

## **CLUB DRUGS, CLUBBING AND ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In spite of the growing significance of Asian Americans within the U.S., and in spite of the concern about young people's drug use, the available research data on young Asian American drug use is relatively limited in comparison with the availability of research on other major ethnic groups. A primary reason for this, according to some researchers, has been the belief that because Asians report "much lower overall use prevalence rates than most other ethnic/racial groups" (Austin, 1999, p. 208), drug use among Asian Americans is non problematic. Today more published data have highlighted the extent to which drug use is significant and rising in Asian American communities (Ja & Aoki, 1993; Jang, 1996; Nemoto, Aoki, Huang, Morris, Nguyen, & Wong, 1999; O'Hare & Tran, 1998; Zane & Kim, 1994). Much of the substance abuse research on Asian Americans has focused on documenting the prevalence of substance abuse to engage in the debate about whether rates are lower or higher and whether a problem exists or not. While this debate is important because it has implications for policy and resource allocations, simply focusing on prevalence rates obscures the social and contextual facets associated with Asian American drug use.

Young Asian Americans are increasingly involved in the popular electronic music dance scene, and within this scene they are experimenting with and using club drugs. As part of a larger on-going study on the social context of club drug use in the San Francisco Bay Area, we became aware of the prevalence of Asian American youth in the electronic music dance scene, which has also been noted by the local media.

The growing use and attraction of club drugs has been closely linked to the development of dance events including clubs, dance parties, and especially raves (Jenkins, 1999).<sup>1</sup> Although club drugs are used in a variety of contexts, their increased use has been associated with the increasing popularity and notoriety of dance events. The epidemiological literature in many countries has emphasized the extent of drug use among dance club and party attendees. As Measham, Aldridge, and Parker (2001, p. 96) note, "the key conclusion to be drawn ...is that clubbers are extremely drug-experienced."

It is against this backcloth that we examine the drug using experiences of a group of young Asian Americans. In considering their experiences, which for many of our

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1. Different terms have been used to describe the events where dancing takes place, including dance clubs, raves, dance parties and massives. For the purposes of this paper we will use the term dance event to generally include any of these electronic music based events.

respondents were primarily positive, we attempt both to situate their drug use within the wider social context of their lives and connect their use and their involvement in the dance scene with their different social groupings. While some researchers (Austin, 1999; Ja & Aoki, 1993; Harachi, Catalano, Kim, & Choi, 2001; Jang, 1996) have criticized the existing work for its unitary image of Asian Americans, we discovered that important additional subgroup variations existed which crosscut ethno-national differences. These divisions were based not solely on ethnicity but on social, generational, cultural and stylistic features.

### **ETHNICITY AND DRUG USE**

In considering the available data on drug use by Asian American youth, most studies reveal that Asian American drug use is significantly lower than other comparable ethnic groups. For example, according to *Monitoring the Future*, between 1996 and 2000, Asian American 12<sup>th</sup> graders consistently had one of the lowest rates of drug use, for all drugs. They had the lowest rates for any illicit drug use, marijuana, and alcohol. Annual prevalence for marijuana during that time period was 21.7% for Asian Americans, compared with 30.1% for African Americans, 38.6% for Caucasians, and 40.4% for Mexican Americans (Wallace, Bachman, O'Malley, Johnston, Schulenberg, & Cooper, 2002). Recent data from The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) also indicates that Asian Americans generally have one of the lowest rates of drug use. In 2003, 25.6% of Asian Americans reported the use of an illicit drug in their lifetime, compared with 49.2% of Caucasians, 44.6% of African Americans and 37.0% of Hispanics (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004). A similar pattern exists for lifetime use of marijuana, as well as for different age groups. While acknowledging the importance of these larger national surveys on drug use and ethnicity for providing a representative picture of Asian American drug use in the United States, their methodological limitations prevent them from being able to describe Asian American drug use in much detail. Local and small-scale studies, because of their more focused approach, provide a much more detailed and complex picture of Asian American drug use, including information about subgroup differences, drug preferences, use patterns and associations with these patterns (e.g., places of use and motivations of use). Information from these latter studies has also been used to question the portrayal of Asian Americans based on the findings of the national studies.

Unlike many of the epidemiological studies on Asian American youth, whether national or local, we have adopted a primarily qualitative approach to the study of the social context of drug use. Within this analysis, we have sought to examine the different types of involvement of young Asian Americans in the electronic music dance scene. We consider the different social groups of which they are a part and within which they attend dance events and consume drugs. In addition to examining the role of drugs within their lives and their social groups, we highlight the ways in which they actively construct and negotiate their identities around these different social groupings. We demonstrate how different Asian American youth groups negotiate their identity by socially and culturally constructing peer group boundaries in order to distinguish

themselves and their own social group from other perceived groups within the scene.

## **RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE**

### *Methods*

The data used for this article come from an ongoing study on the San Francisco Bay Area electronic music dance scene and drug users. Data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The interviews used for this paper took place between February 2002 and November 2003 and were conducted by the project manager and four interviewers. In the first part of the interview, a brief, quantitative questionnaire was used to collect various socio-demographic characteristics. For the rest of the interview, a semi-structured guide was used to collect primarily open-ended qualitative data on the respondents' backgrounds, their current lives, drug and alcohol use, and their involvement in the dance scene. Quantitative data on drug use were collected at the beginning of the drug use section, using frequency and quantity measures that were based on the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) and Monitoring the Future (Johnston, O'Malley and Bachman, 2002; SAMHSA, 2001). The interviews were tape-recorded and the semi-structured portion was transcribed. Respondents were given a \$45 honorarium for their participation.

Respondents were recruited using several different methods, including advertisements, referrals from other respondents and through contacts of the project staff. Each potential respondent was screened and included if they had used at least one of the six National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) defined club drugs (ecstasy, LSD, methamphetamine, GHB, ketamine, Rohypnol)<sup>2</sup> and were involved in the electronic music dance scene in the San Francisco Bay Area. Involvement in the scene was defined as attending dance events such as clubs, raves, and warehouse parties. As this was primarily an exploratory study, we were interested in interviewing people with a wide range of experiences with club drugs, from those who were "new users", to those who were frequent users, and to those who had used in the past but were not currently using.

### *Sample*

Our inclusion criteria for respondents as "Asian" is consistent with those of the US Census and the NSDUH, which are based on the 1997 directives from the Office of Management and Budget (Office of Management and Budget, 1997). However, we recognize that from a sociological and cultural standpoint, our own classification is problematic because it treats ethnic groups with widely divergent histories, cultural

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2. A small sample of non-club drug users were also interviewed.

norms, and identities as though they are similar. Much research in the US has treated Asians as an homogeneous group and ours will, for the purposes of this paper, exist within that framework as our sample is too small to divide by ethno-national origin. Nevertheless, we do not wish to suggest that the respondents represented in this analysis do not have many distinct ethno-national cultural differences that may affect their experiences with drugs and in the dance scene. However, even from our limited sample, we discovered other social, cultural, stylistic and generational preferences and differences that crosscut ethno-national distinctions.

The sample of 56 self-identified Asians was split evenly by gender, and had a median age of 20. The ages ranged from 17 to 29, and the men were slightly older than the women, with median ages of 21 and 19.5, respectively. The respondents were of seven different ethnic groups/national origins: Chinese (28.6%), Filipino (26.8%), Vietnamese (12.5%), Korean (10.7%), Indian (8.9%), Japanese (5.4%) and Taiwanese (3.6%). An additional two respondents only identified as “Asian.” Thirteen of the respondents reported that they were of mixed heritage, although they listed their Asian ethnic group as their primary ethnic identity. Thirty-eight of the respondents (68%) were born in the US (59% in California), and all but one of the foreign born respondents were born in Asia or the Philippines. The mean length of time living in the US for these foreign born respondents was 15.5 years. Forty-two respondents (75%) had parents who were born in Asia, seven (12.5%) had one parent who was born in Asia and one in the US, and an additional two respondents had a parent (both parents in one case) who was born in a non-Asian country.

Overall the sample was well educated, and the majority (71.4%) of our respondents were attending some form of educational institution at the time of the interview. With the exception of four current high school students, all of the respondents had graduated from high school, and 13 (23.2%) had a Bachelor’s degree. Two-thirds of the sample had either received a four-year degree or were currently attending a four-year university. An additional 4 respondents were in graduate school, 7 were attending community colleges, and 1 was at a vocational school. The majority of their parents also had a fairly high level of formal education, with 75 percent having at least one parent who was a college graduate. Their parents were primarily employed in white-collar, business, or professional jobs, although more of the fathers tended to hold high-level professional positions (e.g., engineers, doctors, etc.) than the mothers. Some of the fathers were also employed in service/retail or labor jobs. The respondents’ mothers were more likely to have clerical/administration, teaching, or nursing jobs, although at least a quarter of them also held business or professional positions. Ten of the respondents said their mothers were housewives or homemakers.

#### **ASIAN AMERICANS AND DRUG USE**

In focusing on the experiences of one small sample of young Asian Americans, we would ideally like to situate our data within the information provided by other local studies. Unfortunately, major differences in study design, sampling, and available data

prevent us from being able to make direct and meaningful comparisons. One major reason for this is that we are specifically studying a drug-using group, which by default means that the rates of drug use in our sample are likely to be much higher than a sample of Asian Americans selected on some other basis.

### *Drug Use in Our Sample*

Given the aim of the study, it is therefore not surprising that 54 of these 56 Asian Americans interviewed (96.4%) had tried ecstasy. However, what is more significant is the overall prominence of drug experimentation as can be seen in **Table 1**. All of the respondents had tried some form of alcohol in their lifetimes, nearly three-fourths had used beer in the last month and 4 out of 5 had consumed some form of liquor. Lifetime prevalence of marijuana equaled that of alcohol, and approximately two-thirds of the sample were current marijuana users. Although alcohol and marijuana were the most widely used substances (which is true even in the general population), we can see that in this sample, ecstasy is clearly approaching these other drugs, at least in terms of our respondents having tried it one or more times. Mushrooms was the only other drug that more than half of the sample had tried, although between one-third and one-half of the sample had tried methamphetamine, cocaine, LSD, and ketamine. Two other drugs are worth noting because of their lifetime prevalence rates - nitrous oxide and the recreational use of prescription opiates. For drugs other than marijuana and ecstasy, the men had higher prevalence rates than the women, although the size of the difference may have been affected by the small sample size.

The median age at first use was generally in the 16-19 range for most of these drugs, although there were a few respondents who tried these drugs for the first time either in their early teens or their mid-twenties (See **Table 2**). Whereas sixteen appears to be the age of initiation for alcohol and marijuana, 18 was the median age for trying ecstasy, cocaine, and mushrooms. Interestingly, LSD, as with nitrous oxide and prescription opiates, was a drug that our respondents tended to try before the end of high school, as opposed to GHB and ketamine, which they experimented with slightly later. These respondents seem to fit the general drug using population in that their initiation into drugs, and in some cases their peak use, had or was occurring in the 16-25 age range. Of course since the vast majority of our respondents were under 25, we cannot know their trajectory of drug use in the future, and whether they are really past their peak.

Other researchers who are studying dance scene populations have described their sample as “drug experienced,” because of the generally high percentage (in comparison with the general population) who have tried different types of drugs, including marijuana, ecstasy, and other stimulants and club drugs (Measham, Aldridge and Parker, 2001). While we do not feel that we can label our drug-using sample in this way, primarily because of our selection criteria and the fact that it does not take into account individual variation or the extent of use, we can say that our sample is clearly trying drugs at a higher rate than the general Asian American population. Our well educated, primarily middle class sample of Asian Americans may not be following the

stereotypical model minority path, at least with regards to their drug use. While the majority of our sample (75% of men and 50% of women) had tried at least five or more drugs, including marijuana and the recreational use of prescription drugs, the extent of their use of some of these drugs varied. While approximately 62% of those who have tried marijuana estimate that they had used it more than 50 times in their lives, 34.6% said the same about methamphetamine and 27.8% about ecstasy. However, the majority of respondents who had ever tried LSD (55%), mushrooms (56.4%), GHB (90.9%), and ketamine (75%), said that they had used them on only five or fewer occasions. Slightly less than half of the respondents who had ever tried methamphetamine (46.2%) or cocaine (44%) said they had used them only 1-5 times.

We can see from this data that while most of our respondents are likely to experiment with and try different drugs, for some, the extent to which they use these drugs is limited. As is true in the general population, marijuana was the most extensively used drug, and 11 of the respondents claim to have used it on at least 20 days in the last month. As seen in **Table 1**, approximately 66% of respondents had used marijuana in the last 30 days, compared with 30% for ecstasy, 12.5% for methamphetamine and 10.7% each for cocaine and mushrooms. However, all of those current ecstasy, cocaine, and mushrooms users, and five out of seven of the current methamphetamine users, had used it on five or fewer occasions in the last month. While these respondents are clearly using at rates higher than the general population, this data, although limited in terms of sample size, suggests a picture of primarily recreational or “weekend”, rather than daily or very frequent, use. If their use of these drugs is often recreational and associated with leisure activities, then it is likely that much of their use of these drugs takes place within their social groups. To further our understanding of drug use in this sample, it is therefore important for us to examine their social groups and the role of these drugs within that framework.

#### **ASIAN AMERICAN GROUPINGS, ETHNICITY AND DRUG USE**

##### *i) Starting to Use*

For the vast majority of our Asian American respondents, their initial experience with ecstasy had taken place with their friends, and for many, these friends were also Asian.

(R) I started hanging out with Steven .... and got more into like the Asian scene .... Raving and street racing were the two things that I picked up .... that’s probably where my biggest influence from drugs is, also.

(I) From racing?

(R) No, from the Asian .... Because I was hanging out with nothing but Asians. Like everybody was Asian - Chinese, Japanese, Korean. (099)

Even those respondents who described their initial reluctance to experiment with drugs, eventually decided to try ecstasy because they had been strongly influenced by their close friends or family members who they trusted, as in the case of a twenty year old Vietnamese woman who remarked: “in high school I was kind of like against drugs and

stuff. I was like a really clean person, you know. I wouldn't take any drugs. I'd heard of ecstasy and I was like "oh, I'll never try it." (067). This young first generation Vietnamese woman noted how her cousin's use of ecstasy had a strong impact on her decision to try it:

I think the first strong impact was when my cousin told me. When he tried it for the first time .... I don't see him that much, but we're pretty close when we see each other. He's like a couple years older than me. And he described it to me and it was like "wow" .... he was like "yeah, I know it's bad and I've done research on it, and stuff .... [*but*] you know, trying it once isn't going to hurt you either." And he was just like "everything is intensified." Music feels really good. Emotionally you feel great. You know, you become really open .... I've heard of the good things about it, too, you know .... But until like someone close to you tried it and they tell you about it and, you know, and you're like "oh, okay, I will try it, too." .... that was the first big influence. (067)

This kinship connection in trying ecstasy and other drugs clearly reflects, as we noted above, the involvement of family members in some of our respondents' social networks.

(I) What had you heard about ecstasy before you tried it?

(R) It was my cousins' fault. They pressured me. They really like it. They're like "oh, it's so fun" and they're the ones that took me to my first rave. And they're the ones that gave me the E. .... I got it from them. And my boyfriend was there too, so we shared only half a pill the first time. (192)

This respondent went on to describe how she had done ecstasy even with her little brother.

(R) Sometimes we'll go to like a family thing, cause we've done things together. Even my little brother.

(I) You've done it with your little brother?

(R) I've done it with my little brother. I've done it with my family like at a rave. It was like "oh, how funny, you're here"

(I) You just happened to see them there?

(R) This one time I just happened to see them there. The other time we planned to go with them. (192)

While many reasons were given by our respondents as to why they used club drugs, the most striking feature to emerge from their accounts was the extent to which they noted the role that ecstasy had in helping them explore and learn more about themselves. This inner exploration allowed them to consolidate both their existing friendships and their involvement in Asian groups. This ecstasy characteristic, noted by many other researchers (Beck & Rosenbaum, 1994; Saunders, 1993, 1995, 1997), is generally attributed to the empathetic qualities of the drug, which has been classified as an entactogen (Cohen, 1998; Nichols, Hoffman, Oberlender, Jacob, & Shulgin, 1986). Consequently, the fact that many of our respondents emphasized the extent to which ecstasy allowed them to "open-up" socially was not, given the existing literature, that

surprising. For instance a 22-year-old Filipino male described how ecstasy had helped him to become more social:

I'm a shy person. That's when I first started. I was really, really shy where...I couldn't talk to anyone. I was just like one of those people who's shy in general. But like E helped me out to be more social. And I took the use of the drug to become social to other people. And I took the use of the drug to actually have...just like have conversations, actually give speeches. I actually could do that now because it gave me confidence that time. And now I use...I picked up E throughout my everyday life just to be happy, to think in the positive state wherever I'm in. Even though something bad happens to me, I always try to think of the good things. And I always believe that everything happens for a reason. (034)

This process of self-enlightenment took place not only while under the influence of the drug, but for some of our respondents it continued after the immediate effects had worn off.

(R) Actually I think ecstasy brought me to a different side of me. It brought me to a more social life, you know. At first I would think, "man .... you know, this feeling, I love it, you know, what if I can do this without using ecstasy." So I practiced it and I became more social .... So actually before I used ecstasy I was not much of a social person...well, I was a social person, but it just enhanced it, yeah. So ecstasy...I say I thank ecstasy for bringing...for being the person I am now.

(I) So you tried to carry over how you were on E into your sober life?

(R) I was like if I can do this...if I am like this if I'm not on ecstasy, then my life would be so much fun, you know. (111)

#### *ii) Using Drugs, Bonding, Closeness and a Sense of Community*

Given the attractiveness of these effects of ecstasy and its prevalence within the dance scene, it is not surprising that drug use was a significant feature of our respondents' own social lives and that many of our respondents introduced their friends to ecstasy and other drugs. Within their social groups, they felt safe using the drugs because their friends were present. Using ecstasy worked to consolidate relationships between individuals within the group and improve friendships:

I think that our friendship would have been good anyway. It's not like it would have been bad without ecstasy. But I feel like it kind of opened the doors to like a higher level - and that higher level doesn't need to be experienced with drugs at all. It's just that ecstasy kind of was the gateway .... Like just making all of us feel more comfortable talking about more personal things or just like...it's kind of nice to hear from your friends .... it's not very often that your friends say "you are a really good friend and I love you and I'm really glad to have your

friendship and these are the good qualities about you.” And like actually list them. That’s kind of what happens on ecstasy, is like you really actually tell people, and it’s honest to. You don’t lie. You don’t like say, make things up out of the blue. So it’s honest stuff, from my experience. (032)

By improving and affirming individual friendships, ecstasy also strengthened the cohesion of the group itself. The introduction to and the sharing of drugs was, for many of our respondents, an important group bonding experience that created a more intense feeling of closeness. As this 19-year-old Filipino American female says:

In other raves that I would go to, I went with a really, really big group of friends, and all of us would just be like...hugging and holding hands and being like, “Oh, my God, I love you guys.” .... they’re like, “Oh, I have to talk to you.” .... It’s because they .... say stuff that they wouldn’t normally say. Like I wouldn’t normally be like .... “I really value our friendship.” You should just know that. But when I’m on E I’m like, “Oh, my God, I love you so much. You’re so beautiful. Thank you so much for being there for me.” (151)

The role of ecstasy in solidifying the social group was readily apparent in the narratives of those respondents involved in the Asian Greek system. Many of these respondents had their first experience of ecstasy as part of joining their fraternity or sorority, as seen in this quote from a 23 year old Chinese American male.

(I) What’s your social life been like since you joined the fraternity?

(R) Crazy. Absolutely crazy. There was a time when...it was just drugs, drugs, drugs. My first semester. Actually for the whole house, they consider that the drug semester. Which is silly, because everybody was doing drugs at the time .... It was during pledging. We experimented...literally I was the guinea pig for a lotta the drugs. A lotta X [*ecstasy*]. A lotta X ....

(I) Now that was the first semester ... and then your sophomore and junior years, what were those like?

(R) It died down a lot, but we did do X...I don’t remember how often, but we did do it .... I guess you’d say once every month .... and then it started dying off after that. (203)

### *iii) Drug Use, Trust and Safety*

While ecstasy enhanced the individual’s sense of community and closeness, the group setting also provided a safe environment in which the individual could experiment. As many of our respondents noted, taking ecstasy with people you trust meant an increased sense of safety. Experimenting with ecstasy within a “controlled and safe environment” meant that the individual felt protected:

If it’s in a controlled environment and like you know that the X isn’t like laced with anything really harmful, and you know that there’s gonna be people to take

care of you, and you're around people that like have been around it, and they know like what to expect .... if you start like tripping out on something, they know how to make you feel better. So I mean, if you're in that kinda controlled setting. (212)

The fact that they could trust their friends was an important part of doing ecstasy with others in their group. For example a young Korean American woman described her first experience on ecstasy when she went to a rave with her "pledge sisters".

Well...it was one of those really big raves, and it was like at a really big venue, so. And everyone was going, like all my pledge sisters were going. And it was my first time and I was like, Oh, my God, it's gonna be so much fun, you know .... it seemed like everyone was going, like my pledge sister, like a lotta my sorority girls, and a lot of like the fraternity boys that we're really close with, and so it was like a big field trip or something .... it was really fun for me at least, my first experience .... It was in a nice venue, and like basically just because so many people that you knew were there. And like it's just more fun, knowing that there's more people that you know there that you trust, and like...people who can take care of you .... you feel safer. (204)

Feeling more comfortable partying and using drugs with their own friends was for some respondents a major reason for preferring Asian dominated groups. A young 19 year old Japanese woman explained why she preferred to hang out with her own friends while on ecstasy:

(I) So how...when you're at those rave-clubs, what is it about the environment there that makes the experience of doing ecstasy better?

(R) Oh! Because it just feels like it's our club. I don't know. And like...when we have a big group too. Oh, that's another thing, maybe the party thing...I didn't really know anyone, I only knew my ex-boyfriend and a friend, and I made a few friends, but it's not like I really felt like...it was like...I belonged there, you know. But at the club, it was like a big group of us, and we have like our circle, and so I like that. (176)

Although many of our respondents had initially experimented with ecstasy at public dance events, many others talked about the enjoyment of taking ecstasy with their friends in a more private setting.

Sometimes we have this like little gathering, where we have like a E-party, where it's just a bunch of our friends that we know, so it's probably gonna be like around 10 to 20 people. And we just like take it and .... act like a kid again. We have like a bunch a toys .... we have friends who spin music, and they play music for us. And we just like decorate the house, and just make it like a mini-rave, but just friends. And that's like our safe environment. And we know

the people, while they're on it, that they know how to control their pills .... It's something we consider safe. At someone's house it's more...like .... a deep conversation. You get more personal with the friends that you hang out with. You get more closer to them. You're already close to them, but like you're able to say stuff that's inside of you that you're keeping in and express it out to them, 'cuz you trust them. (034)

Using ecstasy within the private domain with friends, while enhancing group cohesion, was also attractive because the private environment was likely to be more physically comfortable. As a 22 year old Filipina noted:

Being because we're at home and not at a rave, it's so much more comfortable and you can just roll around and ..let your body deal with the E .... When you're at a rave .... you're not so at liberty to like take your clothes off, or like roll around in something soft. There's nothing really soft, there's like concrete and like fucked up kids everywhere, so it can be a little disconcerting when you're at a rave .... House parties are cool, 'cause it's like the benefits of home. (095)

This more friendly, more intimate and more comfortable environment contrasted sharply, at least for some respondents, with that of a rave where they would be surrounded by "strangers":

you're basically going .... with a bunch o' strangers .... and normally that's not very fun, right? But... if you're doing it in the privacy of your home, it was...just fun .... I tended to prefer to do it at .... our house, just cuz like you didn't have to worry about getting home, or like police busting the thing. (245)

#### *iv) Drug Use and Secrecy*

Drug use within the group encouraged cohesion, not only through a process of shared experience but also through the process of maintaining secrecy. While it was the case that many of our respondents had been initiated into using drugs through their Asian friends, not all the social groups within which our respondents operated necessarily approved of using drugs. Consequently, it was not unusual for our respondents to have reservations about telling their friends who didn't use about their drug-taking activities. The distinction between drug-using and non drug-using groups suggests that at least some of our respondents operated in different social networks or different social worlds (Irwin, 1977). Whereas in one social group drug use was acceptable and commonplace, in another it was not. For example, one young Japanese woman talked about having separate groups of "party friends" and "school friends." When with her school friends, she was very secretive about her party life and drug use because she did not want her school friends to look down on her. She noted that they would not understand and would even try to lecture her about quitting.

(R) Like from...my non-party friends group, I don't know how they think and

how they feel about, you know, what I've done. 'Cuz like I kinda kept it from them in the beginning.

(I) Why did you keep it from them in the beginning?

(R) 'Cuz I didn't think they'd understand. 'Cuz I really hate it when like...if...like I've decided to do something, you know, like they give me the lecture .... When they go like, "You know, it's really bad." And, "I heard this." And da, da, da, da, da. You know. Like I kinda wanna say like, "Don't you think I've already thought about that?" You know. And like .... they didn't go partying that much. So I didn't think they'd understand. I think they'd look down on me, like you know, "Why'd you do that?" I don't think they'd understand. That's why I didn't talk about it with them. (176)

A Filipino male respondent thought that his non-using friends believed that "drugs are bad" (100), a sentiment shared by a young Indian woman:

(I) Is there anybody in your life who doesn't know that you .... do ecstasy?

(R) Yeah, a lot of people. Like my whole family. And a lot of people I go to school with, and a lot of my friends too .... Like a lot of my friends know I go to raves, but none of them know that I use drugs.

(I) Why is it you don't wanna talk about it with friends or school people?

(R) 'Cuz everyone looks down upon it, you know. I mean, it's not like something I'm proud of (laughs). Yeah. But...like especially like the kind of people I hang out with. A lot of people are really like good, and they don't do stuff like that.

(I) Has anyone ever told you should stop using?

(R) ...Yeah. (Laughs.)

(I) Who?

(R) A few of my friends that I did tell them about it .... they said that I shouldn't do that, you know.

(I) And what happened?

(R) Oh, well...I stopped talking about it with them. (Laughs.) (065)

Group demarcations and separations were not only based, however, on a drug-using/non drug-using dichotomy, but were also founded on notions of acceptable and unacceptable drug using behaviors. Although drug use was a significant feature of our respondents' social lives, behaving appropriately while using drugs was also important. Many of our respondents believed that using drugs in an inappropriate way had resulted in the decline of the scene and the ruination of its initial "vibe". For example, a young Korean woman describes the type of behavior that is unacceptable, in this case the behaviors of other Asian ravers:

The Asian ravers, a lot of them are like...the type that will go to massives and just get fucked up and sit on the floor all night, kinda thing. Like I'm not saying all of them are, but like the majority of them are. Like me and my group of friends and like a few Asian kids like here and there are the ones that like go to undergrounds like on a regular basis .... Like...to them raving is just something

to do...Or a place...A rave is a place to go to get fucked up. They don't know how to have fun sober. So when they think rave, they think, “Oh, we’re gonna drop [*take ecstasy*] that night.”(190)

While it was not always clear from our respondents’ accounts as to what ecstasy-using behaviors were acceptable, it was nevertheless clear that behaving in such a way as to interfere with other aspects of the scene was considered not “cool”. For example, a Chinese American male worried that only a small proportion of Asian attendees go to events for the music, the rest going solely to use drugs. “I find that there are a smaller portion of Asian attendees of raves who are there and really getting into the music and...really enjoying themselves. And because of that I sort of...wonder if they’re there just to do drugs.” (231) Attending events solely to consume drugs was just as unacceptable as “getting fucked up to have fun”. Such behaviors or motives were illegitimate and uncool.

## **CONCLUSION**

To date, most research has portrayed the drug use of young Asian Americans as significantly lower than other comparable ethnic groups. While this may be generally correct, our research on the electronic music dance scene suggests that, at least in the San Francisco Bay Area, an important drug-using trend may be emerging among young Asian Americans. In this paper, using a small sample of young Asian American respondents, we have examined their drug use, their social groups, and their involvement in the dance scene.

Table 1

Drug	Lifetime Prevalence (%)			Current (30-Day) Prevalence (%)		
	Total N = 56	Females n = 28	Males n = 28	Total N = 56	Females n = 28	Males n = 28
<i>Beer</i>	98.2	96.4	100	73.2	71.4	75
<i>Wine</i>	96.4	100	92.9	57.1	78.6	35.7
<i>Liquor</i>	98.2	100	96.4	80.4	92.9	67.9
<i>Marijuana</i>	98.2	96.4	100	66.1	67.9	64.3
<i>Ecstasy</i>	96.4	96.4	96.4	30.4	35.7	25
<i>Methamphetamine</i>	46.4	39.3	53.6	12.5	10.7	14.3
<i>Cocaine</i>	44.6	39.3	50	10.7	7.1	14.3
<i>LSD</i>	35.7	21.4	50	0	0	0
<i>Mushrooms</i>	69.6	57.1	82.1	10.7	10.7	10.7
<i>GHB</i>	19.6	17.9	21.4	3.6	7.1	0
<i>Ketamine</i>	35.7	32.1	39.3	5.4	7.1	3.6
<i>Nitrous Oxide</i>	44.6	35.7	53.6	8.9	7.1	10.7
<i>Prescription Opiates</i>	44.6	39.3	50	8.9	7.1	10.7

Table 2

Median Age at First Use			
Drug	Total N = 56	Females n = 28	Males n = 28
<i>Beer</i>	16	16	15.5
<i>Wine</i>	16	16	16
<i>Liquor</i>	16	16	16
<i>Marijuana</i>	16	16	16
<i>Ecstasy</i>	18	18	18
<i>Methamphetamine</i>	18.5	17	19
<i>Cocaine</i>	18	18	18
<i>LSD</i>	17	17	17
<i>Mushrooms</i>	18	19	18
<i>GHB</i>	19	20	18.5
<i>Ketamine</i>	19	19	20
<i>Nitrous Oxide</i>	17	17.5	17
<i>Prescription Opiates</i>	17	19	17

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