

Epidemiology Meets Cultural Studies: Studying and Understanding Youth Cultures, Clubs and Drugs



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President George W. Bush signed into the law the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act of 2003, previously named the RAVE (Reducing Americans' Vulnerability to Ecstasy) Act



Two Opposing and Contrasting Discourses

1. *An Official Discourse:*

Raves/dance events are “spaces of excess risk”



Two Opposing and Contrasting Discourses

...More “spaces of excess risk”



Two Opposing and Contrasting Discourses

2. *The Discourse of the Participants:*

The emphasis is on the importance of dance events and club drugs and the pleasures derived

Scholarship on Raves and Club Drugs

Two Traditions:

1. Epidemiology

The study of factors affecting the health and illness and of populations

- ❑ *Public Health Research*
- ❑ *Preventative Medicine*

2. Cultural Studies

The study of how a particular phenomenon relates to matters of ideology, nationality, ethnicity, social class and gender

Contemporary Ecstasy and Club Drug Research

- ❑ Problems of using ecstasy and other club drugs
- ❑ Extent of drug using behaviors associated with the scene
- ❑ Characteristics of the Users

What's Missing



Agency

Pleasure

Context

The Cultural Studies Perspective

Main Characteristics:

- ❑ An attempt to understand the rapid expansion of the dance scene
- ❑ Exploring the experiences of young people
- ❑ Researchers committed to ethnographic and qualitative research

Two Dominant Themes

1. Dance Events as overcoming wider social divisions



Two Dominant Themes

2. Dance Scene reflecting or reproducing wider social divisions



What's Missing

Cultural Studies have provided a detailed analysis of the dance scene

BUT...

Curious silence about drugs and their illicit nature

Little discussion of the pleasure associated with taking risks - pharmacologically and legally

Constructing a Theory of Pleasure, Drugs and Dance

- ❑ Dominance of Pathology Discourse
 - Conceptualization of drug use based on “problematic drug use” taken from treatment studies
- ❑ This discourse ignores the majority of drug users
 - Drug use - episodic & non-problematic

Two Ideal Types of Drug Use

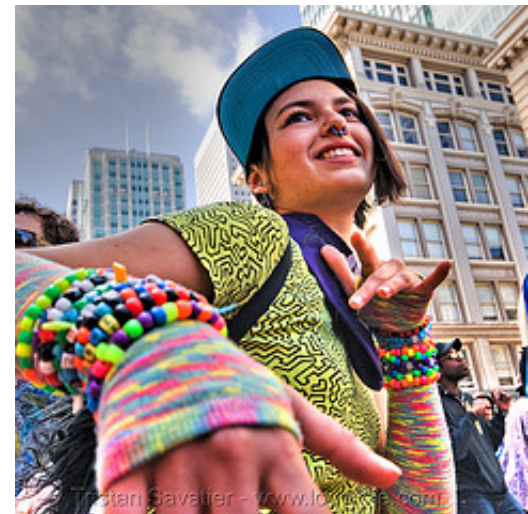
1. *Deficit-retreatist*

Leads to addiction -
drug use core of life



2. *Leisure-innovative*

Mixture of legal and
illegal used for
partying and pleasure



A Discourse of Pleasure

Role of pleasure and excitement in contemporary society:

1. The desire to discover new and exciting forms of consumption
 - ▣ Voluntary Risk-taking (Edgework)



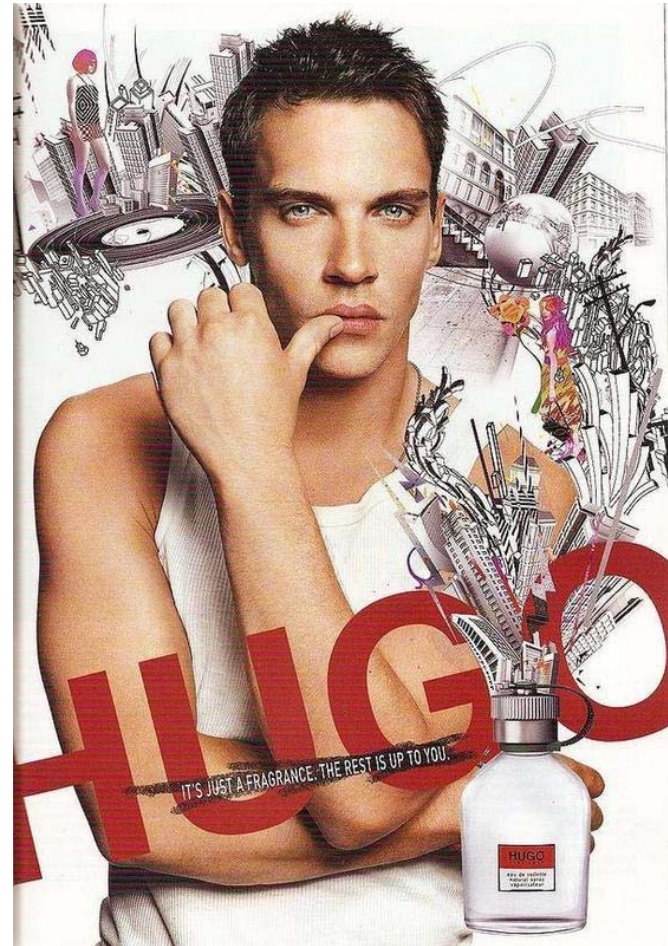
A Discourse of Pleasure

2. The need for the “out-of-the-ordinary”



A Discourse of Pleasure

3. Pursuit of new identities through consumption



Raves and Drugs

**EXCITING, TRANSGRESSIVE, AND
PLEASURABLE**

BUT...

Drug taking is also **RISKY**,
therefore even more exciting

Conclusion

Two competing Academic Research Discourses

1. Drug Epidemiology Research

2. Cultural Studies

- ❑ A pathology approach seems inappropriate
- ❑ Drugs epitomize modern culture
- ❑ Cultural Studies more suited to the experiences of young drug users - but are drugs neglected
- ❑ Cultural Criminology may provide the answers