

Raves

Part 1

Introduction to Raves

High energy, all-night dance parties and clubs known as “raves”, which feature dance music with a fast pounding beat and choreographed laser programs, have become increasingly popular over the last decade, particularly among teenagers and young adults. Beginning as an underground movement in Europe, raves have evolved into a highly organized, commercialized, worldwide party culture. Rave parties and clubs are found throughout the United States and in countries around the world. Raves are held either in permanent dance clubs or at temporary venues set up for a single weekend event in abandoned warehouses, open fields, or empty buildings.

Attendance can range from 30 “ravers” in a small club to tens of thousands in a sports stadium or open field. While techno music and light shows are essential to raves, drugs such as MDMA or ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), ketamine, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), Rohypnol and LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), have become an integral part of the rave culture.

History of Raves

Raves evolved from 1980s dance parties, aided by the emergence of European techno music and American house music. European clubs that sponsored raves in the 1980s tried to limit the exposure of attendees to the public and to law enforcement. Raves were secretive, after-hours, private dance parties where attendance was restricted to invitees or friends of invitees. The site of the party was often kept confidential, and invitees were usually unaware of the location of

the host club until the night of the party. Because of the restricted access and the secrecy surrounding the locations, the growing rave culture was often described as an “underground” movement.

By the mid-1980s, rave parties had developed such a following among youth and young adults that by 1987, London raves had outgrown most dance clubs. It then became common to hold all-night raves - which drew thousands of people - in large, open fields on the outskirts of the city. As the movement continued to grow in the late 1980s, the first rave parties emerged in U.S. cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.



Rave parties and clubs were present in most metropolitan areas of the U.S. by the early 1990s. Teenagers outnumbered the traditional young adult ravers and a new rave culture emerged; events became highly promoted, heavily commercialized, and less secretive. Many new U. S. rave promoters were career criminals who recognized the profitability of organizing events tailored to teens. Capitalizing on the growing

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popularity of raves, specialized industries were developed to market clothes, toys, drugs and music. Private clubs and secret locations were replaced by stadium venues with off-duty police security.

By the late 1990s, raves in the U.S. had become so commercialized that events were little more than an exploitation of American youth. Today's raves are characterized by high entrance fees, extensive drug use, exorbitantly priced bottled water, very dark and often dangerously overcrowded dance floors and "chill rooms", where teenage ravers go to cool down and often engage in open sexual activity. Moreover, many club owners and promoters appear to promote the use of drugs – especially MDMA. They provide bottled water and sports drinks to manage hyperthermia and dehydration; pacifiers to prevent involuntary teeth clenching; and menthol nasal inhalers, chemical lights and neon glow sticks to enhance the effects of MDMA. In addition, rave promoters often print flyers featuring prominent and repeated use of the letters "E" and "X" (E and X for the drug ecstasy) or the word "rollin" (refers to an MDMA high), surreptitiously promoting MDMA use along with the rave.



Raves and Club Drugs

Drugs like MDMA, ketamine, GHB, Rohypnol, and LSD – known collectively as "club drugs" – are an integral part of the rave culture. Many ravers use club drugs and advocate their use, believing that they are not harmful if they are used "responsibly" and their effects are managed properly. Many of the commercially designed rave clothes display pro-drug messages and rave posters and flyers often promote drug use.

Members of private education and drug testing organizations, called "harm reduction organizations," have appeared at raves to test samples of illegal drugs so they can inform ravers of purity levels. Members of these organizations believe that they help reduce the number of overdoses by educating users on the physical effects of specific drugs. Conversely, many law enforcement agencies believe that the practices of harm reduction organizations encourage drug use.

MDMA is unquestionably the most popular of the club drugs and evidence of MDMA use by teenagers can be seen at most rave parties. Ketamine and GHB are also used at raves, as is Rohypnol, although to a lesser extent. A recent resurgence in the availability and use of some hallucinogens – LSD, PCP (phencyclidine), psilocybin and peyote or mescaline – has also been noted at raves and dance clubs and may necessitate their inclusion in the club drug category. Inhalants like nitrous oxide are sometimes found at rave events. (Nitrous oxide is sold in gas-filled balloons for \$5 to \$10.)

Rampant use of club drugs at raves may lead to the use of other and highly addictive drugs by youth. There have been widespread reports of increasing availability and use of Asian methamphetamine tablets (frequently referred to as "yaba") at California raves and nightclubs. Heroin is encountered more frequently at raves and clubs in large metropolitan areas, especially in the eastern United States. A wider variety of visually appealing and easy-to-administer forms of MDMA, LSD, heroin and combination tables are also found at raves and on college campuses.

(See the Fact Sheet, *Raves Part 2*, for additional information.)

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