing (Champion, 1992).<sup>4</sup> Sexuality, through dress and actions, has always been prominent in the alcohol club context (Green et al, 1990). Henderson (1993a) believes that the media sensualised the club scene, influencing its fashion change (reflected in the sexualised images of women used on club produce; Henderson, 1996). And Mair (1997:192) notes how several advertisements for clubs resemble soft porn images, of which the consequence was the creation of the club 'babe': a stereotypical image made by men (Brooks, 1997).

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<sup>4</sup> The change in dress styles can be seen in the work of Pini, 1997 (original research published in 1993) when dress was unisex, androgynous.

Though dress can be quite sensual it is not to attract men as, Henderson (1997) has argued, women dress for themselves. Perhaps this is illustrated by the emergence of women wearing make-up, though this has not led to an arrival of traditional relations between the sexes (Henderson 1993a). Women use appearance to evoke control over other's responses (Wolf, 1991:43), which is especially so with the 'babe' style of attire, and the style of provocative dance that may go with it. However, not all females dress in an exaggerated, bodily revealing style: in part, this variance within the scene relates to specific music tastes (mainly house clubs). Henderson (1997:83) goes so far to say that the contemporary female identity, as constructed through clubbing, has resulted in the acceptance of sexual candour, of which she terms 'babes with attitude'.

### **Identity**

Pini (1997) has argued that identity is viewed holistically through self and others at dance events, in that a 'sameness' is experienced where individuality obstructs pleasure. A main attraction of dance events for participants is the identity it ascribes and the feeling of unity (Thornton, 1993; Henderson, 1997). An historical explanation for the sudden attraction of the dance culture in the late eighties relates to it offering a feeling of belonging to its participants (which is still a major appeal; Henderson, 1993b). The political and economic climate of that period emphasised individualism and estrangement, thus the event allowed people to experience a sense of community which was absent in society (McDermott, 1993; Collin, 1997). Through involvement with this culture, new identities were formed, and were shaped and interpreted by changes in life-style, attitude and conduct (McDermott, 1993).

...Ecstasy culture's prevailing ethos is inclusive... it offers a series of possibilities that people can use to define their own identity, possibilities that can be adapted to each individual's background, social status and belief system. It is endlessly malleable, pragmatic to new meaning. (Collin, 1997:4)

Identity in the dance culture is also described as being contra to the alcohol crowd, forming an 'us and them' perspective which defines clubbers against the mainstream (Thornton, 1993; Henderson, 1997). Despite the emergence of a variety of sub-scenes within the culture (related to music styles and associated styles of dress; Saunders, 1995) there exists homogeneity in this wider sense of identity. Further, there is

intersubjectivity amongst the divisions of the culture: the infrastructure, a drive for pleasure, has remained over the years (vid. Henderson, 1993a; Pini, 1997; Collin, 1997).

### **Finding Yourself**

Self-insight and empathy are further described experiences of ecstasy (Shafer, 1985). There are people who use the drug for self-development (New Age belief holders) and feel that the awareness gained is applicable to everyday life, thus having a lasting influence (Watson and Beck, 1991). In relation to the dance culture, where pleasure seems to be the impetus for use, McDermott (1993:218) found that through using the drug his participants applied insight to problems and re-evaluated life and priorities (however he warns that the opposite can occur and mask problems). Solowij et al (1992) also found many of their respondents to believe that ecstasy use had improved psychological development. This form of enlightenment may also relate to the discovery of the self from the dance event experience, as discussed. Interestingly, there seems to be a gender difference in that women report more positive experiences from using ecstasy, such as wisdom, freedom from worries, oneness with the world, realisations and understanding (Release, 1997).

### **Societal and Academic Conceptions of Female Drug Users**

Women have participated in dance events with as much force and visibility as men (Henderson, 1994)<sup>5</sup>, though they have found themselves on the receiving end of the rebuttal. Since ecstasy tends to be used in this setting<sup>6</sup> the issue of illegal, recreational drug use amongst females has received much attention throughout the clubbing era. However, the attention has come largely from the media, representing women as victims of the dance culture (Henderson, 1997). The ecstasy related deaths of women have received different attention than those of men (Ibid.), and I feel this is related to the changing role of femininity that has been witnessed since the scene began, and especially in the 1990s per se. What it means to be a woman has fluctuated, feminine views and roles have changed.

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<sup>5</sup> An exception being that of the production side of the dance culture, which tends to be male dominated (McRobbie, 1994; Pini, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> A study in London found that fifty-three percent had taken or intended to take ecstasy that evening, with thirty-nine percent likewise for amphetamine (Release, 1997). Closer to home, a Sheffield survey demonstrated that twenty-nine percent of clubbers used drugs in clubs weekly, and seventy-eight percent had used them in clubs within a three month period (Christophorou et al, 1996).

Certain sections of society have found it difficult to accept the shift in femininity: what was once considered 'lady-like' conduct seems to be a thing of the past for many (McRobbie, 1997; Henderson 1997). In particular, attitudes to leisure have changed as women talk about getting 'off their heads' (McRobbie, 1997). Henderson (1997) also notes a change in femininity, in that female clubbers have no desire to marry early, they hope for success in all walks of life, and are confident and happy. Women are openly participating in a culture which the outside world views as 'deviant', they dance bodily expressive, sweat, cheer and take illegal drugs. These are actions which go against some people's expectations, indeed as Ettorre (1992:78) writes "...any 'polluted woman' is seen to reject her identity as a woman. She spoils her identity". Thus, the 'single white female' gets the brunt from the media of what nasty things ecstasy can do (Henderson, 1997). Yet, like all moral panics, the reality is somewhat different from the inside.

Research has found that fun is the main reason for taking ecstasy (Solowij et al, 1992) and when women use it in the dance setting it intertwines with the ability for them to operate with power, as discussed. (There is uncertainty if it is the drugs, the atmosphere, or both which inspire confidence and independence in women; Henderson, 1993a). It has been argued that pleasure is an aspect which has been ignored in the study of women and drug use (Ettorre, 1992; Henderson, 1993a).<sup>7</sup> Thus, self-seeking pleasure must be considered in research on women who use drugs recreationally, as opposed to the perspective women-as-passive-victims that has prevailed (previous literature and its gender bias has consequently represented women in this way; Henderson, 1993b). Furthermore, female drug users have been categorised as deviant, especially in a sexual sense, when common illicit drugs are involved because of the strong moral condemnation they receive (Henderson 1994, who continues that the situation differs for men as they receive less reprehension from society; Ettorre 1992 reiterates by stating the societal view of female users is more critical).

Historically, drug literature has presented men as the main users of illegal drugs, and when it addressed female use, it did so from a male perspective (Henderson, 1993b). Hence there exists the view that women do not use drugs as heavily as men. However, recent research suggests that women are using drugs as frequently as their male counterparts, implying that gender boundaries are dissolving. Measham et al

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<sup>7</sup> The citations from Ettorre refer to women and drug use in general, whereas those of Henderson deal specifically with women and dance drugs.



(1994) studying youth and drug use found that drug uptake and use was equal between the sexes (yet this may be restricted to teenagers or particular regions). Likewise, Parker et al (1995) have argued that in adolescent years, being of female gender cannot be viewed as an obstruction to trying drugs. Though these studies centred upon young people and general drug use the forthcoming information suggests that dance drug use is prominent amongst women, and that it requires investigation from a perspective which recognises the experiences that make use popular. Women tend to take ecstasy at an earlier age than men (Henderson, 1993d; Saunders, 1995) and a study in 1997 found no significant sex differences regarding drug use at dance events (Release, 1997). Henderson (1993a, 1994) found that ecstasy, amphetamine and LSD were used by most young women on a weekly basis, ranging from the past three months to three years.

For many contemporary women drug use is normalised and forms part of their identity, yet as they aspire success and are assertive they can no longer be considered as victims of deprivation from society or men (Henderson, 1993b). Measham (1995:10-11) expands upon the independent feel of today's female drug users, in that they do not see themselves as dependent "...their occasional or regular use... is seen as an integral part of their social world" and they perceive their drug use as "...relatively unproblematic... a rational, informed choice of consumption from a repertoire of recreational drugs taken primarily for pleasure". Nonetheless, she found that women tend to differ from men in their patterns of drug use due to their concern over the stigma attached to losing control: appearance and health are relevant, hence few women will use drugs excessively as their male counterparts may. Henderson (1993d) supports this finding in that women are more 'cautious' regarding ecstasy use, also her participants believed that young women were less likely than young men to take high doses of drugs. Given the outside view of illegal drug use as a non-feminine pursuit, we can question if this is a reflection of the degree to which wider conceptions of femininity permeate into the dance culture. Henderson (1997), nonetheless, recognises that the view where women do not use mind-altering drugs, or if they do then not the same as men, is well set and hard to move ('gender-blind' drugs research played its part). To summarise, not only has the media presented women as innocent victims in their use of drugs, so has academic literature by citing them as casualties of social circumstances/addictive personalities or deviant (which includes pleasure seeking as part of) (Henderson, 1993c).

### *An element of control*

The use of drugs, especially when recreational, often means unofficial rules develop which control usage (McDermott, 1993). These can stem from the individual making active decisions as to what is considered suitable use (Winick, 1992), from the environment, from experiences where control has been lost, or when rules have not been made or followed properly (George, 1993). If we consider the sociality surrounding the use of ecstasy, then this acts as a form of control: dance events occur predominantly at the weekend and control may be exerted by using only at that time. Thus, the club experience can be classed as a ritual (Zinberg and Harding, 1982) which dictates when, where and with whom ecstasy is used.

Drug use does not necessarily result in loss of control yet there exists widespread belief that it does. This has resulted in external controls (from religion, law and society) which work to disempower people by preventing them from experimenting for fear they may lose control, else be punished if they decide to try (George, 1993). When use is kept in check by a number of influences, it sheds doubt on the general view that mood altering drugs interfere with life functioning (Winick, 1992).

### **Ecstasy Related Risk**

There is agreement in the drug literature that ecstasy use follows a general pattern: the honeymoon period after the initial experience, leading onto regular and heavy use, then use ceases or reaches a calming period (McDermott, 1993; Collin, 1997; Henderson, 1997). This pattern implies a 'loosening' of control, related to psychological dependency with the slant being more towards context of use than the drug itself (an example is an addiction to 'dancing on drugs'; Saunders, 1997). Here the negatives of using ecstasy begin to outweigh the positives (Solowij et al, 1992), and it has been found that some suffer psychological problems such as depression and paranoia after regular use of the drug (Henderson, 1993d; Merchant and MacDonald, 1994; Jansen, 1997; Release, 1997). Again, there appears to be a gender difference as women report suffering more problems from ecstasy use than men, such as depression, harsh mood swings, paranoia, panic attacks and anxiety (Release, 1997).

During the initial stages of research I began to realise that the slight health problems casually mentioned in conversations with ecstasy users were more serious than implied. Further, they appeared to stem from using ecstasy heavily. I felt that this

was definitely an issue for investigation and it led me to think that maybe, as recreational drug users cannot see what damage (if any) drugs are doing to them, it results in a lack of consideration of the health consequences. Support for this comes from Rhodes (1997:217) who writes that habitual illegal drug users do not consider risk because of this very normalisation. He goes on to say that the 'risky' action may be perceived to have more benefits than costs, especially if no harm has been encountered. Thus, the experiences which surround the use of ecstasy may outweigh potential risk. Additional risk entails the future of ecstasy users because no research has ascertained the long-term consequences upon health (though investigation is growing in this field, and indicating potential cognitive impairment: McCann et al, 1998; Parrott et al, 1998).

There are, however, further risks for an ecstasy user, such as those associated with the drug's illegal status. Pini (1997) identified a tension related to controlling anxiety if an ecstasy tablet was purchased from someone unfamiliar and thus the action upon the body could be unexpected. However, rather than the users viewing this as a risk, they saw it as a positive aspect in that they could discover, and possibly prove to themselves, that they had the right attitude to overcome the anxiety.

Another potential health hazard is that related to weight loss. Davison & Parrott (1997:225) report that repeated use of MDMA means a reduction in weight which is concordant with recurrent use of sympathomimetic/anorectic agents. Another study found that nineteen percent of clubbers experienced weight loss from ecstasy use and twenty-seven percent from amphetamine (Release, 1997). Weight loss has been recognised in this culture from the early 1990s, and is viewed by those concerned as a short-term health consequence rather than a serious problem (Merchant and MacDonald, 1994). It has also been found to be appealing and welcomed by women (Henderson, 1994; Merchant and MacDonald, 1994) hence may be perceived as a form of weight control (an alternative to diets as Herbert, 1995, suggests). One of the main reasons that women exercise is to control weight (McDonald and Thompson, 1992) and one form of exercise is dancing. Considering the social aspect of the dance event, the music and enjoyment, then dancing in this context can be likened to that of a high impact aerobic class.

Furthering the health risk of losing weight entails consideration of the feminine appeal of this unintended consequence. The implication follows that it could become an incentive to continue using ecstasy. This relates to how a woman feels about her body,

and may be influenced by Western society's obsession with slim women. Pressure is abound to be like the ideal woman, to achieve what she has (Thompson, 1990; Orbach, 1993).<sup>8</sup> Promotion and marketing of the dance culture have come under attack for often presenting strongly-sexual images of woman (Henderson, 1996; Newsome, 1996; Brooks, 1997; Mair, 1997). This is especially so for house music events, and is related to clubs having their own dress codes which state the type of people they want to attract in order to form each club's 'internal image' (Thornton, 1993). Hence dress forms identity and as people tend to adopt the appropriate dress styles when they enter the culture (McDermott, 1993) women may start to enjoy their new figure and feel more comfortable in club-wear. Further, because the scene is promoted with objectified female sexuality, it begs the question if this will have implications for women's relationships with their bodies, and add to insecurities for women in general society.

### **Methodological Importance**

It is asserted in existential phenomenology that the person and world co-constitute each other: as humans are always contextualised, one cannot exist without the other. Thus there is an interdependency where constant interaction shapes the world in which the person lives, whilst shaping the person who lives in that world (Valle and King, 1978). This is especially fitting for studying the dance culture, considering the dynamic interaction between clubbers and their clubbing world, not just shaping the individual's way of life, but shaping the culture too (evident by the dance culture re-inventing itself as links with the mainstream become more apparent; Henderson, 1997).<sup>9</sup> The emphasis, therefore, is on being-in-the-world, and the important reality is what the person perceives it to be. Through the life-world the person is understood, meaning that her subjective world is a primary reality.

#### *Gaining entry into the life-world*

Phenomenologically-based human science has certain characteristics: the life-world; the rule of epoché; horizons of meaning; and intentionality. These features will be taken in turn and discussed. The aim of phenomenology is to gain access into the life-world

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<sup>8</sup> Recently, the media has presented research findings that today's teenage girls use cigarette smoking to aid slimming, there was also a suggested link between smoking and eating disorders (Harrison, 1998). This demonstrates the strength, and early onset, of the female desire for a slim figure.

<sup>9</sup> This re-invention has been attributed to an avoidance or immunity to commercialisation (Wright, 1997 and Gore, 1997 respectively).

(Lebenswelt) of the participants under study.<sup>10</sup> This is not, however, Husserl's transcendental project, rather it is a deviation which fits human science enquiry, though some basic principles of Husserlian philosophy are retained. For any research in psychology to be considered phenomenological, the researcher must hold and employ the notion of the phenomenological psychological reduction (Giorgi, 1997) or the rule of epoché. This allows the researcher to enter the life-world, and refers to setting aside (bracketing) certain knowledge in order to understand phenomenon with regard to its own types of meaning. One type of knowledge that must be bracketed is that of the researcher's experience of the phenomenon: she takes the stance where she does not question the truth or falseness of what is said (Ashworth, 1997a).

Another form of knowledge that requires bracketing is that of a theoretical nature, thus allowing the researcher to understand the world as the participant does without misrepresentation from objective realities (Ibid.).<sup>11</sup> The purpose of disregarding presuppositions is to prevent misconstruing the description of the participant's experience with already acclaimed knowledge of the phenomena under study: it reduces distortion and bias (as such, the fore discussed findings are set aside in the analysis). The description, therefore, is deep enough to seize the basic nature of the life-world (Ashworth, 1996a). The life-world is described from the participant's own standpoint, it is her experience to which the interview relates, and this perspective is retained throughout the analysis (Ashworth, 1997a). There are however certain assumptions that are not bracketed, and these are discussed in the following chapter.

The life-world entails intentionality, 'the consciousness of something' (Husserl, 1931:242), whereby consciousness is the means of entry to anything that is 'given to awareness' (Giorgi, 1997). Intentionality involves the noema and noesis, the perceived (objective) and the perceiving (subjective), respectively. And there is a clear interdependency between these two aspects of experience: the object of experience and the way in which it is experienced. "It is by consciousness that objects are made present... equally as true, *it is by objects that consciousness is revealed or elucidated*" (Valle and King, 1978:14). Following intentionality comes horizons of meaning: "Associated with each act of consciousness is a *horizon* of possible further experiences of the same object" (Smith and Smith, 1995:25). There is one's own perceptual

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<sup>10</sup> To reach the life-world, one has to set aside the particular language of scholarship (which also allows the experiences to be captured in their richness), however it is re-addressed at the end of the thesis.

<sup>11</sup> Husserlian phenomenology and that of human science are discussed in depth in chapter two.



perspective and that of communal perception. Meanings are thus validated by the self, within oneself, and through reciprocal action with others (Husserl, 1970:162-163). In relation to human science enquiry, the former means that contradictions occur in the life-world. Consequently, within the life-world we will find the nature of the (ecstasy-body) experiences as perceived by the participants, given as relevant by them, and also the way these experiences have been perceived. Furthermore the experiences will be perspectival, with a base in objectivity of the perceived object between others. Thus, there is room for intersubjective agreement on the (ecstasy-body) experiences.

As phenomenology<sup>12</sup> rejects the scientific view where all perceive the same underlying reality, qualitative methods are particularly suitable to use. And in order to enter the life-world, research interviews form the basis of inquiry. Research interviews allow connection with the lives of participants, therefore they are suited to the sensitive and ethical nature of this research area. It is here that I leave the methodological discussion and direct the reader to chapters two and three for a more thorough insight.

### **The Lived-body and the Life-world of Ecstasy**

The participants' descriptions are taken as forming an index to experience, and when read with concentrated attention (the analysis process) they will disclose what their world is like. Thus, the life-world from an existential viewpoint contains crucial meanings related to being-in-the-world (Ashworth, 1996b:19). The objective of phenomenology is to "*identify* the investigated topic" (Colaizzi, 1978:68) and so, as touched upon, this thesis asks: what is the meaning of clubbing<sup>13</sup> to women in the late 1990s, and how is the body experienced in this context? Accessing the life-world is a humanistic approach which, again, is especially suitable for studying the sensitive area of the female body and that of illegal drug use. The meaning of the phenomena will emerge through entry into the life-world, and because it remains with the given, will be faithful to the women's experiences.

Despite a small but consistent history of qualitative enquiry within drug research much of it has been of an ethnographic, participant observation method (and little research has focused upon women). The social framework of recreational ecstasy use has been researched very little (which tends to be so for drug use in general, especially

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<sup>12</sup> From hereafter, when I use the term phenomenology, it applies to that of existential, human-science.

<sup>13</sup> I use the term clubbing generically, covering all dance events.

that related to youth; Measham et al, 1994), even though it is difficult to speak of drug use without its context. The social context of ecstasy use in this research is that of the dance event, together with experiences out of that context to elucidate further. The references to ecstasy use out of the club however do not refer to the intimate, one-to-one experiences that many have on ecstasy (such as in therapy), rather they are recreational, with dance music holding a primary place.

This study will attempt to present an holistic picture of women and the dance culture, to bring together many of the issues that have been cited in this chapter. Other researchers using a qualitative approach have investigated: female participation in the culture in its early to mid years (Henderson addressed sexuality and, in part, the social context of ecstasy use, and Pini the construction of the self); potential problems related to recreational ecstasy use (McDermott); health consequences from using ecstasy (Merchant and MacDonald); and a comprehensive account of experiences relating to the dance culture (Saunders). No research has collated aspects of these authors' findings to encompass the whole clubbing experience. The majority of the research has exploited a postmodern approach to document social and economic change. Research from the perspective of phenomenological psychology, with an holistic focus on experience, will add to academic understanding of this culture.

Previous literature on women and drug use has suffered gender bias of a kind which has represented female drug users as victims of men or social deprivation (Henderson, 1993b). However, it is argued that this is no longer the case as today's female drug users are not dependent nor powerless, and to view them as such holds no relation to their self-perceptions (Henderson, 1993b, 1996). These outdated representations are what, I hope, this thesis will challenge. As Gilligan (1993:xviii) writes, when difference is spoken about and reflected on then it "...becomes deviance and deviance becomes a sin in a society preoccupied with normality...". If this difference is erroneous and female drug users are not to be seen as distinct and abnormal then this thesis, by hearing what drug use is like from the perspectives of those cast as deviant, will reveal this reality. This small contribution to the literature, then, sets out to explore the idea that women use drugs for pleasure and without notions of deviancy. Very little attention is given to women and recreational drug use, as opposed to women and addiction, so an aim is to prevent them being invisible.

A further reason to update the literature relates to the dynamic nature of drug cultures, especially that of ecstasy (for example, the acceptance of alcohol in clubs which, until recently, was taboo: McDermott in 1993 stated that the mere suggestion of it was a 'breach of the rules', p.214). Hence this research will be an addition to others on the culture and, thus, I appreciate, will itself outdate.

### **Conclusion**

The findings will therefore extend the literature on women and drug use, further understanding of a culture seen as alien by many, and illuminate the meaning of the drugged lived-body whilst relating it to a wider literature of the body. The contribution to knowledge that this research will offer is the relatively unexplored life-world of women in the dance culture. As such, it will add to qualitative methods which investigate and describe drug users' worlds, and fit into the vacant space of exploring women's recreational drug use in the dance scene.



The aim of this first methodological chapter is to present my argument for the suitability of phenomenological analysis for feminist research (in relation to the research questions). But before this is given, I begin with discussion of qualitative method and then consider contemporary types of analysis (and theories) used in qualitative research. These are evaluated in light of the aims that I want this research to address. The chapter ends with a section entitled 'Phenomenology, myself and the research area' which elucidates the perspective I have brought to the research process and thus clarifies to the reader my hopes for this thesis.

### **A Qualitative Enquiry**

It is argued that researchers who choose to use qualitative methodology do so due to an awareness of the gap between what is studied and the way it is represented (Banister et al, 1994). The gap that I noticed emerged from speaking to women who used ecstasy for recreation. I believed that the representations in traditional psychology of female drug users as deviant, diseased and immoral were misleading. This thesis attempts to explore the gap between the dance culture as understood by its female participants, and the representation of it by those who do not participate.

Little research has been conducted on this culture in general, though much investigation has focused upon ecstasy use and possible physiological effects of the drug upon life functioning. Therefore quantitative methods have been used to indicate the dangers from ecstasy abuse (such as cognitive impairment; Parrott et al, 1998) and highlight issues for harm reduction strategies. Quantitative measures are useful for indicating the level of ecstasy use by means of a survey (vid. Sherlock, 1996) yet they do not observe the social context of ecstasy use. They merely 'tells us' what damage ecstasy may have upon the user, the number of people using ecstasy each week, and what the effects of ecstasy are (though occasionally they predict why people use ecstasy, for example the psycho-social determinants of use; Conner and Sherlock, 1998). As such, quantitative research has a place in the study of the dance culture, but because it neglects holism it is limited with regard to *meanings* of the culture from its participants. Qualitative investigations bring the researcher closer to the culture being studied through dialogue with those involved, allowing a deeper understanding of their world and what their experiences may mean. Whereas quantitative research, in my

view, does not capture the essential character of phenomena because human beings are social creatures and meaning is mediated through language not numbers.

The value of qualitative work has been recognised by feminist researchers for a number of years. Within psychology they have rejected the more traditional methods of research and turned to qualitative ones and their modes of analysis, arguing that the whole quantitative approach to studying female experience is unsuitable. "Women's lives and the meanings of their experience are not only rendered invisible by academic experimental psychology, but women are seen to be less than men in everyday life because of the gendered context of science" (Nicolson, 1997:250). One of the principles of feminist research is to break from traditional stereotypes of women's experience relative to men. Therefore qualitative methods are suitable because they are non-controlling nor manipulative, they emphasise involvement rather than distance, and are natural as opposed to 'gadget orientated' (Coolican, 1994:177). These methods grant a position from which the researcher can connect with women's lives and study their experiences of a phenomenon. Thus, qualitative research, by representing the specific experiences of those concerned, allows *change* to take place and this is a central concern for feminist work. Change can occur at the micro or macro level, affecting attitudes and ways of being. Because I wanted to study the meanings women gave to their experiences of drug use and possibly promote change in how they are perceived, I chose a qualitative approach for this study. The research area is relevant to feminism because it challenges traditional views of women and drugs.

The beauty of... qualitative research is that (regardless of whether or not one agrees with them) they help us to explore the ways in which standard scientific methodology (and every other methodology) shapes - and thereby limits - our understanding of the world, including the people(s) who inhabit it. (Zeedyk, 1998:579)

Qualitative research strongly asserts that participants are not 'objects' but fellow participants in the research process: inquiry is the joint product of researcher and researched, which serves to make the process humanistic. The research process is a social context aligned with human existence and society, therefore it is only natural to consider the researcher's impact on the research for encouraging communication in an open manner as language reflects this natural context. This perspective exemplifies the

argument of Halling (1999) who states that quantitative research is “written by disembodied authors about no-one in particular”.

Qualitative research is often viewed as an important part of the process of hypotheses formation, and as a form of inductive analysis. It discovers potential explanations and understandings that only this method can obtain, and which clearly allow a more solid basis for when experimentation begins. However, it is my argument that the information gained from qualitative analysis is fundamentally valuable in its own right. Qualitative and quantitative research are two distinct forms of investigation with their own reasoning and procedural steps (Giorgi, 1994) thus, depending on the aims and goals of the research, both can derive worthy knowledge independently.

### **Contemporary Theories within a Qualitative Framework**

The use of qualitative methods means that researchers must exploit appropriate means of analysis. They draw upon contemporary (critical) approaches to analyse their work because these are more fitting with their beliefs about human beings, their actions and their social world.

One such approach is that of grounded theory. Grounded theory is similar to phenomenology because the researcher does not hold theoretically based preconceptions prior to gathering information (Coolican, 1994). And both approaches remain with what is given by the participants. Indeed, Giorgi (1994:209) writes “What Glaser and Strauss call ‘generating theory’, phenomenologists would call ‘intuiting disciplinary meanings’ and expressing them in the language of the discipline”. However he makes the differentiation between thematic analysis and that of phenomenology because in the former a theme is found then supporting examples are given to it, which forms a logical process (Giorgi, 1989a:55).<sup>1</sup> Thus it is not experiential which is what phenomenologists stress, because we look at how experiences are lived through and everything is ‘context laden’ (Ibid.). We seek lived meanings, and in grounded theory these can soon become researcher categories.

Because the aim of researchers who use grounded theory is to develop theory, the procedure is to analyse information whilst gathering it and as such the interview guide is adapted as the theory develops (Charmaz, 1996). Grounded theory is used

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<sup>1</sup> I use Amedeo Giorgi as the original source of the phenomenological method in psychology because he was the first to take Husserlian phenomenological philosophy and create a method for human science enquiry.

widely in the social sciences and is far reaching in its use (Strauss and Corbin, 1997). However I did not choose grounded theory for this research because I did not want to develop a theory on women's recreational drug use. Rather I aimed my research to give insight and understanding of women in the dance culture, which may influence change in conceptions of women who use drugs for fun. Further, I wanted to represent the women's experiences as closely as possible to how they were lived through. This latter aspect particularly appealed to me because it retains the idiosyncrasies surrounding human experience.

Therefore, I chose phenomenology for very specific reasons (elaborated later in this chapter) and one relates to its principles of collecting information. In grounded theory the interview guide is adjusted as research progresses, but this is not suited to the phenomenological method of gaining descriptions to enter the life-worlds of the participants. To remove topics from the guide (even if not relevant to each participant's world) would be placing a presupposed hierarchical importance on some aspects more than others. Hence we would be saying that because 'X' is not important to one life-world then we assume 'X' not be to important in the life-world of someone else. The procedure of guide adaptation, in my opinion, implies the assumption that everyone shares the same reality.

Another interesting perspective which I considered is that of social construction. Researchers schooled in the work of social constructionism take the view that there is no one true reality, rather realities are perspectival. They believe that the language we use, and how we use it, plays an important part in how reality is constructed. The primary method of social construction is discourse analysis and researchers using this method have a set purpose in mind. "The basic theoretical thrust of discourse analysis is the argument that people's talk fulfils many functions and has varying effects" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:168).

Thus the reality of the participant, from the social construction perspective, is constructed by the available discourses of culture and society. With discourse analysis "...one is interested in language use rather than the people generating the language..." because the interest is in how discourse is 'put together' and what function this achieves (Ibid.:61). The aim of discourse analysis is to ascertain how 'X' is constructed and this is achieved by placing a 'suspicious eye' on what the participants say (Parker, 1992). The differentiation between this approach and that of phenomenology is that the latter

emphasises the person's subjective world, their reality is what they perceive it to be. As such, it asks what the meaning of 'X' is and takes this at face value.

Language is the medium through which experience is expressed, as such experience is socially constructed, however I did not want my research to focus on discourse. The primary concern here is the person perspective versus language. My feelings as I read the work of discourse analysis was that, to some extent, it took away the person's voice because it was a voice of culture and society. In this way it can neglect the person and the meaning she or he attributes to her or his experience. This forms another function of language, and is what I argue for in this thesis. That we use language to construct and attribute our own meanings, and when we look closely at this we gain an understanding of what someone's life is like. Thus, in discourse analysis there is a tendency to view the person as passively carrying social structures, a view which contrasts with phenomenology where the person is held to be active in the world (we shape for ourselves a personal world; Moss, 1978).

Discourse analysis is widely used in mainstream critical psychology, especially feminist work, so phenomenology tends to 'sit' on the outer edge. Gilligan (1993:xix) points out that if we are solely products of social construction then 'there is no voice' which echoes my point above. The person perspective is neglected by many discourse analysts yet their emphasis on changing subject positions reflects the need for freedom for people. It has been argued that this approach appears contradictory (Ashworth, 2000). Nonetheless, there are some discourse analysts who do not view the person as merely a channel for language. Indeed, this approach can merge with a phenomenological one with regard to where the person is positioned. For example, which type of discourse the person uses (how she or he talks about experience) reflects her or his experience of the world.

The social construction of gender is employed in this thesis, it is in a central position because it makes women visible rather than invisible. And the thesis challenges dominant conceptions of female drug users though the consequences may not be as far reaching as those that arise from a feminist orientated social construction method. This is because the latter would be concerned with inequalities, in the sense of how language reproduces relations of power and how this can be used in a transformative way. Thus, a criticism aimed at phenomenology is that power issues tend not to be approached (discussed more in the section 'Phenomenology and Feminism'). But it cannot be

disregarded that discourse as enabling or disabling an individual's subject position was an issue addressed in my implications: issues emerged from the life-world that supported what discourse analysts had found. Indeed, it was the social construction of gender that <sup>Phenomenology</sup>insurgated this research.

Phenomenology and social construction are similar in many ways relating to views of the social world, and thus share techniques which attain valuable information. Both approaches are fruitful in their aims, and I feel that my critical psychological approach adopted in this thesis supplements and complements that of social construction.

### **Considerations of the Phenomenological Method**

Before discussing in more depth the phenomenological method adopted for this research, there is a need to consider an alternate phenomenological analysis and to discuss the extent to which this has influenced me. It is that of interpretative phenomenology (the hermeneutical method following Heidegger). I will briefly discuss some of the differences between descriptive and interpretative phenomenology, where the interpretative argument is presented then is followed by the descriptive response (Giorgi, 1992;1999).

- Meanings are multivocal, not univocal.

Multiple meanings are describable, and ambiguity can be retained.

- Interpretation is necessary to go beyond the given.

We do not need to go beyond the given as incomplete information can be described.

- People interpret themselves.

It is not necessary to interpret interpretations as all can be described.

Interpretative phenomenology befits research contexts when all the answers cannot be gleaned, thus it is suitable for situations of incertitude (an example being the mental health setting where safety of the individual is forefront) where what is given is articulated in light of non-given, though complementary, aspects such as assumptions (Giorgi, 1999). Interpretation is never certain as there are always other possible interpretations whereas descriptive phenomenology takes the situation for certain. As interpretative phenomenology chooses a framework from which to analyse and thus to base its interpretation (places a perspective upon the given), hermeneutical methods can move from the life-world perspective and cease to have a proper phenomenological

focus. To emphasize the argument I am building in this chapter, I wanted to observe the meaning that female drug users ascribed to their experiences in a way that was free of influences which could produce misrepresentation.

Interpretation however does occur in descriptive phenomenology when, say, contradictions emerge and vague or incomplete statements are given. Here, the meaning is derived from the context of the text as a whole (an illustration of this form of interpretation 'in action' is presented on page 59). Also slight interpretation of meaning takes place when I transform the meaning units into disciplinary language (again see the following chapter). During the interviews per se, interpretation appears through emphatic listening because we assume an understanding of what each other is saying (Ashworth, 1996b). Yet this is the extent to which interpretation takes place as descriptive phenomenology and that of the hermeneutical kind are quite distinct.

### **Phenomenologically-based Human Science**

Phenomenology does not yield new information in the way that science pushes back the frontiers of knowledge. Its task is less to give us new ideas than to make explicit those ideas, assumptions, and implicit presuppositions upon which we already behave and experience life. Its task is to reveal to us exactly what we already know and that we know it, so that we can be less puzzled about ourselves. Were it to tell us something that we did not know, it would not be telling us anything about ourselves, and therefore it would not be important. (Keen, 1975:18)

Phenomenology has a rigorous analytical approach that offers a means of entry into the complex aspects of human experience (Giorgi, 1997). Lived experiences give access to meanings, and the assumption is that what people perceive the important reality to be is actually that. For this reason, phenomenology grasps diverse experiences and unravels their essential meanings (Kvale, 1996). The life-world is defined as "...the world as it is encountered in everyday life and given in direct and immediate experiences, independent of and prior to explanations" (Ibid.:54). And it is this perspective that guides the careful observation of the researcher to the participant's situation experienced in its entirety (Ashworth, 1996a).

Phenomenology entails a 'fidelity to the phenomenon' which means that the experiences obtained of a phenomenon are as near as possible to how they were presented in day-to-day life (Giorgi, 1994:207). This faithfulness is considered to be

objectivity to the phenomenologist and, as the phenomenon retains its everyday life givenness, then objectivity means that experience should be recognised and cannot be objectively removed (Colaizzi, 1978:51-52). In traditional psychology operational definitions mean that the researcher is being objective, but they exclude the experience of a phenomenon (Ibid.). Experience is considered as subjective and non-observable, and thus research which uses this as its starting point is often criticised for weakness. But experience occurs in a midst of subjective content, and this does not discount the possibility of reaching intersubjective agreement in phenomenological analysis (essential features in the findings may be truthful of the phenomena in other people's life-worlds; Ashworth, 1997b:15).

Following discussion of the reduction in the Introduction chapter there are certain assumptions that cannot and should not be bracketed when carrying out phenomenological research. One assumption relates to the emergence of the interview, and is connected to a shared area of interest: necessary because the participants need to know what the interview is about and because the researcher has interest in the area (Ashworth, 1997a). Further assumptions that cannot be bracketed are those which relate to interaction in the interview. Meanings are intersubjective, and experiences are relayed through verbal communication, hence we can assume that others perceive the world similarly to ourselves (Ibid.). Thus, the presuppositions which remain intact refer to the interview as a social situation, and as the qualitative interview is exactly that, then it is only to be expected that they are retained when theoretical and researcher experiential ones are not. In existential phenomenology the subjectivity of the participant is not bracketed (Giorgi, 1997), as Ashworth writes "...bracketing does not extend to the question of the reality of mental life itself, which is described as it appears to reflection" (1996b:7).

Bracketing involves setting aside objective knowledge, which is argued to be problematic in itself because this form of knowledge is ingrained into the researcher's unconscious. It is taken-for-granted, hence some objective knowledge can influence the researcher's understanding of the meaning of a participant's experience. It is difficult to judge the level to which objective knowledge clouded my understanding of the meanings the women gave to their experiences. But the phenomenological reduction allowed me to move away from a purely objective understanding, and consequently to gain a deeper insight than would have been granted if I had retained the natural attitude.



(I discuss reflexivity of the bracketing process in the following chapter. But relevant here is that initially I saw phenomenology as a challenge: I questioned how I could add to psychological knowledge of the phenomena by not interpreting or adding to the descriptions. It is my belief that this ‘tension’ stemmed from my ignorance that psychologists must look for hidden meanings, because traditional psychology always asked why and not what. After analysis of the first life-world I realised that psychological knowledge could be enriched by remaining with the participant’s descriptions, and this awareness grew stronger as I progressed through analysis of each woman’s life-world.)

Before discussing phenomenology and feminism I would like to briefly consider the roots of phenomenology in relation to contemporary use in human enquiry, thereby exemplifying the key influences in my methodological project. Husserl developed the philosophy of phenomenology to study subjective experience, because the attitude surrounding him at the time was positivist and neglected experience as a source of knowledge. Husserl was an epistemologist and his perspective on returning to the ‘things themselves’ laid the foundations for all human science (Thinès, 1987). Husserlian phenomenology is a philosophy and not a method of analysis, therefore the philosophy of phenomenology and its use in psychology differ. For instance Husserl’s reduction aims to reach pure consciousness whereas in phenomenological psychology it is a journey for description of the lived world of phenomena. Also, Husserl in his philosophy did not assume the existence of things, he was not existentialist as this research is: it positions the person in her life-world. Giorgi (1998:171) writes “...my practice is more concrete and directed more toward specific analyses that lead to psychological clarifications in a phenomenological way rather than pure phenomenological findings that may or may not be true of psychology”. He goes on to say that psychology has to retain loyalty to the basic principles of the philosophy (as stated in the Introduction chapter): to do as Husserl means that one is being a philosopher.

Existentialism, as a formal philosophical school, seeks to understand the human condition as it manifests itself in our *concrete, lived* situations. Its concern for these situations includes not only their physical characteristics... but also all of our attending moments of joy, absurdity, and indifference, as well as the range of freedom we experience as

having in our responses to these various moments. (Valle and King, 1978:6)

Considering the above definition we can see how existential thinkers of the latter century were attracted to phenomenology. It granted a position that enabled them to meet with a phenomenon as it was experienced, as opposed to natural science and its inadequacy to allow for this (Ibid.). The fusion of existentialism and phenomenology means that researchers employ descriptive techniques in order to understand human existence and experience (Ibid.). Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Heidegger followed Husserl, but differed because they did not believe in bracketing the possibility of existence.

### **Phenomenology and Feminism**

As discussed in the Introduction chapter my view is that existential phenomenology is particularly suited to study female experiences of the body and ecstasy use because of its discovery perspective, lack of bias and humanistic approach. As my interest included the expansion of knowledge on a culture alien to many, what better way to understand it than embarking on a journey with the women and eliciting their realities. To represent the culture from the women's perspectives (which the reduction promotes) was personally important, and interpersonally, for the women and the culture as a whole (it has already been misrepresented on a large scale by the media and consequential moral panic). As I stated earlier in the thesis, the voices of women who use illegal drugs for recreation need hearing. And the field of drug use is not the only one where studies which account for and represent women's experience of a phenomenon are scant. For example, Nicolson (1998) found a neglect of 'women's own accounts' of how they feel and explain the move to becoming a mother. And Taylor et al (1996) noted how women's voices were either not included or had been 'inadequately represented' in theories accounting for development through adolescence.

It is stressed throughout the thesis that my concern is to give women a voice, to represent women's experiences given their misrepresentation per se. Gilligan (1993:xi), speaking of women themselves restricting their own voices for reasons such as being concerned about how others feel (but a point which I feel is relevant to human science research), states "...by restricting their voices, many women are wittingly or unwittingly perpetuating a male-voiced civilization and an order of living that is founded on

disconnection from women”. Indeed, ‘civilization’ could be swapped for ‘discipline’ as we find that traditional psychology has restricted, by neglecting, the female voice.

Feminist research tends to focus on experience with regard to whose is represented & validated (Banister et al, 1994). This makes phenomenology particularly useful because the participants’ experiences are represented from their own perspectives, through bracketing, and this process means they are validated (validation is discussed in the subsequent chapter). Again bracketing allows the researcher to connect with the lives of the participants (to enter their life-worlds), which is especially suited to study women’s experiences (because, as above, connection allows understanding rather than disconnection and misunderstanding). Bracketing means to remain with the given, and as such the analysis is more faithful to the experiences because they are not distorted. Bracketing allows myself to hear the experiences of women in their own terms without presupposed notions of what is meant, and consequently allows me to represent the experiences this way for the reader. In my opinion, existential phenomenology is under-used when it comes to psychological research with a feminist slant.

Because existential phenomenology ‘presupposes nothing’ (Ashworth, 1996b) the thesis does not come from a feminist standpoint, rather this emerges from analysis of the women’s experiences. However I am a feminist and influenced by the feminist project to “elucidate and challenge women’s subordination in psychology and in everyday life” (Nicolson, 1997). Traditional psychological representations of female drug users and contemporary societal perspectives of female clubbers fuelled my research, as discussed in the Introduction chapter. But phenomenology neglects one of the primary concerns of feminist research - that of power (Ibid.). This is a drawback because we retain the perspectives of the participants so power, in its broader (political) sense, does not come into play. Phenomenologists do not address societal and cultural reproductions of power relations in the way that discourse analysts do from the perspective of language (and this is a reason why many feminists favour social constructionism). However, this thesis reflects upon wider issues of power by addressing (mis)representations of women drug users in academic literature and society, and its importance should not be disregarded. Power (relations of) is dealt with within the research (discussed in the following chapter) but not out of it.

## **Phenomenology, Myself and the Research Area**

To supplement the above discussion with regard to my position within this study I have included this final section to this chapter. It may be read as an extension of the Preface to the Thesis.

Qualitative research embraces experience as a source of knowledge and this often makes it more applicable to life in contemporary society than quantitative research. Experience is a 'mode of presence to the world' from a phenomenological perspective, and the implication follows that "...our experience is not inside us but instead our experience is always of how we behave towards the world and act towards others" (Colaizzi, 1978:52). Phenomenologists believe that by studying experience we obtain rich and exciting findings about being-in-the-world – an argument which, for myself, is further underpinned by personal experience. Taking a retrospective look, as my interest in people and their lives grew so did my fascination with the complexities of human action. Multiple realities and horizons of meanings mean that each individual has their own perspective, therefore different people have different experiences. Thus, when I began this study I decided to approach people and listen to their experiences of being-in-the-clubbing-world (a decision intensified by reading scientific reports on the topic that neglected the person perspective, and consequently appeared 'bland and lifeless'). By taking this approach I believed I would be placing myself in a better position to understand the meanings they ascribed to their experiences. And these informal investigations were fruitful in that they helped form the study (for example, I felt that perception of risk was an issue to investigate; as described in the Introduction chapter).

Because the person and world co-constitute each other, from the phenomenological standpoint, studying experiences of the phenomena meant that I moved closer to it. Individuals shape their personal worlds, consequently groups of people shape a social world, and these worlds give meaning to existence. The following discussion is relative to this point as I cast a reflective eye upon the period when the social world of the dance culture emerged in Britain.

I have grown up in a society that experienced major changes in the late 1980s. The 'yuppie' image had been adopted by many young city professionals and was a way of life which reflected the government's idealistic ethos for society. Around this time there emerged an alternate group of young people, one which outwardly rejected the

'yuppie' lifestyle and vehemently refused to accept the ideals of the government and how these were shaping society. This group of people rejoiced in being part of a group, (for example Sasha, one of the first dance scene DJs, likened the club experience to being part of a family for the weekend; Saunders, 1995). Certain sections of society were coming together and celebrating being together and, without regard to what was shown on news programmes, they 'stuck out like sore thumbs' in a society which was developing into one of estrangement. Researchers have already acknowledged that the climate of British society at this time was a major contributory reason why the dance scene had such impact and appeal (McDermott, 1993; Collin, 1997). Like many other researchers, I was intrigued by its popularity and how clubbers would leave the scene only to be constantly replaced by newcomers.

And many of the clubbers were working-class. Mark Gilman (interviewed in Markey, 1995:19) states "There's something very peculiar about British youth culture, particularly working class. There's a definite sense of immediacy; we don't know what we want but we want it now". Maybe this quote exemplifies what life was like for young working-class people and why so many were attracted to and became involved in the dance culture. Initially I wanted my sample of participants to be working-class women, exacerbated by the observation that "...feminism has remained totally silent about how working-class femininity is lived, except through models of pathologization..." (Walkerdine, 1996:149). However, as indicated earlier in the thesis, this stigma appears not to be primarily a societal status concern when it comes to female drug users: all are looked upon in a pathologised way. Thus, women of any class are affected by this negative stereotype.

To reiterate an earlier point, the phenomenological stance within this research means that the findings are presented from the participants' perspectives. And this is important because it gives female drug users a voice, thereby allowing understanding of their experiences and having the potential to enable change in how they are perceived. It is also crucial because as a researcher I have a responsibility to my participants, the culture of which they represent and to science in presenting information worthy of being known (Kvale, 1996). (The voices of female drug users not corresponding with what has been indicated about them emerges in this thesis, and I hope the reader will appreciate the dissonance between popular belief and what the women think about themselves and their actions.)



Bracketing during phenomenological research is necessary in order to describe the life-world of the female clubber, but also for the later benefit of policy discussion. If issues of policy were directing this research then the life-world would not emerge and therefore policy would not be discussed in genuine relationship with human reality. Bracketing means that we closely observe the women's life-worlds and for this reason there is an absence of area-related theory in the analysis. Setting aside other theories tends not to be carried out for research on drug use, thus it is an aspect which is outside the confines of all current thinking around drugs. And because the primacy of experience forms psychological reality for the phenomenologist (in contrast to theories where experience is neglected) there is an epistemological place for this kind of knowledge. As one phenomenologist writes "...any disjunction between the lived experience of research participants and the supposed intentions of the policy... is of great significance, and must be brought out in research (Ashworth, 1996b:18). Indeed it has been argued that makers of social policy need to bear in mind the viewpoints of the people who use drugs in order for policy to be effective (McDermott, 1993) (see the concluding chapter). Thus, issues relating to policy and morality are 'neglected' in the analysis because I adopt a standpoint of neutrality. (Bracketing is important due to the legal and moral issues surrounding the topic, so I ask the reader to bracket her/his presuppositions of the phenomena.) However, wider policy issues are re-introduced in the Conclusion chapter when we, as investigators, have emerged from the reduction.

The structure of this second methods chapter reflects methodological order and it is here that I discuss the technique employed to answer the research questions. It begins with explorations into the area that were carried out at the outset of the project, and ends with how the analysis was completed. Consideration is given to the research interview as a technique for eliciting meanings of participants' experiences. Reflexivity is included throughout and is sectioned accordingly though, where appropriate, it forms interjections entitled 'reflexive comment'.<sup>1</sup>

### **Exploring the Area**

In the early stages of research I designed an investigative interview guide (Appendix 2), and conducted four exploratory interviews. These enabled me to gain a sense of what it meant to be a woman who participated in the dance culture. Because aspects for possible description by the participants needed to be identified a preliminary scan of the relevant literature was carried out. The reason I opted for this way of reviewing the literature was because I wanted to avoid, as much as possible, the potentiality of findings from other researchers 'clouding' my connection with the phenomena as experienced by the women. Thus, in relation to the phenomenological reduction a full literature review was undertaken when analysis was complete. The exploratory interviews were semi-structured and carried out with women of the same age group and locale as the main interviewees, and the findings were extremely useful in demonstrating whether my initial research questions had standing. As the latter point was confirmed, the interviews formed the pilot ones in that the interview guide needed little alteration (see page 38 of this chapter).

Two of the women went on to become participants for the main interviews, which I do not feel affected the situation in that eighteen months had passed between interviews (and the interviews were treated as new ones, not follow-ups). They had already established trust with myself as a researcher and were aware of the aims of the research. Indeed, their further participation adds a positive note to the research as a whole. Ethical considerations given were the same as those for the main interviews (page 67).

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<sup>1</sup> As this chapter is lengthy I suggest that the reader temporarily ignores the reflexivity sections if she or he requires a reading of the methodological process.



Also during the initial stages of research a participant observation study was carried out (the findings of which are in Appendix 1, retained there as the observation was an exploration and not part of the analysis). The reason for conducting participant observation was to get a 'feel' of the club environment: what the atmosphere was like and what happened there. The observation took place in a house music club in Sheffield and was of a covert nature (notes were taken in the format proposed by Banister et al, 1994). Due to the nature of the observation, ethical concerns were not problematic as clubbers were observed in an everyday setting where observation by strangers is usually expected (it is worth noting that many clubs have close-circuit television cameras, thus people are observed often unknowingly). Protection of the participants occurred in the sense that they could not be identified in any way, thus they were anonymous, even to myself, also because the observation was of a general nature.

*Reflexive comment.* The combination of exploratory interviews and participant observation meant that I was beginning my research with more insight than I started with. I could apply what was being said by the women I spoke to (both formally and informally) to the experience of clubbing. For example I did not witness any aggression or sexual pick-up at the club, and a strong sense of pleasure was in the atmosphere, forming an energy that radiated from the revellers and one which I could feel myself. Thus by exploring the area I acquired a clearer awareness of the clubbing experience and was placed in a better position to understand the participants' meanings from the pilot interviews, and consequently the main ones.

### **Recruiting the Participants**

Eight interviews were carried out and, contrary to quantitative research that requires large numbers of participants, the instances which revealed the clubbing phenomena were important. "Experience with the investigated topic and articulateness suffice as criteria for selecting subjects [sic]" (Colaizzi, 1978:58). Thus, time was spent preparing and analysing the interviews as opposed to conducting them because quality (rather than quantity) is important (Kvale, 1996).

Prior to conducting the main interviews I wrote to a colleague (Sheila Henderson) concerning ethical issues when interviewing people about illicit drug use. I

was worried that if the law became involved then they could take my information and force me to break my code of confidentiality and anonymity. She replied, reassuring me that she had never come across this problem, but to make certain that the research conformed to the appropriate ethical guidelines (something which was already clear in my mind due to its extreme importance). Thus, I was comforted that I would not be, inadvertently, not protecting my participants.

A diverse group of participants was interviewed, with ages between twenty-one to thirty-one years. I chose this age range because the dance culture is heterogeneous in this respect: I wanted to represent the experiences of women over twenty years old in this leisure pursuit as drugs research receives much attention in relation to young people. The women frequented local dance events (mainly Sheffield and Leeds, with the occasional venture to other cities). Locality was important as patterns of drug use tend to be specific to certain areas (Merchant and MacDonald, 1994; Measham et al, 1994), thus having implications for further drug research and policy.

The women were not asked to describe their class status (subjective social class; Argyle, 1994) due to the criteria of phenomenological selection. However, for those with an interest their occupations may give an indication: five were full-time students (three were mature students, of which two were in part-time employment), one was a skilled non-manual worker and two were of intermediate occupations (Ibid.). The six participants I knew considered themselves to be working-class even if they no longer slotted into the categories ascribed to define that class. Descriptions of the participants (in relation to the research area) can be found in Appendix 4.

Participants were obtained through snowball sampling<sup>2</sup> (with the exception of one who responded to the posters and flyers at university, see below). Snowball sampling has a history of use with researchers investigating issues relating to the use of drugs. It is exploited especially when the drug culture is of the illegal kind, and to a greater extent when the participants are not in contact with drug services thus making them a 'low visibility' group (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Chain referral began with asking an acquaintance known to myself as an ecstasy user if she would participate in the research, who then gave contacts of possible other participants (which was the general pattern with the others). Buchanan et al (1988) argue that this is a good method for gaining access to research populations. The sample was, thus, not representative

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<sup>2</sup> The nature of snowball sampling is evident in the individual interviews, where three of the participants refer to each other (pseudonyms were retained within each transcript).

however the aim was not to obtain generalisations to the population as a whole, rather to describe in detail the meanings of the experienced phenomena. As no payment was involved for taking part in the research we can assume that the participants were genuine, and truly interested in the research area. This is contrasted to the volunteer nature of snowball sampling where many problems are encountered (for example, they may seek approval of their actions and thus present demand characteristics; Banister et al, 1994).<sup>3</sup> The participants were willing to talk openly about their experiences, which also occurred for my pilot interviews, and the study of ecstasy users by Merchant and MacDonald (1994). I believe the participants had a genuine interest in the dance culture being investigated and represented in a non-judgemental way (as stated at the outset of the interviews), and for it to be portrayed as it was to them (from my experience of conversing with dance event participators in general, this interest appears to be common).

In March 1998, to obtain more participants for the main interviews I hung posters inside the university, plus loose flyers for women to take (see Appendix 3). Though this type of recruiting attracted interest (people would stop me and ask about my research) unfortunately it received little response: two women contacted me but were busy with exams so offered to be interviewed at a later date, though another respondent did become a participant. By the time exam period was over I had conducted all the interviews so did not need to contact them (an impossible pursuit as they said they would re-contact me: they did not want to leave their name and phone number for reasons which I can only think relate to the nature of the topic).

*Reflexive comment:* Due to the lack of response from the university advertisements for participants, I assumed (May 1998) that presenting the dance culture in academic language may imply to would-be participants that the meaning of their experiences would be lost. An intersubjectivity of clubbing language exists, as will become evident upon reading my account of the life-world, and I needed to find a balance between 'clubber speak' and that of academia. Phenomenology, with its emphasis on the subjective world and thus language, helped me to achieve this though this will only be

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<sup>3</sup> Solowij et al (1992) also raised potential problems related to snowball sampling, such as losing control over who the participants are, how they interpret the questions, the giving of false answers or ones which are tainted by stereotypical images of the drug experience retained in that culture. However, their method of investigation was questionnaire, thus these drawbacks may not relate to the interview as I knew who the participants were and was there to guide misinterpretation.

evident when social criticism occurs. I wanted to recruit participants using their own style of expression, for willingness to participate, so I needed to present myself as a researcher with an understanding of the culture, and someone they could speak to without presupposing they would be judged, not heard, or that their views would be misrepresented (this is where the detraction of meaning may have entered). However, as noted above, I did not need to recruit more participants so do not know if the presentation of the posters was inadequate.

On a final note with regard to the participants, the BBC news (30<sup>th</sup> October 1998, six p.m.) reported the ‘long awaited’ evidence that proved ecstasy causes brain damage in humans. My reaction was one of shock, and concern for my interviewees and many others who could be seriously worried about their future health. I felt that I must obtain the paper and see for myself what the authors had found. Alongside my concerns I also felt relieved that this research was published after my interviews had been conducted as ecstasy users may have been reluctant to be interviewed, or they could have been so worried that they saw me as an advisory: a reassurance that their future was not dim and full of depression as the media representation suggested (they had expressed concern about their future health). Further, the information from the participants may have been ‘down-key’. However, I chased up and obtained a copy of the paper (McCann et al, 1998) to find that the authors had written “Our data *do not* allow conclusions about reversibility or permanence of MDMA-induced changes in brain 5-HT transporter...” (p.1436; my emphasis). Although the media had distorted the findings I was reassured that the research was not giving information which the participants did not know already. The authors went on to say “...people who use MDMA as a recreational drug are unwittingly putting themselves at risk of developing brain 5-HT injury” (p.1437). Surely it is better for ecstasy users to know there is potential risk than to have it misrepresented as fact.

### **Progression of the Research and Personal Thoughts**

An alteration made from the pilot interview guide to the main one involved placing less emphasis on body image and focusing more widely on the body (or bodily awareness). One of the reasons for this change was discussed in the Preface to the Thesis (page iii) but another relates to the finding that body image concerns were not temporally or spatially related to the dance event, and almost all the women were comfortable with

their bodily perception. Therefore, it seemed not to warrant deeper investigation and my initial interests of appearance and weight were retained under the new general heading. Further changes involved less detail on circumstantial information, such as ages and races of other clubbers (recall that the pilots were originally exploratory interviews) and more emphasis on experiential aspects: many areas were addressed by the participants without direction by myself, and information on the social context of ecstasy use emerged mainly through analysis.

Though the interview guide was appropriate for elucidating disclosure, whilst restructuring I tried to perceive it from the perspective of a participant in order for it to work better. For example, I asked myself questions like ‘what would I think if I was asked this?’. The guide was semi-structured and therefore flexible, allowing ‘room’ for the participants to answer as they wished and to expand on relevant issues, but I still felt it important to be participant friendly. My empathising was later helped by an opportunity which arose for me to be interviewed by a colleague. The difficult role of being an interviewee emerged (thinking on the spot, giving instances of an experience) and showed me, in praxis, why it was important to ease participants into the interview. This experience gave insight into being on the ‘other side of the fence’, therefore aiding me to interview the women in a more participant-receptive way or, rather, increasing absolute respect.

From the pilot interviews I was struck by the women’s descriptions of how their attitudes had changed through using ecstasy, in the sense of feeling more self-confident and more relaxed. The question that elicited this response was made more general on the main interview guide, from ‘have the experiences influenced you in a mental sense’ to ‘have you experienced any changes whilst using ecstasy’. This question was asked early in the interview, then at the end on the chance that speaking of experiences triggered recall of any changes. It must be noted that I did not consider this to be a theme at this point, rather I knew of its importance to the participants and its interest to myself. Thus, the content of the guide changed very little, however I made it smaller and less structured in order to allow disclosure to be more fruitful.

I began interviewing and it was at this stage that I felt it would be illuminating to speak to men and hear their experiences of the dance event (especially in relation to the women’s descriptions of the new forms of relations encountered with them). Without my asking, five male acquaintances offered to be interviewed (two of whom

were DJs) but I was advised to wait until after my female analyses were complete to address this issue. Nonetheless, I kept wondering if I could really investigate female experiences of the sociality surrounding ecstasy use in isolation from the opposite sex.

As time progressed, analysis of the interviews was time consuming and so absorbing that I dropped the notion of interviewing men. I had lots of meaningful information from the women's perspectives on the dance culture and the body, and felt that my original emphasis on femininity was the best to keep. This was reinforced by remembering how women had been represented in the drug literature, and that the imbalance needed redressing. As I did not interview men as originally desired, and considering the reflexivity of the impact of myself as a researcher (discussed later), I question if I would have understood men's experiences as fully as those of the women. Being female certainly allowed disclosure which I feel may not have been divulged to a male interviewer. It is possible that a male researcher would be in a better position to achieve richer disclosure than a female one, especially about issues relating to masculinity.

### **The Research Interview**

I decided to use in-depth semi-structured interviews to investigate this topic because of their particular suitability "...for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (Kvale, 1996:105). Interviews allow issues to be explored which are of an intricate nature, and thus cannot be studied by quantitative measures. The meaning of clubbing to women is a complex area due to its diversity with regard to the participants, the event (and music style), and the drugs: it cannot be presupposed to be homogeneous in any respect. To use a quantitative method would elicit standard replies, thus it would not grasp the participants' perceptions of experience.

An instance from personal experience is that every time I have filled in a questionnaire I have felt disheartened by the lack of categories for me to answer truthfully. For example, when asked about certain preferred activities (when given a choice of categories) my answer does not fit into any one category as my mood and the situation affect my actions, therefore my response fits into more than one answer or none at all. This exemplifies the rigidity of quantitative methods to question asking and

the inflexibility of the answers given, because I would have to lie in order to complete the questionnaire which would therefore give a false impression. The formation of the questions asked in a survey as highly structured means that informative disclosure is missed, also there is not enough time for the participant to gain trust in the researcher and consequently what is confided will be limited. The interview, by its conversational nature, allows trust to be established between researcher and researched, thus eliciting deep and meaningful responses. Interviews gain descriptions of the participants' life-worlds, so contradictions naturally arise. And it is argued that a strength of qualitative research is to find an array of views of a theme, and to demonstrate these as a diverse and uncertain world (Ibid.:7).

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to address issues as and when they emerge, giving freedom of speech for the participant and a more thorough understanding for the researcher. This flexible structure enables the participant to follow her chain of thought, thus giving a more detailed account of her experiences. Furthermore it allows interesting responses to be followed, whilst extricating meanings behind actions. The format is akin to a guided conversation (Ibid.), and as such a negotiation is held between researcher and researched which reduces power relations in the interview setting (more later).

### *Conducting the interviews*

I based the interview guide on suggestions from Kvale (1996), who recommends an introduction to the areas of discussion and that the first questions should be structured in a way that eases the participant into the interview (a description was sought, for example 'can you remember your first clubbing experience?'). As the participant became accustomed to the conversation, direct and relevant questions following the initial response dimensions were asked: the emphasis was on getting the participants to expand, to give examples, and for me to clarify. The interview ended by my asking if there was anything the participants would like to add, in order for them to take up any issues that had come to light during the interview, or any concerns regarding the research per se (the guide can be found in Appendix 5).

The interviews took place on an individual basis though one was conducted with two participants (a friend of the participant turned up prior to the interview and offered to take part). I feel this probably eased the situation for the original participant as the



thought of being interviewed can be a little daunting. In this instance, the interview was analysed as one despite there being two participants. I believe this was the best step to take (as opposed to separation) because taking the interview apart would lose meaning: the richness of disclosure came from the dyadic form of their dialogue. The interviews were audio-taped and mainly took place at the participants' homes, though one was conducted at my home and another at my office. Those conducted at the participants' homes took place in comfortable settings which allowed them to feel at ease with the interview situation. Self-protection was also an issue as they were aware of confidentiality regarding the disclosure of illegal activities. This safety was also an aspect in the two interviews conducted at my home and office, as the participants did not want those they lived with to over-hear the conversation (only myself and the participant were witness to what was being discussed). However, the home environment of the participants had the problem of interruptions in the form of phone calls and others in the house passing through, yet these did not disturb the flow of the discussion to a great extent (because topics can be re-addressed when necessary). After the interviews had been conducted, the participants were thanked and asked if they would like to be kept informed about the progress of the research, and the part in it they played in it: all expressed interest.

*Reflexive comment:* The qualitative interview, as a method for inquiring into the life-world of female clubbers, worked extremely well in that a level of disclosure was obtained which more controlled methods of investigation would not have permitted. For example, it allowed the participants a space and time to reflect upon and describe their experiences in detail. This spontaneous aspect meant that discoveries occurred not only for myself, but also for the participants at times (possibly demonstrating authenticity). Discovery as a two way process indicates something about the power relations in the interview: not only was I learning, so were some of the participants. This exemplifies the co-researcher relationship where the participant mutually investigates the topic with the researcher.

### **Reflexivity of the Interviews**

Before moving onto one interview in detail, I will address reflexivity issues of the overall interview process. One interview took place with two participants (Millie and

Sam) which, as given earlier, I feel eased the situation for both in the sense of not being alone and because they had spent their clubbing period together. Therefore, they spoke of shared experiences which meant they often clarified each others responses, and it opened disclosure as they got carried away remembering their past experiences (eliciting good descriptions). However, as evident from the transcripts, Sam was more outspoken than Millie and tended to digress somewhat, adding a difficulty for me to follow up by retaining who-said-what. Sometimes Millie took on the role of interviewer, questioning Sam, which was beneficial as it gave the relations a reciprocal footing. When the interview had ended, talk of clubbing experiences began again, so I asked for permission and hurriedly turned the recorder back on (as we all laughed about this it was not an instance of 'opening-up' because they were no longer being recorded). My feelings after the interview was that, as friends, they had enjoyed re-living what was clearly an important part of their past.

The interviews were audio-taped (chosen because it allowed me to communicate in a natural fashion and thus invite a good flow of disclosure; Coolican, 1994) which meant I could have taken the chance and took notes on the non-verbal actions expressing or emphasising an emotional response. However, I treated the interviews as guided conversations so I did not take notes, and I felt it may have been perceived as intrusive and thus distract (or put-off) the participants. This was based on the discipline being psychology, of which the general public can be wary, and because I believed it was best not to present myself as judgmental due to the nature of the topic. In other words, because of the general view of psychologists as 'analysing everybody' and the suspicion of them looking for deep and hidden meanings, note taking may have been seen as an implicit method of gaining information they did not want to disclose. Thus, I felt that the participants would feel more comfortable and disclose more information if they were not suspicious of my motives.

The reader may be wondering if the participants indicated mistrust or if this was my assumption. From the above it is clear that my assumption was in action, though as every interview begins with an uncertainty focused towards the tape-recorder it is possible that this may have been exacerbated by the nature of the topic at hand. Hence, it was my decision to not record body language, in order for ease (full attention to the dialogue) and comfort (for the participants). An example of fear related to the illegal nature of (and possibly negative associations toward) drug users is evident in the

interview when Sam, after being asked for ‘a picture of their drug use’, responded in shock by thinking I meant a photograph of them both! It is possible that her response was an attempt at humour, however I feel that it was related to the lack of anonymity which a photograph would expose.

The participants’ non-verbal expressions sometimes influenced what I asked and when. For example, if they paused verbally but their non-verbal cues indicated there was more to say I would ask for expansion. This worked conversely in that if their facial expressions indicated closure on a topic then I did not push the issue. After interviewing Teri, I realised how non-verbal communication played such a large role in talking about the dance event and ecstasy related experiences, which moved me to reconsider my initial decision not to record it.<sup>4</sup> However, whilst transcribing I was placed once again in the original interview and thus remembered the emotional tones of the interaction (also noted by intonation and emphasis). So, in my opinion, not recording body language in the interviews did not detract meaning from the findings.

During the interviews I adopted a presentation of naïveté. I feel that this decision was an attempt to understand, and was aided by the use of bracketing during the interviews (‘deliberate naïveté’ which Kvale, 1996, states is an external sign of the underlying phenomenological reduction in action). When knowledge of the culture was presented by myself, it was in a ‘what do you think’ way and not a definite ‘this is it’. I retained the feeling throughout the interviews that the participants knew more than me about the phenomena (they *were* living that life) which, in retrospect, indicated that my initial drive for naïveté was a good approach to adopt. It placed the participants in more of an authority position, enhanced disclosure, and allowed me to listen with intense interest.

Naïveté also involved an element of trying to recognise the emotionality of the experience (experiencing through empathy), though the participants could reject or respond to the emotional input from myself (Hollway, 1999). An example of recognising the emotion of an experience emerged when, early in the interview, Vicki spoke of her decreased involvement with clubs due to her university work-load, where I responded with ‘that’s good’! This was a moral judgement, most likely related to being a fellow academic and recognising the hardship of completing work whilst trying to

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<sup>4</sup> To be aware of non-verbal communication in Teri’s interview more than the others may mean she is more bodily expressive when communicating or that, due to our familiarity, many sentences remain uncompleted verbally to be completed non-verbally (as discussed).

retain some sort of social life. It also showed her that I supported and understood her choice, so that she was encouraged to speak (it did not matter to the interview if she had not clubbed recently). Empathy is an attitude adopted in phenomenological psychology to reveal or conceal aspects of the world (Churchill, 1999), thus it is acceptable for the interview situation and as such is a mode of presence. As researchers we bracket presuppositions relating to objective reality and personal experience because they can distort the meaning of the experience as ascribed by the participant. In relation to emotional responses, the researcher uses 'shows of *cool* emotionality' rather than those of a more severe nature which might show, for example, that she disagrees with the participant's actions. I did not want the participants to feel that they must justify themselves or that they were being judged. Therefore I used empathy to encourage and gain full descriptions from the participants - to enter their life-worlds. Similarly, my use of non-verbal communication was aimed at inviting the participants to tell their stories, and to let them unfold.

The above reactions demonstrate the social interactive nature of the interview, and they allow relations of power to be more equal (clearly a benefit in humanistic research). Remaining with power relations in the interview situation, both Ann and Lou took hold of the interview guide (initially to view the areas of questioning) but never gave it back. Hence they began the interviews and in a sense guided them. I did not see this as problematic as I knew the areas to cover and, as the interviews were semi-structured, the ordering did not matter. Their lead felt more natural than when I had the guide, which I can only relate to my not having it to keep checking for areas to be covered, or worrying for those I may have missed. It gave the interviews a more spontaneous feeling, though I still retained some control over the direction of the conversation via prompts and questions related to issues that the participants raised themselves.

Although I was the researcher and directed the conversation, I do not believe the women felt uneasy with this because they were in charge of their disclosure and if they disagreed with a prompt they said so. The relationship of trust, as established, abated relations of power. The flow of each interview went well and I felt comfortable conducting the interviews. However, as I was familiar conversing on an everyday level with those I knew, but could not join in the conversation as normal, some digression occurred. Having articulate and 'chatty' participants gave a naturalness to the interview

situations, but also did my acquiring knowledge of the culture through informal chats with people who frequented dance events. I acknowledge that I missed some points worthy of follow-up and feel this was connected to the difficulty in trying to remember issues given in such rich and lengthy descriptions, and because the flow of conversation can change rapidly and lead away from a point worth pursuing.

Regarding the guide, requesting early memories of an ecstasy related event at the start of the interview was a good initiation into talking about drug related experiences: all recalled an experience which they seemed please to tell. This question acted as an introduction to the 'nitty-gritty' and followed questions which worked to get a background of their clubbing experiences. Some questions encouraged self-reflection on certain experiences ('have your experiences changed you') though this also occurred spontaneously as the participants often placed meaning on their experiences (cf. Nicolson, 1998) (an example being when Kate spoke of the closeness experienced at the dance event, see page 52). Encouraging the participants to expand on their experiences enabled me to 'get at' the meanings ascribed to them, thus negating the assumption that their meanings of an experience were the same as mine (Charmaz, 1996).

I did ask some double barrelled questions, for example 'what drugs have you used and won't use?' (Lou) which resulted in only the first part of the question being answered. This was a personal fault, but related to my growing experience of interviewing. Drug use patterns were requested toward the end of the interviews, which proved fruitful as the women had become accustomed to talking about drugs so did not seem to mind my prying into this further aspect of their lives. Sam was the only one who expressed curiosity about the research outcome, saying that it would be useful for drug use prevention. Though this was not a research objective, I feel she was offering an idea as to how the research could be usefully exploited, thus expressing genuine interest as opposed to showing suspicion of the 'real' aim (as may be questioned given my previous discussion on the suspicion directed towards psychologists).

### *Specific reflexivity*

To give a more detailed picture of the interview procedure I will now discuss the reflexivity of one interview. The interview is with Kate, a thirty year old who frequents free parties though on occasions visits dance clubs. Kate had been clubbing for around eight years at the time of interview and described her participation in dance events as

being of a cyclical nature. She had been a participant in the pilot interviews (November 1996) and a relationship of trust, I feel, had been established. Due to our pre-established familiarity the interview situation was eased for Kate as she knew what to expect from me, what I was like, what the research was about and what stance I took on drug use. The latter point was important because if, for example, I was a radical opponent of drug use then she may have been concerned that I would not represent her views and experiences truthfully, viz. that I could misconstrue what she said. (My position with regard to the topic is discussed on page 61 of this chapter, in relation to the reduction). It is possible that Kate had preconceived ideas about the questions yet as some time had passed between the interviews (the main one was conducted in April 1998) it is likely she had forgotten the original questions, so her descriptions will have been anew (she did not refer to the pilot interview nor asked me to recall instances from it). The full analysis of this interview can be found in Appendices 8-13.

During the interview I missed some points of discussion which were worth pursuing. For example when she spoke of being tranced-up during the dance (line 133) I should have requested expansion. However, my following question was related to what she had just said about hugging (after 141) where I acted naïvely by questioning if strangers were embraced, in order to get feel of closeness of the free party. There is also an instance where my missed opportunity got redressed by Kate later in the interview: I did not ask why she stopped clubbing all together (line 50), but she told me the reason later (lines 337-341) without my asking. Kate appeared comfortable speaking to me about many issues of drug use, rarely did she not answer thoroughly, and I was left afterwards with the feeling that the interview was enjoyed by both. Below are examples from the transcript which allow me to demonstrate reflexivity.

#### *A missed opportunity*

K: ...we'd not done one [ecstasy] before and we did one together and it was just one of the best nights ever [laughs] it was just like all your Christmas' in one, yeah it was good.

S: *Did you feel nervous or anything?*

K: no, not at all... (lines 17-21)

In this instance I should have asked what made it one of her best nights ever, viz. encouraged her to describe the first ecstasy experience in more detail. The question about nerves was to get an idea of what it felt like prior to taking that first ecstasy.



Three previous interviewees had described experiencing nervousness immediately before consuming their first ecstasy tablet, hence was this an issue in Kate's life-world?

### *Stepping out of role*

K: ...Once you get to know people, you know you start to bump into them in the crowd and stuff.

S: *It's a lovely way to meet people.*

K: yeah [laughs]. (40-41)

I think I said this because of the conversational nature of the interview (it can be difficult to retain the interviewer stance without offering input!). Also because I recognised the importance to Kate of others at free party events, and the belonging experienced, as given in the prior text. Thus, I stepped out of role but recognised the emotionality of her experiences.

### *An example of prompting*

K: ...I think it has changed the way I am, I'm a lot more approachable and easy to talk to and just err, yeah just feel more confident.

S: *Umm, do you know what you could put that down to?*

K: [laughs]

S: *Whether it's just being in the environment and the people you are with?*

K: it's the environment and the people xxx once you've had your boundaries let down by that much it becomes part of the way you are I think... (79-85)

Initially I thought that this was a good prompt, but then questioned this because of her answer: was she just agreeing? Alternatively, it may have been an appropriate prompt in that I was correct about what aspects influenced her change in attitude. It is fair to say that she was not presenting an agreeing character as further in the interview if she does not agree with a question she gives her perception. I am not sure why she laughed with the initial question!

### *Clarification*

K: ...there's always a certain type of dancer, there was one this weekend, you always get the guy whose eyes are popping out of his head and they always dance around the dance floor (.) loads... and then you sort of make friends with them 'cos they're the mad person walking around the dance floor xxx



*S: Yeah to sort of amuse people?*

K: YEAH, yeah.

*S: That's brilliant. Do you find that sometimes you have to work for the high on ecstasy?*

K: yeah I mean sometimes you just get a (.) pill that you don't, you just get, it hits you and you're up there... (161-167)

The first question is an attempt at clarifying that I understood what she meant, clearly I was right as she eagerly agreed. The first part of the second question involves me stepping out of role again, due to the conversational nature where I show to her that I recognise and understand this dance culture entertainment. The resulting part of this second question was asked because she had spoken of others acting to enhance people's ecstasy high, thus led my thinking to that of personally working to reach the high state.

#### *A probing question*

K: ...there's so many different sorts of ecstasy and you get ones which make you run around like an idiot talking to loads of people then you get ones that make you really insular and you just maybe just dance and don't really talk to anybody, you just smile across or, it's just so many different (2) feelings you get off them xxx some of them make you really quiet and not be able to dance at all, just sit in a corner [laughs].

*S: Do you find that it's a drug that you can control?*

K: (3) erm, right if you have an average E yeah you can control it... (188-194)

This question was posed because of her mentioning the many experiences of ecstasy. Thus, I was trying to discover controllability of actions whilst on the drug (it was an area on the interview guide) and if different types affected this ability.

#### *Empathy*

K: ...I remember there was one club where we went to and the bouncers were really, really heavy and erm they were like following me around if I was going to the toilet, followed me into the toilet and shit like that and I didn't have a good time at that club because the bouncers were so heavy... so, yeah your setting can spoil it totally. And then if you've got bouncers glaring across at you making it a heavy atmosphere, it does spoil.

*S: God, that's terrible when they follow you around as though they are keeping an eye on you.*

K: umm, well yeah they were, they thought I was going to fix [take heroin] which I wasn't.

S: *Umm. Err, I don't know if you get this on the underground scene but do you get many women dressing in body conscious clothes?*

K: no, not really. I mean some, people tend to wear sort of not many clothes because it's hot erm, but you don't get people in tiny little shoes and baby-doll outfits... (265-272)

Again, this first statement shows me stepping out of the interviewer role, and is empathic. I recognised the emotionality of her experience as recently I had had a similar encounter where I was followed around a clothing shop by an assistant whom, I can only think, thought I was going to steal (the invasion of her presence and glare caused discomfort). The second question shows me stumbling to change the area: I was unsure how to react to Kate's previous disclosure, and had no related questions to ask. It also shows myself being naïve, asking if body conscious appearance is an issue at the free parties then, dependent on her answer, following questions about dress were directed personally or generally.

#### *Researcher as expert*

K: ...I was just thinking that you've used it all up, whatever it is in your brain is gone, it's like depleted and you haven't got any, what is the stuff?

S: *Serotonin?*

K: serotonin isn't it... (383-385)

Here, Kate places me in position of expert or, at least, someone 'in the know'.

#### *A vignette*

S: *Err, in a recent survey 83% of people thought that drug taking was an accepted part of British people's lives*

K: definitely, I mean 'cos Britain's quite unique in that it's got like the youth culture scene, in Britain it's really unique isn't it and err (2) everyone does it... (401-403)

The above question is an example of one of the vignettes used in the interviews to elicit disclosure. As she answered before I completed the question, it demonstrates her understanding of where the question was heading (...what do you think?).

### *Reiteration*

K: ...my short-term, my memory's not as good but that might be just getting older but I know a few of us that think it's the drugs 'cos I can't remember as well as I used to and things like that... But when you get back into it and excited by it again all that goes, you know, the fear, it's only when you're calming down and getting bored a bit maybe that you start to worry about the health effects again. But you do worry sometimes.

*S: Do you think it's because you notice your memory's not as good and then it sets you off thinking 'oh shit'?*

K: umm and just like I have seen people who've been full-on on the party scene and they've had nervous breakdowns and things like that... (419-428)

This question is a reiteration of what Kate said to make sure I had the correct understanding, viz. I ask if during the calming period worry is triggered by noticing a change in memory ability. As her response was vague and brief, I am not sure if she agreed with what I said, or if her response was such because she was still talking about the risks associated with ecstasy abuse, therefore had progressed further in her chain of thought.

### *Empathy for non-closure*

K: ...I mean some people really lose it, sort of become mentally ill and stuff erm (.) I don't know. I suppose when you describe it like this it sounds really bad but you just, it's just part of the scene and most people come out of it so, they stop and their friends make sure they stop, and they get better.

*S: Yeah, it sounds worse when you talk about it like this.*

K: yeah but you know that person's going to be all right 'cos they're just going to stop and then come out of it... (436-443)

My agreeing statement was an attempt to reassure Kate: I am empathising with her position, reiterating her words for her expansion, as opposed to closing the topic. It would not have been suitable to change the topic at this point nor to respond in a way that she may interpret as worrying (if she did see me as someone more knowledgeable about ecstasy).

### *A conscious though not stated assumption*

*S: Could I ask you, 'cos I know on the free party scene a lot more people talk about the spiritual feel, could you tell me anything about that?*

K: yeah, well it's not, it's not just the big weekend out, it becomes a way of life... (517)

Here, I was asking about the spiritual experience of free parties and Kate answers this in the sense of group belonging and involvement. The spiritual aspect emerged in other interviews, however my awareness of the people who frequent free parties and their tendency to follow New Age philosophical beliefs did influence the question. Though I did not ask directly about the New Age view on spirituality, it was there in my thinking and therefore was not bracketed, yet this was not a disloyalty to phenomenology as I did not pose the question in a way that betrayed the phenomenological reduction. Also, she answered the question as it was for her, as she perceived the spirituality of free party events, not in relation to what had implicitly shaped my question.

#### *Closure at a wrong point*

K: ...at a party scene you get to know everyone's face and everybody knows you. It's a lot more closer and you look around more, you just get closer from doing all that 'cos it's a longer stretch of time so you really get to know everyone. Yeah it does feel more spiritual.

*S: Yeah. Will you be going this year?*

K: yeah in the summer. I used to go to the winter parties but I'm not that hard-core anymore [laughs]... (532-536)

The above question shows me expressing interest on a point which is not particularly relevant to the research but the interview was coming to a close. However, it also shows closure on the spirituality topic which I had just introduced. Maybe this was because, as said above, I was thinking along the lines of New Age spiritual beliefs. Nonetheless, I should not have put closure on this topic, I should have asked more directly if New Age philosophy meant anything to her.

#### **My Impact on the Interviews**

Six of the participants were known to myself prior to the interviews, and of the remaining two, one had been a participant in the pilot interviews. Due to this familiarity it is possible the participants did not view me as an authority figure to a great extent, aiding power relations. There is also the likelihood that being acquaintances granted fuller disclosure. However, it is fair to say that some issues may not have been brought

to light by the participants for a number of reasons: a distance between acquaintances; the topic being of a personal nature; or a desire to present themselves in a favourable light viz. safeguarding their socially presented selves (Ashworth, 1993) (though these problems can arise in situations when the participants are unknown to the researcher).

My age group is close to all the participants which I feel helped disclosure as I could relate to what they said and was not searching for continual clarification. Having prior knowledge of drug using cultures from conversations with people who were willing to share their drug experiences helped my understanding of the drug culture language during the interviews (a glossary of the terms used by the participants can be found after the Implications chapter). Sharing a common understanding of language (drug terminology varies across close geographical borders, an example being Lou and Carol used 'strung-out' to refer to the come-down whereas others used the literal phrase, and the terms 'paff' and 'spliffs' for cannabis and joints, respectively) aided my understanding during the interviews. With acquaintances there was less need to clarify terms, yet it added an unforeseen difficulty that did not arise until analysis. On occasions analysis was difficult as I knew what the women were saying when they said it, but had to keep referring to the context of the text whilst analysing (is my understanding reflective of her perception?). This clearly relates to interpretation involved in descriptive phenomenology which, as described in the previous chapter, takes place when vague and incomplete sentences are given.

Further to the communal understanding of meaning expressed linguistically comes the influence of dialect. Being from the same area as most of the participants meant that we shared an understanding of locally specific terminology (examples include 'honking' and 'barking' which mean vomiting). Thus, an assumption existed that I knew what they meant and they me, one which occurs in all communication and which I feel added to the value of the information gathered. Again, some interpretation was involved, justified by it entailing the meaning of a word as 'structure dependent' (Wood, 1998). Thus, the shared language in relation to geographical regions (drug groups and dialect) enabled dyadic understanding in the interviews and may be considered to increase validity of the findings per se.

An occurrence rather than intention was that myself and the participants are white British. In considering the cultural differences regarding some aspects of femininity, then this may have aided my understanding of female issues (still, I did not

presuppose that our experiences meant the same). As a woman with a working-class background and in higher education I could identify with all the participants in one or both senses. Once more, I feel this aided my understanding and their receptivity to me as a researcher. My being of the same gender of the participants possibly helped disclosure as certain issues may not be revealed to a male interviewer. One example being depression as a result of ecstasy abuse. As this illness tends to be suffered by more women than men, and can have stigmatic connotations, it is possible they felt easier describing this in depth to me. Furthering disclosure, my being a woman in my twenties meant that I understood the fluctuating, unstable nature of bodily-perception: the revelation of issues which are sensitive may need an understanding other for them to be expressed. In addition, two participants raised the issue of sexuality and revealed highly personal information, and one can question if this would have been disclosed in such detail to a man. Clearly, being of the same gender means that many aspects of femininity are understood, thus allowing them to be shared during discussion. However, there is a drawback: it is possible that some information may not be shared because it is taken-for-granted that it is known.

It is argued that when a researcher shares similarities with her participants (age, gender, ethnicity, and cultural group) then she is placed in a position to recognise the full ethical implications of being a participant in the study (Banister et al, 1994). And regarding social identity I could closely identify with the participants, but I retained a professional distance (Kvale, 1996) because I was not living the world of clubbing (my experience of the phenomena came from exploratory reading and conversations). However, because I knew most of the women I did not adopt a detached observer position (Banister et al. 1994): it would be unfriendly to present myself in this way and, in my opinion, it would not work as a research tool as it would alienate the participants. Indeed I empathised with them in order to gain disclosure, I understood many things they were saying because I had heard them over the years from friends who participated in the scene.

In relation to the phenomenological reduction, my experience and knowledge of the phenomena was bracketed when collecting information. However, when listening to the women's descriptions I found myself experiencing a range of emotions: intrigue, shock, sadness, pleasure and amusement as many stories entailed humour. In my opinion it is only natural to experience emotional responses in the interview situation,

especially when the aim is to connect with the lives of the participants. But they can be bracketed, that is, they are held as neither presupposed to be truly descriptive of the phenomena nor presupposed to be alien to it, rather they are reflectively tested for their relevance to the life-world. When the women spoke of depression, for example, my feeling of concern influenced the questions I asked (my interest was not just from a research perspective). However, I tested my concern for its relevance to depression in the life-world, which therefore makes it more probable that I understood it as it appeared in the life-world. As earlier, emotional responses are expressed 'coolly' but the inner experience may be slightly stronger, so the former acts as a check for their connection with the women's meaning. As such, emotional responses, in phenomenological research, act as a research tool.

A further consideration of my impact when collecting information involves the co-researcher relationship. As women we had a space and time where we could chat, and I was in a privileged position as they allowed me to delve into their personal worlds. With retrospect, I questioned if I got on too well with my participants, but I soon dismissed this thought because it is often natural to feel a 'closeness' when people share interest in phenomena and the research involves connection rather than distance. And, in relation to the phenomenological spirit, I respected and took on board what the women said. In my opinion, 'getting on well' with participants allows the interview to be enjoyed with the implication that good descriptive information is obtained.

Indeed, many experiences were disclosed by the women which indicates they assumed I would understand. It appears they took my personal standpoint for granted: it was tacit (yet the participants who did not know me asked for my views on ecstasy use after the interviews). My lack of personal standpoint is related to setting aside presuppositions to enter the life-world, but it also reflects who I am. I do not judge people who use drugs for recreation as I have been doing so with alcohol for many years.

### **Entering the Life-World**

After each interview had been conducted, seven steps of analysis were followed which allowed access into the life-worlds of the participants.



### *1. The interview was centred upon the participant's experience*

The questions asked in the interview worked to draw out the participant's perceptions of the phenomena under study. Mutual interest was focused on the participant's experience as this allowed for open disclosure. Bracketing presuppositions was in action at this point, however I used two vignettes of previous findings to elicit descriptions of experiences, if relevant to the participant. This was not a deviation from phenomenology as my comprehension of the findings was not structured around them (see Appendix 5 for interview guide).

### *2. Recording of intermediary reactions to the interview*

Directly after the interview I noted the participant's emotional responses to issues, including any concerns or comments regarding her part in the research process. Also, I wrote my feelings about the interview, thus reflexivity of the interview situation.

### *3. Transcription of the interview in verbatim*

I then listened to the interview and transcribed it word for word (with the omission of digressed information irrelevant to the research and that in-keeping with anonymity). (See Appendices 7 and 8 for transcript notation and transcript). Transcribing the interview myself enhanced my understanding of what was expressed, thus placing me in a better position to discriminate units of meaning.

### *4. Natural meaning units were primarily identified*

Reading through the transcript allowed me to familiarise myself with the content of the interview, to gain a 'sense of the whole' (Giorgi, 1985). Natural meaning units, which signify a self-contained meaning, were then formed (each meaning unit was numbered in succession on the transcript). Meaning unit discrimination occurred when I noted a change in meaning of the descriptions. At this point, the psychological attitude and the set of the description, as related to the research questions, were in action (Ibid.). This process allowed me to linger upon and thus understand what was said and how it was expressed (an example of this step can be found in Appendix 9).

### *5. Understanding the participant's intended meaning with regard to the units*

At this point in the analysis process I attempted to find what was said in each of the meaning units. The method used to achieve this involved each unit being rephrased into

my words, viz. my understanding of each meaning unit. Here, it was of vital importance for myself to test my presuppositions in order to avoid misrepresentation of the meaning intended by the participant. This process allowed the participant's meaning to be fully understood as I used information only from her concrete descriptions (the emerging life-world). And it is vital in order to take the participant's raw descriptions of everyday life into terms necessary for the discipline of psychology (Giorgi, 1997) (or "the language of common sense enlightened by a phenomenological perspective" as there is a lack of a pre-established and agreed psychological one; Giorgi, 1985:19) (an example of this step can be found in Appendix 10).

#### *6. Meaning units were grouped together as themes which openly reflected the participant's experience*

Themes emerged as I gained access into the life-world and the main issues were outlined. When the same meaning arose in different places of the text, they were placed under a theme which described both of them. A new and general heading was given to those meaning units which, when pulled-together, disclosed different features of a like, though more pivotal, theme. It is here that the rule of horizontalization was utilised in that all the descriptive items were treated as having equal value (Spinelli, 1989). The grouped meaning units, or themes, were then analysed phenomenologically from the perspective of the research questions, in order to describe the meanings from the participant (the rule of description; Ibid.). At this point, implicit meanings were reflected upon even if they had not been verbalised by the participant (Wertz, 1985). Emergent themes were noted (Appendix 11), then grouped (Appendix 12) then presented as final findings, viz. the life-world per se (Appendix 13).

Contradictions were included in the findings, thus the life-world was ambiguous in various respects, as Kvale (1996:34) states "The contradictions of interviewees... may in fact be adequate reflections of objective contradictions in the world in which they live". Giorgi (1992:132) echoes this point from the phenomenological perspective "The descriptive scientist can only present and argue for what is evidentially given; if it is ambiguous, it is described as such".

#### *7. General themes were compared across all the interviews*

The above six steps of analysis were conducted for each interview, and by working on each interview sequentially I remained immersed in the life-world at hand. This final

step however involved synthesising the common themes of the life-worlds. Themes were noted which had an inclination to the more generalised (general features were seen by consistencies) whilst individual findings were retained in mind to escape over-generalising. Here, I had to ascertain which features of the individual themes shared a general truth thus, by further reading over the findings and reflecting over ambiguities, comparison of findings led to similarities and differences (Wertz, 1985).

The overall themes and their sub-themes were presented in the format of a discussion between the participants. In order to begin this step I read through each participant's life-world and noted the points of each theme (to be used as a guide for the discussion; Appendix 14). It was then a case of finding the corresponding numbers of the meaning units from step four. This procedure is akin to coding, yet it was not conducted in a quantitative sense, i.e. by numbers, but by meanings expressed through language. As Giorgi (1994:198) states "one doesn't need to count the meanings in order to understand... one only has to discover and list them, and perhaps discover their latent interrelationships, in order to understand them better". The themes inter-link due to the participants' personal worlds, which encompass the varieties of experience.

The findings are presented under main headings, each including sub-headings (or themes with their sub-themes, respectively). The headings refer to the description of the life-world in how it was perceived by the women, however it may not have been verbalised as such by them. For example, the theme on risk includes sub-themes where the women did not view their experiences in risky terms, though it was implicit. As bracketing ends after the analysis, if I felt some actions were considered risky but were not implied by the women then they were included in that chapter, which in my view is not a bias as they merely 'sit' under that heading.

### **Reflexivity of Phenomenological Analysis**

Colaizzi (1978:53) writes "Each particular psychological phenomenon, in conjunction with the particular aims and objectives of a particular researcher, evokes a particular descriptive method". Wertz (1985:160) reiterates, in that an appropriate method is developed with regard to the unique phenomena under study. Thus, approaches to phenomenological analysis vary. Giorgi (1985) synthesises the meaning units into a consistent statement about the research area, however I differed in that all the life-worlds were merged to give general themes. This is because my aim of analysis was the

life-world as described by the participants, whereas Giorgi seeks the essence of a theoretically important experience. Giorgi (1994) looks for essences through the use of free imaginative variation, where aspects of the description are varied to discover the essential characteristics (for an example of free imaginative variation used extensively and excellently, see Wertz, 1983). Consequently, I did not use free imaginative variation to a great extent: the reality of the women's lived-world was elicited through a journey of discovery with them, resulting in highly variable findings (intuitiveness did occur when the meaning of the life-world was approached, and the meaning expressed in their words was sought).

During analysis I had to take care not to interpret unless it had been said by the women. If I had investigated further when nothing more in the description was given then descriptive analysis would have become interpretative (Giorgi, 1992). The researcher "...must not formulate meanings which have no connection with the data..." because the purpose is to let the information 'speak for itself' (Colaizzi, 1978:59). Thus, it was important to retain a balance between adding too much information and too little. In this sense interpretation does not mean that I cast a suspicious eye on the text and looked for hidden meanings (from manifest to latent, as in the hermeneutics of suspicion), rather it refers to interpreting the meaning from the context as a whole (as discussed in the previous chapter, page 25). Taking an instance from Teri's life-world, my 'interpretation' of her saying she would not go clubbing when she became a mother (chapter five) was that her decision was related to perception of risk. However I could have taken this further and questioned if her choice was related to the conception that mothers should not use drugs (would this be Teri's personal opinion or related to what others would think of her?), or if her decision had something to do with breast feeding and therefore the health of her child, or that she may die and her child would be without a mother. Thus, adding meaning which was not given in the life-world would have placed me in a position where I did not know which interpretation was correct.

When I first attempted descriptive analysis I found myself, when understanding the meaning of the natural meaning units, occasionally interpreting the information in relation to my own presuppositions. I would rephrase one meaning unit into my words and look at what the participant had expressed only to notice that my presented understanding did not tally with hers! For example, the mere adding of a word could change the perception quite substantially. Realising my error during analysis of the first

life-world warned me of the care required, and from then on I continually re-checked my understanding with the original transcripts.

The process of meaning unit identification allowed me to handle the information in a systematic and rigorous way: breaking it down into smaller parts made it manageable. The meaning units were identified in a spontaneous manner, which suits the discovery aspect of phenomenology (Giorgi, 1989a). I accept, as Wertz (1985) recognises, that variations within meaning unit identification may result in different understandings of the phenomena. However, because the meaning units are not already in the text but exist for the researcher in relation to her psychological attitude and set utilised when discriminating (Giorgi, 1985) it is likely that other researchers employing the same method will reach the same understanding.

### *The rule of epoché*

Some researchers of phenomenology advocate outlining their own presuppositions prior to gathering descriptions. However I did not take this step because it was difficult, if indeed possible, to outline my presuppositions before the interviews as the research questions meant that many areas (possibly unknown to myself) would be covered in the interviews. Taking an example from Colaizzi (1978), he first poses a specific question of interest then interrogates his presuppositions of it in order to form a research question which is not based on theoretical or experiential presuppositions (he may also get others to discover their presuppositions for comparison), then he is in a position to gain descriptions for analysis. Thus, some may consider my reflective ‘in-action’ outlining of presuppositions a flaw in this research, however I must leave it up to critical others to ascertain if any assumptions entered the analyses.

During the analysis process I soon realised that putting bracketing into practice was like meditation. Taking the latter, one must train the mind to prevent obtrusive thoughts from entering in order to reach the meditative state. Likewise, when bracketing one must train the mind to prevent distorting meanings from personal knowledge and theoretical findings. Presuppositions that entered my thoughts during analysis were related to my experience of certain discussed phenomenon. For example, in the context of the alcohol-based club I have also been approached by men with a disrespectful manner. But I had to let my experience of this pass as a ‘fleeting thought’ because my experience of something may not be the same as the participants’ experience of the

same thing (there is no one underlying reality). Thus, if presuppositions ‘popped’ into mind at certain points they were set aside in a reflective sense. Bracketing theoretical knowledge of the phenomena (i.e. models of drug use) was not problematic because it was not relevant to the topic under study. Nonetheless some women mentioned taking ecstasy which had been tainted with heroin and my reading had shown this not to be a ‘proven’ adulterating substance. Hence it indicated a possible error in the women’s perceptions, but I did not question its truth or falsity (perhaps laboratories have just not come across this type of adulteration) as it was their experiences I was interested in which form their life-worlds. And when descriptions shed doubt on traditional research findings and supported those of researchers investigating the dance culture with a feminist gaze, I allowed myself to feel the excitement but set aside any thoughts which may have led me away from the true meaning.

Earlier I mentioned how I experienced many emotions whilst collecting information, and this also occurred whilst analysing the descriptions (perhaps more intensely as I became absorbed in the emerging life-worlds). Yet these had to be set aside in order to experience the emotion the woman expressed in relation to an experience, because my emotional response may have differed to hers. An instance from the life-world which may elucidate this point was my surprise at the risks the women took, but these were not actually surprising from the perspectives of the women. As Giorgi (1994:205) emphasises “...the reduction is a means of rendering oneself as noninfluential as possible during the process of research (neutral) in order to come up with valuable (value) findings...”. This relates to the researcher holding no personal standpoint and these principle features of the reduction (neutrality and paying absolute attention to what is said in order to understand experience) meant that I rarely noticed experiences that could be considered odd. Thus, despite my initial awareness of ecstasy users not acknowledging the severity of health consequences in relation to risk (as discussed in chapter one, page 11) the blasé attitude to risk was not noticed by myself until the latter stages of analysis. I took-for-granted the risks women took regarding drug use because of the empathic and neutral position adopted during analysis (which allowed entry into the world of the other), as such some unusual experiences were initially hard to hear. Surrendering oneself to neutrality means we can attempt to step into the shoes of someone else. And is aided by our sharing an understanding of language. We can attempt to understand what experiences mean to another but this will

never be complete as individuals are unique and their being-in-the-world has ‘many layers of meaning’ (Keen, 1978). Layers of meaning are unravelled in phenomenological analysis of the clubbing life-world (thus we can grasp how experiences are perceived) but these may not stretch to other aspects of an individual’s world (for example, her being-in-a-family life-world).

Therefore there is a distinction between methodological bracketing and what the researcher makes of the findings. When out of the reduction, my personal position can be shown and it is included in the final two chapters (eleven and twelve) where I address wider issues which have emerged from the analysis. This goes some way to bridge the tension I experienced when writing the life-worlds, a tension related to not adding the findings of other researchers to ‘enhance’ my findings. I feel this stemmed from the teaching of psychology, in that we are taught to interpret, evaluate and compare from the outset.

#### *The rule of horizontalization*

Due to the rule of horizontalization (where all the interview information is analysed without premature decisions about relevance or relative importance), I was not selective during analysis as to what should be included. This is important in phenomenology because it reduces bias, as one can question how the relevance of the selected material was decided. Placing equal value on the information during analysis was, therefore, a research tool. It is part of bracketing as I cannot assume any hierarchical organisation of the descriptions in an individual’s life-world. Ordering findings tends to be done with regard to external criteria, and we cannot assume that an objective ordering reflects everyday experience (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998). Because of the close observation of each women’s life-world that analysis permits, afterwards I am placed in a position where I can say that a certain theme in a woman’s life-world *appears* to be more important because it features in almost all of her descriptions. For example, pleasure and the importance of other people were central in each women’s life-world. Both were over-arching themes but their meanings are best understood with regard to the experiences they are described in relation to. Hence they do not form themes themselves, rather they are diffused into many of the themes presented in the thesis (chapters four to eleven).



Taking an individual perspective, there were themes of importance which ran through each clubbing life-world. For Kate, other people (including feeling relaxed and safe in their company) formed an higher order meaning, so did changes in her self which other people were perceived to be a crucial part of. Ann placed much importance on overcoming her past problems and gaining a clearer insight of her self (including her victorious battle with her eating disorder). For Teri, the notion of self-control featured centrally in her life-world, to have fun in the least way harmful to her future. And Lou emphasised a contentment with self and others, including the development of a free and open mind. In Vicki's life-world the central theme appeared to be one of survival, which entailed satisfaction about how she reached the conclusion that she did not need drugs to have fun. Sam's over-ruling perception was the atmosphere in clubs and the strange experiences she had encountered whilst on ecstasy (which she described in an amusing manner). And for Millie the experience of ecstasy was also an over-arching theme: she appreciated how it changed her perception of things. In Carol's life-world her ecstasy using group of friends held an higher meaning though so did how the negatives of using ecstasy heavily had reduced her pleasure. The central importance of these themes, however, must be held tentatively as it is possible that the participants may interpret the over-arching themes differently to myself. Furthermore, other themes have the potential for equal importance, an example being the meaning Kate ascribes to her journey through depression.

The rule of horizontalization ended when the themes for each life-world had been identified, and they had been generalised across the participants. (Further potential themes were checked for in the event that individual life-worlds had 'blinded' me to them though none emerged.) When the life-worlds were synthesised, selection as to what constituted the main themes (or focus of the research) was in action. Thus, all the information was treated equally until it was time to write what the thesis was to say. Some themes were more prominent and relevant to the research questions whilst those remaining emphasised and illuminated their meaning. As this was the method of selection for including findings in the thesis, some themes which emerged from observing a singular individual's life-world have not been included, because my concern was to present merged themes: those that shared general truths across the life-worlds (step seven of the analysis process, as above). Therefore the more prominent themes, in this meaning, were those which were present in two or more life-worlds. I

chose to present the findings as a general life-world and not idiographically because, in my opinion, this most clearly demonstrates intersubjective agreement alongside diversity of meaning.

Though the rule of horizontalization had ended at this point I refrained from ordering the themes into an hierarchy for the reason given above. Furthermore adding an hierarchy of meaning is only necessary if it adds understanding to the life-world. It can be argued however that because many meanings are entailed in each of the participant's perceptions of an experience, and these fall under a broader heading (sub-theme), then this makes that sub-theme the higher order perception. For example, the club experience means to be oneself, to feel a sense of belonging, unity and safety. As such the club experience is the higher meaning and the other meanings, though subordinate, are still part of and perhaps central to the higher order theme. This relates to one of the characteristics of phenomenologically-based human science, horizons of meaning, where one experience has the potential for many meanings from an individual person (and it follows that there are many meanings given to the same experience by different people).

Thus I have not intentionally related the themes in an hierarchical fashion whilst presenting them in this thesis because it may not represent the meaning that the participants ascribed to their experiences. Nonetheless this is not to deny that the themes have relationships in the life-world, as given by the participants, and it is in chapter eleven where these relationships are brought to light. And some themes appear to have more value than others in the life-world, again this is demonstrated in chapter eleven and also chapter twelve.

### *Battling with the language*

During analysis, I worried that the process of putting dance culture experiences into psychological language may detract the meaning as intended by the women (reflecting that discussed earlier when recruiting participants). This was related to the move from their concrete descriptions to my psychological understanding, and was exacerbated by the observation that when presenting my work to colleagues, they had difficulty understanding what the participants meant. Perhaps this reflected a lack of understanding of drug culture terminology (which can be unique and locally specific, as discussed) or because the participants tended to describe their experiences using many

expressions that are not particularly verbal (for example, when speaking about dancing on ecstasy, Lou says “it’s music that’s making your body go ‘waay’”).<sup>5</sup> Thus, the many hidden assumptions of conversation in the interview situation can get ‘lost’ when the information is presented in written format.

I wondered if the participants would feel as though the disciplinary representation of their experiences did not represent what the culture meant to them (I had heard one or two comments directed to other academic reports, in the sense of ‘that’s not what it’s about’). Hopefully, a balance between expressing the findings academically without detracting from the meanings was found by using what Giorgi calls, as earlier, common sense enlightened by phenomenology. Wertz (1985:177) expands, and states that by using everyday language its meaning becomes special because the terms are now psychological and refer only to those given experiences. I believe, therefore, that phenomenology allowed the participants’ meanings to be represented as such.

The language used to transform the meaning units was a mixture of psychology and that of everyday life with a phenomenological understanding. Psychology as a discipline is based on natural science which means that the psychologist-researcher is ‘trained’ to be objective in thought and expression. Due to phenomenology concentrating on experience, I needed to write subjectively to connect with and enter the life-world. When transforming meaning through the analysis, disciplinary reflection was entailed, which meant that I presented the findings objectively! The difficulty was exacerbated by the participants speaking objectively as the natural attitude is inbred into our culture. This, again, is recognised by Giorgi (1997) who states that the aim of the phenomenological reduction is to make more sense of the natural attitude. Further, Giorgi (1994:208) writes that during the process of transforming the meaning units into disciplinary language researchers “...seem to get pulled between the two extremes of surrendering the disciplinary meaning to the everyday meaning of the participants, or else using the jargon of the discipline in such an abstract and external way that a certain richness of meaning is lost”. The meaning for the participants is what, in phenomenology, is seized but it is in relation to what is pertinent to the research questions and what they disclose (Ibid.). So, by constant referral to the original transcripts I verified and modified my understanding, which lessened the distance

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<sup>5</sup> Henderson (1993b) also found that women used much non-verbal communication to describe their experiences of the dance club.

between the language of psychology and that of the participants, thereby retaining their meaning (Wertz, 1985:177).

When reflecting on my battle with the language, with hindsight, I question if it also relates to who I am. As a working-class woman working within academic circles I am aware of the arguments concerning the disjunction between working-class experience and middle-class understanding. Walkerdine (1996:158) investigating working-class femininity, in particular the relationship an educated working-class woman has with her father, writes how they fear "...[their fathers'] violence will be misunderstood as just one more working-class pathology by middle-class people...". Did I fear that the actions of working-class women using drugs would be viewed as pathological? In the previous chapter it was concluded that all women who used drugs, irrespective of socio-economic status, were viewed in this way. Nonetheless it is possible that my concern over language and representing experiences without detracting meaning was exacerbated by my assumption that there is a problem with understanding working-class experience, that it is viewed as deviant when it goes against middle-class experience, expectations and ways of living. And as such it reflects my attempt to bridge this gap by exploiting the best method possible to represent the reality of drug use from those who do not consider themselves to be abnormal or diseased.

### **Validity in Phenomenological Research**

Relative to the above discussion, some phenomenological researchers return to the participants to see if the findings compare with their meanings (vid. Colaizzi, 1978). I did not undertake member validation of this form because the participant may place different emphasis to myself on certain points (due to differing interests of the research), so the central themes become neglected, or she may not air her disagreements in order to be courteous (Bloor, 1983). Also, when considering member validation of findings in phenomenological research we can see that when the everyday meaning is transformed into that of psychology, only those of that discipline are in standing to confirm or criticise (Giorgi, 1994). Thus, it is "...not a matter of superiority as a human being, but a matter of specialization..." (Ibid.:209). Relating, in a sense, to Bloor's emphasis of dissimilar attention being placed on the research comes the recognition that the participant's reflection on her experience may not be equivalent to that used by the

psychologist, so to ask if my interpretations are correct is to ask her to interpret them as a psychologist (Giorgi, 1989b).

Lastly, though not in the sense of least, the interview situation forms a social context so human interaction is the pivotal act. Social interaction involves interpersonal processes, and the presentation of the self, so checking validity through the participants may mean that "...resistance to being understood and eager acceptance of understanding..." (Ashworth, 1993:3) is in action. This does not validate the findings as the participant may resist being objectified in the way the analysis brought forth, alternatively she may accept the objectification as it is the correct presentation of self she gave, or the one she prefers (Ibid.). Ashworth relates 'acceptance' and 'resistance' to the anxiety of the participant, to the safeguarding of her 'socially presented self'. As the participants' descriptions are an index to experience, it is only natural for myself to validate the findings by returning to the original descriptions and checking that I have clearly understood the meaning.

Thus, validity in this research follows Kvale's (1996:236) suggestions: first, if the study's design and method is sufficiently used for the topic of investigation and its aims then the knowledge gained is valid (echoed by Colaizzi, 1978 who states that the phenomenological method should be evaluated by how it manages to produce its research aims); secondly, if the logic of the analysis is faithful to the questions asked during analysis then it is valid. Taking the first point, the method was adequate in that it suited the research questions and, as discussed below, produced the appropriate aims. Also, phenomenology's logic remains faithful to the questions posed to the information because they are kept in mind throughout the analysis procedure. Indeed bracketing, by its very nature, increases the adequacy of the findings making them valid of the life-worlds.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to commencing each interview I informed the participants about the aims of the research and the areas to be discussed, in order to help rid any concerns about participating in the investigation and what they would talk about. Giving full information about the design and purpose meant that deception did not occur (Kvale, 1996). And permission to audio-tape the interviews was obtained.

I assured the participants about confidentiality and anonymity and, regarding the latter, gave them the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. Some participants were, however, still concerned about the interview being taped: maybe their voice would be recognised if another gained access to the tape, or the names (such as dealers) they had mentioned. As a lack of anonymity could change other's perceptions of the participants (especially regarding their employment), when the participants expressed concern the tapes were erased very soon after transcription. During transcription all the relevant information was retained on the transcripts, with regard to the research questions, and the principle of anonymity was kept in mind (names were changed, names of places omitted, and any irrelevant, highly sensitive or potentially damning information was not transcribed). Of the eight participants, six expressed concern of their recognition as drug users to family, friends and employers, however one had no objection to being identified at all (though I kept her pseudonym for any possible future repercussions, in order to protect her in the short and long terms). All were given the opportunity to check the information they had divulged meant they were not identifiable: this came in the form of giving them transcripts (six of the women retained a copy). However, it must be noted that this was not a check on the validity of the findings (for the reasons given earlier), rather it was an attempt to lessen researcher power (Banister et al, 1994). The usual response to the transcripts was to read out of interest and keep as a personal historical marker of their lives, then put them in the drawer! (though all stated enjoyment from doing the interviews).<sup>6</sup> If the transcript had information that the participant decided against allowing me to use then I would have removed it, yet none required their transcript to be edited.

Thus, the participants were protected in the sense of anonymity, confidentiality and by being in charge of how much information they disclosed. They were informed that they were under no obligation to answer any questions which they did not feel comfortable with, and that they could terminate the interview if and when so desired (also that they could end their participation with the research per se). After the interviews were completed they were given the chance to ask questions related to the research or to drug use in general. I was prepared with contact numbers for various agencies (see Appendix 6) if they were worried after the interview and required counsel, or if generally curious about any aspect of drug use (the interview guide

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<sup>6</sup> It is my hope that, from time to time, the women will come across their transcripts and that reading them will bring pleasurable memories of what were described as particularly important periods of their lives.



avoided issues which may have caused distress though the mere process of reflection can bring forth previously unconsidered concerns). None of the participants required this information, nor showed any distress as a result of interview disclosure and realisations of the self (future research could investigate if the interview process has an affect on self-perceptions, though this is another research area). The participants were happy to 'air their views' on the dance culture, thus it is fair to say they may feel as though they have contributed to a worthy piece of research. Their willingness to share experiences implies that no anxiety was caused. Because the topic, by nature, encroached on their personal lives it was crucial to avoid inducing possible harm. Finally, the participants were given my contact number and reassured that they would be kept informed about the research.



## Preface to the Life-world (chapters 4-10)

The findings that emerged from entering the women's life-worlds are given in the following chapters. They are presented as 'discussions' between the participants, including descriptions from each life-world. This narrative way of presenting the life-world reflects my role as a researcher. It is my hope that the descriptions will take the reader on a journey with the participants and, as I experienced during the research, that the women's stories will arouse a range of emotional responses.

### **Contextualisation of the Descriptions**

The descriptions have been taken out of the interview context but careful reflection upon their meaning during analysis means they accurately express the essence of the themes. I have not included the questions that preceded the descriptions because some of them were not purely the result of 'straightforward' questioning ('what do you like about clubbing?'), rather many emerged as *part* of an experience which was connectedly described in relation to another aspect in the life-world. This relates to the interview as guided conversation whilst reflecting a natural form of communication. Though it also resonates with the nature of phenomenological analysis, in particular bracketing which was in action during the interviews. I do not negate the influence of context in discourse but, in my view, to include all the questions that elicited the descriptions would weaken the findings, as presented. (However the reader can gain a sense of the context by referring to Appendices 5 and 8 for the interview topics and the transcript of one interview.)

Commentary sections for the descriptions have been added, where elucidation is necessary, and these form the underlying primary reality as mirrored in the themes. In keeping with the spirit of the phenomenological reduction these 'descriptive comments' are characterised by a return to 'the things themselves' - that is, the participants' experiences - rather than input from myself or theoretical findings. The reader will perceive the women's meanings of their experiences because the commentaries have not been distorted by the inclusion of meaning from the experiences of others. Thus, they remain in the context of the life-world and may be considered as a 'summing-up' of the participants' descriptions. Their purpose, therefore, is to put together the horizons of meaning in the many descriptions to make the sub-theme more coherent as a whole.

As such they are not an analysis but they are part of the analysis: my understanding of the meaning of the experiences as given by the women (step five of the analysis process: chapter three). Again, because I wanted the women's voices to make an impact, my commentaries come at the end of the descriptions.

### **Reading the Life-world**

The chapters four and five discuss, respectively, the appeal of ecstasy and the attraction of frequenting dance events. They aim to set the scene for the subsequent ones as the dance event environment and the experience of ecstasy play a pivotal role thereafter.

The next chapter (six) is on bodily awareness in the context of the dance event. This is followed by chapters related to the social context of ecstasy use, of which the body is entwined throughout. The first of these (seven) details the impact of ecstasy experiences and participation within this culture upon life, where drug use is normalised. The next chapter (eight) is that of heavy and regular ecstasy use, and is followed by that of risk (nine). The final 'findings' chapter (ten) discusses the many influences upon the ecstasy experience. In order to clarify the meaning of terms used in the descriptions the reader is directed to the Glossary (page 206).

Though the themes appear to be discrete categories within their own chapters there are relationships between them in the life-world and these are presented in chapter eleven. That chapter is entitled Discussion of the Life-world and forms a synthesis of the findings, thus presenting an holistic picture of the life-world. The relationships between themes are in an overall sense, but they still have resonance with the relationships between themes within individual life-worlds. For example Kate, Vicki, Carol, Millie and Sam related heavy ecstasy use to health problems. In the life-worlds of Lou and Carol there was a relationship between heavy use and bodily resistance to the ecstasy experience. Furthermore, all the women gave the above reasons for why they stopped using ecstasy or intended to. Thus chapter eleven demonstrates how, by merging the themes between the life-worlds, these relationships have been elucidated.

*Note:* If I felt that some quotes required further clarification for the reader then comments were added to the columns by the side of the 'discussions'.

This chapter presents the women's descriptions of the pleasing experience of ecstasy when it has been absorbed bodily. To begin with the ecstasy high is described as giving a boost to confidence whilst giving the women an overall feeling of contentment. They then describe a removal of inhibitions, and that ecstasy seems to enhance communication in an open manner. The experience of ecstasy, music and dancing are then given.

Further descriptions involve a less immediate experience: the potential to sleep after use and wake feeling well. Considering these experiences of ecstasy, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of ecstasy abuse (discussed in more detail in chapter eight). As ecstasy and clubbing go 'hand in hand' this chapter is intrinsically linked with the following one on the attraction of clubbing.

### *Walking on air*

**Millie:** it just made you feel fucking ace, confident as fuck

**Carol:** it does do though, make you feel more confident and stuff but I don't seem to be too bad without it, but I do like it when I've had it and I feel on top of world

**Teri:** it makes me feel more confident but I wouldn't say that I'm not confident unless I have it

**Ann:** confidence, fun and sociable that's definitely part of appeal, it's the perfect designer drug

**Teri:** it just makes you feel happy

**Carol:** no nasty negative thought in your head, everything was pleasant and nice and just happy, I was just happiest person in world and I couldn't believe there was a drug like that, it was so good

*Her first  
ecstasy  
experience.*

**Vicki:** it's generally just like, just feeling fucking wicked man

**Sam:** right content with yourself

**Millie:** yeah right happy, really happy, like Prozac

**Ann:** they say euphoria and it's true

**Carol:** an enormous sense of well-being and that everything is all right

*So relaxing, and childlike*

**Carol:** it's very appealing ecstasy, just feelings that it gives you, lack of inhibitions and you feel almost childlike at times. I mean silly things we've done, drawings for each other, somebody making a game

**Ann:** it's an innocent feeling, like a kid 'cos I've found myself getting quite childish on an E... a gift as a child, something that you've always wanted and you get it on Christmas day and you unwrap it and it's that, you've wanted it for so long and it's there

**Kate:** it was just one of the best nights ever [laughs] it was just like all your Christmas' in one, yeah it was good... I just felt the most excited I'd felt in my life and I just couldn't stop running around

*Her first  
experience of  
ecstasy.*

**Ann:** you don't feel any inhibitions about yourself so you just go for it

**Kate:** you can just get really, really mashed and make an idiot of yourself which is quite fun... get really daft and it doesn't matter

**Lou:** you lose your inhibition, you lose all your qualms, nothing seems to really matter

**Kate:** it relaxes everybody so everybody is chatting on and walking about

**Millie:** and didn't give a shit

**Carol:** makes you feel so relaxed... and along with this right nice exciting buzz, everything's fucking all right, proper is [laughs]

*Full awareness*

**Teri:** it's like when you get a drug you're not, you're having a good time but you're not in control of what you're doing so it's like you're still having a good time but you know exactly what you're doing



**Ann:** you can control it because when I got up on barrel [dancing] I got a quick flick of thinking 'what are you doing, get off you stupid woman you're making a fool of yourself'

*Her first  
ecstasy  
experience.*

**Kate:** if you have an average E, yeah you can control it but sometimes you get one that's really strong or it's got something in it, just really trippy or something and you can't control it as much and you feel really out of control and out of it

*Introducing  
tainted  
ecstasy.*

**Ann:** that's when I get worried, when it's things out of your control on E

**Vicki:** like the first pills you used to take you'd be totally fucked, wouldn't remember a thing for like, six hours would go by, it was pretty dangerous sometimes [laughs]

**Teri:** to talk to people you wouldn't normally talk to, like when you get Benj in a conversation or something you think 'God this is rare, you wouldn't normally talk to me like this', you take advantage of it, well I do with anybody like that, people who you talk to but never really have a serious conversation with

*An element of  
control.*

**Lou:** if you'd had a few beers down pub I just wouldn't have bothered talking to him whereas if you have a tablet you do bother talking to them

**Vicki:** that's another thing me and my boyfriend... we just totally sorted it all out through taking pills 'cos we were so shy with each other and then we just sort of started going out and taking pills together and it just helped us open up to each other... you get like this mad connection with each other, this understanding

**Lou:** we've sat and chelped, sat and chatted for ages about it all and that's when you go into enlightenment business

**C**ontrol on ecstasy is experienced by an ability to retain consciousness and lucid thinking. This is demonstrated by holding meaningful conversations with others, where dialogue is more open than that of everyday. Barriers of communication which act as obstacles to interpersonal relationships are perceived to be broken down, resulting in an experienced mental connection. This 'meeting of the minds' during ecstasy high conversations can mean self-knowledge is found. (Examples of the ecstasy user not being in control are discussed more thoroughly in chapter ten).

*A unique union: ecstasy and dance music*

**Ann:** If you didn't understand music you'll not understand but if you take drugs it changes the full scene altogether

**Carol:** I didn't at first, I hated it... then I heard it on tablets and realised it was something different

**Vicki:** the drugs, the music, it's just like a marriage together, it's like nothing else

**Ann:** I didn't realise that certain music fitted to this drug, I thought you could listen to what you wanted to if it's a drug that makes you feel like 'wow' you could go and see Hawkwind and still feel like, you know, but I realised that there's something else there and it's not just that... realised that music and ecstasy go hand-in-hand

**Kate:** dancing on it's brilliant... the rushes you get are just amazing 'cos like the way they do the music, they build the music up and they drop it down and that tied in with drugs

**Millie:** we were walking round [at Sheffield event] and I was right off my face... and people who'd had these different Es were dancing like sort of name of E. Like there were these kids who'd had these Greyhounds they were called and they were all dancing and to me they all looked like they were greyhounds, you know they were all doing this [makes slow front-crawl type movements like a race dog's legs] and I'm thinking 'fucking hell, they're ace, they're ace' and I was watching them and I stood like on

*There are many different names of ecstasy tablets.*

side-lines thinking 'fucking hell'. Then going round and somebody else dancing like something they'd had and it was right strange

**Sam:** you are what you eat

**Millie:** yeah, yeah [laughs]

**Sam:** Pete got behind me and he started dancing and everything, making me dance you know what I mean and I just couldn't stop, I was right fucked off when it ended 'cos I didn't start dancing 'til about four in morning and I could have gone on for hours. It was ace

*Sam's first  
ecstasy  
experience.*

**Kate:** it keeps you awake and makes you dance for hours... I mean I know that I've been to a free party and I have danced for like twelve hours

**Teri:** some weekends I'll just want to go and get drunk and get wrecked and others I'll think it would be nice to go to a club and dance all night and get off my face like that

**Ann:** drugs are there for energy and they keep you going for hours

**W**ithin the life-world the view is expressed that ecstasy enhances the perception of dance music, allowing an understanding of it. Music and ecstasy are believed to complement each other: a reciprocal action seen by the DJ controlling the music to allow the feelings from ecstasy to be enhanced during the dance. An alteration in visual perception may also be experienced, to the pleasure of the observer, giving the experience an element of fantasy

*Sleep well, wake fresh*

**Teri:** as soon as we got home I was up for about an hour and then I fell straight to sleep [laughs] woke up next morning fresh as a daisy, it was great

*On returning  
from the club.*

**Vicki:** that thing with chilling you out helps you get a better sleep, dream better and stuff, and I just got up the next day and went out cycling, I

*Speaking of  
pure MDMA.*



keep fit, just got up you know and felt back to normal

**Teri:** I can usually go to sleep and then if I go to sleep when I get up next day I feel all right whereas if I have whizz and I'm up all night I feel shit, so I'd rather have a tablet, have a right good night and then feel all right next day. It's ace, it's a right bonus [laughs]

**Millie:** you're not tired at all but your mouth just yawns all time... and I don't know why, like you wouldn't be able to sleep

*Yet some cannot attain slumber.*

**Sam:** I was just necking these pain-killers 'cos I knew they made me go to sleep

**Millie:** temazes [temazepam], they're ace for making you go to sleep

**Sam:** I think if they'd had that Nightol out then I might have bought some, take about four

**Millie:** I never really had a good one [come-down], just 'cos of lack of sleep I think 'cos I'm a big sleep person [laughs]

**Carol:** I was sleeping, getting plenty of kip, getting something to eat when I got up, felt fine next day

*Before heavy ecstasy use.*

**A**nother appealing feature of ecstasy use is described as non-interference with next day functioning. When the ecstasy tablet is of good quality then the experience of relaxation continues into the period of sleep. However, those who cannot sleep describe utilising an aid. It appears that slumber influences the experience of the come-down.

### Waiting for the weekend

**Kate:** when you first get into ecstasy you're just full-on, you're partying all weekend, you're probably going out in the week and partying as well... all you're doing is waiting for the weekend

**Vicki:** it moved on to a really bad stage though because as you've

probably heard, it really does take over people's lives... started living for the weekend, could only see Friday night

**Lou:** we've been doing it for so long now, every weekend for more or less eight months with like a couple of breaks for two weeks here and there... one weekend we had stacks

**Carol:** there's been odd weekend when I've had about ten

**Teri:** I don't want to get into the habit of having it all the time, I don't want to get into the habit of having it to enjoy myself and then not being able to enjoy myself if I don't have it

*A contrasting experience.*

**Vicki:** it really can turn you into an idiot, you just live for the weekend... we've all totally been so hard-core, like we'd start on a Friday night and be fucked 'til like Monday

**Kate:** now I've started to take them again so, even though I said I wouldn't. But it's so hard not to, 'cos it's really good... you slip back into it... it was like 'yeah I do remember this, and it is so nice and I want to do it again' [laughs]

*Kate stopped taking ecstasy for health reasons.*

**Teri:** I sort of feel like I've got things under control at the moment... I feel like I can handle taking ecstasy, doing it when I want to and I'd like to stay on this level

In conclusion, the experience of ecstasy gives many feelings, all of which form an appeal of the drug. The descriptions range from a lack of inhibitions (where the experience may be likened to a return to childhood) to the complementary action experienced when listening to dance music. Interestingly, the descriptions tend to be psychological in nature, spoken with regard to the influence upon emotions and attitude, as opposed to physicality. A lack of control over ecstasy use is experienced, which is discussed thoroughly in chapter eight and, in part, chapter nine. The following chapter discusses the attraction of clubbing, and exemplifies some of the previously discussed experiences.

## Chapter 5: Clubbing is Class

Within the life-world the attraction of frequenting dance events as a leisure pursuit is contrasted to that of conventional clubs. The women describe the accepting atmosphere which allows them to be themselves, and how they experience independence in this setting. There is a perceived unity between fellow revellers, and a feeling of belonging, where communication with strangers does not involve a suspicion of motives.

As will become evident, the amicability of the relations is experienced by the raising of spirits. The view is also expressed that frequenting dance events, and implicitly ecstasy use, is a phase though one that does not end completely. The chapter ends with descriptions of ecstasy use away from the dance event as this too can be a main context of use. In these instances, the sociality of ecstasy use gains prominence. (As many of the experiences refer to the free party, a description is given in the Glossary, page 206).

*Be yourself in a united atmosphere*

**Kate:** I've always hated things like that 'cos I always got picked on for looking like different so I wouldn't feel comfortable in a club like that

*Conventional night-clubs.*

**Vicki:** our specific scene was come-as-you-are like, just look the way you want to as long as you're having a good time

*The techno scene.*

**Carol:** nobody looks ugly do they, you don't give a shit if somebody's got a black bra on under a white top, you don't seem to judge because everything's cool and fine

**Ann:** there's some odd characters in queue when you're queuing up but when you get in everybody's beautiful

**Lou:** which is best thing about all tablets because it just doesn't matter what anybody looks like, dresses like or anything at all. It doesn't, that's irrelevant... if people are friendly enough, you don't judge

**Ann:** there's no bitterness at all and that's a revolutionary thing in drugs

**Kate:** it's like coming home... you know finding the people that are like you, it's really nice, it feels really safe and sound

*Speaking of free parties.*

**Ann:** definitely because how can you get so many people in one club that get on... with acid house when that first started that was first time everybody had got on in mass quantities... when they started with clubs it was like a united, you don't want to cause any hassle, you don't want to see any hassle

**Kate:** that's it, it just makes everybody friendly and have laughs

**Ann:** it's like walking into Aladdin's Cave or something 'cos you know everybody even though you don't, you know you all feel same

**Lou:** it's all about people's attitude and if people in a club are up for it, you'll want something to do with them and if they're not then you don't really want to bother

**Sam:** told everybody I loved them, you did didn't you, and everybody was ace and 'oh I love you' and like they were right happy that you were having a good time and everything

**Millie:** best thing about it was music and atmosphere, definitely

**Kate:** at a free party you can be as messy as you want, at a club you still have to behave yourself a little bit 'cos of bouncers and stuff like that... you maybe have a bit more of, try to keep it together a bit more

**Carol:** there were strangers coming up and asking for water and for fags and being right happy with me and saying 'cheers' [laughs] everybody was right genuine and it was ace

*Her first dance club.*

**Teri:** it was brilliant, just seemed really friendly and people were smiling at you whereas normally you think they're going to smack you and this girl, she kept smiling at me all time and I was thinking 'uh', all sorts of things go through your head but she was being nice

*Teri's first club experience: contrast to the conventional.*

**Vicki:** it's just that when you're in a club that feeling that you can be whatever, you know you can talk to anybody, everybody's approachable



and everyone's totally as one especially with techno clubs

**Kate:** that's what I mean about being messy at parties, if you're in a club and you were falling over like that you'd feel a bit, well for one you'd know the bouncers would start watching you and it would make you feel uncomfortable but at a party and not a proper club you can just fall over and laugh about it and have a really good time

**T**he atmosphere at dance events is described as one where an amicable attitude is foremost, and enjoyment is the key. Belonging is experienced, and unity is demonstrated by the belief that feelings are shared. Suspicion, transferred from the experience of traditional clubs, eases as oneness is experienced. The life-world reveals that clubbers are congenial, allowing a woman to feel at ease doing what she desires (the free party is described as more liberal than clubs because it lacks the expected standards of conduct).

*Safe to be solo, chat and buzz-the-vibe*

**Lou:** to me it just don't matter who you go clubbing with because I always like to go off on my own and hardly see anybody anyway

**Carol:** in a club you do tend to split up a bit and go off on your own

**Teri:** I've only been once without Lou or Jud being there, I was a bit scared at first but I really enjoyed it 'cos like my two friends they went off 'cos they wanted to go for a walk around but I was just dancing... I'd never just like stay on my own 'cos I'd know that Jud would be worried about me, whereas they knew I was all right so, and I was happy just to be on my own 'cos I wouldn't have thought I would be

*Without her partner and usual clubbing friend.*

**Ann:** I mean I was going out with Steve so you'd have thought I'd have stuck by him and checked to see if he was all right but it rushed me that much that I was off [laughs]

*The first ecstasy experience: her partner was ill.*

**Teri:** happy to wonder off on my own and you don't care. [In conventional clubs] you don't go anywhere on your own then, 'come to

toilet with me' [laughs]

**Lou:** me and Tammy we were just off and we didn't hardly see each other all night, just off meeting new people

**Teri:** if you get talking to people who are complete strangers... I started talking to this lad and we were talking all night and he was a complete stranger, I would never have done that and I like being able to do that

*Introducing conversations with new people.*

**Kate:** 'cos it's a lot more fun and it's a lot more laid-back, people talk more to each other... you go and sit in people's cars and talk to them

*Contrast of free parties to clubs.*

**Teri:** it's just that people will talk to you and you end up having all these new friends in club by end of night and you think 'oh great', it just gives you a right buzz [laughs] a bit of an ego thing I suppose

**Sam:** I used to think next best thing [to dancing] was like you could go clubbing and be really off your head and talk to another bloke and be thinking about fucking everything, no inhibitions or anything

**Millie:** yeah, yeah, never knew him, never seen him before, they tell you everything and it's like ace, feel like you've known each other for fucking years. Go to club week after and they're there, they recognise you and you think 'fucking hell, shit hot'

**Vicki:** this whole dance culture thing it's totally just what we needed you know something where people can come together and communicate with each other 'cos you found people would just stop and talk to each other

**Lou:** you know that each other's fucked and you know that you're going to just smile and be right nice to everybody because there's no point not, and you're going to bring them up and they're going to bring you up

*Introducing 'buzzing the vibe'.*

**Ann:** I like doing that, like giving people massages or you know what nice words to say to somebody to make them feel, like you go 'oh I really like that that you're wearing' and they go 'cheers'... it's all like people



still trying to elevate you up

**Lou:** you know when you first go to a club and you can see people fucked with their eyes going and really happy and you're like 'right, I'm going to get like that and I'm going to smile at you'

**Ann:** but with E even if you just drop for five minutes feeling a bit disorientated... some people pick up on it and make a bee-line for you and start talking and dancing

**Lou:** that's a good night when you've got people all around that are full of energy and full of life and full of fun, keeping you on your buzz and you're kept on it without having to worry

**T**he experience of independence can extend to a release from the restrictions of being with a partner in two ways: freedom from his concern when the club is visited without him; and a surge of autonomy from experiencing the initial feelings of ecstasy, meaning that he is left alone. In the first example, independence allowed her to initiate conversation with a stranger of the opposite sex, which was greatly enjoyed. Discourse is experienced as being open, without repression of emotion. Again, barriers of communication disperse. Though communication at dance clubs is to a high degree, it is perceived to be enhanced at free parties.

A reciprocity of pleasure is described to exist at dance events: pleasant actions or words are shared in order to retain or raise the ecstasy high. The feeling of shared understanding means that other people notice if one gets temporarily confused whilst on ecstasy, and approach the person and act in certain ways to bring her back around. Non-verbal communication is given as a major way of elevating the ecstatic state of fellow clubbers, and it naturally follows that the actor gets a lift from her actions as does the receiver.

### *Safety and comfort in male attitudes*

**Lou:** The atmosphere is completely different, everybody's out to have a right good time if you go to a proper club whereas if you go to a thingy [conventional club] you might be on pull, you don't go to a proper club on

*Contrasting to the conventional.*

pull, you wouldn't, you go for yourself to get off your rocker and to make best of music... whereas you're just going to get pissed aren't you. Still I'm not dissing it, it's a right laugh

**Kate:** when I went to this rock club for a piss-take I was really shocked by how many men were fucking coming-on to me if I was dancing, and I'd forgotten that's what happens at normal clubs, completely forgotten that you have to be a bit more guarded, you know you can't relax as much because you know blokes are going to be thinking that's a come-on or whatever, so that is what's so nice about the dance scene. It's so relaxed... when you do get hassled by a bloke it's so rare that it's a real surprise

**Carol:** I've been chatted-up but it was nicest way of being chatted up ever in my life, no pressure, just talking about life shit which was nice. So, I reckon it's a better atmosphere in clubs compared to alcohol clubs

**Lou:** just get approached by blokes in pissy, shitty ways, there's no respect, well not all time but there's always the fear of that, not every time you go you get dissed but there's a fear of that every time you go

*Speaking of  
the traditional  
club.*

**Sam:** and you go down [local town] with piss heads and all you've got to do is say anything and my keks [knickers] are up my arse and they think they're up for shag

**Kate:** but at dance clubs somebody will come up to you and be talking to you, you won't be worrying 'oh, he's coming-on to me', he'll just be chatting to you. I'm sure that is a big attraction for a lot of women on the dance scene, that they can go out, have a fucking good time and just not be hassled by men at all 'cos it just, it doesn't really happen

**Teri:** I started talking to this lad and we were talking all night and he was a complete stranger and there was nothing in it as in, I didn't fancy him and he didn't fancy me

**Carol:** I think ecstasy's got a lot to do with it, but also because you're all

on a same vibe as well, and I think, yeah on alcohol people get pissed and it's individual but on ecstasy, everybody's listening to same DJ in same atmosphere, on same vibe, it seems much more pleasant

**Lou:** when you go to a proper club you're not bothered what everybody's going to think or say or, you've no fears because you know everybody's going to be off their head on E [laughs] on same level

**Sam:** there was always fucking shagging in bogs [laughs] and there always used to be lads in bogs 'cos you could have a natter and a smoke and what-not with them

*In dance clubs.*

**Ann:** he's [partner] sometimes had a bit of hassle with blokes going 'is that your woman then? Oh, she's nice, shame' but they've been nice about it, even blokes have been nice with each other... or they'll shake his hand, that happens a lot. No hassle, no harsh words, nothing

**Kate:** you can hug blokes and you know they'll not be thinking anymore of it then just a hug, they won't be thinking 'oh, I'm in here' or anything. You can have a really nice hug and feel really close to him but know that you're not gonna be hassled by him afterwards which is a really, really nice thing which helps you feel more relaxed as a woman going out, and that means you can get off your head without worrying, you know if you get too drunk at a normal club then you're a victim aren't you, they home in on you. But that just doesn't happen on the dance scene

**Ann:** you walk into a working men's club and it's like Karaoke and there's loads of slappers about, you'd be right tense. It's comfort, like a slipper

**Kate:** you can go out and just dance your tits off and be as open as you want but not be constantly looking out for men hassling you, I mean it does happen occasionally where you get someone out of his brain like coming-on to you and stuff but it happens so few times whereas if you go to a normal club that happens so much and like every guy that comes up

to you is trying to chat you up and it's like really tiresome

**T**he women describe the dance event as one where amicable relations are found, which they contrast to those of conventional clubs. The main difference involves relations between the sexes. In traditional clubs, sexual relations are in high profile, whereas at dance events they are rarely an issue. Despite a lack of male harassment, in one description there is the implication that, albeit with respectfulness, the woman is the property of her male partner: this echoes traditional relations between the sexes.

*...there is no fighting or jealousy*

**Carol:** well, in alcohol pubs you get sleazed on and you get bitchiness and you get shoved about trying to get to bar and there's a bit of an attitude, a tense attitude, like people going to cop off and that's what you're there for

*A contrasting evening leisure experience.*

**Ann:** there's bitching, paranoia, you're made to look stupid if you go out and get pissed and have a silly dance on dance floor, you'll get smacked, you know it. If we went out, got totally wrecked, got into [conventional club] and started having a laugh on dance floor we'd get hassle, hassle off lads trying to shag us and lasses being all bitchy and jealous

**Sam:** there's some bastards there isn't there, you know 'what's she fucking looking at' and stuff like that

**Millie:** looking you up and down

**Sam:** seeing what you've got on and that, and it was none of that

**Ann:** like lasses in toilets, the conversations they have, it's not bitchy is it, you walk in and they're saying 'where did you get that from? Turn around and let's have a look' and there's like four of you doing typical 'oo yeah' but you don't feel embarrassed about it 'cos it's all a nice sort of vibe that everybody's on

*Back to the dance club.*

**Lou:** there's a disco and there's a club and that's your difference. Your disco is scary, for one, scary for fighting when people have too much ale, scary for other lasses looking rock-hard [laughs] but even scary because there's always a threat when you go into piss-head places of something nasty, so you're always watching your back unless you know disco well

**Vicki:** there's total like aggression and bitchiness amongst the women and all that, it was just shit I mean you just look at them and think 'you don't even know what a good time is'

**Kate:** it's the fact that you're finding those sort of people that you can feel relaxed with anyway 'cos they're not that same 'go out, get pissed, have a fight' sort of thing. You hardly ever see a fight at those clubs but you do at the normal sort of clubs... that's part of the attraction of the dance scene, that you are finding loads of people that you do feel relaxed with to start with

**Ann:** we've had drunks on dance floor at club and everybody just tenses up straight away but they don't rush in and start kicking off... they'd move in slowly and try and wedge them off of dance floor first, pretend that they're that off their head that they don't see them but they [drunks] kept throwing their mates in and they were like knocking some of lasses over and men were really protective over women, they were like 'don't do that' and as a woman you feel flattered and dainty, you know like some sort of goddess, and you think 'oh, they're doing that for me'... and they don't know me from Eve but they just picked drunks up and escorted them off and then came back to them that had been bumped into and said 'are you all right? Sorry about that'. I mean they're apologising for something that was totally out of their hands and you feel like 'oh, thank you'

**Lou:** I've been to plenty of your crap disco things and seen all scraps and everything, been to enough clubs and never seen nothing happen

**Teri:** if you were out drinking you would be suspicious if people came up and started talking to you, like when you go in toilets in a normal club if

you bump into anybody you're like 'oh sorry, sorry' because you talk to people if they talk to you but you're always careful

**Vicki:** they shout and ball at you, I used to go out to clubs and then have to get the bus home with all of them, and just harass you and make you feel really uncomfortable and it's immature... they're all really behind I think, you know like backwards, like mentally, they're all like socially as well like, the men put the women down and they're really sexist and the women just love being tarts anyway and being put down I'm sure but, it's just all that shit... backwards from evolving you know, it's like they've not quite got the point yet [laughs]

*The actions of conventional clubbers can result in judgements of their personalities.*

**Millie:** everybody's more aggressive now. It didn't used to be like that at all. There was no aggression whatsoever

*Speaking of dance clubs.*

**Sam:** it seemed like they'd let all piss heads in

**Millie:** yeah, now some lads and that still go and they say that sometimes there'll be fighting and stuff, there never used to be anything like that ever, everybody was so nice and easy going, everybody was just enjoying themselves basically weren't they, and then now you get people who are pissed a lot who go and like I think drink makes you more aggressive definitely

**F**emale relations are perceived as potentially hostile in conventional clubs (described with reference to sexual pick-up), but amicable at the dance event. However, the implication exists that they can form an exaggerated femininity, yet this is accepted as part of raising and retaining the pleasant ambience. The description where men intoxicated on alcohol disrupted the dance reflects relations of a traditional nature: a 'chivalrous' action of men protecting women, making the woman feel delicate. However, this is, as above, part of retaining the congenial atmosphere (for self and others), perhaps exemplified by the woman feeling praised for being female. The discord in relations between the two night-time recreations can result, in one



description, in an 'us and them' where the 'them' and their actions are perceived less favourably.

*You feel like you really belong*

**Kate:** you only see those people at the club that weekend and you wouldn't know that many people, but at a party scene you get to know everyone's face and everybody knows you. It's a lot more closer and you look around more, you just get closer from doing all that 'cos it's a longer stretch of time

*Contrasting dance clubs to free parties.*

**Ann:** once you start going to a club frequently you start getting to know everybody in there and you realise once you walk in, it's like 'hello, hello, hello, hello' and people who I haven't seen for months: I've gone to club and this guy just picked me up and gave me a swizzle around dance floor going 'I can't believe you're here', but it was nice, after all that time we remembered each other

*Speaking of dance clubs.*

**Sam:** I went to go to this club, we just decided to go and we got there and we were queuing, having a gas and what-not, and I stood in queue thinking 'oh it'll be ace 'cos I don't know nobody' then all of a sudden 'I bet that's fucking Sam over there' and it was Mick... It was right weird when stuff like that happened to you, right strange like you'd think 'fucking hell, I know everybody everywhere', it was like 'ohh' it was right good

*A spontaneous venture to a far away club.*

**Vicki:** there's loads of us, there really is a sub-culture, it's that thing where they talk about community, that sense of community that's been lost

**Lou:** yeah... you can identify with everybody in a club well, more or less everybody

**Kate:** it has a few townies but you can spot them a mile off, they're the odd ones out, so that's what's really attractive about it... it's more like a party, a private party than a club where you're just one person in the

*The free party scene again contrasted to the dance club.*



crowd

**Ann:** I was with my friends and we were so close, like really close and we all changed, we cared about each other, one day they were just acquaintances, we had a laugh and next day they were like a brother to you as soon as we'd started taking Es

**Vicki:** this whole new group of people that were just brilliant, and like they were brilliant off the pills as well, it wasn't just like everybody was on pills, although I have experienced that in the later stages of techno, just started thinking it's all pretty false

**Ann:** our lot started changing anyway, all techno years, it's just too much on your head anyway, house music's a lot better

**Millie:** it used to be good, convoys down motorway, they used to go in summer before me and they said there were convoys all over place. Dancing on top of cars in car park, sound systems in back of vans and shit. And they just stopped doing it like 'cos I went in Winter. Police used to bust all services and that 'no ravers'

*The procession of vehicles going to and from the club.*

**Sam:** it got to that point where you couldn't go to [name of services]

**Millie:** Yeah, yeah... and sometimes somebody would take music in and fucking all start dancing and stuff. This one lad, fucking ace, we all went in and everything was all like [makes eerie sound to indicate silence] and I remember being sat on floor 'cos it was that packed, everybody from Sheff clubs used to come, everybody from [Leeds club], all sat in having cuppas, talking and people with a stereo and this lad, you know when that advert was on telly that was something to do with mouth-wash, and he kept coming back on telly saying 'still working', he did that in there. He stood up and everything was quiet and goes 'still working' and starts fucking dancing and that, and it was ace and everybody were like 'why'

*Service stations were places where people would congregate after the club. In this story, the man is referring to his ecstasy still working.*

**Vicki:** we're hoping the free parties will start up 'cos we take a sound

system out and have parties outside in the woods which is brilliant

**Kate:** and you've arranged it all for yourself, it's like this real tribal thing and you do become part of that whole scene, you might go around with a bucket to collect money for the generator to keep the party going

**T**he experienced belonging is strongly demonstrated in the dance context by non-identification with people who usually frequent conventional clubs. Hence, identity to this culture forms belonging, and this creates pleasure before and after the event when clubbers from neighbouring areas meet up and socialise. Here, we find description of one who would entertain all by imitating a television advertisement though by representing it in terms of ecstasy: the drug was still working (akin to the product on the advert). Belonging is experienced perhaps more intimately with clubbing friends, yet these groups disperse, related to a falseness of the ecstasy 'personality' or to the heavy relentless beat of the music upon the (drugged) mind.

*An infinite favourite pastime*

**Ann:** is clubbing a phase?

**Vicki:** it definitely is just a phase

**Ann:** I'm bound to move on, I'm going to end up working, if I get married to Stu, in a house and doing normal things but there's always going to be something I can see us doing

**Kate:** once you're on it you don't leave it, you might have a period where you don't go for a while but you always get back in there. You just miss it

**Carol:** it's a special occasion this weekend so we might be going to a club... probably go for special occasions I should imagine

**Vicki:** I hear about people, even university lecturers, who just sit and neck pills like for dinner you know, maybe I will feel like that when I'm older, just sit around and take them the odd time

**Teri:** only time I could see myself stopping is if I had a family or 'cos I think even if, say, I had my own house and if I was married, I mean that doesn't stop you does it, it doesn't mean to say you have to stop, it would only be if I had kids 'cos then it's like you're putting your health at risk maybe and if anything happened to you or just coming home, you can't go home to your kids fucked can you. Like if they got ill in night and you were off your face having a bad night

**Kate:** I'm getting older now but I can't see myself stopping, not for a lot longer, not immediately. It's not just a really good night out, it's a way of finding really good people as well, I think I'll carry on doing it for ages

**Millie:** I haven't been for ages. Can't think of anywhere to go that I'd like

**Sam:** I suppose if I knew it was going to be a right ace night

**Millie:** like it used to be. I'd fucking go definitely. I'd go every week [laughs]... Neil's not into it so I can't see me going again. I'd like to if Sue was into it, I'd go 'cos I'd like Sue to go, I think she'd actually enjoy it

**Lou:** you could go just to watch, it would be better than going to cinema... It's like a hobby isn't it, you don't have to take drugs to go but we don't go without taking drugs. We wouldn't dream of going without taking drugs, it would be a different experience all together but that wouldn't be a negative thing, just a different thing

**Ann:** I've said to Stu 'do you think we could go to a club and not take drugs and just see whether we can still have as much of a good time?'... I said we'll have to take some with us but music would be right good and we'd like 'oh come on' [take them anyway]

**Vicki:** now there's a bit of this cynical thing, nothing can really top a night out like that, like them days, it's a really golden, rose tinted memory [laughs]

**Millie:** it was one of best times of my life. Amen [laughs]

**A**s the attraction of dance events is strong, this begs the question as to whether the appeal is endless. Becoming a parent is viewed as a reason to end clubbing as maternal health is of great importance to parent and child. This implies that the woman views her actions in risky terms, as being high whilst caring for a child is perceived to be irresponsible. Further, it suggests a purely female obstacle to clubbing. For some, however, they no longer frequent dance events and a lack of clubbing friends (including male partner) restricts the return. Here, the freedom the woman once experienced has gone, indicating that it was temporally related to the clubbing part of life.

Before ending this chapter, ecstasy use with a circle of friends and away from the dance event is discussed. The descriptions show an alternative context for use, and aim to emphasise the similarities of experience in both settings.

### *Up close and personal*

**Carol:** it's like right bondy-nicey with your friends and it makes things right special

*Shared  
ecstasy  
experiences.*

**Lou:** at first you're doing it and it's a completely new experience, there's nothing like it. Them first few months that we had on them, nothing can be compared to it, nothing at all in the world even like true love or whatever, nothing can be compared to the actual feeling and I mean with us being in such a close group as well, that affected it, how good and addictive, not addictive but addictive to yourself because we were in such a close group and everybody was so special

**Carol:** it is a right social drug and bonding you get with your friends on it is far, it's so special... you can't bond on alcohol or acid, or even on coke

**Lou:** the best times have been when it's been our small group, for personal ecstasy use, like just being in the house or down at the pub... when you go to a club you haven't got that belonging... when we all did it, it was more of a personal belonging, identity thing



**Teri:** when you have it somewhere else it's more of a group thing... when you stay in pub or at somebody's house it's all about talking to people or whatever because I normally get my talking head on [laughs] and people laugh at me... it's more about other people 'cos last thing you want to do is be on your own

*Contrast to the club environment.*

**Carol:** you get a different kind of buzz because in house you tend to loll about with your friends, massage somebody's foot or dance around a table or [laughs] go for a drive and all get excited and be 'whoo, let's do this, let's do that'

**Lou:** all that was important at first was being with my friends, being close and being fucked, not literally but together [laughs]

**Carol:** chemical effects of ecstasy are the appeal and people who you're with are appeal as well... you become much more intimate with your friends

**Ann:** you can get in bed with them and there's just no embarrassment, no stoppages anywhere, just sort of all one

*Intimacy is an element.*

**Lou:** we were in such a close group for one and we all had special relationships, special people everywhere that you could proper trust and that if you knew if anything happened you'd be all right because there's always one who'd always, regardless, help us out. That's what appealed at first and it was something new, new enough and it made me fork out twenty quid every weekend to come home to get fucked with my friends rather than stay at college, that's how big the appeal was then which is huge because it was so good at first. However, as time passes on, things change and the appeal's no longer there

**Teri:** it brings you closer to other people I think... it allows you to become, I don't know how to put it, it deepens friendships and it sort of, what you have then lingers on afterwards

**Lou:** for me to be such close friends with like Carol in such a short period of time it's bizarre, it takes like years of friendship to gain like chats, you know like when you're not doing them at a club you're using your mind a lot more on next day when you're still feeling effects, you've not had a tablet but you're feeling effects from night before and we've sat and chelped [talked], sat and chatted for ages about it all and that's when you go into enlightenment business and you do find something from them regardless of what anybody says, there is something to be gained through trying ecstasy, definitely

**Carol:** it proper impacts on your life... all experiences you have on tablets, especially when it's a bonding one

**Lou:** because of that closeness that we had with all the people and all their friends and we're trying to get some kind of closeness back with other people but we'll never find it again

**T**he sociality surrounding ecstasy use is experienced as creating a dependency upon ecstasy, activities and others. These experiences may surpass those had at clubs, though appear to be an extended and closer form of the clubbing experience (independence diminishes as group experiences are foremost, and belonging is more intimate). Close attachments are believed to remain when not under the influence of ecstasy, defying boundaries of space and time. One friendship is related to the nature of conversation on the come-down, with the belief that ecstasy use can be educational. As earlier, there is description of group closeness fading: failed attempts to recapture unity with other people suggest it was a once in a lifetime experience.

In conclusion, many reasons are given in the life-world why dance events appeal to the women. Essentially these refer to a comfortable and safe setting to have fun, and are an experienced difference to traditional clubs. However, when ecstasy is used out of this context the described pleasure and unity form a prime similarity with that of the event. Dance is another appeal of frequenting dance events, and is discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6: The Body



The body, as experienced at the dance event, is discussed in this chapter. The women describe dance and how the environment is central to induce a trance like state. Connections with fellow clubbers are experienced when dancing, where non-verbal communication is pivotal to group celebration. Weight loss is also described, and how this satisfies bodily perception. Lastly, the meaning of appearance with regard to contrasting dance scenes is given, and the 'babe' style of dress as an expression of the ecstatic libido. The first two experiences naturally entwine, to reveal the individual and social aspects of dance, whereas the remaining relate to the physical and mental relationship of the body. The body is also important in the absorption of ecstasy, hence can influence the ecstasy experience (chapter ten). It plays a significant role in relation to risk (chapter nine), and lastly health when ecstasy has been abused (chapter eight).

*Dance and trance, heaven on earth*

**Teri:** when you go to a club it's all on, in a way it's all on dancing and being in that club and listening to music and everything

**Vicki:** dancing is such a big part of it

**Ann:** I got a quick flick of thinking 'what are you doing, get off you stupid woman you're making a fool of yourself' [laughs] but then no sooner had that thought come, something in music changed and I'd sort of forget and click onto that... to dance to music and be totally out of my tree, euphoria and you're just buzzing

*Speaking of her first ecstasy experience when she danced on a barrel.*

**Lou:** I just like to get into my dancing and like leaving it all behind when you go to a club because that's what it's all about, forgetting it all and getting on same wavelength as everybody else and finding whatever the hell it is that you find [laughs] I suppose it could be classed as ecstasy, an ecstatic state

**Vicki:** I went to [conventional club] and that was like really aggressive music but you seem to get tanked up and mosh the aggression out, and that was alcohol orientated

*A contrasting experience of dance.*

**Lou:** you go for yourself to get off your rocker and to make best of music,

music's more important, that's what it's all about, music and seeing what levels you can take your brain to at a club

**Ann:** music comes from tribal music, that continuous banging of a beat, they used to believe in whatever God they believed in and if they had a meeting or had to sort something out they used to dance, you see them and arms are moving around, mad sort of dancing, I can see connections. There something in it, the way we dance and way tribal do and how they are close-knit together, then they'll sit down and have a smoke together

**Lou:** I heard somebody say about a club, it was a Buddhist monk, he said he went and sat and watched and he said it's like everybody's meditating because they're unaware that they were meditating, everybody's using a level, like being on a level with other people around them and using that level to bring their level, everybody a group level to make it all into one, that's Taoism, everything becomes one and merges... the people, the atmosphere, the high, everything together. I mean at a normal club it's nothing like, it's not spiritual in any sense whatsoever

*The holism of the dance.*

**Carol:** it's music and everything around you just gives you a right nice buzz, other things buzz you, all people and music... music takes over you more because you're surrounded by it and you've got all lighting there as well that's enhancing everything

**Lou:** when you meditate you're taking all the cares and worries away and just concentrating on the breathing, and you forget it all and go to a different level and with ecstasy, I think, you're taking a drug because of society, way it is today people don't, a load of twenty year olds don't sit about meditating, it's not what society does

*Clubbing as a form of relaxation, in a spiritual sense.*

**Vicki:** just want to experience more of life, people our age, we need more, we need things. They say that we're spoilt and all that but, oh yeah we could be spoilt, we're given everything but what are we meant to do. You're given drugs for a headache, there's all that quick fix thing, you're bored you turn on the TV, there's all these stimulations around you and

*Vicki extends the above point.*

course you're gonna jump on the bandwagon and take what life's got to offer

**Lou:** so, what a lot of twenty to thirty year olds do is take a tablet which takes them to a meditative state where they can forget all about their worries and their strife even though it can be getting them into deeper worries and deeper strife but when you're up there it doesn't matter. You get a glimpse of something and that's what it is, enlightenment, it's good

**Ann:** there's a lot of problems that I think about through week but it's typical like it's-really-good-to-get-off-your-head because you forget everything. I mean that's our way, like this club culture thing they've sussed it, if you can have a night where you're not worrying about things and shitting yourself over bills, and you just forget everything for one night and feel absolutely fantastic, get dressed-up-to-nines, people love you, you love other people, what's wrong with that? People have a go at it but what's wrong with that, you're not hurting anybody else

**Vicki:** I was so stressed out like, I hadn't been out and done any pills for ages... I just went out one night and I was so blindly off my head that you know it just chilled me out, I was chilled out so much for ages after that

**Teri:** it seems when you're in a club it's more of a personal thing... because in a club you go in your own little world and you're sort of more oblivious to people around you, go off dancing in your own little world

**Vicki:** it's just like a dream like sort of manic, manic but slow. It's everything conjured up in one really, it's like letting go but being in control at the same time, that's what it is, but really letting go, just really feeling at peace and just like letting your body express that and totally going with it, you know the music. You know there's studies on music affecting your moods and that, taking you different ways, yeah it's just a total letting go and feeling really good [laughs] it's brilliant

*Describing  
the dance.*

**Lou:** I read this thing that that Buddhist monk had said that it's like

*Lou relates  
the above*

meditating and reaching this like Nirvana, this other place, which it's not like heaven and hell, it's not that concept, it's a mind concept and that's why he's said that because he's realised that people are suddenly at one with their mind, their mind and body are at one but it's all gone as well because there is no mind and there is no body because your mind's not working to move your body, it's just like letting go completely, just letting go and you feel a click, a realisation that, I don't know what the realisation is though [laughs] because that's ecstasy when you're not in a club, that's ecstasy when you're sat thinking which we've done a lot of, but you only realise when you've been in a club you reach such a great state through music, lights, atmosphere and your drug

*descriptions of dance back to Taoism. Then ends by stressing the importance of the club experience for later enlightenment*

**Kate:** 'cos you really home in on the beat and then you'll trance off a bit and that's nice, just really trance off and totally lose it and it just feels really tingly when you're tranced up and dancing. And then they'll stop raising the music, and as they drop it down and raise it up, like teasing a bit you just get this rush going up and down you and how do you explain a rush? A rush is just like this feeling going up from your toes up to your head, it just goes 'wush' [laughs] and that's really nice

*The DJ's control of the music induces the altered state.*

**Lou:** I love it, it's brilliant, you lose it completely. When we went to see Daft Punk at [Manchester club], oh my God best night honest, proper lost, I wouldn't have known where I was, I wasn't even on this [planet], I wasn't here at all, I was off in a little world... you were lifted above everything and you had no, you kind of lost your mind, got to a stage of no mind which is enlightenment... that was best night ever at a club because it was just, music brought you up and up and up and up and, it's really hard to describe, it's like you know you're at a club dancing but you could be anywhere, your physical body doesn't seem to matter, you know you're dancing and you're going for it but you lose the sense, you know like when your brain is making your body do this [lifts arm], you don't feel like your brain's making your body do that, it's music that's making your body go 'waay' and so because you're not having to think about what you're doing, you're just getting lost with music. Yeah, your

*Lou reiterates the above though relates it to the spiritual feel.*



body's gone-y and your mind's gone-y too [laughs]... When music stopped I'm like 'eh, what?'

**Vicki:** you'd sit down on the edge of the dance floor and the music would be like 'Do, Do, Do, Do' and then it would just like lift you as each sort of new layer of music came in. The pill would come-up with it sort of thing and you'd just be like 'oh my God' and you'd get up and just go mad then the music would bring you slightly down again. And it was like just discovering this new mad music, it was really quirky and full of character

*Vicki is speaking of her early club experiences.*

**D**ancing is a major appeal of frequenting dance events in the women's life-world, and involves the unison of the music with the bodily absorption of ecstasy. The way the environment is constructed is described to help take the dancer to a higher level of consciousness. Due to the safety of the environment, social identity is suspended and dancing in this context takes on a different meaning to that in conventional clubs: the women speak of being oblivious to the surroundings. The music is experienced to have a control over dance, through the DJ's control of the music working to take the body into an higher state of ecstasy, which encourages heightened bodily sensations. An ambiguity exists as during dance the women feel completely free as the music exerts control, yet they are not out of control.

The outcome of this novel way of feeling is one perceived as enlightenment, and means freedom from worries. Hence, the dance may be described as a spiritual experience likened to meditation, where dualism of the group and individual ceases to exert its presence: a group consciousness is attained. In a further meaning to enlightenment there is indication that reaching the high state of the dance is a prerequisite to benefiting from conversations had when on ecstasy and out of that setting (akin to mind expansion, discussed more in the following chapter) where ecstasy use is perceived as a learning experience.

*...you really connect with people*

**Carol:** I right like Sasha and Digweed and everybody was happy and dancing, I was at happiest point I could have ever been at that point in

time, couldn't have been a happier person and I was tingling all over and that's because of music and because of nice buzz that everybody dancing was giving off, and just watching everybody 'cos I'm not a dancer, I know when they're going to throw their hands in air and all that, I can feel it

**Ann:** yeah it's weird isn't it. And everybody knows when to do that or when there's a build up in music... you're looking at each other and you're nodding at each other saying 'yeah I know, it's coming, it's coming' then when it does everybody's like 'whoa'

*Connections  
are related to  
the DJ's  
command of  
the music.*

**Kate:** yeah I mean you'll be dancing away and say there's just been a really good track and somebody's dancing in front of you, it makes people contact with each other 'cos you'll be dancing away and you'll look across and somebody will be dancing back and then you'll like sort of energise each other to dance more and then after that you just go and hug them even though you don't know them 'cos you've just danced together and it's just been really good... you'll like look into each others' eyes and you'll be grinning your heads off and dancing and you really connect with them, and then you'll go and give them a hug or something but not always [laughs] on a good night

**Ann:** you get buzz off everybody else 'cos I was looking down on everybody's faces and music would be building up and you do all movements and they're looking at me going 'go on'

*Ann is still on  
the barrel!*

**Lou:** there was only really me and this lass dressed up and we'd been dancing non-stop on dance floor for hours and you know how you get eye-contact, you get that special level with people, that's what it's all about, it's fucking brilliant

**Ann:** I think it's amazing how people don't even have to communicate, it's all through way that you use your body while you're dancing... you can have a conversation with somebody by just like, your moves

**Millie:** I used to love watching people dance... I was just fascinated with

*Observing  
others dance*



this lass making cubes out of her fucking hands, you know doing [demonstrates cube making with hands] [laughs]. I was just watching her and she was just doing right weird things and I just couldn't take my eyes off her, it was ace, really, she fetched me up on my E

*can be beneficial.*

**Ann:** there's some sort of telepathy... Pete would be on balcony bit and he used to dance with lights, lasers would come down onto him, and for us at other side we could see it was like a wall of grey smoke but it was what that laser had made, and Pete used to do a chad [face peering over edge of wall with hands resting on top] over it... he could see when light-man would move it down and he'd pretend to push it and guy who was doing lights clicked on what Pete was doing and they had a right play, you know he was sort of setting lasers off and Pete was throwing [them]... and these guys were strangers, you can't shout across a club 'right I'll throw this one and you do that'

*Ann's earlier quote which implied there was more to the connections is enhanced here.*

**Kate:** sometimes you've been dancing all night, somebody's been grinning across at you going 'yeah you're dancing as well' and then you'll start to flag and they'll go 'come on' and then you'll be like 'oh yeah, right' and you just keep making each other dance more and, yeah you keep getting those connections

**D**ance is described as very much a social experience, though previously was expressed as individual: a contradiction exists in the life-world. It is fair to say that although dancing is somewhat personal in the sense of reaching an altered level of consciousness, it is also social in the sense of attaining group consciousness, hence it is dualistic. Again, the holism of the dance setting gains prominence as a non-dancer also feels the music bodily, and thus joins the celebration. Group consciousness is perceived to involve a communal level of feeling, again controlled by the music, and works as an encouragement to keep dancing. The likening of shared understanding to telepathy exemplifies the elevation of spirits through dance and play. The experience of individual dance with the trance like state, alongside collective celebration and awareness of others, fluctuates: it appears that when contact

is made with a fellow dancer, then the social takes over from the personal, implying that though the women may be lost in the music, they have not lost control of their actions.

*Losing weight is inevitable*

**Carol:** I've lost a few pounds since March, only about four pounds... but that's not why I use drugs because I'm slim anyway

*Since using  
ecstasy  
heavily.*

**Lou:** I've lost a bit of weight but I'm not like a bean, I've still got my bits

**Vicki:** well I've always been pretty slim, I've always been sort of aware of my weight but never actually used drugs to control weight. Sometimes you just look and go 'oh, it's a bit of a bonus' but you don't, maybe unconsciously or something, I don't really feel it's been an issue for me

**Sam:** I ended up bulimic didn't I? On verge of anorexic and what-not

**Millie:** yeah but would you blame that on taking Es?

**Sam:** I blame it on taking speed and going clubbing. I used to go clubbing and everybody was right skinny so I used to take like speed Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and like come home Monday and think 'fucking hell, I haven't ate like for all these five days' it gets to Tuesday or something like that and I'd have something to eat and I'd notice I'd lost that much weight so I ended up fetching it up, do you know what I mean, and then I thought 'well I can miss Tuesday'

**Ann:** when I first started clubbing I daren't get my legs out or anything like that, I suffered with anorexia and bulimia for about six years... I never thought I'd get over that. Going clubbing was sound because I was losing weight

**Sam:** it was like, hips used to stick out without even breathing in, especially if I was laid stretched out, just bits of bones were sticking out

**Millie:** I wouldn't say it was major but I know a lot of people that have, definitely

**Lou:** I was about nine [stones] twelve [pounds] at Christmas, maybe a bit before that, last summer say and now I'm like about eight ten, twelve depending on what we've been up to. Definitely with drugs, definitely

**Kate:** that's really nice [laughs]. It's great. I mean that's another thing about free parties is that they last longer, I mean I know that I've been to a free party and I have danced for like twelve hours, and if you dance for twelve hours you're gonna lose some weight. And then there's the come-down where you don't feel like eating anyway as well and it just speeds your metabolism up and makes you lose weight anyway

**Sam:** I wouldn't eat anything all day Saturday if I was going clubbing, so like you'd go like twenty-four hours with nothing to eat

**Millie:** you should always make sure you've had something to eat 'cos you know you can't eat for a couple of days after

**Sam:** when you come out of club last thing you ever wanted was something to eat

**Millie:** you used to go to services and they'd be people there eating egg, bacon and all that and you'd just think 'oh God', thought of it made me feel queasy actually

**Vicki:** I mean I have done, probably lost weight when I was going through that stage of taking pills all the time 'cos your appetite goes and I don't like it, don't like having no appetite 'cos you start a meal feeling really starving then you go 'urgh', just like this horrible sick feeling

**Kate:** I mean when I was talking about cycles you see a lot of people first come on the scene and they might be a bit chubby and then a year later they'll be like, lost loads of weight and I can't say that isn't nice, it is, it is good

**Teri:** it's great, I love it [laughs]. That's first thing I do every time I go to a club and I go home, jump on scales and think 'hee, hee'. Sometimes I

haven't lost anything and others I've lost four pounds and I think 'how have I managed that', sometimes you dance all night and sweat and I'll jump on scales and I've lost nothing, and other times I'll not really dance right much and I've lost about four pounds

**Kate:** it is quite quick 'cos I say when you first get into ecstasy you're just full-on, you're partying all weekend, you're probably going out in the week and partying as well so because you're so like into it that you're probably doing a lot of dancing

**L**osing weight is given, and accepted, as an inevitable consequence of using ecstasy and dancing on a regular basis. An eating disorder is described to occur from losing appetite when using amphetamine, influenced by a desire to be slim like fellow female clubbers. Also, the discovery of this recreation can be found to be suitable to a woman who already suffers an eating disorder, hence satisfying the need to control weight (with little effort involved). Generally, there is implication of risk to health when, at the weekend, the body is fed with drugs but not food.

*...you feel better about yourself*

**Teri:** it's a right bonus, flat stomach next morning

**Lou:** makes you feel better about yourself as well [laughs] like 'oh look at me a size ten clothes' and that's another reason I suppose, must be one of reasons for carrying on, I'm not sure about that but I think it must have something to do with it, psychologically because I associate it with, but you can sort your head out on that one, that's not like a major thing

*Lou feels that her newly slim figure is an obstacle to stopping using ecstasy heavily.*

**Kate:** well it just makes you feel better about yourself doesn't it and adds to feeling confident, if you're thinner then you're more confident and you're more nice about yourself

**Ann:** you start getting your body out more like little tops and little skirts because you're more proud of way that your body looks... do you actually in clubs spot a podgy lass 'cos I don't think I do



**Lou:** with you having more confidence with your figure you can wear nicer clothes

**Ann:** some of dresses that lasses wear I think 'God I wish I could wear that' because they look fabulous don't they, but then as I've started changing way that I dress I feel like I'm one of fabulous people when I'm in there

**Sam:** I had a pair of Destroy shorts 'cos I'd lost all my weight by then. Please don't try and imagine me in it now [laughs] it'd embarrass me. And they were shiny and they'd got like this black velvet and they were about fifty-five quid in sale. And I used to wear like black trainers and a little top, it was ace

**Ann:** I started fitting into a bit more slinkier, club clothes are just amazing compared to what I normally wear, you know really tight little tops and dresses with holes in and big sandals, it's good to be able to fit into them

**T**he described boost to self-perception from obtaining a slimmer figure may appear contradictory when one considers the dance event environment. If a woman feels relaxed and accepted in this setting, as discussed, then we might expect her to not feel concerned about her body size. Clearly this is not the case, and as such it implies that bodily perception reflects that of everyday life per se: it is not temporally or spatially related to the event though it reflects upon this social space.

#### *Gaining weight and keeping it off*

**Ann:** The only problem with taking Es and losing weight is that if you stop you've got twice as much hassle to put up with 'cos you're on your come-down, you feel a bit depressed, you start putting weight on, it's knocked me a couple of times but then it's choice of keep going clubbing and bugging yourself up, so that's why I try and go every month or something and just try and keep fit, and then you still feel good when you go to club 'cos you've looked after your body not through drugs but

*Ann used to suffer an eating disorder.*

yourself, you've been fit enough to do that, toned your body up

**Kate:** I know when a lot of people have stopped they say 'oh I'm putting on weight' but I don't know whether that would be the only thing to make them go back to doing it, but I've sat around with mates who've been having a period where they're not going out and they've put on weight and we talk about that 'oh we're putting on weight again aren't we'

**Ann:** I've had some bad times going on Slimfast but I still had that boost in my confidence from E to say 'all right you want to lose weight, exercise, be careful what you eat, you'll be happier then' whereas I wouldn't be happy if I thought 'that's it, I'm not eating anything now'. Or you realise you can't carry on taking drugs to lose weight because it's defeating object, you're making yourself ill... it's hard to feel well in a club when you're not really physically up for it anyway, you can go too far I mean you see it in lads as well not just lasses

*Slimfast is a diet aid.*

**Sam:** if I could take speed now without getting paranoid, I'd take it

**Millie:** what just to lose weight?

**Sam:** yeah, get rid of, you know what I mean

**Kate:** if I'm feeling bad about myself and I'm going out at the weekend I'll know, it'll be in my mind 'oh, I'll take loads of speed this weekend, I won't eat that much and I will feel thinner by the end of the week' [laughs] which is nice but it wouldn't be the only reason that I did it

**Ann:** I was eating stacks, thought it was brilliant. 'Cos you knew you were going out on Saturday so you could eat what you want, whatever you'd ate in week it was gone by weekend. I'd have a pair of jeans on and they'd be a bit tight when I've gone to try them on in a shop, or like a dress that I'm wearing for club and I've thought 'well by time I've been in club an hour, it will fit' and it's true, I've done it 'cos I've gone in something that fits perfectly and after an hour it's massive on me and it



feels ace

**Kate:** I wouldn't say I definitely use it as a form of weight control, but it's like I have been drinking [alcohol] loads but it's quite nice to get back into drugs again more 'cos then you're not drinking as much and that's not calories is it [laughs] but it wouldn't ever be the reason why I did it, it's just nice when you're aware

*Kate has recently had a break from ecstasy use.*

**Ann:** you have to be careful that you don't look gaunt. It's a case that you're losing weight but you're still making an effort to make yourself look attractive, you're not doing full 'I want to be thin' it's like you're happy doing it and still feeling good about yourself, you know it's not like you're on a diet and you're depressed and thinking 'oh God, I'm not going out 'til I've lost this weight', you're dancing away thinking 'a bit more calories are burning off here'

**G**iven the previous discussion, it is to be expected that once partying stops the weight returns. In one meaning to weight control in the life-world, there is indication of a positive development of body image as the woman progressed from starvation to entertaining a healthier lifestyle for a slim figure. Self-esteem was retained as risk to health was reduced.

However, from the descriptions, amphetamine sulphate is the main drug used to control weight, and an awareness of this option acts to reassure the mind (encompassing a further meaning to keeping body size in check). Thus, gaining weight after achieving a slim figure is experienced disappointingly, though knowledge of weight control via drug use in whatever form is reassuring.

### Little dresses and loads of make-up

**Teri:** When I get there first off, when I'm feeling all suspicious and sussing it all, looking around, that's when I think 'uh, I feel really fat, everybody's dead skinny in tiny clothes and uh' and I feel all self-conscious then, but once I've had my tablet or whatever I don't care [laughs] I just think 'oh sod it, I'm me and I'm enjoying myself so I don't care'... when I first walk in I think 'uh, I wish I could do that' and just

*Teri is talking about house music clubs. She then contrasts the environment to that of alcohol clubs.*

wear knickers and bra, I mean I wouldn't anyway, I'd probably feel more self-conscious like that if I go to a normal club, you feel like you're on show more and everybody's eyeing each other up to cop off or something

**Carol:** you do feel like you're in competition, you end up wearing little dresses and loads of make-up because everybody else does and you'd feel odd if you kept going there and not doing that but at a club it doesn't seem to matter, there's people walking around in bikinis and don't seem to get any hassle, lads just seem to look at them and go 'fucking hell, nice buzz' and that's it

*Carol continues the contrast.*

**Vicki:** on the techno scene, men just laugh at that, like 'look at the state of that'... there's a lot of sort of traveller types that New Age traveller affect, there's just no hang-ups about appearance, I mean all right you want to look good and if you've done some speed you might get a bit paranoid and you're looking in the mirror or whatever but it's not really like that

*Vicki's scene is different to that of house.*

**Kate:** some people tend to wear sort of not many clothes because it's hot, but you don't get people in tiny little shoes and baby-doll outfits but then people do wear, people might wear quite few clothes like they might wear low-cut T-shirts and stuff but it's a different way of wearing them... if the girls were wearing short skirts they'd be wearing leggings underneath the skirt, they wouldn't be having bare legs like maybe at a townie club. But then I went to a night [club] oh God months back and there was a girl dancing with nothing on at all on the top and she was just dancing with literally everything out [laughs] which is like, it's a different way of dressing, [on her scene] people don't dress party-ly, they dress more funkily, it may be wearing little clothing but it's a different message it's giving off, it's more funky it's not sort of as sexual

*Kate is speaking of the free party scene, which can be likened more to the techno one as opposed to house.*

**Teri:** I think people think different things of you as well because you wouldn't, if you went to a dance club you wouldn't think maybe something like 'look at that tart', you'd think maybe they were showing

off or that that they were that sort of person who wanted to strut around and look good and all that whereas if they wore that in a normal drinking club you'd probably think things like 'tart', I know you shouldn't do but you would more than in a dance club because in a dance club you'd be thinking they were doing it more for comfort and to be cool and because you can, you can now, it's no big deal in a way. You're allowed, it's not a bad thing but if you did in a normal club people would automatically have stereotypical images of you, and lads would as well, you'd get complete latches coming on to you

**Vicki:** that babe effect, yeah it's like happy house and all that. You see on the adverts and all the men are hung-up on their appearance as well so I wouldn't really say that's exclusive to women in that scene... it's too much like lipstick and silver dresses, there's too much posing

**Ann:** all designer stuff, it's all part-and-parcel 'cos even on fliers it will tell you dress code

**Carol:** if you were going to like a right housey-dancey club your fliers would be right slim women with little dresses on and stuff and it would affect how I dressed then, I think it might be worse for younger people because at twenty-six I'm right comfortable about what I wear and I know that it's more than just appearances that matters and that on club scene I don't think they judge you by appearance so much

**Lou:** you don't have to impress anybody because if you've got a great grin on your face that's what impresses people most, and that's if you just let go of all, and that's a realisation as you go along I think, at first I don't think you realise that but as you go along, it's the smile that makes it and that's what makes people like attractive to the opposite sex and their own, similar sex, that's what makes you attractive when you're on tablets not what you're wearing, you don't look at that at all, I don't anyway

**Vicki:** I went to [flamboyant house night at Sheffield club] and it was hideous, just horrible, all these women fighting for the mirror in the



toilet... all these women with feather boas like, you know they just didn't know how to have a good time, at the end of the night I'd just go 'come on', they didn't seem to have a good time they were that concerned with dancing over each other, a competition on the dance floor and that's just not what it's all about

**Carol:** I wouldn't wear little tiny dresses, couldn't wear anything like that because it's far too 'hey look at me' white bikinis that just glow in ultra-violet [lights]

**Teri:** I haven't got confidence to do it and plus it's not comfortable and I don't want to be one of these that strut around all night more worried about how they look than enjoying themselves because it's a waste of time

**Carol:** I think some of it is competition, you can see women are competing way they dress. Since it became, this is all what I've read as I haven't been on scene long enough to know, since it became more mainstream and got more popular with sort of normal people, they might be, probably are true clubby type people, on a tablet you don't give a fuck, they don't seem that relaxed, you're just right happy and if you look happy you appeal to people, you don't have to make that much of an effort to get that much attention in a club because it's not what it's all about is it. Perhaps these are people that have come in from normal night-clubs and have a different connotation of it than I have... they just stand there right stiff just dancing. I mean every time I've gone to a club I've had boots on, trousers and like just a T-shirty type number [attire] and felt comfortable enough in them to enjoy myself but I could imagine it would be nice to get dressed up and go to a club, but not to pose like, like a girly thing with your friends to know that you look good and you feel good and to have a laugh

**Vicki:** that was another thing, you just didn't really feel any competition in the atmosphere, I never compete to look good against other people, I

*In techno clubs.*

don't compare myself to any girls at all

**Carol:** these people that wear small dresses and stuff, I don't use drugs for my weight but I am conscious enough about my body not to wear some of stuff they wear, like I think my belly's too big

**Sam:** I used to dress like that

**Millie:** no I never did, so. I'd have liked to [laughs]

**Vicki:** it's all about treating yourself every so often and that was sort of what it was like for clubs, you go out and buy a new outfit and it's all part of this ritual... buy something to wear, getting ready and it's like getting psyched and you know the weekend would begin Thursday night, get up Friday morning and go and buy something to wear and it was part of that, building your esteem up

**Sam:** and you'd just seen yourself before you'd come out of club and you knew that you looked rough as fuck

*Appearance  
after the club.*

**Millie:** oh God yeah

**Sam:** you see some of them and they used to look fucking gorgeous

**Millie:** you used to go into bogs [toilets] and there were loads of lasses in putting make-up on, getting changed in services

**Sam:** it was just amazing, do you know what I mean, how they look so good and you look shite [laughs]

**Millie:** yeah, yeah isn't it. You see them all in bogs dolling themselves up. Or they just didn't have a good night, didn't sweat much

**Sam:** I was going to say even if I didn't even dance, I used to sweat

**T**he descriptions demonstrate that within the dance culture there are different styles of music with their own associated styles of dress. Followers of house music may dress revealingly ('babe' style) which is recognised by the women as accepted, and possibly encouraged by the objectification of women on promotional material. As not all followers of house music feel the pressure to conform to this appearance, there is heterogeneity in the clubbing world. Dressing in less in conventional clubs is described to emit a different message: the actor would be perceived stereotypically, in relation to the traditional relations.

In the life-world there is agreement that dance events are accepting with regard to dress, which houses a contradiction when one considers the 'us and them' viewpoint between clubbers (similar to how women dressing revealingly in alcohol clubs are viewed). However, there is no desire to be perceived as women who are overly concerned with appearance to the point where pleasure takes a back seat, because attractiveness is based on experiencing pleasure. Perhaps an illustration of the implication that appearance is chosen over pleasure is after the club when looks are refined with make-up. Interestingly, those who do not favour the 'babe' style of dress do not give much indication of how they themselves dress, though say how they do not: maybe this reflects the difference in emphasis on emotional rather than physical appearance. Further, the techno and free party scenes are perceived as more accepting and place less emphasis on this element of physicality, so there is no pressure to look the best, nor pleasing to the opposite sex.

*...maybe it is an expression of the ecstatic libido*

**Ann:** I think females clubbing get this, I mean it makes you feel horny anyway but you strut-your-stuff don't you, like club gear that people wear with all these feathers and that, but total strangers I want to, not me looking I-want-to-look-good-in-front-of-them, I want them to have some sort of feeling from what I'm doing to them. Like if you dance provocative sort of thing and they like it and you can see it, you're giving them a feeling, you're making them think 'phroar, God that's nice, carry on' and I like doing that

*Regarding  
ecstasy.*

**Sam:** when you're up on an E in club, I know it sounds fucking disgusting



but you're so fucking horny aren't you, and like if somebody touches you or anything like that you get tingles and everything, not that you would but you think 'God I could shag him at moment' you know what I mean

**Millie:** [laughs] yeah, yeah

**Ann:** when I'm in a club I'm a completely different person or not a different person there's just an extension on me, it's like playing a character, playing a role... you don't make them want to shag you so that they're going to follow you around club all night, you know your limits and you know looks in their eyes where you think 'that's enough' and you like wave and your off but you say something really nice like 'see you later, I'll probably bump into you' and they forget and they're like 'oh yeah, sound'

**Vicki:** I'm a bit sort of ambivalent towards that view, it sort of does but I can see that it's more in another scene. I can see that housey scene, they're all really concerned with their appearance and with my scene it's totally different, everybody just thinks everybody's wicked anyway

*Regarding libido increase.*

**Ann:** I like to go off so I can still have my twenty minutes getting lost 'cos you know it's a long way to toilet [laughs] flirting my way around all men, and sort of just being right vibrant and that's my bit... me and Maria would be dancing quite provocatively in club and lads love it, they'll just stand there and even lasses know what you're on with, just smile at you and walk passed giving it 'sound' sort of thing

*In the first part, Ann is referring to clubbing with her partner.*

**S**exual confidence is experienced, which may, in defence of 'babes', be reflected in their style of dress. It may also be reflected in a style of dancing where the dancer controls her expression of sensuality. This empowerment has been transferred from the clubbing period when she was single, as she now liberates herself from her partner to indulge herself. Sensual dancing is described to occur with another woman, and is part of the 'anything goes' nature, and the sexual irony, of the dance culture. One can see that women of the 'babe' style of dress derive pleasure from

their actions, thus it is a different kind of fun exhibited between the previously discussed 'us' and 'them'.

To conclude, in the world as lived by the women the diversity within the dance culture emerges. The club environment means that sensuality can be in high profile despite sexual relations being down-played. There is intersubjective agreement that pleasure is central, derived mainly from the dance. Dancing is both social and personal, and involves unity between mind and body, self and others (the latter strengthens belonging). Furthering bodily awareness, the appreciation of weight loss is shared though does not appear to be temporal nor spatial to the event.

## Chapter 7: A Way of Life which Touches you Forever

In the life-world, ecstasy use has a journey like nature which brings with it many changes for the women. The majority experience self-assurance, especially with regard to social interaction and relationships. They also describe the development of a more relaxed approach to life, and the dissolution of gender boundaries. Drug use is given as part of the women's lives, thus normalisation is seen on a personal and social scale.

*The journey chills you out and builds confidence*

**Ann:** I think out of the lot of us I was one that became spiritualised by it all, it never touched them... and this was first time I've ever took it

**Vicki:** I've got a whole big good side to how it's changed my attitudes

**Ann:** because through ecstasy I really had time to sit and work things out, living on my own and doing drugs was a good combination because I thought 'why are me and my foster parents going through all this, we ought to forget about it and make a fresh beginning' because I was looking over my shoulder constantly for years, never looking forward so I couldn't see where I was going... a back-pack on my back with all my problems and hassles and past things, so I got rid of that, turned my head around to front and it's enlightened me 'cos I've seen that things are never that bad, you can sort them out, it just don't seem as heavy world. Live life and enjoy it, and if you think you're doing things that you shouldn't and you're happy then do it

**Lou:** it's opened my eyes to myself loads like ecstasy and clubbing. It's opened my eyes, like I would have been engaged... taking tablets and seeing a totally different part to life that's there to be enjoyed like club land, seeing all that and thinking 'flipping heck, what am I doing, what' like he wouldn't have had any interest in that and you can't have that kind of a hobby and have a boyfriend that doesn't have that kind of a hobby... it gave me so much more confidence once I realised that, you know you feel a bit narrow minded with same bloke for a long time, you haven't opened your eyes to everything and once you do and you realise that you can do that too, there's no reason that I can't go in a club, you

know because before I used to dress alternatively or whatever, there's no reason why I can't put some nice clothes on and go to a club and have a fucking ace night and it gives you a boost, as in ability to make friends and talk and have a laugh and have right good times with people so it has changed my life dramatically, very, very dramatically

**Ann:** I mean clubbing culture is a thing that did change me, I didn't have a job or anything, I was on dole, against everything and I'm at uni now and so spiritual about that... being at uni, having a job and I've got my own place, I'm constantly telling myself what I have got, I'm still on one of them, definitely

**Vicki:** the way things are for like young people there's bugger all, you know what I mean and people like, life is totally to be lived for the moment, I think even the older people are aware of that, with unemployment being unsteady and that feeling of it can be taken away from you, your job can be just pulled away, things are so unpredictable that people are more and more realising like just go out and have it

*The dance event is an outlet which offers living for the here and now.*

**Carol:** it's chilled me out stacks and I've realised life isn't as serious as people make it out to be, and it's short, you want to live it and enjoy yourself, don't hurt anybody else because it's not worth it, try your hardest to have a right good happy life because it is short and not to dwell on things too much, it's made me realise that. It proper has made me realise that things aren't that serious, to not be unhappy about more than necessary... and, like situations, I'll get one thrown in my face and I handle it in a certain way and think 'fucking hell, I wouldn't have been like that', like in a different sense. It chills you out and I get out more, I've got more friends, better taste in clothes I suppose, no fucking money though [laughs]

**Lou:** you definitely, definitely get to learn loads more about you yourself and about everybody else. You can see who's a good, you can see goodness in people and you can also see other things too but you can see

the goodness shines through

**Vicki:** people just forgive and forget, it just makes people less grudging, just makes people like chill-out and that's the way it changes you, it makes you know there's an alternative way of looking at things, an alternative outlook it gives you... there's more to life than stupid fucking worries that you've got

**Ann:** I'm a lot more placid, I'm not as vicious minded, I've really sort of calmed down

**Lou:** it's done my mind a load of good, I use my mind now a lot more, it's like, I was saying to my friends you're burning some brain cells but you're building new ones by what you're actually thinking about and going through and experiencing, that's right, you are building something, you're learning more and more and more all time

**Carol:** I think they are enlightening but I suppose it will die down

**Lou:** I've stopped learning because we've been doing it too much... we're not getting lifted, we're not finding that ecstatic state of no mind, I think. Before we always found this state of 'it doesn't matter, it just doesn't matter' that's what it's like at first and now it doesn't matter but it's not like 'yeah, it doesn't matter' it's like 'oh right, it doesn't matter again', I'm not saying I've found all I can find from using ecstasy but I think I've found enough for the time being

*Heavy use has halted personal learning from ecstasy.*

**Vicki:** I wouldn't change it for the world, like all the experiences I've had have been brilliant

**Teri:** I probably feel more confident

**Kate:** I'm loads more confident, I don't know. Yeah, once you've been on that scene, it just gets you to let boundaries down and I was a lot, maybe it was my age 'cos I was young then but I wasn't that confident before and I found it hard to talk to people and stuff but now I find it loads



easier to talk to people and I don't just mean on that scene, I think it has changed the way I am, I'm a lot more approachable and easy to talk to

**Teri:** and like various people who, I suppose, normally you wouldn't take the time to sit and talk to them and have a proper conversation because you'd be worried about just stupid things maybe like did they want to talk to you, or have they got time to talk to you, or are they just talking to you because there's nobody else to talk to, and just stupid things like that and it allows you to become, I don't know how to put it, it sort of deepens friendships and what you have then lingers on afterwards, the people who you might have sat down and talked to that night, next time you see them, even if you've had nothing, you still feel like you can talk to them whereas before you probably wouldn't do

*Whilst on  
ecstasy,  
deeper  
conversations  
than usual are  
held.*

**Kate:** definitely, it does, it keeps on, before I was always quite uptight and then I did that for so many weeks for so many years it sort of, you just get into the habit of talking to anybody and not being so guarded and stuff and that carried on in my life as well as I do find it a lot more easy to make friends outside the club

**Teri:** they [lads] never used to talk to me, I didn't make much effort either 'cos I always felt too shy and didn't have confidence to, whereas now I talk to them like I would anyone else

**Vicki:** I was sort of taking them and realising things about it. It was that stage where it was just like a real happiness that I'd found and without drugs I would just like go 'fuck it', just really knew how to chill-out 'cos I was really uptight

**Kate:** it opens it [personality] up really 'cos before you've got a lot of boundaries between people, when you go to a normal pub or club that's not a dance club you don't really talk to that many people and you sort of stay in your own little groups but at clubs like that [dance] you just get used to running around talking to anyone, you just have no, your boundaries aren't there

**Vicki:** it just like opened up a new side of me as well, it was mad

**Kate:** just feeling so much more relaxed and confident and open to people, that's been a major effect

**Millie:** it used to [have a confident and laid-back influence] but is that 'cos we've stopped, so if we get up and go for it again

**Lou:** you get a glimpse of something and that's what it is, enlightenment, it's good and if you can use that and still use that and let it affect your normal life too which I think you've got to be strong to do, you've got to have time to contemplate it as well, you can't have a proper demanding job, go out clubbing and have time, if you haven't got enough time on your hands to realise and discuss what's happened, what's happening

*Whilst using ecstasy heavily.*

**Ann:** through ecstasy it's enlightened me. If I'm looking at my own life story, I see myself as I was, I had a really rough childhood, fostered, took away from my family, put with foster parents, didn't work out, I always felt odd one out and I think a lot of that was my fault as well 'cos I never made a massive effort, like the world's against me... then doing loads of stupid things, no money, no job, nothing and then to just go to Glastonbury and do that, and I came back a completely different person. I started having faith in things again, it was like you can make things happen, if you want something go for it, if you get it great, if you don't, go for something else and feeling like that and because I've succeeded in doing I can sit here today and say 'I'm doing what I have always wanted to do so you tell me that Es are bad 'cos I can't say that they are because that's what it did for me', and I don't know how, I mean you can take acid but you're not on a trip for rest of your life. Like Aldous Huxley's Doors of Perception, once you've had a taste I don't think you ever come back out, you can either go further one way or further other way, you can get totally off your head or chill-out for a bit but you can still see through door, you still know what's there, you've been there

*Ann is speaking, once more, about the influence of her first ecstasy experience.*

**Lou:** it touches you forever and it changes you as well and it's whether

you hold onto that

**Vicki:** it's just that thing, getting out and discovering more to life. It started in the club context and I'm sure it sort of overlaps on your outlook of life, just going out there and finding happiness

**Ann:** so even out of clubs people are still holding that culture together. It's not just a culture that's on drugs because even when we've all come down and we're doing our everyday thing, it's something that lingers, something that's still there in all of us and we know it

**Vicki:** just like thinking there's more to life, I think that'll stay with me

**Kate:** it's the environment and the people. Once you've had your boundaries let down by that much it becomes part of the way you are I think, it just makes you more relaxed maybe and that's a sort of permanent thing... and I can dance now and there was a time when I thought I could only ever dance on drugs but now I can, before I didn't really dance very much and I'd never dance unless I was off my head but now I can actually dance without being on drugs which I could never do before, so it's made me be able to dance [laughs]

**M**ost of the women believe that using ecstasy has resulted in positive changes of attitude. One alteration described in the life-world is related a more relaxed outlook on life, akin to the calmness experienced during the dance though as a long-term influence. There is also the perception of a deeper understanding of self where, in reflection, ecstasy experiences are interpreted as spiritual. In a further meaning, awareness of the self is related to the dance culture's emphasis on pleasure, which formed a realisation that life had more to offer. Indeed, the 'live life and enjoy it' philosophy is described as a transition by all. There is belief that knowledge has been gained through the process of intellectual thought and reflection.

Transitions in attitude also relate to social interaction, and it appears that the ecstasy experience of opening communication channels and enhancing empathy lose temporality and spatiality, entering life thereafter. Though the changes are viewed to be

permanent, there is indication of temporality regarding those to confidence and relaxation: these experiences diminished as the clubbing period elapsed. The transformations are of an individual nature, reflecting upon the social world, and can be said to be related to how ecstasy makes one feel plus the nature of participation within the scene.

...with a 'knock-on' affect upon gender

**Teri:** it brings you closer to other people I think, people who, just like that about Benj, you wouldn't normally sit down and have a conversation with him and when you do, I don't know it might sound silly but it makes you feel special that he's talked to you like that... you're like friends with them when you wouldn't have been before, you're on same level whereas before it would have been like a lad and a girl thing. That's how it's always used to seem to me, it's only since taking ecstasy that I've felt like I can talk to them, probably from being off my face on various nights that I've talked to them and got to know them... it's nice, I like it

*Teri expands upon what she said in the previous section.*

**Lou:** no gender distinction between us lasses and lads and that's a thing I think tablets brought that about, that's important

**Vicki:** in the future there's going to be no gender differences especially in the club scenes, everyone feels the same in that context. And there's all that skating thing, that Run DMC video, and it's all that androgyny style that's come in. But you know there's just a blurring of the boundaries

**T**hrough sharing ecstasy experiences (on a personal and social scale) a further change is experienced, and entails an openness which has allowed an equality between the sexes. Once more, a change in the relations amongst the sexes is not perceived as temporally and spatially related to the ecstasy event, and is viewed positively. Gender dissolution is implicit in the interviews, as all speak of consuming ecstasy, and sharing their experiences, in mixed sex groups.

An alternative way of being

**Vicki:** people say taking drugs you go out to escape but it's just like being aware of an alternative way of being, it could be an escape from going into that downward spiral of mundane life as it is, the times you know, sometimes things get on top of you whatever but just this thing where you know there's another side to life now, there's a place you can go, you know you can sort of just like be happy and there's an outlet now where like before it was just like, I was more sort of inclined to get pretty depressed from the thought of just not having things to look forward to

*Vicki speaks of the dance club.*

**Kate:** it's not just a really good night out, it's a way of finding really good people as well

**Carol:** because ecstasy users are a different type of people to people who don't use ecstasy. Comparing to my mates who don't, they're on a different level. I don't mean that in a nasty sense, I'm not putting us at a higher and them at a lower it's just a different one. You're all looking for same sort of vibe, you're all one same vibe, you're just wanting pure pleasure, fun, relaxed time away from stress

*The alternative way of being is the same for all involved.*

**Vicki:** I mean you'd actively find out what drugs give what feeling at what part of the night... just a self discovery thing as well, you know you're curious to find out about yourself and you enjoy manipulating different contexts, going into them taking drugs feeling like that in that context, talking to that people in that way and just mix and match with everything around, it's just total curiosity from being bored [laughs]

**Teri:** it's changed my attitude to people who take ecstasy because, well until you know what it's like you can't even understand people that go and do it

**Carol:** usually on a come-down I go down to pub... you sit there and everybody who's been out on piss [drinking] on a Sunday, they come in 'oi you miserable bastards what's wrong with you' and we're not miserable at all, we're all happy we're just not fucking smiling, we're



strung out, we're all content but they can't understand fact that we are happy, we just don't look it

**Vicki:** you go like 'oh God, you don't know what you're missing' it's like, it's abnormal not to take them for me. And you know I've always been like that and been part of it

**Kate:** well it's not just the big weekend out, it becomes a way of life

**Carol:** while ever I've got a fit body and mind I'll always use drugs, even class A ones because I believe they are one of little pleasures in life and most of them are natural and people have took them for spiritual purposes and that for years

**Vicki:** just going out there and finding happiness, you can find happiness within yourself but you know that certain contexts stimulate that... it's fascinating I mean, I'm bright, I'm not stupid and like I've done loads of drugs and I don't really think people should be judged. It's really harsh that people get looked on as being really stupid for taking drugs 'cos like to me it was experiencing more

**Lou:** respect, respect for other users which sounds bad but it's right though

*United in stance.*

**Vicki:** I'm really up for finding an alternative way to do it... I quite fancy a future of like just finding an inner peace and knowing how to get the most out of my own happiness

*A move away from drugs.*

**A**ll the women have used other illegal drugs prior to trying ecstasy (taken from the interview texts), hence drug use can be said to be part of their lives. It may be described as a way of life, which reflects a general normalisation where it is not perceived as abnormal to use drugs for pleasure, and can involve expansion of the mind. Further, the outside view of ecstasy users as deviant enters the life-world and is dismissed, as seen when respect for fellow users is given.



Drug use as an alternative way of being may be temporary, though is believed to have instigated a progression to find inner satisfaction without drugs. Happiness is viewed as a right and as something actively discovered for oneself, indicating the independence of the women's personalities. Identity is evident as there is the implication that one must experience ecstasy in order to understand users' motives and actions.

...it is a normal thing to do

**Sam:** I think it's an accepted part of youth culture

**Millie:** yeah definitely

**Sam:** I think it's an expected thing mainly now especially if you look at evidence they put in [news-] papers and advertising 'if your kid hasn't took drugs by sixteen, seventeen year old that they are a deviant to society'. You know what I mean, 'your child will take drugs between twelve and sixteen at some point in their lives, eighty, ninety percent of statistics' whatever

**Kate:** definitely, I mean 'cos Britain's quite unique in that it's got the youth culture scene, and everyone does it, I'd say so many young people do it, it may be once a month or it may be once a week whatever but everyone does

**Ann:** if you fit into a group where you're taking ecstasy and there's other people same then you can't be that wrong because there's so many other people doing it

**Teri:** I mean there aren't many people you know who've not had some drug whether it be just like smoking a joint or, just about everybody I know has had something... like in Sheffield, how many clubs are there [lists five clubs], all on one night each place is full and that's just in one city, so if you're talking every town or city across the country and everybody in there is having something, be it whizz or ecstasy or whatever, so there's millions of people doing it... It does seem like it's a

normal thing to do, until you have to keep your voice down when you're talking about it

**Carol:** I agree. Me and my friends, it's an accepted part of life and over past few months it's got so normalised that we, I nearly skinned-up [rolled a joint] in [town pub] the other week [laughs]... but I do think a lot of people around my age and especially young ones growing up that are sixteen, look what they've got to go to, they don't have to go to piss-head pubs they can go to clubs and it's going to be like going out for a drink for them. But at that age there's potential for abuse isn't there, especially if it's your first drug experience

**Ann:** club culture it's not seen as a dirty drug culture, it really changed... when you get into club culture it's like drinking is to our mums and dads, you know like 'oh yeah I'll have a sherry' and 'oh go on I'll have another one' and it's just like that in a club, we don't see ourselves as drug addicts, we don't look like drug addicts

**Lou:** it's just like a Friday night getting pissed

**Vicki:** it totally is dead accepted, I mean like I say I've been doing drugs for nearly ten years and I couldn't believe, that was a big thing when I started university, the amount of students that took drugs... the amount of students' parties I've been to and they're all like graduating being lawyers and everything. I just couldn't believe the part of society that you thought was going to be, you know the chief earners and all this, a small percent of the population with it being education and everything, they were the ones that were the worst

**Lou:** that was three days of God knows how many tablets we'd had, about nine over three days, it was like for breakfast, no food just tablets, no nothing just tablets

**Carol:** you'll all sit with a tablet, swallow it, just like having a drink of lager, it's just like having a fag and off you go, we went shopping once

E'd off our face [laughs]. You don't think though, you could have seen your mother or your aunty, that day we'd had three tablets and two night before

**I**t is clear from the above that drug use is normalised. With regard to Britain's youth culture the view is expressed that, ironically, the statistical evidence depicted in the media regarding the extent of their drug use encourages it. Further, this concern extends to dance clubs as a mainstream leisure pursuit as the use of ecstasy could hold potential dangers to those inexperienced with ecstasy.

The justification for normalised use of ecstasy in the life-world forms a reversal of the outside view: from the inside it cannot be immoral as so many other people use. This fellow feeling defines identity with the culture. For some, taking ecstasy is so habitual that they describe issues of illegality being unnoticed. A tinge of concern from the outside world enters the life-world when the women discuss their identity as drug users being exposed. Implicitly, to be recognised out of context on ecstasy associates with a deviation from 'normal' actions.

In conclusion, drug use is described as part of life where the impetus for use is pleasure, and a way of discovering the self (though this may be an unexpected consequence as opposed to a motivation). The main changes given in the life-world are in attitudes, which all view as changes for the better. It appears that dance event experiences lose their temporality and spatiality and extend into life thereafter.

## Chapter 8: Using Ecstasy Regularly and Heavily

Within the life-world the use of ecstasy can become heavy<sup>1</sup>, related to the nature of use and how the women feel when it has been absorbed bodily. (As ecstasy use increases so does participation in dance events, which may influence the previously discussed changes in attitude.) Again, the journey like nature of ecstasy use is described where the come-down progressively worsens, and the consequence of heavy and regular use is problematic mental health. The women are aware that to abuse a drug means it will eventually reciprocate the abuse, hence the outcome may be a desire or a decision to quit use.

*The come-down seems to last so long*

**Carol:** from about November to March when I was having say just half a tablet or a tablet on a Friday night, I was sound next day, I was sleeping, getting plenty of kip, getting something to eat when I got up, felt fine and it was like that in March until we started hammering them, but come-downs weren't that bad even like one weekend we had about ten from Friday to Monday because it was a Bank Holiday

**Kate:** I don't mind having a one day come-down midweek, you're sort of crying and feeling weird and you're upset and then you remember 'oh it's a come-down, it's a Wednesday' and it makes you feel okay about it 'cos you just think 'I'll just get through today'

**Carol:** because your come-downs weren't anything noticeable to affect your life you could still get up and do your thing, perhaps you needed a couple of days relaxing and resting but now they seem to be getting longer

**Ann:** I'm not right into having Es anymore 'cos come-downs seem to be getting worse

**Kate:** I used to do lots of E and then it just started to feel bad all the time

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<sup>1</sup> By heavy use I am referring to the women describing their use of ecstasy as regular, on a weekly basis, which lasts for a number of months or years, and where more than one tablet is consumed in one weekend.

**Carol:** now it seems that bit of thick and tiredness stretches further to next weekend

**Kate:** for the first two years I took E I never really got come-downs at all, I was fine you know, I didn't really understand what a come-down was and then it started that I did get come-downs but it was only a day so that was okay but when it went into this like depression that never went away I did stop taking them

**Vicki:** started getting Wednesday come-down and then it grew to like Tuesday [and] Wednesday, then like Tuesday, Wednesday [and] Thursday and then I was just depressed like every day and then it got to point where I was taking pills and feeling depressed

**Kate:** I felt it creeping up, it was like you was having a one day come-down then it was two, then three then maybe have a whole week of feeling down and be all right for a while, it gradually sort of stretched out until it was just like 'dush' [all the time]. But I do think it was definitely ecstasy that majorly caused it

**Lou:** it all builds up and builds up and builds up, and come-downs are a lot harder to handle. Every time me and Rich have had a tablet we've always had some billy at same time, but every time we've had a tablet he's ended up crying, I've ended up crying, not every time both of us, and irritability, whereas before you just used to be strung-out a bit, a bit thick and now they're getting a bit more to it than just a bit of dumbness... making you think things that aren't real... little things can niggle for no reason, you can get one thing in your brain and you can drive yourself insane, if you carry on thinking about it, you don't snap yourself out of it, I bet you could go fucking bonkers forever, you know like on a bad acid trip you think it's going to go on forever

*Toxins  
accumulate in  
the body.*

**Ann:** I think they're getting more dodgy and scientific facts, I mean you don't need to listen to them, you know yourself if you take them what's going wrong, it's whether you admit it to yourself really



**Sam:** yeah, the more you use it they got increasingly worse, they were horrible, I don't think I've ever had a good come-down, you're knackered and sometimes you feel shite

**Millie:** no mine were all crap [laughs] I never really had a good one, makes you ratty as fuck, that's worse thing about it and you go to work on Monday and it's wank, feel like shit

**Kate:** recently I've started to do E again and I'm all right at the moment but this week I did have a bad come-down, Tuesday night I was just, I was okay all day Tuesday then I started crying and I just cried all night and then Wednesday I felt really up and down, I was like really tearful

**T**hrough using ecstasy regularly and in high doses, the come-down is described to extend its temporality. The women acknowledge this and it works to discourage them from using ecstasy on future occasions (ironically, they do use it again but not to the extent as before; discussed later). The heightening of the side-effects is related, in the life-world, to toxic accumulation in the body. In another retrospective meaning to the experience of the come-down, it is given that they did not worsen: all were bad. It is possible that the after-effects were not just the result of ecstasy use as other drugs tend to be used in conjunction with it (see chapter nine). But the women's perceptions of ill health, however, do not relate to those other drugs.

#### *Mega-paranoid and feeling down all the time*

**Kate:** the long-term effect of doing a lot of E is you get depressed whether you're prone to it or not... I think any person that did E for a long time would get that big depression thing, not just the come-down... paranoia, yeah that can come along as well

**Sam:** stuck in house for six months like and not go out anywhere, that's happened to me

**Millie:** yeah I daren't go out, don't want to go out

**Sam:** I don't know if I was insecure before but like I ended up fucking

mega-paranoid... you just get more paranoid and it got to a point where, even if nothing had happened, everything had been all right all night and I was convinced I'd said something wrong to somebody, made a twat of myself and they were taking fucking piss out of me and it used to right freak me out, it was horrible. Thought I must be mentally ill

**Vicki:** now I can't even handle half a wrap of speed 'cos I've been getting this speed psychosis thing, imagining cameras are on me, like totally freaking me out, 'cos I went to Tribal Gathering and we were on these brilliant pills, it was the speed I worked it out, you know you take that much speed it starts getting the opposite effect, and these cameras all homed in on me 'cos I was dancing at the front which is normally good fun, you're getting attention and that but it was just like totally freaked me out and now when I go out if I have any speed I imagine cameras watching me, just getting a self-consciousness feeling which I never used to get. I used to be really into meth-amphetamine, that is really powerful stuff

**Sam:** sometimes I get still paranoid, you know if I'm stoned. And I do think about all crap times, it's a thing that right freaks me out, I sit there getting right worked up about it, it's usually when I'm stoned like, when I've been visiting people and that and think 'oo have I done something wrong, have I stopped too long'... before it was constant, everyday, you didn't have to have nothing and I wouldn't go out anywhere unless it was with my mother, 'cos I thought somebody was trying to get me beat up as well. It was horrible, I swear down it was proper horrible

*Sam has not used ecstasy or speed for a number of years.*

**Carol:** I've had a couple of weeks of bad paranoia, that went when I had a bit of a chelp [talk] at who'd set, I think she'd set it off in my head, and I felt fine after that, but I don't know. I don't seem to have been depressed but I have had a bit of paranoia but that's come and gone

**Ann:** when I was going to [Leeds club] every week when I was single it was great but my comedowns were making me paranoid and I started to

get depressed

**Vicki:** like crying all the time and not being able to cope, I felt like that a wee while ago

**Ann:** every time we've been out and then come back I go on a 'God is this what I really want, a relationship', I'm on it now and I have to admit that I'm doing that but it's usually due to Es. It's always after we've been out and, week after I'm all right, a bit like gouched but I sort of accept it and get on settee and it was a week that I was like that and usually it's just a day

**Kate:** I started to get really bad come-downs and then the come-downs stopped being come-downs and it just turned into one long, long, long depression, it lasted a lot of months and it got so bad that I went to the doctors and she did offer me Prozac which is good, she offered it me straight away but she also said 'I want you to do counselling first' which I thought was good so I did do quite a few sessions of counselling to sort of try and get out of this depression. And I wasn't, I think a lot of it was, looking back I do think maybe I might have been a bit depressed anyway but it was majorly due I think to taking ecstasy, the reason I got into this big trap of being really down so I said I wouldn't take it again

**Millie:** yeah it's like doing too much all at once can make you a bit weird

**Vicki:** they say like take a break, and it just all built up, totally eating away at my sense of self, it was like I didn't have any personality, I only had personality when I was on the drug

*The advice of drug workers.*

**Carol:** it seems to be at point I am now, I do seem to be very, very stropy again and one minute I'm all right and next minute I hate everybody, feel like a manic fucking depressive this week

*Carol has just begun a break from ecstasy.*

**Kate:** it's just like your brains like, you have nothing left, you're just numb, you know 'cos if you're using that much up then there's a price to

pay and it was horrible... I was just thinking that you've used it all up, whatever it is in your brain is gone, it's like depleted and you haven't got any, what is the stuff? Serotonin isn't it

**Vicki:** the general down-side, this serotonin, I remember educating myself about it but people educated me about that. I knew a girl who said this thing about serotonin levels, you use it all up and like you get to a stage where it will all end and it will be right bad and everything but you just don't know, you don't take any notice when you're in it, you just like [think] it'll never happen to me sort of thing

**Kate:** it wasn't a depression where I was crying or anything, it was just depression where I felt nothing, I was like a zombie, I felt totally numb and I knew I wasn't happy but, it wasn't like a normal depression where you might be a bit angry and a bit emotional, there was no emotion left, it was like I was completely sort of numb and that's what did me. That's why I didn't do anything about it for such a long time 'cos I didn't realise how bad it was for a long time and then I suddenly realised that 'God, I've felt nothing for so many, so long and I just can't stand this feeling of nothingness anymore'

**Vicki:** I remember reading an article in Mixmag about this, saying that some people are, I don't know if this is me, if I'm part of it but some people are like predisposed to this toxicity or something like to be at the bottom of this serotonin level, and I think this is what I've got

*Mixmag is a  
dance culture  
magazine.*

**Carol:** I've had mood swings like that before, it was all hormones I'm sure, when my periods were really bad so whether it fucks about with your hormones and makes you a bit dodgy

**Vicki:** yeah, I mean we women we've got that hormonal thing and everything and we're much more complex than men, much more interesting. I don't know, I think it probably does totally affect us really differently

**P**aranoia is a consequence of heavy and regular ecstasy use, again not described as limited to the come-down. The unease experienced from paranoid thinking can linger as, after being clean from ecstasy for a number of years, it re-emerges in certain situations. Another meaning to paranoia is related to using strong amphetamine. However, some who suffered this disorder do not believe it was purely due to ecstasy abuse, rather this acted as a catalyst to previous insecurity.

Feeling emotional and an inability to cope with life stressors, plus social withdrawal, are described in relation to ecstasy abuse and are indicators of depression. Feeling depressed, which was once temporal to the come-down, can become constant. There is contradiction in one instance of the life-world: in the previous section she described taking ecstasy and feeling depressed, though here she describes only having character when high. Thus, an ambiguity exists, perhaps implying a progression to the later stages of use where constant depression was the end product. There is awareness of serotonin exhaustion whilst using, but the risk is taken.

### *Losing memory whilst gaining lethargy*

**Vicki:** I've made the mistake of about four or five weeks later taking another one then I was too relaxed, I didn't have any oomph about me, I just couldn't get on with shit and so there's just that balance you have to get with taking pills and you can get it right

*Ecstasy acted as a relaxant, until this experience.*

**Ann:** like losing your memory and fatigue, not being bothered with college, losing plot, not being arsed to do anything... at work, making my own mind up what people want to drink basically... and with college, trying to grasp studying at same time

**Kate:** a lot of us say that we feel a lot more stupid [laughs] since we've done it but like my short-term, my memory's not as good but that might be just getting older but I know a few of us that think it's the drugs 'cos I can't remember as well as I used to

**Carol:** my memory's not as good but I think that'll come back, I don't think that's a permanent thing, I hope. My memory does seem a bit piss-poor and sometimes you do feel right thick on come-down, you say stuff

and you make words up, a combination of this word and that word that both mean same thing, like 'walk' and 'stroll' 'I'm going for a stroll'  
[laughs]

**Ann:** like when you get back [from club] me and a friend were sat trying to have a conversation and she was staring at me and I'm talking to her and her staring's starting to take over conversation and I'd go 'what, what you staring at?' and she'd go 'I can't remember what you were on about, I've been trying to grasp it' and I'd go 'well, what was I on about?' and we both couldn't remember. We'd sit there for another minute and then go 'were we just having a conversation?'. I think it's a bad stage if you're losing your memory and you can't even have a conversation

**F**urther to the above, there is a described loss of interest in sex, and thus motivation to indulge in sexual activities. However when intercourse does occur, focusing attention is affected and changes the whole meaning to making love. Vicki explains...

another thing is like your concentration, say you've got to keep a certain concentration to like, you know keep focused if you're engaged in sex, it's that kind of thing, your mind wanders. You can have good sex on pills but your mind just can wander, you can get really horny with your mind but it's just a mind thing it's not like physical, just like a mad space experience

Thus, within the life-world problems manifest themselves in everyday activities and can be detrimental to social and personal life (again, they are not limited to the come-down period).

### Reciprocal abuse

**Lou:** effects aren't anywhere near what they used to be for one... effects aren't good enough anymore, tolerancy, I'm far more tolerant of them now because we've been banging them for far too long far too frequently

**Carol:** I have read it places and I've heard it off other people and it seems to be true, that more you use ecstasy like every weekend, if you abuse it



then it abuses you and your negatives start getting more than your positives, you don't get as much as a buzz from it and you feel shite for about a week and like, this up and down business, one minute I'm fine and next minute I'm in a proper foul mood

**Lou:** now if we have tablets we haven't got that belonging, that identity anymore and maybe that's why tablets aren't as good

**Carol:** I'd hope that if I got to point where I was having to inject a tablet to get a buzz that I'd have stopped by then, because now I've started snorting it... I think that snorting is because swallowing's not giving me that much of a buzz anymore, it's like trying something a bit different

**Lou:** a friend, a bloke, looks shocking, gaunt, white and the thing is I've been going it longer than him so when I look in mirror, do I look like that... with us all being so close and doing same thing for so long we wouldn't notice if one of us started to look a bit poorly

**T**here is awareness in the life-world that to use ecstasy heavily and often means that the body begins to resist the actual experience. To abuse a drug means it will eventually abuse the user: the influence upon mental health is the abuse.

The implication is that recreational use stops being that, which leads onto the following section where the women know they must stop use for a while.

*The outcome: people crash, burn and learn*

**Vicki:** you know how to draw the line like, everybody does... everybody knows when it's affecting them... be like one heavy session then you just go 'right, that's enough'

**Ann:** yeah, that's whole thing about being an addict you've got to admit

**Vicki:** if everybody's left to be trusted they find their own limit, unless you get people who are predisposed, just a bit fucked up and stuff and they don't know when to stop. But even a guy I knew did fifteen pills in one weekend and like had a nervous breakdown and everything, it took

him that far to go but he did find, you know, his limit, especially with pills 'cos I mean they really can fuck you up, I've heard a lot of nervous breakdown stories

**Kate:** I have seen people who've been full-on on the party scene and they've had nervous breakdowns and things like that, people who've done so many drugs and for so long. The amount of people that I've seen really, really lose it is frightening sometimes 'cos that combination of doing it that long and that many mixtures of drugs and cocktails and just the lifestyle, yeah people do crash and burn and I've seen a lot of people do it and I know I have myself, but not, I just got depressed... but it's just part of the scene and most people come out of it so, they stop and their friends make sure they stop, and they get better. But you know that person's going to be all right 'cos they're just going to stop and then come out of it but a lot of people do, they do it for so long, then they push it and push it and then they go [pushes hand down to indicate severe drop]. And it's quite a sudden thing as well sometimes, one minute they'll be all right, and there's a lot of people on Prozac now that don't do E anymore because, you know, it just puts them straight back again so a lot of people have had to give it up because of having depression and stuff

**Lou:** I bet if we carried on taking tablets like this we're going to have biggest come-down, I'm going to have biggest come-down ever, because it's just going to get worse and worse and worse and worse and we're going to have to stop at some point

**Carol:** I've had ten days with no MDMA in my blood and I'm hoping that I'm coming down, coming off them, getting it out of my system which will probably take about two months

**Lou:** you'll never get that first buzz ever again while we're slamming, unless we have a break for a very, very long time like months. It won't be out of our systems in a month, if I had a month off it wouldn't be out of my system, it wouldn't, we need to give over for like two months, three

months and then proper, if we're doing it again we have to start doing it differently... it's just because it's there, they're easy to get hold of, everybody else is doing them, it's harder to say no then it is to say yes [laughs] and that's only reason, it proper is and that's piss-poor

**Carol:** my reasons for wanting to quit with ecstasy for a bit, it's my health, from fainting

**Lou:** with us being still close friends, still an affected friends, we've got friends that are influenced, we are all influenced by people that come out and do tablets because we all do tablets together every weekend, so if any one of group starts doing tablets all group does tablets. It's impossible for it to be any other way, everybody has to stop or everybody's going to continue

**Teri:** sometimes I'll think ahead and think I'll not have any for a while and I don't know, as long as there's somebody else there as well it's easier 'cos usually Jud will not be bothered... otherwise if I'm not bothered he'll say 'all right, I'll not either' and then you know you're not on your own so it doesn't matter whereas I can imagine if I was just there and everybody else was I'd think 'ummm, don't want to miss out' [laughs]

*Teri's use of ecstasy has always been controlled in this way.*

**Kate:** it's good in the end 'cos you learn when you come out of it, you don't feel like you've achieved anything but you've actually been sorting stuff out when you're down but just calmer really now, I wouldn't go for it as much, I'd be a bit more sensible and I'd be watching out for the signs to stop doing it for a while and maybe just go back to speed. Just being a lot more careful and being a lot more aware really, that it's not all good and just to watch out for tell-tale signs

**Vicki:** because I'm really aware of that depression thing it's sort of changed my outlook, you know sometimes I can't really enjoy it now 'cos I just think 'am I gonna get a come-down off this?'... the need for going out and having a good time sometimes overrides the reality of what it might feel like in two weeks time, you know you're thinking about that

now and you're just like 'oh I need to go out, gonna risk it'

**Kate:** now I've started to take them again even though I said I wouldn't. But it's so hard not to, 'cos it's really good [laughs] and, I don't know, I think I'd recognise the pattern... if I start feeling it slide into getting depressed again then I will definitely stop for a while. That was terrible at the time, I never want to go through that again, it was just too hideous

**Vicki:** I'd rather make the most out of one, that's what everybody's like now, just make the most out of a little bit of the drug 'cos you just think 'oh what's the point' just gets too excessive and you feel like an arse-hole, just getting really greedy, so it's that sort of sensible outlook you get

**Ann:** we're still following but in different ways, instead of going out every weekend we do big do's [monthly]

**Carol:** I'm going to try and quit with tablets apart from special occasions 'cos I'd love to have a month off and drop [swallow] one and see if it felt any better than the last one I had, it's an incentive to stop

*Detoxify the body.*

**Vicki:** I sort of worked it out and now I like really plan, actively construct my drug use. Now I know I can only take them every two months or something to get a brilliant night and not have any come-down 'cos the come-down just feels like it, just so literally like

**Kate:** I'll just carry on doing it but not as full-on as I was, 'cos for a start the parties aren't every weekend, they're once a fortnight or once a month

**Vicki:** there's just that balance you have to get with taking pills and you can get it right... yeah I reckon I've got that balance, but I mean I'm just not that bothered

**Lou:** what I'd like to happen is I'd like us all to stop and then just start going clubbing again after a bit. We need to reflect on what's gone off these last God knows how many months

*Lou's main context of use was out of the club.*

**Vicki:** now we all try to rely on it to have a good time without the drugs you know because you start thinking after a while it's all a bit false, it's like contrived you have to be on drugs to have a good time and all that, you have to get over that sort of thing and say 'I'd be having a wicked time without being off my head on pills'

**Carol:** I'm trying to keep it to one a weekend... none last weekend, first weekend off since November

*It is now  
September.*

**Vicki:** now it's sort of changed a little bit where everyone is really buzzing off going out straight. That's a new scene that, totally like especially amongst my techno style group

**Teri:** in back of my mind I'm thinking 'well I'll not have it this weekend 'cos I had it last, and I'll just get drunk this weekend', prove to myself I can still have a good time without having any, I don't know maybe a bit of a battle in your mind... I've seen in a way from other people over years, friends who I've seen, and they've said they can't really enjoy a good night if they haven't had a tablet, and I've thought 'uh, I don't want to be like that'. So at moment I feel like I can enjoy myself if I have a tablet but I can also enjoy myself if I don't and still have an equally good night. So in back of my mind I try to like not get into having it three, four weeks in a row or 'cos then I'm proving it to myself... then you feel like you're doing right thing because it's easy to convince yourself 'oh fuck it I'll just have it anyway'

**Vicki:** I've told my mum and my uncle and various people that I take drugs and they just went 'you don't need it' and that's what I'm slowly beginning to realise. I don't really need them

**Ann:** we've also seen what we're like without drugs, we're actually like that anyway and we've started sussing that we can listen to music without having to take drugs. I could dance around room now to music and be on a right, so it's in me and I've realised that you don't have to keep going every weekend. Once you've stepped through that door you're always

going to be like that I think, it's just for life

**Kate:** it changes the way you listen to music, I'm sure it does, changes some pattern in your head like how you listen to music... it's funny, music really makes me up now. It's like, when you're dancing away on E and you get that rush, I can get that rush from just listening to a good dance track when I'm not on it anymore... it ties into your emotions even when you're not on it 'cos I can really rush off a good dance track and just really get that feeling like when you're coming up off an E

**I**n the above descriptions there is an ironic reassurance in the belief that people recover from mental health problems and that they are an expected part of the scene. Hence, the women protect their health by abstaining from ecstasy. There is also a desire to stop for reasons relating to bodily resistance of the drug: abstinence will allow them to fully appreciate the ecstasy experience again. Active construction of use is the action taken after the rest period, giving the feeling that this period has been beneficial. However, depression is risked again, related to the pleasures of use. Thus, ecstasy is used again but in a way that allows for a balance between pleasure and pain.

The descriptions indicate how it can be difficult to stop use, related to dependence upon the sociality that surrounds ecstasy. To end this section, a further consequence of regular ecstasy use and frequenting dance events involves the belief that the mind has internalised these experiences. In this way, mind and body work in union to reconstruct the clubbing experience.

In conclusion, the experiences of regular and heavy ecstasy use demonstrate the progression of psychological problems. The women take action to recover and return to ecstasy but then use it differently. However, the meaning of recovery is somewhat ambiguous: whether it is complete where ecstasy can be consumed again, or semi-complete where legal drugs stabilise the problem. The women are knowledgeable about the dangers of ecstasy use, the possible basis (serotonin depletion) and the length of time needed for the drug to leave the body, which implies they have been educated, possibly by their own means, or inadvertently through the wide-spread reportage on the dangers of this recreation presented by the media.



Following discussion of heavy ecstasy use comes risk within the life-world. Descriptions of risk begin with the first ecstasy experience as this may be perceived as a gamble to one's healthy existence. But there is overall agreement that dangers from ecstasy use are not considered when the women are engrossed in the culture. Potential dangers to health and mortality come from mixing drugs (including high doses of ecstasy). The chapter ends with ecstasy experiences that have been unpleasant for the women, demonstrating the uncertain nature of drug use. On a positive note, risk of male harassment and machismo is avoided by choosing this context for leisure (as opposed to alcohol-based ones, when one considers the life-world descriptions).

### *Chancing the first ecstasy*

**Ann:** I was a bit nervous about taking it because I'm epileptic and they say don't take it, so that was a bit of a worry

**Lou:** we'd never done a tablet before, absolutely bricking it, proper shitting it like going 'are we going to do one or what?'... the whole two hours of the car journey consisted of me and Teri going 'shall we?' 'yeah come on fuck it, everybody else can why can't we?' 'no, no, no, it's too dangerous' because we're allergic to everything so it was like 'fucking hell, we're bound to cork it [die] aren't we?' [laughs]

**Teri:** and we were both dying to have one thinking 'ohh' but scared, you know how you hear all these people, because we're both really allergic to stuff so we were shitting ourselves, like die there and then because both of us have allergies to all sorts so I thought we're bound to have an allergy to E, you can have one and die

**Lou:** in end we compromised and thought 'if we have a quarter we'll be all right'

**Ann:** we had our E and everybody went through a dodgy 'oh my God' and I was being Mrs Counsellor saying 'you'll be all right, you've took something and we don't know what it is, it's going to have some sort of effect on your body, we don't know but at least we're together'... and

each one started feeling dodgy... not sort of understanding what to expect, we'd all had acid [before] we knew what happened with that but this was something that, it's dangerous, you're taking something that you've got no idea what effect it's going to have on your body but you do it anyway

**Vicki:** I'm pretty sensitive, I'm pretty easily affected with drugs... I feel if anything was going to happen dodgy it would happen to me sort of thing 'cos like one can [alcohol] and I'm drunk, I'm just sort of susceptible to getting the full effect of drugs

**I**nitial concerns of health and existence are abandoned by the women and ecstasy is taken for the first time. The influence of everyone else using implies a perceived general safety. Indeed, as all the women escaped unscathed, it dismissed any prior concerns and influenced further use.

*You need to take a step back to note the dangers*

**Millie:** I try not to think about it... I just don't think about it... you wouldn't fucking do anything would you if you thought [about the risks involved]

**Ann:** clubbing keeps you going it's when you stop, that's when problems are 'cos if you're clubbing all time you can cope with it and you can handle it better... but if you pull from that, long-term you do start to see problems like with me and Stu only going once a month we've seen a lot

**Kate:** when I've been doing ecstasy for a long, long time and then I started to calm down and have come-downs and stuff I went through a big period, and a lot of my friends did, of really, really fucking worrying about the long-term effects of what we've done to ourselves

**Ann:** I think panicky time was when we were all coming up and Lisa collapsed, because you don't think it's going to happen to any of your friends, or you think it might happen to yourself but you just don't see it in your group. She was out cold and bouncers had to drag her outside for

some fresh air and it all got a bit 'this is reality of taking ecstasy'

**Carol:** it's not until you've been hammering them that you sit back and realise risk you've been taking or if you have a bit of a bad do at a club and you mong out and your eyes are rolling back and stuff like that, or if something dodgy happens to you personally or to a close friend I reckon that makes you think about your health but while you're doing it, do you fuck

**Kate:** there's been times when I have really worried about the long-term effects, especially when there's a documentary on the telly saying 'look at how many brain cells you've wiped out'. But when you get back into it and excited by it again all that goes, you know, the fear, it's only when you're calming down and getting bored a bit maybe that you start to worry about the health effects again. But you do worry sometimes

**Sam:** and on radio comes that fucking advert where it's experiments that have been tested on guinea pigs everyday, and then like it sounds like, you think it's an anti-vivisection thing, and it's on about E being tested on us everyday 'cos they still don't know effects of it and you think 'fucking hell', you know what I mean 'am I going to end up like a dribbley old lady [laughs] in some kind of institute, fucking rocking away and throwing stuff at staff'

**Kate:** we don't know the long-term effects and it's like this whole generation of people that have done so many, this much ecstasy and we're just like a big fucking experiment and we're the guinea pigs. Yeah I think there might be like in thirty years time, if ecstasy has some sort of bad side-effect like it makes you go senile quicker or, you know have an effect that doesn't come out for years later, there might be a massive health crisis in this country where everybody fucks up because everybody's done it 'cos nobody knows

**Lou:** only thing is your periods, I don't know what happens to them but something definitely affects them... It could make you infertile, it could

*After using  
ecstasy  
heavily.*

do anything to you, but because you don't know you're taking that risk aren't you, which is such a massive risk when you talk about it like this and think about it, and buzz I'm getting isn't worth that risk anymore, it was at first... your high has got to be worth the risk you're taking

**Kate:** some people really lose it, sort of become mentally ill and stuff. I suppose when you describe it like this it sounds really bad but it's just part of the scene

**Vicki:** you just take a risk and that's part of it, part of the fun

**Lou:** like I say you never know what's going on physically inside... we're taking tablets, risking our lives every time we do it and that doesn't seem to matter

**Carol:** I'd had a couple of tablets night before and I went out in afternoon, I'd had about four hours kip, just had one half of lager and a bit of a doob [joint] and fainted in the pub. Very embarrassing, felt a right cunt and that's made me realise that I must be hammering my body, one minute fine, next minute gone-y and that's got to be something to do with doing tablets every weekend

**Vicki:** we used to have some right sessions, just scares me now to think how much drugs I used to do

**Lou:** it's nice to have a tablet during the day [laughs], nice chill but is it right finding a chill when you could be risking proper all sorts, proper risking loads

**Ann:** life skills, you've got to live life, you've got to take risks and if you've took risks and come out a different person then that was a good thing to do

**Lou:** as long as you can handle it, you've got to be strong... very mentally strong and stable... I was going to say that I think you have to be quite a strong person to do it but I don't think you do, I don't know whether you

*To use ecstasy heavily and often.*

do or not

**Vicki:** it is a bit stupid sometimes if I think about my mum, I think if something happened she'd be totally heartbroken and mum knows I take 'em but she doesn't like it, doesn't really want to hear me talk about it

**Lou:** when I hit that certain low that made me think I'd got to stop for my career's sake, for my mum and dad's sake because they knew my attitude was changing, not being in, my life-style was changing, they asked about if I took E and that's bloody scary, you don't want that at all

**T**he women describe how they tend not to consider the risks associated with ecstasy use, which may be likened to not thinking about those of everyday as to do so would create obstacles to living normally (though the outside view may be that illegal drug use is more risky than everyday actions). There is an almost nonchalant attitude to risk and, ironically, talking about health risks is described as giving the impression that it is worse than it actually is. During contemplation time, the cost of relaxation is weighed up against the cost to well-being and perspectives on use take a U-turn. Here, health advertisements work in a negative fashion: to worry the women about future health because if they have used heavily then they can do nothing but wait for the outcome.

*It gets expensive (and it is illegal!)*

**Lou:** before taking tablets I'll have this known, I was a woman who knew what to do with her money and I was organised enough, not mega-organised, but proper organised enough and then all of a sudden I've got like, must have ran up about a grand and a half debt in such a short space of time, and that's with not, you don't care, things aren't important anymore, all that was important at first was being with my friends

*The sociality surrounding ecstasy use.*

**Vicki:** just scares me now to think... how much money I used to spend, 'cos I went from necking a bottle of cider at the weekend, spending two pound fifty on a night out to like spending ninety quid or something, all these clothes and shit that goes along with it

*Designer clothes can be part of the culture.*

**Sam:** got in debt, didn't have money to pay nothing 'cos I was coming home at weekends just to go out on Saturday night with everybody

**Lou:** law and it's illegal, 'what is it heck, it's not illegal doing that' you don't even think that at all

**Carol:** we take a lot of risks, legal risks as well as our health ones

**Sam:** I've been lucky I've never had anything with coppers except one time I think I made friends with fucking drug squad in [town club] and I thought she was all right [laughs]. She's going 'can you get me some Es' and I'm going 'I'll have a go, wait there and I'll be back' and like luckily nobody had got any 'cos I'd have grassed everybody up

**Teri:** when you think it's illegal [laughs] and we're all doing it

**F**rom the above descriptions, the sociality of ecstasy use gains prominence once more. There is risk described in relation to the status of ecstasy. It is a Class A drug, therefore risk of arrest and prosecution for possession are very much a reality though tend to be 'brushed aside', reflecting normalisation within the life-world.

*Stacks of ecstasy, sometimes with other drugs*

**Teri:** I think I've had it twice in past month, two weekends, two mad weekends, Lou's birthday when I had about two and a half then and then a Sunday afternoon, I think I had about two and a half then as well, after only saying I was going to have one [laughs]

*Speaking of ecstasy.*

**Carol:** since last November I've had at least one a weekend, but since March we've been having, I've had loads

**Lou:** it's every weekend, it's not just one tablet a weekend or one night a weekend, it was Friday, Saturday and Sunday days

**Vicki:** I've taken three before and snorted them on come-downs

*Three tablets in one session.*

**Lou:** if I give you an example of last week, I took half on Wednesday, got



drunk as a lord on Friday, Saturday had about two and a half, Sunday maybe worked out one and three-quarters or something like that

**Ann:** we tend to go once a month to clubs, have one or two ecstasy tablets, bit of acid and some speed, oh and a bit of a smoke [hashish] when we get back

*Introduction  
to mixing.*

**Sam:** we'd go out Thursday 'cos sometimes there was a Thursday night [event] somewhere, have some speed and like have some Friday night, a wrap or two, and you'd like go to club and have like an eighth of billy and an E and you'd be smoking hash all day Sunday, come-down Monday

**Kate:** I've got really back into drinking loads and sort of taking E and drinking which I never used to do, and that's really nice

**Vicki:** we've all totally been so hard-core, we'd start on a Friday night and be fucked 'til like Monday, 'cos we'd just go out, neck your drugs, be up, these clubs are open 'til six then go on a come-down session, start drinking whisky all day, smoking weed all through next night

**Kate:** if I'm feeling really jittery and I need to calm down, just beer, not spirits because they make you up, I mean it's spirits before you go out and beer when you're coming down

**Vicki:** I'd go like I'll take a wrap of speed just to perk me up and you'd be drinking, really bad for your liver and at one point I was taking like two pills, three wraps of speed but I mean I've probably done that every weekend for a while but that was only maybe for like four [months]

**Kate:** at a party weekend it would be probably, last weekend, each night we did an E each and half a wrap of speed between the two of us, on the Saturday and Sunday. I don't know how much was in the wrap [laughs]... and a lot of alcohol. Just beer. Oh and Saturday was vodka, lots of vodka

**Lou:** drinking more or less [laughs] every night, that's terrible isn't it, I never realised. Speed recently it's been regular, every weekend for about

last four and then it's like every other for last couple of months but before that, just didn't bother with whizz for ages, when we were having right nice times on tablets we didn't need whizz

**Vicki:** some pills needed speed

**Sam:** first time I ever got off my face I went to [town club] and I'd had a gram and a half of speed and then Chris give me this acid tab and then I said it wasn't working so like Smithy gave me another one and I thought 'well, it's still not working'... then Smithy fetched me a Rhubarb and Custard [ecstasy] and he told me 'take half of that' 'cos it was capsules and so I necked it and as soon as I'd necked it he goes 'no, it was a full one', it was my first E like and I was like 'oh right'

**Ann:** with going to club, having a couple of Es then going back and having coke maybe it's a different effect 'cos you're that wrecked anyway, so it must have had something to do with that... we'd had some speed as well and a lot of smoke [hash] so I think it was too heavy a cocktail

*On the disappointing experience of cocaine.*

**Millie:** getting stoned more often even though we used to smoke before

**Carol:** having a drink and paff [hash] on a come-down is right nice, you realise that it's suitable and it makes you feel right good, relaxed and sometimes it kicks your tablet back in, makes you in tingle all over which is nice, a bonus [laughs]

*On visiting the pub on a come-down.*

**Kate:** it's like maybe you take your E and speed and dance all night and then you get really, really messy in the mornings and just drink loads to come-down or the other way around, you just drink loads before you go out, and then sometimes you're taking loads of drugs and drinking masses at the same time as well

**Sam:** I was necking these pain-killers 'cos I knew they made me go to sleep

*During the come-down.*

**Millie:** temazes [temazepam], they're ace for making you go to sleep

**A**n implicit potential danger to health comes from the amount of ecstasy consumed and what other drugs it is taken with. The poor quality of ecstasy, or bodily resistance, can mean it is taken simultaneously with amphetamine. Soft and/or legal drugs tend to be used during the come-down from ecstasy, and are described as easing the experience. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is implication that the danger from mixing drugs is not perceived as importantly as that of ecstasy alone: consideration of risk is primarily in relation to ecstasy. This section certainly shows the idiosyncrasy between the women in their choice and use of drugs.

*Once, I felt so ill*

**Kate:** I was completely stood still and there was, I wasn't just sweating, sweat was pouring down my back and I was completely soaked and I've never felt so ill in all my life then I got really anxious. So I went to sit in the corner, this is really sad [laughs], I went and sat in this corner and I thought 'fucking hell I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I've taken this dodgy tablet and I don't know what's in it' and I did genuinely believe that I was going to die so I just thought 'well I'll just sit here and wait for it to happen' [laughs]. I didn't go and find my mates or anything like that and I thought 'okay, that's it then, sort of fucked up' and I sat there for about an hour and my eyes were fucking rolling back in my head, I felt so ill that all I could think was I was going to die, it was horrible

*After taking  
an ecstasy  
tablet bought  
from a  
stranger.*

**Carol:** I got right hot, all my body started buckling on me and I knew I just needed some fresh air, that's all it is, you need a bit of fresh air and some water, that was a bit scary because I was going to door and you know how everything starts to go black and white and patchy when you're going to pass out, and that was happening so I didn't know if I was heading right way or anything, but I was all right when I got outside

*In the dance  
club.*

**Kate:** it wasn't like feeling a bit sick where you know you just go outside, get some fresh air and you're okay or you go into the toilet and drink some water, it wasn't like getting too much of a rush, it was a real, just

fucking totally wiped out and the sweating was really worrying me 'cos you hear of all these people dying from overheating and stuff... I felt really calm which is probably the E 'cos it does calm you, I just thought 'well this is it then, which is a shame, I don't want to die now' but in between being fucking violently ill that's how I felt, I did feel really calm... I managed to go to the toilets once and I was sliding down the wall and stuff. One of the toilets had a window and I was getting some fresh air and when I came out and found this corner I couldn't move after that, I just sat in the corner and I couldn't move my arms, my legs, nothing and like I said my eyes were rolling back in my head so I couldn't see properly or nothing

**Ann:** I spent one night in club just walking and walking and I got onto dance floor and my legs just buckled, and I ended up crouched down at side of dance floor and I couldn't move and I was feeling right 'ooou' but this guy come up, picked me up and carried me into chill-out room and I didn't say a word to him, I was embarrassed but at same time I thought it needed to be done... 'cos I was getting too claustrophobic and I couldn't move and I'd seen people looking and staring at me, not nastily but saying 'oh she's fucked' and I thought 'oh never, I am the one that I usually look at and say oh look at them' but that was me, it had finally happened

**Sam:** it was a PitBull [ecstasy] mixed with smack and ketamine, and I sat in a chair outside [the club] when it was thundering and lightning and I just couldn't, it wasn't that I couldn't move, I just couldn't be bothered 'cos I just felt so fucked up and I needed to go to toilet, it must have started about eleven, twelve o'clock and I didn't go to toilet until it was ready to leave, about half seven, eight o'clock and I just kept turning my head over deckchair and puking to side of me

**T**his final discussion details the occasions when immediately after taking ecstasy an unexpected, adverse experience has occurred (here, exposure to danger is prominent). These unfavourable experiences of ecstasy include a range of physical and mental difficulties: clearly a contrast to the experience when it is

the desired one. They take a long time to go and, thus, the women have to sit out this period of unwell. A further meaning to the unpleasant ecstasy experience within the life-world is related to the strength, or dosage, of ecstasy, where the woman undergoes a forceful bodily reaction. This feeling of unwell can be conquered, and stands in contrast to the above experiences. Nonetheless, ecstasy is used again (taken from the interview texts) which means the women were not deterred by their experiences.

To conclude, the women describe the many risks of being an ecstasy user, however only a few have undergone unpleasant experiences on the drug. Again, as the ecstasy using journey progresses, the excitement from full participation wears off to be replaced by consideration of risk to well-being and future health.

# Chapter 10: Influences Upon the Ecstasy Experience



This discussion focuses upon influences which are described to affect the ecstasy experience. It begins with adulterated ecstasy, followed by setting and other people, and ends with the number of ecstasy tablets taken. Risk is naturally entwined throughout this chapter, as will become evident.

*It depends on what is in it*

**Ann:** You take your E and if it doesn't work you've fucked it in a techno club, you haven't got a chance, everybody's got glaring eyes going 'fu, fu, fu, fu' and if you're on that vibe you're fine because you don't notice how wrecked everybody is, but if you've had a straight pill it's freaky and if techno's playing it's just like 'boom, boom, boom, boom' and that's all you can hear, you can't hear any of three-o-three little 'diddups' 'cos your ears are not trained to it 'cos your E is not working how it usually does, so you've had it and you just end up walking about 'cos you've got some sort of whizz energy in you

*Techno has an heavy, throbbing beat.*

**Carol:** loads of adulterated tablets but I don't know what the fuck it is [in them]

**Sam:** I paid fifteen quid for a worming tablet that didn't make me feel right good [laughs]. I just went outside club and kept honking my guts up

**Millie:** we've been ripped off a few times, just dud ones that haven't worked, well they might not have had E in them. You used to get sorted before you went most of time, well we did 'cos we'd been ripped off

**Kate:** the people I get drugs off, 'cos I never buy drugs off people I don't know, hadn't got any so I did buy one off somebody I didn't know and I took it and I just never felt as ill in my life

*The previously discussed bad experience.*

**Vicki:** I'll totally plug this one, get testing in clubs, it's so needed, you're just getting ripped off all the time, people dying and stuff, you can get dodgy whatever in pills... getting ketamine sold as pills that's another reason why we just totally need testing

**Kate:** there's so many different sorts of ecstasy and you get ones which make you run around like an idiot talking to loads of people then you get ones that make you really insular and you maybe just dance and don't really talk to anybody, you just smile across or, it's just so many different feelings you get off them... sometimes you get ones where you just don't want to dance, you just want to chat your head off to somebody

*Introducing the variety of ecstasy tablets.*

**Vicki:** you'd like drop your purse and walk on and totally do mad things. Like the first experience was sort of along those lines, just really psychedelic... looking at this doorway in this chill-out room and I thought it was a picture, a moving picture on the wall and just like started walking towards this picture, started walking through it [laughs] and went 'vroom' into this new fucking mad atmosphere. It was just bizarre, it's wicked

**Kate:** sometimes you just get a pill that it hits you and you're up there but sometimes you have to dance it up, a lot of times you have to take it and got to work it up definitely

*Helping the high to be reached.*

**Carol:** if it's proper ecstasy you don't because there's no work involved at all, everything just does things for you, trees just look gorgeous

*Regarding pure MDMA.*

**Vicki:** you get really good pills and if you get some of them it's just doing so much more benefit for you than any bad you know. Like that one I had at New Year was pure MDMA and I was just like in a real whirlwind and then sort of came-down and I was pure straight

**Sam:** if there were decent Es I've had a right good time

**Kate:** with MDMA powder not pills it's really difficult to judge it... it's a lot stronger, when you take that it's a lot more wobbly for ages, it's a real messy one 'cos you take that and your legs just feel like jelly and you're wobbling and wobbling around and you're feeling really good but you can't dance for ages but you usually take it with your mates and you're all falling over together and just giggling like mad, but yeah it's a lot different feeling to a pill, it's not as clean, it's more messy

**Vicki:** you get mongy like smackys pills which are really bad, really bad itchy sort of come-down off them, horrible, like imagine insects on you

*Ecstasy  
tainted with  
heroin.*

**Sam:** smackys Es I've never had a good time

**Ann:** we had one at [event last month] but that was really smackys and I was barking my rocks up [vomiting] morning after, pretty bad but I think I was a bit ill before that and that probably just made it worse 'cos Stu was all right and he'd had same, he said he felt rough but I was actually throwing up and I've never ever done that in a morning

**Kate:** there's been ones that I've had where there's been lots of heroin in it 'cos that's one where you just, you're really monged out and you feel really wobbly, you can't really talk to anyone, you just sit but quite often it's all right 'cos you go and find somebody else that's on one like that and just sit with them and you feel comfortable sitting but you know you can't get up and dance

**Sam:** if it was anything like that I had in them Es, there was no way I'd ever want to be like that again... it was really, really horrible. Like you can't move and you just, I don't even think lethargic's word for it. You just feel like your body's in a coma but your head's like, feels like somebody's picked your brain up and splattered it against wall, you just can't think... you just can't get comfy or anything like that

**Millie:** I've had smackys ones but it hasn't affected me same

**Kate:** sometimes if I've had a pill that's got a lot of acid in it I might get a bit paranoid... once you reach that point where you've worked it up and you get on the high and you're off, that sort of goes away really

**E**cstasy is described to be often tainted with other substances, and unfortunately the women rarely know what the added drug is. Clearly there is a danger, a risk to health when impure ecstasy is taken though the women are mostly unaware that what they are buying is not ecstasy. Thus, they can find themselves

victims of the dance drug culture's profit making business. When ecstasy is of good quality it is said to act upon the body with no effort on the part of the woman and can resist the sometimes negative feel of the come-down.

State of mind, environment and other people

**Ann:** it could be things like that, things affecting your mind. Or like we were rushing to get to club and I was thinking 'we're going to be late, we're not going to get in' or like we might not have sorted our drugs out and we're going in empty handed and then I've had a bit of a dodgy night, so it could be tension building up

**Kate:** sometimes just your mood and the night, say the music wasn't particularly my sort of music, it wasn't that good I'd have to work at it a lot more but once I'd got there I'd be up and running sort of thing

**Ann:** I used to think that it was a dodgy E but maybe it's something to do with your chemical balance because we could have all had same E and I've spent all night walking around club and everybody else is on dance floor, that can do your head in 'cos you're thinking 'well we've all had same, but they're having a right time and look at me' and I've thought about what I've ate that day, or if I've drank anything, or was I a bit upset, did I have any emotional hassles

**Carol:** you know there's a possibility of when you come-up on a tablet you're going to get gippy and feel sick, if your tablet is all right and your state of mind is all right that'll pass

**Lou:** I remembered somebody on about it saying at first you don't really realise what a rush, you know how to appreciate your rush 'cos they're a bit scary... all of a sudden I thought 'no, what am I doing, it's a fucking drug, I've took acid and all rest before, why aren't I controlling this too'... and once I'd realised, I was perfectly fine

*Regarding her first ecstasy experience out of the club.*

**Ann:** it's a dreadful feeling that, it's just tenseness. I've found that if I chat to people I come-up a lot better, or sometimes I've been on that

*Working for the high.*

much of a panic with butterflies and I think 'chill. Just look at these people's faces, look at them smiling, look at them dancing, get on it' and I force myself to smile, literally, and to just sort of slowly get into rhythm of things and before I know it I've come-up

**Vicki:** just being aware of chill-out and go with it, especially when we started taking them, you'd take strong ones where you'd get a bit afraid at first and a lot of people have panic attacks and shit happens to them which is quite serious. You know they need the right people around them as well to teach them how to use it, just like [say] 'chill-out'. Sometimes you can't really relax while you're having a dance, you have to go sit down and go [takes deep breath in and out] and get your head around that

**Millie:** a few paranoias but nothing major, somebody's always managed to get me out of it

**Lou:** once you realise that you have to sort your own mind out and just go 'right, come on, come on, come on, come on, it's all right, do it do, give me your best shot' and then you're sorted

**Teri:** everybody kept asking me 'you all right, can you feel anything off it' it really pissed me off 'stop asking me, leave me alone' and I got in a right bad mood and I was dancing 'cos Lou said 'come on let's go and dance it'll bring you up' and she was like coaching me along [laughs] then she said 'all of a sudden you get this big smile on your face' and before I knew it I was like [smiles widely] smiling away dancing [laughs]

*An early  
ecstasy  
experience.*

**Sam:** for your E to work you used to have to be on go anyway, you know dancing, you had to move so like if you sat down and it come-up you just couldn't be bothered to move

**Millie:** well, I thought so yeah. I used to mong out loads in corner me

**Kate:** I've mostly ever done it in nice circumstances but... I remember there was one club where we went to and the bouncers were really, really



heavy and they were like following me around if I was going to the toilet, followed me into the toilet and shit like that and I didn't have a good time at that club... they thought I was going to fix [take heroin] which I wasn't

**Lou:** when we went to [Sheffield club] once, that was a wank night for me, no it wasn't a wank night at all but it was, you know like at Daft Punk, got lost in it all, well that night my ex was... being a pillock, and I wasn't taking it off him, I thought 'fuck you I've had enough' and I just thought that I really have to get off my face to enjoy, and leave him... and I did get lost in music, lost my head though, not a nice kind of lifted above it all, I can remember being right at front banging, proper mad dancing, and like falling over because I was so, and not being able to breath but not being able to stop myself dancing to breath properly, I couldn't calm down or chill-out because I was so worked up and het-up with him being like that, I just needed to get off my head as much as I could and that was some experience, that was a bit bizarre

**Kate:** and another thing, it's all come back to me now [laughs] I remember going to a club and this girl really laid into me, I was really, really off my tits, really friendly and fluffy and stuff, and this girl really laid into me in the toilets and after that I was really jittery and I couldn't, even though I was really, really off my face I couldn't relax again and have a good time 'cos she'd spoilt the night really so, yeah your setting can spoil it totally

**Millie:** I like E but in right place, I couldn't like do it like in pub or something. Well yeah it's all right but I'd rather be in a club, you know proper going for it, you couldn't in [local pub] could you, and there's loads of young fucking kids and that whereas like at club there's loads of young dick-heads but you can avoid them like plague because it's that big and you can dance and let yourself go whereas you can't anywhere else

*Introducing  
ecstasy use  
out of the  
club.*

**Sam:** I did it once and I didn't like it, in middle of day in Mark's house watching a fucking film... it just wasn't same feeling... I don't like it not



in a club, can't stand it, it was horrible, boring, just like laid there and you get so far through them and you think 'God I wish I'd start coming down now' 'cos you just feel like 'ugh' right monged out and that and you just can't be bothered to move, you're yawning

**Carol:** outside you've got all your nature that was enhancing you, people talking to you and loads of touching and stuff like that, just walking around because your legs were bouncy but in a club it's music and everything around you just gives you a right nice buzz, other things buzz you, all people and music and music sounds ace [laughs]

**Lou:** we didn't go and do them at a club, you'd do them at a club and you get lifted with music and it's a different kind of high to what we had which was all very close group of friends, we did them for each other with each other

**Kate:** I mean maybe if I did go to a townie club and take E I wouldn't relax at all because you know, they're just not my sort of people, but the dance scene has got those people which I feel good about

**Carol:** when it was my birthday, I went out with sort of drinking friends and in [pub] I saw Coll and everybody and he just came up and shoved half a tablet in my mouth and left me with them, I made them promise to get me later as soon as possible [laughs] because once I'd had that half of tablet I didn't want to be with drunk people

**Lou:** you don't like any contact with real [straight] people when you've had tablets

**Sam:** I don't think I'd go to a club now 'cos it went downhill at one point

**Millie:** [regular club] did as soon as it started playing techno, it killed it

**Sam:** last two times you went... nobody fucking spoke to anybody, they were all in their own corners

**Millie:** now you get people who are pissed a lot who go and like I think drink makes you more aggressive definitely... that's why I don't like it at pub, it did that atmosphere totally

**S**tate of mind is believed to influence how ecstasy will be experienced, and can be affected by the environment and other people's actions towards the women. There is a need, described in the life-world, for mental state to be at ease when the drug begins to work or unease will continue into the trip.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the women are knowledgeable about how to control the ecstasy experience in order to lessen the chance of an unpleasant trip, be it by personal or social aspects. The former can be classed as intrapersonal guidance and the latter as an interpersonal form (which may work on the power of suggestion). However, an enjoyable experience can turn unpleasant, and remain so when the source of irritation is escaped from.

*Different doses, differing experiences*

**Teri:** we just had half and we took it a quarter at a time so we didn't really get much off it at all. I don't know if we were getting it from each other but I didn't feel like dancing, I didn't feel like just sitting down, I didn't feel like walking around, I just didn't know what I wanted to do... I don't know if it was just that one that we'd had that was a bit strange because everybody else said they didn't really come-up loads on them, but we both felt really indecisive, I wasn't happy whatever I was doing

*The first  
ecstasy  
experience.*

**Lou:** we should have had half and then we'd have got a buzz but on a quarter we just, we danced for a bit, then didn't know if we wanted to sit down, stand up, talk, not talk

*Ditto!*

**Carol:** that day we'd had three tablets and two night before and by Saturday night I started hallucinating and I fell to sleep on Coll's settee and John said I was just convulsing like mad, my body was shaking all over and he was shitting himself

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis, I use the term 'trip' synonymously with how it is used when people speak of tripping on LSD. However I do not mean that the ecstasy trip is the same as the LSD one, rather it is a means of describing the ecstasy experience, as it is when used to detail that of LSD.

**Teri:** like you say 'I'll just have one tablet' and then 'oh I'll just have another half because it'll be better' and 'oh I'll have another half because it will be better even more', you always want more and more and more, always want it to be better... [laughs] it doesn't work at all, well it doesn't seem to. After that first one it doesn't really do much at all and you think 'bugger, what did I do that for' but once you've had your first one you just think 'well it's got to I'm having more so it's bound to work, just this once maybe it will'

**Carol:** when you've been taking tablets every weekend for so long you get tolerant, you do have to work at your high and because you've paid six quid for your tablet and you might be taking more than one, things buzz you but they don't buzz you as much as they used to do but you know there's certain things you can do to buzz you, like last week, touching people's head and it makes your scalp tingle

**Lou:** because you're more tolerant of it you're not getting your rushes or you're not feeling your rushes as much

**Carol:** now I've started snorting it and that's a really different feeling to swallowing it

**T**he ecstasy experience is also described to be affected by how much is taken. For example, a high dose of ecstasy means the psychological experience alters (hallucinations) alongside that of the body (convulsions). Considering these descriptions, there is indication that a limit must be found in gaining the desired outcome of the trip.

To conclude, in the life-world external influences (people, environment) act upon the women, affecting state of mind and thus the ecstasy trip. Though nothing is certain in the drug induced state, the women have ways of combating anxieties: either personally, or through others offering guidance. Therefore, aspects of a psychological, social and drug nature influence how ecstasy will be experienced.

The following is a synthesis of the women's life-world and it is here that the relationships between the themes, as described by the women, are elucidated. As such, this chapter forms an holistic discussion based upon the meaning of clubbing to women in the late 1990s and how the body is experienced in that context. As the life-world is perspectival, many meanings are given in this synthesis and, when relevant for illumination, there is also inclusion of findings from other researchers. Comparison of the clubbing recreation to that of alcohol-based clubs is retained, and highlights the meaning of the women's experiences.

### **The Body**

Dancing in the club and free party contexts is a central pleasure of this recreation and thus forms a main appeal. The experience of ecstasy absorbed by the body is important, as it unites with the music in the dance. The spatiality of the environment (lighting, music and decor) is also a significant feature, as it encourages the holistic experience by complementing the music, which in turn complements the drug in a unique way.

#### *Inhabiting an ideal space*

The safety of the environment is an absolute primary value in the life-world, and relates to others in that it originates from the perception of a shared attitude where pleasure is central, people are accepting and the feeling of belonging is strong. The women let themselves go when dancing, thus safety is crucial: dancing is taken for what it is, which is not a sexual invite. This is contrasted to the traditional club, where women can experience a feeling of unease, related to the frequent assumption of sexual pick-up (they may get approached by men at the dance event though the manner is not disrespectful). Safety is implicitly related to the influence of ecstasy upon the body and a feeling of sameness, where fun and relaxation are the priorities. Thus, the women do not feel restricted in their actions in this context, moreover they need not guard themselves from male attention or harassment.

Furthering the primary value is the female relations in this setting, which are described as pleasant, but potentially spiteful and hostile in the alcohol club. Again, this is related to the attract a partner ethos which places a feeling of competition in the air. Thus, a woman experiences a lack of threat at the dance event as the female communion is relaxed. As relations are amicable within and between the sexes, there is

little hostility (potential aggression is associated, in the life-world, with alcohol). Social relations at the dance event, therefore, do not reflect those of traditional clubs nor those of daily life, and they are a reason the women subscribe to this recreation. Thus, it is a different social world to everyday life, of which the women return to after the weekend. Furthermore, the experience of the event is described with an almost utopian feel.

*Dancing in oblivion, sharing the energy*

The 'utopian' experience is perhaps exemplified when dance is described. Taking the individualistic side to dancing, the women speak of losing themselves in the music. Mind and body are one, and a trance like state is induced, aided by the holistic high, music, and lighting working to intensify the experience of ecstasy (akin to Shamanic trance). These new sensations leave the dancer with the feeling that she has been enlightened, where enlightenment means freedom from worries: a state of 'no mind' with an outcome of relaxation. The dance is thus described as an alternative form of meditation, and as a suitable means to do so in current society (there is implication that it is a risky form of relaxation, however one that is worth the risk). The feeling of inner tranquillity during the dance is expressed by the body moving with the music, which the DJ controls, and which in turn controls bodily movement. Yet the dancer is, paradoxically, not out of control, which is illustrated when the women describe connecting with fellow dancers on the dance floor. This leads onto the social side of dancing: the women experience individual oblivion but still have awareness of surrounding others.

Group consciousness involves a shared level of feeling again controlled by the music and expressed bodily (which forms meditation in an holistic sense). Fellow clubbers respond to the non-verbal actions expressed by others whilst dancing and thus it forms communication, which acts as an encouragement to keep sharing the ecstatic union of the drug and the music. Intersubjectivity exists as group celebration is formed, where a build up in melody has an experienced sameness in feeling. In the life-world, the communal understanding of fellow feeling is also expressed through the attitude of others during non-dance time, verbally by sharing pleasant comments and non-verbally through expressions of pleasure. This attitude forms an atmosphere where pleasure is central and the spirits of fellow clubbers are raised. Thus, a form of energy radiates which helps the clubber retain her high. Once more, ecstasy has a complementary



action upon the environment, which in turn complements the ecstasy experience. Both sender and receiver gain pleasure from these actions, demonstrating the intersubjective desire to have fun. Thus, non-verbal communication at the dance event is given as a primary method of elevating and maintaining the ecstasy high.

The experience of dance as discussed is an actuality in the women's life-world, though Pini (1997) in her research on the early British rave scene, almost ten years prior to this research, found similarities. She discovered an 'intertextuality' with the discourses of New Age philosophy in how women experience the rave: during the dance they feel as though the music takes over bodily movement, that mind and body are perceived holistically, like that of self and others. The latter is important as when dancing, a union with others is experienced, where non-verbal communication has an almost telepathic feel (what I have called connections, Pini refers to as telepathy). All add to taking the body "...onto a different plane of consciousness..." (p.164) which is pivotal to the clubbing experience. As discussed, the life-world descriptions involve the holistic self and others, and the sharing of feeling through non-verbal communication taking the dancers into a higher state, or group consciousness. These similarities are striking considering the dynamic nature of the dance culture. Clearly, the impetus and pleasures have remained.

McRobbie (1994) speaking of girls who frequent dance clubs has identified a 'text of avoidance' in that clubbing involves desertion in its rebuffing of social and political demands: "It is as though young ravers simply cannot bear the burden of the responsibility they are being expected to carry" (p.172). Though she is referring to women in their earlier years, the clubbing world as lived by the women houses a similarity, one of 'time-out'. McRobbie is speaking of requiring an outlet where demands placed upon them can be put to the back of the mind, thus the club experience forms a release from these tensions. Within the life-world, the women speak of the relaxing outcome of the dance, in that it gives a freedom from everyday pressures. Thus, for young and older female clubbers, the pivotal meaning to this leisure pursuit is forceful in similarity.

The women describe planning their weekend leisure to take place in this 'ideal' atmosphere, and there is indication in the life-world that it is an inclusive recreation (as Collin, 1997, suggested in the Introduction chapter). However, it is exclusive, as there are obstacles to frequenting dance events in the women's descriptions. These are found



to take the form of dress-codes, knowing where to go, being prepared to party outside, non-appreciation of the music, pregnancy, an intolerant attitude towards those who use drugs, and the observation that people high on alcohol do not 'fit in'.

### *Dance away the calories*

Another meaning of the drugged lived-body involves dancing for many hours, where calories are burned. Hunger is lessened, thus weight loss is a common side-effect, and though it occurs to different extents, it is not displeasing to any of the women. For some, weight loss has been of a severe nature and perception of the body has a major role. The ease of attaining a slim figure in this way is central: it appeals to one already battling with her eating; alternatively, it acts as a case of accidental learning. In both examples, the thinness of fellow female clubbers is influential.

Within the life-world, having a slimmer satisfies bodily perception. It boosts the women's self-esteem and pleasure is gained from wearing 'nicer' clothes (implying that more appealing clothing is tailored for the thin woman). As discussed in a previous chapter, the dance atmosphere is one of acceptance, thus a contradiction exists as to why women feel better when slimmer. However, this discrepancy is part of everyday life, diffused into the clubbing life-world. There is, nonetheless, appreciation of dance drugs for their ability to reduce body mass. Yet the building of confidence and self-esteem from the ecstasy journey has allowed one woman (who still battles with perception of her body) to neglect harmful ways of controlling weight and adopt more healthy methods.

### *Us and them, but we are all united*

The dance event is described as having a lack of bitter judgement directed toward how people dress. However, a judgement on appearance exists in the life-world, both between and within scenes, and is directed towards the women who dress in the 'babe' style. Again the women's views of the outside world permeate into the life-world, as wearing little clothing is described as being the domain of conventional club females (though club promotion uses these images of women which, as Thornton 1993 stated in the Introduction, creates the image they want). This forms an 'us and them' perspective, and is temporally and spatially related to both night-time recreations, and the emission of a sexual message. Judgement in the life-world revolves around an appearance or

pleasure principle, where attractiveness, for the latter, is created by a release of tension. The 'them' are perceived to be too concerned with appearance to relax and enjoy the clubbing experience. The 'us', therefore, have the 'feel good, look good' ethos whereas the 'them' are believed to follow the 'look good, feel good' perspective.

Once again, a contradiction exists in the life-world, however it is an inconsistency which reflects opinions as to what constitutes attractiveness (an outer versus inner form of beauty), and the judgements exist on a peripheral level. The dance culture has a diversity of participants who, perhaps at a deeper though more unconscious level of understanding, still experience the sameness, and thus still identify together as clubbers. Therefore, the sociable experience and a desire for pleasure may mean that the feeling of all being united in this atmosphere over-rides the more explicit level of judgements: 'babes' are not described as the 'odd ones out' as alcohol people are. Further, the promotion of an amicable atmosphere means that judgements based on appearance are not acted upon ('babes' are part of the elevation of mood, and temporarily 'nothing matters' but the here and now). This unity is contrasted in the life-world to the conventional club atmosphere, where women do feel judged by their appearance by both sexes who act upon these judgements.

The primary value of safety emerges, once again, as a woman is free to express herself sensually when dancing without others perceiving it as an invitation to some form of sexual relationship. This relates to the 'modes of looking' found by Pini (1997), where objectification of others had diminished and oneness and incorporation had emerged. Henderson (1993b) writes that the lack of traditional relations between the sexes in this 'social space' has allowed women confidence in this 'social world' to explore their sensual enjoyment. In the life-world, this is a form of empowerment for the woman, though be it in a sexually ironic manner. It is possible that the other women also explore themselves in a sensual way, though be it implicitly, due to the interrelationship of body and mind during the dance, and the enhancement of mind-body pleasures. The freedom from inhibition may be central here, yet not all who experience this act in a sensual way. The liberation from inhibitions does not, however, mean that a woman has no control over her actions.

A further value of clubbing in the life-world relates to identity. Identity within and between the music scenes is formed by a feeling of sameness related to ecstasy use (there is the belief that one must experience ecstasy to understand its appeal), the

appreciation of dance music (again, experiencing ecstasy and hearing the music elucidates understanding of the connection) and with regard to dress styles. Through the sociality of ecstasy use, the women feel like they really belong to the culture or to a smaller part of it, for example small groups of ecstasy using friends<sup>1</sup> (discussed later). Identity is associated with the previous discussed opting for a 'utopian' environment for the weekend, though it filters to outside the event, to the weekly world. There is a danger from choosing this leisure space, and it is related to a dependence the women feel toward the culture, which is discussed later.

### **A Way of Life which Touches you Forever**

Nearly all the women describe changes in attitude in relation to using ecstasy. These changes are unique when one considers that drug use is part of the women's lives: they have used other drugs but none have had the same influence. This implies that it is more the social context of ecstasy use rather than the drug alone which has had this affect. Due to regular participation in dance events, it appears that the experiences and emotions felt in that context permeate into life when ecstasy is not being used.

#### *New ways of being*

Whilst on ecstasy, barriers of communication are described to break down, which allow the women to experience a new confidence when socialising. This aids social relationships, and is an affect which lasts into life thereafter. A woman may describe changes of the self in the form of her personality being freed, as she no longer feels tense when interacting socially. Also, a calmer attitude to life is experienced, which is associated with the relaxation experienced at the dance event, and in particular that of dance and the release of tension. Concerns of life are sedated, and life is lived to be enjoyed. Thus, in the world as lived by the women, they feel that they have acquired an attitude from which life is approached for all it has to offer, and to worry unduly is unnecessary.

Further, there is enhancement of self-awareness experienced during the ecstasy journey. A change in lifestyle instigated a change in perspective (associated with the initial excitement of ecstasy use), and acted as a release from a rut the women did not know they were in. Consistent with the life-world is the finding by McDermott

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<sup>1</sup> The sociality of the culture can also be seen in the interview texts when the women speak of a collective 'we'.

(1993:218) who, after spending a considerable amount of time with a group of ecstasy users, stated that ecstasy use "...allowed the user to step back and re-evaluate his or her life and priorities". In the life-world, there is a feeling of enlightenment as positive thought and action, due to reasoning and retrospection, mean that faith in oneself is restored. The relaxed and confident self allows a re-evaluation of life and, as the outcome was pleasing and unexpected, it may be why the ecstasy journey is interpreted as spiritual. Thus, control over life and destiny is taken where problems are recognised as resolvable. It seems that ecstasy acted as a catharsis, allowing repressed emotions which had lowered self-esteem to emerge and be dealt with. These life transitions are perceived as changes for the better. Similarly, Gibson (1996) wrote that the ecstasy experience was one of a "...redefinition or rearrangement of the values of the self and of the society..." (p.199). There are descriptions in the life-world of altered perceptions of societal values, through the sense of belonging and community experienced, in regard to the fore discussed taking pleasure from life. Thus, the sociable experience of ecstasy gives a clearer understanding of the self and of what society means to the women.

In a study in Sydney Australia, Solowij et al (1992:1164) found that through using ecstasy, the participants expressed the view that insight had been gained which "...enriched their psychological growth...". This is consistent with the above life-world descriptions where a feeling of enlightenment was experienced as a result of using ecstasy regularly and heavily: the enlightened feel entails the changes in attitude. Thus, psychological growth was enriched as new ways of thinking (or being) were developed. The women also give examples of similar changes happening to others. One example involves the replacement of an antagonistic view on life to a calmer approach, whereas another entails a reconsideration of life, priorities and destiny for a mature mother, experienced as a release from habitually installed constraints upon thought and action. In the life-world, the women's changes are on a personal level but reflect upon the social worlds they inhabit, as the emphasis appears to be one of humanitarianism as well as pleasure.

The influence of these alterations can also be seen by boundaries relating to gender dispersing when on ecstasy, and extending to when not on the drug. Hence, differences between genders diminish and a sameness is experienced, which is related to the equality of the relations between the sexes at dance events. The women have had

the opportunity to gain a closeness with men, without sexual obstructions: by implication, men have 'opened up' and embarked on this new way of being.

### *Self-enlightenment*

A further meaning to the experience of enlightenment in the life-world involves the belief that using ecstasy can expand the mind. Though pleasure is the main reason for ecstasy use, mind expansion is a pleasing consequence. In one instance, intellect is perceived to increase and relates, again, to the meditative state reached at the dance event. This experience is believed to allow discussions out of that context to be on a deeper level than those in general. Thus, personal education takes place away from the event, though related to the temporality and spatiality of it, and acts as a justification for possible damage from ecstasy to the brain. However, the relaxed state of mind diminishes through heavy use and learning in this way ceases. In another instance, the mind is believed to be expanded through experiencing more of life in different ways. This forms part of the pleasure principle, which seems to be the ruling force of clubbing, where happiness is actively discovered by oneself. However, this form of enlightenment is, again, temporary, but ecstasy experiences have acted as a catalyst to the awareness that fun is there to be had, and that everyday concerns can be escaped from.

Thus, an experienced increase in intellect, plus deeper understanding of the self and others, form self-discovery. Watson and Beck (1991), researching ecstasy use in America, noted a difference in the perceptions of ecstasy experiences based on why people used: self-development and enlightenment, or social and recreational aims. Those with a spiritual interest (New Age beliefs) believed that the awareness and additional benefits gained could stretch into, and therefore be used, in general life. Also, that when they stopped or reduced use it was because "...they had learned all that the MDMA experience could teach them and had integrated it into their everyday lives" (p.268). They concluded that recreational users felt that long-term benefits were small, whereas spiritual followers believed in a long lasting influence. This perspective stands in contrast to that given in the life-world in one major sense, that of recreational users not perceiving the benefits of ecstasy use to be enduring. The women believe that the enlightening aspect of ecstasy use, where changes in the self extend into everyday life, are long-standing. Thus, despite the women's social and pleasure reasons for use, the

spiritual aspect emerged as a consequence and has the same feel as it has for the 'New Age seekers' in Watson and Beck's study (by implication, a set purpose for ecstasy use is not required in order to attain the (un)expected benefits).

Psychoactive drugs are used by many to experience spirituality, to gain insights which are advantageous to life (Saunders et al, 2000). The above discussion of the life-world suggests that everyone would benefit if they attained a positive self in this manner, however there is a way of achieving this. Saunders et al (2000) recommend that the seeker prepares herself and the environment prior to the experience, and when it has ended, she must integrate what has happened. However, we must consider the consequences if this method is not applied, especially as the environment for ecstasy use tends to be one of fun. As we have seen from the life-world, and soon to be discussed, control over ecstasy use can be reduced, and mental health problems are an actuality. Thus, a price is paid for the benefits of self-discovery: ecstasy can act as a medicine during certain stages of use, though it can too be a poison.

#### *It is not wrong to use drugs*

The women speak of the acceptance of drug use, especially regarding ecstasy, within their social group though also within the wider community. This acceptability is likened in the life-world to that of alcohol use in general society. Indeed, there are many similarities between these main leisure contexts: a time and space to experience music, dance, to socialise, and dress smart. Due to the latter (and ecstasy's allowance to retain command over thought and action), the dance culture is believed to have changed perceptions on drug use, as it emits the message of pleasure without loss of self-control. The women are aware of the increase in drug use by young people, and express concern of the outside representation of it being the norm. One can question if this is an irony in the life-world, a double-standard where young people should be protected from drugs, or the benefit of experience given this normalisation (related to youthful risk taking and eagerness to experiment).

As discussed earlier, one of the values in the clubbing life-world is identity. Since ecstasy use takes place on a large scale, it acts as a justification for personal normalisation whilst defining identity into the dance culture. There are unconsidered consequences however, as habitual use of ecstasy means that everyday activities are carried out whilst on the drug. When concern is expressed about exposure of the self as



an ecstasy user, it is implicitly related to the outside view of drug use as deviant (of which the women are aware of though do not view their actions in deviant terms), and may be the backlash from the early moral panic surrounding ecstasy. Delving deeper into the life-world reveals that, in some cases, two presentations of the self are in action. Given the wider conceptions of illegal drug use per se, this is a form of self-protection, in that the women are aware of negative attitudes and potential stereotyping. Clearly, the normalisation of ecstasy demonstrates the strength of the appeal of the drug, or that of the culture, which it is a major part of and cannot be separated.

### **Using Ecstasy Heavily and Regularly**

As ecstasy use becomes habitual, then barriers to when it is used and in what quantity may be dropped. In the life-world, when the women have 'discovered' the scene, participation becomes frequent, and the use of ecstasy regular. Indeed, being-in-the-world revolves around forthcoming ecstasy associated events, which may indicate a psychological dependency. By implication, a danger of this dependence relates to losing interest in other life projects because they are pushed aside to promote the ecstasy social world. A further danger is that ecstasy starts to be used in higher doses, use becomes abuse (with the exception of a contrasting experience where dependency upon ecstasy to have fun was purposively avoided).

Interestingly, Measham (1995) writes that despite an equality between the sexes regarding drug use, women "...consume drugs less frequently and in smaller quantities per session... [because] physical health and appearance, appear to be relevant. The stigma women feel regarding loss of self control in relation to excessive drunkenness is mirrored in illicit drug use" (pp.10-11). In contrast, it is demonstrated in the life-world that the women do use ecstasy often, and in large quantities. Moreover, they do not consider how they look to others when 'off their heads' as a deterrent (as is more evidently seen when the women describe unpleasant ecstasy experiences). Nor is health an obstacle to using excessively, with the exception of the latter part of the ecstasy journey when health problems have been experienced, as below. In fairness, the usual ecstasy experience is one of self-control, so Measham's findings may refer more to other drugs. Nonetheless when control is lost on ecstasy, the experience can still be pleasurable. Henderson (1993d:67) also found that women "...generally take a more cautious approach [to ecstasy] than young men". Again, this is a contrast to the

descriptions given in the life-world as the women's approach was not cautious (with exception of the one who constructed use, though she still consumed what can be considered high doses in one session). Through researching the representation of femininity in girls and women's magazines, McRobbie (1997) noted a change in attitudes toward leisure "Girls seem to have thrown off the old notions of ladylike behaviour and talk frankly about wanting to 'get out of it'... on drink or drugs" (p.196). I feel that McRobbie's view corresponds accurately to the experiences of ecstasy use described in the life-world.

### *Just not feeling yourself*

Initially, a come-down from ecstasy use may not be experienced, which, on an implicit level, influences further use. However, when ecstasy is used regularly, the come-down progressively worsens and there is description of the after-effects lasting for the whole week.<sup>2</sup> This can mean that the low of the come-down becomes a continual depressive state. In one meaning to depression, the woman is left feeling emotionally barren, though in another she feels as though her personality has been taken away (a lack of experiencing emotions may mean the same as losing personality as emotions are intrinsic to the self). These experiences of depression are related in the life-world to the neurotransmitter serotonin being depleted: a belief most likely based on the findings of psychobiology which is wide-spread in its reportage that ecstasy reduces serotonin levels. Outside knowledge is present once again in the life-world, as the women are educated about ecstasy. Also the view is expressed that females may be affected differently to males by ecstasy abuse, due to hormones and the complexity of the menstrual cycle, influencing the mood disorders.<sup>3</sup>

A further meaning to the outcome of heavy use is paranoia, which is not limited to the temporality of the come-down, in its literal sense. Winick (1992) writes that

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<sup>2</sup> The come-down (when the experience of ecstasy begins to wear off) refers to the day after ecstasy has been used though also to its stretch into mid-week where a change in emotionality is experienced (commonly known as the 'Wednesday Blues'). It also refers to, as discussed, a week long experience as a result of using ecstasy heavily. In a literal sense, it can mean the time when the user has stopped abusing ecstasy and thus is coming-down (coming-off) the drug all together. Thus, in the life-world the come-down means the same in any given meaning though it differs with regard to temporality.

<sup>3</sup> Consistent with the descriptions where women feel as though they suffer from ecstasy abuse more than their male counterparts is the findings of the Release (1997) survey. They found that women undergo more positive experiences on ecstasy but experience more problems (for example depression), and offer two suggestions for this: firstly, that women are more literate than men and took more time completing that section of the survey; secondly, that women take the same dose as men despite their smaller body weight. However, they do not mention female hormones as an influence as the women do in their life-world.

many of the negative results from using drugs can be related to pre-existing difficulties of the user. Within the life-world, there is the belief that ecstasy triggered a reaction to problems which were already there, such as anxieties of the self. Thus paranoid thoughts were exacerbated through the abuse of ecstasy.

A disturbance in short-term memory is experienced, where problems with retaining and retrieving information manifest. The come-down experience extends its temporality, and there is little time for respite when ecstasy is used regularly. A change in memory is most explicitly experienced in an inability to retain attention when conversing (rather, forgetting that a conversation was being held) and may be why the women describe a general feeling of dumbness. There is also an experienced loss of interest in daily activities and a feeling of lethargy which can be detrimental to personal and social life in the sense of vocation and intimate relationships. Thus, the negative side of ecstasy use begins to take over from the positive, where the social 'pull' of the ecstasy experience is outweighed by the problems associated with abuse upon the body (a complete turn-around in perspective occurs). This actuality is consistent with the report by Solowij et al (1992:1170) that "There seems to be a point at which the unpleasant side effects increase to the extent where they outweigh the pleasurable effects initially sought...".

### *Hitting the bottom, bouncing back*

As a result of the health problems just discussed, the women embark on a period of abstinence, or recognise this as the action they should take. The view is expressed that problems must be personally acknowledged in order for them to be dealt with. In the life-world, the women are reassured by their belief that if they act, they will recover from the problems of ecstasy abuse (a belief based on personal experience and the observation of others). Thus, they state that ecstasy users find their own limit to how much ecstasy their body can handle and, fortunately for the women, they do not feel that the outcome has been too detrimental to life and health.

As ecstasy is used weekly, and the come-down lasts all week, the body has no time to literally 'come-down' from the drug. A further reason to abstain for a while is related to detoxifying the body so that on future occasions ecstasy will be appreciated. However, the wish to abstain can be hindered by reasons related to the sociality surrounding ecstasy use. Perhaps a delve into ecstasy use out of the dance event context

where conviviality comes to the fore will elucidate (recall that though the dance event is highly social, it is more individual than group experiences out of this context). When ecstasy is used in this way, the togetherness from shared experiences mean that interpersonal bonding occurs rapidly, so initially being with this group means that nothing else is of concern. Again, this may indicate psychological dependence upon the context of use, where one is blinded to other life issues. Attachments formed are close and personal, but are not perceived to be temporally and spatially dependent on the drug.

The group created out of the context of the dance event is like a smaller part of the ecstasy culture as a whole. Implicitly, it may have developed due to a need to belong. McDermott (1993:220) has written that the rise of the dance culture occurred because "...the eighties was a period of closure... it could well be that the Ecstasy experience gave some insight into the possibility of a form of community that no longer exists". Collin (1997) furthers the explanation to the Thatcher years of individualism. Hence, its popularity formed through a feeling of belonging to the dance culture (which had contrasting values to the governing society). Though a decade has passed since the emergence of the culture, the feeling of belonging from ecstasy related events is a major appeal in the life-world. The political climate has changed, but social issues may remain in that people still need to feel as though they are part of a community (where pleasure is utmost and individuality is dispersed).

Thus, rationality and reality can be in opposing positions when there is a desire to rest from using ecstasy. A fear of social isolation, because the remaining members of the group still use, is experienced. For those who have managed to stop use and recovered from ecstasy related health problems, there is the belief that the break has been valuable, implicitly because they took action before anything worse happened. An element of risk is evident (of which the women are aware) because they use again and chance recurrence of the problems which were constructive in their taking a break: risk is over-ruled by the desire to have fun. Perhaps the desire for pleasure has the affect of decreasing the negative (potential depression), so the need for fun creates a state of mind where during and after the ecstasy experience is experienced positively. Alternatively, the women may feel that they will not suffer again because they have developed new patterns of using, ones which avoid excess. Thus, the outcome is that ecstasy use becomes using actively constructed in order to avoid illness and to make the

most out of the experience. A balance can be found, to enjoy the high without the after-effects. This issue also exists for those who want to stop use, as they too intend to use ecstasy differently on future occasions, again not to abuse.

George (1993) cites that drug users make and apply, maybe unconsciously, rules to control their use. Boundaries can be set up after experimentation or from learning by mistakes, and they may not be forefront until they have been broken. Rules to control use have been established in the life-world, for example only using with friends or at dance events, one woman and her avoidance of dependency, and, as above, the outcome of excess where rules are more consciously applied than before. The latter relates to George's learning by mistakes, because the women made the error of abusing ecstasy, and suffered for this. Heavy use affected health which in turn affected quality of life, meaning that new rules (or modified old ones) were constructed.

The belief in the life-world that they (and others) can, will and do recover from uncontrolled ecstasy use and associated problems may be related to the network of support within the dance culture. George (1993) writes that the traditional view of drug use leading to dependency, which then leads to problems, acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy for users. Thus, for the women participating in a drug using culture which has social support on a wide and personal scale (alongside education of its drug of choice), this may explain their belief that dependency can be overcome: that problematic use can, once again, become non-problematic. In this way, the dance culture acts as an external control. This perspective equates with the one held by Watson and Beck (1991:262) who write "...a body of user folklore is evolving that informs and conditions individuals to accept certain norms of appropriate and inappropriate use...". It appears, from the descriptions given in the life-world, a social world of ecstasy use has developed.

### **To Take a Chance**

The danger to good health is evident from the above discussion on ecstasy abuse. However, it is not until the break, or calming period, is taken that the women worry over the risks associated with past use. This concern in the life-world is associated with future health (increased by the media), and may reflect concerns from the world at large, as there is widespread knowledge that long-term consequences are unknown. The women are aware that they form the guinea-pigs of ecstasy research, though be it

unintentionally. In retrospect, risk is an expected part of participation in the dance culture.

### *Fluctuating perceptions of risk*

As the hazards involved in ecstasy use are considered with hindsight, there is a nonchalant attitude to risk in the early to middle part of the ecstasy journey. Here, the perception of risk is pushed aside in order to subserve this life project, as previously discussed. Rhodes (1997:217), writing about risk activities in relation to illegal drug use, states “Behaviours which are habitual do not demand risk assessment or calculation for their doing; they are simply done”. The normalisation of ecstasy use in the life-world may explain why the women did not assess their actions in terms of risk. However, there are instances of momentarily realisations of danger when they (or a friend) underwent an adverse experience on ecstasy (discussed later).

As already mentioned, a return to ecstasy use after a break can occur, and it is here that concern over future health consequences disappear (similar to initial involvement with the scene). Thus, worries over immediate health and prospective healthy existence, of which the former influenced abstinence where the latter occurred, do not work to prevent the women from using again. Risk can be a central issue involved in the decision to try ecstasy if the women suffer an illness or sensitivity which could affect their health or mortality. However, inquisitiveness to the ecstatic state alongside the fellow feeling of everyone using influences the decision to take the chance. Remaining with the habitualness of ecstasy use, risks relating to the illegal nature of use are taken, again they are brushed aside. When the legal risk is spoken of, it is with regard to others (such as unintentional ‘grassing-up’ of friends) as opposed to personal risk, which is recognised though not stressed. These risky actions, and that of finance, may again be indicators of psychological dependence: a nonchalant attitude towards other life activities is adopted.

A further hazard in the life-world is that of mixing drugs, though it is not explicitly expressed as such by the women. One potential danger to health is the mixing of ecstasy with amphetamine as both work in a stimulant fashion upon the body. Polydrug use occurs before, during and after the ecstasy related event, and there is heterogeneity as to what drugs are used with ecstasy and in what ways.



### *The agony of the ecstasy*

Perhaps the danger of ecstasy use gains prominence when the women describe occasions when an adverse experience of the drug has taken place. The experience of ecstasy differs to that expected, and physical feelings work to influence the psychological, exacerbated by the awareness that adulteration is to blame.<sup>4</sup> When one considers the deaths in the outside world from ecstasy use as a result of toxicity causing problems, such as over-heating and water retention, these adverse actions upon the body are potentially dangerous. Whilst awaiting recovery the women are in a vulnerable position as personal safety is at risk because they would not be capable of self-defence if necessary. However, they do not perceive this in risky terms: they are not victims at the dance event as they could be if immobile due to alcohol intoxication in the conventional club setting.

Once again, if we refer back to Measham's earlier conclusion that women use dance drugs in ways which avoid the stigma attached to immoderate drinking, we can question its applicability in the life-world. The above experiences did not deter the women from using again, thus they risked losing self-control on future occasions, and did not exert extra controls afterwards, such as only buying ecstasy when the quality is known (though they always tended to buy from someone they knew). It is possible that the women perceived the incident as a one-off when we consider the amount of ecstasy they have consumed overall. Fortunately, these instances appear to be uncommon, as only a few described bad ecstasy experiences.

### **Influences upon the Ecstasy Experience**

As already touched upon, there are many aspects within the clubbing life-world which influence how ecstasy will be experienced. The ecstasy tablet can be tainted with other substances or be a dud, thus a chance is taken in the purchase (as with all illicit drugs, there is no quality control). One aspect of safety described is the availability to test ecstasy at the event, though one which is more viable is that of purchasing it from a known dealer, prior to the event. This pre-planning also implies a protection where risk to health, and pleasure, is avoided (a wise safety-net considering the previously discussed unpleasant experiences). The women are aware of the differing qualities of

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<sup>4</sup> As adulteration of ecstasy exists in the world as lived by the women, it is worth noting that ecstasy has been stated to be the most adulterated drug in Britain due to its popularity. Russell Newcombe made this statement, cited by Abbott and Concar (1992:33) who do not give a reference for him.

ecstasy which most likely reflects personal experience though, once again, could be due to the wide-spread reportage on ecstasy as a drug, resulting in self-education.

Sometimes impure ecstasy is found to be enjoyable despite an alteration of the usual experience, and a difference to that expected. One of the contaminants of ecstasy cited in the life-world is heroin. If we compare the experience of heroin to that of ecstasy, it is somewhat of a strange combination: the latter is uplifting and is more suitable to the dance event whereas the former acts to depress bodily actions. The women usually know in advance when they are able to purchase pure MDMA, showing the intensity of the adulterated ecstasy market.

### *Self and others*

In the life-world, state of mind is given as an influence of the ecstasy experience. For example, a tense feeling prior to consumption can continue into the ecstasy high. However, the women are aware of how relax into the forthcoming trip, and that with any psychoactive drug work may be involved to appreciate the experience. Pini (1997:162) states that "...reaching the desired state is... something you have to 'work for'". She goes on to say that this is attained by a positive attitude whereby anything negative which could de-enhance the experience is avoided. The life-world descriptions can give an appreciation of what is avoided, classed as negative, and how this 'work' is enacted. Firstly, being in the preferred setting and with the right people is important as it acts to avoid negativity: being surrounded by others who unconsciously emit vibes of happiness, or consciously by sharing compliments, elevates the clubbing mood. Secondly, these people can actually help one to work for the high by taking the women's mind away from any anxiousness and guide her through it (interpersonal guidance; though others can hinder the way a trip is unfolding). Thirdly, the woman herself works to rid this state and reach the desired one by using thought control or acting in a way which takes her mind off it (intrapersonal guidance). Thus, mind over matter is in action in these instances, in order to delineate anxiety and replace it with comfort. One can see how the body and mind are in constant interplay during the absorption of ecstasy, and the negation of these working separately is most striking when the women describe how bodily movement can influence the ecstasy experience: dancing can induce the high state in a different way to when immobile.

Further to the previously discussed methods of control in recreational ecstasy use, Zinberg and Harding (1982) stress controlling influences over general drug use: 'rituals and social sanctions', which work within small groups and sections of society. Here, the setting is important in that the rationale of choice is "...use in a good place at a good time with good people'" (p.19). This clearly relates to the descriptions in the life-world, whilst reiterating the first point made above about working for the high: the context of ecstasy use has the desired music, temporality and people (the women often become regulars to their preferred club). The authors go on to say that as psychedelic drug use is intense and lengthy, then users plan times to account for this. Again, in the life-world, use mainly occurs on a weekend where Sunday is given over to the come-down. The earlier quotation by Zinberg and Harding relates also to identity, and furthers the earlier discussed value of clubbers. Time is carefully planned as to when, and where, ecstasy is used, and the dance event is a social world which gives the women a place in that world (a contrasting area to that of everyday life where belonging is experienced, pleasure is gained and leisure time had). Again demonstrating, as earlier, that clubbing is not inclusive, one has to be 'in the know'.

A final described influence upon the ecstasy experience is that of the quantity of tablets taken. Extra tablets may be consumed during the ecstasy high but this alters the experience rather than enhancing the present feelings. Within the life-world, there is also description of the body resisting the experience of ecstasy. Jansen (1997) discusses tolerance to ecstasy as an influence in how it will be experienced, where users take higher doses in order to recapture "...the mental state which they experienced initially..." (p.125). The women describe taking more tablets to try and achieve the initial feelings, or using alternatives to swallowing ecstasy (though to inject is perceived as a negative action<sup>5</sup>). What may appear paradoxical inasmuch as what has been discussed, is that the women are somewhat careful over their consumption of ecstasy in order to get 'off their heads'. This mindfulness is evident in the first use of ecstasy related to a perceived fear of the unknown, the spreading of consumption over the weekend when use is heavy, and lastly when using again after a rest period where smaller doses are taken in a planned way. Control of this form is also evident in the pre-purchasing of ecstasy before the event (including polydrug use), and constitutes

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<sup>5</sup> The injection of ecstasy being perceived as a more damning form of consumption than that of inhalation, and thus a path that will not be taken, holds a similarity to the feelings of heroin users who will not pass the boundary of chasing the dragon to intravenous injection (Rhodes, 1997). This, therefore, can be classed as another form of control over ecstasy use, in that personal limits have been established.

planning of the evening, as above. However, as the evening progresses, control over the high state appears to be lost, or is not an issue, especially when the evening has ended (though the use of other drugs may reflect another element of control, one that aids the come-down). Thus, the women plan the evening for the best outcome: deciding how much to take and when to stop, with the peak of the experience being the dance or togetherness (at the event and out of it, respectively).

Jansen (1997:117) writes "...ecstasy effects are less susceptible to the influence of set and setting than psychedelic drugs such as LSD... Nevertheless, expectations do play an important part in all drug effects...". As we have seen from the life-world, set and setting do influence the ecstasy experience, though it can be argued that the women's expectations were instrumental. For example, when ecstasy is used out of the dance event by one used to experiencing it in that setting, the woman undergoes a feeling of boredom (it did not live up to expectations). Also, when fellow clubbers are expected to be friendly though are not, the experience of shattered expectations may have influenced the negative ecstasy experience rather than the nuisance others themselves.

### **Forever Ecstasy**

As an ending to the world as lived by the women, the question of ecstasy use and dance events having an everlasting appeal is discussed. The view is expressed that the recreation is phasic, though there is belief that involvement will remain to some extent. Another meaning entails an inability to see a closing point, where the people and the pleasure act as the foginess to this observation. Entering a further meaning in the life-world is that two women stopped clubbing some years ago, though the desire to return exists, albeit in a slight form. Nevertheless, there is the belief that one could go clubbing without taking ecstasy (recall that some women have internalised the ecstasy experience so feel the high when dancing without ecstasy) which is cited as a potentially enjoyable form of entertainment. However, this is followed by the expression that the music would be appreciated and thus encourage them to embark on the ecstasy experience: again showing the unison of the drug with the music, or the undying appeal of the ecstatic state per se. Further, as the benefits gained throughout the ecstasy journey are described to outweigh the negative experiences, this demonstrates the pleasure and meaningfulness the women have experienced through using the drug.

To conclude, the above synthesis of the women's life-world has elucidated how the body is experienced at the dance event, and how bodily issues intertwine throughout experiences of the ecstasy culture per se. Perhaps most evident is the interdependency of clubbers and the clubbing world, a constant interaction, which works to define and shape the dance culture as a whole. This reflects a co-constitutionality (Valle and King, 1978) where the world, or smaller part of it, as lived by the women, gives meaning to their existence, which in turn gives meaning to their world. Thus, being-in-the-world is demonstrated by the interaction of the social and the psychological upon the clubbing environment: the perception of self and others equate to a world of significance.

Interdependency is demonstrated when the women describe the social and individual aspects of dance. Here, the atmosphere of the event (temporally, spatially and in relation to others), plus the ecstatic state, are crucial to invite a woman to become one with her surroundings. It is during the dance that indication of mind-body unity is prominent, as the movement to the music means the lived-body reaches a higher level of consciousness. The interdependence of self and others emerges in the group celebration as individualism fails to exert its presence, again there is no dualism. The pleasure of self and others also creates the dance event atmosphere, giving it an energy which works to keep clubbers on their high. The women's experience of ecstasy and that of the dance event, therefore, act interdependently as the person and world do in existential phenomenology. Consequently, the experience of ecstasy and the environment complement each other and interact to give the holistic clubbing experience which represents a constant interplay (also occurring when ecstasy is taken out of the dance event with a small group): self and others shape the experience.

A demonstration of the psychological and social worlds working in mutual dependency is that of the influence of ecstasy related experiences upon life and attitude. Spirituality and enlightenment are experienced as coming from within the self, and are felt as transformational (akin to Saunders' suggestions in the Introduction chapter) in the sense of their immediate influence upon life though also in the longer term. Co-constitutionality is demonstrated when temporality and spatiality of these experiences are extended: giving meaning for the women in turn giving meaning for their world. Thus, not only is how ecstasy experienced important, so is the influence of being involved (or belonging) to this culture. An alternative way of being means risk perception is nonchalant, and the ecstasy related world becomes an exclusive one (again

an interdependence of self and world giving meaning for the women). However, psychological dependence has its costs. Certain activities are pushed aside, such as interactions with others not related to the lifestyle (including the ‘dropping’ of partners who do not take ecstasy), work commitments, and financial responsibilities. Furthermore, there is the cost to well-being. Nonetheless, risk is given as part of the clubbing life-style, it goes with the territory.

In addition to the interdependence of social and psychological aspects of use is the relaxation and togetherness this leisure pursuit allows. The social appeal of the ecstasy experience is strong and can be an obstacle when there is the desire to stop use (the co-constitutionality which gave meaning becomes blurred). The interdependent relationship between person and world, and the unison of body and mind, are evident when interpersonal and intrapersonal guidance are exploited to ease the women into the ecstasy experience. Finally, co-constitutionality is prominent when the women perceive indefinite involvement with the ecstasy culture.

We have seen how, within the life-world, individualistic certainties exist though they tend to live strongly within a social network of support. This heterogeneity is accounted for when Moss (1978:87) states “The body in action is the means by which I take hold upon space as a field of action, and shape for myself a personal world”. The women have shaped their personal worlds, and their ecstasy using journey has meant for a world of gain and pain. A social world outside of the life-world has been formed as the interdependency between clubbers and the culture constantly redefines and reshapes (as noted in the Introduction chapter).



## Chapter 12: Conclusion and Implications

From the personal worlds shaped by the women, conclusions emerge which have relevance to their social world. We are now out of the phenomenological reduction and these conclusions will forward thinking around the body, drug use, and issues of femininity. What is discussed is the actuality for these women but there are obvious issues of epistemology - but also issues of social policy - as will become evident.

As apparent from this thesis, the body of phenomenology is not the objective body of traditional psychology: the body as separate from the mind, the body with the effects of drugs. Rather it is the body which is lived by the women, the body as one with the mind, the body as experiencing the drug. The lived-body is our means of accessing and occupying social worlds, and it is a means by which we express ourselves. There is interdependence between lived-body and lived-space, actions and experiences, actions and organisation of the personal world (Moss, 1978).

In each moment we discover that we are oriented toward some destination with our body, before we even think about what we are about to do. (Ibid.:85)

Therefore, the lived-body and lived-space allows us to understand what the women's social world is like. Actions and experiences are meaningful, and because meaning is mediated through language, listening to the voices of female drug users has allowed meaning to be represented. I recognise that the relationship between experience and language is a controversial one. The stance of this thesis (which, to some extent, has to be taken-for-granted since its treatment would form a thesis of a different kind) is that of Merleau-Ponty (1962:178) "Thus speech, in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it". He indicates that 'authentic' thought (in which, as in the case of these interviews, we find the direct 'formulation' of experience) is identical with speech. So there is a clear affinity between phenomenology and discourse analysis yet the emphasis differs. Discursive approaches emphasise the world as a social resource and places the individual in the collectivity, whereas phenomenology sees language as an embodiment of thought, a reaching of lived experience into meaning.

### **Bodily Pleasure and Relaxation**

The lived-body is experienced at the dance event most prominently as a drugged lived-body, which exhibits forcefully when the women describe the pleasures taken from

dancing and socialising. In the dance, the body 'lives' the music and revels in the group consciousness: body and mind work in unison to induce a meditative state. Here, we find a lack of sexual objectification, which runs into the sociality of the event per se. The women experience freedom to express themselves, verbally and non-verbally, and this allows a release from the restraints of everyday life, and those described as relating to alcohol-based clubs. Thus, by participating in this social world women should not be judged too harshly (a view expressed within the life-world) as they are merely seeking pleasure and relaxation: the pivotal meaning to leisure time (and that of the weekend world). The use of drugs for recreation has a long history in Western society, and though the women's drug of choice may differ from that related to conventional clubs, the only difference in judgement from the outside world appears to be based on one drug being legal whilst the other is not.

The dance event does not involve escaping from the world as the traditional view of drug use leads us to believe. If this was the case, people would not socialise on this large scale, take uplifting drugs and be happy, rather they would use a more 'out of it' drug, a depressant maybe, and desire to be alone in their high (not celebrate life as analysis of the life-world suggests). It appears that the weekday social world has pressures which the dance event offers an escape from, though they are returned to after the weekend. Implicitly, some of these tensions may be related to an heterosexual social world. Gender orientation at the dance event is assumed to be of an opposite sex nature, which adds meaning to the appreciation of the environment because there is no objectification nor male controlling influences. Thus, though the environment is heterosexually assumed it lacks the outside associations of heterosexuality. The women experience an apparent dependency upon this weekend world for pleasure, which implies they feel a need to find others with similar interests to themselves and to gain pleasure and relaxation from their company.

Dance events are not inclusive, therefore some people choose this night-time recreation and others its counterpart. People are self-motivated to participate, which suggests that frequenting dance events merely represents a difference in selection. Experiencing the drugged lived-body in the dance context constitutes an alternative form of pleasure. The women speak of the enjoyment of experiencing empowerment in this context, related to the lack of male controlling actions (something that is missing in the alcohol night-club). The safety of the dance event, which is an absolute primary

value, is assumed unquestionably: the women believe they will not be taken advantage of in this setting. However, as with all social worlds, there is chance of deception. For example when a woman has lost self-control because of a negative ecstasy experience. In addition, there is some indication in the life-world of traditional relations between the sexes (such as the woman who was viewed as the property of her male partner, the actions of males from the traditional pub environment entering the club, and, amongst the sexes, when fighting takes place). Does this mean that the safety of the environment will suffer, that traditional expectations will emerge and reduce the protection that the women feel? viz. that males, or females, may assume that sexually based relations are there to be had. This may be an indication of the changing nature of the scene, and, clearly, it is an issue that future researchers must be mindful of.

If the dance scene remains something like the form given in the life-world, the safety and pleasure, it is my opinion that the attraction of the culture to women will not abate, and it is possible, as Merchant and MacDonald (1994) state early in the thesis, that gender identities are being re-shaped in society as a result of these experiences. Thus, the traditional night-club recreation may take on new forms of relations between the sexes.

### *The feminine self*

As women in general report more positive experiences from ecstasy use (Release, 1997), it suggests that they are more open to these affects. At the dance event, women experience independence and confidence in an environment where they feel at ease. There are descriptions in the life-world of beneficial transitions in life and changes in attitude from using ecstasy and participating in the culture. The women gained confidence and an outlook where they took charge of their destinies (a further value of the clubbing world). It is possible that women are open to positive change because of their social world, their experiences in wider society, because the event is a social space where they are allowed to be themselves, to explore themselves through conscious states and sensuality (explicitly and implicitly). Thus, it is a freedom from social constraints and is possibly a move away from traditional expectations such as marriage and settling down (exemplified when full independence is experienced because a woman goes clubbing without her partner, or he left whilst she takes her autonomous enjoyment. And, by the rejection of marital engagement when the clubbing lifestyle is

'discovered'). It is also a desertion of the societal notion of control which is so powerfully thrust upon contemporary women. A 'good girl' must always keep her actions in check, because to lose control means to lose one's femininity (Kilbourne, 1994). Nonetheless, the women are in control of their pleasure, which is a control not linked to oppressive situations.

It may be questioned why the women do not choose to reach altered states of consciousness, and thus self-discovery, through other means. They are not afraid of the work involved in reaching the non-drugged meditative state, because sometimes they have to work, similarly, for the ecstasy high by using thought control. As the women do not select general meditation, it suggests there is more involved. Perhaps this is because it is a contemporary form of meditation, one that involves fun, takes place in a comfortable environment, and entails conviviality. Further, the experience involves a strong sense of belonging. Has this been lacking in society as analysis of the life-world suggests? To participate in society offers little unity, to participate in the dance culture gives a sense of togetherness that has long since been lost: indeed, group celebration is like a return to tribalism. This, and the use of ecstasy, add to the women's sense of well-being (a notion that tends not to be addressed in work on women and drug use; Ettore, 1992). However, there is a warning from the life-world: though the self may be discovered, it can then be lost in an array of health problems (from utopia to hell). There is also implication that if people do not abuse ecstasy (and in relation to spiritual insight), then the changes can be reached in a less harmful, and possibly more insightful, way.

As the dance culture offers a way of life which gives identity, rewards and peer support, then social policy needs to take this into account. Drug services, and research to an extent, have focused upon addiction (mainly that of opiates), not recreational use, thereby neglecting dependence upon the way of life which drugs such as ecstasy allow. There is a real need to re-awaken recreational drug use in relation to females, without the impact of injecting, sex and the risk of HIV, and for non-opiate support programmes.

### *Satisfying bodily perception*

Through experiencing the drugged lived-body on a regular basis, a reduction in body mass occurs. Again, what does this tell us about the social world when the women, who

are not obese in the first instance, perceive this as a bonus? As satisfied bodily perception was found not to be temporally or spatially related to the dance event, there is chance that it is related to slim women being attributed a more positive stereotype in Western society. Or that being thin gives some form of control over life, given that advertisements for diet aids imply that a woman can achieve control through controlling her weight (Kilbourne, 1994). For the women who did not suffer an eating disorder (though the thinness of female clubbers was an influence for those who did), the appeal of a slimmer figure again reflects concerns of the outside world (a notion of control which they did not reject). As the dance culture is part of wider society per se, it is possible that their promotion tactics (limited to specific clubs) supplement the insecurities women feel about their bodies. McRobbie (1994) writes that despite the new autonomous climate for women, magazines still associate an ideal body image with love and happiness. Thus, contradiction in the life-world occurs because of this very disjunction between the weekend and weekday worlds. As Orbach (1993) states, to prevent women feeling dissatisfied with their bodily perception we must change how they are valued in society.

For those uncomfortable with their body shape and weight, the ability to eat plentifully during the week knowing that calories will be burnt off at the weekend appears quite healthy, in comparison to bingeing and purging for instance. However, the regular use of drugs such as ecstasy will take its toll on the body and mind, as seen from the life-world. There is recognition of weight loss in the literature of the drug services<sup>1</sup>, and also in that of related academic research, but scholastic knowledge has not researched connections between this form of drug use and weight control. Thus, service provision needs to take account of this appealing and effortless way of controlling weight (including the danger that a slimmer figure may encourage women to continue taking stimulating drugs for weight control). This point is of vital importance considering the escalation in eating disorders for both males and females.

### **New forms of use**

Since much discussion of the body in the life-world revolves around the drugged lived-body, there are further implications which arise from the findings, related to drug use

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<sup>1</sup> Lifeline, a Manchester based drug agency, produce a leaflet aimed at female clubbers warning of the hazards of losing weight through drugs and dancing. The emphasis is that it is important to recharge body



per se. The use of drugs for pleasure is not perceived by the women as immoral, indeed it is taken-for-granted. Again, this reflects the social world in that normalisation is an actuality in contemporary society. However there is concern in the life-world about the way public health advertisements present evidence on the increase in young people using drugs: they are perceived to encourage rather than discourage. If the experienced 'older' drug user interprets the message in this way, maybe the authorities should listen to those in the know. This is a severe implication for the makers of social policy and what they are trying to achieve.

George (1993) argues that the reality of drug use being regular, dependant yet controllable has implications for future drug service philosophy and implementation. Though the women's use, as it progressed, created problems, they were recognised and action was taken to retain health and sanity. The women also took care to maintain livelihood through employment and/or studies, which goes some way to fulfil the gap recognised by Measham (1995). She writes of the lack of research on young women and new forms of drug use, which includes their perceptions of it being non-problematic with weekly employment. Analysis of the life-world has shown that disruptions to weekday work came in the form of tiredness on a Monday and difficulty retaining concentration. Further, the women did not fall to deviant measures to fund their drug use, they often gained debt.

As the women stopped using heavily, or intended to in the near future (alongside group fragmentation) it shows that ecstasy use does naturally lose its appeal as other researchers have found (Watson and Beck, 1991; Solowij et al, 1992; McDermott, 1993; Henderson, 1993d; and psychedelics in general Zinberg and Harding, 1982). Thus, as McDermott (1993) writes, drug cultures develop their own controlling influences and we should listen to these people to enhance policy. However, a serious gender issue emerges, and is one related to the reproductive cycle. One woman would stop clubbing and taking ecstasy when she became a mother, and it was discussed that this was related to perception of risk. This suggests that being female means there are obstacles to participating in this leisure pursuit, yet this may also be the case if the recreation was that of alcohol, as being high on either drug can lessen attentiveness to the child.

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and mind during the week via a balanced diet and general good health, as fitness and health are necessary to rave all night. It is entitled 'Claire and Jose: The E Plan Diet'.

### *Drugs and femininity*

The women describe taking drugs primarily for pleasure, which furthers understanding of women and the use of drugs (recall that pleasure is an aspect which has been ignored in this field: Ettore, 1992; Henderson, 1993c). Though the women had to protect their identity as drug users, they were not rejecting their identity as women (which is the general view; Ettore, 1992). Rather, they were asserting their femininity, forwarding womanhood, with an approach that did not accept the outside view of female drug users. The findings may help shift the prejudice surrounding illicit drug use, especially that of women and that relating to the dance culture (a task which I recognise is hard to do yet this may be a small step forward). They may also help to resolve the double-standard where women receive more social criticism than men for using drugs (Ettore, 1992; Henderson, 1994), and thus present a more balanced approach to gendered drug use.

Further, the actuality from the life-world that women use ecstasy regularly, heavily, and often in conjunction with other drugs will update the related literature. This step is vital due to discussion in the previous chapter where the findings of Henderson (1993d) and Measham (1995), in that women are careful in their use of drugs, were rejected. Thus, the literature will now recognise that some women desire to and do use drugs in ways attributed to men, rejecting the notions and stigma attached to what is considered non-feminine actions. The belief that appearance and health are obstacles to ways of using dance drugs is visible when scanning the harm reduction information leaflets from 'Lifeline' in Manchester (in my opinion, a very respectable drug agency). These have been formed through detailed research and recognition that education is the best stance to take. Their leaflets on Peanut Pete, aimed at males, and Claire and Jose, the alternative for females, may demonstrate the difference in conceptions of gendered drug use. For example, Pete revolves around excessive use though Claire and Jose focus on body and health issues. Taking the latter, they warn women not to try and 'keep up with the boys' in the amount of drugs they consume because of their smaller body size influencing how that drug will be experienced: in 'Claire and Jose get off their cake' Claire takes a full ecstasy tablet and loses control, wishing she had only taken half like Jose had. Losing control is an actuality of the life-world but is related to tainted ecstasy, not the dosage. Nevertheless, it is a crucial concern to educate people that body size does influence the drug experience, and thus to warn them of the dangers. With respect

to Lifeline, the difference could reflect geographical area, or be one of the changes we are witnessing in the dance culture and in femininity in general.<sup>2</sup> Once more, this information is useful for drug service provision.

Analysis of the life-world also demonstrates the women's autonomous drive for using ecstasy, and it is hoped this will redress the balance of how women have been represented in academic literature. It will portray them in their own light and not that of a male perspective. Ettorre and Riska (1993) have recognised the gap in the literature, where women are invisible due to the concentration upon male use, or at least from their use being somehow attributed to their feminine roles in life, viz. the sex-role theory. They call for a 'gender-sensitive perspective' where women are visible and individualistic foci is delineated as this ignores social group influences for use and, thus, does not hint at the public outcome for those groups. Though the authors speak mainly about legal psychotropic drug use, they have identified important issues relevant to other types of female drug use.

### **Ecstasy and Health**

As discussed, there appears to be a psychological dependence on the ecstasy context of use in the life-world. A consequence is that ecstasy gets abused, and mental health problems are experienced, which can affect the women's everyday functioning in the world. There is speculation in the life-world that being female (the intricacy of hormones) means they are prone to mood disorders from heavy use of ecstasy. Also given is that the menstrual cycle is affected. The latter may be related to weight loss, and the former purely conjecture, however it must be questioned if immoderate ecstasy use does influence female hormones in some way. Unfortunately, this is something that cannot be answered in this research but it has potential for quantitative investigation.

Once again, this information is useful for drug service provision and could inform harm reduction strategies by educating women to the dangers of abusing ecstasy. Also, it gives insight into how recreational use stops being that and thus acts as a warning. It shows that the outcome of the women's abuse may be the best path to take initially - to actively plan use - as opposed to waiting until ill health has been

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<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, Lifeline's concerns are valid, and it is my view that they provide excellent information and harm reduction advice. As Sherlock (1994) found, Claire and Jose have been responded to positively by women.

experienced.<sup>3</sup> Again, this point is recognised by drug services who advise that if ecstasy must be taken, then to consume one tablet per month. Perhaps a key point worth ‘playing on’ to encourage users to take the drug in moderation is that bodily resistance to ecstasy occurs (as analysis of the life-world has shown).

To further enhance social policy, the women’s descriptions of depression and disturbance in memory may be read in conjunction with the findings of those investigating neurochemical toxicity and the role of MDMA upon cognitive functioning. For example, McCann et al (1998) found evidence of a decrease in 5-HT transporter binding, which may have the consequence of psychiatric disorders related to 5-HT deficits such as depression and memory impairment.

### **Conceptions of Risk**

The findings also show that despite concern over experiencing the (ecstasy) drugged lived-body for the first time, curiosity overcame the fear. Thus the women took a risk to their health and mortality, which demonstrates that people will take ecstasy no matter what. Regardless of the widespread coverage of potential dangers from ecstasy use, and concurrent scare stories, the observation that many use ecstasy without danger overrides the concern. Shock and scare tactics do not work for those with a curiosity, and I personally believe that the old ‘Just Say No’ campaign is not fruitful in its intentions for this very reason.

After this initial, and quite substantial, concern there are no more worries about the immediate risk of taking ecstasy: in the life-world, it is taken-for-granted that ill health or death will not happen. This relates to what Rhodes (1997) suggests, that actions which are normalised do not warrant risk perception. Risks to health were not recognised until later into the journey of use. In addition, they were associated purely with ecstasy despite polydrug use occurring by all the women. The neglecting of risk perception is, again, part of psychological dependence to this lifestyle, it is described as constituting the fun (the women were educated about the drug and knew the dangers, almost expecting health problems with hindsight). These descriptions may help to explain conceptions of risk, and thus develop risk theory further as a psychological perspective, whilst benefiting awareness of recreational ecstasy use.

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<sup>3</sup> Zinberg and Harding (1982) suggest that more studies are required of people who have replaced ‘abusive’ patterns of drug use with those of occasional use.

An additional risk relates to the adulteration of ecstasy, which is heavily cited in the life-world. Evidence from the outside world exacerbates this concern: when ecstasy tablets have been properly investigated to ascertain what is in them, many unknown substances are found.<sup>4</sup> The women are aware of this potential hazard and take it nonetheless, yet there is call for free and easy access to information. For instance, ecstasy testing at dance events, which some local drug agencies do free of charge. However, though testing can help reduce harm it is not a safe-guard against risking mortality: for example, the case of Leah Betts where the ecstasy she took was the purest on the market when tested (Headon, 1996)<sup>5</sup>, and those where an allergic reaction appear to have taken place (McDermott et al, 1993; Henderson, 1997).

A final risk encountered in the findings is that of state of mind when ecstasy is taken and the setting it is taken in. This information forms part of harm reduction and was recognised as a crucial goal by the researchers McDermott et al in 1993. If we are to educate people about the drug they choose to use, then how to deal with anxiety arising from the self and situation is crucial. Again, it was found that the women often knew how to overcome discomfort and ease into the experience, but it is not known if this was something discovered as the ecstasy journey progressed, or was known from the outset.

To conclude, the majority of the issues that emerged as a result of listening to the voices of female ecstasy users relate to health and well-being. They form harm reduction advice of which this research promotes in a non-judgmental way, as a consequence of the epoché. Through entering the life-world of the women, we have seen that ecstasy use is not meaningless: it is a way of life or part of it, with benefits alongside the widely publicised negative aspects. The meaning has also been observed because the social context of use has not been ignored, which quantitative research tends to do as the means of investigation do not allow for it to be measured (McFadden and McCamley, 1999) or, qualitatively speaking, represented. Because access has been gained into the social world of the dance culture, the resulting information can be used to aid

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Saunders' website ([www.ecstasy.org](http://www.ecstasy.org)) often presents the results of ecstasy testing, conducted in a reputable laboratory, where samples are sent anonymously.

<sup>5</sup> The inquest into Leah's death concluded she had died from drinking an excessive amount of water. It has been argued that 'misinformation' may have been an influence as word spread that water could counteract the chemicals of ecstasy (Carey, 1997), when the real advice was that water must be sipped to prevent dehydration. Consequently, harm reduction experts came under attack for delivering this information (Henderson, 1997).

communication and thus enhance service and provision, support training and education, and possibly promote policy and structural change (Ibid.). McDermott (1993) also calls for us to 'open up a dialogue' with recreational ecstasy users in order to inform social policy, a point echoed by Henderson (1993c:128) who argues that being "more in touch with the reality of women's everyday experience" will allow a friendlier approach.

However, because the women knew the risks from using ecstasy though they were not deterred, I reiterate a conclusion made by Merchant and MacDonald (1994), that it is difficult for policy makers to construct and present related policy. Further, as Henderson (1997) argues, knowing more about ecstasy in the sense of its effects and dangers, viz. harm reduction, is a 'red herring' because knowledge about drugs does not stop youth from using. She calls for more understanding of the uses and 'social effects' to give more information about the culture. It is hoped that these findings will go some way to address this, to understand the social consequences of use and thus give more insight into society per se. Perhaps people acknowledge harm reduction advice yet continue to use because, as Vicki suggests, we live in a world of uncertainty so we "jump on the bandwagon and take what life's got to offer". Harm reduction may not be (and does not claim to act as) a prevention, but it has been found to be effective in educating people about drug related danger (McDermott et al, 1993).

There is evidence that young people do not perceive adults, especially parents and teachers, as being 'in the know' about drugs, and hence will not trust them when it comes to education (Parker et al, 1995). This implies that younger people, especially those with personal drug experience, will be heard by today's youth. Thus, because the reduction allows us to retain the perspectives of the women, then their experiences of ecstasy may be useful in assisting the education of young people. This is especially important if we consider that "...urban adolescents will be susceptible to new patterns of polydrug use... It seems likely that a significant minority will develop drug careers, particularly moving into dance drugs and emergent new designer drugs..." (Parker and Measham, 1994:13). Maybe this lack of trust is responsible for Wright and Pearl's (1995) finding that, aside from increased education, school children's knowledge was still 'limited'.

There are further issues that relate to enhancing academic literature on women and drug use, and will consequently inform policy and practice. Women have been somewhat invisible in drug literature until recently, and when they were represented it



was from a male perspective or a deviant one. Clearly this is not suitable to contemporary female recreational drug users who act independently in their consumption. The findings from this research reiterate those of Henderson (1996) and Measham (1995), that women should not be viewed as passive but active. Also, they challenge the stereotypical view of female drug users as "...diseased, neurotic, pathological, decadent or polluted" (Ettorre, 1992:29): none of the women were physically or mentally unwell, morally perverse, nor 'dirty and corrupt'. Further, that drug use is not always problematic, as in the case of one woman who used external and internal controls from the outset, and the outcome of ill health resulting in more controlled use. These points are important as they contrast with those of traditional research findings (McFadden and McCamley, 1999).

As well as being useful for social policy and academic representation, the findings will also help to improve understanding of this culture, to those alien to it, and those who may have misconceptions due to the large scale reports on the dangers of ecstasy. More understanding of the cultures within our culture as a whole can only be beneficial, and though it will not rid some people's belief in the deviancy of illicit drug use, it may lead to a more sympathetic eye. Consequently, it will form greater awareness of the complex and dynamic nature of drug cultures.

As this leisure pursuit is subject to ongoing change this thesis documents an historical period of women's recreational space. Again, this is important because it requires investigation and representation as it progresses so that future researchers can observe its advancement. In relation to this I take examples from the work of Nicholas Saunders and Sheila Henderson, both have researched the dance culture and have extensive knowledge of it. Saunders wrote two books on ecstasy and the dance culture before writing one entitled 'Ecstasy Reconsidered', where his previous work was adapted in light of the findings from researchers and academics. Thus, it is fair to say that although he began with an almost utopian view on the uses of ecstasy, he adapted this to take account of the negatives in order to make a comprehensive work. Sheila Henderson wrote many articles about the 'new women' in dance drug use that differed so much to what the drug literature would have us believe. However, she now describes herself as less 'certain' in that the negative side related to the drugs, and then those of femininity per se, have emerged (the irony of sexual confidence albeit in a 'please your man' manner; Henderson, 1997:84). Thus as their research, and the culture, has

progressed, opinions have changed in the sense of reconsideration. This can be nothing but a strength on behalf of these authors and clearly exemplifies the importance of keeping up to date with the culture for academic literature.

### **Future Research Considerations**

In an ending to this chapter, afterthoughts for further investigation will be discussed. Only one participant followed free party events and, given the differences between this ecstasy lifestyle and that of dance clubs, a study focusing on free party people would be insightful of that particular scene. In a comparable sense, to interview more women of the 'babe' style would give further understanding into the (complexity of) motivations and perspectives on pleasure and appearance. Thus, possibly balancing the 'us and them' viewpoint which was expressed in the life-world from those who did not dress as such. Though this research has focused on the fun context of use, especially the dance event, other uses of ecstasy (such as intimate one-on-one and that related to spiritual awareness) would be insightful of the drug as a whole, and perhaps illuminate some of the findings in this thesis.

Perhaps the most significant consideration for future research involves that of the longitudinal kind. This would demonstrate if the women who desired to stop use did so (though this could be achieved by conducting a follow-up study), also it would discover whether their perceptions of, say, the changes (or transitions) experienced as a result of participation in this culture still remain. I certainly feel that a follow-up study would answer questions which were left unanswered at the time of interview: do they still club and take ecstasy, or use it in the ways they believed they may when older, or like that desired after the forthcoming rest period?

A further consideration would be to investigate male participants of the dance culture, especially how they experience their bodies in this social space, and what their bodily perceptions are per se. This would be interesting to explore given the recent increase in men suffering from eating disorders. Remaining with issues of masculinity, and as discussed in chapter three, to interview men would demonstrate if their life-worlds held similarities to these women: does clubbing mean the same for them as the opposite sex? do they too appreciate the environment with its lack of sexual objectification or do they go there to attract a woman? do they enjoy the new forms of 'chatting' which the women so clearly do? Henderson (1996:77) notes the significance

of men with regard to the new sexual relations found in dance clubs, and writes “Its importance should not be underestimated since the predominant image of young men’s behaviour arising from the young women’s accounts is one which differs from the more traditional one of young men in night-clubs intent upon pursuing sex”. To investigate the male perspective would, clearly, be an adjunct to these findings.

Given the women’s perceptions of females who frequent traditional night-clubs, it would be illuminating to discover what their night-clubbing life-world tells us about their world. For example, do they hold an ‘us and them’ perspective similar to that of the clubbing women, and what are their perceptions of femininity? These issues remain to be investigated as the social world of the alcohol club is still a popular recreation for many young women.

To summarise, though this research has looked at many female experiences of the ecstasy culture, resulting in an holistic life-world, it has limitations. There are further areas within the dance culture which remain to be investigated, and to do so would build a more detailed picture of this popular night-time recreation. More qualitative research is required to look at the meanings of experiences, but that which takes a social constructionist approach would be insightful of how gender is constructed within this culture. For example, discourse analysis would be extremely informative in demonstrating if, as the women indicate in the experiences they describe, there is an equality in perceptions of the other sex. To return to a point made earlier in the thesis, social construction research in the dance culture would supplement the findings presented in this thesis.

The extent of the meaning to many of the words and phrases should be taken from the context in which they are spoken: for example, being 'off my head' can mean, at one extreme, really high and out of control, though to a lesser extent it can mean merely being high where control is retained.

**Acid:** LSD, which is an abbreviation of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide.

**Babe style:** a style of dressing in the club context, more so in house clubs, which is body conscious and revealing. For example some women may wear bikinis and feather boas. Make-up is worn in general but there are different extremes to flesh revealing.

**Base:** strong amphetamine, usually meth-amphetamine.

**Billy:** amphetamine.

**Boozer:** public house.

**Buzz:** excitement, or energy, emitted and experienced by clubbers.

**Buzz-the-vibe:** raise others' spirits in the club, viz. elevate the ecstasy high.

**Chill-out:** an expression used to indicate relaxation, or said to calm another down.

**Chill-out room:** a room inside the dance club where softer music is played and air is usually circulated: a quieter place to sit and relax.

**Come-up:** when the user recognises that a drug is altering how she feels, viz. she is getting high (coming-up) with the drug. A precursor to a 'rush' regarding ecstasy.

**Come-down:** when the drug's influence upon the body begins to wear off.

**Cop-off:** find a partner, usually for some form of sexual relationship.

**Dance club:** licensed premises with security staff. Events are organised by promotion people to profit financially. Clubbers have to pay an entrance fee, and there are usually dress-codes. Akin to general, alcohol based night-clubs.

**Doob:** cannabis joint.

**Diss/dissed:** treat with disrespect.

**Fluffy:** happy and pleasant, usually whilst high on ecstasy.

**Free party:** held at unlicensed premises (i.e. fields and disused community centres). No security staff, dress-code or entrance fee. No profit making except for fund raising for that event and future ones. It is part of the free festival circuit, and has links with travellers. Due to the Criminal Justice Act, which affects the rights of protesters, travellers and party people, problems with the police enforcing the bills may be experienced at events. The free party culture, in its holistic sense, fights for the right to party.

**Full-on:** signifies level of involvement with the culture and ecstasy use, usually in relation to the initial excitement of the scene and heavy participation.

**Funky:** a trendy coolness, with an element of eccentricity usually relating to attire or music style.

**Gip/gippy:** same meaning as to retch, when one feels nauseous or is about to vomit.

**Grunge:** refers to a subculture characterised by a dress style described by Ann as scruffy, with (in her life-world) an attitude associated with the rejection of mainstream society's norms: a non-desire to be typecast as 'normal'.

**House:** a style of music which often includes vocals and has lower beats per minute than techno (characteristic four beat) (Saunders, 1995).

**Ketamine:** an adulterating substance in ecstasy, and a drug used by veterinary surgeons to induce sleep in animals.

**MDMA:** abbreviation of 3, 4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine: the chemical name for ecstasy, in its pure form.

**Meth-amphetamine:** a powerful form of amphetamine.

**Mixmag:** club culture magazine.

**Mong-out:** a feeling characterised by inactivity, tends to be spoken of in relation to adulterated ecstasy, or through being inactive when the drug is initially absorbed by the body.

**Off my head (face, tree or rocker):** the state of being high.

**Out of it:** tends to refer to being very high, possibly to the extent that one is not 'with it'.

**Pills:** ecstasy tablets.

**Piss heads:** a term which refers to people whose preference is for alcohol, thus getting drunk.

**Pull:** attract a partner, possibly for a sexually orientated relationship.

**Rush:** the first feelings from ecstasy when it has been absorbed bodily. The rush has been described in the life-world as a tingling sensation that moves up the body, from the toes reaching seemingly further than the crown of the head.

**Slappers/slags:** loose women, in a sexual sense of the word.

**Smack:** heroin.



**Speed:** amphetamine.

**Spliff:** cannabis or grass joint.

**Strung-out:** feelings of the come-down, generally tired though content.

**Tablets:** ecstasy.

**Techno:** a music style with little use of vocals, 120 beats per minute or above, characteristic sounds are made by using technology such as synthesizers as opposed to samples as found in house music (description from Emma Postlethwaite, given in Saunders, 1995).

**Townies:** people who frequent conventional clubs, usually in the town centre, and are likely to get drunk for their leisure.

**Whizz:** amphetamine.

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## Appendix 1: Participant Observation

### Description of the context

Sunday 8th December 1996, 3.30 AM to 9.30 AM, House music club, Sheffield.

Quite small for a club: one long room with small bar (no alcohol was on sale, just bottled water, ice-pops, and lolly-pops) at one end and dance floor at other, in between was a seating/standing area.

Lighting was dim all over with UV and 'club type' lighting.

Music was house and some techno, which increased in loudness around five AM (the club stays open to twelve noon). More people, and a lot of doormen but as part-goers, arrived when other clubs had closed (around three AM: though it was quite full to begin with, it was crowded later on).

The toilets had toilet rolls (constantly being replaced when empty) and the water taps were working so people could refill their bottles bought from the bar.

Pipes went across the ceiling and pumped lots of cold air out: sometimes it was a little too cold, especially if not dancing or jigging around much.

Condensation formed on the walls when the club filled-out.

### Describe the participants

Ages ranged from 17 to early 40s, the majority was in the mid to late 20s.

Gender: a good mix of male and female, perhaps slightly more males (60:40).

Ethnicity was predominantly white yet there were quite a few blacks (mainly male), did not spot any Asian or Oriental people.

Background was difficult to tell, assumed majority was working class due to area, but would only have discovered this by talking to lots of folk.

Clothing varied from jeans and trousers for men, shirts, T-shirts and jumpers. A lot of men (the ones with muscles who looked like crowd of friends, plus some others) danced topless. In sum, I would say that dress was smart but casual (there was no dress code on the door). Very few dressed traveller type i.e. dreadlocks.

Clothing for women appeared a little smarter, I did not notice any jeans but trousers were worn and they were fashionable/smart. Clothes were quite body revealing whether

in a tight fitting sense or a skimpy one, but they were not babes: they did not appear to be dressing to impress (looked nice but not poseur).

Describe who the observer is

White, working class, 25 years old, female Ph.D. student.

I knew six men there (those I had gone with), two had been before. Also four more men and one women who knew those I had gone with, other than that I knew no-one.

Describe the actions of the participants

I could not hear what people were saying due to the loud music, though could manage to chat with friends.

Most people entered around five AM, this eased off around nine, but still a few came in before and after that.

The majority were dancing alone (not in groups except for a circle of men, who were the topless, muscular ones as above, and not really in pairs except for some women), sexes mixed and merged on the dance-floor.

Dancing was somewhat reminiscent of the hippies at Woodstock: they clearly felt the music, where parts of it lifted people up (everyone at the same time) like waves of movement (excellent to watch).

A lot were seated, yet this fluctuated: the odd person would sit down from dancing when someone got up to dance.

Whether seated or standing, people were jigging, moving, and/or dancing on the spot.

Groups were mixed sex, few couples of females and one group of men (around six in number: the muscle men).

There was few male-female couples: I noted maybe three, kissing naturally, touching gently (possibly loved-up?).

I did notice dilated pupils on those I got close enough to see (could not say if this was due to drugs or the lighting), some people were probably straight. Could roll joints quite freely.

I did not spot any drunken people, nor any trouble/fighting.

The atmosphere was friendly, people smiled at each other. I could chat with women in toilets.

### Interpret the situation

People were there, it seemed, to have fun, dance, meet-up with friends, enjoy the music, and the atmosphere (the reasons my friends had gone): clubbing seems to definitely be a recreational pursuit.

It is possible that some were regulars, due to how they danced and chatted together.

I did not witness any chatting-up, as seen in alcohol based clubs, though it is possible that I did not notice.

It appeared that most people arrived after being at another club, due to time of arrival and the loudness of the music increasing: perhaps it is somewhere to go to keep the night going.

### Alternative interpretations of the situation

If I was older, I may have perceived and interpreted the situation differently, for example the loud music, darkness, and dampness in the air may not have appealed! Someone older or one who disliked the music, or the scene per se, may have felt uneasy and interpreted the situation as unpleasant, or incomprehensible.

Following this line, I think that the observer's attitude to drug use would influence interpretation of the situation: perhaps someone with a high disregard for drugs would not understand why people take ecstasy and dance for hours on end to this style of music, in dark, hot, crowded conditions (the club did at first feel a little intimidating).

If the observer had been male and similar to myself (i.e. age, liked dance music) I think there would be little difference in interpretation.

If I had been more experienced with this kind of situation (i.e. a clubber myself) I may have picked up on more and interpreted the experiences differently.

Interpretations also depend on whether the observer has taken any drugs (being a drug related scene), which is a possibility of participant observation in this instance: surely the influence of the drug would affect the perception of the situation, say ecstasy and an empathic view towards the clubbers. However, it would not be wise to use drugs and conduct research because of this.

## Feelings as an observer

It felt a little odd at first because I was there as an observer and with friends who were there for pleasure: a balance between my roles (observer and participator) naturally emerged around half way through the observation, when I felt at ease (trying to keep an eye on what was happening without feeling conspicuous came as the evening progressed). Also, as mentioned, on first arrival at the club I felt a little intimidated (due to the dark, loud atmosphere) so this may have resulted in my feeling odd. In a related sense, it was only the second time I had visited a dance club: an alien situation, very different to conventional night-clubs, and the first time was some years ago.

I do not think that I had an affect on what was being observed: to the clubbers I think I will have been seen as another person there for a night out, as I did not look like a stereotypical researcher because I dressed in a similar fashion to the women, was in the general age group of the crowd, and I was with a group of people who was there for fun. Thus, it is fair to say that I was anonymous.

It was difficult to observe everything and everyone due to the large amount of people, but by having a walk around I believe that I got an overall picture of events.

Ethically I feel the observation was sound due to it being an everyday situation, one where observation by others is expected. Also, no-one was identified and I have retained anonymity of the club.

The ages and socio-economic status are assumptions.

Finally, my background in psychology, my experiences of friends who regularly go clubbing and so on, may have affected what I observed and how I interpreted that. However, I did try to see the situation for what it was, without any assumptions that I wanted to test, viz. I used the phenomenological reduction.

## Appendix 2: Pilot Interview Guide

**Aim:** to get a general picture of the lifestyles of people involved in the dance culture: experiences and knowledge of clubbing as a recreation. It's really informal, need your expertise to help me find issues in need of further investigation for my Ph.D. No records of the interview will be kept with your name on, so anonymity is assured and your information will be treated confidentially. You're more than welcome to choose your own false name. During the interview, if some issues arise that you don't want to talk about, this is okay. If some of the content is to be included in the final draft, I will check with you that it is all right to use it. At a later date, when aspects need additional investigation, would you be willing to be interviewed further? Your help would be (and is now) much appreciated. Thanks

---

Just a few personal details:

- age
- occupation - if none, previous
- SES
- education
- marital status
- children

1. Can we start off talking about clubbing

a: how long have you been going?

if long:

- i. noticed any changes in the overall scene (dress, ages, race, class).....*expand*
- ii. have you changed re types of clubs visited? due to what (music, friends, new clubs)

b: how often do you go?

c: what type(s) of club- music, locality, ages, race, dress code.....*note part 3*

d: reasons for going? (fun, sexual relations)

e: do you/have you visit alcohol based clubs (on the town)?

if yes what would you say were the main differences (sexual boundaries)

2. Can I ask you about dance drugs (especially Es and speed)?

It's up to you if you want to answer:

i. in a general sense of knowledge and other's experiences OR

ii. about your personal knowledge and experiences.....*note re next questions*

a: do you feel that they go hand in hand with clubbing? (know of people who don't use)

i. types used (mixture, inc. alcohol)

b: with regard to E use would you say it affects:

i. social life? (empathy, acceptance of others)

ii. mental state in long-term (self awareness/love/acceptance - permanent?)

iii. do you consider these to be motivations for use? - if not, what others

c: any health problems?

i. psychological

ii. physical

d: know of dangers/harm? L/T, S/T (perhaps adulteration, does it worry you)

if yes

i. know how to prevent harm? immediate or in long run (in week perhaps keep healthy)

ii. how found out? (friends, media, drug agency info i.e. posters, flyers, leaflets)

e: ever lost weight via drugs and/or dancing (immediate, long-term?)

if yes:        \*motivation or bonus or both

                  \*problem or welcomed

                  \*alternative to diets

f: if use, think you'll always use E



g: views on harder drugs

### 3. Dress issues

a: is how you dress when clubbing important to you?

if yes:

i. describe your style



if dress to impress: .....No - go to b

ii. do you feel it's freedom of expression or pressure? (media, other clubbers)

iii. specific to all clubs?

b: ever come across term 'babe culture'?

if yes: i. how do you perceive these women ↓

if no: wear very few clothes, revealing, sexualised ↓

c: does it have any influence on way you perceive yourself (bad feelings, not bothered)

d: specific to all clubs?

i. does age, class, ethnicity make a difference?

e: stems from? freedom of expression, conformity to expectations from media/marketing people (glamorise clubbing)

*Well I think I've covered all the areas, so thank you very much. Is there anything you'd like to add about clubbing experiences?*

*Or would like to ask about the interview?*

*Would you be interested in doing a later interview? Much appreciated if so.*

*Thanks again.*



## ECSTASY AND THE DANCE CULTURE

with apologies to Nicholas Saunders

I am a PhD student at Hallam University conducting research into the club culture, more specifically what it means to be a woman on the dance scene.

I am looking for women of any age willing to be interviewed about their experiences, thoughts and feelings of dance clubs and drug use within the club culture: what is it like to be a woman on this scene, what does it mean to you? The research will document an important period of time regarding women's leisure and pleasure, highlighting how it has impacted upon female roles, identity and femininity in society today.

The interviews will be treated confidentially and you won't be identified by name.

Your help will be very much appreciated, if interested please contact:

Sharron Hinchliff

via Marjorie Knight

0114 2252543

or Email: [s.hinchliff@shu.ac.uk](mailto:s.hinchliff@shu.ac.uk)



## Flyers used to Recruit Participants

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#### Appendix 4: Participant Information

*Ann* was twenty-five years old when interviewed. She used to be a follower of techno music but moved on to house. Her first club experience was approximately 1993, from then on she went weekly. Now she goes on a monthly basis and uses ecstasy on these occasions, though previous use was heavy and regular. Her main context for ecstasy use has been the dance club. Ann had been a participant in the pilot study, approximately one year earlier.

*Carol* was a twenty-six year old interviewee whose first club was visited in 1991 but none after until 1996. She prefers house music, has clubbed occasionally and in the future intends to go to celebrate certain events. She has used ecstasy excessively, mainly out of the club setting, though it moved to occasional use.

*Kate* was aged thirty when we conducted the interview. She had also been a participant in the pilot study eighteen months before. Her first clubbing experience was around 1990 and her preference is for free parties, though she is not adverse to clubs. She used to party weekly, but this moved to fortnightly. She has used ecstasy heavily in the past though now it is more an occasional kind of use.

*Lou* was twenty-one years old at the time of interview, and visited her first dance club in 1996. She prefers house music clubs and in the past visited them occasionally whereas now they are kept for special occasions. She used to use ecstasy heavily and regularly (mainly in settings outside of dance clubs), but moved to using occasionally.

*Millie* was age thirty-one at the time of the interview, and had visited her first club in 1991. Her preferred music style was house, she used to go weekly and use ecstasy heavily. She no longer goes clubbing, and rarely takes ecstasy. Her main context of use was the dance club.

*Sam* was twenty-seven years old when the interview was conducted. She had started clubbing back in 1992 and preferred house music. She went every week and used

ecstasy heavily. However, she no longer goes clubbing and does not use ecstasy anymore: her main setting for use was the dance club.

*Teri* was aged twenty-two when we conducted the interview. Her first club was in 1996. She prefers house music clubs and frequented them on occasions but only goes for special occasions. Her ecstasy use has always been carefully regulated by herself, thus not heavy nor regular, and has remained that way. She has used ecstasy in both the setting of dance clubs and out of them.

*Vicki* was twenty-four years old when interviewed, and frequented her first club in approximately 1996. Her preference is for techno music, and she would club regularly though this became less frequent. She has used ecstasy excessively but now it is occasional, and the main setting for use was the dance club.

## Appendix 5: Main Interview Guide

Thanks for taking part.

It's really informal: need your experiences, feelings and thoughts on the dance scene and drug use within it, basically **how it's impacted upon women's lives**. It's for my Ph.D. which will shed a clearer light on women in the 90s, especially those who use drugs for pleasure and on the club scene in general.

You won't be identified by name and whatever you say will be kept confidential.

If there's any questions you don't want to answer that's fine - we can just move on.

---

1. Age
2. Occupation
3. Type of club/event - where, length, frequency.
4. How did you get into the scene - **early** memories, can you give an example?
5. What do you **like** about clubbing?
6. "once on the scene there's no going back" *do you agree?*
7. Has it **changed** you - lifestyle, way you think

### ECSTASY

8. *Assuming that you've taken ecstasy - where* have you used it?
9. What do you **like** about ecstasy - control, confidence, fun, sociability
10. Can you explain the **feeling**?
  - a: What about when at a club/event
11. Work for the **high** (nerves, uncertainty) *could you explain*
12. What are your feelings of **alcohol** based clubs?



13. How would you **compare** them to dance clubs? atmosphere, sexual relations, fear

BODY

14. Club culture tends to **advertise** using thin attractive women: *affect you - happy with weight and shape*

15. A lot of **dress** in clubs is body conscious: *why - safe environment, fashion, heat*

16. 26.7% experienced **weight** loss through drugs and dancing (Mixmag, 1996):  
*happened to you*

a: If appeals - why

DRUGS *to build up a picture*

17. Use: past **month** (type, amount) **usual** (type, amount) **lifetime** (type)

a: Any you would **not use**

b: Any drugs to **comedown**

18. In a recent survey, 83% felt drug taking to be **accepted** part of British people's lives:  
*what do you think?*

a: unproblematic - risks

19. Ever experienced anything **unpleasant** whilst high - adulterated ecstasy, out of the ordinary behaviour

a: **outcome**: more careful, abstinence

20. **Excessive** use: problems, health, appearance

21. What's happening **now** re clubbing

22. **Future**: clubbing, dance drugs.

23. *Just to sum up then*, is there any more ways you feel that your experiences on the club scene may have **changed** you? - Lifestyle: better or worse

Thank you.

Is there anything you'd like to add or any questions you'd like to ask me?

If you are interested, I will keep you informed about the research and the part you have played in it.

Know of any other women who may be interested in doing an interview?

## Appendix 6: Useful Contacts

### ***ROCKINGHAM DRUG PROJECT***

117 Rockingham Street  
Sheffield  
S1 4EB  
Tel: 0114 2755973

### ***CREW 2000***

32 Cockburn Street  
Edinburgh  
EH1 1PB  
Tel: 0131 2203404

### ***SHED***

Address as above  
Tel: 0114 2729164

### ***EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION***

Tel: 01603 621414

### ***LIFELINE***

101-103 Oldham Street  
Manchester  
M4 1LW  
Tel: 0161 8392054

### ***RELEASE***

388 Old Street  
London  
EC1V 9LT  
Tel: 0171 7299904

### ***NATIONAL DRUGS HELP LINE***

0800 77 66 00

## Appendix 7: Transcript Notation

underline - emphasis

CAPITALS - spoken loudly

xxx - inaudible

(.) - pause

(2) - duration of pause, number indicates seconds

## Appendix 8: Interview Transcript - Kate

S: err, can I start by asking what type of clubs or events you go to?

K: erm, I go to the [free party event] things nowadays, they're not really clubs, erm it's a big event at a community centre not a club-club and err, that's about it really xxx

S: what about in the past?

K: erm, [Sheffield club] and a few clubs in Nottingham I used to go to.

S: right, and how long have you been going?

K: [laughs] err years (.) since I was, no I didn't really get into the club scene until I was about twenty-one.

S: err, how did you get into clubbing and that sort of scene?

K: well I didn't go to clubs when I wasn't into dance music, it was by getting into dance music I got into going to clubs 'cos before that I used to go to xxx I wasn't really into clubs...

S: so you found the music before the scene?

K: well it happened at the same time, sort of got in with certain people who were into this sort of music you know.

S: and do you have any early memories of when you started going?

K: [laughs] err, I can remember my first E.

S: oh right, yeah.

K: I can remember that [laughs].

S: that would be a good one.

K: erm, well that was at a free party, oh I didn't say that I used to go to free parties all the time not clubs, just like in the middle of a field. And we went to the middle of a field and err (.) we'd not done one [ecstasy] before and we did one together and it was just one of the best nights ever [laughs] it was just like all your Christmas' in one, yeah it was good.

S: did you feel nervous or anything?

K: no, not at all... I just felt the most excited I'd felt in my life and I just couldn't stop running around. Yeah it was just great.

S: so what is it that you like about these events you go to?

K: erm (3) just music, well the music definitely and just, you know there's a certain type of people that go to different clubs and err (.) the sort of people that go to the

things I go to are more on the alternative scene and it's different than going to a normal club 'cos it's a lot more fun and it's a lot more laid-back, people talk more to each other and it just, it's not as posy and it's not as erm, what's the word I'm looking for, yeah it's more like a party, a private party than a club where you're just one person in the crowd, it's like you get to know everyone really quickly, you get to know all the faces 'cos it's not like a club where its different people every week, it's the same people every week and that's really nice, what I like about it.

S: yeah, does that keep together outside of these events?

K: yeah, yeah, yeah it tends to. Once you get to know people, you know you start to bump into them in the crowd and stuff.

S: it's a lovely way to meet people.

K: yeah [laughs].

S: there's a little quote, once on the scene there's no going back, would you agree?

K: absolutely (.) I mean I've gone through a cycle of erm, you first get into it and then it's everything to you and all you're doing is waiting for the weekend or go out in the week as well and you're just waiting for the weekend, then waiting for the next party and the next party, and then err you're really full-on, going to absolutely everything, then you calm down a bit and don't go out as much, then then, well me I stopped going at all and then I got back into it again and it was just like it was at the start, really full-on, it just goes in cycles and (.) you can see other people doing it as well 'cos you're like on the end of the cycle and there's people just on the beginning bit and they're really full-on and they're really up for everything and you're more calm. But yeah it definitely goes in cycles, but once you're on it you don't leave it, you might have a period where you don't go for a while but you always get back in there really. You just miss it.

S: and err, when you do get back into it after a rest period is it still as good, like when you first started going?

K: well because I've been doing it for so long it's not quite as exciting but yeah it's still just as good, it's like coming home you know, it's like you get on it again and it's like 'oh yeah, decent people' and you really miss those people 'cos they're a certain type that are into that certain scene and, yeah it's just great [laughs] it's just like being (.) you know finding the people that are like you, it's really nice, it feels really safe and sound.

S: erm would you say that it's changed you, your experiences of

K: yeah I'm loads more confident (2) I don't know. Yeah, once you've been on that scene, I don't know, it just gets you to let boundaries down and I was a lot, maybe it was my age 'cos I was young then but I wasn't that confident before and I found it hard to talk to people and stuff but now I find it loads easier to talk to people and I don't just mean on that scene, I think it has changed the way I am, I'm a lot more approachable and easy to talk to and just err, yeah just feel more confident.

S: umm, do you know what you could put that down to?

K: [laughs]

S: whether it's just being in the environment and the people you are with?

K: it's the environment and the people xxx once you've had your boundaries let down by that much it becomes part of the way you are I think, it just makes you more relaxed maybe and that's a sort of permanent thing.

S: so it runs into your life, it's not just immediate?

K: yeah definitely, it does, it keeps on (.) 'cos, yeah before I was always quite uptight and then I did that for so many weeks for so many years it sort of, you just get into the habit of talking to anybody and not being so guarded and stuff and that carried on in my life as well as I do find it a lot more easy to make friends outside the club, when I'm not clubbing or whatever.

S: do you think it sort of calms your personality?

K: not calms, it opens it up really (2) 'cos before you've got a lot of boundaries between people, when you go to a normal pub or club that's not a dance club you don't really talk to that many people and you sort of stay in your own little groups but at clubs like that [dance] you just get used to running around talking to anyone, you just have no, your boundaries aren't there you know.

S: erm, can I just ask you some things about ecstasy?

K: yeah [laughs].

S: what contexts, places have you taken it?

K: erm clubs, parties, going on country walks, staying in with my boyfriend, staying in with friends, coming-down after a club [laughs] all sorts really.

S: are there any preferred ones?

K: erm (2) definitely sort of err, at an outside party it's best, taking it out in the country's really nice, but taking it at a club's nice as well. Those two I suppose.



S: what makes that better do you think?

K: (2) well at a free party you can be as messy as you want, at a club you still have to behave yourself a little bit 'cos of bouncers and stuff like that, but if you go to a free party and take it everyone tends to, everyone takes it in a different way, they get more messy and more silly and err, you just have a really good look around and you don't have to worry about what you look like or, you can just get really, really mashed and make an idiot of yourself which is quite fun, like at a club you maybe have a bit more of, try to keep it together a bit more...

S: is that what you'd class as messy, being really off your head and just not worry?

K: yeah just really get really daft and it doesn't matter.

S: what do you like about ecstasy in particular?

K: (4) erm, it makes dancing better, dancing on it's brilliant. But also just the way it relaxes everybody so everybody is chatting on and walking about and just, yeah the fact that it keeps you awake and makes you dance for hours. That's it, it just makes everybody friendly and have laughs.

S: you mentioned dancing on ecstasy, could you explain how it feels?

K: err, right (.) the rushes you get are just amazing 'cos like the way they do the music, they build the music up and they drop it down and that tied in with drugs and, 'cos you really home in on the beat and then erm, you'll trance off a bit and that's nice, just really trance off and totally lose it and (.) it just feels really tingly when you're tranced up and dancing. And then they'll stop raising the music, and as they drop it down and raise it up, like teasing a bit you just get this rush going up and down you and how do you explain a rush? A rush is just like this feeling going up from your toes up to your head, it just goes 'wush' [laughs] and that's really nice. And hugging people, just hugging people on ecstasy just feels so nice, it's so nice to touch other people 'cos it feels great... and everybody does hug as well which is really nice.

S: even with strangers?

K: yeah, yeah I mean you'll be dancing away and err, say there's just been a really good track and somebody's dancing in front of you, it makes people contact with each other 'cos you'll be dancing away and you'll look across and somebody will be dancing back and then you'll like (.) sort of energise each other to dance more and then after that you just go and hug them even though you don't know them 'cos you've just danced together

and it's just been really good. It does make people contact each other more on the [dance] floor and just walking around and stuff.

S: buzzing each other?

K: yeah, yeah 'cos there's, you'll be dancing away and there'll be somebody dancing like you, then you'll like look into each others' eyes and you'll be grinning your heads off and dancing and you really connect with them, and then you'll go and give them a hug or something but not always [laughs] on a good night, on a good club night.

S: do you feel like, I've heard someone say it's like a special bond when you do get that with someone when you're having a dance?

K: yeah, yeah you do and you just keep, 'cos sometimes you're dancing and you've been dancing all night, somebody's been grinning across at you going 'yeah you're dancing as well' and then you'll start to flag and they'll go 'COME ON' and then you'll be like 'oh yeah, right' and you just keep making each other dance more and, yeah you keep getting those connections (.) 'cos there's always a certain type of dancer, there was one this weekend, you always get the guy whose eyes are popping out of his head and they always dance around the dance floor (.) loads and they always walk passed you and do this [makes elongated face with wide staring eyes] to you and then you're looking for them to do it again, and then you sort of make friends with them 'cos they're the mad person walking around the dance floor xxx

S: yeah to sort of amuse people?

K: YEAH, yeah.

S: that's brilliant. Do you find that sometimes you have to work for the high on ecstasy?

K: yeah I mean sometimes you just get a (.) pill that you don't, you just get, it hits you and you're up there but sometimes you have to dance it up, a lot of times you have to take it and got to work it up definitely (2) sometimes you don't.

S: do you think it depends on the quality of the tablet then?

K: it can yeah, but also sometimes just your mood and the night, say the music wasn't particularly my sort of music, it wasn't that good I'd have to work at it a lot more but once I'd got there I'd be up and running sort of thing. So, it's lots of things really but yeah a crap pill, sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's just you and the mood you're in.

S: right. What about nerves, do you get nervous?

K: erm (.) sometimes if I've had a pill that's got a lot of acid in it I might get a bit erm paranoid sometimes, sometimes if I've taken far too much speed I might get a bit jittery,

but it always, once you reach that point where you've worked it up and you get on the high and you're off, that sort of goes away really. But sometimes I've been, sometimes if I've just been on acid or if I've had an E with acid in it you can get that real (.) you'll be like dancing away and you'll be all right and then you'll get paranoid and then it'll go away then you'll get paranoid, it comes and goes.

S: umm and then it gradually disappears?

K: but sometimes it doesn't [laughs] or you can stop just feeling really self-conscious or (.) it depends, there's so many different sorts of ecstasy and you get ones which make you run around like an idiot talking to loads of people then you get ones that make you really insular and you just maybe just dance and don't really talk to anybody, you just smile across or, it's just so many different (2) feelings you get off them xxx some of them make you really quiet and not be able to dance at all, just sit in a corner [laughs].

S: do you find that it's a drug that you can control?

K: (3) erm, right if you have an average E yeah you can control it but sometimes you get one that's really strong or it's got something in it, just really trippy or something and you can't control it as much (.) and you feel really out of control and out of it. The average one I'd say you don't feel that out of it.

S: umm, it sounds like there's quite a mixture, a variety of ecstasy.

K: yeah I know that, I mean there's been ones that I've had where there's been lots of heroin in it 'cos that's one where you just, you're really monged out and it's (.) you feel really wobbly, you can't really talk to anyone, you just erm (.) sit but quite often it's all right 'cos you go and find somebody else that's on one like that and just sit with them and you feel comfortable sitting but you know you can't get up and dance 'cos you, either your legs are wobbling out under you, but you find someone else in the same state and you feel comfortable together doing that. Sometimes you get ones where you just don't want to dance, you just want to chat your head off to somebody... a lot used to have a lot of acid in but I haven't really had a trippy pill for a long time. And then there was the time when there was a lot of like dirty pills around that were supposed to have like ketamine in them or heroin...

S: I know we've touched on this a bit but, what are your feelings of alcohol based clubs?

K: well it's funny 'cos like for years and years when I was on the dance scene I was purely into chemicals and it made me go off drinking completely but erm (.) this last six

months I've got really back into drinking loads and sort of taking E and drinking which I never used to do, and that's really nice and err, I'd say a lot of the people on the party scene have got back into drinking as well, it's like maybe you take your E and speed and dance all night and then you get really really messy in the mornings and just drink loads to come-down or the other way around, you just drink loads before you go out, and then sometimes you're taking loads of drugs and drinking masses at the same time as well so. But it's, yeah when it first started people didn't really drink that much, it was strange if people were pissed but now those people have started to like get really pissed as well so it's more of a mixture of people now, some are just pissed, some do drugs. But myself, I've started to drink a lot more again.

S: have you started going to alcohol based clubs or anything?

K: erm, well I go to the pub now a lot more than I ever used to 'cos I didn't really go to pubs that much when I was into drugs... you find sound systems doing nights in pubs and stuff and people might just get pissed for that, they won't bother doing loads of drugs. Do I go to night-clubs? Yeah, I've started to err (.) but that's just being a student really I think.

S: what about any sort of mainstream clubs like [name of one in Sheffield]?

K: well I went to [Sheffield club] for the heavy metal night [laughs] but that was just a piss-take [laughs]. Not really, no. I have done it but that's because we need a cheap night out and we want to take the piss out of people... if I'm planning a real weekend out it's always, or I want a good night out, then it's dance clubs definitely, I wouldn't want to go to any other sort of club.

S: erm, what about the atmosphere of clubs compared to dance clubs?

K: erm (2) well the scene I'm on with the dance scene it's more like you're old friends so I've always hated things like that 'cos I always got picked on for looking like different, and erm so I wouldn't feel comfortable in a club like that anyway and err (4) 'cos if you're on the dance scene people tend to be less straight so there's not that sort of violence thing and crapness you get at a more townie club anyway so I've always (2) 'cos that's what's so good about the dance scene you know, it attracts sort of less, well I know I'm not on a straight dance scene but the scene I'm on it doesn't have, it has a few townies but you can spot them a mile off, they're the odd ones out, so that's what's really attractive about it... as much as the music and as much as the drugs, it's the fact that you're finding those sort of people that you can feel relaxed with anyway 'cos

they're not that same 'go out, get pissed, have a fight' sort of thing. You hardly ever see a fight at those clubs but you do at the normal sort of clubs... I mean that's part of the attraction of the dance scene, that you are finding loads of people that you do feel relaxed with to start with, I mean maybe if I did go to a townie club and take E I wouldn't relax at all because (.) you know, they're just not my sort of people, but the dance scene has got those people which I feel good about.

S: do you think the setting affects how your E feels too?

K: (5) erm, I've mostly ever done it in nice circumstances but I'm sure yeah I'd say, yeah I remember there was one club where we went to and the bouncers were really really heavy and erm they were like following me around if I was going to the toilet, followed me into the toilet and shit like that and I didn't have a good time at that club because the bouncers were so heavy and another thing, it's all come back to me now [laughs] I remember going to a club and err this girl really laid into me, I was really really off my tits, really friendly and fluffy and stuff, and this girl really laid into me in the toilets and after that I was really jittery and I couldn't, even though I was really really off my face I couldn't relax again and have a good time 'cos she'd spoilt the night really so, yeah your setting can spoil it totally. And then if you've got bouncers glaring across at you making it a heavy atmosphere, it does spoil.

S: God, that's terrible when they follow you around as though they are keeping an eye on you.

K: umm, well yeah they were, they thought I was going to fix [take heroin] which I wasn't.

S: umm. Err, I don't know if you get this on the underground scene but do you get many women dressing in body conscious clothes?

K: no, not really. I mean some, people tend to wear sort of not many clothes because it's hot erm, but you don't get people in tiny little shoes and baby-doll outfits (.) but then people do wear like, it's a different sort of, people might wear quite few clothes like they might wear low-cut T-shirts and stuff but it's a different way of wearing them if you know what I mean... I noticed it the other day, like I always get the piss taken out of me for wearing a skirt and trousers but I noticed a lot of other girls were doing that, if the girls were wearing short skirts they'd be wearing leggings underneath the skirt, they wouldn't be having bare legs like maybe at a townie club. But then I went to a night [club] OH God months back and there was a girl dancing with nothing on at all on the

top and she was just dancing with literally everything out [laughs] which is like, it's a different way of dressing [on her scene], people don't dress party-ly, they dress more funkily, it may be wearing little clothing but it's a different message it's giving off, it's more funky it's not sort of as sexual.

S: not to attract attention, well that type of attention?

K: umm, yeah I'd say that.

S: err, quite a few women do experience weight loss through drugs and dancing, has that ever happened to you?

K: err, yeah that's really nice [laughs]. It's great. I mean when I go to, that's another thing about free parties is that they last longer I mean I know that I've been to a free party and I have danced for like twelve hours, and if you dance for twelve hours you're gonna lose some weight. Err, and then there's the come-down where you don't feel like eating anyway as well (.) and it just speeds your metabolism up and makes you lose weight anyway so. It is good yeah, I mean when I was talking about cycles you see a lot of people first come on the scene and they're like, they might be a bit chubby and then a year later they'll be like, lost loads of weight and err (2) I can't say that isn't nice, it is, it is good.

S: is that 'cos of err the feel-good-factor?

K: yeah well it just makes you feel better about yourself doesn't it and adds to feeling confident, if you're thinner then you're more confident and you're more (.) nice about yourself so.

S: is it kind of a rapid thing the weight loss, does it occur quickly?

K: yeah with erm, with a lot of people it does. Yeah it is quite quick 'cos I say when you first get into ecstasy you're just full-on, you're partying all weekend, you're probably going out in the week and partying as well so because you're so full, so like into it that you're probably doing a lot of dancing so yeah you do lose weight quickly.

S: do you think that acts as a motivation to carry on doing tablets and dancing?

K: (4) I do know that when a lot of people have stopped they say 'oh I'm putting on weight' but I don't know whether that would make them be the only thing to make them go back to doing it but I mean I've sat around with mates who've erm (.) been having a period where they're not going out and they've put on weight and we talk about that 'oh we're putting on weight again aren't we' but (.) I wouldn't say that was a major motivation for anybody but it is really nice [laughs]. I know that if I'm feeling bad about



myself and I'm going out at the weekend I'll know, it'll be in my mind that 'oh, I'll take loads of speed this weekend, I won't eat that much and I will feel thinner by the end of the week' [laughs] which is nice but it wouldn't be the only reason that I did it. But err, I do think about this.

S: err, I remember a girl saying that weight was a big problem when she stopped clubbing, so she was going once a month to try and use it as a form of weight control.

K: no I've never, no I wouldn't say I definitely use it as a form of weight control but (2) but it's like I have been drinking loads but it's quite nice to get back into drugs again more 'cos then you're not drinking as much and that's not calories is it [laughs] but it wouldn't ever be the reason why I did it, it's just nice err when you're aware, that's good about it.

S: erm could I just ask you about drugs to build a picture? Erm your past months drugs.

K: err, Es, speed and coke.

S: ah, ah and what's your usual pattern for the week?

S: well it depends whether it's a party weekend or not. At a party weekend it would be probably err (2) last weekend, each night we did an E each and half a wrap of speed between the two of us so, erm on the Saturday and Sunday. I don't know how much was in the wrap [laughs]... and a lot of alcohol.

S: is that just beer, lager or?

K: err just beer yeah. Oh and Saturday was vodka, lots of vodka.

S: is there any particular drugs that you use to come-down?

K: erm well I don't smoke hash but err all my mates smoke loads of hash to come-down... just drink really I suppose. If I'm feeling really jittery and I need to calm down, just beer, not spirits because they make you up, I mean it's spirits before you go out and beer when you're coming down so.

S: how do you feel when you are coming down?

K: well err, one of the reasons I stopped, I used to do lots of E and then erm it just started to feel bad all the time. Like I started to get really bad come-downs and then the come-downs stopped being come-downs and it just turned into one long, long, long depression so erm, it was really erm, it lasted (2) a lot of months and it got so bad that I went to the doctors and she did offer me prozac which is good, she offered it me straight away but she also said 'I want you to do counselling first' which I thought was good so I did do erm (.) quite a few sessions of counselling to sort of try and get out of

this depression. And I wasn't, I think a lot of it was, looking back I do think maybe a might have been a bit depressed anyway but it was majorly due I think to taking ecstasy, the reason I got into this big trap of being really down so erm I said I wouldn't take it again and when I did go out I just started to do loads and loads of base-speed and like drink a lot more of spirits, like a bottle of vodka and a wrap of base to myself but erm, just recently I've started to do E again and I'm all right at the moment but erm, this week I did have a bad come-down like Tuesday night I was just err, I was okay all day Tuesday then I just started crying and I just cried all night and then Wednesday I felt really up and down, I was like really tearful... I mean for the first two years I took E I never really got a come-downs at all, I was fine you know, I didn't really understand what a come-down was and then it started that I did get come-downs but it was only a day so that was okay but when it went into this like depression that never went away I did stop taking them but now I've started to take them again so, even though I said I wouldn't. But it's so hard not to, 'cos it's really good [laughs] and, I don't know, if I feel like, I think I'd recognise the pattern, if I feel myself going back into that sort of thing where, I don't mind having a one day come-down midweek, you're sort of crying and feeling weird and you're upset and then you sort of remember 'oh it's a come-down, it's a Wednesday' and it makes you feel okay about it 'cos you just think 'I'll just get through today' so that doesn't bother me but if I start feeling it slide into getting depressed again then I will definitely stop (.) for a while. That was terrible at the time, I never want to go through that again, it was just too (.) hideous.

S: do you think that was using it for so often?

K: yeah, yeah definitely 'cos I mean I've done it for years so.

S: did you actually feel it creep up on you or did you have to stop before

K: no I felt it creeping up, it was like you was having a one day come-down then it was two, then three then maybe have a whole week of feeling down and be all right for a while, it gradually sort of stretched out until it was just like 'dush' [all the time]. But I do think it was definitely ecstasy that majorly caused it, it's just like your brains like, you have nothing left, you're just numb, you know 'cos if you're using that much up then there's a price to pay and it was, it was horrible... I was just thinking that you've used it all up, whatever it is in your brain is gone, it's like depleted and you haven't got any, what is the stuff?

S: serotonin?

K: serotonin isn't it, it wasn't a depression where I was crying or anything, it just depression where I felt nothing, I was like a zombie, I just felt totally numb and I knew I wasn't happy but, it wasn't like a normal depression where you might be a bit angry and a bit emotional, there was no emotion left, it was just like I was completely sort of numb and that's what did me. That's why I didn't do anything about it for such a long time 'cos I didn't realise how bad it was for a long time and then I suddenly realised that 'God, I've felt nothing for so many (.) so long and I just can't stand this feeling of nothingness anymore' it was really horrible and it was just like, I have no serotonin left in me, I don't know it was like it was completely used up.

S: but you did manage to come out of that?

K: yeah, yeah I did and then for ages I said 'right, I'll just do speed when I go out' and it's fine just doing speed, that's okay but then you slip back into, I did, no somebody gave me half a pill, just because they did [she consumed] and then that was it, it was like 'yeah I do remember this, and it is so nice (.) and I want to do it again' [laughs].

S: err, in a recent survey 83% of people thought that drug taking was an accepted part of British people's lives

K: definitely, I mean 'cos Britain's quite unique in that it's got like the youth culture scene, in Britain it's really unique isn't it and err (2) everyone does it, I'd say so many young people do it, it maybe once a month or it may be once a week whatever but everyone does. Oh, I did mushrooms as well in the last month.

S: oh right, yeah. Erm do you ever think about, you know how it is normalised with everyone using, do you ever think about the risks involved?

K: I do think we're like, we don't know the long term effects and it's like this whole generation of people that have done so many, this much ecstasy and we're just like a big fucking experiment erm, and we're the guinea pigs. Yeah I think there might be like in thirty years time, if ecstasy has some sort of erm bad side-effect like it makes you go senile quicker or it makes people, you know have an effect that doesn't come out for years later, there might be a massive health crisis in this country where everybody fucks up because everybody's done it 'cos nobody knows. I sometimes, not now because I haven't done it for so long but when I've been doing ecstasy for a long, long time and then I started to calm down and have come-downs and stuff I did, I went through a big period and a lot of my friends did of really, really fucking worrying about the long term effects of what we've done to ourselves. 'Cos I know a lot of us say that we feel a lot

more stupid [laughs] since we've done it but like my short-term, my memory's not as good but that might be just getting older but I know a few of us that think it's the drugs 'cos I can't remember as well as I used to and things like that. There's been times when I have really worried about the long-term effects, especially when there's a documentary on the telly saying 'look at how many brain cells you've wiped out'. But when you get back into it and excited by it again all that goes, you know, the fear, it's only when you're calming down and getting bored a bit maybe that you start to worry about the health effects again. But you do worry sometimes.

S: do you think it's because you notice your memory's not as good and then it sets you off thinking 'oh shit'?

K: umm and just like I have seen people who've been full-on on the party scene and they've had nervous breakdowns and things like that, people who've done so many drugs and for so long. The amount of people that I've seen really, really lose it is frightening sometimes 'cos that combination of doing it that long and that many mixtures of drugs and cocktails and just the lifestyle, yeah people do crash and burn and I've seen a lot of people do it and I know I have myself, but not, I just got depressed, I mean some people really lose it, sort of become mentally ill and stuff erm (.) I don't know. I suppose when you describe it like this it sounds really bad but you just, it's just part of the scene and most people come out of it so, they stop and their friends make sure they stop, and they get better.

S: yeah, it sounds worse when you talk about it like this.

K: yeah but you know that person's going to be all right 'cos they're just going to stop and then come out of it but a lot of people do, they do it for so long, then they push it and push it and then they go [pushes hand down to indicate a drop]. And it's quite a sudden thing as well sometimes, one minute they'll be all right, and there's a lot of people on prozac now that don't do E anymore because they, you know it just puts them straight back again so a lot of people have had to give it up because of having depression and stuff..

S: would you say that some people are prone to paranoia and depression or is it just the drugs?

K: it's hard to say (2) the long-term effect of doing a lot of E is you do get depressed whether you're prone to it or not... I think any person that did E for a long time would

get that big depression thing, not just the come-down... paranoia, yeah that can come along as well.

S: have you ever, whilst you've been on E, have you ever experienced anything unpleasant?

K: there was the time I thought I was going to die. Erm, I went to a club and I, the people I get drugs off 'cos I never buy drugs off people I don't know hadn't got any so I did buy one off somebody I didn't know and I took it and erm, I just never felt as ill in my life, I was totally, I just completely stood still and there was just, I wasn't just sweating, sweat was pouring down my back and I was just completely soaked and I just felt, I've never felt so ill in all my life then I got really anxious. And erm, so I went to sit in the corner, this is really sad [laughs] I went and sat in this corner and I thought 'fucking hell I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I've taken this dodgy tablet and I don't know what's in it' and I did genuinely believe that I was going to die so I just thought 'well I'll just sit here and wait for it to happen' [laughs]. I didn't go and find my mates or anything like that and I thought (.) 'okay, that's it then, sort of fucked up' and I sat there for about an hour and I was like, my eyes were like fucking rolling back in my head, I just felt so ill that all I could think was I was going to die, it was horrible. Sometimes you take a pill and you feel sick but it wasn't like feeling a bit sick where you know you just go outside, get some fresh air and you're okay or you go into the toilet and drink some water, it wasn't like getting too much of a rush, it was a real, just fucking totally wiped out and the sweating was really worrying me 'cos you hear of all these people dying from overheating and stuff, I've never sweated like that in my life, it was really scary.

S: how did your body feel, sort of feelings?

K: I FELT REALLY CALM which is probably the E 'cos it does calm you, I just thought 'well this is it then, which is a shame, I don't want to die now' but in-between being fucking violently ill that's how I felt, I did feel really calm... some people have got ill on it and they're really freaking out and they're screaming and shouting and stuff and then people come and calm them down and help them out, take them outside, give them water and stuff.

S: were you able to move or did you

K: no eventually I couldn't, I just err, I managed to go to the toilets once and I was sliding down the wall and stuff. One of the toilets had a window and I was getting some

fresh air and err, when I came out and found this corner I couldn't move after that, I just sat in the corner and I couldn't move my arms, my legs, nothing and like I said my eyes were rolling back in my head so I couldn't see properly or nothing, couldn't do anything.

S: did that gradually wear off?

K: YEAH, it just gradually went away, but it took a long time, it must have taken me about an hour and a half of being really that bad and then it started to calm down. But I mean sometimes, yeah a lot of times you might take E, especially with MDMA powder not err pills it's really difficult to judge it and a lot of the times you take that and you do feel really quite ill for a while, feel really sick and stuff but, BUT NOT panicky sick or not worrying sick, you just know you feel a bit sick and it will pass

S: but you're feeling good with it sort of thing?

K: you're feeling good with it too and it's fine, you just know you feel a bit sick and it'll calm down within a few minutes, you know... it's a lot stronger [than ecstasy tablets] when you take that it's a lot more wobbly for ages, it's a real messy one 'cos err, you take that and your legs just feel like jelly and you're wobbling and wobbling around and you're feeling really good but you can't dance for ages but you usually take it with your mates and you're all falling over together and just giggling like mad, but yeah it's a lot different feeling to a pill, it's not as clean, it's more messy... that's what I mean about being messy at parties, if you're in a club and you were falling over like that you'd feel a bit, well for one you'd know the bouncers would start watching you and it would make you feel uncomfortable but at a party and not a proper club you can just fall over and laugh about it and have a really (.) good time. That powder's really messy.

S: yeah, erm we've talked about health problems, what's the outcome of those problems you had?

K: (2) erm well, I got through it. I learned a lot while I was going through it, it's good in the end 'cos you learn when you come out of it, you don't feel like you've achieved anything but you've actually been sorting stuff out when you're down (.) but just CALMER really now, I just wouldn't go for it as much now, I'd be a bit more sensible and I'd be watching out for the signs to stop doing it for a while and maybe just go back to speed or. Just being a lot more careful and just being a lot more aware really, that it's not all good and just to watch out for tell-tale signs.



S: could I ask you, 'cos I know on the free party scene a lot more people talk about the spiritual feel, could you tell me anything about that?

K: yeah, well it's not, it's not just the big weekend out, it becomes a way of life, it's like you start mixing with those people [interruption]. It's err, it's 'cos you're in the middle of nowhere, you're in this, usual beautiful places and you've arranged it all for yourself, it's like this real tribal thing and you do become part of that whole scene and, you might go around with a bucket to collect money for the generator to keep the party going, I don't know you just (.) because it's a lot longer and err, you go and sit in people's cars and talk to them, you get to know people a lot closer than you would at a club and then you'll all go back somewhere together and you stay together a lot longer, then you start seeing them in the week as well, it just becomes more of a way of life really because you're mixing with those people all the time whereas a club's more like, you go to a club but you only see those people at the club that weekend and you wouldn't know that many people in the club but at a party scene you get to know everyone's face and everybody knows you. It's a lot more closer and you look around more, you just get closer from doing all that 'cos it's a longer stretch of time so you really get to know everyone. Yeah it does feel more spiritual.

S: yeah. Will you be going this year?

K: yeah in the summer. I used to go to the winter parties but I'm not that hard-core anymore [laughs]...

S: with clubbing and ecstasy use, what's happening now?

K: well I've just started to take it again now really after a period of not really doing it. So, YEAH I'll just carry on doing it but not as full-on as I ever was, 'cos for a start the parties aren't every weekend, they're once a fortnight or once a month so.

S: you know when you weren't doing ecstasy but were doing speed, did you still go then?

K: err yeah.

S: did you enjoy it?

K: OH YEAH, I still had just as good a time but it's a different feeling when you're on E, but speed's good as well 'cos you do chat to a lot more people and that's nice so [laughs], that's good as well.

S: err and what about your future in clubbing. Do you think you'll always go?

K: yeah, I'm getting older now but I can't see myself stopping, not for a lot longer, no not immediately. It's not, it's not just a really good night out, it's a way of finding really good people as well, yeah I think I'll just carry on doing it for ages.

S: is there anything other than your health that might stop you?

K: no, no I wouldn't have thought so. No a job wouldn't err, no.

S: well we're near the end now, just to sum up is there any more ways that you feel your experiences might have changed you?

K: (2) I can dance better than I could dance [laughs]. It's like, it changes the way you listen to music, I'm sure it does, like changes some pattern in your head like how you listen to music 'cos I don't listen to music the same way as I did before I did ecstasy and erm, I can dance now and there was a time when I thought I could only ever dance on drugs but now I can, before I didn't really dance very much and I'd never dance unless I was off my head but now I can actually dance without being on drugs which I could never do before, so it's made me be able to dance [laughs] and it's funny, music really makes me up now. It's like, when you're dancing away on E and you get that rush, I can get that rush from just listening to a good dance track when I'm not on it anymore. I don't know, maybe it changes the way you listen to music 'cos I can get so fucking up from listening to music.

S: like the way you hear it?

K: yeah and it ties into your emotions even when you're not on it 'cos I can really rush off a good dance track and just really get that feeling like when you're coming up off an E. But just feeling so much more (.) relaxed and confident and open to people, that's been a major effect and loads of people say once they've been on the scene for a while it's not just when you're on the drugs, it carries on afterwards 'cos I knew this bloke who was so shy he was like, he couldn't talk to anyone and then he did it for a long time but he doesn't do it anymore but he can still be friendly now, he could never do that before so 'cos he was so shy he was emotionally crippled, he couldn't talk to anyone, he can now. Just that really.

S: that's a big positive effect.

K: umm, yeah, that's true.

S: well that's it, is there anything you'd like to ask or add?

K: no, I asked you the last time.

S: thank you very much, that's been brilliant.

K: I forgot to tell you that, the fact that you can go out and just dance your tits off and be as open as you want but not be (.) constantly looking out for men hassling you, I mean it does happen occasionally where you get someone out of his brain like coming-on to you and stuff but it happens so few times whereas if you go to a normal club that happens so much and like every guy that comes up to you is trying to chat you up and it's like really tiresome but at dance clubs somebody will come up to you and be talking to you, you won't be worrying 'oh, he's coming-on to me', he'll just be chatting to you. That is such a, I'm sure that is a big erm (2) attraction for a lot of women of the dance scene, that they can go out, have a fucking good time and just not be hassled by men at all 'cos it just, it doesn't really happen on that scene. You can hug blokes and you know they'll not be thinking anymore of it then just a hug, they won't be thinking 'oh, I'm in here' or anything. You can just hug a bloke and have a really nice hug and feel really close to him but know that you're not gonna be hassled by him afterwards which is a really, really nice thing which helps you feel more relaxed as a woman going out and, that means you can get off your head without worrying, you know if you get too drunk at a normal club then you're a victim aren't you, you know they home in on you. But that just doesn't happen on the dance scene which is really nice. When I went to this rock club for a piss-take I was really shocked by how many men were fucking coming-on to me if I was dancing and, and I'd forgotten that's what happens at normal clubs, completely forgotten that you have to be a bit more guarded, you know you can't relax as much because you know blokes are going to be thinking that's a come-on or whatever, so that is what's so nice about the dance scene. You know it's so relaxed.

S: like a safe environment where you can let go?

K: yeah (.) and when you do get hassled by a bloke it's so rare that it's a real surprise as well.

S: so err, is there anything more then?

K: no.

S: well thank you very much.

***Err, can I start by asking what type of clubs or events you go to?***

1. erm, I go to the [free party event] things nowadays,
2. they're not really clubs,
3. erm it's a big event at a community centre not a club-club and err, that's about it really xxx

***What about in the past?***

4. erm, [Sheffield club] and a few clubs in Nottingham I used to go to.

***Right, and how long have you been going?***

5. [laughs] err years (.) since I was,
6. no I didn't really get into the club scene until I was about twenty-one.

***Err, how did you get into clubbing and that sort of scene?***

7. well I didn't go to clubs when I wasn't into dance music,
8. it was by getting into dance music I got into going to clubs
9. 'cos before that I used to go to xxx I wasn't really into clubs...

***So you found the music before the scene?***

10. well it happened at the same time,
11. sort of got in with certain people who were into this sort of music you know.

***And do you have any early memories of when you started going?***

12. [laughs] err, I can remember my first E.

***Oh right, yeah.***

13. I can remember that [laughs].

***That would be a good one.***

14. erm, well that was at a free party,
15. oh I didn't say that I used to go to free parties all the time
16. not clubs, just like in the middle of a field. And we went to the middle of a field and err (.)
17. we'd not done one [ecstasy] before
18. and we did one together
19. and it was just one of the best nights ever [laughs]
20. it was just like all your Christmas' in one, yeah it was good.

***Did you feel nervous or anything?***

21. no, not at all...
22. I just felt the most excited I'd felt in my life
23. and I just couldn't stop running around.
24. Yeah it was just great.

*So what is it that you like about these events you go to?*

25. erm (3) just music, well the music definitely
26. and just, you know there's a certain type of people that go to different clubs
27. and err (.) the sort of people that go to the things I go to are more on the alternative scene
28. and it's different than going to a normal club
29. 'cos it's a lot more fun
30. and it's a lot more laid-back,
31. people talk more to each other
32. and it just, it's not as posy
33. and it's not as erm, what's the word I'm looking for, yeah it's more like a party, a private party
34. than a club where you're just one person in the crowd,
35. it's like you get to know everyone really quickly, you get to know all the faces
36. 'cos it's not like a club where its different people every week,
37. it's the same people every week
38. and that's really nice, what I like about it.

*Yeah, does that keep together outside of these events?*

39. yeah, yeah, yeah it tends to.
40. Once you get to know people, you know you start to bump into them in the crowd and stuff.

*It's a lovely way to meet people.*

41. yeah [laughs].

*There's a little quote, once on the scene there's no going back, would you agree?*

42. absolutely (.)
43. I mean I've gone through a cycle of erm,
44. you first get into it and then it's everything to you
45. and all you're doing is waiting for the weekend
46. or go out in the week as well and you're just waiting for the weekend,

47. then waiting for the next party and the next party,
48. and then err you're really full-on, going to absolutely everything,
49. then you calm down a bit and don't go out as much, then then,
50. well me I stopped going at all
51. and then I got back into it again
52. and it was just like it was at the start, really full-on,
53. it just goes in cycles
54. and (.) you can see other people doing it as well 'cos you're like on the end of the cycle
55. and there's people just on the beginning bit and they're really full-on and they're really up for everything
56. and you're more calm.
57. But yeah it definitely goes in cycles,
58. but once you're on it you don't leave it,
59. you might have a period where you don't go for a while but you always get back in there really.

60. You just miss it.

*And err, when you do get back into it after a rest period is it still as good, like when you first started going?*

61. well because I've been doing it for so long
62. it's not quite as exciting
63. but yeah it's still just as good,
64. it's like coming home you know,
65. it's like you get on it again and it's like 'oh yeah, decent people'
66. and you really miss those people
67. 'cos they're a certain type that are into that certain scene
68. and, yeah it's just great [laughs]
69. it's just like being (.) you know finding the people that are like you,
70. it's really nice,
71. it feels really safe and sound.

*Erm would you say that it's changed you, your experiences of*

72. yeah I'm loads more confident (2) I don't know.



73. Yeah, once you've been on that scene, I don't know, it just gets you to let boundaries down and I was a lot,
74. maybe it was my age 'cos I was young then
75. but I wasn't that confident before
76. and I found it hard to talk to people and stuff
77. but now I find it loads easier to talk to people
78. and I don't just mean on that scene,
79. I think it has changed the way I am, I'm a lot more approachable and easy to talk to
80. and just err, yeah just feel more confident.

*Umm, do you know what you could put that down to?*

81. [laughs]

*Whether it's just being in the environment and the people you are with?*

82. it's the environment
83. and the people xxx
84. once you've had your boundaries let down by that much
85. it becomes part of the way you are I think,
86. it just makes you more relaxed maybe
87. and that's a sort of permanent thing.

*So it runs into your life, it's not just immediate?*

88. yeah definitely, it does, it keeps on (.)
89. 'cos, yeah before I was always quite uptight
90. and then I did that for so many weeks for so many years it sort of,
91. you just get into the habit of talking to anybody
92. and not being so guarded and stuff
93. and that carried on in my life as well
94. as I do find it a lot more easy to make friends outside the club, when I'm not clubbing or whatever.

*Do you think it sort of calms your personality?*

95. not calms, it opens it up really (2)
96. 'cos before you've got a lot of boundaries between people,
97. when you go to a normal pub or club that's not a dance club you don't really talk to that many people
98. and you sort of stay in your own little groups

99. but at clubs like that [dance] you just get used to running around talking to anyone,

100. you just have no, your boundaries aren't there you know.

*Erm, can I just ask you some things about ecstasy?*

101. yeah [laughs].

*What contexts, places have you taken it?*

102. erm clubs,

103. parties,

104. going on country walks,

105. staying in with my boyfriend,

106. staying in with friends,

107. coming-down after a club [laughs]

108. all sorts really.

*Are there any preferred ones?*

109. erm (2) definitely sort of err, at an outside party it's best, taking it out in the country's really nice,

110. but taking it at a club's nice as well.

111. Those two I suppose.

*What makes that better do you think?*

112. (2) well at a free party you can be as messy as you want,

113. at a club you still have to behave yourself a little bit 'cos of bouncers and stuff like that,

114. but if you go to a free party and take it everyone tends to, everyone takes it in a different way,

115. they get more messy and more silly and err,

116. you just have a really good look around and you don't have to worry about what you look like

117. or, you can just get really, really mashed and make an idiot of yourself

118. which is quite fun,

119. like at a club you maybe have a bit more of, try to keep it together a bit more...

*Is that what you'd class as messy, being really off your head and just not worry?*

120. yeah just really get really daft

121. and it doesn't matter.

*What do you like about ecstasy in particular?*

122.(4) erm, it makes dancing better,

123.dancing on it's brilliant.

124.But also just the way it relaxes everybody

125.so everybody is chatting on and walking about and just,

126.yeah the fact that it keeps you awake and makes you dance for hours.

127.That's it, it just makes everybody friendly and have laughs.

*You mentioned dancing on ecstasy, could you explain how it feels?*

128.err, right (.) the rushes you get are just amazing

129.'cos like the way they do the music, they build the music up and they drop it down

130.and that tied in with drugs and,

131.'cos you really home in on the beat and then erm, you'll trance off a bit

132.and that's nice, just really trance off and totally lose it

133.and (.) it just feels really tingly when you're tranced up and dancing.

134.And then they'll stop raising the music, and as they drop it down and raise it up,

135.like teasing a bit you just get this rush going up and down you

136.and how do you explain a rush?

137.A rush is just like this feeling going up from your toes up to your head, it just goes

'wush' [laughs]

138.and that's really nice.

139.And hugging people, just hugging people on ecstasy just feels so nice,

140.it's so nice to touch other people 'cos it feels great...

141.and everybody does hug as well which is really nice.

*Even with strangers?*

142.yeah, yeah I mean you'll be dancing away

143.and err, say there's just been a really good track

144.and somebody's dancing in front of you, it makes people contact with each other

145.'cos you'll be dancing away and you'll look across and somebody will be dancing  
back

146.and then you'll like (.) sort of energise each other to dance more

147.and then after that you just go and hug them even though you don't know them

148.'cos you've just danced together and it's just been really good.

149.It does make people contact each other more on the [dance] floor and just walking  
around and stuff.

***Buzzing each other?***

150.yeah, yeah 'cos there's, you'll be dancing away and there'll be somebody dancing like you,

151.then you'll like look into each others' eyes and you'll be grinning your heads off

152.and dancing and you really connect with them,

153.and then you'll go and give them a hug or something

154.but not always [laughs] on a good night, on a good club night.

***Do you feel like, I've heard someone say it's like a special bond when you do get that with someone when you're having a dance?***

155.yeah, yeah you do and you just keep,

156.'cos sometimes you're dancing and you've been dancing all night,

157.somebody's been grinning across at you going 'yeah you're dancing as well'

158.and then you'll start to flag

159.and they'll go 'COME ON' and then you'll be like 'oh yeah, right' and you just keep making each other dance more and,

160.yeah you keep getting those connections (.)

161.'cos there's always a certain type of dancer, there was one this weekend, you always get the guy whose eyes are popping out of his head

162.and they always dance around the dance floor (.) loads

163.and they always walk passed you and do this [makes elongated face with wide staring eyes] to you

164.and then you're looking for them to do it again,

165.and then you sort of make friends with them 'cos they're the mad person walking around the dance floor xxx

***Yeah to sort of amuse people?***

166.YEAH, yeah.

***That's brilliant. Do you find that sometimes you have to work for the high on ecstasy?***

167.yeah I mean sometimes you just get a (.) pill that you don't, you just get, it hits you and you're up there

168.but sometimes you have to dance it up,

169.a lot of times you have to take it and got to work it up definitely (2) sometimes you don't.

*Do you think it depends on the quality of the tablet then?*

170.it can yeah,

171.but also sometimes just your mood

172.and the night, say the music wasn't particularly my sort of music, it wasn't that  
good

173.I'd have to work at it a lot more

174.but once I'd got there I'd be up and running sort of thing.

175.So, it's lots of things really

176.but yeah a crap pill,

177.sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's just you and the mood you're in.

*Right. What about nerves, do you get nervous?*

178.erm (.) sometimes if I've had a pill that's got a lot of acid in it I might get a bit erm  
paranoid sometimes,

179.sometimes if I've taken far too much speed I might get a bit jittery,

180.but it always, once you reach that point where you've worked it up and you get on  
the high and you're off,

181.that sort of goes away really.

182.But sometimes I've been, sometimes if I've just been on acid or if I've had an E with  
acid in it you can get that real (.)

183.you'll be like dancing away and you'll be all right

184.and then you'll get paranoid

185.and then it'll go away then you'll get paranoid, it comes and goes.

*Umm and then it gradually disappears?*

186.but sometimes it doesn't [laughs]

187.or you can stop just feeling really self-conscious or (.)

188.it depends, there's so many different sorts of ecstasy

189.and you get ones which make you run around like an idiot talking to loads of  
people

190.then you get ones that make you really insular

191.and you just maybe just dance and don't really talk to anybody, you just smile  
across or,

192.it's just so many different (2) feelings you get off them xxx

193.some of them make you really quiet and not be able to dance at all, just sit in a corner [laughs].

***Do you find that it's a drug that you can control?***

194.(3) erm, right if you have an average E yeah you can control it

195.but sometimes you get one that's really strong

196.or it's got something in it, just really trippy or something

197.and you can't control it as much (.)

198.and you feel really out of control and out of it.

199.The average one I'd say you don't feel that out of it.

***Umm, it sounds like there's quite a mixture, a variety of ecstasy.***

200.yeah

201.I know that, I mean there's been ones that I've had where there's been lots of heroin in it

202.'cos that's one where you just, you're really minged out and it's (.) you feel really wobbly,

203.you can't really talk to anyone, you just erm (.) sit

204.but quite often it's all right 'cos you go and find somebody else that's on one like that and just sit with them

205.and you feel comfortable sitting but you know you can't get up and dance

206.'cos you, either your legs are wobbling out under you,

207.but you find someone else in the same state

208.and you feel comfortable together doing that.

209.Sometimes you get ones where you just don't want to dance, you just want to chat your head off to somebody...

210.a lot used to have a lot of acid in but I haven't really had a trippy pill for a long time.

211.And then there was the time when there was a lot of like dirty pills around that were supposed to have like ketamine in them or heroin...

***I know we've touched on this a bit but, what are your feelings of alcohol based clubs?***

212.well it's funny 'cos like for years and years when I was on the dance scene I was purely into chemicals

213.and it made me go off drinking completely



214.but erm (.) this last six months I've got really back into drinking loads  
215.and sort of taking E and drinking which I never used to do,  
216.and that's really nice  
217.and err, I'd say a lot of the people on the party scene have got back into drinking as  
well,  
218.it's like maybe you take your E and speed and dance all night  
219.and then you get really really messy in the mornings  
220.and just drink loads to come-down  
221.or the other way around, you just drink loads before you go out,  
222.and then sometimes you're taking loads of drugs and drinking masses at the same  
time as well so.  
223.But it's, yeah when it first started people didn't really drink that much, it was  
strange if people were pissed  
224.but now those people have started to like get really pissed as well  
225.so it's more of a mixture of people now, some are just pissed, some do drugs.  
226.But myself, I've started to drink a lot more again.

***Have you started going to alcohol based clubs or anything?***

227.erm, well I go to the pub now a lot more than I ever used to  
228.'cos I didn't really go to pubs that much when I was into drugs...  
229.you find sound systems doing nights in pubs and stuff  
230.and people might just get pissed for that, they won't bother doing loads of drugs.  
231.Do I go to night-clubs? Yeah, I've started to err (.) but that's just being a student  
really I think.

***What about any sort of mainstream clubs like [name of one in Sheffield]?***

232.well I went to [Sheffield club] for the heavy metal night [laughs] but that was just a  
piss-take [laughs].  
233.Not really, no.  
234.I have done it but that's because we need a cheap night out and we want to take the  
piss out of people...  
235.if I'm planning a real weekend out it's always,  
236.or I want a good night out,  
237.then it's dance clubs definitely, I wouldn't want to go to any other sort of club.

***Erm, what about the atmosphere of clubs compared to dance clubs?***

238.erm (2) well the scene I'm on with the dance scene it's more like you're old friends  
239.so I've always hated things like that 'cos I always got picked on for looking like  
different,  
240.and erm so I wouldn't feel comfortable in a club like that anyway and err (4)  
241.'cos if you're on the dance scene people tend to be less straight  
242.so there's not that sort of violence thing and crapness you get at a more townie club  
anyway so I've always (2)  
243.'cos that's what's so good about the dance scene you know,  
244.it attracts sort of less, well I know I'm not on a straight dance scene but the scene  
I'm on it doesn't have,  
245.it has a few townies but you can spot them a mile off, they're the odd ones out,  
246.so that's what's really attractive about it..  
247.as much as the music and as much as the drugs,  
248.it's the fact that you're finding those sort of people that you can feel relaxed with  
anyway  
249.'cos they're not that same 'go out, get pissed, have a fight' sort of thing.  
250.You hardly ever see a fight at those clubs but you do at the normal sort of clubs..  
251.I mean that's part of the attraction of the dance scene, that you are finding loads of  
people that you do feel relaxed with to start with,  
252.I mean maybe if I did go to a townie club and take E I wouldn't relax at all  
253.because (.) you know, they're just not my sort of people,  
254.but the dance scene has got those people which I feel good about.

***Do you think the setting affects how your E feels too?***

255.(5) erm, I've mostly ever done it in nice circumstances but I'm sure yeah I'd say,  
256.yeah I remember there was one club where we went to and the bouncers were really  
really heavy  
257.and erm they were like following me around if I was going to the toilet, followed  
me into the toilet and shit like that  
258.and I didn't have a good time at that club because the bouncers were so heavy  
259.and another thing, it's all come back to me now [laughs]  
260.I remember going to a club and err this girl really laid into me,  
261.I was really really off my tits, really friendly and fluffy and stuff,  
262.and this girl really laid into me in the toilets

263.and after that I was really jittery

264.and I couldn't, even though I was really really off my face

265.I couldn't relax again and have a good time 'cos she'd spoilt the night really so,

266.yeah your setting can spoil it totally.

267.And then if you've got bouncers glaring across at you making it a heavy atmosphere, it does spoil.

*God, that's terrible when they follow you around as though they are keeping an eye on you.*

268.umm, well yeah they were,

269.they thought I was going to fix [take heroin] which I wasn't.

*Umm. Err, I don't know if you get this on the underground scene but do you get many women dressing in body conscious clothes?*

270.no, not really.

271.I mean some, people tend to wear sort of not many clothes because it's hot erm,

272.but you don't get people in tiny little shoes and baby-doll outfits (.)

273.but then people do wear like, it's a different sort of, people might wear quite few clothes like they might wear low-cut T-shirts and stuff

274.but it's a different way of wearing them if you know what I mean...

275.I noticed it the other day, like I always get the piss taken out of me for wearing a skirt and trousers

276.but I noticed a lot of other girls were doing that, if the girls were wearing short skirts they'd be wearing leggings underneath the skirt,

277.they wouldn't be having bare legs like maybe at a townie club.

278.But then I went to a night [club] OH God months back and there was a girl dancing with nothing on at all on the top

279.and she was just dancing with literally everything out [laughs]

280.which is like, it's a different way of dressing [on her scene],

281.people don't dress party-ly, they dress more funkily,

282.it may be wearing little clothing but it's a different message it's giving off,

283.it's more funky it's not sort of as sexual.

*Not to attract attention, well that type of attention?*

284.umm, yeah I'd say that.



*Err, quite a few women do experience weight loss through drugs and dancing, has that ever happened to you?*

285.err, yeah that's really nice [laughs].

286.It's great.

287.I mean when I go to, that's another thing about free parties is that they last longer

288.I mean I know that I've been to a free party and I have danced for like twelve hours,

289.and if you dance for twelve hours you're gonna lose some weight.

290.Err, and then there's the come-down where you don't feel like eating anyway as well

291.(.) and it just speeds your metabolism up and makes you lose weight anyway so.

292.It is good yeah,

293.I mean when I was talking about cycles you see a lot of people first come on the scene and they're like, they might be a bit chubby

294.and then a year later they'll be like, lost loads of weight

295.and err (2) I can't say that isn't nice, it is, it is good.

*Is that 'cos of err the feel-good-factor?*

296.yeah well it just makes you feel better about yourself doesn't it

297.and adds to feeling confident, if you're thinner then you're more confident

298.and you're more (.) nice about yourself so.

*Is it kind of a rapid thing the weight loss, does it occur quickly?*

299.yeah with erm, with a lot of people it does.

300.Yeah it is quite quick

301.'cos I say when you first get into ecstasy you're just full-on,

302.you're partying all weekend, you're probably going out in the week and partying as well so because you're so full,

303.so like into it that you're probably doing a lot of dancing

304.so yeah you do lose weight quickly.

*Do you think that acts as a motivation to carry on doing tablets and dancing?*

305.(4) I do know that when a lot of people have stopped they say 'oh I'm putting on weight'

306.but I don't know whether that would make them be the only thing to make them go back to doing it

307.but I mean I've sat around with mates who've erm (.) been having a period where they're not going out and they've put on weight

308.and we talk about that 'oh we're putting on weight again aren't we'

309.but (.) I wouldn't say that was a major motivation for anybody

310.but it is really nice [laughs].

311.I know that if I'm feeling bad about myself and I'm going out at the weekend

312.I'll know, it'll be in my mind that 'oh, I'll take loads of speed this weekend, I won't eat that much and I will feel thinner by the end of the week' [laughs]

313.which is nice

314.but it wouldn't be the only reason that I did it.

315.But err, I do think about this.

*Err, I remember a girl saying that weight was a big problem when she stopped clubbing, so she was going once a month to try and use it as a form of weight control.*

316.no I've never,

317.no I wouldn't say I definitely use it as a form of weight control

318.but (2) but it's like I have been drinking loads

319.but it's quite nice to get back into drugs again more

320.'cos then you're not drinking as much and that's not calories is it [laughs]

321.but it wouldn't ever be the reason why I did it,

322.it's just nice err when you're aware, that's good about it.

*Erm could I just ask you about drugs to build a picture? Erm your past months drugs.*

323.err, Es, speed and coke.

*Ah, ah and what's your usual pattern for the week?*

324.well it depends whether it's a party weekend or not.

325.At a party weekend it would be probably err (2) last weekend, each night we did an E each and half a wrap of speed between the two of us so, erm on the Saturday and Sunday.

326.I don't know how much was in the wrap [laughs]...

327.and a lot of alcohol.

*Is that just beer, lager or?*

328.err just beer yeah.

329. Oh and Saturday was vodka, lots of vodka.

*Is there any particular drugs that you use to come-down?*

330. erm well I don't smoke hash

331. but err all my mates smoke loads of hash to come-down...

332. just drink really I suppose.

333. If I'm feeling really jittery and I need to calm down, just beer,

334. not spirits because they make you up,

335. I mean it's spirits before you go out

336. and beer when you're coming down so.

*How do you feel when you are coming down?*

337. well err, one of the reasons I stopped,

338. I used to do lots of E and then erm it just started to feel bad all the time.

339. Like I started to get really bad come-downs

340. and then the come-downs stopped being come-downs and it just turned into one

long, long, long depression so erm, it was really erm,

341. it lasted (2) a lot of months and it got so bad

342. that I went to the doctors and she did offer me prozac which is good, she offered it  
me straight away

343. but she also said 'I want you to do counselling first' which I thought was good

344. so I did do erm (.) quite a few sessions of counselling to sort of try and get out of  
this depression.

345. And I wasn't, I think a lot of it was, looking back I do think maybe a might have  
been a bit depressed anyway

346. but it was majorly due I think to taking ecstasy,

347. the reason I got into this big trap of being really down

348. so erm I said I wouldn't take it again

349. and when I did go out I just started to do loads and loads of base-speed

350. and like drink a lot more of spirits, like a bottle of vodka and a wrap of base to  
myself

351. but erm, just recently I've started to do E again

352. and I'm all right at the moment

353. but erm, this week I did have a bad come-down



354.like Tuesday night I was just err, I was okay all day Tuesday then I just started crying and I just cried all night

355.and then Wednesday I felt really up and down, I was like really tearful...

356.I mean for the first two years I took E I never really got a come-downs at all, I was fine you know,

357.I didn't really understand what a come-down was

358.and then it started that I did get come-downs but it was only a day so that was okay

359.but when it went into this like depression that never went away I did stop taking them

360.but now I've started to take them again so, even though I said I wouldn't.

361.But it's so hard not to,

362.'cos it's really good [laughs] and, I don't know,

363.if I feel like, I think I'd recognise the pattern, if I feel myself going back into that sort of thing where,

364.I don't mind having a one day come-down midweek,

365.you're sort of crying and feeling weird and you're upset

366.and then you sort of remember 'oh it's a come-down, it's a Wednesday'

367.and it makes you feel okay about it 'cos you just think 'I'll just get through today' so that doesn't bother me

368.but if I start feeling it slide into getting depressed again then I will definitely stop (.) for a while.

369.That was terrible at the time,

370.I never want to go through that again, it was just too (.) hideous.

***Do you think that was using it for so often?***

371.yeah, yeah definitely

372.'cos I mean I've done it for years so.

***Did you actually feel it creep up on you or did you have to stop before***

373.no I felt it creeping up,

374.it was like you was having a one day come-down then it was two, then three

375.then maybe have a whole week of feeling down

376.and be all right for a while,

377.it gradually sort of stretched out until it was just like 'dush' [all the time].

378.But I do think it was definitely ecstasy that majorly caused it,

379.it's just like your brains like, you have nothing left,

380.you're just numb,

381.you know 'cos if you're using that much up then there's a price to pay

382.and it was, it was horrible...

383.I was just thinking that you've used it all up, whatever it is in your brain is gone,  
it's like depleted and you haven't got any,

384.what is the stuff?

***Serotonin?***

385.serotonin isn't it,

386.it wasn't a depression where I was crying or anything,

387.it just depression where I felt nothing, I was like a zombie, I just felt totally numb

388.and I knew I wasn't happy but,

389.it wasn't like a normal depression where you might be a bit angry and a bit  
emotional,

390.there was no emotion left, it was just like I was completely sort of numb

391.and that's what did me.

392.That's why I didn't do anything about it for such a long time 'cos I didn't realise  
how bad it was for a long time

393.and then I suddenly realised that 'God, I've felt nothing for so many (.) so long and I  
just can't stand this feeling of nothingness anymore' it was really horrible

394.and it was just like, I have no serotonin left in me, I don't know it was like it was  
completely used up.

***But you did manage to come out of that?***

395.yeah, yeah I did

396.and then for ages I said 'right, I'll just do speed when I go out'

397.and it's fine just doing speed, that's okay

398.but then you slip back into, I did,

399.no somebody gave me half a pill, just because they did [she consumed] and then  
that was it,

400.it was like 'yeah I do remember this, and it is so nice (.) and I want to do it again'  
[laughs].

***Err, in a recent survey 83% of people thought that drug taking was an accepted  
part of British people's lives***

401.definitely,

402.I mean 'cos Britain's quite unique in that it's got like the youth culture scene, in  
Britain it's really unique isn't it

403.and err (2) everyone does it,

404.I'd say so many young people do it, it maybe once a month or it may be once a  
week whatever but everyone does.

405.Oh, I did mushrooms as well in the last month.

*Oh right, yeah. Erm do you ever think about, you know how it is normalised with  
everyone using, do you ever think about the risks involved?*

406.I do think we're like, we don't know the long term effects

407.and it's like this whole generation of people that have done so many, this much  
ecstasy

408.and we're just like a big fucking experiment erm, and we're the guinea pigs.

409.Yeah I think there might be like in thirty years time,

410.if ecstasy has some sort of erm bad side-effect like it makes you go senile quicker  
or it makes people, you know have an effect that doesn't come out for years later,

411.there might be a massive health crisis in this country

412.where everybody fucks up because everybody's done it 'cos nobody knows.

413.I sometimes, not now because I haven't done it for so long

414.but when I've been doing ecstasy for a long, long time and then I started to calm  
down and have come-downs and stuff

415.I did, I went through a big period

416.and a lot of my friends did of really,

417.really fucking worrying about the long term effects of what we've done to  
ourselves.

418.'Cos I know a lot of us say that we feel a lot more stupid [laughs] since we've done  
it

419.but like my short-term, my memory's not as good

420.but that might be just getting older

421.but I know a few of us that think it's the drugs 'cos I can't remember as well as I  
used to and things like that.

422.There's been times when I have really worried about the long-term effects,

423.especially when there's a documentary on the telly saying 'look at how many brain cells you've wiped out'.

424.But when you get back into it and excited by it again all that goes, you know, the fear,

425.it's only when you're calming down and getting bored a bit maybe that you start to worry about the health effects again.

426.But you do worry sometimes.

*Do you think it's because you notice your memory's not as good and then it sets you off thinking 'oh shit'?*

427.umm

428.and just like I have seen people who've been full-on on the party scene and they've had nervous breakdowns and things like that,

429.people who've done so many drugs and for so long.

430.The amount of people that I've seen really, really lose it is frightening sometimes

431.'cos that combination of doing it that long

432.and that many mixtures of drugs and cocktails

433.and just the lifestyle,

434.yeah people do crash and burn and I've seen a lot of people do it

435.and I know I have myself, but not, I just got depressed,

436.I mean some people really lose it, sort of become mentally ill and stuff erm (.) I don't know.

437.I suppose when you describe it like this it sounds really bad but you just,

438.it's just part of the scene

439.and most people come out of it so,

440.they stop and their friends make sure they stop,

441.and they get better.

*Yeah, it sounds worse when you talk about it like this.*

442.yeah

443.but you know that person's going to be all right 'cos they're just going to stop and then come out of it

444.but a lot of people do, they do it for so long, then they push it and push it and then they go [pushes hand down to indicate a drop].

445.And it's quite a sudden thing as well sometimes, one minute they'll be all right,

446.and there's a lot of people on prozac now that don't do E anymore

447.because they, you know it just puts them straight back again

448.so a lot of people have had to give it up because of having depression and stuff...

***Would you say that some people are prone to paranoia and depression or is it just the drugs?***

449.it's hard to say (2)

450.the long-term effect of doing a lot of E is you do get depressed whether you're prone to it or not...

451.I think any person that did E for a long time would get that big depression thing, not just the come-down...

452.paranoia, yeah that can come along as well.

***Have you ever, whilst you've been on E, have you ever experienced anything unpleasant?***

453.there was the time I thought I was going to die. Erm, I went to a club

454.and I, the people I get drugs off 'cos I never buy drugs off people I don't know hadn't got any

455.so I did buy one off somebody I didn't know and I took it

456.and erm, I just never felt as ill in my life,

457.I was totally, I just completely stood still and there was just, I wasn't just sweating, sweat was pouring down my back and I was just completely soaked

458.and I just felt, I've never felt so ill in all my life

459.then I got really anxious.

460.And erm, so I went to sit in the corner,

461.this is really sad [laughs]

462.I went and sat in this corner and I thought 'fucking hell I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I've taken this dodgy tablet and I don't know what's in it'

463.and I did genuinely believe that I was going to die

464.so I just thought 'well I'll just sit here and wait for it to happen' [laughs].

465.I didn't go and find my mates or anything like that

466.and I thought (.) 'okay, that's it then, sort of fucked up' and I sat there for about an hour and I was like,

467.my eyes were like fucking rolling back in my head,

468.I just felt so ill that all I could think was I was going to die,



469.it was horrible.

470.Sometimes you take a pill and you feel sick but it wasn't like feeling a bit sick where you know you just go outside, get some fresh air and you're okay or you go into the toilet and drink some water,

471.it wasn't like getting too much of a rush,

472.it was a real, just fucking totally wiped out

473.and the sweating was really worrying me 'cos you hear of all these people dying from overheating and stuff,

474.I've never sweated like that in my life,

475.it was really scary.

***How did your body feel, sort of feelings?***

476.I FELT REALLY CALM which is probably the E 'cos it does calm you,

477.I just thought 'well this is it then, which is a shame, I don't want to die now'

478.but in-between being fucking violently ill that's how I felt, I did feel really calm...

479.some people have got ill on it and they're really freaking out and they're screaming and shouting and stuff

480.and then people come and calm them down

481.and help them out, take them outside, give them water and stuff.

***Were you able to move or did you***

482.no eventually I couldn't, I just err,

483.I managed to go to the toilets once and I was sliding down the wall and stuff.

484.One of the toilets had a window and I was getting some fresh air and err,

485.when I came out and found this corner I couldn't move after that,

486.I just sat in the corner and I couldn't move my arms, my legs, nothing

487.and like I said my eyes were rolling back in my head so I couldn't see properly or nothing,

488.couldn't do anything.

***Did that gradually wear off?***

489.YEAH, it just gradually went away, but it took a long time,

490.it must have taken me about an hour and a half of being really that bad and then it started to calm down.

491.But I mean sometimes, yeah a lot of times you might take E, especially with MDMA powder not err pills it's really difficult to judge it



492.and a lot of the times you take that and you do feel really quite ill for a while, feel really sick and stuff but,

493.BUT NOT panicky sick or not worrying sick,

494.you just know you feel a bit sick and it will pass

***But you're feeling good with it sort of thing?***

495.you're feeling good with it too and it's fine,

496.you just know you feel a bit sick and it'll calm down within a few minutes, you know...

497.it's a lot stronger [than ecstasy tablets]

498.when you take that it's a lot more wobbly for ages, it's a real messy one 'cos err, you take that and your legs just feel like jelly

499.and you're wobbling and wobbling around

500.and you're feeling really good

501.but you can't dance for ages

502.but you usually take it with your mates and you're all falling over together and just giggling like mad,

503.but yeah it's a lot different feeling to a pill, it's not as clean, it's more messy...

504.that's what I mean about being messy at parties, if you're in a club and you were falling over like that you'd feel a bit,

505.well for one you'd know the bouncers would start watching you and it would make you feel uncomfortable

506.but at a party and not a proper club you can just fall over and laugh about it and have a really (.) good time.

507.That powder's really messy.

***Yeah, erm we've talked about health problems, what's the outcome of those problems you had?***

508.(2) erm well, I got through it.

509.I learned a lot while I was going through it,

510.it's good in the end 'cos you learn when you come out of it,

511.you don't feel like you've achieved anything but you've actually been sorting stuff out when you're down (.)

512.but just CALMER really now, I just wouldn't go for it as much now,

513.I'd be a bit more sensible

514.and I'd be watching out for the signs to stop doing it for a while and maybe just go  
back to speed or.

515.Just being a lot more careful and just being a lot more aware really,

516.that it's not all good and just to watch out for tell-tale signs.

***Could I ask you, 'cos I know on the free party scene a lot more people talk about  
the spiritual feel, could you tell me anything about that?***

517.yeah, well it's not, it's not just the big weekend out, it becomes a way of life,

518.it's like you start mixing with those people [interruption].

519.It's err, it's 'cos you're in the middle of nowhere,

520.you're in this, usual beautiful places

521.and you've arranged it all for yourself,

522.it's like this real tribal thing and you do become part of that whole scene

523.and, you might go around with a bucket to collect money for the generator to keep  
the party going,

524.I don't know you just (.) because it's a lot longer

525.and err, you go and sit in people's cars and talk to them,

526.you get to know people a lot closer than you would at a club

527.and then you'll all go back somewhere together and you stay together a lot longer,

528.then you start seeing them in the week as well,

529.it just becomes more of a way of life really because you're mixing with those  
people all the time

530.whereas a club's more like, you go to a club but you only see those people at the  
club that weekend

531.and you wouldn't know that many people in the club

532.but at a party scene you get to know everyone's face and everybody knows you.

533.It's a lot more closer and you look around more, you just get closer from doing all  
that 'cos it's a longer stretch of time so you really get to know everyone.

534.Yeah it does feel more spiritual.

***Yeah. Will you be going this year?***

535.yeah in the summer.

536.I used to go to the winter parties but I'm not that hard-core anymore [laughs]...

***With clubbing and ecstasy use, what's happening now?***

537.well I've just started to take it again now really after a period of not really doing it.

538. So, YEAH I'll just carry on doing it but not as full-on as I ever was,

539. 'cos for a start the parties aren't every weekend, they're once a fortnight or once a month so.

*You know when you weren't doing ecstasy but were doing speed, did you still go then?*

540. err yeah.

*Did you enjoy it?*

541. OH YEAH, I still had just as good a time

542. but it's a different feeling when you're on E,

543. but speed's good as well 'cos you do chat to a lot more people and that's nice

544. so [laughs], that's good as well.

*Err and what about your future in clubbing. Do you think you'll always go?*

545. yeah,

546. I'm getting older now but I can't see myself stopping,

547. not for a lot longer, no not immediately.

548. It's not, it's not just a really good night out, it's a way of finding really good people as well,

549. yeah I think I'll just carry on doing it for ages.

*Is there anything other than your health that might stop you?*

550. no, no I wouldn't have thought so.

551. No a job wouldn't err, no.

*Well we're near the end now, just to sum up is there any more ways that you feel your experiences might have changed you?*

552. (2) I can dance better than I could dance [laughs].

553. It's like, it changes the way you listen to music, I'm sure it does,

554. like changes some pattern in your head like how you listen to music

555. 'cos I don't listen to music the same way as I did before I did ecstasy

556. and erm, I can dance now and there was a time when I thought I could only ever dance on drugs

557. but now I can, before I didn't really dance very much

558. and I'd never dance unless I was off my head

559. but now I can actually dance without being on drugs which I could never do before, so it's made me be able to dance [laughs]

560.and it's funny, music really makes me up now.

561.It's like, when you're dancing away on E and you get that rush,

562.I can get that rush from just listening to a good dance track when I'm not on it anymore.

563.I don't know, maybe it changes the way you listen to music 'cos I can get so fucking up from listening to music.

*Like the way you hear it?*

564.yeah

565.and it ties into your emotions

566.even when you're not on it 'cos I can really rush off a good dance track and just really get that feeling like when you're coming up off an E.

567.But just feeling so much more (.) relaxed

568.and confident

569.and open to people, that's been a major effect

570.and loads of people say once they've been on the scene for a while it's not just when you're on the drugs, it carries on afterwards

571.'cos I knew this bloke who was so shy he was like, he couldn't talk to anyone and then he did it for a long time but he doesn't do it anymore but he can still be friendly now,

572.he could never do that before so 'cos he was so shy he was emotionally crippled, he couldn't talk to anyone, he can now.

573.Just that really.

*That's a big positive effect.*

574.umm, yeah, that's true.

*Well that's it, is there anything you'd like to ask or add?*

575.no, I asked you the last time.

*Thank you very much, that's been brilliant.*

576.I forgot to tell you that, the fact that you can go out and just dance your tits off

577.and be as open as you want

578.but not be (.) constantly looking out for men hassling you,

579.I mean it does happen occasionally where you get someone out of his brain like coming-on to you and stuff



580.but it happens so few times whereas if you go to a normal club that happens so  
much

581.and like every guy that comes up to you is trying to chat you up

582.and it's like really tiresome

583.but at dance clubs somebody will come up to you and be talking to you, you won't  
be worrying 'oh, he's coming-on to me', he'll just be chatting to you.

584.That is such a, I'm sure that is a big erm (2) attraction for a lot of women of the  
dance scene, that they can go out, have a fucking good time

585.and just not be hassled by men at all 'cos it just, it doesn't really happen on that  
scene.

586.You can hug blokes and you know they'll not be thinking anymore of it then just a  
hug,

587.they won't be thinking 'oh, I'm in here' or anything.

588.You can just hug a bloke and have a really nice hug and feel really close to him but  
know that you're not gonna be hassled by him afterwards

589.which is a really, really nice thing

590.which helps you feel more relaxed as a woman going out

591.and, that means you can get off your head without worrying,

592.you know if you get too drunk at a normal club then you're a victim aren't you, you  
know they home in on you.

593.But that just doesn't happen on the dance scene which is really nice.

594.When I went to this rock club for a piss-take I was really shocked by how many  
men were fucking coming-on to me if I was dancing and,

595.and I'd forgotten that's what happens at normal clubs,

596.completely forgotten that you have to be a bit more guarded,

597.you know you can't relax as much because you know blokes are going to be  
thinking that's a come-on or whatever,

598.so that is what's so nice about the dance scene.

599.You know it's so relaxed.

*Like a safe environment where you can let go?*

600.yeah (.)

601.and when you do get hassled by a bloke it's so rare

602.that it's a real surprise as well.

*So err, is there anything more then?*

603.no.

*Well thank you very much.*



*Err, can I start by asking what type of clubs or events you go to?*

1. Currently she frequents free parties
2. which differ to clubs
3. as they are large events that take place at community centres

*What about in the past?*

4. She has been to some clubs in Sheffield and Nottingham

*Right, and how long have you been going?*

5. For many years
6. she began clubbing at around twenty-one years old

*Err, how did you get into clubbing and that sort of scene?*

7. When she did not like dance music she did not frequent clubs
8. through appreciating the dance music it started her off clubbing
9. as prior to that she did not fancy clubs

*So you found the music before the scene?*

10. The music and the scene coincided
11. became friends with people who listened to dance music

*And do you have any early memories of when you started going?*

12. She can recall her initial ecstasy experience

*Oh right, yeah.*

13. She is able to recall that

*That would be a good one.*

14. Her first ecstasy was at a free party
15. she forgot to mention that she frequented free parties a lot
16. which differ to clubs as they occur in the middle of a field, hence they were there for the first ecstasy
17. they had never consumed ecstasy before
18. they took it together
19. it was one of the most enjoyable evenings she has had
20. she enjoyed it and likened it to all her Christmases united

*Did you feel nervous or anything?*

21. No nervousness

22. she was as exhilarated as she had ever felt

23. she had great difficulty in staying still

24. it was excellent

***So what is it that you like about these events you go to?***

25. Certainly the music

26. differing clubs house specific clientele

27. the people who frequent her type of events are from the alternative scene

28. which differs from the usual club

29. as it is more enjoyable

30. and is more casual

31. people communicate more together

32. people do not pose as much

33. it is akin to a private party

34. more so than in a club where you are solo in a large group of people

35. you become acquainted with all speedily, recognise their faces

36. as it differs to clubs which have a diversity of clientele weekly

37. it is the same people that go every week

38. which is pleasant and what she enjoys about the events

***Yeah, does that keep together outside of these events?***

39. Yes, it is inclined to

40. as soon as you are acquainted with people you notice them outside of events

***It's a lovely way to meet people.***

41. yes

***There's a little quote, once on the scene there's no going back, would you agree?***

42. Completely agrees

43. she has experienced a rotation

44. initial involvement in the scene involves it meaning all to you

45. you just wait for the weekend to arrive

46. perhaps venture out in the week too

47. awaiting successive parties

48. you go to everything as you are full-on the scene

49. followed by a period of calm where you do not club much

50. she ceased to go completely

51. then began to club again
52. which was akin to her initial involvement, going to everything
53. involvement in the scene rotates
54. which is visibly evident by the actions of others as your circle is ending
55. people on the start of the circle go to, and enthuse about, everything
56. and you are more relaxed
57. yet it certainly rotates
58. though when you have entered the scene you do not leave
59. part of the circle may entail not participating for some time but you always return
60. you pine for it

*And err, when you do get back into it after a rest period is it still as good, like when you first started going?*

61. Due to reasons of her clubbing for such a long period
62. it is not as exhilarating
63. yet it is still as enjoyable
64. akin to returning to home
65. you return to the scene and remember you liked the people there
66. you do pine for those people
67. as they are a specific kind who enjoy that specific scene
68. it is brilliant
69. it involves discovering people similar to you
70. it is very pleasant
71. it feels secure and complete

*Erm would you say that it's changed you, your experiences of*

72. yes as she is a lot more self-assured
73. once there, it allows boundaries to be broken as she was a lot
74. perhaps it was due to her youthfulness then
75. as she lacked self-assurance previously
76. it was difficult for her to communicate with others
77. yet presently it is much easier for her to do this
78. which is not selective to whilst on that scene
79. she believes it has altered how she is: easier to approach and communicate with
80. also feeling more self-assured

*Umm, do you know what you could put that down to?*

81. [laughs]

*Whether it's just being in the environment and the people you are with?*

82. It is the setting

83. and the participants

84. when your boundaries have been broken to that extent

85. it transforms the way you are

86. it causes you to be more calm possibly

87. which is constant to life

*So it runs into your life, it's not just immediate?*

88. Yes it certainly continues to affect life

89. as previously she was somewhat tense

90. then she clubbed for many weeks and years that it

91. you acquire the routine of communicating with anyone

92. losing your protective barrier

93. which continued into her life too

94. because it is much easier for her to make friendships out of the club context

*Do you think it sort of calms your personality?*

95. It unrestricts your personality, not calms

96. as previously there are many barriers between folk

97. when you frequent conventional clubs and pubs you do not communicate with many

98. people remain in their own small group

99. yet at dance clubs it is usual to move around and chat with anybody

100. your barriers just do not exist

*Erm, can I just ask you some things about ecstasy?*

101. yes

*What contexts, places have you taken it?*

102. clubs

103. parties

104. strolls in the countryside

105. remaining indoors with a partner

106. remaining indoors with friends

107. for the come-down after a club

108.a variety

*Are there any preferred ones?*

109.Certainly, at a free party is most enjoyable, consuming ecstasy in the countryside is very pleasant

110.yet consuming in the club setting is pleasant too

111.she infers it is those two contexts which are preferred

*What makes that better do you think?*

112.at a free party you do not have to worry about being off your head

113.whereas in clubs you have to conduct yourself properly due to the bouncers

114.yet ecstasy at a free party is consumed differently by people

115.they become more off their heads and daft

116.you glance around and there is no concern over one's appearance

117.you are able to become very high behave foolishly

118.which is enjoyable

119.at a club you perhaps have to not get so high and act correctly

*Is that what you'd class as messy, being really off your head and just not worry?*

120.Yes, you behave silly

121.and it is not a worry

*What do you like about ecstasy in particular?*

122.It improves dancing

123.dancing on ecstasy is excellent

124.yet also how it calms everyone

125.as they stroll around and talk

126.also as ecstasy prevents tiredness and gives energy to dance for long periods

127.which is it, causing friendliness and fun

*You mentioned dancing on ecstasy, could you explain how it feels?*

128.The rushes from ecstasy when just consumed are marvellous

129.as how DJs play the music, raising and then lowering it

130.and that connected with the drugs

131.as you are automatically guided towards the beat, you go into a daze

132.it is pleasant to go into a daze and completely be unaware

133.which makes the skin tingle when dancing as such

134.then the DJs drop the music down, and lift it back up

135. playfully making fun, where the rush is felt from head to toe  
136. she queries how to explain how a rush feels  
137. it is a feeling which starts at your toes and goes up to your head suddenly  
138. which is very pleasant  
139. and embracing people whilst on ecstasy feels really pleasant  
140. it is very pleasant to touch others as it feels brilliant  
141. everyone embraces which is very pleasant

***Even with strangers?***

142. Yes, as you will be dancing  
143. and a very good tune has just played  
144. and someone dances ahead of you, it causes a connection  
145. as when dancing you look across and see somebody dancing back to you  
146. then you activate one another to dance more so  
147. afterwards you embrace that person despite s/he being a stranger  
148. as it has been enjoyable to dance together  
149. it causes people to connect more when dancing and strolling around

***Buzzing each other?***

150. Yes as when dancing someone will be dancing the same as you  
151. then you get eye contact and are smiling profoundly  
152. and dancing and you relate to them  
153. then you embrace them or something  
154. but this is not always the case, just on a good evening

***Do you feel like, I've heard someone say it's like a special bond when you do get that with someone when you're having a dance?***

155. Yes and you retain [it]  
156. as occasionally you have been dancing all evening  
157. and someone is smiling over to you as if to say 'you're dancing too'  
158. then you become a little tired  
159. and they encourage you to continue which makes you realise you should, hence you cause each other to continue dancing  
160. yes, you maintain these bonds  
161. as there is continuously a specific type of dancer, whose eyes appear to protrude from his head



162.who continuously moves around the dance floor a lot

163.they continuously stroll passed and dance with a certain look on their face

164.then you search for them to repeat the action

165.then you become friends as they are the crazy person strolling the dance floor

*Yeah to sort of amuse people?*

166.Yes

*That's brilliant. Do you find that sometimes you have to work for the high on ecstasy?*

167.Yes as occasionally you have ecstasy that does not require work, it begins to be felt and you are high

168.yet occasionally you need to dance the ecstasy to work

169.mostly it needs working up certainly, though at times it does not

*Do you think it depends on the quality of the tablet then?*

170.It is possible

171.yet also your disposition

172.the evening too, for example if the music was not too good or not her style

173.she would have to provoke the feelings more so

174.however, when there she would be active and high with the drug

175.hence it is many issues

176.yet yes, the quality of the tablet

177.occasionally it is difficult, just your disposition at the time

*Right. What about nerves, do you get nervous?*

178.Occasionally if she has consumed ecstasy adulterated with LSD she may get paranoid

179.occasionally if she has consumed excess speed she may have an attack of nerves

180.yet as soon as you reach the high it is fine

181.it tends to disappear

182.yet occasionally on LSD or ecstasy with LSD in it you feel

183.you dance and feel fine

184.then paranoia occurs

185.then it passes and returns, it fluctuates

*Umm and then it gradually disappears?*

186.Yet occasionally it does not disappear

- 187.or you cease to feel self-conscious  
188.it is influenced by differing types of ecstasy  
189.some ecstasy tablets speed you up and you chat with many people  
190.then some cause you to be cut off from general currents of thought  
191.where you dance and smile without chatting to anyone  
192.there are many alternate sensations they give  
193.some cause you to be silent, unable to dance, and to sit down in the corner

***Do you find that it's a drug that you can control?***

- 194.You can control it if you consume a normal ecstasy tablet  
195.yet occasionally some are powerful  
196.or it is adulterated, for example akin to a trip  
197.where you cannot control it so much  
198.and feel really high and lacking any control  
199.with the usual ecstasy tablet you do not feel too out of control

***Umm, it sounds like there's quite a mixture, a variety of ecstasy.***

- 200.Yes  
201.she has consumed ecstasy adulterated with much heroin  
202.then you are not up and running, just sat feeling unstable on the legs  
203.you cannot communicate, just sit down  
204.yet usually it is okay as you discover another on the same drug and sit with them  
205.you are aware that you cannot dance yet are agreeable with sitting down  
206.as either your legs are unstable beneath you  
207.yet you discover another who is experiencing the same  
208.and it is agreeable to do that together  
209.occasionally ecstasy makes you want to talk vigorously and not dance  
210.much ecstasy was adulterated with LSD yet she has not come across this for some time now  
211.also there was a period of ecstasy adulterated with dirty substances such as ketamine or heroin

***I know we've touched on this a bit but, what are your feelings of alcohol based clubs?***

- 212.It is odd: for the many years she frequented dance events she solely consumed drugs

213.it caused her to be put off consuming alcohol totally  
214.yet over the past half year, she has returned to drinking a lot  
215.consuming ecstasy whilst drinking which is a completely new experience  
216.and is very pleasant  
217.she feels that loads on her scene have returned to drinking  
218.you may consume ecstasy and speed and dance all through the evening  
219.and the next morning become really out of it  
220.and consume a lot of alcohol when coming-down  
221.or alternatively, you consume a lot of alcohol before going out  
222.occasionally you consume much drugs plus much alcohol  
223.when the scene initially began, people did not consume much alcohol: an oddity to  
see drunken people  
224.yet currently those folk get drunk too  
225.currently it is a variety, some people are drunk and some on drugs  
226.yet personally, she has began to drink alcohol more

***Have you started going to alcohol based clubs or anything?***

227.She currently frequents public houses more than ever before  
228.when she consumed drugs she rarely visited pubs  
229.sound systems will do an evening in a pub  
230.where people may just get drunk, not consume a lot of drugs  
231.she considers if she goes to conventional clubs: she has begun to yet feels it is due  
to being a student

***What about any sort of mainstream clubs like [name of one in Sheffield]?***

232.She visited an heavy metal evening yet only to have a laugh at others there  
233.she has not visited any mainstream clubs  
234.though on occasions she has as it is less expensive and they desired a laugh at  
others  
235.if she arranges a proper weekend  
236.or desires an enjoyable evening  
237.then dance clubs are the first choice as she does not desire other clubs

***Erm, what about the atmosphere of clubs compared to dance clubs?***

238.On the free party scene it is akin to being with long term friends

239.hence she detested the 'normal' scene as she is targeted for having an alternative appearance

240.she would not feel at ease in those clubs

241.folk on the dance scene are inclined to use illicit drugs

242.hence the aggression and negatives of town clubs do not exist in dance clubs

243.which is what is agreeable about the scene

244.it invites less [straight people], though she is not on that conventional scene

245.there are few conventional club goers, yet they are noticeable, the unusual ones

246.which is the big appeal about the scene

247.the same as the music and drugs are

248.it is discovering those folk you feel at ease with

249.as they differ from those who go out to get drunk, have a fight

250.it is rare to witness a fight at dance clubs yet you see them at conventional ones

251.which is partly the appeal of dance clubs, that you discover many people you initially feel at ease with

252.perhaps if she consumed ecstasy in a conventional club she would not feel at ease

253.as those folk are not her type

254.yet the dance scene has the people she feels nice to be with

*Do you think the setting affects how your E feels too?*

255.She has mainly taken ecstasy in pleasant surroundings yet is certain it affects the trip

256.she recalls going to a club where the doormen were burdensome

257.they trailed her into the toilets

258.which prevented her enjoyment of that club

259.also, she is remembering more

260.she recalls visiting a club where a woman had a go at her

261.she was really high, very amiable and happy

262.and the woman had a go at her in the toilets

263.afterwards she had an attack of the nerves

264.and despite being very high she could not

265.ease into it again to have a pleasant evening as she had ruined it

266.yes, the context can ruin it completely

267.also it ruins if the doormen stare at you causing a burdensome ambience



*God, that's terrible when they follow you around as though they are keeping an eye on you.*

268. Yes they were

269. they believed she was going to use heroin which is untrue

*Umm. Err, I don't know if you get this on the underground scene but do you get many women dressing in body conscious clothes?*

270. Not usually

271. people may dress in less due to the heat

272. yet people do not wear small shoes and tiny dresses

273. people may wear little clothing yet it is different

274. an alternative way of dressing as such

275. people make fun of her for wearing trousers under a skirt

276. she spotted that many other females dressed the same: leggings under short skirts

277. they did not show naked legs as in conventional clubs

278. yet a few months ago at a night-club a woman danced with her top half naked

279. she danced with her breasts exposed

280. on her scene it is an alternative way of dressing

281. they do not dress for parties, it is a more out-to-have-fun in a cool, trendy style

282. which may involve dressing in less though the impression it gives differs

283. it is not as sexual but more fun-trendy-cool style

*Not to attract attention, well that type of attention?*

284. Yes, she agrees

*Err, quite a few women do experience weight loss through drugs and dancing, has that ever happened to you?*

285. Yes and it was pleasant

286. it is wonderful

287. also about free parties is that they continue for long periods

288. she has danced at such events for around half a day

289. if you dance for that long you lose weight

290. then you come-down and have no desire to eat

291. dance drugs boost the metabolism which causes weight loss

292. it is pleasurable

293. when she spoke of the rotating nature of clubbing, newcomers to the scene may be a little overweight

294. then a year on they will have lost a lot of weight

295. she cannot state that weight loss is not pleasing, it is nice

*Is that 'cos of err the feel-good-factor?*

296. Yes as it boosts self-esteem

297. adding to self-assurance when you are a slimmer person

298. and you feel better about yourself

*Is it kind of a rapid thing the weight loss, does it occur quickly?*

299. With many people the weight loss is quick

300. it is somewhat rapid

301. as initially with ecstasy you take it loads

302. you party both in the week and at weekends

303. enjoying it so much that you dance a lot

304. hence, weight loss is rapid

*Do you think that acts as a motivation to carry on doing tablets and dancing?*

305. She is aware of people who stop partying and know they are gaining weight

306. yet she is unsure if this would be the sole reason for them to return to partying

307. she has sat with friends who were having a break from it and have put weight on

308. they chat about gaining weight again

309. yet she would not state that it was a main motivating force of clubbing

310. yet it is very pleasurable

311. she is aware that if she feels down about herself and is going out at the weekend

312. she will be conscious of the actuality that she can consume speed, not each much food and feel slimmer as the week ended

313. which is pleasant

314. yet it would not be the sole reason why she did it

315. yet she does consider this

*Err, I remember a girl saying that weight was a big problem when she stopped clubbing, so she was going once a month to try and use it as a form of weight control.*

316. No she has not ever

317. she certainly does not use it to control her weight



318.yet she has been consuming lots of alcohol

319.yet it is somewhat pleasant to return to drugs

320.as you do not consume so much alcohol, which means no calories

321.yet it would not be why she does it

322.it is pleasant when you know, which is what is nice about it

*Erm could I just ask you about drugs to build a picture? Erm your past months drugs.*

323.Ecstasy, amphetamine sulphate and cocaine

*Ah, ah and what's your usual pattern for the week?*

324.It is influenced by whether it is a weekend partying

325.when partying occurs, for example last weekend, she consumed two ecstasy tablets and one wrap of speed

326.she is uncertain of the amount of speed in the wrap

327.plus loads of alcohol

*Is that just beer, lager or?*

328.Beer

329.lots of vodka was drank on Saturday too

*Is there any particular drugs that you use to come-down?*

330.She does not use hashish

331.though her friends smoke a lot on the come-down

332.only alcohol she assumes

333.only beer if she is experiencing an attack of the nerves and requires relaxation

334.spirits stimulate so they are a no-go

335.they are fine prior to going out

336.and beer for during a come-down

*How do you feel when you are coming down?*

337.A reason why she ceased to use ecstasy

338.previously she consumed ecstasy a lot and began to feel continually unwell

339.her come-downs began to worsen

340.the come-down was that no more as it became one lengthy depressive state

341.it went on for many months and got so detrimental

342.that she sought medical advice and was pleased to be offered prozac immediately

343.also agreeable was the offering of counselling before prozac use

344. she frequented many of these sessions to rid her depression  
345. in retrospect, she feels that much of it was due to being depressed beforehand  
346. yet the chief cause was ecstasy  
347. as to why she got stuck in that depressive state  
348. hence, she stated that she would not use ecstasy anymore  
349. when she went out she began to consume vast amounts of strong amphetamine  
350. and consume much more spirits, for example one bottle of vodka plus a wrap of  
strong amphetamine  
351. yet currently she has returned to ecstasy use  
352. and presently she is fine  
353. though a few days ago she had a negative come-down  
354. she felt fine on Tuesday but in the evening she could not stop weeping  
355. the next day she was weepy and her mood fluctuated  
356. during her initial couple of years on ecstasy, she was okay and did not get come-  
downs  
357. she did not comprehend them  
358. when they did begin, she was fine as it lasted for just one day  
359. she ceased to use ecstasy when it progressed to a never ending depression  
360. yet currently she uses ecstasy though stating she would not  
361. yet it is difficult to not use  
362. as it is very pleasant  
363. she believes that she would note the sequence of returning to the depressed state  
364. it does not concern her to experience come-down for one day in the week  
365. where you weep, feel strange and are distressed  
366. then you recall that it is a come-down as it is mid-week  
367. which allows you to feel all right as you just need to pass through that day hence it  
is not a problem  
368. yet she will cease use for a period if she notes the return of the depression  
369. which was horrendous when it occurred  
370. so ghastly that she does not desire to experience it a second time  
*Do you think that was using it for so often?*  
371. Yes, certainly  
372. as she used ecstasy for many years

*Did you actually feel it creep up on you or did you have to stop before*

373.no, she noticed it gradually affecting her

374.the come-down progressed from one day to three

375.then possibly a full week of being low

376.and feel fine for a time

377.it progressively lengthened to being with her all of the time

378.yet she feels it was certainly ecstasy which was the chief cause

379.there is not anything left in your brain

380.you are deadened

381.there are consequences from using it up heavily

382.it was awful

383.she was contemplating that something in the brain has been used up completely

384.she asks what it is called

***Serotonin?***

385.Serotonin, yes

386.she did not weep during her depression

387.she did not feel anything, akin to the walking dead, completely deadened

388.she was aware that she was not content yet

389.it did not resemble the usual depressive state re feeling annoyed and sensitive

390.she was deadened totally, no feelings there at all

391.which is what got her

392.hence was the reason she did not act upon it earlier as it masked the seriousness of  
it

393.all of a sudden it came to her that she had been numb for a long time, a feeling she  
could no longer tolerate, it was horrendous

394.her serotonin was non-existent as though she had used it all

***But you did manage to come out of that?***

395.yes

396.and for a long time after she decided to use only speed on night outs

397.it is okay to just use speed

398.yet the she fell back into

399.she took half an ecstasy tablet as it was given

400.which triggered her memories of the pleasure it gives, hence desiring repetition

*Err, in a recent survey 83% of people thought that drug taking was an accepted part of British people's lives*

401.certainly

402.Britain is unmatched regarding its youth culture

403.and everybody uses ecstasy

404.young people use it monthly or weekly yet everybody uses

405.she forgot to mention that she took magic mushrooms last month

*Oh right, yeah. Erm do you ever think about, you know how it is normalised with everyone using, do you ever think about the risks involved?*

406.No one is sure about the long term influences

407.the complete epoch of folk who have consumed lots of ecstasy

408.are test cases for a large experiment

409.thirty years on she feels there may be [negative consequences]

410.there may be delayed influences from ecstasy use, for example rapid senility

411.Britain may face a huge health crisis

412.due to people who have used becoming unwell as no-one is aware

413.occasionally she, though not currently due to abstinence

414.yet after long term use, becoming more placid and experiencing come-downs

415.she passed through a large time of

416.so did many of her friends

417.being very concerned of the long term influences of their actions

418.as many of them feel more dim since using

419.her short term memory capacity has deteriorated

420.which may be due to ageing

421.yet some of them feel it is due to drug use as she cannot recall to the extent she could before

422.on occasions she has been very concerned about the long term influences

423.particularly when television documentaries cite the amount of brain cells you have killed

424.yet the fear disappears once you return, and are inspired, by ecstasy use

425.concern over health occurs when you are lessening consumption or becoming apathetic about it

426.yet you are concerned occasionally

*Do you think it's because you notice your memory's not as good and then it sets you off thinking 'oh shit'?*

427. Kind of agree

428. she knows of folk having nervous breakdowns from excessive parting

429. those using lots of drugs for a long time

430. occasionally it is scary considering the number of people who have broke down

431. as the blend of using for a long time

432. and the many mixtures of drugs

433. and the style of living

434. yes, she has seen many hit the bottom and pay for it

435. and she is aware she did herself in the form of depression

436. some folk become mentally ill and the likes

437. when talking about it it appears very negative yet

438. it is a section of the scene

439. the majority recover

440. they themselves cease to use and their friends help

441. and they recover

*Yeah, it sounds worse when you talk about it like this.*

442. Yes

443. yet you are aware that they will be fine as they cease to use and recover

444. many folk use for long periods and continue getting close to breakdown until they do

445. it can be somewhat abrupt, one point they are fine

446. there are many on prozac today who no longer use ecstasy

447. as it has a detrimental affect

448. hence many had to stop using due to depression

*Would you say that some people are prone to paranoia and depression or is it just the drugs?*

449. It is difficult to know

450. depression occurs regardless after lots of ecstasy use

451. she feels that anyone using ecstasy for a long time would suffer depression not limited to the come-down

452. paranoia can appear too



*Have you ever, whilst you've been on E, have you ever experienced anything unpleasant?*

453. She visited a club one time and felt as though death was imminent
454. she does not purchase drugs from strangers
455. yet she purchased one from a stranger and swallowed it
456. and she has not ever before felt so unwell
457. from being stationary, she was totally covered in sweat as it ran down her back
458. she has not ever felt that unwell before
459. then became uneasy in her mind
460. she sat in a corner
461. this is pathetic
462. she sat there believing she was to die due to consuming adulterated ecstasy with unknown to her substances
463. she truthfully felt she was to die
464. hence she decided to stay out and wait for it
465. she did not attempt to get her friends nor any help
466. she remained there for an hour thinking she had made a mistake
467. her eyeballs rolled back in their sockets
468. she could only contemplate death due to feeling so unwell
469. it was horrendous
470. the feeling differed to those when you consume ecstasy and are aware that all you need is fresh air and water
471. it was not that the rush was too strong
472. she was completely obliterated
473. she was concerned about the sweating due to hearing of death by overheating
474. not ever has she sweat so much
475. which was very frightening

*How did your body feel, sort of feelings?*

476. She felt composed which she was due to ecstasy as it has this influence
477. she accepted it and felt disconcerted as she was not ready to go yet
478. she felt composed at intervals of being tremendously unwell
479. some people become unwell and they cannot handle it, they scream
480. then others go to them and relax them



481.by an aid, get them fresh air and water

***Were you able to move or did you***

482.no, finally she could not move

483.she got to the toilet one time and could not stand up

484.she found a window in a toilet and got fresh air

485.then left to sit in the corner where she could not move

486.could not move her limbs or anything

487.she was unable to see clearly due to her eyes rolling in their sockets

488.could not do a thing

***Did that gradually wear off?***

489.It steadily wore off yet over a long time period

490.it took around one and a half hours of being so ill then it began to ease

491.many occasions of using ecstasy, particularly MDMA powder which is hard to ascertain [the amount]

492.many occasions of using that you feel somewhat unwell, sickly for a bit yet

493.yet not sickly which is worrying nor alarming

494.you are aware of the sickly feeling which will disappear soon

***But you're feeling good with it sort of thing?***

495.You feel pleasant and it is okay

496.you are aware of the sickly feeling which will ease very shortly

497.powder is more powerful than ecstasy tablets

498.the feelings are unstable legs for a long time and silliness

499.you walk around very unstable

500.and feel very pleasant

501.yet you cannot dance for a long time

502.it is the norm to consume with friends where you all fall and laugh lots

503.it differs lots to a tablet, the feeling is not as pure, it is more silly

504.in a club compared to a party, you would feel [odd] if your legs were unstable and you were being silly

505.the doormen would observe causing a feeling of discomfort

506.yet at a party you are able to fall, giggle and have a very pleasant evening

507.powder is very silly

*Yeah, erm we've talked about health problems, what's the outcome of those problems you had?*

508. She managed to recover

509. she acquired much as she passed through

510. the end result is positive as you discover much afterwards

511. you do not sense accomplishment, though whilst low you have worked things out

512. she is more at ease currently and would not take part to that extent

513. she would be more practical

514. she would look for indications to have a rest from it and possibly only use speed

515. only being more wary and conscious

516. that not all of it is positive and to look for indications of relapse

*Could I ask you, 'cos I know on the free party scene a lot more people talk about the spiritual feel, could you tell me anything about that?*

517. Her scene is more than large weekend celebrations, it emerges in to a lifestyle

518. you begin to associate with the folk there

519. as you are centred in nowhere

520. you are in normally delightful settings

521. you have sorted it out for yourself

522. it is akin to being in a group linked by kinship and beliefs where you emerge as part of the whole

523. possibly you will gather money for the generator which retains the party

524. as they last for a long time

525. and you take a seat in cars and have a chat

526. you become closer acquainted with people as compared to a club

527. then everyone goes together to somewhere, you remain united for longer

528. then you begin to meet those people during the week

529. due to associating with those people, it emerges as a lifestyle

530. compared to a club where you meet the people on that weekend

531. and you would not be acquainted with many of those people

532. everyone knows each other at the parties

533. due to the longer time period, you are more visually aware and become intimate, hence get acquainted with all

534. yes, it is sensed as more spiritual

*Yeah. Will you be going this year?*

535. Yes in the summer time

536. previously she frequented those in Winter yet is no longer that full on

*With clubbing and ecstasy use, what's happening now?*

537. She has recently returned to ecstasy after abstinence

538. hence, yes she will continue to use yet not be as heavy

539. as for one, the parties are monthly or fortnightly and not every weekend

*You know when you weren't doing ecstasy but were doing speed, did you still go then?*

540. Yes

*Did you enjoy it?*

541. Yes, she had as good a time as ever

542. yet the sensation differs to ecstasy

543. yet speed is nice also as you communicate with more people

544. hence, that is good too

*Err and what about your future in clubbing. Do you think you'll always go?*

545. Yes

546. she cannot see herself not going despite her ageing

547. no stopping in the near future

548. it is not only the enjoyable evening, it is a method of discovering sound folk

549. yes, she feels she will continue for a long time

*Is there anything other than your health that might stop you?*

550. No, she does not think so

551. not employment

*Well we're near the end now, just to sum up is there any more ways that you feel your experiences might have changed you?*

552. Her dancing has improved

553. she is certain that it alters how you perceive music

554. say it alters brain recognition patterns

555. as the way she listens to music has altered since using ecstasy

556. once she felt she was only able to dance whilst high yet now she can just dance

557. previously she danced very little

558. and would only dance whilst high on drugs

559.yet currently she dances without their influence, which is a new experience

560.it is odd, music lifts her now

561.whilst dancing on ecstasy and you feel the rush

562.she gets the rush whilst hearing a top tune when not on ecstasy

563.she is unsure, perhaps it alters how you perceive music as it can lift her so much

***Like the way you hear it?***

564.Yes

565.it connects into your feelings

566.despite not being on ecstasy as she can rush from a top tune and feel like she is coming up on ecstasy

567.yet experiencing more relaxation

568.and self-assurance

569.and being unrestricted with folk which has been a massive change

570.many say that after being on the scene for a time, these influences continue after the drugs

571.as she is aware of someone so bashful he could not chat nor be friendly but can now despite no longer using ecstasy

572.previously he could not do that due to being emotionally incapacitated yet can now

573.that is it

***That's a big positive effect.***

574.Yes, that is true

***Well that's it, is there anything you'd like to ask or add?***

575.no, I asked you the last time

***Thank you very much, that's been brilliant.***

576.She overlooked to mention this: you can go out and have a right good dance

577.and be as unrestricted as you desire

578.yet not have to always look out for male harassment

579.sometimes you may get someone high making a move on you

580.yet it is a rarity, though more commonplace in conventional clubs

581.where each fellow approaching you is attempting a chat up

582.which is very wearing

583.yet at dance clubs someone will approach and chat though you need not worry that he is after you

584. she is certain that this actuality is a major appeal of the scene for women, as they  
can venture out and have an excellent time

585. without male harassment as it does not occur there

586. you are able to embrace men with the awareness that they will take it for what it is

587. they will not assume that they are in with a chance

588. you are able to have a pleasant embrace, feel intimate yet know there will be no  
detrimental after-effects

589. which is a very pleasant aspect

590. it aids relaxation for women going out

591. and also you can get high without the concern

592. females overly drunk in conventional clubs are victims as men centre upon you

593. yet this is not a concern of the dance scene which is pleasing

594. at the heavy metal evening, she was taken aback by the number of men chatting her  
up when she danced

595. she had overlooked that this occurred in those clubs

596. totally overlooked that you must protect yourself more

597. you are unable to be at ease so much as you are aware that men will assume it is a  
come-on

598. hence, that actuality is pleasing about the dance scene

599. it is so laid-back

*Like a safe environment where you can let go?*

600. Yes

601. if a man hassles you it is a rarity

602. and such an astonishment too

*So err, is there anything more then?*

603. no

*Well thank you very much.*

## Appendix 11: Grouping of Meaning Units into Themes - emergent themes

The event: free parties 1, 15, 519-520 DIY 521, 523-524

Setting contrasted to clubs 2-3, 16 relaxed: no expected actions 112-113, 119, 504-506

E consumption contrasted to clubs: silly, no app worry 114-117 [definition of messy 120-121]

Previous club involvement 4 & length of clubbing period 5-6

Music & clubs unite initially 7-10: due to new friendships 11

Music is important 25 & drugs 247

People are important contrasted to clubs 26-28, 30, 32

- belonging contrast to clubs 33-38, 526-527, 530-533 out of party context 39-40, 518, 522, 528-529, 548 all → spiritual feel 534

- belonging contrast to conventional 238, 245-246, 248-249, 251-254 appearance & comfort 239-240 illegal drugs & less violence 241-244, 250

Openness, fun & no traditional relations between the sexes 576-578, 583, 586-589, 593, 600-602 contrast to conventional 579-582, 592 guard oneself 594-597

- pleasure without pressure for women 584-585, 590-591, 598-599

Return (3rd cycle): miss people, safe, friendly, accepting 64-71

Communication 31, 525

Pleasure 29, 70, 118, 127, 548 more so than conventional 235-237 will always go 545-547, 549 [nothing will stop her 546, 550-551]

Clothing is not body conscious fashion 270, 272 but alternative 273-274, 280-281 e.g., cover bareness: more common than first thought 275-277 as contrast to conventional 278-279 due to heat 271 not sexualisation 282-284

Weight loss: enjoyable 285-286, 295, 310 self-esteem & assurance 296-298

- due to length of event & dancing 287-289

- also after-effects: no appetite 290 stimulating drugs 291-292

- inevitable (1st cycle) 293-294, 299-304

Weight gain after (2nd cycle) 305, 307-308



- not a motivation 306, 309, 316-317 though a pleasing pick-me-up 311-315, 321-322

Alcohol return: calories & pleasing return to illegal drugs (3rd cycle) 318-320

Changes lifestyle 42, 58, 517

Cycle of involvement 43, 53, 57

1st: besotted 44 takes over life 45-48, 54-55

2nd: calm down or stop 49-50, 54, 56, 59

3rd: return, similar to 1st part 51-52, 59, 63 not as exciting 61-62 miss it 60 not in the winter 536 (see calmer use after depression)

Builds confidence: boundaries go 72-75, 80, 568 (or just grown up? 74) inevitable 84-85, 90

Calms outlook: life thereafter 86-89, 567

Improved social skills: life thereafter 76-79, 91-94

Opens personality: boundaries go 95-96, 569 life thereafter 570-572

- due to setting & people 82-83 contrast to conventional: less socialising 97-100

1st E is memorable 12-13, 19 not alone 17-18

- setting: free party 14, 16 & enjoyment 19-24

Contexts of use: fun, intimacy, socialising, aids come-down 102-108

- preferred context: nature & dance setting 109-111

Setting affects E: bad atmosphere & doormen 255-258, (stereotype: junkie) 267-269  
woman & attack 260-266

Appeal: relaxes & socialises [accepting folk] 124-125, 127

Appeal: tactility & empathy [accepting folk] 139-141

Appeal: dance experience, stimulant 122-123, 126

- music, dance, E unite: DJ & control over feeling 128-130, 134-135, 143

- outcome: trance like state 131-133

- connection with another: motivation & NVC 142, 144-146, 148-152, 155-160

appreciation: tactile 147, 153 (makes the night good 154)

- the crazy dancer: amusement, friendly, motivation 161-166

Rush explained 137-138

- dance to work E experience 168-169, 173 temporary 174, 180

- due to quality 167, 170, 176 mood 171, 177 music 172

E experiences alter music perception 553-555, 563-564

- heard like when on E 560-563, 565-566

- dancing better: no drugs 552, 559 before: high to dance 556-558

E & LSD: fluctuating paranoia 178, 181-186 actively eliminate 187

Speed & nervousness 179

Experience due to quality: 188, 192 boost communication 189, 209 silent, non/dance,

NVC 190-191, 193 pure MDMA: wobbly but OK, social, silly 497-503, 507

Controllability due to quality: strong/adulterated 194-199

E & heroin: quiet, physically unstable & OK 201-203, 205-206

- active reassurance/aid 204, 207

Previous adulteration: 210-211

Safety in knowing dealer 454-455, 462

- bad E experience: death 453, 456, 458, 462-463 sweat & anxiety 457, 459 473-475

eyes roll 467, 487 differed to usual sickness/non-worrying 470-471, 491-496 unable to move 482-483, 486, 488 gradual decrease 489-490

- action: first 483-484 & then 460-462, 464-466, 468-469, 472, 485 though calm 476-478 contrast to others 479-481

Illegal drugs but no alcohol (1st cycle) 212-213 re scene 223-225 no pubs 228

- alcohol returns (3rd cycle?) 214, 217, 224, 226 with E 215-216, 222

- so do pubs: music 227, 229-230

- aids after-effects (relaxes?) 218-220, 332-333, 336

- as prerequisite for evening 221, 334-335

Conventional clubs: due to student life, laugh & cheap 231-234

Heavy E & after-effects increase: none to short/OK ones 356-358, 364-367, 373-378

depression 338-341, 345-347, 371-372, 435

- active in getting help 342-344 though delayed [due to numbness] 388, 391-393

- due to serotonin 379-381, 383-385, 394

- outcome: abstinence 337, 348, 359 but speed & alcohol 349-350, 396-397, 540-541  
[sensations differ but good to chat 542-544] learn to be sensible 509-513, 538-539  
Return to E (3rd cycle) 351-352, 360, 537 recovered 395, 508  
- too nice to stay away 361-362, 398-400  
- after-effects return: weepy, mood changes 353-355  
Aware of depression: possible return 363 cease E 368, 514-516  
- unbearable 369-370, 382, 393 differs to usual depression 386-387, 389-390  
Depression is inevitable 449-452 [paranoia maybe]

Others breakdown: heavy use & mixing 428-429, 431-434, 436, 444-445 though recover  
by self & others: an actuality 439-441, 443 but some do not 446-448  
- causes fear 430, 437, 442 yet part of scene 438 (safety in knowledge of recovery 443)

Drug use is normalised 401, 407 especially re our youth culture 402-404

Possible long term influence 406, 408-412

- personally realised after calming (2nd cycle) 413-417, 422, 425-426 external cause  
423

- now influence: memory loss & dimness 418-421 [due to age?]

Return to E (3rd cycle): long term concern goes 424

Drug use pattern: monthly 323, 405

- weekly: mixing speed, alcohol & E 324-329

No hashish though aids after-effects 330-331

## Appendix 12: Grouped Themes

### A. The appeal of free parties

1. Pleasurable in general
2. Music & drugs: unite, dance
3. More relaxed setting than a dance club for E induced actions
4. Lack of traditional relations between sexes: pleasure without pressure
5. Personal involvement: nature [A7]
6. People as contrasted to dance clubs, also part of E return, more sociable [A7]
7. Feeling of belonging: contrast to dance and conventional clubs - communication (though latter OK for expense)
8. Appeal so strong worry over health consequences goes

### B. New lifestyle and influence of...

1. Previous involvement & length of involvement
2. The start: music, parties & friends
3. Type of people so liked they are missed [A6 & 7]
4. Changes lifestyle
5. Goes in a cycle: progression
  - i. besotted, first E is memorable, anti-alcohol & pubs
  - ii. weight gain, calmer/stop, breakdown → fear (may not return to scene) [A8]
  - iii. illegal drugs again, miss the parties, alcohol (various uses) & pubs return, recovery from illness, after-effects & awareness of possible illness [see E] [A6, 7 & 8] [B3]
6. Positive outcomes: confidence, calms, social skills, openness (due to socialising) - permanent [A6]

### C. The appeal of ecstasy

1. First ecstasy was so enjoyable it rendered repetition
2. It is so enjoyable health concerns go [A8] [B5iii]
3. It is enjoyed in many contexts: preference for nature and dance
4. Experience(s) are enjoyable: depend on quality
  - i. relaxes folk, allows socialising
  - ii. hugging and empathy

- iii. stimulating for dance or maybe not
- iv. rush: unison with music → trance state and possible connection with another [A2]  
[C4ii]
- v. boost communication or not [A7]
- vi. unstable legs and silliness if pure
- 5. Use is so widespread it is normalised
- 6. Dancing on ecstasy eventually alters music perception: feel rush without ecstasy  
[C4iv]
- 7. No longer need ecstasy to dance [C6]

#### D. Influences of the ecstasy experience

- 1. Setting: other people can spoil the experience [C4ii]
- 2. Quality, mood and music: dance the ecstasy up [C4iii]
- 3. Quality affects controllability [C4]
- 4. Adulteration with LSD (not common now) and paranoia
- 5. Adulteration with heroin (not common now): experience and aid
- 6. Adulterated ecstasy → extreme illness, experience and action taken
- 7. Safety in knowing dealer
- 8. Speed and anxiety: contrasting dance drug

#### E. The influence of heavy ecstasy use [see B]

- 1. After-effects increase → inevitable, unusual, unbearable depression: serotonin
- 2. Delayed active aid due to unusualness
- 3. Outcome was abstinence but other drugs used: speed and ale, communication [D8]
- 4. Worry over long term influence [A8]
- 5. Others breakdown: personal fear, usually recover, part of lifestyle
- 6. Eventual outcome: return, sensibility, note return to depression [A8] [B5iii] [C2]
- 7. After-effects return: alcohol not hashish [B5iii]
- 8. Memory deterioration and dimness
- 9. Patterns of use: heavy and mixing

#### F. The body [see also dance]

- 1. Setting: no worry over appearance, comfortable, accepted

2. Relations between sexes: pressure off appearance [A4]
3. Less clothing: heat, non-sexual
4. Weight loss inevitable: pleasing, confidence, esteem [B5i]
  - i. after-effects and lost appetite: drug experience
5. Weight gain when stop: not a motivation, awareness aids esteem [B5ii]
6. Weight gain due to alcohol: pleasing return to ecstasy [B5iii]



## Appendix 13: Individual Life-World

Kate is thirty years old and her involvement with the dance scene is centred around free parties, though occasionally she frequents dance clubs. She has participated in the scene for many years, hence has witnessed (in herself and others) a cyclic nature of involvement with this life-style. Drugs are part of Kate's life, as she mixes and alternates from one type to another for certain needs and situations. As with her fellow interviewees, Kate notes the differences between similar events, settings, people and drugs: the main contrast falling amongst free parties, dance clubs and clubs of the conventional kind.

### **Free parties: not clubs, just like in the middle of a field**

The pleasure Kate derives from her involvement clearly shows the attraction of the scene. Pleasure is gained from the people, atmosphere, drugs and music, differing from that had in conventional clubs as she cites it as more fun, more laid-back and more social, as people mix and communicate on a larger scale. The setting also differs from dance clubs as the events mainly occur outside, where she finds herself in beautiful surroundings "in the middle of nowhere", which is Kate's preferred setting for ecstasy use. Ecstasy consumption in this setting differs too, as Kate enjoys getting "messy": being able to act silly with no worries about how others perceive her actions.

everyone takes it in a different way, they get more messy and more silly and you just have a really good look around and you don't have to worry about what you look like or, you can just get really, really mashed and make an idiot of yourself which is quite fun, like at a club you maybe have a bit more of, try to keep it together a bit more

The latter part of the quote demonstrates that expected standards of acting (as found in dance clubs and maintained by the doormen) are not an issue, hence the free party setting is more relaxed for this kind of ecstasy induced fun. As free parties take place in natural surroundings and are arranged and executed by fellow revellers, an element of belonging ensues from this personal involvement, where Kate may help out by, say, collecting money to keep the generator, for the music, running.

*It's like this real tribal thing and you do become part of that whole scene*

The sense of belonging also stems from familiarity with fellow participants. Again, this is contrasted to dance clubs where people differ from week to week and you are “just one person in the crowd” yet free parties house the same people every week: a familiarity which Kate enjoys immensely. She believes this to be due to the length of the party as it continues for much longer than a dance club, and afterwards the same people stay together.

you go to a club but you only see those people at the club that weekend and you wouldn't know that many people... but at a party scene you get to know everyone's face and everybody knows you. It's a lot more closer

Kate feels the people are like “old friends”, thus there is a real sense of community (an attraction is the lack of people who frequent the conventional clubs, when they do they oddly stick-out of the crowd). This belonging stretches into life out of the party context, indeed Kate feels that involvement on this scene is a way of life, as people begin to mix with each other during the week. “It's not just a really good night out, it's a way of finding really good people as well” who Kate can be herself with, thus feeling comfortable and relaxed in their company. Also, as the next quote demonstrates, there is a non-judgmental approach to appearance.

I've always hated things like that [night-clubs] 'cos I always got picked on for looking like different, and so I wouldn't feel comfortable in a club like that anyway

Nonetheless, Kate has frequented conventional clubs yet feels this is part of student life: a cheap alternative, allowing fun in the form of having a laugh at what people do there. However, they are not considered to be proper nights out because if she was planning a good evening, then dance clubs or free parties would be the only choice.

if you're on the dance scene people tend to be less straight so there's not that sort of violence thing and crapness you get at a more townie club anyway... 'cos they're not that same 'go out, get pissed, have a fight' sort of thing

The lack of aggressive action appeals to Kate, as she states it is rare to see a fight at dance clubs and free parties. The safe, friendly and accepting nature of the people mean so much to her that she misses them the most when she has taken a rest from partying.

Part of this safe environment entails the lack of traditional relations between the sexes, as found in conventional clubs, which allows a freedom for women in that they can dance, be open but do not need to be on guard against unwanted male attention. There is safety in the knowledge that...

somebody will come up to you and be talking to you, you won't be worrying 'oh, he's coming-on to me', he'll just be chatting to you... You can hug blokes and you know they'll not be thinking anymore of it then just a hug, they won't be thinking 'oh, I'm in here' or anything. You can just hug a bloke and have a really nice hug and feel really close to him but know that you're not gonna be hassled by him afterwards which is a really, really nice thing

However, Kate does state that male harassment sometimes occurs though it is such a rarity it comes as somewhat of a surprise. She goes on to say how tiresome it is to be constantly approached by men in the setting of conventional clubs, and how she had forgotten it was a norm. Kate recognises that the relations between the sexes are part of the appeal of the dance scene to women: pleasure without the pressure, as a woman can go out and get high with no worries. Hence, it is more relaxing for them and, as a comparison: "if you get too drunk at a normal club then you're a victim aren't you, you know they home in on you".

### **It's not just the big weekend out, it becomes a way of life**

Becoming involved in the free party scene means that a new lifestyle is formed. Initially, Kate did not like dance music yet once her appreciation began, so did her visits to dance events: both emerged as a result of new friendships with people already enjoying the scene. Kate feels that once you are involved you do not leave, though participation runs in a cyclic nature. The commencement (or first part of the cycle) indicates some form of dependence, hence it took over her life.

all you're doing is waiting for the weekend or go out in the week as well and you're just waiting for the weekend, then waiting for the next party and the next party, and then you're really full-on, going to absolutely everything

Kate has witnessed this cycle in others, for example when she was beginning to calm down, she saw the excitement of this new 'discovery' in others. This may be linked to the actuality that for Kate, and maybe for others, her first experience of ecstasy was

memorable: it took place in the free party setting and was one of the best evenings she has ever had. She embraced the experience without nervousness which demonstrates her excitement of this novel arena, and it implicitly reveals her 'normal to use drugs for pleasure' perspective.

it was just like all your Christmas' in one, yeah it was good... I just felt the most excited I'd felt in my life and I just couldn't stop running around. Yeah it was just great

For Kate, initial involvement meant that legal drugs such as alcohol were not desired at all, as she says "I was purely into chemicals": an outlook which reflects the feeling of all the early day clubbers, when it was an oddity to see people drunk. However, Kate notes a change on the scene where now these people use alcohol instead of ,or as well as, illegal drugs.

It is during this first part of the cycle where weight loss occurs as an inevitable consequence of the lifestyle: the combination of stimulating drugs and dancing for many hours. Again, Kate witnessed this in relation to other people on their first involvement.

you see a lot of people first come on the scene and they're like, they might be a bit chubby and then a year later they'll be like, lost loads of weight

The second part of the cycle involves calming down with relation to partying and drug use, or maybe even abstinence. The latter is the path which Kate took, as she suffered mental health problems (discussed later) as a result of heavy use of ecstasy during the first part of the cycle. She has seen breakdowns of a similar kind occur with other people (again, more later) which has had a frightening affect on Kate despite her believing that it is part of the lifestyle: an element of safety is entailed in the 'knowledge' that people recover as long as they stop using. It is here that the lost weight is regained, and is viewed with slight disappointment though also as an accepted part of the scene (discussed later).

Despite worries over possible long term health problems during the second part of the cycle, there is a return to ecstasy use, and this exemplifies the third phase. One of the reasons for the return is that Kate misses the people there, as mentioned earlier, Kate feels safe and sound in their company.



it's like coming home you know, it's like you get on it again and it's like 'oh yeah, decent people' and you really miss those people 'cos they're a certain type that are into that certain scene and, yeah it's just great... it's just like being you know finding the people that are like you

Kate also missed the parties. The return to partying is akin to first involvement on the scene where Kate would go to all the dance events, though it is not as exciting but still as enjoyable. It is at this stage where Kate finds herself now, and the difference between this and the first stage lies in her changed view of alcohol.

this last six months I've got really back into drinking loads and sort of taking E and drinking which I never used to do, and that's really nice

A novelty lies in the mixing of ecstasy with alcohol: as consumption of alcohol began, so did the frequenting of pubs. During Kate's initial involvement, she did not visit pubs due to her anti-alcohol viewpoint, but now she goes more than ever especially when there is a dance music night, though the drug of choice is legal (alcohol). Beer is used by Kate as an aid to the come-down as it relaxes her from a nervous feeling. Alternatively, spirits are consumed as a prerequisite for the evening as they have a stimulating influence, hence are no good for aiding the after-effects of ecstasy.

Kate has been drinking a lot of alcohol and is pleased that her return to ecstasy means she will not drink as much, which means no weight gain (a satisfying thought considering the fluctuation in weight as a result of the cycle of involvement). Another difference between this stage and the first is Kate's change in outlook of ecstasy: she experienced prolonged depression as a result of use, which is why she hit the second cycle and abstained from use. As she recovered, it is one of the reasons she returned to ecstasy though be it in a more sensible and wary fashion (addressed later as an outcome of heavy use).

*It just gets you to let boundaries down*

Kate's participation in the scene has had a positive affect upon her attitude: she has lost her 'uptightness' and feels more confident. Due to an increase in self-assurance, Kate's social skills have improved, as she finds it much easier to talk to people, both in and out of the party context. Kate believes these changes are due to the scene allowing boundaries to be broken, in the sense of the amount of socialising entailed, made easy by the friendly, accepting people and the relaxed atmosphere. This is an inevitable

change considering the length, and nature, of her involvement and also reflects ecstasy's ability to enhance communication and empathy. Kate contrasts this sociality to conventional clubs where people tend to stay in groups and not talk to many others.

you just get into the habit of talking to anybody and not being so guarded and stuff and that carried on in my life as well as I do find it a lot more easy to make friends outside the club

Thus, Kate feels more relaxed in her outlook of life, which she believes to be a permanent affect. She feels as though her personality has been opened up, and that this is the biggest positive influence of her experiences. Here is a similar example Kate gave of a friend.

loads of people say once they've been on the scene for a while it's not just when you're on the drugs, it carries on afterwards 'cos I knew this bloke who was so shy he was like, he couldn't talk to anyone and then he did it for a long time but he doesn't do it anymore but he can still be friendly now, he could never do that before so 'cos he was so shy he was emotionally crippled, he couldn't talk to anyone, he can now

### **I can remember my first E: the appeal of ecstasy**

As mentioned earlier, Kate's first experience of ecstasy was so pleasurable it was etched into memory, and rendered repetition. Not only is ecstasy consumed in the context of dance events, but also at home with a partner or friends, as an aid to the come-down, and for going on walks in the countryside. Nature is Kate's preferred setting for use, though one which entwines with dance music: the free party. The strength of the appeal of the ecstatic state is evident as concern over long term possible health takes a back-seat.

The intensity of the appeal of ecstasy can also be seen in the normalisation of its use. Kate believes it is an accepted part of life, especially regarding British youth.

Britain's quite unique in that it's got like the youth culture scene... I'd say so many young people do it, it maybe once a month or it may be once a week whatever but everyone does... it's like this whole generation of people that have done so many, this much ecstasy

The experience of ecstasy is appreciated (and will be discussed more later) though varying quality (adulteration and other drugs sold as ecstasy, for example MDA) of the drug means differing experiences. One of the main appeals of ecstasy use is the relaxing



influence it has upon its users, allowing a friendly atmosphere for communication and to have fun. Another aspect related to the people and their accepting nature involves physical contact in the form of hugs, which is greatly enjoyed and exemplifies a feeling of togetherness.

just hugging people on ecstasy just feels so nice, it's so nice to touch other people 'cos it feels great... and everybody does hug as well which is really nice

### *Dancing on it's brilliant*

The most appealing aspect of ecstasy involves the way it interacts with the music in the dance. An aspect is the stimulating feature enabling Kate to dance for long periods of time. Kate speaks of the music tying in with emotions, hence of the feeling when the DJ controls the music, building it up and then bringing it down, which encourages 'rushes' from the drug.

they'll stop raising the music, and as they drop it down and raise it up, like teasing a bit you just get this rush going up and down you

Kate explains the ecstasy rush as "this feeling going up from your toes up to your head, it just goes 'wush' and that's really nice". The outcome of the music controlling the body is the feeling of being in a trance like state.

you really home in on the beat and then you'll trance off a bit and that's nice, just really trance off and totally lose it and it just feels really tingly when you're tranced up and dancing

It appears as though during the trance bodily sensations are heightened, whilst mind and body dualism does not exist. At the stages in dance where the tranced state is not in play, Kate speaks of connections made with other people.

you'll be dancing away and you'll look across and somebody will be dancing back and then you'll like sort of energise each other to dance more 'cos you've just danced together and it's just been really good. It does make people contact each other more on the floor and just walking around and stuff... you'll be dancing away and there'll be somebody dancing like you, then you'll like look into each others' eyes and you'll be grinning your heads off and dancing and you really connect with them

This type of connection formed during the dance acts as a motivation to continue dancing, especially when Kate has danced all night and is beginning to feel the strain. Usually this occurs in the form of non-verbal communication, a smile, eye contact, a look of acknowledgement and an expression of encouragement. Connections made in the dance have a very rewarding feel for Kate, where appreciation is shown afterwards in the form of a hug: again, physical contact is greatly enjoyed. Kate says that hugging does not always occur, just on a 'good' night, implying that the most enjoyable evenings have this form of connection.

*I don't listen to music the same way as I did before I did ecstasy*

As a result of dancing on ecstasy many times for long periods, Kate feels that the experience has altered the way she perceives music. As though it "changes some pattern in your head". Kate says that without the influence of the drug, she now listens to music and it has an uplifting feel akin to when dancing on ecstasy and feeling the rush, especially when listening to a tune she really likes.

it ties into your emotions even when you're not on it 'cos I can really rush off a good dance track and just really get that feeling like when you're coming up off an E

Also related to Kate's vast experience of dancing on ecstasy, and possibly to how her music perception has altered, she can dance better than before (practice makes perfect). She speaks of a time when she would only dance when high on drugs, now this has changed and she has gained a confidence in her dancing abilities, which means she no longer needs ecstasy to gain pleasure from a dance.

I can dance now and there was a time when I thought I could only ever dance on drugs but now I can, before I didn't really dance very much and I'd never dance unless I was off my head but now I can actually dance without being on drugs which I could never do before, so it's made me be able to dance

### **Will I be on one or not?**

Though the majority of Kate's ecstasy experiences have taken place under "nice circumstances", there is a variety of aspects (be them internal or external) which influence how the ecstasy experience will progress. A major one is the setting, as Kate

has already mentioned, she would not feel comfortable on ecstasy in conventional clubs, and feels more relaxed in the free party context. Thus, people are important as she feels at home with those on the free party scene. Kate cites a time at a dance club where the doormen stereotyped her as an heroin addict and assumed she was entering the toilets to take a fix. They spoiled her enjoyment of the evening by following her around, thus creating a heavy atmosphere and discomfort for her. Another example takes the form of verbal assault from a fellow female clubber.

I remember going to a club and this girl really laid into me, I was really really off my tits, really friendly and fluffy and stuff, and this girl really laid into me in the toilets and after that I was really jittery and I couldn't, even though I was really really off my face I couldn't relax again and have a good time 'cos she'd spoilt the night really

It is evident from the two examples how other people's actions can easily spoil the ecstasy experience, in the latter instance causing Kate to change from feeling happy and friendly to nervous and non-relaxed. This demonstrates the power others have over one's actions, and contrasts to how ecstasy is experienced in the setting of friendly and accepting people.

*There's so many different sorts of ecstasy*

Not only do the ambience and people influence how ecstasy is experienced, so does the quality of the drug. Some ecstasy tablets boost communication.

you get ones which make you run around like an idiot talking to loads of people sometimes you get ones where you just don't want to dance, you just want to chat your head off to somebody

Some of them influence her to feel like being quiet, with no desire to have a dance.

you get ones that make you really insular and you just maybe just dance and don't really talk to anybody, you just smile across... some of them make you really quiet and not be able to dance at all, just sit in a corner

Kate uses an example of pure MDMA powder, which is much stronger than ecstasy in tablet form, to describe the different feelings from the differing types of ecstasy.

it's a lot more wobbly for ages, it's a real messy one 'cos err, you take that and your legs just feel like jelly and you're wobbling and wobbling

around and you're feeling really good but you can't dance for ages but you usually take it with your mates and you're all falling over together and just giggling like mad, but yeah it's a lot different feeling to a pill, it's not as clean

The physical experience of MDMA is unstable legs, causing the her to fall over, though this can be fun as the above quote demonstrates. It also shows the sociability of the drug, whilst exemplifying the reason why Kate prefers ecstasy use in the setting of free parties as opposed to clubs: it is fun to wobble around but this action is unsuitable for clubs and their doormen who have the job of keeping drugs away and retaining certain standards of acting.

Ecstasy adulterated with LSD can mean Kate suffers fluctuating paranoia when dancing, which she actively rids by stopping herself from being self-conscious. As a comparison, when ecstasy is tainted with heroin the experience is one of physical instability and lack of communication, hence the drug causes inactivity (though she feels comfortable with the situation). Kate has actively discovered how to deal with this: she finds another in the same state and takes a seat with him/her. These actions may indicate an experienced drug using person, as she can handle the unexpected and work through the negative.

Sometimes, dancing is necessary to work up the feelings from ecstasy though once she is there, she is "up and running", which suggests that physical movement and/or mentally tuning in to the music aids the experience (though some tablets do not require this extra work). Other aspects which affect the experience include mental disposition, influenced by, say, the external "the music wasn't particularly my sort of music, it wasn't that good", demonstrating that the right frame of mind has an influence. The actuality that Kate can work on, and for, the ecstasy experience implies that the drug is one where the user remains in control, as control is necessary for decisions to be made and acted upon. However, the quality can affect controllability of the body.

if you have an average E yeah you can control it but sometimes you get one that's really strong or it's got something in it, just really trippy or something and you can't control it as much and you feel really out of control and out of it



*I never buy drugs off people I don't know*

As the heading states, Kate prefers to buy ecstasy from people she knows. This is due to the varying qualities of the drug in that she knows (more so) what she is getting from a known dealer. Hence, the dealer is trusted and there is an element of safety entailed in the purchase which reduces risk. On one occasion, Kate bought ecstasy from a stranger.

I went and sat in this corner and I thought 'fucking hell I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I've taken this dodgy tablet and I don't know what's in it'

Kate's fear and concern is evident, steered by her lack of knowledge as to what was in the tablet. This was her worst experience on ecstasy as she felt extremely unwell and that death was imminent.

I was totally, I just completely stood still and there was just, I wasn't just sweating, sweat was pouring down my back and I was just completely soaked

The physical experience was one of severe sweating, which had an influence on her state of mind by making her anxious, related to stories heard of people dying from overheating. Also, her eyes were rolling back in her head which meant she could not visualise properly. Yet, the most debilitating physical feel was an inability to move "I just sat in the corner and I couldn't move my arms, my legs, nothing".

Kate contrasted this to the usual sickly feeling experienced when ecstasy is first felt bodily (a strong rush), which can be overcome by getting fresh air and drinking water: an awareness which is reassuring in itself.

a lot of times you might take E, especially with MDMA powder... and you do feel really quite ill for a while, feel really sick and stuff but, but not panicky sick or not worrying sick, you just know you feel a bit sick and it will pass... you're feeling good with it too and it's fine, you just know you feel a bit sick and it'll calm down within a few minutes

It took a considerable length of time for Kate to start to feel better. At first, she tried to help herself by getting fresh air from a window in the toilet where she slid down the wall as she could not stand. Then she took a seat away from everyone and awaited death.

I just thought 'well I'll just sit here and wait for it to happen', I didn't go and find my mates or anything like that and I thought 'okay, that's it then, sort of fucked up' and I sat there for about an hour... just fucking totally wiped-out

Kate did not get help from friends, possibly due to her inability to control movement or, as she says, all she could think about was dying: hence her ability to think clearly was clouded by a sense of morbidity. Strangely, Kate accepted her perceived fate, she felt very calm which as she says was probably due to the ecstasy as this is one of its characteristics.

I just thought 'well this is it then, which is a shame, I don't want to die now' but in-between being fucking violently ill that's how I felt, I did feel really calm

Kate contrasts her experience to those of other people where they have panicked and screamed so others have gone to their aid. It is possible that Kate's quiet, though sad, acceptance of the situation prevented others from acting this way.

### **I used to do lots of E and then it just started to feel bad all the time**

As Kate's ecstasy use progressed, she began to experience after-effects: a come-down which she did not get initially. Hence, she did not understand what a come-down was because she did not suffer them for the first two years. When the come-downs started, they only lasted for one day midweek, which acted as a reassurance for Kate because she knew why she was feeling that way.

I don't mind having a one day come-down midweek, you're sort of crying and feeling weird and you're upset and then you sort of remember 'oh it's a come-down, it's a Wednesday' and it makes you feel okay about it 'cos you just think 'I'll just get through today' so that doesn't bother me

The one day come-down gradually increased to lasting a whole week where she would feel down. She was aware that depression was creeping up on her, and all of a sudden became constant. She feels that "the reason I got into this big trap of being really down" was due to using ecstasy frequently for many years, and that it is an inevitable consequence for anyone using the drug in this fashion (paranoia may emerge too).



I started to get really bad come-downs and then the come-downs stopped being come-downs and it just turned into one long, long, long depression... it lasted a lot of months and it got so bad

Kate believes her depression was the consequence of a complete obliteration of the neurotransmitter. This is reflected in the next quote where she cites her depression as differing to the usual kind due to an emotional emptiness.

it wasn't a depression where I was crying or anything, it just depression where I felt nothing, I was like a zombie, I just felt totally numb...it wasn't like a normal depression where you might be a bit angry and a bit emotional, there was no emotion left

Kate knew she was unhappy but, due to the numbness, she delayed seeking help: she did not grasp how bad it had become. Then "I suddenly realised that 'God, I've felt nothing for so long and I just can't stand this feeling of nothingness anymore' it was really horrible". The doctor offered Prozac to Kate but advised her to go to counselling first, which Kate was pleased about, and attended a few sessions.

The outcome of her suffering was a conscious decision to stop using ecstasy all together. For an evening out, strong amphetamine sulphate and alcohol became the drugs of choice. The sensations of amphetamine differ to those of ecstasy as the former increased her communication with people. Hence she still enjoyed herself and felt it was fine to just use amphetamine: she did not suffer any detriments.

when I did go out I just started to do loads and loads of base-speed and like drink a lot more of spirits, like a bottle of vodka and a wrap of base to myself

*Now I've started to take them again even though I said I wouldn't*

Kate sees her journey through depression as a learning experience, with the eventual outcome being a return to ecstasy use but in a more sensible fashion (the third part of the cycle). She will continue to use but not be as enthralled as she was initially, aided by the actuality that the parties are occurring on a less regular basis.

I learned a lot while I was going through it, it's good in the end 'cos you learn when you come out of it, you don't feel like you've achieved anything but you've actually been sorting stuff out when you're down, but just calmer really now, I just wouldn't go for it as much now

There is an element of pride when Kate talks about recovery from her illness, though ecstasy is “too nice” to stay away from and, thus, easily to slip back into. Kate is fine at the moment with her recent return to ecstasy though did experience a bad come-down recently where she cried for a whole day (followed by a fluctuating tearful mood). However, Kate believes that due to her past experience, she would recognise the pattern which signified her returning depression, then she would stop again, but only in the short-term.

I'd be watching out for the signs to stop doing it for a while and maybe just go back to speed. Just being a lot more careful and just being a lot more aware really, that it's not all good and just to watch out for tell-tale signs

Her commitment to noting the symptoms of depression stems from the experience being hideous and so unbearable that she never wants to go through it again. Kate has also seen other people suffer as a result of heavy ecstasy use, usually in the form of nervous breakdowns.

that combination of doing it that long and that many mixtures of drugs and cocktails and just the lifestyle, yeah people do crash and burn and I've seen a lot of people do it

When Kate contemplates the number of people who have suffered severely from ecstasy use, it frightens her. However, people recover by personally stopping and by friends encouraging this action, which seems to be an accepted part of life on the scene, whilst acting as a kind of reassurance that everything will be all right in the end. She cites the actuality that Prozac is used by some who can no longer enjoy ecstasy, which implies that, again, the outcome will not be too detrimental to life. Ironically, by talking about drug related problems in this way gives Kate the sense that it appears worse than it actually is.

there's a lot of people on prozac now that don't do E anymore because they, you know it just puts them straight back again so a lot of people have had to give it up because of having depression and stuff

During the return to ecstasy use (also whilst initially euphoric) concern over long-term health disappears: excitement counteracts the fear. This concern, however, emerged

during the time when Kate was not consuming ecstasy, and was related to the actuality that no one knows for certain the long-term influence of ecstasy use upon health.

we're just like a big fucking experiment, and we're the guinea pigs. Yeah I think there might be like in thirty years time, if ecstasy has some sort of bad side-effect like it makes you go senile quicker or it makes people, you know have an effect that doesn't come out for years later, there might be a massive health crisis in this country where everybody fucks up because everybody's done it 'cos nobody knows

Kate was very worried at her time of abstinence about what affect her use may have had on her health, though it is only at these times the concern appears. This is reinforced by external means, such as television documentaries which cite how many brain cells are deleted by ecstasy use. Also by the recognition that her memory is not as good as it was before her journey of ecstasy use: the process of ageing as an issue is over-ridden by the drugs.

a lot of us say that we feel a lot more stupid since we've done it but like my short-term, my memory's not as good but that might be just getting older but I know a few of us that think it's the drugs 'cos I can't remember as well as I used to and things like that

Kate's recent pattern of drug use, for the month and then the week, will give an insight into the intensity of her use, bearing in mind that she has now calmed down a lot. Last month she used ecstasy, amphetamine sulphate, cocaine and psilocybin (magic mushrooms). Her weekly pattern is dependent upon whether she will be attending a party, for example last week was a party weekend and she consumed two ecstasy tablets (on consecutive nights), amphetamine and lots of alcohol.

### **Bodily issues**

The relations between the sexes on the free party scene (especially a lack of male harassment) mean that the pressure is 'off' how one looks, as there is no aim nor desire to attract a partner. Fun and relaxation are the priorities. Here is an example from Kate's recent experience of a conventional club.

I was really shocked by how many men were fucking coming-on to me if I was dancing and, and I'd forgotten that's what happens at normal clubs, completely forgotten that you have to be a bit more guarded, you know

you can't relax as much because you know blokes are going to be thinking that's a come-on

Due to the relations between the sexes, women can feel safe wearing little clothing. However, the intentions of the actor dressing in less and the impressions of the observer differ to those found in conventional (and even dance clubs): it is not sexual and of a poseur nature, but funky. As a contrast, Kate gives the following example.

I went to a night [club] oh God months back and there was a girl dancing with nothing on at all on the top and she was just dancing with literally everything out which is like, it's a different way of dressing

Women dress in less for the heat yet they do not dress revealingly as the next quote reveals. Hence, there is no pressure on the free party scene to have an appearance which is sexually appealing to others.

I always get the piss taken out of me for wearing a skirt and trousers but I noticed a lot of other girls were doing that, if the girls were wearing short skirts they'd be wearing leggings underneath the skirt, they wouldn't be having bare legs like maybe at a townie club

*If you dance for twelve hours you're gonna lose some weight*

Due to the length of the free party, people dance for longer periods than at a dance club, so weight loss is inevitable. Another contributing aspect is that ecstasy has an energy boosting quality, hence "it just speeds your metabolism up". Appetite is lost when under the influence of the drug and during the come-down. Weight loss occurs quickly during the first part of the cycle of involvement as it is then that the most dancing occurs. Kate has lost weight and "I can't say that isn't nice, it is, it is good", hence the weight loss is pleasing, boosting self-esteem and assurance.

it just makes you feel better about yourself doesn't it and adds to feeling confident, if you're thinner then you're more confident and you're more nice about yourself

However, the lost weight soon returns once people stop partying (the second part of the cycle). Her and her friends have spoken about this, in a slight midst of disappointment, though she stresses that it does not act as the motivation to start partying again. Now that Kate has been drinking lots of alcohol, she is pleased about ecstasy playing a large



part in her life again, as it means less alcohol hence less calories. Kate does not use drugs and dance as a form of weight control though her awareness of it being a possibility is a pleasing pick-me-up, aiding self-esteem from dissatisfaction with how she perceives her body.

I know that if I'm feeling bad about myself and I'm going out at the weekend I'll know, it'll be in my mind that 'oh, I'll take loads of speed this weekend, I won't eat that much and I will feel thinner by the end of the week' which is nice but it wouldn't be the only reason that I did it. But err, I do think about this

## **Conclusion**

The appeal of the free party scene (the atmosphere, people, sense of belonging, a lack of traditional relations between the sexes, and the music and drugs which unite in the dance) is so strong that Kate feels she will always frequent these events. The main attraction is the people, who are accepting, friendly and allow her to feel safe. The only time she cannot see herself going is if her depression returns, though this would count as a rest period, not a permanent halt. Kate worried over possible long-term ill health as a result of ecstasy use when she abstained, and she says that this concern did not exist when first on the scene, nor when she returned to ecstasy use (excitement and enjoyment prevent the thought). However, an ambiguity exists because concern is still there, as Kate is ready to note any signs of depression as a result of her return to use.

## Appendix 14: Comparison of Themes Across the Interviews

I went through each participant's life-world and noted meanings relevant to a theme or sub-theme. Then I found the meaning unit numbers of the relevant quotes and wrote these by hand at the side of the meanings. As this process involved masses of paper, I will give examples from only two participants for two themes, to demonstrate the format.

### What is liked about ecstasy?

#### **Kate:**

Act silly with no worries. 115-21.

Communication. 31, 525, 569.

Excitement & stimulant properties - dance. 288, 22-3, 126.

Entwines with music & dance. 123, 128-35.

Empathy. 139-41.

Different experience of varying ecstasy - quiet, wobbly & giggly, immobile. 188, 190, 202-8, 193, 189, 498-502.

Weight loss - slight to severe. 291-2.

Heavy use. 301-2.

Confident & relaxed. 576-8.

#### **Lou:**

Non-judgement on appearance. 222-3.

Entwines with music and dance. 29.

Relax. 68-9, 169.

Communication enhanced. 125, 236.

Gender boundaries dissolve. 386.

Weight loss - slight. 206, 210-11.

Heavy use. 18, 70.

Confidence. 105.

Inhibitions gone. 374.



## The body

### **Ann:**

Non-verbal comm. 64-6, 81.

Connections with others [club appeal]? 52-3, 55, 62-3, 79-81.

Dance - lose self. 48-9, 54, 50, 103-5, 107-9, 312-3.

Provocative - male & female. 136-40, 331-6, 344-5, 141-3, 146, 149-50, 337-8.

Sexuality explored. As above.

Dress & its progression. 208-10, 237-8, 211-2, 232? 213, 222-5, 239-40, 228, 233-6, 403-5, 418, 426-8.

Weight loss (eating disorder) & self-esteem. 396-7, 398, 400, 402.

Weight control & depressing return. 399, 411, 422-5, 401, 406-10, 412-17, 419, 420-1.

### **Kate:**

Weight loss & self-esteem. 285-6, 295, 310, 296-8, 294-4, 299-304, 311-5, 321-2.

Weight & depressing return. 305-9, 316-7, 318-20.

Dress. 270-4, 275-9, 280-4.

Dance - lose self. 128-33, 134-5, 143.

Non-verbal comm. As below.

Connections with others [club appeal]? 142, 144-6, 148-52, 155-60.

Touch - hugging? 147, 153.

Other dancer? 161-6.

Dance & no drugs [way of life]? 552, 559, 556-8.

Thus, as the findings were presented as a discussion, the relevant quotes were grouped together. Some of these, however, were moved to a more relevant theme as their meaning best suited that. A further check for inclusion was completed after this, during further reflexive analysis, thus more additions and changes were made.