

Pleasure seekers: Clubbing is a controlled rave experience

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Clubbers—people who dance the night away in dance clubs—are seeking communal, ecstatic experiences. And, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, modern clubbers get a more controlled, legalized version of the raves of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Authors Christina Goulding (University of Wolverhampton), Avi Shankar, Richard Elliott (both University of Bath), and Robin Canniford (University of Exeter) immersed themselves in club culture for five years, interviewing clubbers and researching the history of raves and clubs.

According to the researchers, raves were secret, underground, spontaneous parties, whereas modern clubs are controlled by security staff and fashion police, who decide who gets in and who doesn't. But the emphasis on the pleasure of dancing and the use of the illegal drug Ecstasy survive into the new era.

"We find that the effects of the deafening music, the ingestion of Ecstasy, the energetic dancing, and the management and organization of space combine to produce a calculated, highly sought-after, shared experience and a temporary suspension of the rules and norms of everyday life," the authors explain. "Further, we suggest that the club, and the pleasurable practices and experiences that it supports, has become a site of contained illegality."

The authors also point out a spiritual dimension to clubs, which are sometimes located in former churches, have DJs at the pulpit, display light shows at the altar, and use names like the Church, The Sanctuary, God's Kitchen, etc.

They also noticed that although the drug use and pursuit of pleasure survive, increased regulation has made clubbing a more publicly acceptable form of partying. "Raves constituted untaxable, unstable, and unpredictable pleasures that provoked moral panic in the media and amongst State authorities that ultimately led to the imposition of repressive, judicial forms of power," they explain. "Clubbing subsequently emerged as a more legitimate environment in which to experience the euphoric consumption experience of rave."

Source: University of Chicago

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