

The Music Says My Soul. The Beat Says My Life: Electronic Dance Music Culture

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## Introduction

When nothing else makes sense in the world, music provides a guiding light. Music is everywhere we are. Whether that is in a movie theater, on television, in grocery stores, gyms, schools, etc. Songs and lyrics are associated and applied to so many different aspects of our lives. Music has been embedded into our psyche since the day we were born. It relaxes, inspires, controls, manipulates, and so much more. Music is seemingly what helps us understand the world around us, to spread messages, and to soothe the soul. We look forward to going to our favorite artist's concert, the release of a new CD, or attending a music festival. One of the most amazing aspects about music is that it is created and heard in different tones, words, and sounds all across the world. Music means something different to every individual. The music we listen to and create is a direct reflection of our culture's values, and for this reason I have chosen to look at it from a scholarly perspective.

Life is music, and music is a form of communication. A world without music is almost unimaginable. We use music as a medium to convey and accept so many emotions. In its most basic sense, communication focuses on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media (National Communication Association). This could be in the form of a song, vocal variation or tone, eye contact, or body language. Music incorporates auditory elements while also allowing the listener to potentially create visual images in their mind that relate to the lyrics or sounds. The auditory elements we come to know and love are made of noises, beats, and words that ultimately create the message. The words that are turned

into lyrics of a song are used as an extremely powerful tool that can speak directly to its listener.

Music is an extremely important and interesting aspect of life for scholars to study because we can learn a great magnitude about human communication patterns, styles, and preferences through analyzing certain genres and the following it creates. Music can also be looked at for its relationship to culture. It is such an important element to our human culture that without it, a huge chunk of our social communication mechanism would be gone. The music our culture produces not only tells us a lot about ourselves, but also lets us rediscover humanity, and our connection to humanity. For these reasons, music works as a direct indication of our interests, traditions, values, and principles. As our ever-changing cultural beliefs alter, so does our music. The relationship between music and culture go hand in hand, for they are both always evolving to fulfill the demand of the other. As culture can create music, music can also create culture.

For the purpose of this paper, I am taking a qualitative approach to focus on the relationship between Electronic Dance Music (EDM) and it's growing popularity among our society. By studying this relatively new music genre, I will be able to analyze its effects on our culture and ultimately what the music and EDM culture means to it's listeners.

*What is EDM?*

Electric/Electronic Dance Music (EDM) is broadly understood as “electronic music produced primarily for the purpose of use within a nightclub setting, or in an environment that is centered in dance-based entertainment. The music is largely created

for use by disc jockeys and is produced with the intention of it being heard in the context of a continuous DJ set; wherein the DJ progresses from one record to the next via a synchronized segue or mix” (Wolff). EDM is an umbrella term that includes many different sub-genres. The main sub-genres are House, Trance, Hardstyle, Electro, Techno, Dubstep, Mashup, and Trip Hop. There are so many different kinds of sub-genres because each one is associated with a certain kind of sound or beat.

### *Why EDM?*

There are roughly 25 different types of music genres that our world listens to and one of the newest genres is Electronic Dance Music (EDM). The ever-increasing popularity of the Electronic Music Movement has made the United States obsessed. Every year the International Music Summit (IMS) meets to hold the world’s most important music industry gathering in the world. It is a high-level music industry conference attended by the global industry leaders in the dance music scene. According to the IMS Consumer Report of May 2014, “the Electronic Music Industry is now worth over \$6 billion per year” (Feinstein, Ramsay). The amount of revenue EDM brings in each year is, “equivalent to the GDP of Kyrgyzstan” (Feinstein, Ramsay). These astonishing statistics shed light on just how fast the industry is growing.

EDM is the type of music the youth is listening to in the car, at the gym, with friends, or in clubs. For many the music means dancing in the sun for three days straight in a festival crowd of 200,000+ people, dressing up in crazy costumes, or making memories with friends that are unforgettable. Massive EDM festivals are selling out around the world in minutes. Young Americans are traveling to other countries to attend

EDM concerts, free their minds, and dancing into the night. EDM is becoming a cash goldmine and is huge for the commercial industry pulling in billions of dollars each year, while also playing a big part in the American pop culture movement.

*Rolling Stones* states that, “Electric dance music is already the defining youth culture of the 2010s, but it’s slowly taking over all aspects of modern music: Skrillex is on the cover of *Rolling Stones*, Daft Punk are at the Grammys, Baauer is atop *Billboard* and Avicii is on Country Music Television” (Castillo, et al.). With examples like these, it becomes important to analyze how this music culture has not only cultivated billions of dollars for the industry, but also why people are saving up their money and looking forward to these music events all year long.

### *Preview*

I will first establish my connection to EDM- how I started listening to EDM, and my personal viewpoints to its ideological values. Next, I will examine a study done on EDM followed by the music’s history, its beginnings, and influences. From there, I will delve into EDM as a music genre and style looking at the characteristics that make it unique. I will analyze the music genre as a whole as opposed to concentrating specifically on a single artist because there are so many different types of sub-genres of EDM. Next, I will include personal interviews I conducted with four people who have attended EDM raves and festivals in order to get multiple perspectives about the culture. In doing this I want to determine what the underlying assumptions and feelings are about this culture and how the people involved view it and understand it to mean. I want to strengthen the idea that this culture is formed to embrace the ideology that everyone is different and that

people can come to events like a rave or listen to EDM and feel accepted among their peers and the world around them. Finally, I will discuss the findings of the interviews and the common themes that were prevalent among them.

From the interviews and literature review on EDM, I will show how the culture surrounding the music is shaping our communication climate and our identities. I want to emphasize how important music is in our everyday lives from the people we surround ourselves with, to the environment we choose to be a part of. On a more scholarly level, this project will allow me to apply the information I have learned from Communication Studies to an area of work I am highly interested and involved in. From this project I hope to learn, understand, and share that EDM raves and festivals are vastly growing and evolving to create a place where anyone can go to feel accepted, loved, and unique.

### *I'm Jammin'*

There are many reasons for which I chose this topic, but the main one is that I myself am a fan of EDM music and I attend raves and music festivals. I first started listening to EDM with my older brother starting in 2011. He was always super into music so he would constantly show me the up and coming music and artists to listen to. He introduced me to a couple EDM artists that he was listening to and I instantly fell in love. It didn't seem to matter to me that I didn't know the lyrics or had ever heard beats like that before. What I did know is that it gave me this crazy feeling of escape that no other music genre had done before. I started talking to my friends about the music and surprisingly a lot of them had already known about it and were listening to it. After about a year I fell in love with EDM and would find myself putting on Calvin Harris or Baauer

on repeat any chance I got. The trance like feeling I get when listening to the music is indescribable and always seems to match my mood. I then started attending raves and music festivals with my friends as not only a vacation, but also as a place where we could all hang out and listen to the music we loved. We could bond over talking about similar artists, or meet new people that shared our same interests.

My favorite event to attend is the Coachella Music Festival put on each year in Indio, Ca. It is a three-day festival with 90,000+ people coming from all over the world. The best part is that there is a large variety of music genres represented so there is a crazy mix of different kinds of people. While basking in the sun at Coachella, you are surrounded by all your friends while also listening to your favorite music artists. My friends say it makes them feel like they are at an adult Disneyland, and well, its pretty similar. The festival is where I can see my favorite EDM, Pop, and Rap artists perform while in the midst of thousands of people. By attending music festivals such as this and raves, I have come to learn and appreciate the relationships I have and how much influence music has on my life.

Through my schooling in the Communication Studies discipline, I have been able to recognize and apply the scholarly connection that lies between the music I love and communications. Music is not only used as a medium to communicate, but it can also represent different ideologies, values, perspectives, and messages. There is so much more to EDM music than just catchy beats and wild outfits. It provides its listeners with a sense of identity, acceptance, and escape.



## Literature Review

### *Eventbrite*

When attempting to find research on EDM, I found it highly interesting that all of the articles and sources I was finding were written in the last couple years, or in our current year, 2014. It made me realize that since this music genre is fairly new, there is still so much research and information that will come of it as the years progress and EDM continues to grow. Granted, Rock & Roll, Classical, Jazz, and other genres have been around for decades. Although, what makes EDM special is that it's future is so promising that it may even one day surpass the popularity other genres of music have created. EDM will be the music playing at the pool parties we attend this summer, the road trips we will take with friends, or at the clubs where we will dance the night away. It is essentially, everywhere we are.

In a recent study done by the online ticketing service Eventbrite, it shows just how much power EDM has over our generation. The company conducted a research study entitled, 'EDM Audience Analysis' in order to provide further insights into the dance music community in comparison to other music genres. They compared it to Classical, Rock, Jazz, Reggae, Indie, Hip-Hop, Folk, Country, R&B, and Pop. The study was conducted, "in attempt to uncover beneficial information so that they could more effectively cater to the dance music pool for purchasing tickets and merchandise purposes" (Lee).

Eventbrite conducted the study from Twitter feeds during January 1<sup>st</sup> 2013-December 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 by sampling 1,000 representative dance music fans that were

aficionados of sub-genres of EDM. The company “compared conversational trends in behavior and actionable insights to 1,000 fans of ten other genres of music” (Lee). The results showed that, “dance music Twitter users talked about music through their social outlets four times more than General Music Twitter users, referencing concerts and events 30% more often, and also had an average of 1 out of every 3 tweets referencing music and the culture of dance music (52% more than the General Music pool)” (Lee).

These findings show that EDM fans are very present on social media sites and have a particular interest and passion in posting about the music they listen to and love. This really comes as no surprise because most of the EDM fan base is made up of teens and young adults who are all part of the Millennial and Internet Age. This age demographic is constantly connected to social media sites so that they may engage with others who are doing exactly the same. It allows them to create a sense of identity not only with the music, but also with other fans. The study states that, “EDM fans are hyper-active in their social media usage”, and that, “they talk more about music compared to General Music Fans... underscoring the intense levels of fandom. Beyond sheer volume of conversation, these individuals actively engaged within the EDM subculture” (Lee). The high use of social media by EDM fans is one key factor in helping the music genre continue to rapidly grow.

Another aspect of the study Eventbrite looked at was for marketing purposes. It discovered that, “EDM fans are social media exhibitionists” and “have highly actionable entertainment behaviors, allowing for many opportunities for brand engagement” (Lee). The findings encourage brands to take advantage of several opportune moments in the natural flow of the EDM community. It references Twitter as, “a central tool in

intercepting fans and utilizing visual trends in parallel to heavy visual decorations and production elements of electronic festivals and shows” (Lee).

The ‘EDM Audience Analysis’ believes that there are three different stages in the purchase decision journey of EDM fans, starting from the discovery to the drop. The multiple stages allow brands numerous opportunities for engagement for several reasons. The first reason is that even before the event, the fans drive the movement. The study states that, “40% of EDM fans’ social conversations are about loving the genre, which drives greater discovery and sharing of music, media, and events” (Lopez). The EDM fans grow an affinity for this type of music and want to share it to the world. The second reason is that during the event, they share in the moment. It is reported that, “1 in 4 posts about EDM occur during a live electronic music event, for a potential of 42 billion impressions for EDM events in a single year” (Lopez). The third and final reason is that after the event, they keep the momentum going. A true test to what kind of people EDM fans are, is the fact that, “with a 10-to-1 ratio of positive-to-negative posts, EDM events create way more lovers than haters” (Lopez). All of these reasons play an important role for brands trying to appeal to EDM fans.

What both the branding goals and statistics of the study show is that EDM fans are a force that has made a very heavy influence on the current music industry. Not only are the fans passionate about music, but they are also taking part in the culture, events, and fan groups. The usage of social media, Twitter especially, has captured the attention of businesses globally. Something so simple as a Tweet can be compared and looked at on a large scale to represent the idea that EDM is here to stay.

*EDM Waves*

EDM has evolved over many decades and it is seemingly difficult to pinpoint when and where it was created because of differing opinions. However, most of the EDM is said to have started in Europe. For this paper I will attempt to break down its history into three waves while solely focusing on its eventual presence in the U.S.

The first wave starts in the late 1980's. This was a period where live instrumentals could be replaced by synthesizers and keyboards. Much of the music's origins in the U.S. came from the underground club scene in Chicago where artists, "began spinning Disco records in garages and warehouses in the city" (Meshna). These all night parties were, "filled with Black and/or gay male party goers that began to shape a new underground dance movement in America" (Meshna). The culture grew out of the disco era and influential DJs used disco as inspiration to create the new "House" genre. The term "house beat" and "house music" refer to the fact that this kind of music was only played for small audiences at private parties or at home. From there, "house parties got so enormous that they were being organized as big events and record companies and radio started to get a hunch of a new genre coming up" (Seedorf). This sparked a huge interest among the population, and people wanted to know what the hype was about.

The second wave of EDM starts in the early 1990's. In this decade started the craze for computers and the stardom of the DJ. With improvements in technology and costs many people were actually able to produce and mix their own electronic music. The Internet was coming up fast and this made the spread of everything digital much easier, faster, and more effective. DJs started, "producing EDM mixtapes and this is how they

generated exposure and dropped their names” (Seedorf). On the other side of the world there began a, “European Electronic Music Boom in the UK, Germany, and France which led to the opening of many superclubs and outdoor raves were frequently held” (Clair). This second wave of EDM development shows that the genre was quickly gaining immense popularity and the DJs were becoming icons.

The third wave starts with the early 2000’s and leads up to today. With even more technological advancements, more sub-genres of EDM have evolved. This phenomenon has, “instilled a whole new different way of software manipulation into electronic music producers of this decade” (Clair). DJs are now producing chart and radio hits and are even getting big name artists to be featured on their productions. With the 2000s not even over yet, “one can say that this is only the beginning of Electronic Dance Music as there are many other fusions and genres that have not even been created, much less discovered” (Clair). EDM artists have, “raised their fees from a couple hundred dollars to \$250,000 for an appearance of just a couple of hours” (Seedorf). Artists from other music genres are now flirting with EDM because of its unstoppable popularity and many DJs in other genres have made the switch to EDM because they are afraid to miss the rise.

### *Emergence of Raves*

The history of raves, much like EDM, is uncertain as to when and where it originated or who introduced it. However, many similarly believe that the first raves were in Europe and Germany. They usually, “started out as a secretive late after-hour parties held in clubs, commercial building, and even private homes for invited guests only” (Borrego). However, much of the rave popularity was not uncovered until the early

1990's when news and media exposed the finding of these raves to the public. This sparked much interest and curiosity among teen and adult partygoers. In the early 1990's the first raves held in the U.S. were in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. During its early stages, "raves were considered illegal and private parties that were most often broken down by police" (Borrego). As time progressed into the early 2000's the rave scene also changed. It then became, "a legal and public party due to its popularity and high demand from partygoers" (Borrego). Now in the early 2010's we can see that this interest in raves is still very popular.

### *Substance Use*

With popular music genres of the past and present drugs are always associated with the music and the fans, and EDM is no exception. One of the key characteristics attached to EDM and the rave culture has been the use of illicit drugs. For many, drug taking is a large part of the rave experience. It seems like now more than ever these drugs are having widespread availability, particularly Ecstasy or "Molly" which is pure MDMA. However, the use of drugs at raves is by no means necessary or mandatory. Not all attendees or "ravers" use drugs at these events. For this reason, I have chosen three different culturally oriented viewpoints towards the EDM culture, raves, and festivals that I believe exist.

The first viewpoint comes from the media, law enforcement, and public health advocates. They see raves as a place where there is nothing but excessive drug use and music. It's almost hard to blame them when the only aspect the media reports on is when a tragedy happens or the amount of cops needed to secure an event venue. Although,

what needs to be realized is that these exact kinds of events happen at other music genre concerts and festivals as well. Raves are not so much of an exception to what has been occurring for decades with fans using drugs, or the amount of security needed to contain a large crowd. Take for example the 1969 Woodstock Music and Art Festival, or the 1967 Summer of Love. People gathered to hear the music they loved with fellow fans and friends while under the influence of drugs. These festivals and gatherings stressed ideals of love and human fellowship, very much similar to the ideals believed at raves.

The second viewpoint comes from the people and creators inside the EDM scene. One of those people is Pasquale Rotella, the CEO/Founder of Insomniac Events. He is essentially the, “prime mover of EDM’s tidal rise, helming the most powerful events brand in the fastest-growing dance-music market in the world. More than a dozen festivals and various multimedia events bear the Insomniac name” (Castillo, et al.). Rotella states that, “We provide Wonderland. You don’t need drugs” (Reynolds). He feels the need to say this because of the stigma that all raves include the presence of drugs. He wants the attendees and the public to understand that you don’t have to be under the influence to have fun at a rave. Event companies like Insomniac have designed their events so that anyone can have just as much fun sober. Rotella is confident that his events and events similar to his are a place where people can go to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging.

Lastly, the third viewpoint comes from the actual people who attend raves, and the true fans of EDM. They believe in the ideal credo of the rave movement; P.L.U.R. It stands for, peace, love, unity, and respect. Known as the ‘Godfather of American Rave Culture’, N.Y.C. DJ Frankie Bones originally coined this term in the 1990’s. He

famously said after a fight that broke out at his rave in New York City, “If you don’t start showing some peace, love, and unity, I’ll break your faces” (Tonge). This was just the beginning of the integration of P.L.U.R. vibes into the rave scene. Bones believed that, “we as a community need to observe P.L.U.R. in our everyday lives; the reason we love the people around us is because we all love the music, and so we should try and reach beyond that and embrace our fellow man” (Tonge). Essentially, these sentiments do not solely arise from the use of drugs but are created so as to produce an atmosphere of one heart and one love.

## Method

### *Participants*

For my interviews I chose two females and two males that I knew were knowledgeable about EDM music and the rave culture. Out of these four people, only one of them is a close friend of mine. The other three are also my friends but we do not have as close of a friendship and I only see or talk to them a couple times a year. The first female interviewee has been a long time friend of mine that I have known since high school. She is in her early 20s and has recently gotten her college degree. The second female interviewee is someone that I have met at Cal Poly. She is also in her early 20s and will receive her degree within the next year. The first male interviewee I met last year at Coachella. He is also in his early 20s and has gotten a college degree. The second male interviewee I also met at Cal Poly, and he is as well in his early 20s and has received a college degree. For three out of the four interviewees I conducted a Skype interview because of convenience and availability.



I felt that conducting Skype interviews was perfect for this project and is right on track with the growing popularity of video interviews as part of the job application process. The advantage of a Skype interview is that the interviewees are better able to participate when they are ready and relaxed so that they may think more clearly and thoughtfully before responding. Although my interviews were not business related, the overall usages of video interviews of any kind are becoming extremely prevalent.

### *Questions*

For my interview questions I made most of them open as opposed to closed questions so that the interviewees could elaborate on certain ones if they wanted to. I also made sure that the questions were not leading and were instead neutral so that the questions didn't suggest a certain type of answer.

The questions were divided into five categories: Background, DJs/Artists/Music, Drugs/Drug Use, Relationships, and Demographics (see Appendix). When I gave each interviewee a copy of the questions the category titles were left on so that they could see the progression of subjects that were to be asked. The "Background" questions asked things like; how many raves have you attended, money spent per rave, who do you go with, etc. For the "DJs/Artists/Music" category, I asked questions like; favorite genre of EDM, knowledge of EDM artists, and if EDM artists and DJs deserve the same respect and credit as other music artists. The subject of "Drugs/Drug Use" asked questions that pertained to what drugs are present at raves, drug of choice, how the drugs make you feel, etc. Next was the category of "Relationships". I asked questions like; is it difficult to make friends at raves, is there a shared identity between you and your friends, what does

P.L.U.R. mean to you, etc. The final category was “Demographics.” For this category I wanted to ask if the male to female ratio is equal, is there a diverse amount of people at raves, and thoughts about EDM and raves becoming international.

### *Procedure*

Before I was able to conduct any sort of interview I had to get my research project approved by the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee. This is to insure protection of human subjects, the researcher, and the University. This required me to get approved a Human Subjects Protocol Approval Form and an Informed Consent Form. The Informed Consent Form was signed by every interviewee, which allowed me permission to confidentially publish his or her answers. Once the committee had reviewed my project and approved it, I was able to start conducting my interviews.

There were two procedures I followed when conducting the interviews because only one was done in person and the other three were done via Skype. For the face-to-face interview I had the interviewee meet me at the downtown coffee shop Kreuzberg so that it was a neutral location for both of us. I went over her Informed Consent Form so that she was aware of what the research project was about, her confidentiality, and how her answers might be used in my paper. After she read and signed the form, we were ready to begin. I gave her a hard copy of the questions and I used my laptop to also read the questions and type her responses. She did not have to ask for any clarification on any questions and was able and willing to answer each question. The whole interview took about twenty-two minutes and that also includes the time I took to probe her on certain questions for which I felt produced a very meaningful response.

For the other three interviews that were done via Skype, the procedure was a bit different. Two weeks before the interviews I emailed each interviewee an Informed Consent Form and the list of questions. This was to insure that by the time we were ready to do the interview they had already signed the form and sent it back to me. This worked out perfectly and I was able to have all three forms signed and returned to me before each interview.

The first Skype interview was done during an evening while I was in the library. After reminding the interviewee of the purpose for the interview and its objectives we were ready to begin. During the interview we both had the list of the questions in front of us so that we were able to reference it or make comments about it. Overall, the interview went smoothly and I was able to gain valuable answers. The second Skype interview was conducted from my house and the interviewee's house because the location for us was convenient and available. Almost the same procedure as the first Skype interview was done for this one. The interviewee answered all of the questions in-depth and even said they were happy to be able to participate because they were an "avid fan" for EDM. The final interview was also conducted in the same fashion where we were both at our houses. For all of the Skype interviews the average time spent per interview ranged from 20-25 minutes.

### Analysis

For analyzing my interview transcripts, I chose to use a thematic analysis so that I could focus on the themes that occurred within the data. Thematic analysis is essential in qualitative research because it "helps researchers move their analysis from a broad

reading of the data towards discovering patterns and developing themes” (Harvard University). To help identify themes among the interview transcripts, I will distinguish similar answers so that I may surface the underlying common ideas. Next, I will interpret these themes so that I am able to compare their frequencies and show relationships between different themes. Since there are so many varying answers among the four interviewees and twenty-five questions, a thematic analysis will allow for the data to be condensed and analyzed inductively in order to identify commonalities. There are five categories of question types, so I will code similar answers for each category and then determine if there are relationship themes among all of the question categories.

### *Background Questions*

The first question category for the interviews was simply called “Background Questions”. This allowed me to have an overall assessment of each interviewee and I found that the average number of raves attended among them ranged anywhere from 7-50+. The average amount they spend at an EDM concert or rave ranged from \$20-\$500. An overall theme that occurred with the four interviewees is that they prefer to attend raves with, “friends and significant others” or, “anyone who wants to go! The more the merrier!” The underlying idea behind these answers is that raves are something that are to be experienced with people that you have a good relationship with or are into doing the same things as you. They are attending raves with friends or meeting new acquaintances so that they may enjoy each other’s presence. Another interesting commonality among the answers was to the question, “how would you describe what a rave is to someone that has never been?” Most agreed that it could be understood as a gathering of people that enjoy lights, dancing, music, and drugs. However, more interestingly is that a core

response to that question also included describing a rave as a place where, “you feel free to express yourself” and “you don’t have to think about any responsibilities or stress from normal life”. This shows that the rave is so much more than the physical aspects; it provides the rave goers a place where they can feel alive and escape from the normalcy of everyday life.

### *DJs/Artists/Music*

For the second question category interviewees reflected on the aspect that actually established raves- the music. Like any other genre of music, the interviewees could agree that when asked the question, “do you ever feel that the music talks to you?” that the answer was a resounding, “yes”. Yet, the answers also yielded an overall theme that understood EDM as allowing the listener to connect with the music on an “emotional level” and that it can “take you back to a really happy/nostalgic place”. It can then be conferred that EDM communicates with its listeners on a conscious and subconscious level. This is because not only do the listeners hear and see the music being performed, but it is also tapping into their emotional states and allowing them to reflect on their personal experiences or feelings. The music is seemingly not just “talking to them” but actually becoming “one with them”.

As for the credibility and respect aspect for DJs and artists, it was made apparent by multiple interviewees that in order to make and produce EDM music it includes a wide variety of skills, talent, and creativity. They could however agree that it was easier for the DJ to perform a live set compared to a live band, but the work required to produce EDM tracks is extremely difficult and time consuming. When asked about the familiarity

of the EDM artists/DJs at events, the answers varied from being 10% familiar with them to 50%. These fairly low numbers are mostly in part because there are so many artists for each sub-genre of EDM that it is almost impossible to know and listen to them all. The size of the event also plays a factor into how many artists or DJs an EDM fan might be familiar with. With music being the quintessential element behind raves, it can be understood that without it raves would cease to exist. The music provides its listeners with a feeling of escape where they can listen to tracks and reminisce on seeing it performed live while being surrounded by friends and fellow fans.

### *Drugs/Drug Use*

The third category of question types involved interviewee's own drug use and their reflection of drug use among the rave scene. As it is known, drug use among rave goers is an extremely important element that plays into the rave experience. While this viewpoint is highly understood by a majority of the public, it is also true that many rave goers also prefer to attend raves soberly. Both states of mind produce equally different experiences, as did my interview answers. All interviewees could agree that attending raves soberly could be equally as fun as being under the influence of drugs, but each creates different types of feelings and experiences. The results were split with two interviewees saying that have attended a rave sober, and two that had not. However, three out of four agreed that you would not have the same experience at a rave if you were sober as opposed to being on drugs. The theme among these answers hint that raves cater to people being on drugs and that most people, "wouldn't want to be sober around thousands of people that are on drugs." With that being said, when asked what their favorite "drug of choice" was when attending raves, the answers varied. I found that only

two interviewees chose Ecstasy as their drug of choice, and the other two preferred LSD or alcohol. However, all four agreed that these substances make them feel friendly, happy, energetic, and “amazingly euphoric”. One interviewee summed up the feeling of being on drugs as, “making you see beyond what meets the eye”. The theme that is established here is that for every individual the experience at a rave is completely different. It depends on their state of mind, location, knowledge, and awareness of the people and events going on around them.

### *Relationships*

Any type of event where people come together to enjoy a shared interest can almost always result in relationships being formed or reestablished. From personal experience and through the research I have conducted I have realized that the relationships you have with the people you attend a rave with or meet there play a crucial part in your overall experience. As humans we naturally want to experience the things we love with other people. For this reason, I first had my interviewees answer questions based on relationships formed through the rave culture. I then asked them about their feelings towards the overall atmosphere raves create for relationships. A consensus to the question, “do you feel a different type of relationship between your friends you go to raves with and your friends that don’t attend raves?” was that they don’t essentially have a “different type” of relationship but instead feel a “deeper connection” to those rave friends. This is because they could be spending multiple days together at a rave or festival creating memories that no one else will ever relate to. Three out of four interviewees also agreed that it was “easy” to make friends at raves because people are very generous, friendly, and caring. Though, it can be assumed that a majority of people act this way

because they are under the influence of drugs, which ultimately alters their natural actions. When I asked the interviewees if the people raving with them or among them “create a sense of safety, comfort, or acceptance” every interviewee agreed that it created all those feelings. One interviewee agreed that acceptance played a key part in their raving experience. The interviewee said, “I told my rave friends I was gay before any of my other friends just because we were in an environment every weekend that was so loving.” This shows that the atmosphere that a rave creates lets its attendees feel free to be who they truly are. Finally, I asked them their thoughts on EDM’s associated credo of P.L.U.R. (peace, love, unity, & respect). I wanted to ask about this because I felt that this ideology was an important aspect of the rave culture. All interviewees agreed that those feelings are present at raves, but it was pointed out that not everyone knows what it is about or may be representing it for the wrong reasons. Although, my favorite response pointed out by an interviewee is that P.L.U.R. vibes are present because, “it is exemplified in the way these festivals can have hundreds of thousands of people of all walks of life with no fights or major negative occurrences.” Overall, a theme that is established through these relationship answers is that the rave atmosphere creates a place where you can be free from the pressures of reality and simply enjoy what you and thousands of others have come together to do- experience the music.

### *Demographics*

Lastly, I wanted to ask about the demographics present at a rave because I felt that it was an important part of showing how diverse and global the rave scene has become. Two out of four interviewees agreed that there was a higher male to female ratio at raves, and the other two said they were unsure. Since most raves draw such a huge crowd, it is



sometimes hard to survey the audience and make a judgment call on if the sexes are equally represented. When asked if, “there is a diverse amount of different races, sex, culture, religion, etc” present at raves all interviewees said yes. Two interviewees said that diversity is their favorite part of a rave because there are tons of different people that come together to, “present an accepting environment”. Anyone can attend a rave in a completely different country, speak a foreign language and physically look different, yet still share the same experiences and feelings as everyone around them. I believe that is the most beautiful aspect about the rave culture.

### Discussion

From the humble beginnings of synthesizers and keyboards, to mixtapes and underground dance parties, the EDM culture has come a long way. What was once just spinning disco records and illegal private parties has turned into an international music movement. It’s hard to believe that in just over thirty years, this music genre has grown to be just as big as other music genres that have been around for many decades. EDM artists and DJs are topping record charts and sweeping music awards. This momentous success is due mostly in part to the fact that music parallels our culture.

From the study conducted by Eventbrite it shows a critical element of our culture, and that is the connection between social media and music among the youth. Not only are the youth listening to and attending EDM raves and festivals, but they are also expressing their thoughts about the music through social media outlets. Since technology is used in almost all aspects of our daily lives, it makes sense that companies such as Eventbrite would want to investigate how they can make more profit off their music fans. These

social media sites are also allowing music fans to connect with other fans about certain EDM artists or events. By being able to do this, EDM aficionados from all over the world could potentially form relationships with others through computer-mediated communication. This aspect of meeting people and forming relationships through social media sites is a key component of what our culture has fostered. The connection between social media and music is huge and expanding everyday as the abilities to post and share videos and songs become easier. Further research into the relationship between EDM and social media could be very beneficial for analyzing another dimension of the culture that my paper did not focus on.

The interviews provided insightful reflections about the rave culture and ultimately what it could say about our society as a whole. One theme that was apparent through the interviews was that every single individual who attends a rave has a completely unique experience. There are many factors that play into the experience but essentially the whole event is what you make of it. A second common theme among the questions was that raves can provide a place where you can feel love and acceptance. Anyone can go and feel that they belong there and that no one else is judging them. Raves create an atmosphere that allows people to go and feel like they are almost escaping reality by entering a world where all their troubles and insecurities are left behind. What both of these themes can tell us about our culture is that maybe we all need to become a little more accepting, respectful, caring, or passionate. If people are attending raves because they feel ostracized from the outside world, then maybe we need to look in before we project our problems out.

What this paper shows us is that music does not only tell us a lot about ourselves, but also about the world we live in. We are reminded of the fact that music plays a vital role in our communication with society. What music we chose to listen to in the privacy of our homes, or amongst thousands of people is a direct reflection of not only our values, but also the values of our culture. Through music we are able to connect with humanity and express our feelings and attitudes in a completely liberating way. The rave culture embraces this feeling of liberty and personal expression and strives to make it an important element in the music and among its people. EDM not only represents a type of music, but also a way of life. As EDM artist FatBoy Slim phrased it in his chart topping hit, one should simply, "Eat, Sleep, Rave, Repeat". The EDM movement is here to stay and it will continue to fill the rhythms of our life.

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## Appendix

### *Interview Questions*

#### Background Questions:

- 1.) How many EDM festivals/raves have you ever attended?
- 2.) Which was your favorite & why?
- 3.) On average how much do you spend per rave?
- 4.) Who do you usually go to raves with?
- 5.) How would you describe what a rave is to someone that has never been?

#### DJs / Artists / Music:

- 1.) On average, how many (percentage) of the music artists/DJs playing at the raves you attend are you familiar with and listen to?
- 2.) Do you have a favorite genre of EDM (House, Trance, Electro, Techno, Dubstep, Moombahton, and Trip Hop)?
- 3.) Do you think that DJs deserve as much respect & credit as other music artists who perhaps sing, dance, or have other talents?
- 4.) Do you ever feel that the music “talks to you”? If it does is this because the type of beats the music has or certain vocal elements, etc?

#### Drugs / Drug Use:

- 1.) Of the raves you have attended, how many of them were you under the influence of drugs?
- 2.) Have you ever gone to a rave sober?
- 3.) What type of drugs are usually present?
- 4.) What is your drug of choice when attending a rave?
- 5.) How does this drug make you feel?
- 6.) Do you feel that most of the people attending the rave with you are on drugs?

7.) Do you think you would have the same experience at the rave if you were sober as opposed to being on drugs?

Relationships:

- 1.) Do you feel a different type of relationship between your friends you go to raves with and your friends that don't attend raves?
- 2.) How difficult is it to make friendships at raves?
- 3.) Of those friendships you make at raves, do you stay in contact with them or ever see them again?
- 4.) Is there any sense of identity that is formed between yourself and your friends when you are at a rave?
- 5.) How connected (mentally or physically) do you feel when you are with them raving? Do they create a sense of safety, comfort, or acceptance for you?
- 6.) EDM Music prides itself on "P.L.U.R. (peace, love, unity, & respect)- do you feel any of these emotions when you are at a rave?

Demographics:

- 1.) Is the male to female ratio equal?
- 2.) Is there a diverse amount of people of different races, sex, culture, and religion?
- 3.) What do you think of EDM and raves becoming international?