

**Faculty of Health Sciences
National Drug Research Institute**

**An ethnographic study of recreational drug use and identity management
among a network of electronic dance music enthusiasts in Perth, Western
Australia**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University**

September 2012

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

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Abstract

This thesis explores the social contexts and cultural significance of amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS) and alcohol use among a social network of young adults in Perth, Western Australia. The study is positioned by the “normalisation thesis” (Parker *et al.* 1998), a body of scholarly work proposing that certain “sensible” forms of illicit drug use have become more culturally acceptable or normal among young people in the United Kingdom (UK) population since the 1990s. Academic discussion about cultural processes of normalisation is relevant in the Australian context, where the prevalence of illicit drug use among young adults is comparable to the UK. This thesis develops the work of Sharon Rødner Sznitman (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008), who argued that normalisation researchers have neglected the “micro-politics that drug users might be engaged in when trying to challenge the stigma attached to them” (Rødner Sznitman, 2008, pp.456-457).

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted among ‘scenesters’ – members of a social network that was based primarily on involvement in Perth’s electronic dance music (EDM) ‘scene’. Sixty scenesters were involved in participant observation over 18 months, and a subset of 25 participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This thesis argues that the values associated with particular ATS practices are more nuanced and contested than have been depicted within accounts of normalised drug use. Analysis in this thesis is framed by exploration of the negotiation of dual identities claimed by young adults in this study. These are their self-identification as ‘normal’ within the context of the mainstream community and their simultaneous pursuit of a ‘scenester’ identity and associated partying and illicit drug use. I examine how negotiating the uncertain parameters of these identities, and occupying a position within and between these social fields results in complexities, tensions and nuances in drug practice that were continually negotiated.

Two sub-arguments are pursued. First, I argue that the negotiation of drug use that scenesters considered to be acceptable and also pleasurable was complicated by the beliefs and values that were negotiated during the performance of scenester identity. The importance of developing and maintaining status as an authentic scenester contributed to the value placed on maintaining control over one’s physical and

emotional state when using drugs. Elaborating on this theme, I begin by exploring the decreased symbolic value of ecstasy use and the preference for moderate and/or private use among scenesters. Scenesters termed its emotional and physical effects ‘gurning’ and considered ecstasy to be a ‘messy’ drug that compromised self-control. Despite the negative associations of ecstasy, it was nonetheless regarded as a fun and pleasurable drug by many. The main argument presented here is that the cultural values attributed to ecstasy use were unsettled and negotiated in flexible ways.

I then explore how scenesters reconciled the status of alcohol as a fun and ‘social’ drug but one that was associated with the undesirable experience of loss of control and tiredness. This was achieved through concomitant use of diverted dexamphetamine or ‘dexies’ – a drug readily available in the local landscape. Analysis explores how, while use of dexies was casual, understandings of dexies and the ways scenesters rationalised their use, complicated understandings of drug-related pleasure and harm. This analysis contributes to nuanced understandings of recreational drug practices.

The second sub-argument presented in this thesis is that the stigmatisation of drug use in the community continues to destabilise the expression of recreational drug practice even within a network of recreational illicit drug users. This is initially explored in relation to the practice of smoking crystal methamphetamine (or ‘meth’ smoking). I examine how the status of meth smoking as a recreational drug practice was uncertain and contested within the network. Analysis is contextualised by public discourse emphasising the addictive properties of the drug and its association with personal degradation. I explore two themes. First, negotiation of quasi-private and private forms of use (in ‘meth circles’) illustrates the importance of management of a non-stigmatised identity. Second, inconsistent views about whether meth smoking was social or controlled, and reassessment of involvement by users, exposed the instability of the values associated with recreational style use among scenesters. I argue that the establishment of crystal methamphetamine smoking as a deviant practice within the general community, as well as within the EDM scene, shaped a hidden style of practice that was not easily regulated and was strongly associated with heavy use in the form of ‘benders’.

Analysis then explores the micro-level management of recreational drug-using identity over time, particularly in relation to the maintenance of competent and self-managing identities. I argue that scenesters drew on limited, deficit-based social constructions of drug users to derive understandings of what constituted recreational forms of drug use, and therefore boundaries were subjectively interpreted, highly variable and rooted in relational experiences. This is underpinned by uncertainty about the limitations of normalised drug use in relation to the realisation of ‘adult’ identity.

This thesis contributes to an increasingly nuanced understanding of the complex and renegotiated aspects of ‘normal’ practice among regular drug users. The shared and processual aspects of recreational drug practices and the renegotiated aspects associated with identity management among young adults are under-developed areas of the normalisation literature that are explored in this study. This study also contributes to the methodological literature in the Australian alcohol and other drugs (AOD) field, which has under-utilised the ethnographic method. Ethnographic analysis of the integration of dexamphetamine into recreational drug practices and the negotiation of crystal methamphetamine smoking among socially integrated drug users also contributes to the current literature. The conclusion of this thesis discusses the implications of the continued stigmatisation of drug users in relation to recreational drug-using young adults.

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Acknowledgments

The work for this thesis was undertaken in two cities – Perth and Melbourne – and the list of people to thank is long. First, David Moore. We got there in the end! Your unfaltering standards, steady guidance and wisdom have been exceptional. To all of the NDRI Melbourne crew: Monica, Christine, Nicola, Robyn and Amy – I am grateful to you all. I know how hard you have worked for your successes and I wish you all the best luck from here on. Monica, in particular, you've been so fantastic and I can't thank you enough.

The support that I have received through the National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) at Curtin University and the NHMRC grant has made this project possible and I am grateful. The admin, IT, and research staff from NDRI in Perth have been a fantastic support. Thank you to all of the other researchers that I worked with on the NHMRC grant – particularly Lisa Maher who read my final draft. Thanks also to Sherry Saggars who also read a previous draft. Dr Kristin Argall (Express Editing Writing and Research) provided professional editing services in the preparation of this thesis.

A note that parts of Chapter 7 appear in the following Elsevier publication which was co-authored with Professor David Moore: Green, R., & Moore, D. (2009). 'Kiddie drugs' and controlled pleasure: Recreational use of dexamphetamine in a social network of young Australians. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 20, 402-408.

I am grateful to YSAS and particularly Andrew Bruun who took a junior researcher from Perth on board who has been 'almost finished' her PhD for far longer than anticipated. The work at YSAS has been enriching and given me a new direction and passion. Thanks to Penny also for your patience, and also to Jozica, Constance and Kat. I also thank Roslyn Russell at RMIT University for supporting me in the final stages and with editing.

Mum and Dad, and my brothers – I love you, I miss you and I hope that I have made you proud. I count myself as exceptionally lucky to have you all. Many good friends have followed my journey and have been there for me tirelessly from the beginning. Sorelle, Julissa, Kirstin, Sani, Richard, Ben, Simone – many others who have listened to the ongoing PhD story. Cath, I would have been lost without you. You are like my family here and I won't forget everything that you've done for me. Finally to my childhood

friend Linda, I would like to dedicate this to you. I can't think of two more different paths! Your courage is an absolute inspiration.

So many adventures and so many people involved, I am thankful for everything that I have gained along the way. Foremost, I am grateful to the 'scenesters' for giving me insight into your private lives, teaching me about the scene and about myself. Your generosity and trust are gratefully acknowledged, and I sincerely hope that your personal experiences have been represented with sensitivity.

– CHAPTER 1 –

Introduction: ‘Recreational’ use of amphetamine-type stimulants in Australia

In Australia, ecstasy¹ and meth/amphetamines² are the most commonly used illicit drugs after cannabis (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2011). These drugs are included under the umbrella term ‘amphetamine-type stimulants’³ (ATS) and they are more formally classified as synthetic psychostimulants⁴. This thesis provides an ethnographic analysis of the micro-level processes of negotiation of recreational ATS use among a social network of young adult Australians. The setting for this ethnographic study is Perth, Western Australia (WA). This site is of

¹ 3,4-Methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA), is known commonly as ecstasy, and it is a drug from the phenethylamine and amphetamine families. It has both hallucinogenic and ATS effects, and therefore it is not strictly an ATS. Tablets or capsules sold as ‘ecstasy’ promise MDMA effects, but may or may not contain MDMA. Data indicate that synthetic substances like mephedrone, benzylpiperazine (BZP) or 4-Methylethcathinone (4-MEC) are often used as substitutes for MDMA (UNODC, 2011).

² The term ‘meth/amphetamines’ encapsulates amphetamines and methamphetamines.

³ A note on the use of single (‘ ’) and double inverted commas (“ ”) within this thesis. Single inverted commas are used to introduce new terms and to introduce slang expressions and informal language used at their first appearance in each chapter. Double inverted commas denote direct quotations.

⁴ The term ‘psychostimulants’ refers to a broad class of drugs that stimulate the central nervous system (CNS), prompting the release of dopamine and serotonin in the brain. The term encapsulates illicitly manufactured ecstasy, methamphetamines (powdered, crystalline and base); amphetamine sulphate and pharmaceutical stimulants, including dextroamphetamine and pseudoephedrine (which are synthetic ATS); and natural drugs such as cocaine, caffeine, nicotine, adrenaline, khat, cocoa and guarana.

particular interest, as use of meth/amphetamines and ecstasy in Perth is consistently reported to be the highest in the country (AIHW, 1999, 2005, 2008, 2011).

In the 1990s across many Western countries⁵, drug surveillance studies recorded an unprecedented increase in the use of ATS (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction [EMCDDA], 1999; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2009). This prompted interest among researchers, the public health community, policy makers and the media. The dominant research approach in the international alcohol and other drugs (AOD) field/s is to investigate the prevalence and aetiology of psychosocial and other health impacts associated with drug use among individual users, as well as the associated public health and policy implications. An approach focused on risk and harms is underpinned by the continued medicalisation of illicit drug use in formal rhetoric. For example, the National Institute on Drug Abuse – the US Federal Government’s primary research agency on “drug abuse and addiction”, and the world’s largest funder of drug research – defines “addiction” as “a chronic relapsing brain disease” (NIDA, 2010). The emergence of technologically assisted neuroscience, which photographically detects ‘abnormalities’ within the brains of drug users (Fowler *et al.*, 2007; Thompson *et al.*, 2004), has further reinforced the dominance of biomedical approaches to understanding drug use. Despite continued research emphasis on risks and harmful forms of use, epidemiological studies show that the majority of ATS users do not seek assistance from drug treatment services, and they maintain productive roles within the economic and social mainstream (Black *et al.*, 2008). The approach taken in this thesis acknowledges that drug use does not result in serious harmful consequences for most people, particularly for those who do not experience disadvantage, marginalisation or do not and can be best understood as a part of particular lifestyle choices.

⁵ This denotes countries that can be considered a part of the developed world, including the United Kingdom (UK, and other countries within the European Union [EU] such as Ireland), the United States (US), Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

This study is informed by a body of literature that considers the cultural implications of the wide availability and common use of illicit drugs among certain sections of the population. Researchers found that there were changes in attitudes towards illicit drug use among young people in the UK, including social accommodation of ‘sensible’ forms of use; and broader cultural accommodation of illicit drug use within the media and public policy (particularly health and crime-related) (Parker *et al.*, 1998; Parker *et al.*, 2002). These observations led to the development of an influential hypothesis termed the ‘normalisation’ thesis, which proposes that, among youth and young adults in the UK, certain drugs and certain styles of drug use have become more acceptable or ‘normal’. While this work originates in the UK, researchers have argued that these observations are applicable to the Australian context, particularly among club-goers (Duff, 2003a). This chapter provides an overview of recent and contemporary research on normalisation, critical responses, underlying theorisation of recreational and controlled drug use, and a summary of the theoretical underpinnings that have positioned the normalisation thesis in relation to broader social, cultural and economic changes characterising late modernity.

The thesis does not endeavour to ‘prove’ or ‘disprove’ the normalisation thesis, but rather it engages at length with one important aspect of it – what Sharon Rødner Sznitman (2008) has termed the “micro-politics” of normalisation. Rødner Sznitman uses this term to refer to the analysis of ongoing processes that ‘socially integrated’ illicit drug users undertake to negotiate non-stigmatised identities in relation to mainstream values. Her work (Rødner, 2005; 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008)⁶ has implications for the ongoing academic consideration of the implications of normalisation, and it provides an analytical springboard for this study. Informed by Rødner Sznitman’s approach, this thesis provides an ethnographic analysis of the micro-level negotiation of ‘normalised’ drug use among young adults who are

⁶ Sharon Rødner (2005, 2006) and Sharon Rødner Sznitman (2008) are the same author.

located in two overlapping but distinct social fields – those of the ‘mainstream’ and an electronic dance music (EDM) ‘scene’.

Ethnographic research, comprised of the mutually informing processes of participant observation and in-depth interviewing, took place among a social network of Perth-based EDM enthusiasts. I term them ‘scenesters’ on the basis of their membership of the local EDM scene. Individuals in this study also used the terms scenester and scene. However, they are applied slightly differently in this thesis. First, the term scenester was used by these young adults in common language to signify a particularly enthusiastic and frequent form of participation in the scene. I use it here to refer to *all* individuals who identified as members of the Perth EDM scene. For the participants, scene referred to the association with EDM style, as well as the particular values and practices associated with EDM that located these young adults within a social network.

My academic use of the term scene encapsulates these aspects, but it is also informed by academic work theorising the connections between individuals that share particular interests, values and lifestyle choices, and whose stylistic choices are informed by a global style (Straw 1991). Scenesters used the term ‘community’ interchangeably with scene. I use the term scene in preference to community for analytical purposes. In Chapter 5 I examine how, at least traditionally, the term ‘community’ is associated with values of trust, social cohesion, and investment in the future. These values are not emphasised within the academic literature describing the ties between individuals involved in music “scenes” (Straw 1991). The term scene encapsulates the sense of community that scenesters experienced and it simultaneously opens up the consideration of processes of social competition for status among them.

Among scenesters, the pursuit of ‘partying’ was a central unifying activity and the proclaimed ethos for involvement in the EDM scene was the ‘love’ of the music. An integral component of the social lives of scenesters was the use of licit and illicit drugs. This both facilitated and enhanced avid socialising and experiences of attending EDM events. Use of ATS, or what they understood as ‘recreational drugs’

or ‘party drugs’⁷, was considered normal. Concomitant use of ATS with alcohol occurred regularly⁸. I examine in this thesis how, despite this broad acceptance of ATS, understandings of ‘acceptable’ and ‘desirable’ styles of use were more open to negotiation and situational than are represented in the literature. The focus of the thesis on identity management is informed by engagement with the renegotiation of ‘normalised’ drug use that occurred within the social contexts and daily experiences of these young adults. Ethnographic data provides the detail and richness to support such analysis.

To assist with my introduction of this central theme I draw on an informal conversation that occurred during participant observation. The discussion occurred during the morning of what they termed a ‘bender’, a term referring to an extended period of drug use where one or more nights of sleep are skipped.

It was 1pm on Sunday and they were sitting in a local pub. Most of the group had been awake for over 24 hours. Their time together began the previous evening, when they attended a private house party until approximately 1am, followed by their favourite EDM nightclub. From approximately 5:30am, they spent the morning at an ‘after-party’ with other scenesters smoking crystalline methamphetamine, which they commonly referred to as ‘meth’, while they talked and continued to listen to EDM. From 8am on, scenesters began leaving the party, and at 12pm, a small core group

⁷ This is an informal umbrella term used to refer to drugs that are used in leisure contexts, and particularly in association with clubbing and formerly raving (though not exclusively). I use the term ‘recreational drugs’ to capture the association that these individuals made between these drugs and leisure or ‘partying’. The term encapsulates stimulants such as meth/amphetamines, psychedelics (e.g. lysergic acid diethylamide [LSD]), as well as and substances with depressant and dissociative properties (e.g. gamma hydroxybutyrate [GHB] and ketamine respectively). The terms ‘club drugs’, ‘designer drugs’, and ‘party drugs’ are somewhat interchangeable, although designer drugs can also be used to refer to drugs that are less commonly used such as 4-bromo-2,5-dimethoxyphenethylamine (2C-B) or dextromethorphan (DXM).

⁸ ‘Regular’ drug use refers to monthly or more frequent use.

comprising Gretel, Monique, Andrew and Trevor⁹ moved on to the pub. This is where they re-joined other scenesters (including Ange and Simon).

Benders typically involved the use of various legal and illegal drugs, particularly ATS, which facilitate wakefulness. On this occasion, ecstasy and alcohol were consumed alongside meth. Benders were most strongly associated with crystal methamphetamine¹⁰ use, and scenesters reported that they were able to ‘pull’ the longest benders when they smoked it. Meth was perceived as the most ‘potent’ drug that was used among them. However, the heavy and prolonged sessions of drug use were also associated with social context. Meth was often smoked by passing a glass pipe among members of a small group termed a ‘meth circle’. In the above scenario, members had smoked in a meth circle throughout the morning until they ran out of meth at approximately 10am. This was a typical way that scenesters smoked meth. In this scenario they then decided that going to the pub that afternoon would be a good way to end the social experience before the working week began the following day, which was Monday.

The topic of discussion among the group at the pub was a recent burglary that occurred at Ange’s house. Those present expressed their sympathy, as Ange described how somebody broke into her house while she was at home. Remarking on the brazen action of the perpetrators, Simon surmised that it “must have been junkies”. Among these individuals, the term ‘junkie’ was a commonly used term that denotes a drug ‘addict’ – somebody who uses drugs compulsively, to the detriment of their health, finances and social standing. Gretel contributed to the conversation about the burglary by saying, “We call them junkies, but I wonder what people would call us?” Her comment did not receive any verbal response from those at the table. The atmosphere among them seemed prickly and dismissive. Looking around

⁹ All references to names and places mentioned in this thesis are pseudonyms.

¹⁰ Powdered and crystal methamphetamines were the most commonly used methamphetamines among this network, and are referred to as ‘meth’, which was one of their terms.

the table following this comment, I noticed that Andrew immediately grabbed his beer and directed his eyes down at the table. The other members of the group also avoided making eye contact, except for Monique, who raised her eyebrow at Trevor across the table. After a silence, Gretel mumbled under her breath, “Ok, just a bit hypocritical that’s all”, and Monique said, “Well I think that’s a bit different”. Gretel lit a cigarette. She seemed annoyed. The conversation moved on to another topic.

Gretel’s comment (“We call them junkies, but I wonder what people would call us?”) can be understood in relation to the intense public scrutiny that meth use received in the Australian media at the time. The drug was touted as having an unprecedented ‘addictive potential’, and the mass media was littered with imagery of desperate, unhealthy and compulsive ‘ice’ addicts. Gretel (22 years old) was a regular – sometimes weekly – user of meth. However, by her accounts, she grew up in Perth in a caring and well-to-do family. She held an undergraduate university qualification and was employed on a full-time basis. Gretel did not fit the profile of the addicted, desperate meth user that was depicted in media representations. Her profile was typical of scenesters more generally.

Over the time spent with scenesters while they were participating in ‘bender’ weekends (like the one represented above), I noted that they often became impatient with one another and petty arguments were frequent. This was particularly the case at the ‘end’ of bender weekends. They attributed terse interactions and their own mood swings and short tempers to the combined effects of tiredness and ‘coming down’ from drugs. Nevertheless, the dismissive reaction of scenesters to Gretel’s comment highlights some of the sensitivities that scenesters had when discussing the values and images attached to the junkie stereotype. I argue that scenesters were uncertain of how to resolve the devalued cultural metaphors that were associated with meth use in relation to the strong emphasis that they placed on maintaining a normal status in a social mainstream.

These tensions were not openly discussed among the network. One of the reasons for this is because they knew that not all scenesters approved of meth smoking. Bender weekends involving meth smoking were not practiced by all scenesters and some in

the network understood the practice as a transgression of 'recreational' drug use. This reflected a certain level of acceptance of some of the public discourse that emphasised the addictive and transformative properties of crystal methamphetamine. Further, scenesters who smoked meth also acknowledged negative aspects of the practice – including the effects that it had on their mental health and its association with antisocial behaviour among their friends. Thus, the practice of meth smoking was a socially contested one and exposed the unstable boundaries of performance of the recreational drug-using style.

This thesis elaborates on the processes of negotiation of recreational forms of illicit drug use in relation to identity. In particular, it examines the tensions and uncertainties that arise from the negotiation of dual identities within overlapping but discrete social fields. The term 'dual identities' refers to the different (and at times intersecting) values and priorities associated with maintaining social status within the mainstream alongside affiliation and pursuit of a different set of values and lifestyle choices within the EDM scene. While the values maintained in these social fields overlapped, there were also significant tensions. Involvement in heavy and regular illicit drug use that accompanied the partying ethos of scenesters threatened fulfilment of functional productive roles in the mainstream. Further, while certain forms of drug use were usual and regular activities in the scene, many forms of drug use continue to be illegal and stigmatised in the mainstream. Scenesters subscribed to these values to differing extents. Metaphors of the junkie and the addict were very salient among them, and served as reminders of the value of negotiating functional and 'recreational' use. However, at the micro-level of practice, I argue that negotiation of these tensions was not seamless.

Issues of identity management have been under-explored ethnographically and rarely interrogated in the Australian context. Three practices that were observed among scenesters are the focus of analysis: the use of ecstasy, the concurrent use of alcohol with the pharmaceutical stimulant dexamphetamine ('dexies') the smoking of crystal methamphetamine ('meth'). The central argument presented in this thesis is that normalisation is not complete or static – it is complex, nuanced and continually negotiated and renegotiated.

Two sub-arguments are pursued. First, I examine the way that values associated with recreational style were complicated by the competitive social processes that scenesters engaged in within the scene. I explore how notions of being an ‘authentic’ scenester and projects of gaining status in the scene informed the emphasis that scenesters placed on controlled self-presentation and the embarrassment that they associated with appearing intoxicated in public. However, these values were negotiated in tension with the continued pleasures associated with two commonly used drugs – ecstasy and alcohol – both of which were associated with loss of control.

While ecstasy was commonly used it was also associated with devalued rave culture and commercialised aspects of the EDM scene. I explore how changes in the EDM scene and the popularisation of ecstasy among a non-scenester or mainstream crowd disrupted the pleasures that scenesters associated with its use. I explore the self-consciousness and regulation of practices through online technology associated with scenester membership, and how this informed the way that ecstasy was understood and used. Similar to the value attributed to ecstasy, alcohol was also associated with loss of control. Appearing ‘drunk’ in the EDM scene was not valued. While the use of stimulants in association with alcohol was a common way to negotiate this tension, I explore how the use of a diverted pharmaceutical stimulant, dexamphetamine, complicated understandings of drug-related pleasure and the negotiation of drug-related harm. Examination of these two practices (ecstasy use and the concomitant use of dexies and alcohol), in relation to negotiation of scenester identity contributes to the wider argument that, while scenesters generally agreed on the importance of enacting ‘recreational’ styles of drug use, at the micro level of practice the values constituting this style were more complex, nuanced, and renegotiated.

The second sub-argument that is pursued in this study is that the ongoing stigmatisation of drug use in the community has a destabilising effect in relation to expression of values associated with recreational drug use. I explore how scenesters rationalised engagement in drug practices that were heavy or strongly associated with

stigma by emphasising how they were different from failed drug users. Informed by Rødner Sznitman's work (2005; 2006; 2008), I argue that their own identities as drug users were weakly defined and practices associated the performance of recreational drug practice were unstable. Ethnographic analysis shows that understandings of boundaries between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' use, and 'functional' and 'problematic' use, were therefore open to interpretation and negotiated processually by individuals in the context of their own experiences. This sub-argument is pursued through examination of the values attributed to the practice of meth smoking and the associated practice of 'pulling benders' – both of which were introduced earlier.

In order to further contextualise this study, I begin with a summary of relevant epidemiological drug trends in Australia. I then outline the aims of my study, describe the project methodology, and summarise the chapters comprising the body of this thesis.

The epidemiology of youthful drug use in Australia

In Australia in 2007, it was estimated that over 1.5 million people aged over 14 years had used ecstasy in their lifetime and approximately 1 million had used meth/amphetamines in their lifetime (Table 1)¹¹. Young adults were the group most likely to have used these drugs recently. Table 2 presents statistics relating to 20 to 29-year-old Australians sampled from the general population every three years from 1998 to 2007¹². This data indicates that, in 2007, more than one in five 20 to 29-year-olds (23.9% or 701,700 young adults) had used ecstasy at least once. Some fluctuations in drug patterns are also evident. In 2007, 16% of 20 to 29-year-olds had used meth/amphetamines before. This represents a drop from the 2004 data that

¹¹ Although more recent data is available, data for this study was collected in 2007 and more recent statistics are thus not directly relevant to the time of the research.

¹² For a more comprehensive summary of ecstasy use trends among young Australians between 1988 and 2009, see Sindicich (2009).

showed lifetime use of meth/amphetamines to be similar to ecstasy at 21.1%. In comparison, reported lifetime ecstasy use among this group increased steadily between 1998 and 2007, from 13.9% to 23.9%.

Table 1: Ecstasy, meth/amphetamines and cocaine use amongst Australians aged over 14 years in 2007

	Ecstasy	Meth/amphetamines
Last 12 months	608,400	394,800
Use ever	1,530,700	1,081,200

Source: (AIHW, 2008)

Table 2: Use of ecstasy, meth/amphetamines, cocaine, and cannabis among young Australians aged 20-29 years from 1998-2007

	1998* [^]	2001*	2004	2007
Ecstasy in last 12 months	8.4%	10.4 % (295,200)	12% (330,900)	11.2% (330,200)
Used in lifetime	13.9%	19.7 (559,500)	22% (608,100)	23.9% (701,700)
Meth/amphetamine in last 12 months	12%	11.2 % (317,800)	10.7% (295,300)	7.3% (214,700)
Used in lifetime	20.9%	22.0% (624,600)	21.1% (582,400)	16.0% (470,400)

Sources: (AIHW, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2008)

* In the 2001 and earlier surveys, ecstasy was analysed under the category of 'ecstasy/designer drugs' (the term 'designer drugs' was not defined in the survey). Similarly, in 1998 and 2001, the term 'amphetamines' was used, and replaced by 'meth/amphetamines' in 2004.

[^] population figures are not available for 1998 data.

Worldwide, significant resources have been dedicated to investigating negative health effects and risk of experiencing poor health and wellbeing outcomes among ATS users. Numerous studies, both within Australia and internationally, have established that there are a number of chronic forms of harm attributable to ATS use. These include drug dependence and blood-borne virus transmission associated with

injecting drug use. Poor psychosocial outcomes such as psychosis, depression, anxiety and violent behaviours are also emphasised in relation to the use of meth/amphetamines (Darke *et al.*, 2008). Health effects that specifically relate to ecstasy use include dopamine depletion, particularly among heavy users (McCardle *et al.*, 2004). The effects of ecstasy on cognitive function are commonly investigated, and deficits are shown to be relatively small in controlled studies (Bedi & Redman, 2008; Rogers *et al.*, 2009).

Although ATS-related deaths are rare (Gowing *et al.*, 2002), they are typically caused by seizures, cardiac arrhythmias and respiratory failure (Darke *et al.*, 2007). Ecstasy-related deaths are also linked to hyperthermia and hyponatremia (Gowing *et al.*, 2002). Amphetamines are also cardiotoxic and are associated with cardiovascular complications (Darke *et al.*, 2007).

In summary, there are a range of drug-related risks attributable to specific drugs and modes of administration (McKetin *et al.* 2008 compare these to administration of methamphetamine via smoking), and these are heightened in the context of polydrug use (Gouzoulis-Mayfrank & Daumann, 2006). Death or experiences of severe ATS-related harms are rare. The manifestation of negative outcomes is strongly linked to associated risk practices such as unsafe sex and drink- or drug-driving (Baker & Lee, 2003; Minichiello *et al.*, 2003; Riley *et al.*, 2001), rather than the effects of drugs alone. Further, while poor psychological wellbeing is commonly associated with ATS use, the extent to which ATS users have pre-existing mental health issues is unclear.

Despite the overwhelming focus in the research literature on risk factors and harms associated with drug use, the range, nature and severity of harms experienced by young adults who are not clients of AOD treatment services is less well understood. Relative to the proportion of all young adults who use ATS, very few seek formal help and support for AOD issues. For example, an Australian study reported that while 17% of a national sample of 706 primary ecstasy users had reportedly 'ever overdosed', of the 50 individuals (7%) who had reported 'overdosing' on a drug in the six months prior to survey, only two had sought formal help (Black *et al.*, 2008,

p.xxiv). Further, accessing drug treatment services for dependency in relation to ecstasy or meth/amphetamine is also reportedly low (Pennay & Lee, 2009).

Although specialist care is rarely sought, research suggests that regular drug users more commonly access non-specialist health professionals. A national annual study that samples ecstasy users reported in 2007 that just over one-fifth (22%) of the sample had accessed either a medical or health service in relation to their drug use during the six months preceding the interview. Services accessed were most commonly general practitioners (GPs) and counsellors (Black *et al.*, 2008, p.xxiv), but there is little indication of the severity of the issues for which these individuals sought help.

Furthermore, research suggests that some young adults who experience forms of harm related to ATS use are likely to self-manage the health, social and financial effects (Duff *et al.*, 2007). This pattern is supported by data suggesting that the majority of ATS users in Australia are well educated, engaged in mainstream institutions and activities (either employed or studying), and unlikely to have a criminal history (Dunn *et al.*, 2007, p.xii). That is, a population group of socially integrated ATS users are likely to draw on the support and resources available to them. These may include strategies such as taking paid 'sick days' from work if they encounter negative drug-related effects. On the other hand, some research indicates that young adults who use ATS anticipate certain negative effects and accommodate these by adjusting their routines accordingly (Duff, 2003a; Kelly, 2007).

This study investigates the social contexts and cultural values associated with this style of use. This includes consideration of the hidden ways in which 'harms' are understood and managed. Sociologist Cameron Duff argues that the continued dominance of 'expert' voices over 'non-expert' forms of knowledge about risk and harms leads to a range of gaps and omissions in policy, and this has "implications for the development of harm reduction strategies within young drug using populations" (2003b, p.286). It is important to develop understandings of these informal strategies to inform development of relevant public health messages and policy.

Academic discussion of controlled and recreational forms of drug use is not new. I now outline a brief history of the conceptualisation of these forms of drug use.

Theorising 'recreational' drug use

The concept of 'recreational drug use' assumes that drugs can be used in controlled ways to accompany particular lifestyles and associated leisure activities, and can be engaged in alongside participation in mainstream activities (D. Moore, 1996).

Academic conceptualisations of recreational drug use began in the 1950s with the work of Howard Becker, who wrote the following based on his study of cannabis users:

The most frequent pattern of use might be termed 'recreational'. The drug is used occasionally for the pleasure the user finds in it, a relatively casual kind of behavior in comparison with that connected with the use of addicting drugs. The term 'use for pleasure' is meant to emphasize the noncompulsive and casual character of the behavior (Becker, 1953, pp.235-236).

In his early work, Becker outlined a three-stage process of learning 'how to be a drug user'. These involved learning the techniques of drug consumption, learning to recognise the effects, and learning to enjoy the effects. He described the social rules that serve as informal controls and define drug use as acceptable and pleasurable among groups of users. Becker elaborated on this theory in later work, including in his influential book *Outsiders* (1963). He offered the concept of 'social pharmacology', which explains how drug experience and perception of harms is socially mediated. His work debunked theories that prioritised the innate pharmacological properties of drugs as central to drug experiences.

Becker's work, and the concept of recreational drug use, received renewed attention through Zinberg's (1984) work, in which he proposed that 'controlled' forms of illicit drug use are possible and offered the 'drug, set, setting' framework. This emphasised that there is more to drug experience than the pharmacological effects of drugs on the body. Drug experiences are produced through the interaction of pharmacology ('drug'), individual characteristics and expectations ('set'), and the

social setting of use. This work took up Becker's notion that drug use is inevitably shaped by social sanctions and social rituals.

Others have pursued this focus. For example, US researchers Waldorf, Reinerman and Murphy (1991) conducted a study with 267 current and former heavy users of cocaine who were socially integrated. They found that long-term daily use that was heavy often led to problems, but that half of their sample were able to maintain 'controlled use' for long periods of time. Long-term, heavy and daily use of cocaine often resulted in an escalation of use and increased problems. The ability to control cocaine use was associated with the maintenance of 'meaningful life roles' in the mainstream. They argued that, among their sample, "a commitment to their everyday lives gave them a stake in normalcy and bonded them to the conventional world" (Waldorf *et al.*, 1991, p.220). They contend that the experiences of the cocaine users in their sample show that individuals need not experience harm and that they can reassert control if their use becomes problematic (Waldorf *et al.*, 1991, p.156). They stressed the possibilities for harm reduction through the examination of controlled drug practices. They argue that the experiences of their sample offer an opportunity for others to learn how to reduce harms experienced among other drug users (*ibid.*).

In the Australian context, Mugford and Cohen (1988) drew on Zinberg's work when they argued that the dominant framework in which drugs are understood is in relation to deficits – what they termed the 'pathology paradigm'. Based on his review of studies from the 1970s to the 1990s, Mugford found that:

use of drugs for social 'partying' purposes is commonly associated with a mode of use which is controlled and sharply different from obsessive use characteristic of the stereotypical 'junkie'. Moreover, such controlled use appears to be the norm rather than the exception (1991, p.247).

This conclusion was similar to Waldorf *et al.* (1991). Mugford (1994) went on to undertake research with cocaine users who were not involved in the treatment system and had not been arrested because of their use. He described his sample as "young, individualistic and educated users who partake of a cosmopolitan, peer oriented pattern of non-work activities in which partying looms large" (1994, p.128). He

wrote about a style of cocaine use that is “a part of a ‘lifestyle’ in which the ‘rhythms’ of that lifestyle dictate cocaine use, not vice versa” (1994, p.127).

Mugford argued that “we ought to ask what ‘fit’ there might be between such a group of people, the rhythms of life commonly found in such a group and the way they construct cocaine use” (1994, p.131).

Mugford pointed out that different types of society or different epochs have vastly different rhythms of life, and that modernity “has a very specific set of such rhythms” (1994, p.129). He contextualised drug use in relation to the growth of a modern, consumerist hedonism and the postmodern obsession with excitement simulation and the evanescent (Mugford, 1994, p.129). While he acknowledged that the use of cocaine and other drugs has harmful consequences for some, he drew from Zinberg’s ‘drug, set, setting’ model to highlight that drugs are understood and used differently in different contexts, and therefore have different outcomes. He wrote that “[T]his variability is only surprising if one reads cocaine as a ‘thing’ with determinate properties rather than as a possibility for creating and engendering a range of meanings and experiences” (Mugford 1994, p.131). Mugford called for greater attention to “set and setting” in drug research “so that the complex ways that a drug [...] entwines into a culture can be understood” (ibid).

Taking a similar approach to Mugford, Moore (1993a) also set out to develop Zinberg’s ‘drug, set, setting’ model. He proposed that recreational drug use is typically non-dependent and integrated into expressive or leisure-oriented aspects of life without dominating all other pursuits and pastimes or interfering with working life (1993a, p.414, a definition that Moore elaborated on in 1996). He also argued that the ways in which drug use is negotiated are themselves socially constructed and situated. Considering the evolving composition of social networks, Moore argued that rules and rituals associated with drug use are continually negotiated because of fluid social processes. Further, he suggested that the primary research focus on drug use might be misguided, as it may not be the central feature of activities within social networks.

Another extension of the work of Becker and Zinberg was offered by Grund, Kaplan and De Vries (1993), who argued that the successful utilisation of social controls requires not only rituals and rules, but also depends upon life structure and drug availability. An increasingly dynamic model of self-regulation was discussed by Decorte (2001), who argued that perceptions of drugs are a product of particular situations, contexts, events, time periods and drug use transitions. For Decorte, self-regulation and becoming a “controlled cocaine user” is a “cycle of processes” that the drug user learns over time as they develop experience and knowledge (2001, p.297).

The ‘normalisation’ thesis offers the most significant contribution to academic theorisation of cultural and social implications of youthful drug use in the 1990s and 2000s, and it is informed by concepts of recreational and controlled drug use. This literature is the major theoretical body informing this study and it is outlined in detail below.

Introducing the ‘normalisation’ thesis

The study that led to the development of the argument that drug use had become ‘culturally normalised’ amongst young adults began in 1991. A group of UK researchers based at the University of Manchester, and led by Howard Parker, gained funding to conduct a longitudinal study with young people who were aged 14 years. The study had a criminological focus, and it aimed to investigate the links between alcohol use and deviant behaviour. It was also funded on the back of significant concern over heroin use in the UK.

The major assumption guiding this study, at least initially, was that while certain drugs (such as heroin) and certain styles of drug use (such as injecting drug use) continue to be stigmatised, casual styles of drug use and drugs (such as cannabis, amphetamines, and ecstasy use) were no longer seen by young adults as marginal or deviant practices. The authors found that young people had ‘accommodated’ drug use into their understandings of normal leisure activities, and they led lives that were productive and functional. Involvement in other criminal or deviant behaviour among

the sample was unusual. This central proposition was elaborated on in the most significant publication related to this study – the book *Illegal Leisure* (Parker *et al.*, 1998).

In this book, the authors detailed six major aspects of their argument. First, drugs have become more accessible; second, the prevalence of drug use has increased, resulting in a narrowing of gender and social differences in drug-use patterns; third, young people make cost-benefit decisions concerning drug use, and use has filtered into less formal settings; fourth, young people are ‘drug-wise’ and open-minded about future use; fifth, young people hold future intentions to use drugs; and, sixth, drug use is increasingly accommodated into broader society, particularly through mass media (Parker *et al.*, 1998, pp.151-7).

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I provide a detailed summary of the argument for normalisation. There have been significant development to this argument as well as sustained criticism of its central claims. The purpose of outlining these aspects in Chapter 2 is to highlight some of the underdeveloped areas of the argument for normalisation and potential avenues for contemporary inquiry. My study is broadly oriented by the most widely accepted criticism of normalisation, which was originally put forward by Shiner and Newburn (1997). They argued that normalisation is a broad and overgeneralising meta-narrative that homogenises the experiences of young adults.

My work specifically takes up Sharon Rødner Sznitman’s concern over how functional and socially integrated young adults negotiate the continued stigma associated with drug use in the general community. Her work examines the Swedish context for illicit drug use and focuses on the ‘micro-level’ processes of negotiation that young adults undertake to alleviate tensions and anxieties provoked by their drug use. In particular, she examines the powerful ‘othering’ discourses that young adults draw on in order to distance themselves from stigma and legitimise their own drug-related activities.

Rødner Sznitman (2008) calls for greater consideration of the ‘micro-political’ implications of drug normalisation and the social processes associated with illicit

drug practice. Her work is outlined more fully in Chapter 2. Rødner Sznitman's concerns have been taken up recently by Pennay and Moore (2010), who examine the enactment of normal drug practice among a friendship network in Melbourne, Australia. Nevertheless, this continues to be a neglected area in contemporary drug research. Rødner Sznitman's focus on the continued tensions that are negotiated at the micro-level, particularly in relation to the management of identity, offers considerable opportunity for expansion and elaboration.

In this study, I take up this focus through ethnographic examination of the management of drug practice in relation to dually negotiated identities – that is, those within the mainstream and the EDM scene in Perth. I also examine the tensions, contradictions and inconsistencies in the negotiation of identity over time. I now briefly highlight the strengths and potential contributions of ethnographic research to the AOD research field and, specifically, in exploring the micro-level aspects of drug practice.

Ethnographic research in the drugs field

Ethnographic research typically focuses on the investigation of the cultural practices, social relations and political economy of a particular set of people or a particular social context. The necessity to build rapport and trust between the ethnographer and participants during often personalised and lengthy interactions in the 'field', means that ethnography is a particularly apt method for investigating cultural practices and activities that are 'hidden', illegal, or otherwise stigmatised, or groups that are hard to access. Scholars argue that it is for these reasons that ethnographic research is a particularly appropriate method for the investigation of illicit drug use (see Adler, 1985; Bourgois, 2002; Dwyer & Moore, 2010; Lalander, 2003; Maher, 1997, 2002; Moore, 1995; Slavin, 2004b).

In particular, ethnographic research, where the primary research method is participant observation, focuses on the in-depth observation of social relations in everyday settings and their creation, maintenance and transformation. The most distinctive characteristic of ethnographic research is the endeavour to gain an

insider's perspective on the 'lived experience' of research participants through a significant investment of time spent among individuals and groups as they go about their lives.

Ethnography focuses on cultural practices and social relationships rather than on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, or individuals. It does not rely on self-report data, but analyses practices and actions within social contexts. Ethnography offers significant advantages in the continued exploration of drug use in the community, and particularly in the study of micro-level identity processes and group negotiation of drug practices. While no longer considered 'rare' (Pennay & Moore, 2010; Siokou *et al.*, 2010), this method continues to be under-utilised in the AOD field in Australia. This is particularly the case for more traditional forms of ethnography which involve the investment of a significant amount of time (between one and three years) in the field by the primary researcher.

I now summarise the methods used in this study and the central objectives guiding my investigation.

Project aims and methodology

This study aims to gain insight into the social worlds of young adults who regularly use ATS, are aged between 18 and 30 years, and do not use AOD services. I briefly outline the method used here, but full details will be provided in Chapter 3. Recruitment was conducted via 'snowball' sampling, which is a process of recruitment from a small number of seed contacts via processes of social networking, and that "partakes in the dynamics of natural and organic social networks" (Noy, 2008, p.329). Data collection was undertaken across 18 months from 2006 to mid-2007. The ethnographic method incorporated participant observation with 60 individuals, coupled with complementary in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a subset of 25 individuals. The fieldwork settings were primarily nightclubs, bars, private parties, and large EDM events held primarily in inner-city areas of Perth – all natural social settings for participants. The young adults involved in this study were identifiable as a social network because they all participated in Perth's local EDM

scene. The ethnographic research process involved the simultaneous collection of data and the generation of hypotheses or theories from these data. The central research questions in participant observation and in-depth interviews were informed by normalisation studies and the work of Australian club and drug researchers such as Cameron Duff (2003b, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2008). I outline the research literature that provides a framework to this study, as well as the central issues informing my focus, more fully in Chapter 2.

In summary, my attention was focused on issues including the individual and shared practices of licit and illicit drug use (with particular attention to ATS use); the relationship of drug practices with social and cultural processes such as group membership; stylistic aspects of use; and broader discourses informing negotiation of acceptable drug use. I also examine how boundaries of acceptable and desirable practice were decided upon in social contexts, and how well they were individually negotiated, adhered to and maintained over time. This included attention to areas of contestation, inconsistency and tensions associated with the maintenance of dual identities within the mainstream and within the EDM scene. To conclude this introductory chapter, I provide an outline of the chapters that comprise the body of this thesis.

Chapter outline

This thesis argues that the values associated with particular ATS practices are more nuanced and contested than have been depicted within accounts of normalised drug use among young adults. Analysis in this thesis is framed by exploration of the negotiation of dual identities claimed by young adults in this study. These are their self-identification as normal within the context of the mainstream community; and their simultaneous identification in values in the EDM scene and pursuit of a ‘scenester’ lifestyle, which included illicit drug use. This thesis explores the tensions and uncertainties associated with straddling two worlds.

I examine how straddling this position of duality results in complexities, tensions and nuances in drug practice that were continually negotiated. This destabilised understandings of what is normal. Chapters proceed accordingly.

In Chapter 2, I outline the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis in this thesis, with specific attention to the ‘normalisation’ research. I map out my contribution to normalisation research, which is to the theorisation of the ‘micro-politics’ of normalisation. Chapter 3 outlines the ethnographic methods I used to undertake data collection, incorporating discussions of recruitment, the negotiation of issues of consent and other ethical considerations, and how the process of data collection illuminated key themes central to my analysis.

Chapters 4 and 5 locate participants in two discrete but overlapping social fields: the social and economic mainstream, and the EDM ‘scene’. In Chapter 4 I explore socio-demographic characteristics of scenesters generally. I draw on an ethnographic account of the personal stories of six scenesters who feature throughout this thesis. Chapter 5 elaborates on some values and social processes that defined scenester identity and membership in the scene. The pursuit of status was important and was achieved through expression of ‘authentic’ EDM enthusiasm and through social networking – or being ‘known’ within the scene. I argue that pursuit of status in the scene informed understandings of acceptable and desirable drug practice.

Chapters 6 to 10 present ethnographic analysis of the social and cultural contexts of ATS and other drug use among scenesters. In Chapter 6, I explore the decreased symbolic value of ecstasy use and the preference for moderate and/or private use among scenesters. The main argument presented here is that the cultural values attributed to ecstasy use were unsettled and negotiated in flexible ways.

Chapter 7 describes how scenesters reconciled the status of alcohol as a fun and ‘social’ drug but one that was associated with the undesirable experience of loss of control and tiredness. This was achieved through concomitant use of diverted dexamphetamine or ‘dexies’ – a drug readily available in the local landscape. Analysis explores how, while use of dexies was casualised, understandings of dexies

and the ways scenesters rationalised their use, complicated understandings of drug-related pleasure and harm.

In Chapter 8, I examine how the status of meth smoking as a recreational drug practice was uncertain and contested within the network. This is contextualised by public discourse emphasising the addictive properties of the drug and its association with personal degradation. Two sub-arguments are put forward. First, negotiation of quasi-private and private forms of use (in 'meth circles') illustrates the importance of management of a non-stigmatised identity. Second, inconsistent views about whether meth smoking was social or controlled, and reassessment of involvement by users, exposed the instability of the values associated with recreational style use among scenesters.

In Chapter 9, I explore the micro-level management of recreational drug-using identity over time, particularly in relation to the maintenance of competent and self-managing identities. I argue that scenesters drew on limited, deficit-based social constructs of drug users to derive understandings of what constituted recreational forms of drug use, and therefore boundaries were subjectively interpreted, highly variable and rooted in relational experiences. This is underpinned by uncertainty about the limitations of normalised drug use in relation to the realisation of 'adult' identity.

Chapter 10 summarises the main arguments presented throughout this thesis, elaborates on how this work contributes to academic knowledge and concludes with discussion of policy implications.

– CHAPTER 2 –

The cultural ‘normalisation’ of drug use and its implications: A literature review

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature on the cultural ‘normalisation’ of drug use. It summarises the theoretical work underpinning normalisation research and, following an appraisal of the major critiques of the normalisation thesis, outlines the academic contribution of this thesis.

The normalisation thesis was originally put forward by UK researchers Howard Parker, Fiona Measham, Judith Aldridge and others in the early 1990s (Measham *et al.*, 1993a; Measham *et al.*, 1994; Measham *et al.*, 1993b; Parker & Measham, 1994). The authors, both collaboratively and individually, have produced a sizeable body of work based on the ongoing results of the longitudinal study on which the normalisation thesis is based. The crux of this work is the proposition that some forms of drug use have become more culturally acceptable or ‘normal’ among certain sections of the UK population. In this chapter I summarise this literature before detailing the six aspects comprising the argument for normalisation. I also outline three main theoretical themes that underpin the normalisation argument: first, normalisation researchers consider the cultural positioning of ‘risk’ in a modern world, drawing on the work of Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1991); second, they situate drug use in relation to leisure and market trends in post-industrial societies; and third, they draw on sociological work exploring the impact of broader social, economic and cultural changes on the experiences of young people as they enter adulthood. These theoretical themes also provide a backdrop to my investigation.

One of the aims of this chapter is to highlight the contribution made by this thesis to the normalisation literature. My contribution is underpinned by the major critiques levelled against the normalisation argument, which draw attention to the complex, nuanced and negotiated aspects of normalisation. In particular, I draw on work by Sharon Rødner Sznitman (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008). This chapter reviews her work and argues that attention to the micro-political implications

of normalisation can provide insights into the social construction and negotiation of identity in relation to illicit drug practice. This approach exposes some under-developed aspects of the literature that are taken up within this study.

There is a dearth of research exploring the implications of micro-level aspects such as how connections and values that are shared within networks of young adults inform specific drug practices. First, this study considers how young adults negotiate drug use in association with specific identities and membership among their peers. I explore the significance of drug use within the Perth EDM scene as observed among and represented by my ethnographic participants. I explore the values and beliefs associated with performance of a 'scenester' identity informed the significance that drug use had within the various contexts comprising the scene. Further, I consider the areas of tension and contestation in the enactment of shared values.

Second, I explore the tensions that are produced by the maintenance of 'dual identities' among my participants – that is, mainstream values and priorities and the values and beliefs that are negotiated within their drug-using peer-groups. This departs from individualised representations of drug practice towards a nuanced account of negotiated identity management processes and extends Rødner Sznitman's line of enquiry because it situates young people in social contexts.

Finally, I argue that there has been little articulation of the ways that young adults negotiate recreational drug-using identities in relation to 'adult' identities. Analysis of processual and renegotiated aspects of drug practice in this thesis contributes to nuanced and sensitive understandings of 'normalised' drug experience among young adults. These areas of contribution are summarised at the end of this chapter.

Before beginning my examination of the normalisation literature and the specific contribution of this study, I review academic work on raves and clubbing, focusing on the UK literature. These studies informed the work on normalisation because they analysed illicit drug use outside of the framework of pathology and deviance. I argue, however, that approaches of youth cultural studies researchers may offer useful tools in the conceptualisation of nuanced understanding of normalisation. The work of post-subcultural studies researchers is drawn on in later chapters, particularly when

analysing meanings of group activities shared amongst young adults and the importance of personal status in informing understandings of pleasurable drug use and shaping drug practices.

Raves, clubs and post-subculture studies

Prior to the 1980s, youth cultural research was most strongly defined by the work undertaken researchers from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham (Doherty, 2011, October 28; S. Hall, 1976; Perez *et al.*, 2012). Highly visible working-class youth cultures in post-war Britain were the focus. These included ‘mods’, ‘rockers’, ‘teddy boys’, ‘skinheads’ and ‘punks’. The subcultural approach was most comprehensively defined in *Resistance through Rituals* (S. Hall, 1976). Drawing from a neo-Marxist framework, the defining point of analysis was that ‘subculture’ was a product of class struggle, and unique styles (such as fashion and grooming) represented resistance to control the dominant class. This resistance was expressed in various stylistic forms. For example, mods (P. Cohen, 1972) were interpreted as competing for higher status through an exaggeration of middle class, conservative dress style and demonstration of expensive tastes (e.g. wearing suits). Likewise, skinheads reacted to their lower-class conditions through nihilistic and self-destructive practices such as aggression, heavy drinking and barbiturate use. The CCCS approach attracted considerable criticism (e.g. Hollands, 1990; MacDonald, 1991) and this contributed to the relative dormancy of youth culture research in the 1980s (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2006). However, the emergence of ‘raves’ or ‘dance parties’ in the late 1980s reinvigorated interest in youth cultural research. ‘Raving’ represented a unique set of stylistic practices (Reynolds, 1998; Saunders & Doblin 1996), and it provided fertile ground for a new wave of researchers who were informed by postmodern theoretical approaches. Before summarising the approaches and contributions of these ‘post-subcultural’ researchers, I outline some of the characteristics of the rave tradition.

The roots of the rave tradition are diverse and contested. They range from the gay, ‘black’, dance scene in New York in the 1970s, the Chicago house scene (1970s–1980s); the Detroit ‘techno’ scene of the early 1980s; and Britain’s ‘acid house’ scene (linked to clubs in Ibiza, Spain) in the 1980s (Wilson, 2006). Rave style is

discussed comprehensively in the international rave and club studies literature¹³. The focus of events was dancing, and rave parties usually lasted all night. The unifying ethos of raving promoted acceptance, sharing and openness according to an ethos of 'Peace, Love, Unity and Respect', or 'PLUR' (Weber, 1999). Raving was associated with distinct fashion, such as baggy, fluorescent clothing and accessories such as whistles and glowsticks (Wilson, 2006). Some rave participants also reportedly revelled in symbols of childhood – wearing rainbow colours, cartoon emblems, and expressing the PLUR ethos through enthusiastic, friendly behaviour, and the indiscriminate acceptance of others (Weber, 1999).

An integral aspect of rave culture(s) was EDM. Though diverse, EDM is critically defined by synthesisation and an emphasis on musical beats rather than lyrics. Distinctive and innovative computer-generated music styles such as 'acid house', 'techno', 'trance', 'jungle', 'gabba', 'happy hardcore', 'trip-hop', 'techstep' and 'garage' (these are explored in Reynolds, 1997) developed in the cultural context of raves. These forms continued to fragment, blend and diversify into 'subgenres', which number in the hundreds (Brewster & Broughton, 1999; Fikentscher, 2000).

Rave parties were initially unlicensed and held in a diverse range of venues ranging from underground clubs to abandoned urban warehouses and forested areas. However, over time, they attracted increased public attention and regulation (Luckman, 2000). The associated public media exposure – and panic in relation to reported drug use – contributed to the demise of underground and unlicensed rave scenes across the world in the mid to late 1990s, and the transformation of the scene into diffuse and profit-driven 'club' and 'dance music' scenes. Accompanying these shifts, EDM styles began to enter the commercial mainstream and they continued to diversify greatly (Shapiro, 1999).

¹³ Commentators have written in the context of North America and Canada (Anderson, 2009; Hunt *et al.*, 2010; Silcott, 1999; Wilson, 2006); the UK (Colin & Godfrey, 1998) and Australia (Luckman, 2000).

A key feature of rave scenes across the world was their inextricable association with the use of alcohol and a range of party drugs, particularly ecstasy. Ecstasy was informally branded the “flagship rave drug” (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007). The chemical effects of ecstasy which are understood to promote empathy with others (described as ‘empathogenic’) were inextricable from the rave ethos of ‘PLUR’.

Although raves were strongly linked to illegal drug use, young rave and club goers were not generally involved in other violent or acquisitive forms of ‘crime’ and composition of crowds was diverse. While the focus of subcultural studies researchers was on ‘deviance’ and criminal activity, rave participants were understood to be otherwise ‘normal’ and productive members of society. The criminological and psychological theories that underpinned early youth culture studies were put aside by many researchers, who drew on postmodern theoretical approaches to theorise social formations of rave and club-goers, and critically analyse implications for individual and collective identity.

Although there has been considerable debate relating to the ‘meaning’ of postmodernism, researchers tend to agree that it represents a reaction against modernist concerns about truth and knowledge. Grenz writes that the postmodern ethos “resists unified, all-encompassing, and universally valid explanations” (1996, p.12). Summarising the ‘postmodern turn’, Stahl (2003) writes that, “in the aestheticized setting of the quotidian there are no commodities left, just signs... [S]ubcultural style becomes simulacra, copies with no originals” (p.29, citing Muggleton, 1997, p.196). The implication, he adds, is that there is no space for originality and creative practices become “depthless manifestations of post-modern pastiche” (Stahl, 2003, p.29). Postmodern theory strongly informed the critical re-consideration of notions of ‘authenticity’ of youth cultural practices.

On the back of comprehensive critiques of the CCCS approach, developments in post-subcultural studies were characterised by what Weinzierl and Muggleton describe as a “wrestling for a new conception more adequately disposed to capture the changing sensibilities and practices of post-subcultural formations” (2003, p.6). Of particular significance to this study is the argument that young people no longer ‘belong’ to particular subcultures or adopt values within groups in a homogenous and

uniform way. Steve Redhead (1990, 1993, 1997) first introduced the 'popular cultural studies' approach and the concept of post-subcultures. He drew on Baudrillard's notion of 'simulation' to suggest that subcultures are no more than surface phenomena and to debunk notions of 'authenticity' promulgated by subcultural theorists.

Departing from a modernist concern with socio-structural identities, Michel Maffesoli's work (1995) considered the collective association of people who share allegiances that are organised around values more than identities, and which may be temporary and multiple. He described these informal associations as 'microgroups'. Maffesoli argued that identity is situationally specific, and that associations are not so much expressions of stable identity (who you are) as much as a repertoire of ways of being (how you are in particular places and situations). He also offered the concept of 'urban tribes' to conceptualise the nebulous and fluid social identity and forms of collective expression among groups.

Andy Bennett (1999) took up Maffesoli's concern that collective associations between individuals in society are shifting and are becoming increasingly consumer oriented (1995). Using Maffesoli's term 'tribus' (reframed as 'neo-tribes' by Hetherington, 1992), Bennett analysed the participation of young people in a UK dance music scene, describing the experience as 'tribal'. Summarising neo-tribal theory, Bennett writes:

In contrast to subcultural theory, which argues that individuals are 'held', if not 'forced', together in subcultural groups by the fact of class, community, race or gender, neo-tribal theory allows for the function of taste, aesthetics and affectivity as primary drivers for participation in forms of collective youth cultural activity (1999, p.495).

For Bennett (1999), ways of enacting identity are dependent on context, and individuals are free to choose among these ways of being. Bennett's emphasis is on lifestyle 'choice'. He does not discount the role of social stratification completely, but he does consider how consumerism offers the individual new ways of negotiating structural issue (1999, p.607).

As well as increased articulation of the different factors that inform collective youthful associations, postmodern theory has also brought increased attention to the subjective and emotional dimensions of clubbing and raving. For example, Malbon (1999) describes the experience of being in a crowd as “in-betweenness or liminality – of being somehow taken outside of or beyond oneself... sensorially bombarded” (Malbon, 2005, p.492, orig publ 1997). He also writes of the “ecstasy, joy, euphoria, ephemerality, empathy, alterity, release, the loss and subsequent gaining of control, and notions of escape” as “oceanic” (ibid). This work also considers the interaction between self and environment – an aspect of spatiality that was seldom considered in previous studies.

Straw’s application of the term ‘scene’, which was derived from popular music studies contributed to this academic discussion. This work is particularly relevant in the current context because it offers a framework for the consideration of beliefs and values that connected the young adults in my thesis. Straw (1991; 2002) used the term to describe “geographically specific spaces for the articulation of multiple musical practices” (2002, p.8). He writes that:

With the increased attention to the urban within cultural studies, categories like subculture, community or movement have come to seem less and less able to contain the variety of activities which transpire within them, or the fluid mobility in which they participate. 'Scene' seems more efficient at expanding to encircle these activities (Straw, 2002, p.252).

The flexibility of the concept is emphasised, as is the way that scenes function as sites of fluid urban community – both intimate and cosmopolitan (Silver *et al.*, 2010). A useful characteristic of scenes is the way that they encapsulate processes of globalisation. According to Straw (1991), scenes are semi-localised – often having their own sense of community – but usually reference a sense of global style.

Applying the concept of ‘scene’ to the study of rave participation among young people in Perth in the early 1990s, Moore (1993a, 1993b) also argued that the term ‘scene’ is more appropriate than ‘subculture’. According to Moore, ‘scene’ more adequately encapsulates the cultural diversity, fluidity and heterogeneity of social

entities and accounts for overlaps between social groups who may not have traditional ties such as ‘friendship’ (2004, p.201).

The academic theorisation of heterogeneous connections of youth through lifestyle and sensibilities rather than neighbourhood or class, gave rise to the consideration of social competition and distinction. This theme was most influentially taken up by Sarah Thornton. Thornton’s (1996, p.184) analysis of the processes of social conflict and cultural competition that occurred within club cultures was heavily informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) perspectives on ‘taste’, ‘distinction’ and ‘cultural capital’.

Thornton (1996) offered a useful approach to the consideration of youthful identity-shaping in relation to clubbing, when she described club cultures as ‘taste cultures’. She writes:

Club culture is the colloquial expression given to the British youth cultures for whom dance clubs and their offshoot, raves, are the symbolic axis and working hub. Club culture is not a unitary culture but a cluster of sub-cultures which share this territorial affiliation, but maintain their own dress codes, dance styles, music genres and catalogue of authorized and illicit rituals. Club cultures are taste cultures. The crowds congregate on the basis of their shared taste in music, their consumption of common media and, most importantly, their preference for people with similar tastes to themselves (Thornton, 1996, p.184).

The notion of ‘subcultural capital’ is central to her consideration of hierarchies, conflict and membership within these club cultures. Explaining her use of the term, she argues that ‘sub’ does not imply ‘substandard’ but refers to ‘subterranean’ – the excluded, the oppressed, the underground (Thornton, 1997). She explains the relevance of this concept to young people’s participation in music culture in the following way:

Although it converts into economic capital, subcultural capital is not as class-bound as cultural capital. This is not to say that class is irrelevant, simply that it does not correlate in any one-to-one way with levels of youthful subcultural capital. In fact, class is wilfully obfuscated by subcultural distinctions... The assertion of subcultural distinction relies, in part, on a fantasy of classlessness. This may be one reason why

music is the cultural form privileged within youth's subcultural worlds (Thornton, 2006, p.101).

Although the fantasy of classlessness allows the possibility of heterogeneity, Thornton argues that club spaces are encoded by sets of values. Specifically, the unifying logic is 'hipness' – that is, cultural knowledge and commodities are acquired by participants to raise their status and help differentiate themselves from members of other groups (Thornton, 1996). Weinzierl and Muggleton point out that Thornton's work has led to "a growing concern with performativity as a basis for comprehending the ongoing construction of subcultural identities" (2003, p.5).

The work of post-subcultural studies researchers provides a backdrop to the broader consideration of drug practices within socio-cultural frameworks rather than criminological or biomedical ones. The normalisation researchers took up consideration of leisure oriented drug use and stylistic practice. They situated the consideration of identity, as well as values of pleasure and control in relation to broader socio-cultural and economic changes in the modern world.

I argue that some of the offerings of post-subcultural studies research in the 1990s may enhance the analysis of nuanced understandings of the implications of normalisation. In later chapters, this study takes up Straw's conceptualisation of 'scene' and Thornton's use of the concept of 'subcultural capital' to explore the notions of membership and belonging among scenesters, but also the simultaneous processes of competition and status building that occurred among them and how this informed the value and significance attributed to specific drug practices.

The argument for normalisation is outlined in detail below. I also provide an overview of developments and critical treatment of normalisation research. This provides a backdrop to the discussion of the contribution of this thesis.

The cultural 'normalisation' of drug use

In 1991, a research group at the University of Manchester began a longitudinal study of young people's drug-taking behaviours in north-west England. Originally concerned with investigating the relationship between alcohol and offending among a 'post-heroin generation' (following high rates of heroin use in 1980s), Parker and

colleagues noted significantly higher rates of drug-trying and current use among their cohort of almost 800 adolescents in comparison to previous studies (Measham *et al.*, 1993a; Measham *et al.*, 1993b). Their analysis was informed by the observation that drug-using students were similar to the ‘normal population’ of young people across a number of measures. Further, socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, were weaker indicators of use than previously reported. That is, their sample could not generally be considered ‘delinquent’, marginalised or necessarily even experiencing problems from their use. The authors suggested that a social transformation was occurring in respect of recreational drug use and that a broader process of cultural ‘normalisation’ of drug use was underway (Measham *et al.*, 1994).

This general statement came with some important caveats. The first was that normalisation did not imply that drug use was accepted outright or uncritically among young people – that is, that ‘it is normal for young people to take drugs’. Rather, most young Britons will have tried an illicit drug before their twenties, and it has become something that is not necessarily considered to be ‘deviant’ (Parker *et al.* 1998, p.152-3). Second, the thesis was primarily based on the prevalence of and attitudes to the use of cannabis. For example, amphetamines, ecstasy, nitrites and LSD were also considered a part of normalisation and notions of ‘recreational use’ at the time excluded ‘hard drugs’ such as heroin and cocaine. Further, certain styles of drug use were not included in the thesis. For example, Parker *et al.* state that “chaotic combination drug use and dependent ‘daily’ drug use form no part of our conceptualisation” because “[T]he minority of young people who use ‘hard’ drugs the hard way are not regarded as recreational drug users by most of their peers” (1998, p.152). Thus, according to their analysis, normal use was negotiated and regulated among peers.

A key feature of the normalisation thesis was that it represented a move away from theoretical approaches that linked drug use to the psychological deficiencies of young people. Parker *et al.*’s analysis integrated understandings about the “reasoned” decision-making processes of young adults, self-regulation, functional drug-use and control. The authors stated that they were “disappointed by theoretical projects in

sociology, psychology, and social policy” and they argued that dominant positivistic paradigms (particularly quantitative criminology and developmental psychology) were inadequate in illuminating the reasons for increased uptake and accommodation of drug use among otherwise mainstream young people (Parker *et al.*, 1998, p.29). The normalisation researchers conceptualised young people as active agents rather than individuals solely driven by the effect of group ‘forces’ such as peer pressure or normative values, problematising approaches focused on crime, deviancy and harms which originally informed the basis for their study (Parker & Measham, 1994).

Importantly, normalisation research is not a static body of work. The research encompassed seven phases of quantitative data that tracked a cohort from 1991, when participants were 14 years of age (the median age of 716 respondents), to 2004, when they were aged 27 years (219 respondents). Qualitative interviews were also conducted with subsets of participants at a number of time points (1996, 2000). The final qualitative interviews were conducted in 2005 with 19 participants (aged 28 years), many of whom had been interviewed previously (Aldridge *et al.*, 2011, pp.186-200). The book *Illegal Leisure*, published in 1998 (Parker *et al.*), most comprehensively outlined the key features of the argument. These are: drug availability, drug-trying, drug use, being drugwise, future intentions to use drugs and the cultural accommodation of the illicit (pp.153-156).

Drug availability

Although the rates of drug-trying among the original cohort of 14 year olds were comparatively higher than those reported in previous surveys, the authors noted that by the age of 18 years all of their respondents had been in a situation where illicit drugs were available to try or buy (Parker *et al.* 1998, p.153). This aspect of normalisation was linked to statistics that showed an increase in seizure of drugs by authorities. Normalisation researchers argued that the availability of drugs in the illicit market, decrease in market prices (they referred to cocaine in particular) and the maintenance of purity levels of drugs supported and promoted the cultural environments of drug-trying among young people. This was also associated with what was termed a ‘commodification’ of the psychoactive experience – a trend that also applied to alcohol.

Drug-trying

A second aspect of the normalisation thesis is that drug-trying began at a younger age than it did among previous generations, and involvement extended later into adulthood. This was accompanied by the closure of gender and class differences – for example, Parker et al. wrote that while previously young men ‘experimented’ with drugs more than young women, this was no longer the case. Further, they found that education did not necessarily insulate young people from drug-trying. This disrupted stereotypes that drug-trying was linked to academic failure and delinquency (Parker *et al.* 1998, p.154).

Drug use

Parker and his colleagues theorised that decision-making around continued drug use is dynamic and driven by ‘cost-benefit assessments’. That is, young people continue to make choices regarding their style of use, for example, types and patterns of drugs that they used. They showed that young people used drugs in polydrug combinations and argued that this represented a ‘pick ’n’ mix’ approach, which also involved matching the choice of drug(s) type to personal preferences such as mood and social context (Parker & Measham, 1994). The drug-use patterns of this cohort were also found to be embedded in environments that supported use. This was particularly the case in club cultures (Parker *et al.* 1998, p.154).

Being ‘drugwise’

The fourth point in the normalisation thesis related to the finding that, even when young people chose not to use drugs, or were ‘abstainers’, they were still knowledgeable about recreational drugs. This was interpreted as “a ‘soft’ incidental measure of normalisation” (Parker *et al.* 1998, p.155) a sign that drugs were present in the social worlds of all young people, whether or not they used themselves. Based on the high prevalence of drug use among their peers, Parker *et al.* surmised that abstainers could not easily avoid having relationships with drug users, and found that abstainers accommodated others’ decisions to use drugs (*ibid.*, p.102). Furthermore, normalisation researchers found that social drug use was treated in a ‘matter-of-fact’

way by respondents, and this accommodated a distinction between drug misuse and 'sensible' use (ibid, p.155). This distinction contributed to individual decisions about use. Acceptance of social drug use also informed the interpretation of drug dealing among friends. The activity was interpreted within a frame of trust and friendship and was rarely perceived as a criminal offence (ibid, p.155).

Future intentions to use drugs

This fifth dimension of normalisation held that young people were open-minded about future drug use. This aspect was supported by exploration of the 'drug careers' of the research cohort. Initially the normalisation researchers categorised young people according to four groups: current drug users, former triers, those in transition and abstainers. I explain these categories below.

'Current drug users' included those in the sample who had used within the past month and intended to use again. At the other end of the spectrum were 'abstainers' – a group that had not used and did not plan to use in the future. As discussed previously, this group usually accommodated others' drug choices. This reflected the reality that young people are likely to encounter drug use among their peers and therefore need to come to terms with this reality despite their own decisions not to use.

'Former triers', shared a common 'abstentionist' attitude with abstainers; they had stopped using, but had previous drug-using experience (ranging from trying to heavy use), and had stopped using. Those 'in transition', were the most difficult to categorise because they had tried drugs and intended to use again in the future but did not currently use. Their 'pro-drug' attitudes differentiated them from abstainers, and they were deemed more likely to move towards rather than away from regular use (Aldridge *et al.*, 2011, p.137). They were individuals who were "reviewing and revising their drug status" (Aldridge *et al.*, 2011 p.127).

As the normalisation cohort aged, while the researchers found that they generally 'matured out' of using, this was delayed, and they broadly 'settled' into drug status groups (Williams & Parker, 2001). This was attributed to the movement into different life stages. Categorisation of drug status groups was therefore revised to

reflect this finding. The ‘in-transition’ category was collapsed with ‘abstainers’ because the two broadly shared the same tolerant attitudes towards others’ use and current non-use (Parker *et al.*, 2002). Further, when the cohort was aged 22 years, the category ‘former triers’ was re-titled ‘ex-users’ because they had settled into a longer-term pattern of abstaining – even if they had used heavily in the past. A new category of ‘opportunistic users’ was developed to capture occasional styles of use that were common among this older group (Parker *et al.*, 2002).

Overwhelmingly, however, the analysis of drug careers supported a case for normalisation because very few members of the cohort were completely abstinent from illicit drug use or did not intend to use in the future.

Cultural accommodation of the illicit

The sixth dimension of the normalisation argument moved to the crux of the analysis: broader cultural change. The authors showed that the cohort incorporated drugs into their lives in different ways to the socially excluded users of heroin observed in the 1980s and crack cocaine users in the 1990s (Parker *et al.*, 1998, p.156). They observed that the majority of young people successfully accommodated recreational use into their leisure time in ways that ‘fit’ alongside busy lives and were not driven by physical addiction. This was a style that was observed among males and females alike, as well as across a range of social backgrounds. The authors contextualised this finding in relation to wider changes in global and British culture, including fashion, media, music and the alcohol industry.

I now explore three themes that organise the broader discussion of normalisation: the re-framing of risk in the modern world, leisure and pleasure in consumer culture, and broader transitions between youth and adulthood.

Theoretical frameworks

Normalisation and risk

From a theoretical perspective, the normalisation research was underpinned by Anthony Giddens’ (1991) work exploring the forging of modern identity. He argued that, in a postmodern world, individuals are increasingly expected to construct their

own biographies. That is, they must shape who they want to be in order to reach 'self-fulfilment'. While they have greater access to 'expert knowledge' and are considered better equipped to manage risks for themselves (e.g. making decisions about health), they are expected to be rational, autonomous decision-makers. Ulrich Beck's (1992) conceptualisation of 'risk society' also informed the argument for normalisation. Beck discusses how contemporary society has become ever more risk conscious, and individuals are increasingly expected to manage themselves in relation to rational calculations of risk. An important point made by both Beck and Giddens is that increased choice and freedom is also accompanied by individualised responsibility for the consequences of poor decisions.

This theoretical strand within the normalisation research considers the ways that young people view risk-taking in late modernity – where risk is conceived of as a way of life. These notions inform Parker *et al.*'s (1998) proposal that young people make 'cost-benefit' decisions in relation to risks associated with drug use. They conceptualise young people as active, rational decision-makers – as negotiators of risk. Decision-making in relation to illicit drugs is likened to decisions made in relation to other legal 'risky' activities ranging from tobacco smoking to adventure sports (1998, p.208). They also recognise young people's capacity to make informed decisions about their own lifestyles in relation to the enactment of broader identity-shaping projects.

Parker *et al.* also considered how young people negotiate the place that hedonistic experience has for them in relation to contemporary experiences of work pressure and stress. Risk-taking practices were set against a backdrop of macro socio-cultural and economic shifts. This aspect of analysis was elaborated on more fully in later work. For example, Parker and Williams write:

This is a conventional sample, the majority of whom are well educated, starting promising careers and the remainder gainfully employed. Very few are unemployed or involved in crime. Their substance use is largely shaped by a work hard – play hard ethos with the weekends hosting most psycho-active consumption. For drinking [...] we see that alcohol use is linked to pleasure and enjoyment, essentially going out after work or at weekends [...] However alongside this enthusiasm for 'time out' and strongly represented in the main reasons for drinking, is stress relief and the

notion of self medicating to ‘wind down’ to temporarily forget everyday pressures. There is new priority given to these less hedonistic motives compared with earlier self-assessments (2003, p.407).

Here, Parker and Williams acknowledge that while “psycho-active consumption” is partly about seeking hedonistic experience, in the context of modern stresses, seeking such experiences can be understood as a coping mechanism.

In the second edition of *Illegal Leisure*, Aldridge and colleagues argue that the underlying political motive of normalisation researchers was “to cast young people in a more positive light, as reasonable, responsible agents making their drug-taking decisions, weighing up the costs and benefits of their actions, carefully deciding which drugs to take or avoid” (2011, p.217). That is, while they may be doing something that is illegal, they are actually conforming to dominant values of rationality, moderation and self-regulation.

An original contributor to normalisation research, Fiona Measham has significantly extended this theme by exploring the ways that young adults conceptualise risk and harms in relation to pleasure and hedonistic experience, and take risks in intentional and rationalised ways. She writes of an expression of hedonism that is constrained within boundaries of time, space, company and intensity (Measham, 2004a). This notion of controlling risk in relation to intoxication experiences has been framed in various ways – as ‘controlled loss of control’ (Measham *et al.*, 2001), ‘determined drunkenness’ (Measham, 2006), ‘bounded hedonistic consumption’, ‘rational hedonism’ and ‘calculated hedonism’ (Brain, 2000, pp.7-8).

This perspective, which considers the ways that young people weigh up competing demands of control and hedonistic experience is drawn upon to contextualise the experiences of scenesters and the ways that they negotiate tensions between different sets of discourses such as control and pleasure. Parker *et al.*’s treatment of the negotiation of values of control in relation to pleasure extends into a second major theme within normalisation literature which considers the role of the consumer market and identity shaping processes. I outline this theoretical aspect of the normalisation literature below.

Identity, psychoactive consumption and normalisation

A second central theoretical concept integral to normalisation research is the proposition that young adults' relationships with leisure are different to previous generations. This is underpinned by their ability, through participation in the workforce, to also be participants in consumerist society. The disposable income of young people and young adults (given that they typically have few financial commitments) means that they are ready targets for the consumer market and advertising. Researchers write of how the mass media and advertising industry encourages the 'youth' market to consume as a way of forging meaning and shaping identity in the modern world. This proposition is woven into normalisation work. In *Illegal Leisure*, Parker and colleagues write:

The challenging prediction offered is that given the potency of global fashion, leisure, and 'pleasure' markets we are moving to a situation where the world of leisure is not a vehicle for transporting or displaying youthful identity but is the cultural milieu in which young people actually create their personal and social identities (1998, p.28, citing Hollands, 1995).

The authors proposed as a potential explanatory theory that "changing patterns of consumption are related to the fragmentation of subcultural worlds and perhaps even the reframing of youth culture" (1998, p.28).

Analysis of the complexities of consumerist and leisure economies that support the drug practices of youth and young adults – and their relationship to forming identity– has become increasingly integrated into broader discussions about the processes of normalisation. A particular focus is the diversification and proliferation of the alcoholic beverage industries and their integration into illicit drug cultures. Based on findings from a school study in north-west England, Brain, Howard and Carnwath (2000) wrote about the drug consumption of designer drinks among their sample in relation to identity. They suggest that:

[p]oly-drug repertoires should be understood on the broader backcloth of the commodification of youth culture whereby young people are urged by potent market forces to purchase and consume leisure and through fashion even purchase elements

of their social identity rather than create it themselves (Brain, Howard & Carnwath, 2000, p.17).

According to these researchers, the alcohol consumption patterns of young people are inextricably linked to the marketing industry, which targets them as psychoactive consumers.

Measham extended the theoretical consideration of drug use as a consumerist experience that is associated with the shaping of identity. She writes:

[the] contemporary socio-cultural milieu [...] is more complex and multi-faceted than that of previous generations; where consumption is central to the leisure experience and where leisure is central to the construction and performance of image within a performative society (Rojek, 2000). This is evident across a range of aspirational, risk taking, status defining and image enhancing leisure time pursuits including the consumption of legal and illicit drugs (Measham, 2002, p.338).

In particular, Measham explores the relationship between psychoactive consumption and control in contemporary leisure space. One of the most critical concepts in the current thesis, which was introduced earlier, is the way young adults negotiate tensions between the states of bodily control and pleasure. Drawing on Kevin Brain's (2000) work, Measham argues that the individualised pressure to be responsible in everyday life is offset during 'bounded hedonistic consumption'. In later work she terms this 'controlled loss of control' (Measham, 2004b), writing:

Drinking and recreational drug use occur at specific times and in specific places. The counter balance to the control, stress and performance of our work lives, is the distinct physical, social and 'head' space we mark out to facilitate a "controlled loss of control" in leisure time and in the consumption of a range of legal, prescription and illicit drugs to medicate for the problems and maximise the pleasures in an increasingly stressful world (Measham, 2004b, p.343).

Measham's work also situates young people's decisions in relation to complex individual, social and economic processes that are also mediated by structural constraints (e.g. gender and ethnicity). She explores the connections between the ways that physical and social leisure spaces (particularly clubs and pubs) have

changed since the 1990s, the consumption of legal and illicit drugs within these spaces, and the implications in terms of personal, mental or 'head' space for individuals (2004b, p.344). More recently, Measham and Moore (2009) conceptualise an increasingly complex, fragmented association between leisure environments (including sub-scenes) and drug practices. This extension of the normalisation literature situates youthful drug experience within the context of changing consumerist markets and environments.

This work is particularly relevant to the consideration of how young adults in the current study negotiate their identities and practices in relation to dual identities as members of a dynamic and evolving EDM scene, and as psychoactive consumers in a broader society where values are overlapping but also discrete and sometimes competing.

Youth transitions and normalisation

Finally, normalisation researchers have considered drug experience in the context of the sociological literature on the social and economic aspects underpinning altered pathways into adulthood. For example, Parker and colleagues drew on sociological work concerning the changing experiences of young people growing up in late modernity. They cite the work of Giddens (1991) and Furlong and Cartmel (1997b) to argue that the changes that they observed among the study's cohort can be explained within the context of broader social processes and shifts, rather than changes inherent within individualised psychological profiles of young people. Furlong and Cartmel (1997a, 1997b) write about a number of shifts in the experiences associated with growing up in the 1990s, including changing educational experiences (e.g. the raising of the legal school-leaving age), the decline of the youth labour market through emphasis on training and a casual work force.

Summarising this work, Parker *et al.* (1998) comment on the altered characteristics of transitions to adulthood in contemporary society? They argue:

The transition from childhood through adolescence on towards adulthood and full citizenship is now a longer, more uncertain journey... [W]hat we are defining is a far longer period of semi-dependency as young people spend more time in education

and training, live at home longer, delay marriage and parenting and so on (Parker *et al.*, 1998, p.157).

Here Parker *et al.* combine theories of risk management with a sociology of youth to position their analysis of alcohol and other drug use. Williams and Parker later elaborate on this point, arguing that “[G]rowing up in a risk society, in which consumption is central and independence takes longer to achieve, is generating some different coping strategies for today’s youth” (2001, p.410).

Sociological theorisation of youth transitions also offered a theoretical framework for the interpretation of the longitudinal data from the normalisation research. In their analysis of ‘drug careers’, Williams and Parker demonstrate that, although young people are more likely to move out of drug use as they age, they are likely to continue using as they transition into young-adulthood (Williams & Parker 2001, p.410). The finding that drug use is not something that everybody ‘grows out’ of strengthened the argument that broader cultural changes are at play.

Sociologists (e.g. Wyn & Woodman, 2006) have argued that the social and economic changes that have occurred in the UK relating to changes in the workforce, education and living arrangements are also relevant in the Australian context. I bring these considerations to my analysis of the changes that young adults in this study negotiated in relation to their drug use over time. This is an under-explored aspect of normalisation, particularly as it remains to be seen how Parker *et al.*’s cohort negotiate involvement in drug use as they age into their thirties and beyond.

Critiques of normalisation

Normalisation research has been the subject of ongoing revision since findings were first reported in the early 1990s. Parker *et al.* have presented increasingly nuanced additions to the argument, revised it based on emerging findings, and have more recently co-authored journal articles with critics of their work to discuss areas of continued incongruity, convergence and some areas of ongoing debate (Measham & Shiner, 2009). Many researchers have sought to elaborate on under-explored aspects of the debate, or propose that normalisation is too general and an over-simplification.

There are three main types of criticism that have been levelled at the argument for normalisation: “neutralisation” theory (Shiner & Newburn, 1997, 1999), the concept of “differentiated normalisation” (Shildrick, 2002), and the call for greater attention to the ‘micro-political’ implications of normalisation (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008). Following my discussion of these major critiques, I highlight the contribution of my study, which takes up the third area investigating the micro-political implications of normalisation and of the ongoing identity-shaping processes undertaken by drug users.

Normalisation and neutralisation theory

Shiner and Newburn (1997, 1999) mounted one of the earliest and most significant critiques that has been levelled against normalisation. They drew from a psychological theory termed “neutralisation”, which considers how individuals who display character traits, or behave in ways that are not considered socially acceptable, rationalise their activities. In the earliest application of this theory, criminologists Sykes and Matza (1957) argued that the “risk-taker” accepted community moral standards and used techniques that rationalised (to themselves and others) their own behaviour. Drawing from the work of Matza (1964), Shiner and Newburn argue that young people can use drugs while simultaneously subscribing to a normative discourse (that “drugs are bad”), and that this functions to neutralise guilt and shame (1997, p.523). In later work they also question whether such “epochal” shifts in attitudes towards drug use described by the normalisation researchers could have occurred (1999, p.142).

Shiner and Newburn (1997) have also critiqued the empirical basis for normalisation, arguing that “claims about the extent and normative context, of youthful drug use are exaggerated and inaccurate” (Shiner & Newburn 1997, p.526). This critique was methodologically driven. They also argue that the central analysis is flawed because Parker *et al.* (1998) rely heavily on the lifetime prevalence of drug use rather than considering the frequency of use or recent use (Shiner & Newburn, 1997, p.526). This critique has been supported by others (Pape & Rossow, 2004; Ramsay & Partridge, 1999). Parker *et al* (2002) responded to this claim by reasserting that normalisation is concerned with social and cultural accommodation, rather than

statistical indications of drug consumption. They also clarified that normalisation only included certain types of drugs and did not extend to injecting drug use (Parker *et al.*, 1998).

Shiner and Newburn further postulate that the normalisation thesis over-simplifies the decision-making processes of young people, particularly because the authors did not differentiate between different types of drugs (1997, p.142). They also identify that young people do not view drug use as unproblematic and argue that normalisation “pays inadequate attention to the normative context of behaviour” (1997, p.526). While they agree that some cultural change is underway, they argue that the pace of change reported in Parker *et al.*'s work had been overstated. In a second edition of *Illegal Leisure*, Aldridge *et al.* respond to Shiner and Newburn's critique in depth. They argue that while young people may draw on neutralising language, their rationalisations are not ‘excuses’ for bad behaviour or a reflection of beliefs that drugs are wrong. Rather, they are signs of healthy adjustment to a situation where judgment may be passed on them (2011, pp.220-221).

Differentiated normalisation

Another critique of normalisation was put forward by Shildrick (2002). Using qualitative methods, she explored a range of motivations and interpretations that young people hold in relation to their drug use. She aimed to present a holistic and integrated understanding of experiences. A feature of her work was the in-depth analysis of differences in use between subgroups in her sample. Her analysis demonstrated that some participants' styles of drug use and motivations reflected propositions made within the normalisation thesis, while others did not. In particular, the patterns of use among a subsample of her cohort who were heavy drug users and socially and economically marginalised could not be explained in relation to an argument for normalisation. She argues that issues associated with cultural identity and social and economic disadvantage are under-explored within the normalisation debate, and that normalisation functions as a ‘meta-narrative’ to obscure these factors.

A related criticism levelled against normalisation by Shildrick is that the parameters and boundaries of the normalisation debate are ill-defined. Shildrick writes that that is “there is little agreement as to what the concept actually means” (2002, p.40). She concludes:

First, normalization is too expansive a concept, which does not allow for the ways in which some types of drugs and some types of drug use may (or may not) be normalized for some groups of young people. Second, normalization rests on a too sharp a distinction between ‘recreational’ and ‘problematic’ drug use (Shildrick, 2002, p.46).

Shildrick also argues that cultural experiences of young adults – for example, as members of social groupings – must be considered alongside drug-using careers, arguing that these areas are typically treated separately. She proposes the concept of ‘differentiated normalisation’ in which different types of drugs and drug use may be normalised for certain groups of young people, but not others (Shildrick, 2002).

In defence of the normalisation work, the original normalisation researchers addressed the issue of differences between groups of young people. For example, in their book *Dancing on Drugs* (Measham *et al.*, 2001), the authors explored the implications of the normalisation thesis among a specific sub-section of the youthful population – those involved in club and dance drug scenes. They argued that this group represented “the most serious end of the UK’s recreational drug using population” (Measham *et al.*, 2001, p.1). That is, they aimed to explore the diversity of experience within drug-using groups and some of the boundaries of practices that are regarded as normal. Measham *et al.* wrote that it is unlikely that the range of harms that are endured by clubbers would become broadly socially accommodated (2001, p.183). This research demonstrates that what is regarded as normal among a subsection of the population lies beyond that which is tolerated in other contexts.

Shildrick’s perspective on differentiated forms of normalisation opened up this under-elaborated area of normalisation studies. She explored the ways in which structural disadvantage and experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage inform different understandings held by young people about normal forms of drug practice, and the significance that they ascribe to drug use. Macdonald and Marsh (2002)

agreed with Shildrick's approach and wrote about different orientations to drug use among socially excluded young people. Their work, alongside Shildrick's contribution, questioned the usefulness of homogenising discourses of cultural normalisation.

South (2004) supported these conclusions on the basis of qualitative research involving two groups that demonstrated different vulnerabilities to risk, concluding that problematic outcomes were attributed to structural factors and 'social capital'. South argued that the implications of normalisation for understanding the nature of drug markets had not been thoroughly explored, and that "[M]ost research, media reports and government policies are concerned with dependent, high-problem, drug users, who fund their use via regular or daily involvement in crime" (2004, p.526). He explored the blurring of boundaries of recreational activities through his analysis of heavy drug use and 'social dealing'.

South agreed with the general premise of the normalisation thesis, noting that "drug use was a 'normal' feature of their day-to-day approach to 'life management'" for his participants. He elaborated on this work by exploring contrasting case studies of "heavy recreational users" (2004, p.528). One group (London-based participants interviewed in 2003) was legally employed and academically achieving; the other (Essex-based participants interviewed in 1997) experienced problems with their use, were low academic achieving and some were described as having "crossed the border into illegal activity" (ibid). South found that while his study participants shared an 'ideal' of managing legal work and drug use, thus having similar 'orientations' to drug use, the enactment of this varied. In particular, vulnerability to 'risk' between different groups was identified – indeed, the 'social capital' and structural advantages that London participants had meant that they were more successful in achieving the aforementioned 'ideal' balance.

Pilkington (2006, p.25) contributed to this area of research in her study of controlled heroin use among a Russian cohort. Heroin was a drug that was excluded from the normalisation thesis. Drawing on Zinberg's early theories, she argues that "social setting [...] is the central differentiating factor between chaotic or 'problem' use and drug use that is understood as 'normal'" (Pilkington, 2006, p.46). Pilkington

describes how normalisation is “profoundly local, temporally and spatially specific” (2006, p.25).

These studies all contribute to an increasing body of literature that explores the implications of normalisation in detail. They elaborate on increasingly nuanced understandings of normalisation by grounding the ‘meta-narrative’ of normalisation within the specific structural constraints and socially contingent realities of the lived experiences of young adults. This study considers a recent area of development in relation to this line of inquiry – the ‘micro-politics’ of normalisation.

The micro-political implications of normalisation

The arm of scholarly inquiry into the normalisation research that is most relevant to this thesis was offered by Sharon Rødner Sznitman (Rødner 2005, 2006, Rødner Sznitman 2008). Her work considers identity management processes among functional and socially integrated drug users. The central issue for Rødner (2005) is how identity is negotiated in the context of Swedish society, where there is a zero-tolerance drugs policy and low drug use prevalence compared to the UK. Rødner Sznitman published three linked papers based on 44 qualitative interviews with young adults aged 18 to 30 years (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008). Specifically, she considers the implications of the ongoing stigma that is faced by drug users in the broader community. Negotiation of stigma in relation to social status has a long history in sociology.

The work of Goffman (1963, discussed earlier) is drawn on widely in academic theorisation of the devalued status of certain individuals and groups in the community, and it strongly informs Rødner’s analysis. Goffman writes of how individuals bring anticipations to situations regarding identity characteristics, but how this ‘virtual social identity’ can be discredited:

[E]vidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It

constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity (1963, pp.11-12).

According to Goffman, a discredited identity is not associated with respect or regard – it is damaging to social status. Goffman extends his analysis to the avoidance of stigma, through managing discrediting information:

The issue is not that of managing tension generated during social contacts, but rather that of managing information about his failing. To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where (1963, p.55).

In the first paper of three that I discuss here, Rødner (2005) uses Goffman's work to consider drug users' self-presentation in drug-related interviews. She explores how participants in her study valorised control as a normal state, individualised their decision-making, and positioned themselves as rational, informed, 'active' decision-makers.

She examines how individuals constructed their identities and that of their friends through the dualism of "us" and the "Other" – the other being those who have failed to control their drug use (2005, p.338). Rødner interprets this as a defensive technique that functioned to emphasise the "bad behaviour" of the "Other", while playing down their own "bad behaviour" (ibid, p.340). The implication of this self-presentation in relation to a devalued other is that "the informant's identity as drug users is weak, not yet accomplished" (ibid, p.344). That is, the extreme and negative outcomes of drug use (i.e. the problematic user) are far more strongly elaborated on than positive expressions of drug use. As a result, she found that participants had very few labels to describe themselves.

In her second paper that reports on the same qualitative data, Rødner (2006) elaborates on this theme of self-presentation by exploring the adherence of her participants to a Swedish core ideal of being an active negotiator of risk, and a self-controlled, rational individual – values that are promoted in Swedish public health policy. She then develops a theme that was introduced in the first paper, which is of the strategies that the young adults in her study use to negotiate identity. Rødner

writes about how her participants used stories as a resource to help them avoid elements associated with failed drug users. The technique increased perception of control over their use, and was aligned with a core value of self-control in Swedish society. Two assumptions underpin her analysis: the first is that “risk discourses are important to people’s everyday activities”; and the second is that “risk is not a static construct, but always negotiated and reconstructed” (ibid, p.935).

Like the original normalisation research, Rødner’s work is situated in relation to Beck and Giddens’ theorisation of risk society. She also draws on Foucault’s (1982) work on self-governance as a technique of power. These two bodies of work have much in common, given that, as Rødner puts it, “the notion of risk society is fundamentally dependent on the willingness of the population to assume responsibility for their health and security” (2006, p.933).

Foucault’s work explores the mechanisms by which humans are placed in relations of production, signification and power. Foucault envisages the emergence of the State (since the sixteenth century) as a kind of power that ignores individuals and favours the interests of the totality, or of a particular class or group. The state – a political structure – offers a form of pastoral power, “a modern mix of individualization” (1994, pp.222-223) or a new form of pastoral power (replacing Christianity). The state finds support in a whole set of institutions the individualizing tactics that characterised these institutions, which include the family, medicine, psychiatry, education and employers. Rødner writes “the notion of risk society is fundamentally dependent on the willingness of the population to assume responsibility for their health and security” (2006, p.933). She thus connects Foucault’s theories with Beck and Giddens’ (1991) understandings of how risk society produces a burden of self-efficacy.

Drawing on these intersecting bodies of work, Rødner considers how her participants engaged in “constant self-reflection” (2006, p.941) in relation to risks and “claim the utmost accountability” (ibid, p.946) for their health. She emphasises how they are “a part of and react to the society in which they live” (ibid, pp.945-946) and their drug use is “entangled in the commonly held expectation that people have direct control over their actions and are able to refuse temptations” (ibid, p.946). That is, although

drug use is inconsistent with cultural expectations, individuals draw from wider societal values to shape understandings of unacceptable practice. She argues that “informants’ risk evaluation schemes open up the way for a complex pattern of risk reduction techniques aimed at the self and the social context, as well as the substance” (ibid, p.946).

The final of Rødner Sznitman’s three related papers extends the analysis of the conceptualisation of ‘normalised’ drug experience (2008). The starting point for her analysis is the deconstruction of the term ‘normalisation’ through the examination of its early application by Wolfsonberger and Thomas (1983). Wolfsonberger and Thomas (1983) argued that individuals may enhance their own skills so that they are able to adopt valued roles. The first strategy by which this can be achieved is through “assimilation”. That is, deviant or non-conforming individuals take on devalued identities by hiding their stigma. Rødner Sznitman notes the analytical commonalities between Wolfsonberger and Thomas’ (1983) analysis and Goffman’s (1963) analysis of the strategies that individuals use to “‘pass’ as non-deviants by avoiding stigma symbols” (Rødner Sznitman, 2008, p.450). Rødner Sznitman’s analysis looks back to original use of the term normalisation, which was in the context of learning difficulties and disability. In this context, normalisation refers to the processes whereby the individual does their best to fit in despite particular deficit(s) that they might have.

A second aspect of Wolfsonberger and Thomas’s (1983) theorisation of normalisation is based on the possibility of resistance. This is labelled “transformational normalisation”. It involves challenging the status quo by re-evaluating characteristics that are perceived as negative and realigning these with alternative, positive identities. Transformational normalisation offers the potential to raise the status of devalued groups. Applied to illicit drug use, this could mean challenging pathology paradigms and celebrating the pleasures associated with using drugs.

This analysis is considered in relation to Parker *et al.*’s use of the term normalisation. It is from this point that Rødner Sznitman (2008) mounts her main critique of normalisation. She argues that, because the authors assume that drug use is no longer

stigmatised and has already moved from the “‘margins’” of youth subculture into the mainstream of youth lifestyles and identities, they ignore the “‘potential micro-politics that drug users might have been engaged in when trying to challenge the stigma attached to them’” (2008, pp.456-457).

Rødner Sznitman’s (2008) argument is based on critical reflection on the reasons that her participants might be motivated to be involved in drug-related research, and her consideration of how her participants fought for the right to “‘be viewed in the same way that non-drug users’” are viewed – “‘to be treated as regular people’” (2008, p.470). According to her analysis, this ‘transformational agenda’ informed their decision to participate in a drug-related interview, despite the risk that protection of their identity could not be completely guaranteed. She argues that this was an attempt to reposition drug use “‘outside the realm of stigma and immorality’” and “‘to elevate a stigma to a position of positive status’” by presenting a new view of drug use and drug users in Sweden (2008, p.470). Her study is among the few to consider the ongoing ways that young adults continue to negotiate normalised drug use at the micro level of experience.

Pennay and Moore (2010) draw on Rødner Sznitman’s work in their exploration of co-existing discourses of pleasure and self-control within a network of recreational users of illicit drugs in Melbourne, Australia. Drawing on ethnographic data, they specifically explore the ways that young adults were informed by popular understandings of “‘excessive’” hedonistic experience as a sign of personal failing – or “‘flawed neo-liberal subjectivity’” (ibid, p.557) , and how individuals in their study:

must reconcile the stigmatising anti-drug discourses of friends, family and the wider society – which link drug use with loss of self-control, dependence and irrationality – with their own embodied appreciation of the intense pleasures and social relationships produced by drug use (ibid, p.567).

They examine the ongoing tensions that participants experienced in negotiating their identity and status. For example, some group members invoked the need for self-control in relation to illicit drug use and had developed a number of strategies to cease or regulate their use. Citing Rødner Sznitman, they liken this to ‘assimilative’ normalisation.

Pennay and Moore (2010) also explore of how participants in their study continued to use drugs in ways that compromised societal expectations. Referring to their excessive drug use, participants spoke about their “terrible willpower” – emphasising their individual failings (ibid, p.567). Other group members rejected the need for self-control, choosing instead to valorise the pursuit of unrestrained bodily pleasure facilitated by the heavy use of illicit drugs – an example of ‘transformative’ normalisation.

Rødner Sznitman’s inquiry into the “micro-politics” (2008, pp.456-457) of normalisation contributed to the more recent academic emphasis on the finer details and contested aspects of ‘normalised’ drug use. Pennay and Moore (2010) took up this analysis to argue that competing definitions of the meaning and desirability of ‘controlled’ drug use point to the complex ways in which illicit drug users try to challenge the ongoing stigma associated with their drug use. Their work also illuminates the continued tensions that exist when negotiating drug user identity. I argue that there is still much to be understood about the ongoing processes of identity management and the contested spaces of normalised drug practice that occur within social networks of drug users. It is primarily in relation to this aspect of normalisation that I situate my thesis and to which my work offers a contribution to research knowledge. I now outline the threads of analysis and questions that I will be taking up in this thesis, and how this study advances current understandings.

Advancing a micro-politics of normalisation

The theme of identity negotiation is at the forefront of this thesis. I argue that most accounts of drug users overlook some of the more complex and uncertain processes associated with identity negotiation. This is a limitation that Rødner acknowledged when she wrote that her participant’s drug use is “probably less neat and rational than it was presented in interviews” (2006, p.947). The neglect of the processual aspects of drug use and identity-management within the drugs field is one outcome of the dominance of cross-sectional surveys, which provide snapshots of ‘behaviours’ and ‘beliefs’ at static points in time and isolate the individual from their practice and social contexts. Rødner (2005) discusses how young adults are likely to enact their ‘mainstream’ identities within interviews – to demonstrate their

competence and self-control to the interviewer. Ethnographic observation of young adults as they pursue leisure and sociable experiences among their peers offers potential insights into the socially-gated worlds that are not commonly accessible to, or explored in, the AOD research literature.

This study engages with the reality that young adults live in a world where individuals perform a number of distinct identities simultaneously, negotiating different sets of values that may overlap or converge, but that may also be contradictory. The multiplicitous, partial, overlapping and shifting characteristics of identity are central to postmodern theory. Postmodern theory challenges notions of a 'fixed' self, and highlights the uneasy and complex relationship between aspects of life. According to Sarup, identity is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash...[and] not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each observer in each period" (1996, pp.25-26). He also writes that "[I]dentity is contradictory and fractured. Identity in postmodern thought is not a thing, the self is necessarily incomplete, unfinished – it is 'the subject in process'" (ibid, p.47).

The increasingly fine-grained focus of normalisation commentators, and Rødner Sznitman's (2008) analysis which sets up the "micro-political" implications of normalisation, leads to a central question that is the concern of the current study: How do individuals manage multiple identities, particularly in the context of the stigma attached to illicit and heavy drug use in the general community, and the potential health, social, financial and other related problems associated with use? Specifically, in relation to the experiences of the young adults involved in this study, I consider how membership and identity within the EDM scene are negotiated alongside mainstream concerns and how this is maintained over time.

Drawing on ethnographic data, this thesis will expand on three underdeveloped areas of the normalisation debate specifically exploring the micro-political implications of normalisation. In this chapter I have shown that critiques of the normalisation debate have generally moved to increasingly nuanced analysis of the implications of normalisation in specific cultural contexts.

First, I propose that a greater emphasis on processes of identity negotiation that occur within drug-using networks can potentially offer a more nuanced understanding of the complex and renegotiated aspects of normalisation. Early in this chapter I highlighted how rave and club studies researchers were concerned with exploring the cultural significance of participation in the rave and clubber styles, and the connections between the two styles. While there has been some recent discussion of social organisation and distinction within clubbing cultures (e.g. Perrone, 2009), little research has been conducted in the Australian context (Siokou, 2002; Siokou & Moore, 2008; Siokou *et al.*, 2010 are exceptions). Post-subcultural approaches of early rave and club studies researchers informed the focus of normalisation researchers on recreational forms of drug use and of processes of commercialisation and commodification. However, they do not feature strongly in academic theorisation of ‘normalised’ drug use. I argue that the underdevelopment of some of the insights of post-subcultural researchers within the normalisation debate has also resulted in a lack of sensitivity to some of the more contested micro-level aspects of normalised drug experience.

Thornton’s (1996, 1997, 2006) work on ‘subcultural capital’ provides a useful analytical framework for the consideration of the ways that group membership and status inform and shape understandings of normal drug practice. Thornton’s work also guides my exploration of the processes of social competition and regulation (e.g. gossip) in relation to the constitution of acceptable drug practice. Measham’s (2004b) work points to the increasing conceptualisation of drugs as ‘fashionable’ commodities and experiences – entwined with commodified leisure and pleasure-seeking in the modern world. I consider the ways that young adults negotiate identity in relation to contradictory messages within consumer culture (e.g. of control and of responsibility as ‘neo-liberal’ citizens, but also of identity-shaping through consumer activities and leisure experiences), and how they shape their practices of drug consumption in relation to these discourses.

My ethnographic analysis enhances understanding of the inconsistency, uncertainty and disagreement that occur within groups in relation to negotiating the parameters of recreational and normal drug practice. Attention to these processes contributes to

an increasingly nuanced representation within the research literature of the enactment of normalised drug practice.

The second area that I take up is how discourses of stigma and harm associated with illicit drug use are interpreted and negotiated by young adults within social contexts. I elaborate on Rødner Sznitman's (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008) analysis of the ways that her participants represented their association with drug use (outlined earlier). I explore the destabilising effects that continued threat of damaged identity had to the negotiation of recreational practice among this network.

Third, this thesis contributes to the articulation of normal identities in relation to ongoing involvement in drug use. Young adults negotiate their identities in complex social, economic and cultural spaces alongside the continued evolution of their interpersonal relationships, social roles, health status, financial status, resources and their expectations and personal priorities. There has been some consideration to a critique that the normalisation researchers have not given adequate attention to the interplay between structure and agency when considering transitions out of drug use (Measham & Moore, 2009). In collaborative work, Measham and Shiner (2008) drew from the approach of life-course criminologists Sampson and Laub (1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003), who consider the tension between structure and agency. Laub and Sampson argue that desistance from crime is facilitated by 'turning points' or changes in situational and structural life circumstances. Their work proposes that, decisions are partly determined by the choices that individuals make, but modified and limited by structures and situations. Measham and Shiner (2008) consider this work in relation to some of the transitions that accompany or facilitate transitions out of drug use, such as a good marriage or a stable job.

Despite this consideration of the interplay between structure and agency, very little research has sought to understand the processes of decision-making, negotiation and renegotiation of drug use in relation to the claiming of 'new' or changed identities as young adults mature and take on new responsibilities and their life roles change. I consider the values that informed individual drug-related transitions. In particular, drawing on sociological work describing significant changes in the social roles and expectations of young adults in the contemporary world (discussed in Furlong &

Cartmel, 1997b; Wyn & White, 1997; Wyn & Woodman, 2006), I consider how the culturally unstable notions of 'adulthood' and 'youth' may inform more highly elaborated understandings of normalised drug use. I will explore the values associated with normalised drug practice based on longitudinal data, the parameters of what is considered normal or socially acceptable among them and investigate points of inconsistency and tension. There is limited Australian research that addresses these concerns. This is a significant gap given that it has been well established in epidemiological research in Australia and internationally that many young people continue to use illicit drugs well into their late-twenties.

In the next chapter, I describe how I met the scenesters.

– CHAPTER 3 –

Becoming an ‘honorary scenester’: Ethnographic fieldwork in the Perth electronic dance music scene

This chapter outlines the methods that I used to identify, gain access to, and conduct ethnographic research among the network of young adults who are the focus of my study. Ethnography aims to gain understanding and insights into the cultural practices and social meanings constructed by individuals and groups through immersion in their ‘everyday’ worlds over a period of time (Emerson & Pollner, 2001, p.239). Establishing rapport and trust are central to the ethnographic method, facilitating access to cultural practices that may be concealed or hidden because they are illegal or otherwise stigmatised. Several scholars have argued that, for these reasons, ethnographic research is a particularly appropriate method for the investigation of illicit drug use (see Adler, 1985; Bourgois, 2002; Dwyer & Moore, 2010; Maher, 2002; Moore, 1995; Slavin, 2004b).

Ethnographic research involved participant observation spanning 18 months and was conducted among 60 individuals. Although my analysis is contextualised by data derived from participant observation among the wider sample, it focuses specifically on 25 individuals who I refer to as ‘key contacts’ and who participated in complementary in-depth semi-structured interviews. The processes of participant observation and interviews are collectively referred to as ‘fieldwork’. Fieldwork focused on ATS and alcohol use. Participant observation was based primarily on informal time spent in EDM social environments – including nightclubs, bars, and large music events – as well as cafes, restaurants, private parties and their homes. While many of the details of recruitment, data collection, ethical considerations and data analysis feature in this chapter, I also explore some of the insights gained through the process of fieldwork that contextualise participants’ involvement in drug use.

In this chapter I discuss the challenges of locating a network of young adults who were willing to be involved in research and establishing an accepted identity among them. I describe a tiered entry to the field beginning with the difficult experience of

attempting to recruit members of a friendship group to the study. This network was characterised by long-standing social connections and was resistant to accepting new members. Members also emphasised that participation in (what they termed) ‘drug research’ clashed with many of their personal notions of identity and aspirations within the mainstream as emerging adults. The encounter did prove useful, however, in identifying a key analytical theme in this study of identity management among socially integrated illicit drug users.

Following this early experience, I describe how I subsequently became acquainted with individuals who facilitated my access to scenesters – members of the Perth EDM scene. Some key ethnographic tools including being of a similar age to participants, having social connections and knowledge of Perth and having had past involvement in the EDM scene, facilitated access to this network. I argue that the relative ease with which I was included by scenesters in their regular social activities was telling of its composition, which was based on values and lifestyle rather than emotional or long-standing connections. This experience also highlighted the importance scenesters placed on the key values of sociability and social networking. These values also centrally informed scenester activities of partying and drug use. The performance of ‘social’ drug use is explored in subsequent chapters in this thesis.

This chapter also provides insights into the work of building relationships that was central to establishing fieldwork relations. I describe how I developed an incomplete membership of the EDM scene and among scenesters. This membership was described by one scenester as that of an ‘honorary scenester’. The term encapsulates the dual identity that I had among them. First, my involvement in the scene was both defined and limited by my research agenda. Second, I was also included by some scenesters as a ‘friend’ or ‘one of them’. I describe some of the challenges in negotiating this dual identity as researcher and as a friend or peer. I reflect in some depth upon how I negotiated relationships with male and female scenesters in relation to my gendered identity.

Finally, this chapter describes the incorporation of an online component in participant observation and how this medium is used as source of data. *E-scope* – an

online forum and EDM resource – was an integral component of the social ecology of scenesters' lives. However, using *E-scope* as a source of ethnographic data raised ethical questions that had potentially serious implications for the study and for protecting identities. I discuss the issues associated with integrating this dimension of the field into my fieldwork. I also describe the process of recording and analysing all participant observation data, including *E-scope* data. I begin here by summarising my participant observation activities.

Fieldwork beginnings: Locating the field and participants

Participant observation is the hallmark of ethnography, being described by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw as the process of “establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting” (2001, p.352). In this study, participant observation was conducted between December 2005 (which is when approval was gained from Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee) and June 2007. It involved regular contact with 60 individuals in the EDM scene, which was a natural context for social and leisure experiences and the use of ATS and alcohol. However, the process of meeting and gaining an accepted place among this network (who I refer to as scenesters) was a gradual process.

When I began fieldwork my efforts, I aimed to gain access to young adults who use ATS and were clients of AOD services by recruiting through informal social networks and through a process of ‘snowball’ sampling¹⁴. However, I brought to this experience some additional ‘tools’ that were products of my personal attributes. First, I considered Perth ‘home’ – the city in which I was born and where I had family and

¹⁴ This involved identifying and establishing relationships with previously unknown individuals through social networking from a small number of known social contacts. Snowball sampling is particularly appropriate when undertaking research on illegal or socially unacceptable activities or if individuals may be more likely to participate if approached by an individual with similar experiences (Oliver, 2006).

established social networks. I drew on my knowledge of Perth throughout the fieldwork and tapped into my established social networks to help me bridge social boundaries when locating participants. Equally important was the fact that I was a contemporary to my research subjects – being aged in my mid-twenties at the time of fieldwork. These personal qualities gave me insights and advantages when attempting to enter the field, and they shaped and mediated the entire research process.

Regardless of these assets, my entry into the scene was not immediate or straightforward. Prior to fieldwork commencement I undertook some scoping work to potentially identify participants through my own social networks. These efforts were not encouraging. At many points I was informed that, due to career aspirations, financial considerations and investment in steady relationships, involvement in ATS was very sporadic if it occurred at all.

Nonetheless, I identified and established regular contact with one individual, Fiona (aged 25 years at the time) who gave a different story. Fiona continued to use ATS with her partner, Chris (also aged 25 years) and their friends and she expressed interest in the research. I had already met many of her friends and she began to invite me out with her during her regular social activities. Fiona's friends were aged in their early to mid-twenties and I began to pursue these individuals more formally from December 2005. Members of this network, which comprised 15 individuals, had been friends for between five and ten years and were aged between 24 and 26 years. Most had met through secondary school. This core group had the common experience of attending raves and using ecstasy and meth/amphetamine together in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Further, they occasionally organised to go out together to nightclubs, music festivals and large EDM events. Such outings typically started and ended at a private house and involved heavy alcohol, ecstasy and 'speed'¹⁵ use. On one occasion I attended a large EDM festival event with them,

¹⁵ Participants in this study reported that, in approximately 1999-2000 in Perth, there was a noticeable shift in the ATS market. Up to this time amphetamine sulphate or 'speed' was widely available; whereas after this time the market was dominated by methamphetamines (powdered, crystal and

where all members were using ecstasy and speed, and they spent time together 'coming down' (from the effects of ecstasy) at Cameron's house until around midday the following day. On another evening in these early weeks of fieldwork some of these individuals also used speed while attending a nightclub. I also attended barbeques and outdoor picnics with them.

Although I was encouraged after spending a few nights socialising among this network and getting to know its members, it was also clear that possessing the qualities of a group member does not precipitate inclusion and acceptance (Schuetz, 1944). Despite having common interests, mutual friends, and importantly, an existing member (Fiona) to vouch for my presence, I faced several challenges when attempting to gain acceptance among this network.

The first challenge concerned the women in the core group. On many occasions several of the women in the group were unfriendly and unwilling to engage in conversation. Although I persisted gently with these relationships, it was far easier to engage with young men in the group and I began to develop a relationship with Nick and Ryan – who were core members. In February 2006, it became apparent that the women were not willing to accept my presence and this was becoming detrimental to my involvement. I had been invited by Fiona to a barbeque and continued to find that I was ignored in conversation by the women, particularly when Fiona was not in the room. I began talking to Ryan casually, and had been in conversation for around ten minutes, when Catherine commented loudly to the whole group "Ahhh, just go and sleep with him!" This prompted laughter and was clearly a comment intended to embarrass me. When I later asked Fiona about this encounter, she revealed that the women were particularly sceptical about my motives and believed that I had persisted in attending social functions with them because I was 'chasing' (hoping to begin a sexual relationship with) the men in their network. Fiona later apologised and informed me of the gossip circulating about me among the group. In order to avoid

base). Powdered methamphetamine was also sold as 'speed'. These reports were supported by police seizure statistics (see Stafford *et al.*, 2006).

such tensions on future occasions Fiona covertly excluded me from many social activities. I became aware of this as, on several later occasions, Fiona mentioned details of ‘big nights’ shared between them.

These encounters were telling of the relationships held between individuals in the network. The actions of Catherine were efforts to protect the solidarity of the group. These mitigated against the ready acceptance of new individuals. Further, the interpretation of my motives for attempting to gain a place in this network was mistaken because of the unusual work and identity of the ethnographic researcher. The guardian role that Catherine took has been described as a ‘gatekeeping’ (Saunders, 2006).

In addition to the tensions associated with my establishment of an accepted identity there was a deeper resistance among this network to participation in the study. During the course of my early interactions, I approached most members to discuss my project and to ask if they were comfortable being involved. The reaction that I received was similar to my pre-fieldwork scoping activities and was not positive. Individuals emphasised the declining place that ATS use had in their lives particularly in relation to career aspirations and increased responsibilities. For example, Ryan said to me that he seldom used drugs because he was focusing on his career as a lawyer and preferred playing sports on weekends over partying. He assured me that his friends are “not the type of people that you should be studying”. Here he referred to the socio-demographic status of these individuals, who were all from relatively wealthy families and had private school education, as well as their non-serious style and sporadic involvement in drug use. He also expressed the opinion that research should be undertaken with “people who have problems”. According to Ryan’s assessment, he and his friends were therefore not appropriate participants in drug research. My inability to gain consent from many of these individuals in Fiona’s network, coupled with the lack of involvement in ATS use, meant that much of the fieldnote data that I gathered over this period are not used in this thesis.

These difficult initial encounters with Fiona’s network revealed the personalised and socially politicised terrain of ethnographic fieldwork, but they also pointed to a

theme that is central to the analysis in this thesis: the importance of identity negotiation among young adults who are socially integrated and use illegal drugs. The presence of a drug researcher in their social network brought to light the ongoing tension between the negotiation of responsible and culturally valued roles and their enjoyment of illicit drug experience and partying. Potential inclusion in this study also tapped into anxieties about employers discovering their past and current ATS use. Members were very conscious of maintaining their confidentiality and were mistrustful of my interactions with them.

Despite the challenges faced in gaining access to this network, as well as the disappointment of gathering field data that could not be used, these early efforts were not fruitless. It was from my developing relationships with two young men in this network – Nick and Cameron – that I became oriented with the Perth EDM scene, and this set of physical and social spaces became the fieldwork site. This was precipitated by an observation that, while most of the network reserved their ATS use for special occasions, Nick and Cameron were involved more regularly. I was alerted to this when I (albeit reluctantly) attended a backyard barbeque dinner, which was hosted by Fiona in March on a Sunday afternoon some weeks after the encounter mentioned above. Soon after greeting Nick, he mentioned that neither he nor Cameron had slept, as they had both had a big night (using ‘pills’ – a slang term for ecstasy). They had also had a similar night two weeks earlier and spoke about attending an ‘after party’. I identified this as an opportunity to try to gain access to other people with whom they used. Ignoring the negative attention that I received from the women in Fiona’s network, I expressed interest in going out with them next time. They invited me to a nightclub the following week.

After this occasion, I began to attend two nightclubs that feature heavily in this thesis (*Flame* and *Club A*¹⁶). Nick and Cameron used ecstasy and engaged in heavy alcohol use almost weekly from March to May 2006 and approximately monthly thereafter. They were EDM enthusiasts. Nick frequently played music for me to demonstrate various EDM styles, shared CDs with me and began imparting other knowledge

¹⁶ All venue names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

about EDM and what he referred to as ‘the scene’ – such as which nightclubs were popular, what type of music was featured and how to find out about EDM events. He also helped me to gain social credibility among a broader network of other EDM enthusiasts, who I later met. While Cameron moved away from Perth and was not a key contact, my relationship with Nick continued to develop and he participated in two in-depth interviews. Further, I also spent considerable time with Fiona and her partner Chris in the context of the EDM scene: they also became key contacts.

From around April 2006, the nature and intensity of data collection changed significantly. This point marked my increasing involvement in the EDM scene and the establishment of relationships with numerous ethnographic informants. I now describe how I came to spend time among a broader network of ‘scenesters’¹⁷.

Meeting the scenesters

My involvement in the scene was facilitated by relationships with two individuals, Trevor and Theo (25 and 26 years old, respectively). I met Trevor one Saturday afternoon in April 2006, when socialising among a group of friends who were not using ATS. The occasion was a backyard barbeque which had been organised by a long-time friend of mine and her partner. The day involved cooking a barbeque lunch (and later on, dinner), drinking beer, kicking a football in the back garden and gathering in the lounge room to watch the football on television. It was on this day that I mentioned to Trevor that I was going to *Flame* (a drum and bass [DnB] nightclub) to meet some friends (Nick and Cameron). Trevor seemed surprised and interested. We began talking more about this – Trevor asked me some tentative questions like “Oh yeah, do you go there a bit? I’ve never seen you there before”, and I soon discovered that Trevor planned to go to the same nightclub that night. He did not have a car or driver’s license and had been unsure about how to get there. I offered him a lift to the club in my car and he accepted.

¹⁷ I refer to Chris and Fiona as scenesters, although they were not as involved in the ‘scene’ as many others.

On the way to *Flame*, I told Trevor about my research, saying that I had spent the summer going to music events and hanging out with people, but that I'd been having trouble meeting people who would like to be involved in my research. I attempted to pitch the study in an accessible and appealing way, saying that I wanted to do research into the lives of 'normal people'. I emphasised the importance of doing research with drug users who did not fit the stereotype of 'addicts'. This explanation was typical of subsequent encounters with potential participants. At the time Trevor did not immediately say much to me about what he thought of the study, but he seemed happy for me to go out with him that night. Gaining consent from Trevor, and other key individuals in this study like him, was a gradual process that was formalised through participation in in-depth interviews.

On that night I met many of Trevor's friends. It seemed that Trevor was a 'regular' – he knew many others at the club and women and men alike greeted him with hugs and smiles. Trevor and his friends used ecstasy that night and danced until 6am before going home. *Flame* became a usual setting for observation during fieldwork. Over the following weeks, I met Trevor regularly (introducing him to Nick and Cameron) and continued to go out to various nightclubs and EDM events. This included socialising in private venues before going out (referred to as 'pre-s'). Often I met different individuals from week to week. These brief encounters were frustrating as I felt that I was not getting to 'know' any of the people that I met. I learnt over time that this was typical of interactions within public social spaces in the EDM scene – where individuals favoured having numerous short interactions (to socially network) and where conversation was difficult because of the volume of the music.

My involvement in the field deepened following one evening at a bar called *Lounge* with Trevor in late June 2006. *Lounge* also became a regular fieldwork setting – the bar was a relaxed space where EDM was played and where conversation was also possible (dancing was not usual), and it was a popular venue for birthday celebrations or going-away parties before scenesters moved on to other venues. It was at *Lounge* that I was re-acquainted with Theo (26 years), who I knew from my undergraduate studies.

Theo was an EDM enthusiast and well-known member of the scene who had been involved since his teens in the late 1990s. Theo became a vital conduit for meeting many others involved in the scene and, as a regular ATS user, he was a key contact. During my initial conversation with Theo I told him about my research and he took a keen interest. He remarked, “It’s about time somebody did something like this!” He said that he felt there were a number of people that I “should meet” and he actively sought to introduce me to key individuals in the scene. Over the coming months he did so, vouching for my presence in the scene by saying that he knew me from the past. He also invited me into the private social spaces of the scene where I was able to develop relationships with scenesters that were more substantial.

I possessed a number of advantages in terms of gaining access to and acceptance among, scenesters. For example, my age gave me some legitimacy to my presence in the scene. I was regarded as a peer – able to draw on common interests, relate to experiences of my participants and engage in the scene in a way that was not conspicuous.

A critical element that shaped my positioning in this network, my ability to meet a large number of individuals relatively quickly and my success in gaining some acceptance within it can be explained by the composition of the social network and the values shared between its members. Granovetter’s (1973, 1983) application of social network theory is useful here. He distinguishes between ‘weak’ ties, or ‘bridging’ ties, which are social links that relate to relationships that are made outside of one’s family and natural social networks (such as neighbourhood and school) and strong, long-standing ties, known as ‘bonding’ ties such as those with close friends or family members.

Fiona’s network could be considered to be linked by bonding ties because they were connected through long-term school-based associations and family connections. In contrast, most scenester relationships can be characterised as weak ties, as members of these networks are linked to one another by their mutual interest in, and enthusiasm for, EDM events rather than through strong, enduring friendships. While there were many scenesters who had known one another for many years, my ability

to gain entry to a scenester network and gradually gain acceptance as a new member demonstrates the fluidity of its social relationships.

One of the weaknesses of strong bonding ties is their insular nature. This insularity could be observed in the case of Fiona's network. While this network offered security and reassurance for many of its members, other members, such as Nick and Cameron, were resistant to this insularity and sought additional social connections. By contrast, scenesters were generally welcoming of new members. Based on scenesters' reports, members regularly 'discovered' the scene and 'disappeared' from the scene. This was partly linked to individuals' tiring of the drug use and partying associated with pursuing a scenester lifestyle, as well as a range of other reasons. In the context of a high turnover, openness to gaining new members was essential to the ongoing vitality of the scene and its very existence.

Later in this chapter I go into some more detail on the 'messy' aspects of fieldwork such as negotiating my gendered identity in the scene, gaining informed consent and negotiating offers of drug use in the scene. First, however, I describe the characteristics of participant observation and how data was collected.

Participant observation: Moving with the scenesters

Participant observation was undertaken in contexts which extended to social and weekday activities that did not necessarily involve drug use (e.g. barbecues and dinners) and considerable time was spent one-to-one with individuals eating together (or having a coffee), talking on the phone or on instant messaging services (IMS, real-time, text-based, online conversations). That is, I became part of the lives of many scenesters outside scene-related activities. This enabled me to observe individuals in a range of natural settings. This lengthy and socially embedded methodology facilitated deeper understanding of how ATS (and other drug) use was positioned within the broader context of scenesters' lives, including their relationships within the scene and outside of the scene, and where this involvement sat within the broader context of their experiences. Informal time spent with scenesters also provided more scope to hold relaxed conversations with individuals

outside of the noisy night-time environments of parties and clubs and to interact with them when they were not affected by illicit drugs.

Over the initial period, when relationships were being established, fieldwork was conducted, on average, once a week. However, in April 2006, my involvement intensified when I established relationships with members of a social network of EDM enthusiasts – ‘scenesters’. From May 2006 to June 2007, I spent time with scenesters on over 200 occasions. Table 3 summarises the frequency of participant observation over this time.

Table 3: Observation schedule May 2006–June 2007

Timeline	Observation activities
December 2005 to May 2006	1 night/week
May to July 2006	2 nights/week
July to October 2006	3-5 nights/week
October to November 2006	2-3 nights/week plus preliminary analysis
November 2006 to March 2007	3-5 nights/week (extra in December-January)
March to June 2007	2 nights/week plus in-depth interviews

Following an initial period of observation from May to October 2006, for one month I reduced my involvement to two or three nights a week and limited the periods of time that I spent with them within each observation session. This time was used to conduct some preliminary data analysis which assisted with the identification of emerging and underdeveloped themes in my data. I resumed full fieldwork again from November 2006 to March 2007. This second phase of fieldwork was the most intense data collection period due to the establishment of successful fieldwork relationships, the summer season (a time of intensive socialising), the large number of public holidays (notably, Christmas and New Year’s Day), and the frequency of large, special events held over this time. From March to June 2007, I again scaled back my observation to around two nights a week in order to focus on conducting in-depth interviews.

Observation periods were concentrated on weekends, and they often involved observation throughout the night and into the next day. Scenesters socialised for long hours – often entire weekends – facilitated by their ATS and other drug use. Weekend observation began between approximately 9 to 11pm and culminated anywhere between 3am and 2pm the following day (the average time was approximately 9 to 10am). Occasionally I split these lengthy sessions into two, by leaving in the morning to sleep and re-joining groups later in the day (anywhere between the hours of 12 to 8pm).

Between Monday and Wednesdays, scenesters rarely socialised with one another. However, on Thursday nights they regularly attended a music night at a suburban pub. To my knowledge, ATS use was rare among participants on this night. Alcohol was used by most (though not heavily as driving was common) and these evenings provided an opportunity to socialise with participants in a more relaxed environment. Weekend plans were often the topic of conversation, and this night therefore facilitated the planning of weekend participant observation activities. ‘Special’ events (large EDM events or music festivals) involved a different observation schedule because they usually marked the beginning of longer than usual periods of socialising and often began during the day. These sessions frequently began at a private house before participants moved on to the festival and, after the festival, they moved on to a nightclub and/or a private house.

Observations were recorded as written fieldnotes. An example of a typical fieldwork entry is included in Appendix A. At no time did I use recording devices during participant observation. Scenesters were very protective of their privacy and openly recording observations may have threatened their trust and openness. Instead, I carried a piece of paper in my handbag to write down the details or highlights of conversations that I had with scenesters when I moved to private places such as bathrooms or my car (Emerson *et al.*, 2001, p.357). These notes served to remind me of details when I began writing fieldnotes at home. I also carried a copy of the plain

language statement explaining the fieldwork component of the research (see Appendix B), should individuals wish to know more about the research.¹⁸

Following each observation period (when I arrived home), I typed conversations on my computer and made handwritten notes as accurately as I could (sometimes relying on short notes taken during evenings in order to prompt my memory). I then dedicated time from Sunday to Wednesday of each week to writing detailed fieldnotes. Aware that it was impossible to record every detail of interactions that I had with scenesters over the course of sessions, I concentrated on recording details such as dates, where and when I met people, who was there, who wasn't and why, what we did, what we generally talked about, money transactions, the sequencing of drug use and the amounts used and significant occurrences such as conflict between scenesters. Over time, I became more adept at identifying conversations that were significant and remembering them.

Over the period of fieldwork, I wrote approximately 400 A4 single-spaced, typed pages of fieldnotes and approximately 200 A4 pages of handwritten notes. I also recorded details of mobile text messages and saved text from IMS conversations (copying text into a separate document and de-identifying names). These were common ways that scenesters communicated with me, as well as with one another. However, the data from these sources were significantly less rich and drug use was not a common topic of conversation.

I did not record the names of my contacts, or details of residence, in my notes. Further, I regularly changed the pseudonyms for my key contacts throughout fieldwork so that they could not be easily tracked in my notes. All data and pseudonyms were stored securely. In the thesis, some key contacts are composite characters – an ethnographic technique of assembling key elements from one or two individuals to comprise one persona, or changing the details of their story slightly, such as their occupation (Emerson, 2001). I use this technique to conceal identity,

¹⁸ A separate statement was used to inform participants when conducting interviews, see Appendix C. This is also discussed later in the chapter.

particularly if individuals had a unique story or if they confided in me personal information that made them easily identifiable both outside the network and to other scenesters. The risk inherent in this technique of de-identification is that the intricacies and nuances that give significance to an individual's story are lost. However, this is a trade-off that is balanced against the risks associated with identifying an individual within the research.

Researcher positioning: Three challenging aspects of fieldwork

The process of data collection is typically invisible or de-emphasised in scientific research – in which the 'objective' researcher remains detached from the lives of research participants. However, ethnographic fieldwork is often confronting, uneasy, ethically fraught and centres on the development of relationships within sometimes unfamiliar social terrain. I am reminded of the necessity of developing 'messy' and complex relationships by Hume and Mulcock, who write that:

If we want to gather fine-grained information about the beliefs, values and practices of others we need to be able to relate to those others on a one-to-one basis. And for that we rely heavily on our own interpersonal skills. Participant observation is thus an intensely humanistic methodology based almost entirely on the messy, complicated, and often emotionally fraught interactions between two or more human beings, one of whom is the researcher (2004, p.xviii).

In this section I discuss the management of two aspects of ethnographic fieldwork that presented particular challenges. They are: negotiating my gendered identity, gaining informed consent, particularly with intoxicated participants, and negotiating a researcher identity and invitations to share in illicit drug use. These aspects of data collection are often described as challenging (e.g. Cohen, 2000) and indeed are often absent in accounts of fieldwork.

Being a female researcher in the scene

Perrone (2010) has written about the challenges of working as a female ethnographer in club spaces in New York. She writes about dealing with sexual advances,

negotiating her safety and the importance of having the 'right' physical appearance. Similarly, my identity as a female aged in her 20s shaped my interactions with participants in this research, presenting many challenges (e.g., gaining acceptance as a researcher), and also offering me advantages. Negotiating these issues also gave me considerable insight into what it is like to be a female scenester.

One of the main challenges that I experienced was negotiating a balance between encouraging new relationships with people in the scene without being subject to unwanted sexual advances, or appearing sexually interested in males and engaging in competition with other females for males' attention. In nightclubs, I observed that (seemingly) 'subtle' gestures including having a friendly demeanour (e.g. smiling) were interpreted as a sign of my potential sexual interest, and I quickly learned that in these environments it was unlikely that I would develop relationships with men that were conducive to research.

Accordingly, I became more selective and spoke initially only to men already known to Trevor or Theo. Once I began to trust others in the scene I was able to broaden this network significantly. On the other hand, mindful of my personal safety, I was cautious not to put myself in potentially dangerous situations with individuals who I met even if it was through others (e.g., I did not leave venues alone with them and did not providing my contact details immediately, or at all).

Despite the benefits that I gained through meeting Trevor and Theo – enabling me to meet others and giving me insight into the scene – it wasn't until I developed friendships with women in the scene that I began to manage negotiation of the sexualised aspect of the scene with more ease. This was a gradual process, however, as my dealings with women were initially difficult. My early fieldnotes did not feature interactions with female scenesters (aside from Fiona), and they also documented how conversations with many of the women (including Monique) had been superficial and brief. That is, initial conversations had only lasted a minute or two and women seemed disinterested in talking to me (one social cue being that they looked around continually while we were talking). The majority of substantial interactions that I had were with young men because they were more available and ready to talk. At the time I felt that this probably reaffirmed a suspicion of me among

young women in the scene – that I was engaging in competition with them for male attention.

To illustrate this issue, I discuss one early encounter with a key contact, Monique, documented in my fieldnotes in August 2006. During this interaction, I encountered Monique’s assertive, competitive style in her dealings with other women in club spaces. This particular evening was a Saturday night at *Lounge*. Prior to the excerpt below, I had been talking with Monique and a couple of others when a male friend of Monique’s approached:

I was chatting to Melissa and Monique started to talk to the guy, Craig who Gretel noted had been ‘sleazing onto her’ at [venue name] a couple of weeks ago. They had been talking for a few minutes when Melissa left to get a drink. I sat down on a bench against the wall (it was about 4am at this stage – I was getting tired) and Craig sat down for a minute talking to me. I think that Monique had been approached by somebody else and she disappeared for a moment. We were talking about something trivial, like his work etc. when Monique came back. She looked down at us, and immediately sat on his knee, wrapping her arms around him and our conversation immediately came to a halt. She said to me, ‘Rachael, isn’t Melissa or somebody else around?’ (indicating that I should leave to talk to somebody else). The conversation with Craig ended as Monique then launched into another topic. Craig looked over at me, seemingly surprised by the interruption. I got up and left.

My initially difficult encounters with some women in the scene reflected those of other female newcomers. For example, Melissa, who was (by her accounts) also relatively new to the scene, provided some insights into relationships between females in the scene in an interview:

The girls were not as friendly as the guys. In fact, you are the only person that I have really made friends with. The other girls, because it is such a male dominated scene, whenever a new girl comes on the scene it is...you know, they feel threatened. That was a really horrible feeling. Especially because nobody knew me and how could they just assume that I was there to steal their spotlight or whatever it was. It was just all so fake. Nobody wanted to be my friend. None of the girls did. They have their own little cliques. Whereas the guys were a lot more chilled out. They were all kind of friends. Didn’t seem like there was that much conflict between them.

Like Melissa, I interpreted gendered interactions within the context of the broader scene, which was highly sexualised, competitive in relation to status and image, and gossip driven (Melissa uses the term 'so fake'). As such it was common for female-female relationships to be distant and unfriendly – at least initially. This was triggered by the large amount of attention bestowed on new women in the scene by the men (as I had already experienced). Ange said that getting a lot of attention is “something that happens to virtually all new girls in the scene – they’re like fresh meat for the guys. It’s a bit intense” (notably, here Ange also acknowledges that female-male relationships were also sometimes difficult to negotiate).

Acknowledging some of my difficulties, Theo tried to assist me to negotiate relationships with the women that he knew. He said in a casual conversation, referring to the two women mentioned above (Monique and Gretel), “a lot of girls don’t like them because they are kinda the centre of attention... but I reckon you probably will like them – but only if you don’t try to compete with them, like, with guys and that’. He also acknowledged that the two women know “everybody” and would be valuable contacts for me.

I initially took Theo’s advice. I attempted to avoid a sexualised gaze through deliberate choices in attire. I did not wear ‘clubbing’ attire or revealing clothing (as I mentioned, I usually wore pants, t-shirts, and flat shoes). I avoided positioning myself as sexual competition to the other women – attempting to neutralise my presence as best I could. Similarly, I initially avoided participating in the personalised and often scathing gossip that seemed to be so central to interactions among scenesters. I avoided the overly personalised and ‘messy’ elements of the scene in my attempt to maximise the success of relationships.

These experiences represented my negotiation of balancing the hybridity that is necessary to be a good ethnographer: the balance between being too close and being over-involved (and thus unable to identify taken-for-granted practices and features of the scene); and being too distant to gain valuable insights. As Pollner and Emersen (2001, p.126) suggest:

[b]y prioritizing non-involved observation over skilled performance within the field of action... and by not fully appreciating the detailed and temporally unfolding

particulars of the lived order, the ethnographer is denied access to the 'quiddity' of social action.

Over time, I realised that my cautious and distant approach was impeding my ability to be sufficiently 'immersed' in the scene to gain insights. My experience of fieldwork resonates with Goffman's (1989) comments that participant observation involves "subjecting yourself to, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals." He argues that if you don't get yourself in a situation where "you've been taking the same crap they've been taking" you can't do a "serious piece of work" (Goffman, 1989, p.125).

Among scenesters, 'looking good' was highly valued and integral to one's popularity and acceptance. Individuals were very body conscious and fashion savvy. Taking photographs of various (fashion/stylistic) 'looks' and browsing over them in detail, taking note of how people looked with particular attention to fashion, make-up, weight, and who is photographed together, was common among scenesters. It was something that they often did in small groups, punctuating discussion with critical remarks, jokes, and commentary on what occurred that night – integral to their enjoyment of the scene.

Accordingly, they invested a significant proportion of their disposable income in purchasing the 'right' clothes, shoes and accessories (particularly mobile phones and stereo equipment), styling their hair, going to the gym and other activities that contributed to them achieving a look that they deemed fashionable and attractive. They often spent beyond their financial means to do so, accruing credit card debt.

These practices became evident to me during encounters with scenesters where my fashion sense came under scrutiny. On several occasions scenesters asked what 'brand' I was wearing, or they unexpectedly looked at the 'tag' on the inside of my clothing to see the branding. Men in the scene were similarly fashion conscious. For example, on one occasion, one of the men informed me that I "need" to buy new shoes. He noted that mine were "too old" and therefore unacceptable. Attempting to assist me in my fashion, he insisted that I try on one of his old (unisex style) pairs to

see if they fit my feet – and subsequently gave them to me (even when I insisted that they were too big).

Over time it became apparent that, while I did not wish to alienate women through deliberately attracting the gaze of men, my decision to ignore this aspect of their world was limiting my participation in the scene. This was demonstrated when I attended a fancy dress party that had a cabaret theme (in October 2006). Contrary to my usual moderate, casual dress, I decided to wear a dress, high-heeled shoes (as was customary in this setting). It was on that particular evening that I had some good conversations with women – who approached me to comment on my outfit (my hair, shoes and dress) throughout the night. Indeed, Gretel approached me two weeks after that occasion, asking me if she could borrow the same dress for a cocktail party. Gretel came to my house to try the dress on. I took this opportunity to talk to her about my observations of competition between women in the scene, tell her about my project and emphasise that I was not interested in becoming involved with the men in the scene. I told her that I had been having trouble with men ‘sleazing’ on to me. She subsequently invited me to come out with her and this is how I also came to know Monique.

Over time, I developed mutually beneficial friendships with Gretel and Monique. They confided in me personal aspects of their lives as I assured them that I was somebody that they could trust and, in exchange, they both smoothed the way for more comfortable interactions with men by introducing me to those that they trusted. For example, towards the end of fieldwork, Monique admitted to me that she had told her male friends that she would “kick their arses if they skeezed onto you!” (‘skeeze’ is a variant of ‘sleaze’). It is also worth noting that my activities did not extend to a role that I regarded as ‘counselling’ (e.g. therapeutic techniques beyond listening were not used and there were no instances where referrals to services were made). Further, my role as confidant was not typical of all relationships, but mainly those who were key contacts (and particularly the six individuals who are introduced in Chapter 4). My relationships with other women in the scene varied significantly and they shifted continually as relationships progressed. However, acceptance by at least some of the women in the scene was vital to the development of relationships with men that were conducive to the collection of fieldwork data.

The experience of negotiating gendered relationships with scenesters illuminated two important aspects of the scene. First was the importance of fashion and identity-shaping to scenesters. Making an effort to be fashion conscious – to embrace the image conscious, consumerist elements of the scene – enabled me to have a legitimate presence and an ‘identity’ among scenesters and to gain some respect among the females in the network. Gypsy, made this link explicit one day when she told me bluntly “we only hang out with you because we think you look good”. It was impossible to neutralise my presence, particularly my gendered positioning, in this network and to do so would result in missed opportunities to gain important insights into the scene. In particular, the importance placed on image is discussed later in this thesis in relation to experiences of the scene by scenesters as ‘superficial’ and ‘fake’. Having a strongly feminised presence in the scene highlighted the importance of competition between women. In later chapters, I discuss how this competition was associated with gossip – an aspect of interactions between scenesters that provided intrigue and interest within the scene but that also prompted decisions by some to become less involved. I also discuss in Chapter 7 how self-consciousness about presentation and image informed particular styles of ecstasy use.

Negotiating informed consent

During the course of ethnographic fieldwork, potential participants were informed verbally about the nature of the study and were given a plain language statement where it was appropriate and/or requested. However, gaining informed consent was an ongoing and gradual process. This is discussed by Murphy and Dingwall, who describe gaining consent in ethnographic research as “a relational and sequential process” that “cannot be established as a contractual agreement prior to research” (2007, pp.2226).

In the scene, immediately announcing my identity as a researcher in every encounter would have been a significant barrier to my acceptance in this network, particularly because of the anxiety associated with protecting privacy in relation to ATS use. Gaining research consent from all individuals who I met and interacted with in the course of 18 months of fieldwork was not only impracticable, but also ethically unnecessary, as it is only a handful of individuals who are referred to directly in this

thesis. Murphy and Dingwall (2007) describe how consent is based on trust, is renegotiated throughout the period of research and is a matter that requires the ongoing judgement of the researcher.

While numerous others were often present in participant observation encounters, I rely heavily on data from key contacts, who gave full consent because they were explained the purpose of the research in detail, read plain language statements and gave their consent in digital recordings. Prior to publishing the first journal article derived from this data (Green & Moore 2009), I provided as many scenesters as possible with a copy of the manuscript for their comment, including those who did not participate in an interview. I received one negative response in relation to the validity of ethnographic method. However, none expressed concerns about the way they had been represented.

The ability of young adults to give informed consent while they are using alcohol and illicit drugs is a contentious issue. Aldridge and Charles (2008) argue that, while intoxication potentially compromises the autonomy of participants involved in research, the potential gain to research knowledge outweighs the risks of participation (thus conforming to ethical principles for health and social research). They suggest that intoxication of participants can be managed within research; that intoxication per se does not indicate 'vulnerability' (Aldridge & Charles, 2008). It is also worth mentioning that none of my participants required urgent medical attention or were the subject of significant police attention (notwithstanding random alcohol breath testing) during fieldwork and so the negotiation of such situations was never necessary.

While spending time with participants when they were intoxicated was a key activity, and fieldnotes were recorded based on these observation sessions, the ethics of doing so were managed through a commitment to also spend time with them when they were not intoxicated. I also often spoke to participants about their activities and behaviour in retrospect (i.e. when they were not intoxicated). This occurred naturally in social encounters among this network, as discussing and comparing experiences of nights out was a usual topic of conversation among scenesters after events. Such discussion was integral to the reinforcement of membership of the social group and

also to projects of competing for status. I drew from these conversations to clarify my understanding of what I observed.

Negotiating a researcher identity

Several researchers have written about the challenging and ‘guilty’ aspects of negotiating ethnographic relationships. Often this is related to the ‘blurring’ of boundaries – that is, between the simultaneous negotiation of personal and professional roles required in the ‘work’ of ethnography (see Bruenjes, 1998; Hume & Mulcock, 2004; Marcus & Fischer, 1999, p.22). This issue was the cause of some stress and confusion among scenesters. The blurring of the traditional boundaries between work and leisure, researcher and friend, were uncomfortable and complicated my relationships with participants in the current study. Notably, my ongoing presence as a researcher created ambiguity about my status in the network and suspicion about my motivations. I was regularly asked (sometime in a joking way) if I was ‘police’. It was not well understood that I was always a researcher –that is, participant observation was not switched ‘on’ and ‘off’, and it was not restricted to formal ‘work’ hours. This resonates with Emerson and Pollard’s comment that “host members” (participants) may “even ignore his self-definition as a researcher, analyst or observer” (2001, p.241).

Offers to share in ATS use were frequent and indicative of expressions of friendship and inclusion by participants. Researcher participation in the illegal activities of their contacts is a contentious issue and a rarely discussed element of fieldwork in club scenes. Measham and Moore state that:

Being personally, emotionally and socially involved in clubland and associated dance drug use still needs to be ‘managed’ in terms of professional identity. This means that club researchers, whilst open about their researcher role, may feel the need to downplay or even hide their consumer role in dance clubs, particularly if that consumption also includes club drugs (2005, p.22).

However, positioning oneself as ‘anti-drugs’ can damage a social researcher’s credibility, raising doubt about their ability to understand the motivations and intentions of participation in such activities. Researchers have written about the

blurring of boundaries between personal and professional identities for drug researchers, framing the dilemma of disclosure as “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” (Measham & Moore, 2005) and calling for greater reflexivity in club studies. The dilemmas that they write about are all the more pertinent for ethnographers, who aim to develop personalised relationships with their ‘subjects’ and spend significant periods of night time in night activities where participants are intoxicated and where their presence may be highly sexualised (Perrone, 2010).

As mentioned, among study participants I was regarded as a peer. I was of similar age and had an appreciation of and enthusiasm for the scene. Being of similar age, I blended in and I continued to improve in this skill as fieldwork progressed and I learnt about fashionable dress and styling in the scene. While friendships were established with scenesters, this was not through shared experiences as a drug user, which I observed would have a detrimental effect on my ability to manage the physical demands of long hours of participant observation with writing fieldnotes and other paid employment during the week. Writing about the nature of participating in the field, Delamont observes:

It is important to participate enough to be able to write feelingly about the nature of the work: its pains and pleasures, smells and sounds, mental and physical stress. However, the researcher cannot actually spend the whole time fishing, teaching or digging coal, because that would prevent both studying other members of the social world and, perhaps more vitally, time spent writing the fieldnotes, thinking about the fieldwork, writing down those thoughts, and systematically testing their initial insights in the setting (2007, p.206).

However, I was initially unsure how I would manage this issue, given the centrality of drug use to the shared experience among scenesters. An anti-drug stance would have certainly prevented establishing rapport with my contacts. As a compromise to this difficult and ongoing issue, I openly expressed a view that I was accepting of others’ decisions to use or not to use. Individuals commonly inquired about whether I was ‘anti-drugs’ as a way of gauging my research agenda. I responded that I tried not to make judgments about other people’s decisions to use drugs. I draw from fieldnotes to recount one such instance and my typical response. This situation involved Nick, who asked me if I wanted to take a “pill” (ecstasy) with him. I

explain that I am “doing a PhD” and that “if I go as hard as you then I will just burn out” (meaning become tired). This reasoning held currency within the context of common experiences of burn out among this network.

Encounters like these were not often required, as presence at all night music events accompanied the assumption that I was using drugs – an assumption that I did not actively refute. I consider this selective disclosure of my own drug involvement in relation to Pearson’s interpretation of “a bluff moral pragmatism” (2002, p.xv) that is necessary to maintaining relationships in the field. Further, scenesters at times observed me consuming alcohol in social contexts, something that undoubtedly contributed to the formation of views about the nature of my stance on drug use more generally.

Nonetheless, participation in the scene required long hours that were physically challenging – illustrating the functionality of ATS among this group (e.g. to facilitate wakefulness during all-night sessions of dancing and socialising). My lack of use of ATS meant that it was difficult to participate fully in all of the activities of the network. This is because many of the contacts involved in this research participated in ATS-facilitated ‘bender’ weekends. I negotiated these difficult hours by breaking fieldwork into manageable periods of time, occasionally going home to sleep and write some notes (sometimes using a digital voice recorder to record my thoughts in the car on the way home), and re-joining participants later that afternoon or evening. I tried to compensate for this lost time by asking questions such as “So what did you get up to after I left?” This invariably meant that I missed out on some of the activities of scenesters. A ‘partial’ insider, I was absorbed in the lifestyle of the scene, but detached from sharing the emotional and many of the social experience of using drugs with scenesters.

There were, however, some benefits of this partiality in relation to my relationships with participants. Detachment from drug use enabled me to remain an observer to some of the ‘politicking’ that occurred in relation to activities of sourcing and paying for drugs. Such issues often created rifts in friendships, something that would have been detrimental to the project. My continued detachment from direct involvement in drug use also enabled me to focus on developing stronger relationships with

scenesters. In the following section I describe how *E-scope* became integral to participant observation activities.

E-scope and fieldwork

Early in the fieldwork (March 2006), Nick brought *E-scope* to my attention, showing me how he used it to access information about the EDM events in Perth. I realised that it might be important to those in the scene when Trevor also mentioned *E-scope* in April 2006. My fieldnotes record the following conversation with Trevor the first time that I met him:

Trevor asked me whether I am an '*E-scoper*'. I said 'Umm no, what is that?' he laughed and said, 'Oh, it's just like ... it's a website. Don't worry about it.' I remembered Nick showed me a website that he said he uses to 'find out about gigs and stuff' I said, 'Oh, you mean *E-scope*, right?' and he said 'Yeah, so you know it?' and I said 'I've seen it, but I don't really use it'.

Trevor's question took on greater meaning as I learnt more about the scenesters. People who were regularly involved in the scene and on the website called themselves by a collective name to signify their membership. In this thesis, the terms 'scenesters' and 'members' equally signify individuals who used *E-scope* ('E-scopers'), because all individuals involved in this study had an *E-scope* identity. In the encounter with Trevor above, he used this conversation to establish that I was not a regular participant in the scene.

Over time, and following several similar encounters, it became apparent that involvement on *E-scope* signified membership of the scene. This was because *E-scope* was not an anonymous space used by members of the scene, but integral to social interactions. Among participants in this study, discussions on *E-scope* were intertwined with face to face interactions and vice versa, essentially indicating a blurring between offline or 'real'-world and online social interaction. Developing an understanding the workings on *E-scope* was therefore critical to gaining insight into the lives of scenesters and their shared values.

From April 2006 I began browsing *E-scope* daily and it became an important tool learning the language of scenesters, emergent social hierarchies, shared norms held

among those in the scene (or at least online norms), cultural practices and so on. I used it to research the venues, types of music and events that members inhabited, as well as learning about their interests, professions and opinions about various topics ranging from favourite restaurants to current political and social issues. I also used information about music events to plan where I spent my time during fieldwork.

Once I was familiar with the language and activities of scenesters, I used *E-scope* regularly to assist participant observation scheduling. For example, scenesters often discussed upcoming music events or what they had planned for weekends on the website and this information allowed me to arrive uninvited to venues in the knowledge that I would certainly meet scenesters. This provided me with a level of autonomy in fieldwork by providing me with some options in planning my weekends with scenesters. I was able to pursue particular individuals who I was interested in spending more time with and to work on developing new and quality relationships. It also eased reliance on scenesters to inform me about events – an aspect that had been limiting and frustrating at the beginning of fieldwork (particularly if participants were late or if they did not show up at all).

As suggested in ethical discussions, researchers must be sensitive to the specific vulnerabilities of online communities (Eynon *et al.*, 2008). The most significant concern in using *E-scope* was participant confidentiality. In particular, I noted that while some network members were vigilant about keeping drug use and online identity separate, other (online) members seemed blasé about their privacy. They frequently used their birth names, referred to personal details in discussions and their online accounts were linked to their personal email addresses (which also sometimes contained their names). For these reasons, I decided against active involvement on *E-scope* through participation in its forum discussion board.

Observation of interactions between members online was used to enhance my understanding of the relationships between scenesters and the dynamics of the scene that I had gained through face-to-face observation. I learned the ‘nicknames’ of members that I had met and monitored the site for their contribution to discussions, taking note of their views on music tastes, controversial issues including drug discussion and their interactions with others.

Monitoring the site also enabled me to track the movement of scenesters in and out of the scene, as it was common for individuals to post what they had been doing recently. For example, on one occasion, a key contact named Monique announced that she no longer wanted to go out as much as she had been – an announcement that signalled a decline in her involvement in the scene and eventually cessation in drug use.

Though seemingly a source of endless ‘data’, web discussions held little significance when taken out of context (Hine, 2008; Sade-Beck, 2004). In Chapter 5 I discuss a number of activities including behaviour that when taken out of context could be perceived as more serious or hostile than intended (e.g. arguments). This therefore rationalised my use of *E-scope* forum discussions as data. Where I draw from web excerpts, I am able to contextualise examples through participant observation data and considerable time learning about and observing scenesters interacting on the forum.

I have taken measures to de-identify the authors of *E-scope* contributions.

Techniques include changing words, switching the order of sentences and running the data through online search engines to ensure that results do not return links to the individuals involved. While I have endeavoured to leave data as intact as possible, it is inevitable that these small changes alter the meaning slightly. However, this has been managed in a delicate balance with protecting the confidentiality of those involved. I now outline the process of identifying key contacts and conducting in-depth interviews.

Key contacts and in-depth interviews

After approximately a year of fieldwork, I had developed varying levels of rapport with approximately 60 individuals, 30 of whom I considered to be reliable contacts. These were individuals with whom I developed the strongest rapport with and who also understood the project. All were asked if they would be interested in participating in an interview and eventually I was able to interview 25 individuals. These are referred to as ‘key contacts’.

The majority of key contacts were slightly older than the average age of scenesters more generally (which I estimate to be between 20 and 23 years). Seventeen participants in the in-depth interviews were aged between 24 and 26 years (at the time of interview). This may have been because these individuals were closer to my own age and therefore I was able to develop stronger relationships with them. Further, these individuals were more willing to sit down and engage in conversation during participant observation sessions, in contrast to younger scenesters who were often highly distracted and tended to be more focus more on the fun and novel aspects of the scene.

Interviews were conducted in the final four months of fieldwork. Interviewees were approached individually, so that they could raise questions without judgment from others and talk about any concerns more easily. Most key contacts raised confidentiality as their main concern. I made sure that I discussed the nature of the interview in detail, and I assured them that I would protect their anonymity and confidentiality. This included not discussing their interviews with others in their network, where gossip was rife, as well as de-identifying them in any personal notes, my thesis or subsequent publications. The use of a plain language statement explaining the research and nature of interviews were used to facilitate the process (see Appendix C).

Four individuals declined to be involved in the research and this was largely because they were uncomfortable discussing their personal lives with me. Two spoke with me about how they had experienced trauma that they believed would be raised during their involvement in an in-depth interview and declined on this basis. For one, this was the death of a close friend from a heroin overdose.

In-depth interviews were conducted in homes, cafes or pubs during weeknights. Typically, I arranged to meet at the individual's house and either stay there or go somewhere nearby to them. Prior to the interview, the nature of the research was explained and participants were given a plain language statement stating details of the research (Appendix B). Further, I asked participants to choose a pseudonym that we would both refer to throughout the recorded interview. I informed them that they should withhold any specific details about involvement in criminal activity

(notwithstanding illicit drug use) that they may have been involved in, informing them that my data could potentially be subpoenaed by a court of law. Consent was then verbally recorded and individuals were given a cash payment of \$AUD 30¹⁹ to reimburse them for their time and expenses. Interviews were conducted on weekdays when scenesters did not usually use illicit drugs and I did not interview any individual while they were noticeably intoxicated.

Interviews ranged between one and two hours in length. Three individuals participated in two separate interviews. I typically did not take notes during interviews which were recorded but wrote fieldnotes afterwards. These notes included details of the process of setting up the interview; poignant moments within the interview, such as topics that interviewees refused to answer; perceived awkwardness or tensions; and links to participant observation data. Notes also included potential issues for follow up in subsequent interviews. Five individuals completed follow-up interviews. Interviews were professionally transcribed and transcriptions were reviewed and amended by myself as necessary.

Interview approach

In-depth interviews presented an opportunity to fill ‘gaps’ in data from participant observation. While I had spent time observing the everyday activity of AOD use, the interviews explored the personal biographies, pathways and transitions, influences, experiences and events that scenesters believed have been important in shaping their current lives and the place of AOD use.

In interviews, I asked individuals to tell their story chronologically beginning with their first use of alcohol and illicit drugs. This is similar to what Thompson *et al.* (2002) describe as a “life story approach”. They write:

[Thus] life stories show the centrality of subjective perceptions and evaluations in shaping the life choices. They are redolent with descriptions of feeling and experience of relationships with significant others, with interpretation of turning-

¹⁹ All mentions of dollar (\$) currency refer to the Australian dollar (AU\$)

points, with influences which were rejected rather than followed, with dreams of lives that might have been. They also reveal the crucial importance of local contexts, local structures of opportunities, and local games of competition (ibid, p.7).

Using this approach, I asked interviewees to conceptualise a timeline and this was used to structure discussion. I encouraged them to discuss their drug use in relation to significant events in their lives such as university courses, employment status, relationships and housing arrangements. This focused the narrative on details of experiences that might not naturally arise in informal conversations. This approach provided a springboard for the exploration of stories and transitions.

The progression of interviews was guided by a semi-structured interview schedule. This listed the themes that I wished to cover in the study, but it was modified as the project developed to cover gaps that I identified in preliminary data analysis and based on pre-existing knowledge about the individual. The guide covered many topics that do not necessarily arise naturally in conversation – for example, experiences of harm and future goals. However, insights and shared experiences gained through participant observation were also raised. This provided a counter to the potentially de-contextualised and ‘confessional’ aspects of formal interviews (Pilkington, 2007, p.380) and it meant that in-depth interviews and participant observation were utilised to complement one another and yield a fuller perspective on participants’ lives.

The process of in-depth interviews provided an opportunity for interviewees to reflect on their personal story in a dedicated space outside of the group environment where participant observation was conducted. A number of individuals commented on the uniqueness of this experience. For example, Ange said that it was “rare” to have a conversation with somebody who “just listens”. Further, the reflective opportunity was appreciated by individuals and some also commented on this. Theo said that it took him “back in time”. Three individuals spoke to me about how it had prompted them to think about their lives after the interview, indicating that the experience may have been of some therapeutic benefit. I made sure that I followed up with each interviewee after interviews, in case they wished to debrief or discuss any issues that they thought about later. Many scenesters took up this offer.

Data analysis

The processes of data collection and analysis were informed by principles of grounded theory. Grounded theory was first articulated by sociologists Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Emerson summarises the grounded theory approach:

the grounded theory approach viewed data collection and analysis not as a means of establishing the relation between a few key variables decided in advance, but as procedures for generating and elaborating complex, interrelated series of theoretical propositions through close, systemic examination of the data (2001, p.291).

Grounded theory can be best described as an iterative, emergent process whereby themes emerge from the simultaneous processes of observation, reflection, and collection of additional data based on analytic themes.

In this study, I approached fieldwork with a set of potential themes and research questions that were guided by close attention to the international contributions to normalisation research (Parker *et al.*, 1997), previous consideration of ATS involvement among young adults in the Australian context (Duff, 2003a, 2005b), and academic treatment of concepts of recreational and functional drug use (outlined in Chapter 1).

Field observations were complemented by in-depth interviews and generated three main types of data: fieldnotes, interview data and observations from *E-scope*. Through the process of fieldwork, fieldnotes were studied and accompanying notes were written comprising additional observations and insights. Emerging themes, contradictions, divergence informed subsequent fieldwork observations. As described by Charmaz:

By studying your data you will become much more aware of your respondents' implicit meanings and taken-for-granted concerns [... and] you learn nuances of your research participants' language and meanings. Thus, you learn to define the directions in which your data can take you (2001, p.340).

The first systematic data analysis phase was conducted between October and November 2006, during which time I began using NVivo7 (QSR International). NVivo is a database management software program, which facilitates thematic 'coding' of data. Charmaz describes coding as "the pivotal link between collecting data and developing emergent theory to explain these data" (2001, p.341). Coding involves line-by-line examination of the data and defining the actions or events that occur in it or that are represented by it (ibid). Groups or data with similar themes are grouped together, and exceptional or negative cases are highlighted. These exceptions are then used to re-question key assumptions. Eventually, each idea or theme begins to form an analytic framework. This framework may then be refined through the examination of common codes and grouping them into higher order categories. It was from this process that I was able to understand what my data covered and to become aware of the gaps in my data.

Armed with these understandings of my data an intensive phase of fieldwork recommenced in November 2006. Ongoing review of my fieldnotes and the generation of questions and areas for elaboration also informed the focus of in-depth interviews. By March 2007, I had begun to identify repetition in my data and strong themes emerged. This is termed "saturation" or "theoretical saturation" in literature describing qualitative methodologies (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p.61). I commenced in-depth interviews to further supplement weaker elements of the data, for example, the individual trajectory of drug use history. *E-scope* data was not analysed line-by-line, but drawn on to support already established themes. Finally, I conducted some descriptive analysis of the quantitative data that I gained from my 25 interviewees. This involved aggregation of basic demographic data including participants' ages, occupations and housing status. I compared these findings to published survey data describing the characteristics of Australian young people who use ATS.

Data analysis was further enhanced through collaborative and multi-disciplinary processes. This study was linked to a wider project funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). Throughout fieldwork I regularly presented my emerging findings to a research group. This group involved senior ethnographers, epidemiologists, experts in drug policy modelling and PhD students who were conducting concurrent ethnographic, epidemiological research and agent-

based modelling (Dray *et al.*, 2012; D. Moore *et al.*, 2009; Perez *et al.*, 2012) with psychostimulant users in Australia. In these forums, my findings were compared and contrasted with both the existing research and emerging findings from ethnographic studies conducted with psychostimulant users in Melbourne and Sydney. This enhanced my understanding of emerging Australian trends and points of divergence in my Perth-based research that may be explored during fieldwork. For example, the absence of pharmaceutical stimulant dexamphetamine use from the Melbourne and Sydney samples indicated that its use among scenesters may be an area worthy of further investigation.

Inductive research provided a particularly good fit with my approach to the project, where I aimed to move from a pathologising approach to illicit drug use to an approach that gives voice to lived experience of young adults. I have attempted to represent my experiences with participants, the workings of the scene, my understandings of involvement in it, and the drug-use experiences of network members. I acknowledge, however, that there are multiple perspectives of events and that notions of authenticity or accuracy in this process are flawed. Representations have been filtered through my own cultural lens and shaped by other factors including my pre-knowledge of the subject and gaps in my understandings – including ones that I am not aware of because of my own biases. Accounts are also limited by my partial membership of the scene and geographical distance from my participants at the time of writing. Acknowledging this, I draw very heavily from participants' own words that were elicited in in-depth interviews to support fieldwork observations, thus attempting to preserve nuances of language and expression. I distinguish data through the use of indentation of text and font size. I treat *E-scope* data in a similar way and I indicate which data source was used when drawing from different data sources.

Exiting the 'field'

In June 2007 I moved from Perth to Melbourne, thus signalling the end of fieldwork and my involvement in the scene. At this point I was no longer collecting data that were 'adding' new insights to my understanding of the scene and the place of substance use in it. My physical departure from the scene marked the beginning of a

period of intensive data analysis and, eventually, writing. Having geographical distance from my participants enabled me to extract myself from the demanding lifestyle of the scene – notably going to all-night events. I was also able to gain some emotional distance from the people that I met enabling me to reflect upon my experiences and observations.

Since this time, I have remained in communication with several key contacts (two males and two females) and regard them as friends. My ongoing connection to these individuals has enabled me to keep updated on the involvement of others in the scene and significant events in their lives (e.g. some are now in long-term relationships and some have moved overseas). I occasionally browse the pages of *E-scope*, and sometimes use this forum to reflect on some of the experiences of fieldwork, particularly by looking through photos and old calendars of music events. Further, when I visit Perth I catch up with some scenesters and make an effort to attend EDM nights with those who are still involved in the scene, staying informed of changes in the scene.

Having described the methods used in the collection of the ethnographic data analysed in this study, I now introduce the scenesters and discuss how they understood themselves in relation to the mainstream community.

– CHAPTER 4 –

The socio-demographic profile of scenesters:

A group of ‘normal’ young Australians

In this chapter I introduce the ethnographic sample. I refer primarily to data collected from 25 key contacts while referring more generally to the wider ethnographic sample of 60 scenesters. I describe the basic demographic characteristics of this network. This includes attention to gender, age and cultural background. I also describe factors such as educational background, employment status and living arrangements.

An important characteristic of this sample is their collective representation of themselves as ‘normal’ members of the community. The concept is particularly important because it was central to scenesters’ self-held identities – their understanding of who they were and their place in the world. The self-description of scenesters as normal was indicative of their investment in a range of cultural expectations such as to be financially successful, healthy and have stable relationships. I describe these as ‘mainstream’ values and I refer to scenesters as mainstream young adults. I do not use the term mainstream uncritically or without acknowledgment of its limitations, but to represent the common experience of scenesters as having access to considerable life opportunity and access to resources or ‘capital’ (Bourdieu’s [1986] term referring to social, cultural and economic resources). The investment in mainstream values is significant because it explains the emphasis among them of adhering to ‘recreational’ styles of drug use.

In the second half of this chapter I outline the profile of six ‘typical’ scenesters’ who are also individuals that feature in subsequent chapters. These profiles draw on ethnographic fieldnotes and in-depth interview data. Along with their identification as normal members of the community, the use of ATS was a universal feature among this network and this aspect of their lives is described in particular detail. These accounts aim to provide a background understanding of the characteristics of

scenesters' involvement in drug use over their lives. Their experiences within the EDM scene, styles of drug use and the ways they negotiated the practice of recreational drug use in the broader context of their ever-changing lives is 'typical' of the broader sample. This exploration is significant because it provides a backdrop to the exploration of specific aspects of drug practice discussed in Chapter 6, 7, and 8.

In this thesis I explore how participants' negotiation of mainstream values and identity alongside 'scenester' identity – which was based on their affiliation and lifestyle in the EDM scene. There were overlaps between these two social fields. For example, scenesters engaged in many socially sanctioned consumptive practices in licensed leisure environments. They also valued self-control in their drug practices, which aligns with dominant cultural values of moderation, rationality and responsibility. However, involvement in illicit drug use, and the partying ethos that accompanied scenester identity and lifestyle, produced ongoing tensions. The processes involved in negotiating these tensions are of particular interest in this thesis, and have implications for consideration of the cultural 'normalisation' (Parker *et al.*, 1998) of illicit drug use.

Sociological work exploring the changed experiences and lifestyles of young adults in Australia provides a backdrop to this chapter. I argue that scenesters' experiences are unremarkable in the context of the experiences of young Australians more generally. In Chapter 2, I briefly outlined some key points of UK sociological work (e.g. Furlong & Cartmel, 1997a & 1997b) describing the altered 'pathways' to adulthood that young people experience in relation to previous generations. These various social and economic shifts have also been observed in the Australian context. According to Wyn (1997), young Australians who were born post-1970s undertake an extended transition to adulthood that is not necessarily 'linear'. Wyn and Woodman (2006, p.502) demonstrate that young Australians remain in education for longer and the proportion of people in their twenties who hold a post-secondary school qualification has increased. They found that more women participate in the workforce and more individuals work in less stable forms of employment (such as short-term, part-time and contractual). Women also are more likely to delay

childbirth until over the age of 30, and women and men marry later and live with their parents for longer (Wyn & Woodman, 2006, p.503). Based on this diversity and non-linearity of life transitions, Wyn and Woodman (2006) question approaches that conceptualise ‘youth’ as merely a state of transition or rely on the notion that there is a normative path to becoming ‘adult’.

This chapter contributes to the development of two broader arguments. In this thesis, I claim that broader social trends of non-linearity and reversibility of transitions have implications for the negotiation of drug use in scenesters’ lives as they aged. I argue that while ATS use was a regular activity in this network, the negotiation of normal drug use was less fixed – it was renegotiated in relation to a range of factors including life priorities. The negotiation and renegotiation of drug use alongside the claiming of adult status is an under-explored aspect of the normalisation thesis. Through an exploration of scenester investment in mainstream identity, this chapter also lays a foundation for the establishment of the broader argument that the negotiation of dual identities (within the mainstream and within the scene) unsettled values associated with performance of recreational drug practice. Before exploring these issues, I will provide a brief background to the site of this study – Perth, WA.

Research in ‘boomtown’

Perth is the capital city of WA and is known as the most ‘geographically isolated’ city in the world. In 2007 (at the time of fieldwork), the population of Perth was approximately 1.55 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2008c). The population sprawls the coast of WA for approximately 125kms. Two-thirds (approximately 66.5%) of Perth’s population is of Anglo-Celtic origin and 61.5% of its residents in 2006 were born in Australia. Of those born overseas people born in the UK represent the vast majority (nearly five times higher than any other overseas born group, ABS, 2007a). Perth has a strong history of British migration and approximately 80% of the population of Perth speak English only (ABS, 2008a). In the 2006 Census, 24.9% identified as Catholic, 25.6% identified as belonging to another Christian denomination (predominantly Anglican) and 22.2% stated that they had no religious beliefs (ABS, 2008a).

Field research occurred at a time of unprecedented economic growth and change in the state. While the Australian economy was strong generally, WA was in the throes of an unprecedented resources and mining boom. In 2007, WA was the most economically productive state in Australia per capita, which was driven primarily by export demand from China and Japan for iron ore and liquefied natural gas (respectively) (ABS, 2008b). This period marked the early stages of an unprecedented rise in the value of the Australian dollar (AU\$) and development of what is now termed a ‘two-speed economy’. This term represents the dominance of the resources sector over others such as retail, manufacturing and tourism preceding a series of recessions experienced over the globe. This crisis – the ‘Global Financial Crisis’ – began with the burst of the US housing market towards the end of fieldwork in 2007.

In February 2007, official unemployment in WA was 3.0% (ABS, 2007b), one of the lowest prevalences ever recorded, and there were 27% more jobs advertised in the May 2007 quarter than in the same quarter of 2006 (ABS, 2007c). Notably, there was a ‘skills shortage’ in WA, which was the product of significant financial incentives offered to ‘unskilled’ or ‘semi-skilled’ workers willing to work in the resources sectors (ABS, 2007c).

In terms of the scenesters, while economic prosperity resulted in a higher cost of living generally, those involved in this research had good job security and a good standard of living by most economic indicators. Perth had been informally labelled as ‘Dullsville’ (Barrass, 2011) in the popular media – a reference to the lack of cultural activity and night life. However, this was a time of cultural invigoration, as the state’s economic wealth attracted investment in the entertainment sectors and resulted in the development of entertainment precincts including restaurants and bars. This context of unprecedented economic prosperity is the backdrop to this study.

Demographic characteristics of key contacts

The ages of the broader network of 60 individuals ranged from 18 to 31 years and interview participants were aged between 21 and 31 years. The ethnographic sample was predominantly heterosexual. Of the broader network of 60, two males identified

as gay. The demographic profile of each of the 25 key contacts is detailed in Table 4 below. The average age of key contacts was 25.4 years (the median age was 25 years.). Among 25 key contacts, 15 were male, 23 identified as heterosexual and two identified as bisexual.

All key contacts were Australian citizens. Nearly half the key contacts (11 of 25) reported that their background was 'Australian'. This generally meant that their parents had lived in Australia for most of their lives and were of an Anglo-Celtic cultural heritage. The remaining 14 reported that they had a background that was not Australian or was culturally mixed. Seven of the 25 were not born in Australia but had lived in Perth for the majority of their lives. Two individuals migrated to Australia in their early teens. Religion did not play a significant role in the lives of any key contact, though the majority were raised in families that described themselves as belonging to a denomination of the Christian faith (generally Catholic or Anglican).

The majority of individuals in the network completed secondary schooling in Perth and many had commenced or completed tertiary studies (see Table 4). Of the 25 key contacts, 24 had completed Year 12 (Perth secondary students usually turn 17 years of age during their final year of schooling). One individual, Bronte, completed Year 11 of secondary school and progressed to university as a mature-aged part-time student. Two others were currently full-time students. All three held paid employment. Five of the 25 had undertaken undergraduate degrees without completing them. Most who did so, went on to complete a vocational course that was tertiary level but not university-based. Vocational courses were the most popular type of educational qualification among the sample.

Three individuals were full-time students and all key contacts had some form of employment. Five had part-time jobs and 20 key contacts held full-time employment. Despite this, the stability of employment varied. Four key contacts held short-term contracts, which were usually three or six months' duration. This indicated that, although they held full-time work, their jobs were not secure or permanent. Most individuals held semi-professional or professional positions. These aspects are indicated in Table 4, as is the level of responsibility that key contacts held in their

jobs. No individual held senior positions. This was primarily because of ages of key contacts – it is somewhat unusual for individuals aged in their twenties or early thirties to hold ‘senior’ level positions.

Housing, family and relationships

The living arrangements of key contacts are summarised in Table 4. At the time of interview, the majority of key contacts no longer lived with either parent and lived in rental housing arrangements such as shared housing with friends or others, or with partners. The living arrangements of scenesters often fluctuated and many continued to seek financial and other forms of support from their families at least occasionally. Moving back into the family home was a strategy used by many to save money or at times of financial difficulty, for example, if studying. This trend of moving in and out of the parental home interspersed with periods of living independently or semi-independently has been observed across many Western countries. For this reason, post-1970s young adults are referred to as the ‘boomerang generation’ – a term used commonly within the mass media (Bennett, 2012; Doherty, 2011) .

None of the 25 key contacts had children and only one in the network of 60 had a child. This reflects a broader trend to delay childbirth in Australia, where the median age of mothers at birth in 2005 was 30.8 years and 30.6 in 2009 (ABS, 2010). Interpreted differently, this statistic reflects the incompatibility (and perceived inappropriateness) of involvement in the scene – a physically demanding, late-night scene – with raising children. Six key contacts were partnered with one another (three couples). The remaining 19 key contacts regarded themselves as ‘single’ and none were married.

Reports of family experiences were mainly positive. While some reported having very difficult relationships with family members and of rifts within their families, most remained connected to family. Key contacts were also asked about their aspirations for the future. At the time of interview, the majority expressed that they would probably have children eventually. However, in May 2009 – almost two years after fieldwork had ended – none of the 25 had begun families. Nevertheless, by this time 14 individuals were in relationships. In 2011, one couple had a child. One

couple expressed the desire to remain childless. The majority of scenesters aspired to undertake overseas travel, or to move overseas or interstate. Many key contacts did this in the years after fieldwork.

Probably the most significant health issue affecting this group was mental health issues. Seven of the 25 key contacts spoke explicitly about experiencing mental health disturbances, most commonly depression and anxiety. However, the incidence of this may have been higher than reported (either not diagnosed, or not disclosed). The issue of mental health was a very sensitive one among this network and not openly discussed. Three reported having previously taken medication because of these issues, though no key contact did so at the time of fieldwork. Considered more broadly, a national study investigating the social, economic, health and family lives of young Australians (Muir *et al.*, 2009) reports that 40 per cent of young Australians aged between 16 and 24 years have experienced a mental disorder at some point in their lives (with mental health issues usually beginning in adolescence). The relatively common experience of depression and anxiety among scenesters does not necessarily distinguish them from mainstream young adults.

Table 4: Socio-demographic characteristics of 25 key contacts

PSEUDONYM	GENDER	AGE AT INTERVIEW (YEARS)	CULTURAL BACKGROUND	BORN IN AUSTRALIA	HIGHEST LEVEL EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	PROFESSIONAL LEVEL	LIVING ARRANGEMENTS
Gypsy	F	21	Australian/ Greek	Y	Technical course	Part-time employment	Middle	Living with parent(s)
Melissa	F	22	Turkish/ Australian	N	Technical course	Full-time employment (short-term contract)	Junior	Living with parent(s)
Gretel	F	22	Australian	Y	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Junior-mid	Living with parent(s)
Cameron	M	23	Australian	Y	Year 12 High school	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Living in home bought by parents and living with parent(s)
Nick	M	24	Australian	Y	Technical course	Part-time employment	Junior-Mid	Living with parent(s)
Calvin	M	24	South American/ Australian	N	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Samantha	F	24	Australian/ Irish	Y	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (short-term contract)	Junior-Mid	Living with parent(s)
Max	M	24	Australian/ Dutch	Y	University undergraduate degree	Part-time employment	Mid	Living with parent(s)

Trevor	M	25	Australian	Y	Technical course	Full-time employment (short-term contract)	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Ling	F	25	Australian/ Chinese	N	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Mortgage
John	M	25	Australian/ Italian	Y	Technical course	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Ryan	M	25	Australian	Y	Technical course	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Mortgage
Ange	F	25	Australian/ Greek	N	Year 12 High school	Part-time employment	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Monique	F	25	Australian	Y	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Renting on own
Andy	F	25	Australian	Y	Year 12 High school	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Renting on own
Theo	M	26	Australian/ English	N	University undergraduate degree, technical qualification	Full-time employment (short-term contract)	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Henry	M	26	Australian	Y	Technical course	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid-Senior	Sharing rental housing

Fiona	F	26	Australian	Y	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (short-term contract)	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Chris	M	26	Australian	Y	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Mortgage
Tim	M	26	Australian	Y	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Bob	M	26	Australian/ Malaysian	N	Technical course	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid	Living in home bought by parent(s)
Gavin	M	28	Australian	Y	Technical course	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid-Senior	Renting on own
Bronte	F	29	Australian	Y	Year 11 High school	Part-time employment	Mid	Sharing rental housing
Andrew	M	29	Australian	Y	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid-Senior	Sharing rental housing
Dan	M	31	Australian/ American	N	University undergraduate degree	Full-time employment (ongoing)	Mid-Senior	Mortgage (two properties)

Six typical scenesters

In this section I aim to give readers a sense of the life histories of scenesters. I draw from data relating to six key contacts and provide an overview of their personal stories. I spent considerable time with these six individuals and they feature prominently in my fieldnotes and analysis. I order their stories chronologically according to when I first met each of them. These stories are representative of the diversity of personal biographies of scenesters more generally, but also the similarities between them. Woven through these stories are references to the characteristics and transitions related to each individual's involvement in drug use. This aspect is emphasised because of the centrality of drug use to this thesis. The complex interaction of structural, social, health-related and economic factors shaping drug involvement is evident. The themes central to these stories will be explored in depth in subsequent chapters.

Fiona

Fiona is a 26-year-old female, who was born in Australia. She is one of the two contacts. I knew prior to my research and she was introduced in Chapter 3. Fiona lived in Perth for most of her life. She described a happy childhood and her teenage years as 'difficult' after her parents divorced and she lost contact with her father. Fiona finished high school and achieved good results. She began a university course.

I met Fiona in 1999, during our second year of undergraduate studies (aged 19 years). In this year, Fiona said that she 'discovered' the EDM scene. From then on, she began going to nightclubs, raves and commercial EDM events regularly (i.e. monthly or more frequently). She used ecstasy and amphetamine powder (speed) as a part of her involvement in the scene, and engaged in heavier use during summer and holidays and in conjunction with raves and large EDM events. She described this as an exciting time and like 'discovering a different world'. The language of 'discovery' and 'world' was commonly used in this network to describe entry into the scene. Fiona could describe attending her first rave in detail, including the brand of ecstasy pill she took. It was also in 1999 that Fiona decided to travel overseas, which she did

for two years. Upon her return to Perth in 2002, she resumed study, but dropped out that year after failing study units. She then began to work in a full-time administration job and saved up to do more overseas travelling, which she did in 2003. She continued to use ATS regularly.

In 2004, Fiona had a change of career path and went back to university to study sports sciences. She was a keen sports person – playing hockey and tennis most weeks and socialising with these friends occasionally. She completed her undergraduate course in 2005, having gained credit for prior study, and began to seek a job in her field. Fiona had difficulty finding a job which she believed was due to her poor academic record. She subsequently took a series of administrative jobs, which she found unsatisfying, boring and low paying.

Fiona had been involved in two long-term heterosexual relationships. Her relationship with her first partner, Tom, was difficult and Fiona felt that it had been ‘destructive’ because they fought a lot. Tom introduced her to Chris and some years later they began a relationship. Fiona and Chris were partners for the entire fieldwork period. They lived separately. Chris had bought a house in an outer Perth suburb and Fiona rented an inner-suburban apartment with her brother. Chris and Fiona spent the majority of weekends at Fiona’s house, which was conveniently located if they were going out to nightclubs or spending time with their friends.

Fiona’s friends comprised two discrete sets: friends from high school, who she claimed were her ‘best’ girlfriends and her friends that she met through her ex-boyfriend (the friendship network that is described in Chapter 3). Fiona concealed the extent of her involvement in drug use from the first network, who were not regular drug users and she used ecstasy and speed with the second network of which her partner Chris was also a member.

Fiona frequently spoke about having money problems and regularly borrowed money from her family to pay rent. She reflected on her ongoing problems with money, describing how a party lifestyle and involvement in the EDM scene was financially burdensome. For example, when explaining why she could not go out to socialise for a week, she said “I’m broke ’cause I bought tickets and drugs for [large EDM event]”. On the other hand, going out clubbing and to EDM events was her favourite

way to relax and have fun. She regularly reported that she 'loves the music' and to go out dancing.

Over an 18-month period (2006 to mid-2007) Fiona went through stages of involvement in ATS use. She sometimes refrained from using for a period of two or more months and at other times she used weekly to monthly. Her preferred drugs continued to be ecstasy and speed (methamphetamine powder). She also used dexamphetamine regularly in conjunction with alcohol. She had 'tried' meth smoking a 'couple of times' but had no plans to use it again, saying that she had smoked it once and it gave her a 'bad comedown' and she did not know many people who smoked it. During fieldwork, she began to talk about the effects that 'big weekends' had on her mental health, emphasising worsening comedowns. There were a number of occasions during fieldwork where my relationship with Fiona was strained because of these effects. She was often very difficult to contact after 'big weekends' – isolating herself in her house to sleep and not answering her phone. On one such occasion my car keys were locked in her house all weekend. She had no explanation about why she did not answer calls. On a number of occasions she did not turn up to arranged coffee dates and did not call for days following.

Mental health issues were generally the biggest personal issue that Fiona faced. She spoke about how depression was 'in my family' – referring to her sister who battled with the illness and did not work full-time because of her mental health. Fiona had spoken to doctors about using anti-depressants in the past but she had not pursued this option because she did not believe that her symptoms were bad enough. She was not seeking professional assistance for any mental health issue during fieldwork.

These difficulties were associated with her disappointment with her career. She spoke about feelings of 'failure' at being stuck in a job that she said was a 'dead-end'. Fiona also spoke about how she was 'getting old' and now felt the need to conceal her involvement in ATS use from her good friends because she did not want them to judge her. In December 2006 Fiona was caught by police drink driving. I was aware that Fiona regularly drove when she was intoxicated, and I often tried to prevent this scenario by offering her lifts. Fiona joked with me that the police could

not believe how lucid she was given her (high) blood-alcohol content. This was facilitated by her speed use on that night. She joked about how she had “got away” with using drugs and driving. Despite this small ‘victory’ over the law, Fiona nevertheless received a large fine and had her license revoked for three months. She had to borrow money from her parents and Chris to pay the fine and she relied on Chris for transport during the course of her licence suspension. This was a significant inconvenience to them both, and it prompted her to re-consider her drug use.

Around this time, Fiona announced to me that she wanted to get her finances under control. She had also amassed a credit card debt of around \$4000 and had owed money to her parents for expenses in addition to the fine. Nevertheless, in the summer of 2007 she attended the majority of major EDM festivals and continued to use ecstasy and speed. After this, she never resumed using ATS as heavily or as regularly as she once had. Despite her long-term involvement in the scene, Fiona was one of the only scenesters who did not participate on *E-scope*. This reflected her loose sense of identification in the ‘scene’ and declining involvement. She was, nonetheless, an avid EDM enthusiast and socially connected to other scenesters. Fiona continued to work full-time in a clerical position throughout fieldwork, and in mid-2007 she enrolled in a postgraduate Masters level degree and began living with Chris.

Nick

Nick is a 24-year-old male, who was born in Australia. He is a single child and was educated at a private boys’ school in Perth. An above-average student, he began a Bachelor of Science degree after completing school. In his first year of university he began using ATS and cannabis weekly, and he began to experience mental health problems. He failed units at university and deferred study. Nick began taking medication for depression and did not work or study for approximately a year. During this time, he developed strong interests in EDM and street art. He then enrolled at a technical college and completed a graphic design diploma. Nick’s parents lived in the wealthiest area of Perth and owned numerous properties. Nick spoke about how they were concerned about him, having aspirations for his success

and how they encouraged him to go overseas until he decided what he wanted to do next.

Nick lived in London for two years, working and travelling through Europe – a time that he reflected on with mixed feelings: nostalgia, pride and sadness. He had met many new friends, had new experiences and felt that he had ‘grown up’ because he had been independent for the first time. He spoke about his memories of this time frequently. Nick moved back to Perth in late 2005. I met him soon after and he was particularly enthusiastic about developing his career, which he felt that he had neglected in his years overseas. Nick moved into his family home and began working full-time in a low-level position using his graphic design skills. Keen to re-establish friendships and a social life in Perth, Nick embarked on a ‘party period’. In mid-2006, Nick’s old housemate John returned to Perth and they resumed living together in an inner-city apartment. They frequently held house parties and ‘after-parties’ and used ATS and alcohol together on a weekly-monthly basis.

Nick had been a regular contributor to *E-scope* for many years. It was in this online environment that he regularly shared his interest in both EDM and street art with others. It was not until I introduced Nick to Trevor (discussed below), in April 2006, that Nick connected with scenesters face-to-face. From this time Nick became involved in the scene – establishing ongoing friendships with many other scenesters that continued beyond my own involvement. Nick had this to say about his school friends, comparing them to scenesters:

I’ve been kind of fed up and a bit bored with them [school friends], they’re all coupled up and they don’t want to do anything new and also I find out that they don’t invite me to as much shit like they’re not that stimulating, some of them. Yeah there’s a couple, in particular I can think of – you invite them all the time and the reciprocal invite is just not there. They’ll say ‘oh yeah, I did this cool thing...’ Or you won’t hear from them for a week or two weeks... I talk to (scenesters) probably every two days or maybe more frequently, yeah because it’s easy to get in touch with them. So we organise to do more stuff and it’s more exciting.

Nick regularly complained to me about how he felt like he didn't 'fit in anymore' with his old friends and. In contrast to the friends that he had within Fiona's network, he reported that found people in the scene interesting and fun. Nick's experience of scenesters as fun, sociable and exciting was common to others. He also valued the potential to meet women in the scene. Despite his frustration with his 'coupled up' friends who did not 'do anything new', Nick remained close to Cameron – valuing the long-standing connections that he had with these individuals.

I saw Nick usually on a weekly to fortnightly basis at EDM events and parties over the fieldwork period and often had coffee with him. Nick was a heavy drinker. He often consumed between ten and 20 standard alcoholic drinks in a session, and this occasionally occurred twice a week. He was also involved in ATS use, using around once a month, with intensified use over summer. His 'favourite' drug was cocaine. However, given that cocaine was not widely available in Perth, he snorted speed and used ecstasy regularly. He had only 'tried' meth smoking once or twice.

Nick became less interested in the scene and drug use in early 2007. His stated reason was the 'politics' of the scene and some of what he described as 'gossip' and 'incestuousness' (i.e. the frequency at which relationships occurred between scenesters). Nick emphasised that he found people in the scene 'fake' and spoke about how they 'only pretend to be your friend'. He also decided to work harder on developing his career. In late 2006, Nick decided to finish his undergraduate science degree. He moved back home with his parents to save money and commenced university study in the first half of 2007. Nick continued to socialise with scenesters throughout 2007 but used ATS far less regularly.

Trevor

Trevor is a 25-year-old male who was born in Australia and has lived in Perth his entire life. He was introduced in Chapter 3 because he was an individual who was critical to the success of this research, introducing me to many others in the scene. In that chapter I wrote about meeting Trevor through my personal contacts who were not involved in this study.

Trevor held a basic tertiary qualification from a technical college. When I first met him he was employed full-time in information technology (IT) field on a six-month contract. He explained that he had been taking contract work for a number of years and over the time that I was doing fieldwork he continued to get this type of non-permanent work. He rationalised his continued involvement in non-permanent work by explaining that he was paid more on contract work than he would be in a permanent position. He also stated that he used the period of time between contracts or while he was finding work after a contract finished to 'party'. He often had interpersonal difficulties at work (e.g. 'fights with my boss'), rarely getting his contracts renewed and occasionally getting retrenched. In October 2006 Trevor lost his job and he did not get another job until February 2007. Over this time (summer), he was a frequent attendee of clubs and music festivals. He relied on his personal savings, but supplemented his involvement through low-level dealing and selling tickets to EDM events. Trevor was known among scenesters as a person to go to for cheap event tickets, which he gained through a bulk-buying system. It was mostly in conjunction with ticket sales that Trevor also sold drugs, but this was usually only to known individuals.

Trevor began attending EDM events in 2002 and became heavily involved in the scene. Aside from his interest in EDM, he had an interest in computers and technology. He did not play any sports or have other hobbies that he discussed. Trevor was an avid EDM enthusiast, and he was an important source of detail about the music and the workings of the scene more generally. Trevor attended EDM events and used ATS usually on a weekly or fortnightly basis. He typically smoked methamphetamine, took ecstasy and used dexamphetamine recreationally. He also smoked cigarettes daily, but he was not a heavy drinker. The usual amount of alcohol consumed during the course of a night was two glasses of mixed spirits (two standard drinks). Trevor occasionally also used 'magic mushrooms'. He was the only key contact who reported this.

Trevor experienced a number of difficulties in his family life and personal relationships. He did not talk much about his past or his childhood, except to impart that he grew up in Perth and was a single child. He also spoke briefly with me about

how he was not in contact with his family. He did not wish to talk in depth about the rift between himself and his parents, only mentioning that they did not want anything to do with him because they found out that he uses drugs. Trevor also had ongoing difficulties in his living situation. He lived in a two-bedroom rented house in a metropolitan suburb that was easily accessible from Perth's CBD. He had four different housemates sharing with him over 13 months and all of these arrangements ended in conflict or with significant tensions in the relationships. Trevor was heterosexual and did not have a girlfriend. He had never had a sexual relationship extending longer than six months.

Trevor said that most of his friends were people that he had met in the scene. He said that, in the absence of having a 'real' (biological) family in his life, the people in the scene were 'pretty much family'. Indeed from spending considerable time with Trevor I estimated that he knew perhaps 200 individuals in the scene. Trevor browsed *E-scope* daily and contributed regularly to discussion. His relationships with those in the scene were, for the most part, conflict free, and he described people in the scene as "more open minded than regular people". He did however, have a good understanding about negative aspects of the scene, saying that it could be "very political" and there that there was a "lot of bullshit". For this reason, Trevor was often reserved in his interactions with others, saying "I just stay out of it, that part of it" (not get involved in others' problems). Trevor described how he had been friends with "so many people in the scene over the years that I can't even begin to tell you about them all". This was typical of older scenesters. He was accustomed to the frequent movement of individuals in and out of involvement in the scene. In this context, it was not unusual for Trevor to become friends with me.

The most significant problem that Trevor talked to me about was his experiences of anxiety. Early into the fieldwork, he spoke about how he had previously been prescribed medications for anxiety. He told me that he had never really worked out 'what was wrong' with him and he had had 'bad experiences' using various medications. Trevor made some connection between his mental health issues and his drug use. At the beginning of fieldwork, he surmised that ATS actually helped him to control his anxiety problems – that they made him feel better. However, over time he increasingly reported negative effects of meth use on his mental health. His solution

was to take 'breaks' of one or two months from using it. Nevertheless, these breaks did not extend to other drug types, and he typically used dexamphetamine, magic mushrooms and sometimes continued to use pills when he was on these breaks.

Trevor's levels of anxiety were particularly obvious during an interview in a café one weekday. During this interview he became visibly upset (shifting his body, looking around continually, stopping sentences). I asked him if he wanted to stop, and he immediately agreed and told me that we needed to leave the café. On the way to the car he told me that he believed some women in the coffee shop were listening to our conversation. I believed that it was very unlikely that they had had any interest in our conversation, with one woman tending to a young child in a pram and the two being engaged in their own conversation. Trevor insisted that I take him home immediately, which I did. When I saw Trevor again, he expressed that he may have 'over-reacted' and had not been happy talking about drugs in public. We continued our interview weeks later in the privacy of his lounge room. He brushed over the incident when I raised it again with him.

When I asked Trevor about the future, he did not have much to say. He said that he knew that his lifestyle had come at a cost in relation to his career, but he enjoyed spending time with his friends in the scene and loved the music and thus had no plans to lessen his involvement. He also aspired to secure full-time permanent work. However, he was conflicted about this and had not made realistic attempts to do so as he rationalised that he would have to sacrifice aspects of his lifestyle (namely partying) to do this. At the end of fieldwork, Trevor secured a one-year full-time employment contract.

Monique

Monique, a 25-year-old-woman, was born in Australia. She was from an upper-middle-class family and attended a private girls' school in Perth. Monique was an average student and went on to obtain a marketing and human relations degree at a Perth university. Since graduating from her bachelor's degree, she maintained a full-time job in her field. She had been working in the same position for around three

years prior to when I met her and lived alone in an inner-city apartment. She did not intend to study further but was dissatisfied with her job and planned to move to another company, which she eventually did in the year following fieldwork.

From July 2006 to January 2007, and for a period of perhaps six months prior to this, Monique attended nightclubs most Friday and Saturday nights. She was very involved in the politics and gossip of the scene. Monique's passion was for the 'breaks' sub-scene and attending one nightclub, *Club A*. She actively disliked the DnB scene, which she perceived as less appealing because of the large number of young men and de-emphasis on glamour. At the peak of her clubbing career, she attended *Club A* between one and three times a week, in addition to attending a number of other social events. Her weeks were filled with social events, appointments and gym visits and it was very difficult to schedule an interview with her. In association with her intense involvement in the EDM scene, Monique dedicated significant time and money to her appearance. She dressed in mainstream clubbing gear – short skirts, high-heel shoes and make-up. Her dedication and appearance had gained her significant attention from men in the scene. Over time she came to know the staff at the club and regular DJs, and this afforded her privileges such as priority entrance when there were queues or if the club was full, exclusive entry to private spaces in the club, and free drinks.

Monique used drugs almost weekly throughout the majority of the fieldwork, and her drug of choice was methamphetamine, which she smoked using a glass pipe over weekends with little or no sleep. She rarely used other drugs, except for ecstasy. She informed me that she had never smoked cigarettes or marijuana. In this respect, she was unique, given that all other key contacts had done both. Monique also rarely drank more than one or two standard alcoholic drinks on an average evening. Ecstasy was the first illicit substance that Monique tried, at the age of 20 years. Around this time, she had become involved with a group of people who attended EDM events. She stated "it was just mainly there'd be one big event a month and everyone you knew would be going". The events that she had attended at that time were more akin to 'raves' than the commercialised music events and smaller-scale club nights that she attended during the period of fieldwork.

Although Monique appeared to be a regular in the scene and therefore well known, this had not always been the case. Theo remarked to me that Monique ‘appeared’ in the scene ‘about six months ago’ and started posting on *E-scope* thereafter. He said that she was a ‘relative new-comer’. I learned that Monique and Theo had become involved in the scene around the same time, between 1999 and 2000. However, Monique had ceased participation in the scene when she began a relationship and recommenced involvement when the relationship ended.

I gained some insight into the way that Monique thought about friendships when I walked with her to withdraw money from a bank one night. On the way, Monique invited me to breakfast with her and some others the following morning and I asked her who was going, which led to a conversation about her friendships. She said cheerily “I have about... six different groups of friends and I just flit between them all” I then asked “So not all of them are people that you see when you go out? She replied “Nah, some of them are school friends... some don’t take drugs at all... some don’t know that I take drugs”. She said that a lot of her friends are “not into” EDM.

A distinctive personality trait of Monique was her overall energy and enthusiasm for life combined with a detached attitude to other’s problems. Her style of interaction was focused on witty and provocative conversation – often centring on gossip. The corollary of this was that she was sometimes unsympathetic and detached. This was noted by other scenesters. Monique was good friends with Gretel and they were often seen ‘out’ at nightclubs and events together. When I asked Gretel if she had spoken to Monique about some personal problems that she had been experiencing, she was coy and looked at the ground, saying “Nahh”. When I asked her why, she said “Look I love Monique, but everybody knows that she is not the kind of person that you go talk to if your grandma dies”. Monique confirmed this when one day she said to me “People know not to start talking about their problems with me. They know that I’ll just say get over it. If you have a problem, go talk to somebody else”.

Monique was well known for the ‘fun’ that she brought to the scene and she was particularly adept at coordinating social events. In particular, she had achieved notoriety in the scene for throwing a particularly good party at her old house, and her

(small) apartment during fieldwork became a regular venue for ‘pre’ and ‘after’ parties. For much of fieldwork, Monique’s relationships with men were also characterised by a casual approach. She resisted sexual involvement with men in the scene, saying to me “They’re just not worth my time”. This did not apply to DJs or men who were not scenesters. Monique often went on ‘dates’ and often spoke about how men were ‘chasing’ her.

Monique met John (26 years old and another key contact) in November 2006 and her carefree attitude to the scene, men and drug use changed. The two of them decided that their relationship was ‘serious’ and John moved into her apartment in January 2007. From this time her drug use decreased dramatically. She pulled ‘bender weekends’ with far less frequency and did not seem to derive as much enjoyment from the scene. For example, she began to leave events at around midnight, which was very early by her standards and the beginning of nights out for many scenesters. She appeared tired and bored. At the end of summer (around March 2007), Monique quit smoking methamphetamine, going to *Club A* and using *E-scope*.

Gretel

Gretel – a 22-year-old female – was born in Australia. There were many similarities in Gretel and Monique’s backgrounds. Both had grown up in Perth, were from wealthy families and attended exclusive private girls’ schools. Like Monique, Gretel studied for, and completed, a bachelors’ degree immediately following high school. Gretel had longer, more consistent involvement in the EDM scene than Monique, assisting with nightclub promotions prior to my meeting her. Her involvement with illicit drugs over time was also more varied than Monique. Her repertoire during fieldwork primarily involved a mix between ecstasy and methamphetamine use – which she both snorted and smoked. Alcohol and cigarettes were ever present – Gretel was a daily cigarette smoker. She was also a regular drinker, consuming alcohol approximately four nights a week and drinking heavily on weekends (between six and ten standard drinks two nights a week).

Gretel described how she ‘tried’ ecstasy when she was 18 and, within six months, also tried speed and smoking meth, but used ATS only very occasionally. Her use

escalated in late 2005, triggered by a relationship split with her boyfriend. She described how she came to use ATS every weekend. Contextualising this transition she said “It was a bad relationship, it was almost a release and almost like a rebellion against a lot of things”. She discussed her ATS use after the split:

- Gretel: Again, like I said, it kind of went to a weekend basis where I was at least partaking in some form of drug taking, be it a line of speed, a point of rock, a pill, or half a pill on a weekend basis and I was in an environment where everyone else was doing that as well so it didn't seem crazy.
- Rachael: And smoking rock as well?
- Gretel: Yeah big time.
- Rachael: So big time as in every weekend?
- Gretel: Never on a weekday, my weekends start from Friday and go until Sunday and I was always very aware of the fact that I have to work during the week and what it would do to me during the week so...

Gretel's insistence that illicit drug use was for weekends only was echoed by all key contacts.

Like Monique, Gretel preferred to spend her time in the more glamorous environment of the 'breaks' sub-scene (and *Club A*), where she was able to gain free entry and also knew the resident DJs. Monique and Gretel commanded a lot of attention from males in the scene. They both presented as very confident and seemed at ease talking to men. They were both articulate and outspoken, often talking and laughing loudly and dominating conversations with sexual innuendo and provocative social commentary. Both had a reputation for spreading gossip. As a result, scenesters seemed to have a polarised view about both of them, and many women disliked them. Melissa, for example told me tentatively “I'm not really friends with them because they never really bother to talk to me”. Others disliked how they demanded being the 'centre of attention'.

Like Monique, Gretel took a similarly casual approach to relationships. She insisted that she did not want a boyfriend and prided herself on being 'mates'. She continued

to have casual sexual relationships with some of these men. Her non-committal attitude towards them was reflected in stories that circulated among the network about men who had been disappointed and angry when she decided she was no longer interested in spending time with them. Theo, who was a friend of both Monique and Gretel, spoke about how he felt slighted by them occasionally and commented on how they treated other men in the scene:

You know, they do treat guys pretty badly, they will sleep with them and then just totally ignore them... I've seen them do it. You know, sometimes they will even ignore me too. I will be at [*Club A*] and they will just walk *right* past me. Won't say hello or anything.

Like Monique, Gretel's attitude changed in the latter part of 2006 when she met Nathaniel. She described the significance of meeting Nathaniel:

This is a really big deal for me. It is. Up until now I have just used men. Seriously. I have just played with them, used them and moved on.

From this time, Gretel began to scale back her involvement in 'bender weekends'. However, she continued to use ATS weekly or fortnightly in conjunction with her involvement in the scene.

Nathaniel was aged 31 years, making him several years older than Gretel (aged 22 years at the time) and he was not involved in ATS use or the EDM scene. She said that he had used drugs in the past, but was "a bit anti[-drugs]" because he had a friend who had become mentally unwell because of his drug use. I spoke to Gretel about some of the tensions that she experienced in relation to his attitudes and non-involvement.

Gretel was extremely reluctant to let Nathaniel know about her level of involvement in drug use and she was somewhat unsure about how he would react. She recalled one night when they were at a party together, where she had tried to conceal meth smoking by washing her mouth out with beer immediately. She justified not telling him because she only had one 'toke' all night (i.e. inhaling from a glass pipe). Continuing the conversation, she said:

I mean he must know. There have been times that I have been out all night and come over at, like seven AM... I mean, where does he think I have been? (laughing) I remember once I told him that I had had an early coffee!

In January 2007, Gretel found out that Nathaniel had been seeing other women. She was emotionally distraught, believing their relationship to be exclusive. She began experiencing anxiety and panic attacks, catalysed by his continued contact with her. She called me often for counsel and advice and said that she was finding out “who my real friends are”, noting that many scenesters did not seem willing to talk to her about her problems. Most of Gretel’s friends were people that she had met in the scene.

When Gretel was sure that the relationship with Nathaniel was over, she decided to start saving money to travel in Europe (something that she had been thinking about for some time). She took up a second job and saved money while living with her parents. Gretel also began to use ATS with less intensity. She gave up smoking meth entirely but maintained fortnightly ATS use – mainly speed and dexies in conjunction with alcohol. This combination helped her to maintain an active social life while working in two jobs.

Theo

Theo, a male aged 26 years (male) was born in England and moved with his family to Australia when he was a child. He was a competitive student, but had difficulties concentrating and used dexamphetamine or ‘dexies’ that he obtained illegally to help him complete assignments in his final years of high school. He did very well in his final examinations and went on to complete an engineering qualification at a Perth university.

In his first year at university he describes going on a ‘party rampage’, attending raves and clubs regularly and developing a strong appreciation for the scene and EDM. He associated these music styles with the UK, to which he still felt connected. This also coincided with a diagnosis of ADHD in that same year, for which he was prescribed

dexies. He began to use his prescription for recreational purposes to facilitate his participation in all-night events, where he also used ecstasy, speed and acid.

It was within the scene that he discovered the value of dexies to others. He began to give or sell his dexies to friends in the scene, saying that “I just usually had them in my pocket to give out”. From this role as a supplier of dexies, he describes how he also began to deal speed and pills:

It became, because I hung out with a crowd that frequented dance music events, people at uni started to recognise my face and just ask me for help, like ‘can you get me pills this weekend?’ and it wasn’t like I went out of my way to be a dealer and make money but I just couldn’t say to no to them. Like they would ask me ‘oh yeah can you get these pills’ and I go ‘yeah, yeah I can’, because they knew that I knew other people. Then I noticed that I was making money out of them and it became really easy to finance my own night by buying up to 50 pills, 100 pills, a time.

Here Theo describes a transition into low-level dealing that was made by many men who were heavily involved in the scene. Despite his emphasis on the ‘social’ aspect of his dealing in this passage above, Theo’s involvement in dealing became more serious over time. Below he describes buying a significant number of ecstasy tablets:

There was a time when I was buying a thousand pills and breaking them up and selling, it was so easy, I’d sell one person 300 of them, another person bought 200 off me and then...I think someone bought 500 off me or something like that. Money just started flowing in, like, I had it left over. I’m like ‘wow’. I started to buy like plasma screens and shit like that.

Intense involvement in the scene and ready access to ATS led to involvement in smoking meth in 2000. He recalled the emergence of crystalline methamphetamine in the market, describing it as a “pure form of speed” and saying “You got so high, I’ve never known higher... it took me a good three to six months of not having it before I’d forgotten that feeling”. According to Theo, the purity of meth was never again the same. For a couple of years, Theo became a daily meth smoker (though still maintaining university study). He describes this:

Then it became I used to use it by myself and used to just sit on the internet *all* night or used to just using it for study. Used to have some nights where...fun nights where you used to just do your own thing in your own time, very antisocial.

Theo spoke about how he started to focus more on study in the final year of university and he graduated in 2002. It was upon commencing a full-time job in 2003, that he began to seriously reassess his own use and dealing activities. He ceased dealing drugs as frequently or in large quantities, saying that he became worried that he would “end up in trouble” if he continued the lifestyle that he had.

Similar to others, Theo also spoke about struggles that he had with “feeling up and down” (mood swings) and going through times where he felt depressed. In particular, he began to question the need to use dexies for medical purposes. This was linked to him questioning and testing his abilities without the medication:

I used to be able to achieve so much on them you started to question yourself and go ‘well are they doing it for me or is it actually my discipline working away?’ And so I learnt to train myself, I’d challenge myself like alright I’ll see if you can do it without them and I was able to do it even better and so then I knew I didn’t need them.

Despite his personal discovery that he can work well without the drug, he reasoned that he was “probably ADHD”. He assessed this based on his perception of his tolerance of dexies. He claimed that dexies “don’t have the same (stimulant) effects on me as they do with other people”. He said “I can have five (tablets) and go to sleep. Ten to me, is like a line of speed”. By comparison, other scenesters reported that five dexies is enough to keep most people awake all night, and ten dexies would result in unpleasant effects, such as anxiety.

While he rarely used dexies as they were prescribed, he continued obtaining prescriptions because he believed that they were ‘handy’ to have. Theo occasionally used dexies in large quantities for recreational purposes – to facilitate attending all-night EDM events. Further, he occasionally used during the weeks to stay awake, which he said helped him to ‘focus’ after heavy drug-using weekends.

There were also other social and monetary benefits to continuing his prescription. He continued to supply dexies to his friends and sold them to people that he did not know well for \$1 to 2 per tablet. Like others, Theo spoke about his prescription as both useful but also a burden, because tablets were sought after as a commodity and his friends constantly asked him for them. Social dealing, which is not typically for profit, was a role thrust upon individuals who were known to have dexamphetamine prescriptions. On the other hand, he embraced this to some extent. He occasionally sold entire bottles for \$300 to 400 to generate profit, and he often bought extra quantities of drugs (meth and pills) to supply to his friends in conjunction with dexies transactions (sometimes for a small profit).

Theo was a regular participant in the scene and his weekend use typically involved use of speed (powdered meth). He occasionally smoked meth and reserved ecstasy use for ‘special occasions’, which was approximately once a month. Theo continued to regard large EDM events as the highlight of his involvement in the scene – talking about how he missed the old rave scene. He maintained that he loved the music and this was the major motivator for staying involved in the scene.

Theo worked in a full-time IT job and had a permanent contract for the entire fieldwork period. He was dissatisfied with his job, often finding himself short of money. He spoke about his long-term involvement in the scene, saying that:

Like I’m only just getting off my ass and applying for jobs and that because I really need more money to get paid more and that. I’ve been meaning to do it for ages but I just know the times that I party and that I just lose that extra motivation to seek long-term goals.

Throughout fieldwork Theo did not have a regular girlfriend. He said that maintaining relationships (with women) was a ‘lot of hassle’. Soon after fieldwork ended Theo met a girl, began a long-term relationship and achieved his goal of getting a better-paying job. At the time he planned to move back to England to live. However, he eventually decided to stay in Perth.

Summary

This chapter has had two aims. An important characteristic of this sample was their self-(re)presentation as normal. The concept is particularly important because it was so central to scenesters' self-held identities. The importance of upholding a normal identity was significant because it framed the reference point from which they negotiated and rationalised their involvement in illicit drug use. I use the term 'normal' interchangeably with the term 'mainstream'. While the concept of mainstream is so broad as to often be meaningless, it reflects the reality that scenesters generally had a range of resources and opportunities available to them that distinguish them from disadvantaged Australians.

The second half of the chapter drew on ethnographic data to illustrate the biographies of some of the key people featured in this thesis. Some common characteristics are the non-linear transitions that this group made from education to the workforce, the relatively high incidence of mental health issues, their involvement in ATS and a declining involvement in drug use for many as they aged. These characteristics are typical of scenesters' experiences more generally. The negotiation of drug use alongside the claiming of adult status is an under-explored aspect of the normalisation literature, and some of the themes within this chapter – particularly negotiating the transition out of regular ATS use – are taken up in Chapter 9.

These stories also describe how scenesters grappled with the negotiation of expectations associated with mainstream participation alongside the scenester pursuits of partying. This is a key analytical theme throughout this thesis. The claiming of normal identities within the context of perceived values within the broader Australian community strongly informed understandings of what constituted acceptable and recreational drug use among this network. However, membership of the EDM scene was also an important part of their lives. The scene provided a rich social environment that referenced global culture but was one to which they felt personally connected and that contributed to their sense of identity. In this chapter I explored how this produced inconsistencies and tensions that were reflected in drug practices at the micro-level. In the following chapters I elaborate on the values that

characterised scenesters as a discrete network. I argue that these informed scenesters' understandings of normal drug practice and the symbolic significance of drug use in their lives.

– CHAPTER 5 –

‘There for the music’: The Perth electronic dance music scene and scenester identity

This chapter has two aims. The first is to orient readers to the social and physical spaces that were actively constructed by the young adults in this study as a part of involvement in the Perth EDM ‘scene’. The second aim is to explore the values that were shaped and negotiated by members of the scene and that were associated with the performance of ‘scenester’ identity. I begin by exploring how participants used the terms ‘scene’ and ‘community’ equally to describe the membership and sense of belonging gained from participation in EDM leisure environments. Scenesters claimed that they were brought together by a shared value of being ‘there for the music’. Expression of ‘love’ of the music was common. I argue that these expressions also represented claims of membership and ‘authenticity’ in the context of commercial influences, the ever-changing social constituency and increased popularity of the EDM scene. I draw on Thornton’s work (1996, 1997, 2006) to consider the importance of status and the processes of social competition in the scene. I also explore how *E-scope* was the primary mechanism through which values within the scene were reproduced, and status and identity were established and maintained.

In later chapters I explore how values that are produced and negotiated in the scene contributed to their understandings of acceptable and desirable drug practice. However, I argue that these values were negotiated in tension with the pursuit of mainstream values and particularly in relation to the ongoing stigma associated with illicit ATS use. This chapter contributes to a central argument within this thesis that the tensions associated with enacting scenester identity alongside mainstream identity meant that the parameters and practices associated with recreational drug style were nuanced and continually negotiated.

Theoretical perspectives on ‘scene’ and ‘community’

In Chapter 2, I noted the long-running academic debate about how to conceptualise collective associations of youth. In this chapter I take up the term ‘scene’ to describe how scenesters derived a sense of membership and identity from their EDM association. Straw explains why ‘scene’ is a useful term:

‘Scene’ is usefully flexible and anti-essentializing, requiring of those who use it no more than that they observe a hazy coherence between sets of practices or affinities. For those who study popular music, ‘scene’ has the capacity to disengage phenomena from the more fixed and theoretically troubled unities of class or subculture (even when it holds out the promise of their eventual rearticulation). At the same time, ‘scene’ seems able to evoke both the cozy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life (1991, p.248).

My analytical use of the term draws on a number of aspects that were representative of the connections between scenesters. These connections were labile and based on sets of interests and lifestyle choices, but nonetheless were associated with a sense of membership. Scenesters referred to this membership by using the terms ‘scene’ and ‘community’ interchangeably. Academically, the term ‘community’ has plural and contested meanings, which have been revised significantly since the popularisation of online forms of interaction. Traditional notions of community encapsulate values of social cohesion, solidarity, commitment, mutuality, trust and investment in common goals, as well as support that enables members to “navigate our way around the demands and contingencies of everyday living” (Allan, 1996, p.2). These values did not accurately represent the use of the term among scenesters, or their understandings of their membership. I draw from Straw to consider how loose social ties and interest-based ties can nevertheless evoke a sense of community. He writes:

[t]he cosmopolitan character of certain kinds of musical activity – their attentiveness to change occurring elsewhere – may endow them with a unity of purpose and sense of participating in ‘affective alliances’ (Grossberg, 1984) just as powerful as those normally observed within practices which appear to be more organically grounded in local circumstances (Straw, 1991, p.374).

I argue that use of the terms ‘scene’ and ‘community’ by scenesters described belonging – their ‘affective allegiance’, but also functioned to delineate boundaries of membership. Maxwell’s (1997) use of the term “community” is relevant here. He writes of the “making” of the Sydney Hip Hop community through three key aesthetic practices which borrowed from global and US culture: rapping, writing and break dancing (ibid, p.51). He describes how:

[T]he act of belief in a community partially constitutes that community, belying what I have tentatively called a ‘will to community’: a kind of broad, cultural incitement to belonging-ness, sufficient to conjure a community where there is none. That community is no less ‘real’ for having this status (ibid, 1997, p.67).

According to Maxwell, membership of the hip hop community was “imagined”. It was created to fill a void (e.g. of hip hop in Australia) and defined in relation to the mainstream. Maxwell highlights that one of the key functions of the language of community is “to evaluate, to include or exclude certain practices, performances or products from the culture, or scene” (ibid, p.53)

Maxwell’s (1997) analysis is helpful in considering the use of ‘scene’ amongst scenesters, as well as their interchangeable use of ‘scene’ and ‘community’. Rather than referring to emotional connection and a sense of support, these terms referred to subscription to a lifestyle and set of practices and experiences understood as ‘different’ from the routine and every day. Importantly, they were representative of values, beliefs and practices that differentiated ‘authentic’ from ‘inauthentic’ forms of participation at EDM events and other social spaces of the scene. Such language was used to protect the values and authenticity of the scene from the continual influences of commercialisation and popularisation of EDM.

The processes of differentiation and distinction that occur in clubbing cultures have been most significantly elaborated on by Thornton (2006). She applied Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of ‘capital’, in attempting to describe the cultural logic of clubbing. Scenesters used forms of subcultural capital to defend threats to exclusivity and their own status and access to the scene. This is contextualised by commercial influences and associated popularity of once ‘underground’ spaces. In their view, authentic

participants were those who were (or were perceived to be) motivated by their 'love' of the music. Accordingly, it was common for scenesters to openly declare that they were 'there for the music'. The value of being there for the music was also expressed in a number of other practices, including drug practice. I elaborate on this in later chapters, describing how scenesters strived to achieve controlled forms of intoxication, or to use drugs associated with a loss of control in private.

Status in the scene was also gained through social networking. The capital derived from social connections produced tangible benefits (access to material as well as social resources), including privileged access to nightclubs and easy access to drugs. The value of being sociable and pursuing social networking also informed drug practice, as scenesters avoided practices that took them away from social interaction. Drug practice that was perceived as 'social' was the most acceptable and desirable among them. This value also informed the establishment of parameters of non-recreational or problematic practice. Later in this thesis I explore how a discourse of sociability was used to rationalise involvement in the stigmatised practice of meth smoking.

Perth and electronic dance music

Perth has historically had a strong and distinctive local music landscape (Brabazon, 2005). EDM 'scene' was used by scenesters as an umbrella term for a number of distinct but overlapping sub-scenes. This reflects the diversification of EDM into various genres or styles. The Perth EDM scene emerged in the early 1990s (Moore, 1995). Throughout the 1990s, as in other parts of the world, unlicensed or 'underground' rave parties were held in Perth in unused metropolitan spaces such as abandoned buildings and warehouses, and in the rural outskirts of the city, for example, in forested areas. There was continued enthusiasm for the rave tradition, as well as the EDM styles of music such as 'trance' that characterised early rave parties. Unlicensed events continued to be held occasionally in and around Perth and they were attended by a subset of scenesters and young people who were under-age (i.e. under 18 years). However, the contemporary Perth scene has evolved significantly since the early 1990s. It has been influenced by the commercialisation and popularisation of EDM (Luckman, 2000; Siokou & Moore, 2008), and is now

primarily conducted in two types of licensed and profit-driven environments or experiences: large music ‘festivals’ and nightclubs. I briefly describe how these two aspects fit within the context of the scene.

Large music festivals

For scenesters, large festivals were understood as an important component of the scene. Although there are a range of lifestyle or music-based ‘festivals’ that are held in Perth, here I refer specifically to those that featured EDM. Stylistically, large EDM festivals borrow elements of rave culture, outdoor live music festivals and nightclubs. They reflect the commercialisation of the ‘rave’ tradition and the popular appeal of increasingly diversified EDM among a new generation.

Music festivals were concentrated in the Australian summer and usually timed in conjunction with public holidays. They were regarded as ‘special’ events by scenesters. This reflected their rarity relative to club nights and the large crowds that they attracted was regarded as a part of the experience – contributing to the ‘vibe’ or sense of anticipation, energy and excitement. Festivals signalled an opportunity to engage in heavy partying and drug use and scenesters often scheduled an extra day off work after such events. Festivals were also relatively expensive. Tickets for festivals were typically around \$100 and generally increased each year (ranging from \$60 to \$150, depending on the size of the event). Financial and time investment added to the sense of expectation and occasion.

Scenesters enjoyed many aspects of music festivals: the excitement and carnival atmosphere, the coming together of large group of friends, and the opportunity to see their favourite Australian and international music artists. However, scenesters expressed the view that festival events were patronised by non-EDM-appreciating patrons (‘punters’) and new or young initiates to the scene (‘newbs’), who they believed were not motivated by ‘love’ of the music but were there purely for hedonistic experience. This devalued the experience somewhat, particularly as it was difficult to demonstrate scenester identity or status because of the sheer size of the festival crowds and unfamiliar environments.

Scenesters strove to express EDM enthusiasm through the careful planning of their festival experiences. They usually studied the timetable before the event and often strove to see DJs who were not well known and not 'headline' acts (noting that in festival events acts play on multiple stages or in linked venues). By choosing less well-attended acts they were often able to recreate smaller club environments.

Social status and connections within the scene were also used to enhance the experiences of attending large festival events. Many scenesters were friends with promoters, DJs and managers, which afforded them cheap tickets and access to backstage or VIP areas. Further, scenesters typically attended well-organised pre-parties and after-parties, and they used their connections in the scene to arrange 'good' quality drugs for the occasion. Nonetheless, it was within local clubs that specialised in EDM where scenesters expressed their 'authentic' EDM enthusiasm (their connoisseurship and expertise), and where they competed for status capital through networking and establishing an identity among scenesters. I now describe how scenester identity was expressed in clubbing spaces.

Nightclubbing and scenester identity

The majority of scenesters identified most heavily with two local sub-scenes: DnB, and breakbeats ('breaks'). Two small, inner-city nightclubs could be guaranteed to play these subgenres: *Flame* and *Club A*. The peak time for attending these clubs was between 10pm and 6am on Friday and Saturday nights. *Club A* was also open on Wednesday and Thursday evenings although it closed between 2 and 3am on these nights. The 'peak' hours where feature DJs played and the biggest crowds attended were between 12am and 4am. Entry cost between \$5 and \$15 on regular nights and between \$25 and \$40 for international or big-name DJ events. During fieldwork I attended these venues on some 40 occasions.

I will now summarise some aspects of the two music styles and the main characteristics of these clubs. While they represented a broader EDM scene, these spaces were characterised by distinct styles of participation that borrowed from global styles. Below, I explore how EDM enthusiasm and sociability were universal

ideals in the scene, but these ideals were emphasised differently in its sub-spaces, which were socially stratified and coded by gender.

DnB style

DnB is characterised by fast breakbeats or syncopated beats (typically between 160 and 190 beats per minute), with heavy bass and sub-bass lines. This style of music is a variation of 'jungle' and was imported from the UK, where DJs drew their influences from hip hop, rap and trip hop to develop the unique sound (Reynolds, 1998). Jungle has been described as "the first truly original British black music style, as multi-racial and influencing UK dance music styles that followed it" (Kirby 2008, in Measham & Hadfield, 2009, p.370; see also McLeod, 2001, p.71). Sanders (1995) and Banerjara and Barn (1996) explore ethnicity in relation to the emergence of jungle in the UK. Hesmondalgh describes jungle and DnB as "a distinctively black British style, expressive of new identities, an often thrilling mixture of the dark and the uplifting, offender humanity with a street-tough demand for respect" (1997, p.177). Cull writes of the Perth DnB scene:

Perth's drum 'n' bass scene has become self-sufficient, confident and expansive: outside influences are not needed as they once were to create a unique scene with a unique sound. Perth is no backwater for drum 'n' bass, despite its geographical isolation. In a short space of time, Perth has become a place of note in the drum 'n' bass spectrum (2005, p.118).

Indeed, Perth has attracted an informal title (celebrated within the local scene) as the Australian 'drum and bass capital'. It is home to the most successful DnB act in Australia, *Pendulum* (and some older scenesters personally knew members of the group). It is interesting that a 'black British style' has gained such popularity in a city whose population is predominantly Anglo-Celtic. Moore (1995) writes about the strong UK influences on the Perth scene, describing the influence of British youth traditions on the development of a small, alternative, EDM scene and how these reflect Perth's strong migratory links with Britain.

The strength of the DnB scene in Perth perhaps reflects a continuation of this migratory influence, as well as the stylistic appeal and ‘cool’ of associating with this subversive style of music. Stylistic aspects of the DnB sub-scene in Perth demonstrated the strong influences of the UK scene. UK artists were appreciated, and supporters appropriated a British and ‘street’ dress style when attending events.

Upon entering DnB clubs, one striking aspect was the large proportion of male attendees. For example, on a typical night at *Flame*, approximately 70% of attendees were male. While there were a number of avid female DnB enthusiasts (‘DnB chicks’), they were always significantly outnumbered by males. Another striking aspect, as an outsider entering the scene, is the assault to the auditory senses. Indeed a heavy DnB bass line is celebrated by audiences, and it is often played so loudly that it reverberates through the body.

DnB style was most readily accessible to and compatible with masculine style. The predominant dress style that characterised DnB clubs mimicked street-wear styles of UK and US minorities (and typically, ethnically ‘black’ cultures). In the DnB scene, branded t-shirts, hoodies, street-style (not fitness brands), loose fitting jeans, caps and dark (black) clothing were typical attire. Females who accessed these spaces also typically appropriated a dominantly black and utilitarian clothing style. However, there was more variation in DnB chick style, with some choosing to wear more ‘mainstream’ clubbing attire.

The central ethos of DnB participation was of effortless cool. I relate this back to Thornton’s work. She maintains that capital is gained by “looking like you are not trying too hard” (Thornton, 2006, p.100). She writes:

Just as cultural capital is personified in good manners, and witty conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being ‘in the know’, using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles. Both cultural and subcultural capital put a premium on the ‘second nature’ of their knowledges. Nothing depletes subcultural more than the sight of someone trying too hard (Ibid).

The streetwear that represented the dominant stylistic code in the DnB scene was sometimes casual looking. However, this belied the effort and expense that punters went to in order to adhere to the style, often spending hundreds of dollars acquiring the latest brands, and going to considerable trouble to acquire unique and internationally revered items (often by shopping online).

While presenting an effortless cool was desired by DnB-attending scenesters, authentic participation in the DnB scene was achieved through unbridled enjoyment of the music – avid and energetic dancing. In 1997, Reynolds wrote, in relation to a jungle club in the UK, that “jungle’s meaning is still made on the dance floor” (p.349). This interpretation is applicable in the current context, where despite the diversification of DnB, the emphasis was on dancing and enjoyment of the music rather than talking. Utilitarian dress style facilitated this pursuit.

Emphasis on dancing was not the only expression of authenticity at DnB events. Authenticity was also shown through demonstrations of EDM connoisseurship. While the primary activity at DnB nights was engaging in enthusiastic and lengthy periods of dancing, it was typical for young men to stand in designated VIP areas, or on the peripheries of the dance floor. These young men did not dance and did not seem to engage in conversation either. They simply watched the DJ. Participating in a restrained manner was a demonstration of technical interest and evidence of genuine EDM enthusiasm and connoisseurship – that they were ‘there for the music’. This form of participation was usually accompanied by other expressions of connoisseurship such as arriving at the venue late or socialising outside until their preferred DJ appeared on stage. Arriving late at EDM events was a demonstration of ones status in the scene – that they had somewhere else important to be – and thus was a strategy to enhance status (making their company more ‘rare’ and valued).

Competition for status in the DnB scene was rife between young men. They valued tough and street savvy ideals of masculinity, and these were expressed primarily through tough and dismissive ‘attitude’ and language, dress style and drug use. Showing restraint from active participation in dancing also fostered an image that they were disinterested in carnivalistic pleasure. Indeed men often did not appear to

be having ‘fun’ – the facial expressions of many young men were generally neutral or frowning (never smiling), and they engaged in very little social interaction. Reynolds writes of a similar style of participation in the context of the DnB scene in the UK in the 1990s, noting that “smiles are rarer than hen’s teeth” (1997, p.349).

In summary, DnB style was well-developed and referred back to an established UK cultural style. It was also highly masculinised. This meant that expressions of masculinity were well articulated and there was strong competition between men for status – particularly to DJ in DnB clubs. Emphasis was placed on controlled effortless cool and connoisseurship. Although scenesters shared a central ethos of being ‘there from the music’, this value was expressed differently in the breaks sub-scene, which I now explain.

Breaks style

The second main EDM subgenre supported by scenesters was breakbeats or ‘breaks’. This electronic genre attracted a less ‘niche’ crowd to nightclubs than DnB and was not characterised by such a distinctive style. The origins of the breaks style are in the US and the UK. Breaks music has a slower beat than DnB (ranging between 110 and 150 beats per minute) and is characterised by a shifting beat and EDM sounds featuring hip hop, funk and jazz elements. Vocals were often featured in breaks music and were delivered in a US-influenced rapping style. The slower beat of breaks meant that dance floors were more relaxed and sociable. This was distinct from the energetic and fervent style of participation witnessed on the dance floor at *Flame*. Reflecting the continual evolution of EDM styles and shifting fashions and tastes, towards the end of fieldwork, DJs in breaks clubs began to favour music that featured electronic sound elements (‘blips’, ‘squeaks’ – less instrumental elements), a style known as ‘electro’.

Breaks music was more appealing to mainstream ‘clubbers’. The breaks club was less assaulting to the senses and, stylistically, the ‘breaks’ scene was less distinct than DnB. In comparison to the DnB sub-scene, there was a more even gender balance in *Club A*. The dominant attire worn at *Club A* was representative of more mainstream ‘clubbers’ attire, which was fashionable and more formal than that worn

at *Flame*. Compared to *Flame*, there was less emphasis on male style. The stylistic code was not distinct or remarkable, and young men aimed to appear neat and fashionable, wearing t-shirts with logos or sometimes collared shirts. This was also a dominantly heterosexual space and one where courtship was acceptable and common. This was distinct from *Flame*, where women did not find their presence overtly sexualised. For example, it was unusual to be approached by unknown men at *Flame*.

In both the DnB and breaks sub-scenes, women garnered status by attracting the attention of men who were the powerbrokers in the scene. Being 'known' by those with influence or resources in the scene afforded certain privileges. These included prioritised entry to nightclubs, free or 'shouted' drinks and invitations to after-parties. Becoming 'friends' with the DJs was a mark of social status within the scene. Such achievement was accompanied by the most sought-after privileges in the scene, including invitations into VIP areas of clubs and invitations to private parties in hotels. Further, having access to illicit drugs, or dealing drugs, was also a source of status within the scene. Women became known in the DnB sub-scene more easily because they were significantly outnumbered by men.

There was a high value placed on social networking at *Club A*. In my fieldnotes, I noted that it was difficult to maintain the attention of scenesters in this space as they always seemed to have somebody else to talk to or to be looking around and not paying attention to conversation. There was a far stronger emphasis on the 'body beautiful', appearing controlled and involved in the voyeuristic pursuits of 'crowd watching' and being noticed by others. It was common to have posed photographs taken in *Club A* and professional photographers frequently attended club nights.

In contrast to *Flame*, *Club A* punters avoided becoming sweaty and dishevelled (resulting from dancing too frenetically or dancing for long periods). The women's bathrooms at *Club A* were often crowded with women re-applying make-up and fixing their hair – something that was not typical at *Flame* (also because there were less women who attended this club). It was also uncommon for women to wear

sneakers to *Club A*. Women who danced at *Club A* usually did so in high heels – the focus strongly being on attracting the attention of males or dancing while talking.

The physical spaces *Club A* and *Flame* were significant to scenesters. They were spaces where one could utilise specific forms of knowledge and status. For example, there were a number of VIP areas in *Club A*. These included back rooms, which were strictly invitation-only spaces, and places where drugs such as cocaine were snorted. One of the most subtle VIP areas of the club was a dedicated section of the bar at the very end where regulars received priority drink service. Knowledge of this space was an indication of one's status as a 'regular' and was usually accessed by men (who commonly bought drinks for women).

Monique spoke about how knowledge of the intricate nuances of the space was a means of demonstrating cool:

- Monique: I mean we used to laugh... like, when they took that little lump out of the dance floor I was devastated because that was the highlight of my night sometimes!
- Rachael: Yeah, but, well I knew where it was and I tripped over it all of the time.
- Monique: I know it was a hard one, but watching drunk girls fall over... I remember once I saw a triple stack on the stairs. And like people still talk about it. 'Do you remember that triple stack?' You know, it was hilarious.

In this passage Monique also demonstrates the importance of presenting a controlled image in this space, and the subtle ways that women competed for status within the scene. In later chapters I explore the relationship between controlled self-presentation and drug use.

One of the most prominent VIP spaces was next to the DJ booth, on a raised section of the stage that offered a slightly elevated view of the crowd. This was a VIP space – one where there were usually one or two young women dancing who were friends with the DJ. Women who were invited into this space were on 'display' to the crowd. The DJ placed handbags in an exclusive area behind the booth and usually organised alcoholic drinks for them. However, although there were avenues through which

women in the scene gained social capital in the scene and enhanced their partying experiences, males ultimately occupied the positions of control and status across the entire scene. They were most often DJs, promoters, and drug dealers.

In summary there was a stronger emphasis on sociability and social networking at breaks events than at DnB ones. Expressions of masculine and feminine identity were nuanced across the scene, and women and men in the scene competed for status in different ways. Women strove to become ‘popular’ (well-connected, socially) whereas men strove to present as effortlessly ‘cool’ and connoisseurs of EDM. Overall, there was a stronger emphasis among scenesters on controlled self-presentation in the breaks sub-scene. Importantly, the ‘capital’ derived from the scene was used to enhance partying experiences, and it was not easily translated or transferred out of the scene. For example, while DJs held high levels of subcultural capital, local DJs were not well paid. Further, although casual drug dealers in the scene often used subcultural capital to sell to their friends, their ‘profits’ were often reinvested towards the enhancement of their status or their own enjoyment of the partying (e.g. buying tickets, gifting others drinks and sharing drugs). In the next section, I explore one of the primary mechanisms by which scenesters shaped their identity and gained subcultural capital: *E-scope*.

E-scope and scenester identity

In Chapter 3, I argued that a critical element in establishing and enacting membership as a scenester involved participation in the internet forum *E-scope*. There is a large and developing literature that presents theories about the value of online social networking. Johns’ work is useful with respect to conceptualising the way that the internet was represented as both a place and a social space by scenesters. He writes:

[T]he internet no longer exists as an isolated realm of ‘cyberspace’ somehow distinct from ‘real life’ but has become integrated into the fabric of our culture. Life on the screen and life in the flesh increasingly converge to become simply life as we live it today – partly online, partly offline, and entirely in social interaction with those we encounter, either face-to-face or through a medium of digital communication. As

digital technologies become increasingly portable and ubiquitous, the distinctions between the online and offline will continue to blur (Johns, 2010, p.500).

While online forums are often be characterised by anonymity, or at least separation between online and face-to-face interaction, *E-scope* members interacted in both ways. Trevor describes the intersection of offline and online environments and the way that *E-scope* was used:

[I]t turned out that a lot of people that go out to these events and stuff, go on these online communities like *E-scope* and [name of another forum] and that, and talk on the forums and socialise that way and find out about what's going on, talk about random shit like, you know, where's the best place in Perth to get a coffee? That sort of thing or, you know, things and stuff you hate about life, that sort of stuff, so yeah, online community's a big part of the scene in Perth, you find out about events and stuff – what's happening. You can talk anonymously sometimes about certain things that you wouldn't talk about in real life.

Here Trevor describes a locally meaningful 'place', where like-minded individuals met, shared information (sometimes personal) and developed friendships. While it was unusual for scenesters to regard themselves as 'friends' purely because of an online interaction, the forum facilitated the development of friendships because it provided a basis for subsequently meeting in person at EDM events.

The defining feature of *E-scope* is that it is specific to EDM. Its central function has been to reinforce a sense of membership within a local network of like-minded others. This is reflected in Gretel's comment:

You have access to people who like the same things as you, understand the same things as you, have the same passion as you, and also could be influenced and like the same music as you. So they're all there for a reason and that's for the dance music. Essentially it does go a little more toward general chat once you go into the discussion forum but essentially everybody there on that forum should be there for the music – whatever sort of music it is, but that's why we're all there.

E-scope was a forum where scenesters could gain information to that enhanced their EDM expertise. Developing specialised knowledge in relation to EDM is consistent

with the value of authenticity. Scenesters spent much of their free time developing their skills and knowledge in this area.

Accomplished scenesters sought to gain increasingly specialised areas of expertise to protect the validity of their subcultural capital – to stay ahead of what was popular and what was devalued. One way of achieving this goal was to learn about the various sub-genres of EDM styles (increasingly specialised variants, such as ‘dubstep’) and keep abreast of the latest trends through particular web resources, including the dedicated EDM space of *E-scope*.

The practice is akin to the need for cultural fluency identified by McLeod:

People who do not necessarily carry the proper cultural capital or share the same aesthetic values often find themselves outside these gated discursive communities, and these fences are, in part, erected through practices of discourse. Being able to acquire the cultural capital needed to enter into these taste communities requires fluency in a rarefied language, as well as knowledge of particular aesthetic hierarchies. The specifics of what is said (and how it is said) within discourse are connected with the way in which these taste communities (which are largely middle- and upper-middle class and male-dominated) are formed. In turn, all of this is connected to the larger social and economic institutions of the mainstream music industry (an industry that is also male-dominated) (2001, p.73).

E-scope helped scenesters to develop their fluency in ‘a rarefied language’ and understand ‘aesthetic hierarchies’ by facilitating access to current and relevant music-related information. This activity was also linked to maintaining identity in the scene in the face of its perceived commercialisation. *E-scope* also provided an opportunity to build social capital in the scene through the manipulation of scenester identity and social networking.

Social networking and online identity

Manipulation of online profiles (consisting of an avatar or a photograph and a nickname) was one way that scenesters shaped identity. The forum offered many ways to express alternative selves. Scenesters used various media in individualised

and nuanced ways to construct their image online – including text, symbols, stylised photographs and aspects of popular culture (e.g. celebrity images and cartoons). For other members, their ‘online’ identity resembled that which they presented face-to-face. Online nicknames were sometimes birth names, real world nicknames or DJ names. More often, they were self-created, fantasy names – chosen by individuals as signifiers of their identity or personal style (i.e. fun, humorous, sexualised, cool).

Posting comments online was integral to the shaping of identity. Scenesters demonstrated their interests, intellect and attitudes in a way that might not have been possible in club or other offline social environments. The use of photographs was the most powerful vehicle for identity shaping. Personal ‘profiles’ included a visual ‘avatar’ – an image selected by them (though not always a photograph of themselves). Scenesters scrutinised pictures posted on *E-scope* closely, often in small social groups at after-parties. Women often posted photographs of themselves that were highly stylised (e.g. resembling fashion photography). Photos of latest purchases, such as cars, new sneakers, or of pets, holidays, or themselves with friends were also common. This enhanced the entertainment value of the scene. Gretel described *E-scope* by saying, “It’s like a gossip magazine, except you know all the people in it”. Gretel’s comment also hints at the way that the medium was used as entertainment, but also to shape image and enhance status within the scene.²⁰

Social competition online

The significance of *E-scope* participation differed among scenesters. The forum was often spoken about as something that was ‘just a bit of fun’ – that is, ‘not serious’ – or used for entertainment only. However, the status consciousness of forum participants was often reflected in social interactions online. Exchanges were often characterised by ‘flaming’ – cynical, sarcastic or derogatory comments posted on the

²⁰ Online social networking became an engrained aspect of the lives of many young Australians after the fieldwork period in this study (post-2007), with the widespread use of *Facebook*.

forum. Further, there were frequent disagreements and arguments that played out in threads on the website.

Social hierarchies within the scene were reproduced and reinforced on the site. The socially stratified aspect of *E-scope* was reinforced by the site itself, which ranked scenesters according to the length of their forum membership and the number of posts. Each member profile was allocated a status (e.g. 'junior member' and 'senior member'). Moderators were the most experienced and they were responsible for monitoring activity on the website, as well as editing or removing inappropriate material and intervening in discussion where necessary.

Senior members and moderators were the most proficient at demonstrating status. They were well equipped in the language, knowledge, and stylistic aspect of being a scenester and also had the respect and backing of other scenesters. This enabled them to dominate discussion, or to silence or shame 'newbs' or those who were disruptive. Examples were removing inappropriate photographs. *E-scope* was also a space where the discussion and enforcement of boundaries and values in relation to drug use occurred. Senior scenesters played an important role in socialising those who were newer to the scene or younger.

Regulation of drug discussion

Scenesters expressed the opinion that *E-scope* participation should be motivated by EDM enthusiasm. However, regardless of the dedicated discussion of EDM and the Perth scene on the site, the most popular section veered into discussion of other subjects. This presented a continual threat to the integrity of the site. Involvement as a member on *E-scope* represented a risk to damage of individual identity because it was publically accessible and members were unable to completely control the content and nature of discussion on the site. Unregulated drug discussion online posed a particular threat to identity. This was made clear when, on one occasion, a journalist used excerpts from the site in a newspaper article. Senior members and website owners had a vested interest in maintaining the image of the website –

particularly because of commercial sponsorship and the damaging potential of negative media reporting.

Conduct was broadly guided by a list of membership rules provide on the site. This stated that the site was not to be used to facilitate illicit activity (e.g. dealing or learning about quality of drugs). Rules were enforced by moderators who could remove content or cancel accounts. The responses of moderators to such activity ranged in seriousness from removing the post to barring the user. The rules were less clear in relation to informal discussion of drugs online such as sharing experiences. Discussion of illicit drug use was regulated using informal social mechanisms. Such activity exposed status hierarchies within the scene, particularly as it was older or more experienced members who were arbiters of social conventions and who often asserted their skills and position to regulate behaviour of others.

The following example highlights the mechanisms by which discussion of drugs by a junior member was regulated on the forum.

The ‘newb’ and online drug discussion

The following extract involves a new *E-scope* user, ‘madmax’,²¹ who began a thread that was titled “preloading and postloading [²²] – Whats your Stratedgy [sic]”. The post read as follows:

madmax

Hey, just want some people ideas on their pre/postloading strategies.

I've been doing some research and some people are saying consuming 5-HTP within 6 hours of dropping numbs the effects while others disagree? What are you thoughts?

Also does preloading with Vit-C and Vit-B6 enhance the affect, or are these purely

²¹ Again, pseudonyms are used here, and sections of these web posts are modified slightly to avoid identification of the contributor.

²² Referring to using complementary drugs after the immediate effects of ecstasy have subsided.

for minimising the effects of those manic tuesday we all encounter after a good saturday night out?

Within ten minutes the moderator responded as follows:

dropping what? a massive turd? your wallet? the name of someone famous that you kinda know in general conversation? what the fuck are you on about?

Here the moderator is using sarcasm to ridicule madmax for assuming that members know that he is referring to ecstasy use. His response sends a message to madmax that drug discussion of this nature is not appropriate. This response is typical of moderators, who protected the site from illicit drug association. Nevertheless, the thread was not shut down, and other scenesters contributed to it. These were predominantly ridiculing and cynical comments. One example is: ‘I’ve heard pre loading with primary school education assists with spelling’. Madmax was also ‘flamed’. One experienced member and moderator posted the following: “GO TO BLUELIGHT²³ ffs²⁴”.

Discussion of this nature continued for many pages. Of this discussion, I have selected two posts to illustrate the way that *E-scope* members respond to drug discussion on the forum. The first was by ‘4fx’:

Argh :crazy:

Every nOOB raver goes thru the same tired old discovery process: ‘omG I WaNT tO gET AS HIGH as I CaN WiTHout the ComE DoWn, Every Day forever!!!! Har har harrrr!!!’

²³ *Bluelight* is an international message board that began in 1999 as a forum focused on harm reduction for ecstasy users, but it is now specifically dedicated to a broad range of drug and social discussion.

²⁴ The term ‘ffs’ means ‘for fuck’s sake’ – a slang abbreviation common in internet lexicon that expresses anger or frustration.

And then they learn about serotonin and 5-HTP and they think based on the theory they have read it is the answer. But let me save you time and money, its all a waste of time. Don't even bother.

5HTP is all snake oil. You cant beat the brain. Just deal with it.

4fx's response shows 'flaming', by demonstrating his belief that appearing physically drug affected, and actively displaying or celebrating intoxication, is not 'cool'. 4fx teases the 'nOOB raver' (the creator of the thread was deemed to be an inexperienced drug taker – 'noob' is a variant of 'newb'). Use of inconsistent capitals signifies intoxication, inexperience with drugs and over enthusiasm, and it is a ridiculing technique – typical of older users' reactions to newbs. 4fx's concluding remark, 'Just deal with it' (referring to the effects of drugs), was a typical response from older scenesters – sometimes known as 'jaded ravers' –who were no longer excited or enthusiastic about using drugs or discussing them. 4fx's post also discourages the public celebration of excessive drug use, which is deemed a transgression of the central scenester value of being 'there for the music'.

The second E-scope post, by 'dancing bird', provides an example of a more moderate response:

The problem with pure chemical theory psychology/pharmacology is the absence of stimuli – i.e. the things that cause the brain to produce said chemicals in the first place and as such, everyone is wired differently so it's generally best for each individual to assess.

[...] I might add, though drug discussion is generally frowned upon in these forums I admire that you are at least attempting to educate yourself about the issue. Dip shits [slang for fool/idiot] that pop pills without researching the effects deserve misfortune imo²⁵.

Dancing bird's post acknowledges the negative reaction among forum members and offers some sensitive advice about the issue of pre- and post-loading. This advice is

²⁵ 'Imo' is web abbreviation for 'in my opinion'

also intended to help madmax learn the values of the forum – that is, by explicitly stating that ‘drug discussion is generally frowned on in these forums’.

Despite their differences, the responses of 4fx and dancing bird exemplify a characteristic of the workings of *E-scope* – older users set the tone. They act as ‘gatekeepers’ of the forum and guard the values of the scene. They communicate that, even though drug use may be an activity of many forum users, this style of post contradicts informal codes of conduct. The variation in contributions to this topic highlights an analytical theme that runs throughout this thesis, which is that values associated with recreational drug identity are unstable and individually negotiated. Although it was generally agreed that drug conversation is not appropriate online, within this same thread, there were examples of how contributions to drug discussion could be tolerated. The following response to madmax’s thread provides an example of this:

Smooth operator

5-htp is a precursor to serotonin, which is what is released into your brain to give you that high that you crave so much. You want to increase the amount of serotonin in your system, so there is more to dump out when you take your filthy little pills. If I was wanting to make sure I had a good night out, starting the day before the rave, take a few pills that day, and then a few more the morning of the rave. Depending on the dosage of the pills you get though. I didnt go higher than 1000mg all up. You need to give it some time to actually get into your system though, which is why it doesnt work if you take them just before your mdma, because your body is busy processing the 5-htp.

Also take magnesium supplements so you dont chew your face off.

Like dancing bird, Smooth operator, who was not a senior member but had an established identity on the forum, provides a sympathetic and educational response to madmax. This scenester attempts to translate the ‘science’ of taking serotonin pills into lay language. For example, Smooth operator uses terms such as ‘filthy little pills’ to refer to the serotonin depleting effects of ecstasy, but also the illegal and possibly adulterated composition.

Identity negotiation strategies are also demonstrated here with the use of narrative techniques. However, the inconsistent use of active and passive voice indicates some uncertainty about the issue of discussion of drug use online. For example, the post begins with Smooth operator talking in scientific language about the science of 5-HTP. The author then switches to third person language, referring quite deliberately to how one might hypothetically use serotonin pills (e.g. 'If I was wanting to make sure I had a good night out...'). The post then shifts into first person. Smooth operator's comment that 'I didn't go higher than 1000mg all up' indicates that the advice possibly derives from personal experience, rather than theoretical knowledge about drugs and their effects.

Despite Smooth operator's potential admission that they practiced 'preloading and postloading' (the title of madmax's original, heavily ridiculed, post) in association with ecstasy, this individual did not attract negative reactions on the forum. A number of techniques were deliberately deployed by Smooth operator. First, the comment was potentially educative and sympathetic to madmax's question, and it was contextualised by prior discussion. Second, Smooth operator was mindful that the comments were public, and did not use language to glorify drug use. This was quite exaggerated. For example, the use of negative language such as 'dump', 'filthy' and the phrase 'that high that you crave so much' is non-condoning and informed by addiction science. These techniques function to distance Smooth operator from drug pleasures – to potentially neutralise association with the practice and engagement in such discussion on the forum.

Finally, Smooth operator demonstrated that they were educated, reasonable and pragmatic – a sensible drug user, who condoned harm reduction. This resonates with dancing bird's approval of informed drug use (reflected in her comment: 'dip shits that pop pills without researching the effects deserve misfortune'). This response represented an attempt to reconcile contradictory discourses related to illicit drug discussion online.

The inconsistency in the way that this individual discussed the topic and their reluctance to write in an active voice (i.e. using terms such as 'me' and 'my') consistently illustrates broader tensions. There were no fixed rules governing drug

discussion on the forum. However, *E-scope* members knew informally that many scenesters used illicit drugs. This caused considerable tension, as shunning such discussion was not being true to the reality of scenesters' lives and concerns. This unresolved tension was represented in the popularity of madmax's thread. Despite negative reaction to madmax, the newb, the entire thread generated around 160 posts (from approximately 40 contributors) – a large response in the context of the forum. This considerable interest, coupled with mixed and contradictory responses, illustrates the tension between an interest in drug discussion among scenesters and an awareness of the need to protect both their mainstream identities and the reputation of the EDM scene and *E-scope* from damaging associations with illicit drug activity. This unresolved tension between public 'mainstream' identity and 'scenester' identity is manifest in many aspects of drug practice and will be central to the analysis in the following chapters.

Summary

This chapter has established that the common thread linking scenesters was their enthusiasm for EDM and participation in the EDM scene. The scene was a source of identity and membership. I argue that scenesters competed for status in this to garner and maintain access to social and material resources that would enhance their individual partying experiences. This has been considered in relation to broader changes in the EDM scene that informed the perception that the scene was becoming more commercially driven. Thornton's (1996, 1997, 2006) concept of subcultural capital has been used to explore the ways that individuals gained status and shaped their identities as scenesters in the social spaces constituting the scene – including online. The primary scenester ethos of being 'there for the music' – or being an authentic scenester – was expressed through demonstrating EDM connoisseurship, expertise, as well as controlled self-presentation in EDM spaces. Establishing a known identity within the scene was also important. Social networking was a feature of scenester activities and was facilitated by *E-scope*. I explored the nuanced expression of scenester values within the DnB and breaks sub-scenes.

Scenesters expressed their identities and engaged in nuanced stylistic practices within EDM sub-scenes. The social spaces created and maintained by scenesters were the main environments where ATS were used by them. In this chapter I described the characteristics of two nightclubs that scenesters frequently attended and that represented the DnB and breaks sub-scenes. I explore how an emphasis on identity-shaping and on status building across the scene contributed to understandings of desirable and acceptable drug experience among scenesters. I argue that the understandings and practices of recreational drug use produced significant uncertainties in relation to expression of recreational drug style. In particular, this is because of the tensions between different values that are prioritised within these different roles including sociability, control and pleasure.

– CHAPTER 6 –

‘Jaded ravers’ and ‘gurners’:

The changing face of ecstasy use

In the 1990s, ecstasy became the ‘flagship’ rave drug – a symbol of dance music culture as a whole (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007) – and the subject of much research in Australia and internationally. In Chapter 1, I outlined epidemiological data showing that self-reported ecstasy use among young Australians rose dramatically in the 1990s and plateaued after 2004. Similar trends were observed in the UK in the early 2000s. The dominant approach to drug trends is often analysis of market factors such as availability and purity. Measham (2004) argued that UK trends can be understood in relation to broader socio-cultural change in British leisure patterns. She cites Shapiro, who wrote that “as drug use becomes increasingly a fashion accessory, it may be even more at the whim of fashion than in previous times” (1999, p.33, in Measham 2004). Australian and international research has seldom investigated how the changing ‘fashion’ of drug use is reflected in the practices and understandings of young adults who use ATS regularly.

This chapter analyses representations of ecstasy use and practices observed among scenesters. My analysis is contextualised by changes in global EDM culture. Drawing on Thornton’s (1996, 1997, 2006) work, I argue that the commercialisation of EDM and the popularisation of ecstasy among young Australians contributed to the symbolic devaluation of ecstasy and the reframing of ecstasy intoxication among scenesters. The status of ecstasy use among scenesters can be understood through analysis of the language that they used to describe the practice and effects of using it. Scenesters referred to the physical and emotional effects of ecstasy intoxication as ‘gurning’. The term ‘gurn’ represented their understanding of ecstasy intoxication as a loss of control experience – associated with self-consciousness and potential embarrassment. The way that ecstasy use was interpreted was a reflection of the

emphasis that was placed on controlled self-presentation in the performance of authentic scenester identities.

In the previous chapter, I described how *E-scope* functioned as a mechanism for the social regulation and reproduction of scenester values. In this chapter I explore how the use of photographs on this online forum galvanised the self-consciousness associated with scenesters' post-rave experiences and informed the way that ecstasy was used among them.

I argue, however, that the social processes of regulation were incomplete and were negotiated in flexible ways. Despite the negative associations of ecstasy, it was nonetheless regarded as a fun and pleasurable drug by many. I discuss how scenesters inconsistently negotiated the presentation of self-control demanded by the authentic performance of scenester identity in relation to the embodied pleasures of ecstasy use. I begin by discussing the 'memories' of ecstasy use among scenesters in the context of what they referred to as the 'old days' (of raving), and their reflections on how the scene had changed. I then analyse current styles of ecstasy use and the associated values.

The 'old days', commercialisation and 'jaded ravers'

Through the course of fieldwork, scenesters often reminisced about various aspects of the 'rave scene', with many talking nostalgically about the old days. Although their length of experience in the scene varied, at the time of interview, 17 of the 25 interviewees had been involved in the EDM scene for at least seven years, with six having been involved since the mid-1990s. Many had memories of raving in which ecstasy use was central. When reflecting on their past drug use in interviews, they described many enjoyable aspects of using ecstasy. These included having long conversations and friendly interactions with 'randoms' (unknown members of the crowd) at events, hugging people, seeing 'smiles everywhere' and giving one another massages. The sense of connection and community that they derived from going to raves was emphasised. For example, Gavin (28 years) said the following:

So it wasn't an isolated experience of enjoying something with one or two friends. I used to take a lot of photographs from above looking down over the events and it,

there would be 30 people hugging on the dance floor, it would be miscellaneous people hugging people, it would be people sharing chewing gum, it would be people sharing water. It was as close as you could get. It was clear why people were into it and I know why I got into myself, the scene that is.

Gavin emphasises the pleasure derived through the shared experience of intoxication. In his description, there is a sense of nostalgia for bygone days. Nostalgia was expressed more generally through reference to the loss of the original rave ethos of 'PLUR', or 'Peace, Love, Unity and Respect', that was a symbol of participation in the rave scene (e.g. Wilson, 2006, pp.77-80).

Unanimously, scenesters described how their raving days were 'over' and how the scene had 'changed'. Many used the metaphor of 'death' to describe this change – for example, saying that 'it died' or that 'the rave scene is dead'. They spoke about how EDM had become increasingly popular and was now was played 'everywhere' – including on commercial radio, television and in most nightclubs. EDM events that scenesters would categorise as 'underground' (e.g. illegal parties in abandoned spaces) continued to be organised by Perth EDM enthusiasts, though they occurred only occasionally. The majority of EDM experiences were derived from time spent in licensed nightclubs or at large commercial EDM festival events. Scenesters discussed some positives associated with the commercialisation of the scene, including a greater range of EDM at a larger number of quality venues. However, most also expressed how the popularity of EDM among young adults more generally meant that nightclubs were attended by non-EDM enthusiasts who they claimed enjoyed the drug experience more than the music.

The term 'jaded ravers' was used by older scenesters to refer to those who had attended raves or been involved in the scene for a long enough period to have noticed these changes. The term was used to describe themselves or it was applied to them by (see Siokou & Moore, 2008 for a similar discussion in relation to Melbourne-based clubbers). In the following interview excerpt, Theo discusses the use of the term 'jaded':

I understand where jaded comes from, you know what I mean? Like those... jaded's basically the fact that those days were so good, and you really miss them. And they were. Those days that we went to raves in a Kombi van and on the way back there... every guy was massaging every chick and it was massive, we were all high on pills and it was magic times and you didn't realise it then, but it just was.

Theo reminisces about the good times that he believes are not lost forever. This narrative style also idealises those experiences, for example, by referring to them as "magic times" even if "you didn't realise it then". This sense of loss resonates historically with other groups who have experienced commercial appropriation of once 'alternative' or 'resistant' musical tastes or lifestyles, such as hippies and punks (Huxley, 1998; Medhurst, 1998).

Nevertheless, while Theo's expression of being jaded was informed by a sense of loss, being a jaded raver was also associated with cynicism. Jaded ravers, in particular, described how they discovered that the ecstasy experience and sense of 'community' that they once derived from raving was 'fake'. For example, Henry said:

I got sick of, every weekend, having these magical experiences and then in the morning looking around and realising that these people aren't your friends, and in fact you'll probably never see them again. It was just so fake.

Disillusionment with the scene and discovering some of the negative aspects of having 'fake' interactions contributed to becoming a jaded raver. On the basis of research in Northern Ireland, McElrath and McEvoy (2001) discuss a similar sense of superficiality and phoniness associated with 'rave-related behaviour' among their Irish participants. They write that they "detected some weariness with such ostentatious displays of affection, and cynicism of what many perceived as the 'falseness' or fakeness of the bon homme associated with being 'loved up'" (McElrath & McEvoy, 2001, p.5).

A characteristic of the jaded raver was resistance to and cynicism towards the practices of younger clubbers who continued to celebrate rave style. Wilson also notes this dichotomy when he compares "jaded veteran ravers" with the "vibrant optimism of neophyte ravers" (2006, p.30). During fieldwork, I observed a small

subsection of clubbers and festival-goers who occasionally dressed in raver fashions. This expression of raver style was typically observed among young women or ‘candy ravers’. Candy ravers were identified primarily by their style of dress but the term also referred to a style of participating at raves (inclusive of dress and behaviour). The typical candy raver was young and often naïve or inexperienced, which was encapsulated in the attire that heavily incorporated elements of childhood (bright colours, cartoons and candy).

Other expressions of raver practices included hugging and giving massages, using rave paraphernalia like whistles and glow-sticks, sharing bottled water, distributing chewing gum and lollipops. Scenesters universally found these practices ‘uncool’. Thornton’s analysis of subcultural capital is useful here in understanding the devalued assessment of these practices. In the previous chapter I quoted Thornton, who argues that “[N]othing depletes subcultural more than the sight of someone trying too hard” (2006, p.100).

The re-creation of raver style was understood by scenesters as uncool and ‘try-hard’ because it artificially and self-consciously attempted to recreate something that they saw as ‘over’ or ‘dead’. Henry voiced this sentiment when he commented on how once-fashionable ‘gators’²⁶ had become a source of amusement for him and his friends if worn at EDM events:

You don’t see the gators anymore. Back then it used to be like, ‘wicked’, and now it’s, ‘Look, she’s wearing gators, how fucking wrong is that!’

Scenesters also commonly used the word ‘cringe’ to describe the embarrassment that they felt when witnessing rave practice in the current context.

²⁶ A gator is an accessory that is similar to a leg warmer. However, it is worn for the purpose of fashion and specifically associated with raves. Usually made in bright or textured materials (e.g. mock fur) and worn by women to accompany a short skirt, they were previously essential marker of raver style.

Although the expression of rave practice was deemed inauthentic, jaded ravers held status within the scene. They had the most EDM expertise and a large number of social connections within the scene. Jaded ravers claimed that despite the death of raving, and their identification of some of the phoney aspects of the scene, they were motivated by their love of the music. They contrasted this with the new generation. This is reflected in Gavin's statement:

This new generation doesn't even know about the music – they wouldn't have a clue what's playing... they just see it as a chance to get fucked up.

This represented an attempt to police the values associated with the scene in the context of its popularity, changing fashions and evolution of membership as young people reached clubbing age and old scenesters dropped out. Embedded in Gavin's comments is the low value placed on the unbridled pursuit of drug experience. Visible drug intoxication compromised the expression of the ethos of being 'there for the music'. I now explore how the cultural devaluation of rave style was extended to excessive and public use of the flagship rave drug, ecstasy, and how the drug was stripped of its associations with raver culture and in the current context was referred to simply as 'pills'. I then argue that the processes of commercialisation, and the shift of EDM into nightclub environments, contributed to an emphasis on individualised experience and controlled self-presentation. This led to the re-definition of ecstasy as being a 'messy' drug.

'We call them pills now'

Although there had been significant changes in the scene, ecstasy use continued to be popular among scenesters. The general quality of pills during fieldwork was thought to be 'good' and between one and four pills were taken in the course of a typical session. Over the Christmas and New Year season of 2006, the pills were reported to be 'very strong'. Scenesters reported that one pill was sometimes enough to 'put you on your arse' – being rendered almost immobile – which limited the ability to socialise but was nonetheless experienced as pleasurable in the appropriate context (e.g. where dancing or avid socialising was not required). During fieldwork, scenesters typically paid between \$30 and \$50 for one pill (average \$35), which is consistent with research conducted in WA at the time. Black *et al.* reported that the

median price paid in 2007 was \$40 (2008, p.26). Higher prices were paid if the dealer was unknown to the buyer. The majority of scenesters used drugs weekly to monthly during fieldwork. Ecstasy was regularly incorporated into the mix of drugs that they scenesters used during fieldwork but use was concentrated around special events that required planning – for example, large EDM festivals or occasions of personal significance such as birthdays.

Despite its continued use among this network, ecstasy no longer held the same symbolic value in relation to scenesters' understandings of its use in the rave context, and its status was therefore complex, unstable and individually negotiated. These changes occurred in the context of the perceived commercialisation of the EDM scene. Symbolic of this shift was the standard use of the generic term pills instead of ecstasy or 'E' (or other terms such as 'eckies' or 'disco-biscuits'). Scenesters also noted these changes. For example, in an interview, I asked Andy (key contact, 25 years) to reflect on changes in relation to drug use in the scene. She responded promptly and succinctly, "We call them pills now".

I also noted in my observations that there was little emphasis on pill brands among this network. Although pills continued to be assigned a pill batch or name (e.g. 'pink hearts' and 'red Mitsubishi'), were occasionally imprinted with symbols and were sold in different colours, these aspects held little symbolic value and were rarely discussed or even mentioned by scenesters. For example, if I asked scenesters what drugs they had taken, they often mentioned the generic drug type (e.g. 'it's a pill') but rarely mentioned details such as its branding. If I specifically asked 'What type is it?', they were often unable to say. Sometimes the response was 'I think they're the same as last week'. Although the colour or imprint, and sometimes texture, generally indicated that they had a pill that was probably from the same 'batch', the symbolic aspect of the drug itself was not celebrated.

Bob (26 years), a longstanding participant in the EDM scene, commented on how this represented a change from previous experiences of ecstasy use:

Bob: A lot of people, back in the day, they used to be really conscious of what pills they got, what colour they were, what kind they were, like

Rolexes, Mitsubishi's, Pink whatever's [sic] and all that stuff. It was a very ... how do you say this ... classified thing back then, it was like, 'oh yeah, you can get these pills, they're the best'.

Rachael: So people now are not really worried about what it is?

Bob: People are not really that ... I'm not anyway. Like a lot of people that I know don't even care what they put in their mouth anymore.

Rachael: Are you saying like the brand name can't really be trusted anymore, or is it just that it's...

Bob: I think it's just died out, like the actual fad of going, 'Oh my God, I've got better pills than you' or 'Oh my God, I'm going to get more fucked up than you'. It's kind of over.

According to Bob, and others in the EDM scene, ecstasy branding was a "fad" and, like other consumer trends, scenesters had moved on. While in 2002, Australian researcher John Fitzgerald argued that the emphasis on branding was evidence of symbolic cultural and consumer identification with ecstasy (he uses the example of the ecstasy brand 'Doves'), the lack of emphasis on pill branding among this scene just a few years later appears to be an effect of the commodification of the symbol of ecstasy. The devalued status of ecstasy may also reflect the popularity of polydrug use among this network. In the context of the regular use of a variety of drugs, the symbolic significance of ecstasy was less important; that is, it became just another drug. However, it is also likely that the decreased significance of ecstasy branding to scenesters may reflect the impact of the drug more generally – an effect of the 'normalisation' of ecstasy use.

Bob also commented that the pursuit of the hedonistic drug experience (e.g. the ethos of "Oh my God, I'm going to get more fucked up than you") was "over". Theo makes a similar observation:

The whole thing's become so image conscious that the whole idea of drug taking back then was really cool, isn't cool anymore in their eyes. That's what I reckon. It's a new generation basically. Not the new generation, I'd probably say an older, grown up generation that has kind of changed its mind.

Theo's assessment, and the assessment of others, that the scene had become "so image conscious" could also be attributed to ecstasy use moving into the mainstream

and losing the ‘cool’ associated with it being an ‘underground’ activity. While getting ‘off your face’, ‘wasted’ – that is, succumbing to hedonistic experience – may have been celebrated in dedicated ‘rave’ (and EDM) spaces, ecstasy was now used in licensed commercial venues where there was greater emphasis on appearance – on appearing normal and in control.

Below I discuss how the valorisation of control was reflected in the popular use of the term gurn to refer to the effects of ecstasy, and how this value was enforced through *E-scope*.

‘Gurning’ and online regulation

In the everyday language of this network, ‘gurn’, ‘gurner’ and ‘gurning’ were used often and understood widely (Green & Moore, 2009, p.406). The term was used in reference to one’s own, or another’s, ecstasy use, with a particular emphasis on aspects of physical appearance that were read as indicators of ecstasy intoxication, particularly jaw grinding, wide eyes and dilated pupils. The term gurn also referred to the more subjective effects of ecstasy, such as its ‘empathogenic’ effects. For example, a common expression was ‘I was feeling gurney’. Some of these effects could be observed in others, including holding hands and the giving and receiving of massages, which were signs of the enjoyment of physical closeness and touch.

The definition of gurn is absent from many official dictionaries, suggesting that it is a colloquialism. However, it is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/gurn?view=uk) as a dialect variant of “grin” meaning to “pull a grotesque face”. As a popular but obscure term, questions about the origins and meaning of the term were posted on *E-scope*. Subsequent discussions on the forum reflect how it was used by scenesters in other social contexts. I refer here to an excerpt drawn from a discussion involving one member, Jimbo, referring to photographs posted by another scenester:

Jimbo: Haha that's my mate Mike in middle of second pic... he's not much of a gurner though, just pulls lotsa funny faces hehe
 angelface: isn't that the definition of gurning?

- Jimbo: I thought the definition of gurning is when someone makes involuntary and unusual facial expressions while under the influence of mind altering drugs... not when simply pulling a silly face.
- angelface: no. look it up.
- Jimbo: I did have a look before posting that and found Ask Jeeves [an online dictionary] had a definition that confirmed my thoughts:
 gurn: Verb. To make involuntary and unusual facial expressions from imbibing excessive quantities of drugs such as amphetamine or MDMA; it is often apparent at raves or techno/house clubs. Originally gurning was a ruralised competitive freakshow at which toothless old men pulled ugly faces.
 gurner: Noun. A person who gurns, see above.
 Or from Urban Dictionary:
 Gurner: Common nickname for somebody demonstrating side effects of the drug extacy²⁷, often resulting in full facial contortions.
 ‘Look at that gurner over there, he looks like he’s trying to comb his hair with his lip!!!’

This passage represents an attempt by scenesters to define exactly what is meant by gurn and it is also an example of how the use of photographs online played a role in the social regulation of controlled behaviour among scenesters. The discussion begins with Jimbo referring to a “mate” in a photograph who is “not much of a gurner”, he is “just” pulling a funny face. This prompted a discussion about whether the term gurn was explicitly linked to ecstasy use (i.e. the way it was by those in the scene). This thread also demonstrates the high value placed on controlled self-presentation among scenesters.

The discussion occurred in a thread that was solely dedicated to photographs of people who were gurning. Posted photographs (of which there were over 50 in this particular thread) were usually followed by ridiculing commentary. Some examples from the thread include, “this guy looks like he belongs in the zoo!”, “funniest thing

²⁷ A variation on the spelling of ‘ecstasy’.

ever!!” and “LOLs²⁸ ... that is a quality gurn” (i.e. a good example of gurning). The comments also usually related to the identity of the people in the photo. One example is the following comment “I see that guy everywhere! Anybody know him?”

The subtext of these exchanges is that ‘looking like a gurner’ is embarrassing. The scrutiny and judgment of photographs depicting gurning was not an experience to which scenesters willingly subjected themselves. This is articulated in the following *E-scope* excerpt:

sunnyboy: I have some killer gurner pics from the past few years at home
good times good timesss
george: theres to [sic] many people saying they got pics but not posting them!
stop being chicken!

This thread reflects the tension that individuals in the scene experienced between enjoying the effects of ecstasy (described as ‘good times’) and negotiating the potential for embarrassment. This was expressed in george’s call to “stop being chicken”.

The sheer volume of material on this topic indicated the degree to which scenesters were amused by pictures of others who were gurning. They legitimised passing judgment and openly ridiculing gurners because they generally maintained that individuals had personal responsibility to ensure that photographs were not taken of them while they were gurning. It was understood that gurners in online photographs had invited ridicule. One scenester expressed his opinion about being photographed while gurning:

I enjoy a good gurn as much as the next guy, but I refuse to be snapped as photographic evidence of my fun times.

²⁸ ‘LOL’ is a common online abbreviation for ‘laughing out loud’. The term does not always appear in capital letters, but the contributor in this case has capitalised the abbreviation to emphasise that they find it really funny. “LOLs” refers to multiple moments of ‘laughing out loud’.

However, this culture of judgment was associated with some anxiety. Scenesters expressed concern that pictures may have been taken of them without their knowledge and exposed online. Images of them gurning that were posted online were potentially very damaging to their mainstream identity. In another example drawn from *E-scope*, an individual commented on his friend who was pictured in a photo:

funniest thing i had seen all night... although i wasnt far off that stage... lucky no-one took photos of me... that i know of.

It was clear that the threat of being exposed as a gurner through the online medium was ever-present if one decided to use ecstasy in public.

While photographs of gurners provided opportunities for social commentary on public ecstasy intoxication among scenesters, discussion also extended to their reactions to seeing people who looked like they were gurning. The following discussion took place on *E-scope*:

urbanhead: I know this may sound weird ... but i get scared of gurners ... its the whole face thing that scares me..

Disco dancer: I know what you mean. Grosses me out as well. Its like they are trying to eat their own faces off. It gets even more hideous when they try to use their phone and send a message. The number of faces I see people pull at an attempt to sms someone. 'ExCuse Me. Can YoU pLeAse TyPe a MessAge To My DeAler SayiNg These ArE aWesOmE. ThE ScrEeN wOnt StaY sTiLL hEy!!'

Individuals in this thread clearly express their disapproval of gurners – describing intoxicated appearance and behaviour as “scary”, “gross” and “hideous”.

Particular emphasis is placed on the loss of control or the inability to function normally when using ecstasy. This is evident in individual's physical appearance, described by Disco dancer as “trying to eat their own faces off”. Disapproval is also expressed at a lack of discretion – of the inappropriateness of being publicly visibly intoxicated and unable to function normally. The above post by Disco dancer shows disapproval of the loss of control and deviation from normal behaviour in public because of drug use. The use of inconsistent capital letters ridicules their

intoxication. The example of sending a message to a dealer emphasises the individual's preoccupation with drug experience over the pursuit of the music

It was clear among this network that the visible effects of ecstasy intoxication were perceived as embarrassing and inappropriate in many social contexts, particularly in nightclubs where controlled self-presentation was expected. On the other hand, I argue that the bodily pleasures associated with ecstasy use continued to be sought and that this challenged the negative assessment of public, uncontrolled ecstasy use derived from scenester values. I begin by describing an incident in which scenesters used ecstasy at a large music festival event. This excerpt contributes to my argument that understandings about appropriate and desirable contexts in which to use ecstasy varied among scenesters.

An example of public ecstasy use

The following extract is drawn from fieldnotes made after a large music festival in January 2007. The excerpt describes a period towards the end of the festival during the main DJ set:

About half way through the set, I looked over at Simon and he was sweating profusely – seemingly more so than the others. He had sweat dripping down his face. He stumbled over to me, putting his arms around me in a big hug. He felt very hot. He was holding a water bottle – Simon had clearly taken a pill and was ‘peaking’. I said ‘How you doin, Si?’ He seemed barely able to talk properly, his tongue moving around his mouth and his jaw moving from side to side. He nonetheless responded, ‘Great. The best!’ His eyes were unfocused, and he had a massive smile on his face. Trevor was frenetically dancing, and passed his water bottle around. He stopped dancing for a moment and I saw him take another pill (he had informed me earlier that he was taking two that day) – washing it down with water from a bottle. Siobahn, Gretel and Monique joined the dance floor half way through the two-hour set. They had initially been at another stage – not fans of DnB – but returned to this act, saying the act on the main stage was ‘boring’. Upon arrival, Gretel spotted Simon, who was standing with his eyes closed and getting a neck rub from a female friend of his nearby. She said laughing and looking over at him, ‘So you’ve seen how fucked up Simon is?! What a gurner!!’

Large EDM festival events were regarded as special events among scenesters and for some, they represented the ideal context in which to use ecstasy. This was particularly because the size of the crowd afforded a sense of anonymity, enabling one to foreground pleasure over the self-conscious forms of presentation foregrounded in clubs. Further, although inexorably altered and visibly commercialised (e.g. widely publicised, dance tents sponsored by brands such as *Red Bull*), festivals were most strongly reminiscent of the old days of raving. Despite raves being seen as uncool, some scenesters viewed festivals as the most desirable and enjoyable public context in which to use ecstasy.

Accordingly, some scenesters used ecstasy heavily in these contexts. It was common to plan their use strategically to ensure that they were ‘peaking’ during the main music act, which was usually at the end of the day, or one that they believed would best suit the enjoyment of the drug experience. Alcohol was typically consumed until that time. Indeed, at the festival described above, six to eight scenesters had ensured that they were together in a group for the main DnB act, and they engaged in activities – such as hugging, massages, smiling and sharing water – that closely resembled earlier forms of rave participation.

Nevertheless, the potential for judgment of non-controlled forms of presentation is apparent in the passage above, which focused on Simon and attracted the comment by Gretel, “So you’ve seen how fucked up Simon is?! What a gurner!!” This commentary continued after the event when Melissa reflected on Simon’s behaviour at a later time by saying to me “Oh my God, how about Simon?! He just was just drooling over everybody!” Despite the good-humoured spirit in which these comments were made, the perceived embarrassment associated with looking like a gurner, even when in large crowds, was enough to dissuade many from using in public at all.

In the following sections I explore how the pleasures associated with ecstasy were re-evaluated in relation to the high value placed on self-presentation and how these were negotiated through ecstasy in private contexts.

The 'googly-eyed monster': Re-evaluation of ecstasy experience and context

The following interview extract encapsulates some previously discussed observations associated with the jaded raver analogy. It also informs my analysis of how scenesters interpreted the subjective effects of ecstasy in a post-rave context where controlled self-presentation was highly valued:

Ryan: That's another reason why I don't really take many drugs anymore because I see what other people look like when they're on pills and it makes ... (pauses)

Rachael: Can you describe it?

Ryan: Yeah. When they've got their eyes popped wide open, they look like they're about to start drooling everywhere, they're chewing, they look like they don't have any idea at all of what's going on around them.

Rachael: And why does that bother you?

Ryan: I don't know. It's like when you see a really drunk person getting into a fight. It's like, 'What are you doing? You're embarrassing yourself'.

Rachael: And so is it concerned, or disgusted, or what?

Ryan: Just a bit gross. Like the analogy with drinking, when you see people going out, they're in a state where they really shouldn't be. Their clothes are falling off, they're throwing up in a gutter somewhere, starting fights, getting abusive and stuff like that. It's really not something I want to be associated with.

Rachael: So you find it's almost like the intoxication is the thing that's really ...

Ryan: I always get paranoid that I'm going to end up looking like one of those people if I go out and take drugs. Because, you know, sometimes you can get a really strong one, or a really weak one and it's kind of hit and miss.

Rachael: Are you worried about seeing someone that you know?

Ryan: It's not that, it's more of a ... what's the word ... not vanity, but I just don't want to be perceived as one of those people that just goes out to get fucked up all the time, because I actually do enjoy going out for the music. I don't know if it's to do with me moving into the drum 'n'

bass scene and getting all jaded, but [taking ecstasy is] something that's more associated initially with like ravers that dress up in bright clothes and, you know, the really baggy pants, bracelets going half way up their arm and giving each other back massages and stuff like that.

In this extract Ryan demonstrates two main elements that were common to other scenesters. First, his comparison of ecstasy and alcohol was common. He conceptualises them similarly as drugs that result in a loss of control. In particular, he places a strong emphasis on the loss of controlled bodily comportment, using the example of intoxicated people 'embarrassing' themselves by being "in a state where they really shouldn't be" (citing examples such as their "clothes falling off, they're throwing up in the gutter somewhere"). Ryan emphasises the facial expressions of ecstasy users (e.g. eyes popped open, chewing) and their apparent loss of control. This loss of control was exacerbated by the unreliable quality of pills, described by Ryan as "kind of hit and miss". Scenesters reported that there were varying concentrations of MDMA and other drugs within pills. The effects produced from these drugs could be difficult to manage in public while maintaining a normal appearance. This variation informed the common practice of taking half a pill at a time.

Second, Ryan's views are contextualised by interpretation of 'out of control' self-presentation as constituting inauthentic scenester practice. Ryan explicitly links his self-conscious preoccupation with image to "getting all jaded" – meaning becoming cynical. Having participated in the scene for many years, Ryan had observed the popularisation of ATS use in conjunction with EDM, and how raving and the associated celebration of ecstasy had become uncool. In the context of such changes, he defended his ongoing participation in relation to the scenester value of EDM enthusiasm, saying that "I actually do enjoy going out for the music". The changed perception of ecstasy intoxication shaped his decision to use less than he once did. Ryan's drug use at the time involved using methamphetamine and dexamphetamine on a monthly basis.

The self-consciousness and anxiety associated with the potential embarrassment of looking like a gurner was mentioned by many others, including John, who said in an interview:

Using pills you can feel your eyes doing the like googly-eyed monster and (laughter)... I hate that. It's the worst thing I reckon and the wobbly legs. Obviously you can't stand up properly ... and you kind of, instead of being like 'this is awesome, this is good' you can sort of think 'shit my eyes are huge, I'm wobbly'. I don't know, I guess there's more sort of ... I wouldn't call it paranoia, but more your outside's thinking about your appearances more than just thinking 'this is great'.

For John, the self-consciousness that he felt when using pills interfered with his enjoyment of the experience. This was significant enough for him to reconsider his involvement. Ange describes coming to a similar conclusion:

For me I stopped doing it (using ecstasy) because of my facial expression on pills basically, and you could feel ... you started to get to the point where you could feel people looking at you. I don't know if they were, but you're so self-conscious about it that you pretty much had to stop doing it.

Gavin similarly reflects on how the effects of ecstasy intoxication had become embarrassing and this had resulted in his friends deciding not to use:

Actually a lot of my friends now that I used to get really fucked up with or they'd get really fucked up with me, they don't take drugs anymore basically because they're like, 'I don't want to have a drug face in public man' you know. So they sort of look back and it's just like taboo... It's almost embarrassing to be like that now, because ... I don't know why, it just is.

Scenesters expressed an acute appreciation of self-control and this extended to their subjective emotional experience when in public. Many spoke about how they disliked losing emotional and social control when they used pills. For example, Monique commented that she prefers "rock" (crystal meth) because "the E affects your emotions, and that's not what I was after". Gretel describes a similar preference for controlled social experience:

No, um, I much more enjoy being able to socially have a drink with my friends than rather find some dark corner and become a love puddle and not be able to talk to people and be myself. Yeah that's my word for it [referring to 'love puddle']. There was a day where I used to say that pills were so much better than everything else, that's great, but I think I've passed that stage ... but I think I would definitely have a preference for something where I'm still able to have my state of mind intact where I know what's going on rather than being not completely but almost, 80% out of control.

Again, Gretel draws strongly on the discourse of control, suggesting that using ecstasy causes her to lose control by becoming “a love puddle” (referring to the empathogenic effects of consuming ecstasy). Implicit in her statement is an interpretation of the self-indulgent aspect of using ecstasy – that it is antisocial. She explains the importance of being able to “talk to people and be myself”. This represents an alignment of the scenester value of pursuing social experience. However, also evident in Gretel's passage is the continued desire for the pursuit of drug experiences. For her, this involved maintaining some control while using drugs – of not letting go and losing herself. In the next section, I explore how scenesters negotiated the enjoyment of ecstasy in relation to scenester identity through the modification of social contexts of use.

Private contexts and pill parties: Re-constituting the ideal ecstasy experience

In this chapter I argue that scenesters grappled with enacting the self-control associated with being an authentic scenester, and the hedonistic pleasure associated with ecstasy use. This is demonstrated through the analysis of scenesters' understandings of ecstasy as a 'messy' drug associated with an undesirable loss of control while it was simultaneously referred to as a 'favourite' drug. Its use at large music festivals and in moderate amounts in EDM nightclubs among scenesters was common. The different emphasis attributed to the pursuit of self-control and enactment of authentic scenester identities meant that ecstasy use was negotiated differently among them.

The tensions between ecstasy as simultaneously pleasurable and potentially embarrassing were most commonly negotiated by using in private contexts. Indeed, scenesters reported that the most enjoyable context in which to use ecstasy was at private house parties or at ‘after-parties’. For example, Theo described after-parties as “a more laid back affair, and that’s when pills definitely start”. Below, Bob discusses this shift in the context of his broader experience in the scene:

Now it’s actually all about image, I reckon, almost (pauses), which is why I think a lot more people take more speed or gear nowadays than E-s. Like if they took E-s, then it would probably be more a private thing, like you know, a pill party, rather than taking it at an event with people that you’re close to. So people that you’re close to, people that you trust and you don’t really care about the kind of stupid face that goes along with [using pills] ...

Here Bob describes ecstasy use as a more “private thing” and mentions “pill parties” – which were parties that functioned similarly to ‘after-parties’ and were typically held in private homes. The defining aspect of pill parties was that they were specifically planned to create an enjoyable social context for using ecstasy. There was an emphasis on privacy, exclusivity and comfort. At one such pill party that I attended (of three over the course of fieldwork), private rooms were set up on the floor with mattresses, cushions and low lighting. Such rooms were also set up with a ‘chill’ style of EDM playing and sometimes visual material such as a DVD playing on mute. Such private spaces enabled individuals to use ecstasy without having to worry about looking like a ‘googly-eyed monster’ or ‘becoming a love puddle’ – of looking like a ‘gurner’ in public. In these settings, individuals were able to relax into the experience (i.e. avoiding paranoia and anxiety) by spending time with friends in an intimate environment.

These environments were perceived as more comfortable because of the privacy and associated intimacy and trust of using with close friends. This indicates a shift away from the open community experience that characterised raving towards a preference for closer, friendship-based, small-group experiences – where they could re-create a sense of community. It was among small groups of friends or with a partner in private settings that activities such as massages or having ‘D&Ms’ (‘deep and

meaningful' conversations) were more appropriate because they were not public and were conducted in the context of pre-established friendships (i.e. not with strangers). Bob indicates this in his comment: "So [using with] people that you're close to, people that you trust and you don't really care about the kind of stupid face that goes along with [using pills]". In such contexts, taking photographs to display on *E-scope* would be perceived as a significant breach of trust.

Summary

In this chapter I have explored the use of ecstasy in a post-rave EDM scene and the impact of broader processes, such as commercialisation, on the significance of ecstasy use and associated practices observed among scenesters. I first explored how the popularity of ecstasy among mainstream youth has damaged its perception among scenesters as a desirable or special experience. Scenesters spoke about the changed status of ecstasy. I considered this in relation to theoretical conceptualisations of drugs as commodities whose meanings are shaped by perceptions of fashion within a continually changing market. Drawing on Thornton's work on subcultural capital (1996, 1997, 2006), I argued that the popularity of ecstasy among a mainstream population has damaged perceptions of the practice as 'cool'.

Second, I explored how the term gurn (and its' variations, gurning and gurner) reflected the perceived undesirability of being intoxicated on ecstasy in public. I argue that the valorisation of control in drug experience among this network is associated with a loss of emphasis on the shared experience. This was understood by scenesters as a result of the commercialisation of the EDM scene. One marker of this change is the proliferation of EDM in nightclubs where participants are often highly image-conscious. I also argued that, in the context of the commercialisation of the scene and the threat to individual status presented by the influx of young clubbers, maintaining self-control was an assertion of authentic scenester identity – of being there for the music. Analysis of data derived from *E-scope* highlighted the function of online photographs as reproducing and socially enforcing the shared value of controlled self-presentation within the scene.

I explored the effects of the two changes described above on current ecstasy practice. In particular, I observed a preference amongst scenesters for ecstasy use in private settings and among close groups of friends – at after parties and pill parties. While these were regarded as ideal settings in which to use ecstasy by most, the status of ecstasy within this network was more complicated. While ecstasy was a drug associated with the commercialisation of the scene, and with the embarrassing experience of loss of controlled self-presentation, it was also a drug that continued to offer embodied pleasures. Scenesters negotiated these competing values in various ways. Some continued to enjoy using heavily at large EDM festival events. For others, threats of embarrassment and ridicule caused anxiety and they no longer viewed ecstasy as a desirable drug. I consider three areas of contribution to the normalisation literature. First, I argue that the normalisation literature does not adequately account for the ways that popularisation of a drug may affect its perception by young adults as a desirable experience or contribute to changes in the ways that it is used. In this case, perceptions of ecstasy by scenesters as a drug that is commonly used contributed to renegotiation of the symbolic value of ecstasy and interpretation of the desirability of the practice within public contexts. This study suggests that the popularisation of a drug can erode the subcultural capital associated with the experience and contribute to the perception of the practice as ‘uncool’. Some authors have considered drug trends in relation to notions of ‘fashion’ in drug experience (Measham, 2004a). However, this in-depth analysis of the ways in which the significance and practice of ecstasy use has changed among scenesters contributes to a more nuanced understanding of these trends at a micro-level of experience.

Second, I consider how processes of commercialisation have had a significant impact on scenesters’ interpretation of ecstasy as desirable and the preferred contexts for its use. Two outcomes were observed here as a result of the popularisation of the EDM scene and the emphasis on image within nightclub environments: some individuals no longer enjoyed using ecstasy at all while others restricted its use to private social contexts. Normalisation research does not fully incorporate the consideration of how

changes that have occurred within the commercial leisure landscape shape practices at the micro-level.

Finally, I have discussed how scenesters interpreted and negotiated one main tension in relation to ecstasy: that between discourses of control and the pleasures that ecstasy use offered. This tension was negotiated variably among them. This suggests that the parameters of acceptable drug use – even in a context where drug use is considered to be ‘normal’ – are far from fixed but are negotiated by considering social context, environment and personal preferences. The complex status of ecstasy and its association with embarrassment and loss of status informed a preference for stimulant drugs. In the following chapter, I explore the practice of stimulant use in conjunction with another favourite, but messy, drug – alcohol.

– CHAPTER 7 –

‘Kiddie drugs’ and controlled pleasures: Using ‘dexies’ with alcohol

In Chapter 2, as part of a critical review of the literature on normalisation, I highlighted how researchers have considered the role of illicit drug use within consumer and leisure lifestyles. For example, Williams and Parker (2003) use the term “pick ‘n’ mix” to describe the way young people select particular drugs to facilitate desired psychoactive experiences. Several recent studies have focussed on alcohol and other drug use amongst young adults in the UK (e.g. Measham, 2004a, 2006; Measham & Brain, 2005; Szmigin *et al.*, 2008). According to these studies, aggressive alcohol marketing, the cultural normalisation of alcohol and other drug intoxication, and changes in night-time leisure economies have meant that young adults must negotiate complex contradictions between a market-driven society that emphasises excessive consumption and the increasing social regulation of such consumption. While researchers argue that heavy alcohol use within sessions – or “binge drinking” (Martinic & Measham, 2008, p.6) – and pursuit of “determined drunkenness” (Measham, 2006) are now considered ‘normal’ leisure activities, this is balanced within the constraints of space, time and social situation (Measham, 2004b). Measham has explored the ways in which young people and young adults negotiate “controlled loss of control” in leisure time as a “counter balance to the control, stress and performance of work lives” (2004b, p.343). Various other phrases have been used to represent the ways that young adults negotiate these tensions. These include “calculated hedonism” (Brain, 2000, p.7) and “bounded hedonistic consumption” (*ibid*, p.8).

The issues identified in the UK research are relevant to the experiences of scenesters in Australia. On one hand, alcohol is widely available and culturally acceptable, and heavy use is a normal consumption practice in night-time leisure environments in Australia and is encouraged in a market economy. In addition, alcohol use is one expression of modern youthful identity and reaching ‘legal’ drinking age (which is

18 years in Australia) is symbolic of claiming of adult citizenship. Young Australians similarly negotiate their alcohol use in an environment that is replete with contradictory messages, and at the time of the study, there was increased policy and media attention placed on youthful 'binge drinking' and alcohol-related harms in the community. Being young adults, scenesters are targeted as consumers of alcohol and associated leisure experiences, including night clubbing. They expressed a desire to 'socialise', 'have fun', 'relax' and 'celebrate' through alcohol consumption.

However, these pursuits were negotiated in relation to the constraints imposed by mainstream roles and expectations, including study, work and family relationships.

Following on from the work of Measham (2004b), Brain (2000) and others, analysis in this chapter considers the specific and localised experiences of scenesters, who negotiated a different set of considerations alongside the maintenance of mainstream identities. Specifically, they negotiated scenester identities within the specific context of the Perth EDM scene. Values within the scene also complicated the negotiation of alcohol experience. While there was a strong emphasis on sociability there was simultaneously an emphasis on the presentation of authentic EDM enthusiast identities and the enactment of controlled self-presentation. I analyse the ways that scenesters intentionally combined stimulant drugs and, in particular, dexamphetamine, with alcohol as a way of reconciling the tensions associated with these pursuits. I describe the desired experience of using stimulants in combination with alcohol as "controlled pleasure" (Green & Moore, 2009).

While scenesters used a range of stimulants in conjunction with alcohol, ranging from licit stimulants in energy drinks to methamphetamines, analysis in this chapter explores the values associated with the recreational use of dexamphetamine (a pharmaceutical stimulant) with alcohol. 'Dexies', as they were called, were integrated into the practices of scenesters. This is contextualised by specific supply conditions in Perth where dexamphetamine was commonly prescribed over other treatment options for Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder(s). Analysis of the social contexts and values associated with recreational use of pharmaceutical stimulants is rare, particularly in Australia. Analysis of the ways that dexies were rationalised, negotiated and represented in the context of the use of alcohol by

scenesters supports my argument that the negotiation of values associated with ‘normal’ drug practice are unstable and continually renegotiated at the micro-level.

In this chapter I argue that the use of dexies by scenesters, while widespread and accepted, troubled experiences of drug-related pleasures and scenesters’ understandings about drug-related harm. This is primarily because of the pharmaceutical status of dexamphetamine. Two key aspects are emphasised. First, the drug’s use was casualised by scenesters and it was considered to be ‘safer’ compared to other illicit drugs. Nevertheless, it facilitated heavy forms of alcohol use and was associated with negative health effects similar to illicit ATS. Second, while it is culturally inappropriate (both in the mainstream and among scenesters) to seek pleasure from dexies, the drug played an instrumental role in facilitating the pursuit of controlled pleasure via the heavy consumption of alcohol.

This chapter begins by briefly describing the dexamphetamine supply context in WA that informed local drug practices among scenesters.

The prescription and use of pharmaceutical stimulants in WA

Dexamphetamine is a common name for dextroamphetamine sulphate, an amphetamine that stimulates the central nervous system by releasing dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin (Kuczenski & Segal, 1997). Its effects include reduced fatigue, elevated mood, increased feelings of wellbeing and confidence, and, in high doses, feelings of euphoria (Zacny *et al.*, 1992). For these reasons, dexamphetamine is sometimes referred to as ‘legalised speed’ (Rasmussen, 2008). Since the 1980s, stimulants such as dexamphetamine and methylphenidate (or ‘Ritalin’) have been increasingly used for the management of Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder(s) (referred to collectively as ADHD) in children and adults (Kutcher *et al.*, 2004). The use of pharmaceutical stimulants for non-medical purposes has received some attention in the international research literature (e.g. Kelly & Parsons, 2007) but very little in Australia.

Between 1994 and 2000, Australia’s licit consumption of psychostimulants was the third highest in the world behind the US and Canada, when standardised (Berbatis *et*

al., 2002, p.540). Of particular significance to this study is that, within Australia, WA has markedly higher prescription rates for dexamphetamine than any other Australian jurisdiction. WA's dexamphetamine prescriptions from 1984 to 2000 increased by an average of 43% per year compared to a combined annual average of 27% for other Australian jurisdictions (Bebatis *et al.*, 2002, p.541). Indeed, prescription rates in WA are amongst the highest in the world, similar to that of the US and Canada (*ibid*). The same dataset also shows that dexamphetamine represents the majority of prescriptions for psychostimulants in WA, a finding confirmed by recent surveillance data (Department of Health, 2007). A 2003 inquiry, conducted by the WA Government, drew a link between high dexamphetamine prescription rates, the prescribing practices of a small number of medical practitioners and adherence to the US model of medicating a wider 'spectrum' of ADHD symptoms (Government of Western Australia, 2004).

In the Australian context, annual national surveys conducted for the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) indicate that the recreational use of pharmaceutical stimulants by young adults in WA is far greater than in other Australian jurisdictions (Breen *et al.*, 2004; Dunn *et al.*, 2007; Stafford *et al.*, 2005). For example, in 2005, recent use in the WA EDRS sample was 74% compared to 25% in the national sample (which also included WA) (Stafford *et al.*, 2006). Another cross-sectional survey, conducted as part of the multi-site, multidisciplinary project of which the current study was also a component, also reported that the prevalence of recent use of pharmaceutical stimulants was 10% in a Melbourne sample compared to 71% in a Perth sample (Jenkinson *et al.*, 2007). While previous research has established the ready availability of pharmaceutical stimulants in WA, as well as the high prevalence of their use amongst young adults, little data is available on the social and cultural contexts of this use. The following outline of the supply context helps to explain the common use of dexamphetamine in recreational drug practice among this network.

Sourcing and using dexies

Commonly known as 'dexies', 'd5s' (referring to the inscription on the tablet) or simply 'dex' or 'd', dexamphetamine has been, for almost all scenersters, an integral

element of the drug landscape throughout their drug careers. The sourcing of dexies was often covert and occurred directly between individuals possessing medical prescriptions and those seeking a recreational supply. These transactions, while rarely the topic of lengthy discussion, were observed frequently during ethnographic fieldwork. Below is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

Nick lined up some dexies from Cameron [who held a prescription] when we got into *Lounge* on Saturday night. The discussion was brief — something like ‘hey mate do you have any ds on you tonight?’, Cameron said ‘yeah, I’ll throw you some later’. Later in the night Cameron went over to Nick and slipped two or three white pills into Nick’s top pocket without saying anything. I think I was one of the only people who even noticed.

Dexies were most often given as ‘gifts’ by the prescription holder or incorporated into reciprocal exchanges of alcohol or other drugs between friends. If sold for money, dexies were usually priced at \$1 to 2 per tablet. I knew five scenesters who held dexamphetamine prescriptions, three of whom were key contacts. All of them filled their prescriptions but did not always use dexamphetamine strictly as medically prescribed (sometimes using it for recreational purposes). The three individuals interviewed (Theo, Gavin and Ange) all questioned the precision of their ADHD diagnoses and used dexamphetamine according to their own assessments of need and sometimes for non-medicinal purposes. For example, in Chapter 4, I described how Theo used his prescription for both medical and non-medical purposes.

For those with a prescription, managing their supplies of dexies required considerable coordination, particularly as they were a popular commodity in the EDM scene. All were concerned that they could find themselves ‘short’ if they gave away or sold too many. For these reasons, they were selective about who they gave or sold their dexies to, and only rarely sold them to strangers (for the increased sum of \$2 to \$5 per tablet). Very occasionally, whole bottles of dexies (containing 100 tablets) were sold for between \$200 and \$400. Such sales delivered a significant profit to the seller because the subsidy provided by the Australian government’s Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme meant that bottles cost under \$15.

Throughout fieldwork, those with dexamphetamine prescriptions (and even those with access to prescriptions through partners or close friends) spoke about the burden of being ‘the person [in their social network] with a dexies prescription’. Gavin (a prescription holder) reflected on a perceived social expectation of those with a prescription to divert to friends:

People always ask me for them. But I get prescribed a little more than I take, just to flip some to some friends because, I don’t know, I think you just have to.

Reluctantly placed in the role of ‘dealer’, they often felt harassed and overwhelmed with requests to supply friends with dexies. Various strategies were used to negotiate these requests. These included telling people that they ‘don’t have the prescription anymore’, that they have ‘run out’ or that they ‘need the rest’ for their own medical needs.

Although usually swallowed whole, dexies were occasionally crushed into a powder and snorted to achieve a more rapid onset of effects. Availability and individual preferences determined the level of use but one to five tablets was a common amount to use ‘at a time’ or ‘in a night’. This is consistent with data obtained from a pharmaceutical stimulant component of the 2007 EDRS, where the median number of dexamphetamine tablets reportedly consumed on the last occasion of use was three (Fetherston, 2007). It was rare for an individual to take more than ten tablets in one session.

I now discuss some of the complex cultural meanings associated with dexies use among scenesters in relation to the value of control.

‘They’re not really worth talking about’: Cultural understandings of dexies

To scenesters, dexamphetamine use was not regarded as especially noteworthy and was often absent from their discussions about drug use (hence my emphasis in this chapter on data from in-depth interviews). Underpinning this ambivalence was a conceptual ‘scale’ by which drugs were ordered from ‘least’ to ‘most risky’. At the risky end of the scale was the injection of heroin, which was widely associated with

loss of personal control, poor health and degradation. At the other end of the scale were pharmaceuticals, which were seen as subject to stringent quality control, available in measured doses and usually taken under medical supervision. Powdered methamphetamine, ecstasy and illicit drugs other than heroin were positioned somewhere in between, recognised as potentially risky but also as familiar and commonplace components of the leisure landscape. Crystal methamphetamine, when smoked, was positioned at the more serious end of the scale. Given its widespread use, cannabis was positioned at the low-risk end of the scale. Alcohol occupied a complex and contradictory position in relation to risk. As a legal, widely available, and socially sanctioned drug, it was sometimes placed at the low-risk end of the scale. However, scenesters also acknowledged high levels of overall harm attributable to alcohol use in their network and the wider community, and they often spoke about alcohol use as therefore ‘worse’ than methamphetamine and ecstasy. This suggests a general perception that all drugs had the potential to cause harm, particularly when used in excess.

Guided by their understanding of dexamphetamine as a pharmaceutical and as a relatively benign drug, scenesters often overlooked its use. I draw from an ethnographic observation described in my fieldnotes to illustrate this point:

Last weekend Trevor and I had a conversation about the number of ‘large’ upcoming music events (three or four). He spent some time discussing the merits of each event to me – which DJs he was looking forward to seeing, which DJs he thought I would enjoy, and offered to get me cheap tickets. He planned to go to most of these events. I commented on the high price of the tickets and Trevor agreed. He said to me that he would ‘probably not go out as much’ until then – ‘just to save and yeah ... just have a break and stuff’ (he was talking about having a break from drug use, an intention that he had spoken with me about previously also).

This Friday night Trevor invited me to come along with him to *Club A*. It was a regular Friday night at *Club A* – one of the locals was playing [‘local’ meaning a Perth-based DJ as opposed to an international act] and we knew the usual crowd would be there.

I sat around most of the night chatting to everybody, moving around between small groups (it’s so loud inside that usually conversations can only happen in groups of

two or three). Throughout the night I occasionally came back to Trevor, who was sipping on his favourite beer. At the end of the night he said that he had three (his typical consumption was two drinks – he is not a big drinker). At about 2:30am he started to spend more time on the edge of the dance floor, standing and watching the DJ, drink in hand. By 4:30 or 5am he was dancing with some friends right in the middle of the dance floor. The DJ was playing heavy drum 'n bass – Trevor's favourite style of music. He came off the dance floor, red, sweating and said that he was going outside. I accompanied him while he had a cigarette (illegal to smoke inside) and sipped on a water bottle.

I was curious as to whether he had kept to his decision to take a break? This wasn't one of the music events that he had been looking forward to, yet he was wide awake at 5am and was talking about going back to somebody's place 'for a bit', and I thought that he may have taken something. I said to him, 'Trevor I don't know how you are so energetic ... you haven't taken anything tonight?' He responded, 'nah, just a couple of dexies.'

Trevor's covert dexamphetamine use and his offhand remark about it were typical within this social context. Amongst scenesters, there was a culturally ambivalent attitude towards dexamphetamine and resistance to identifying it as a 'drug' was widespread. When I asked scenesters if they had taken any illicit drugs on particular nights I was repeatedly told 'I haven't taken anything tonight' and/or 'just dexies'.

The ambivalence towards dexamphetamine and the reluctance to view its use as 'significant' is further illuminated in the following example involving Melissa. When I first told Melissa about the research, Melissa said, "I'm sorry, I don't think I'll be much help to you, I don't really use drugs". Over time, however, field observations revealed that Melissa attended music events on a weekly basis, where she would drink alcohol and use dexies. During an in-depth interview, Melissa spoke about her decision to use dexies even though she 'didn't use drugs'. She said of dexies:

[A friend] just always had them on him and it would be like asking someone, 'Would you like a mint?', You know? It was like, 'Yeah, ok'.

In comparing dexies to mints, Melissa detaches them from the discourse of illicit drug use (i.e. from notions of furtive 'dealing' and 'scoring', and considerations of quality, amount and price) and emphasises their acceptability and the casual way in

which they are offered and used. Melissa was not alone in expressing such sentiments. When prompted on the subject of dexies during an in-depth interview, Monique replied “Well, they’re not really worth talking about”. These comments were consistent with ethnographic observations that use of dexies was considered to be ‘no big deal’; their use was not considered particularly noteworthy or significant by scenesters when compared with the use of other illicit drugs. Dexies were seen as ‘kiddie drugs’; if prescribed to children, so the reasoning went, they could not be ‘that bad’. I now explore the ways that dexamphetamine was rationalised in relation to a discourse of control.

Controlled pleasures

Negotiating a form of control in relation to self-presentation in the public spaces of the EDM scene was a key concern for scenesters. Demonstrating control was a way of expressing that they were ‘there for the music’. This also assisted to differentiate them from the mainstream of ‘punters’ in nightclubs who they perceived to prioritise drug experience over pursuit of EDM enthusiasm.

In addition to considering the risks associated with particular drugs, scenesters categorised drugs according to the ease with which their physiological and psychological effects could be controlled, and how peers were likely to perceive their behaviour when intoxicated. Drugs that, by virtue of their pharmacological properties, were used to ‘get messy’ or ‘messed up’ were distinguished from those that delivered a more controlled experience, which was sometimes described as ‘keeping a lid on it’. In the previous chapter I explored how ecstasy had come to be categorised as a potentially messy drug (Duff *et al.*, 2007). Despite its widespread use, alcohol was similarly categorised. Amongst scenesters, as is common among young adults in Australia more generally, ‘binge drinking’ amongst males and females occurred frequently. However, the decreased motor control, depressant effects and ‘drunken’ behaviour (e.g. passing out or vomiting) associated with excessive alcohol consumption were seen as undesirable, especially in the context of EDM events.

By contrast, methamphetamine was seen as facilitating controlled drug experiences. In the following interview extract, Andy compares methamphetamine's effects with those of ecstasy and alcohol:

- Andy: I find that the rock [crystal methamphetamine] just doesn't affect my emotions at all. The E affects your emotions and that's not what I was after. I wanted to be in full control of what I was doing, what I was feeling.
- Rachael: Okay so what you're describing is choosing a drug that would suit exactly the state that you wanted to be in to go out and listen to music and socialise, right?
- Andy: Yeah, pretty much something that leaves you with control of your faculties, because there's nothing I hate more than a drunk girl. They're loud and squealy. I don't drink that much either, you know what I mean.

The effects of dexamphetamine were well-suited to this desire for the type of control that Andy emphasises. In particular, its unadulterated stimulant effect was widely appreciated for its ability to provide a counterpoint to alcohol intoxication and it was often used to 'straighten' one out during and after heavy drinking. For example, when asked whether he would drink and take dexies, Ryan said:

I have done in the past and you can drink like a trooper. You can drink a lot of alcohol and you don't feel drunk . . . you don't get the whole drunk, drowsy – you get the drunk feeling, but not the fatigue associated [with it].

Similarly, Fiona said that the combination of alcohol and dexies was "great":

[C]oz you can drink and you don't get that that slurring, stumbling thing, you can drink so much more ... but you still get that Dutch courage kind of chatty.

Likewise, Henry said he liked dexies because:

[D]exies really stimulated you. It got you thinking and going. It kept you awake. When you mix them with alcohol you *get all* the great effects of being drunk without the stupor involved.

For Ryan, Fiona and Henry, and for many of their peers, using dexies enabled them to experience the pleasures of alcohol intoxication while controlling some of its negative or messy effects – that is, to experience controlled pleasure.

Throughout participant observation among scenesters I noted the instrumental rationalisation of dexamphetamine use and its cultural detachment from notions of pleasure. Whilst it was culturally appropriate to speak of ecstasy-related ‘highs’, it was deemed ‘pathetic’ to speak about ‘highs’ in relation to dexamphetamine. This is underpinned by the broader cultural detachment of medications (as substances used to treat the ill) from associations with ‘fun’.

Scenesters rationalised their use of dexies in two main ways. First, they emphasised the instrumental nature of their use. When discussing drug use, individuals often spoke about using dexies ‘just’ to stay awake. The measured dose of dexies allowed precise calculations to be made of the amount of time likely to be invested in the social experience and the post-intoxication period. As Gretel said during an interview:

I know if I’ve taken x amount of dexies I’m not going to sleep until x o’clock um but I don’t get a comedown off them at all which is why I actually have a preference with them.

Gretel highlights the ability to control the experience as the main reason for using dexies. The instrumental use of dexamphetamine also manifested in the polydrug-using environment. Dexies were often incorporated in ‘the mix’ during heavy drug-using sessions but were seen as just one element of the experience rather than as its highlight. For example, they were often used to ‘smooth out’ the ‘crash’ when the effects of an ecstasy pill began to wear off, or to prolong the social (and drug) experience – for example, at an after-party.

Second, the pharmaceutical quality of dexies – rather than the pleasures that they offered – provided a clear rationale for their use in preference to other drugs. For example, Calvin said, during an interview:

[E]ven today they're actually probably one of my favourites because it's cheap and it's effective and it doesn't make you feel bad. It's a pharmaceutical product, it's like it's a controlled substance so it's kind of ... it seems to me that when you have them you kind of know how you're going to feel whereas when you have pills [ecstasy] the effects and the duration and stuff like that can change from time to time.

Similarly, when asked if he had a preference for dexies over speed, Max had this to say:

Absolutely. It's a prescription drug, I know what I'm getting every time. I know how I'm going to react to them every time.

This analysis highlights that, while dexamphetamine use was casualised and incorporated into regular leisure activities among scenesters, its status was nuanced. Using dexies troubled experiences of drug-related pleasures because of its medical status, and particularly because it is most commonly administered to children. This informed the view among scenesters that it is 'pathetic' to seek dexamphetamine 'highs' in the same way that they would do with illicitly manufactured drugs. Therefore, the instrumental benefits of using dexies were emphasised – their recreational use was rationalised because they facilitated, enhanced and helped to control the pleasures derived from the use of other drugs – licit and illicit – and the associated leisure activities. They also facilitated and enhanced the pursuit of sociability and extended periods of socialising. Scenesters also rationalised the use of dexies by emphasising that they were 'safer', relative to the use of illicit drugs. I now explore how this discourse of 'safety' was also complicated.

Dexies as safer: Disrupted perceptions of drug-related harm

Evident in the above extracts is the alignment of dexies with a discourse of 'safety'. This association was two-pronged. First, the prescription quality of dexamphetamine enabled individuals to control the dose taken with a high degree of precision and it was in this context that dexamphetamine was interpreted as 'safer' than illicit 'street' drugs such as methamphetamine. Second, dexamphetamine was perceived as facilitating an increased level of personal control, and therefore safety, when in night-time environments. This is particularly because dexies masked the individual's

perception of intoxication – an effect described as ‘straightening’ one out, which referred to retaining awareness of one’s surroundings. The ability to ‘drink like a trooper’ while maintaining bodily control was celebrated and using dexies allowed individuals to enjoy socialising for longer periods without getting too ‘messy’. Female participants also noted that they felt safer and ‘more in control of the situation’ (e.g. in night-time environments) when using dexies in conjunction with alcohol. This also had social benefits outside of the scene. Dexamphetamine was understood as being useful in more formal social or work-related situations where heavy drinking was involved yet presentation of a controlled self was also valued.

Despite dexamphetamine’s pharmaceutical status, ‘safe’ reputation and potential harm reduction benefits compared with illicitly manufactured ATS, I argue that it use troubled understandings of safety and harm in two ways. First, the majority of scenesters had also experienced acute negative side-effects from using dexies. Negative health effects included nausea, stomach cramps, headaches and ‘comedowns’ that were assessed to be as bad as those experienced following the use of methamphetamine or ecstasy. Nick casually referred to dexies as “little bastards” – using the word ‘little’ to refer to how the harsh effects that he experienced were somewhat unexpected and belied their status as a pharmaceutical.

Among regular and heavy users there was a prevalent view that dexies carry similar negative health effects to other ATS. Dan said in an interview:

I once went a bit too far with the dexis. Ate them like candy one day because my ex had a prescription. I was so fucked – both mentally and physically – for like two weeks. I had to basically eat *Bonjella* [gel analgesic] for the ulcers in my mouth. So dumb.

As with other drugs, individuals used a process of trial and error to work out how much they liked using dexies, as well as their preferred dose and style of use (such as their suitability to different social contexts). Experiences like Dan’s of taking ‘too many’ were common among initiates, who often underestimated their potency. In an interview, Bronte recounted that she had begun using dexies in her final years of high school. She established the limits of her use through experience:

Then one day I took six and it must have been just like a magic number for me or something, because I remember I had been talking to my mum all night, so I think she knew something was wrong. She *really* knew something was wrong, when I accidentally threw up on her. So after that, that was when I really decided that that was too many dexies and I would probably have never taken more than three at a time, since then.

While a number of individuals spoke about physical ailments including feeling nauseous after using dexies, others emphasised mental health effects. As with other psychostimulants, dexies were linked to ‘comedowns’ – including anxiety, mood swings and tiredness among participants. Ange also explains her experiences with negative effects of dexies:

Ange: Yes, I get a bit cranky later on, and ... chemically, I guess ...

Rachael: I’m interested to know what you think, there are people who say that dexies – the come down is better, and people who say that it is worse ...

Ange: No, I am pretty bad for dexie comedown – and like I have seen people like really just crash ...

Rachael: Ok, and so what do you mean when you say chemically?

Ange: It is almost like that icky coffee feeling – too much coffee – not good. I took... at [festival name] I had like ... I drank a fair bit of wine, and I took two [dexies] together – normally I take one and then I take one a bit later, and I threw up from about 5 o’clock until the end of the day including the drive home, but that was ... no dexies since then ... I sold everything I had, and then, no, not taking them!

Ange’s description of a negative experience using dexies demonstrates how the status of dexies in relation to harm was somewhat complicated. There were varying accounts of effects and styles of use. This variation illustrates that, as with all drugs used among this network (including alcohol), drug preferences were individualised and appraisals were based on personal experience of using them. Some individuals strictly moderated their use or avoided dexamphetamine completely because of these side-effects. The effects of dexies however, could not be considered in isolation from other ATS use, as all participants (with the exception of Melissa) used ecstasy and methamphetamines as well.

The second way that dexies troubled understandings of safe drug use is through the facilitation of heavy alcohol consumption. Scenesters spoke about consuming larger quantities of alcohol than they otherwise would when they used dexies concomitantly. According to participants, it was easy to lose track of their alcohol consumption because dexies masked many of the usual bodily ‘signs’ (e.g. nausea and impaired speech) which indicated that they had drunk too much. This complicated their perception of dexies as safer as it compromised many of the aforementioned benefits that using dexies might have in reducing overall negative impacts on health and wellbeing associated with other drug use.

Summary

Young adults in this study negotiated tensions arising from two overlapping but frequently competing sets of values – those associated with the normal identities within a cultural mainstream, and those associated with identities within the EDM scene. In this chapter, I considered the ways that scenesters negotiated alcohol practice in the context of competing values of pleasure and control. The tensions that arise in the negotiation of alcohol use are a product of the competing values with which it is associated – both within the mainstream community and the EDM scene. Alcohol is legal and widely available, and its consumption is a normal and accepted cultural practice in Australia. However, increasing public attention to the problems associated with heavy alcohol use, as well as the formal regulation and policing of youth leisure environments where alcohol is consumed, complicate its status. Similarly, within the scene, while alcohol was seen as facilitating the pursuit of sociable experiences and fun, it was also associated with the devalued state of loss of control. Scenesters were particularly concerned with loss of control in relation to self-presentation. Physical signs of drunkenness symbolised an unsophisticated and uneducated style of participating in the scene – undermining efforts to present as in-control and to shape identities as EDM enthusiasts within a socially competitive environment. Further, with its primarily depressant effects, excessive alcohol use compromised the ability to socialise all night. Because it countered the effects of alcohol, the use of stimulants in conjunction with alcohol enabled scenesters to

differentiate themselves from mainstream punters who exhibited a 'drunken' comportment. The outcome was controlled pleasures because stimulant use enabled them to pursue the pleasures associated with the 'sociable' aspects of using alcohol.

The analysis in this chapter elaborates on the argument in this thesis that the negotiations of values associated with 'normal' drug practice are unstable and continually renegotiated at the micro-level. Although ATS practice was considered normal among scenesters, specific values associated with practices were more nuanced and locally contingent than previously depicted in accounts of normalised drug use (Parker, 2005) among young adults. The widespread dexamphetamine use observed among this network was underpinned by factors specific to the social and medical landscape of WA. The supply market for dexamphetamine, coupled with its recreational value as an ATS, contributed to its incorporation into the local illicit drug landscape. However, while dexies were perceived as a quality (i.e. unadulterated) form of amphetamine, their status as a pharmaceutical was complicated and their use was rationalised in complex ways.

I first explored how the use of dexies troubled the associations that scenesters made between drug use and pleasurable experience. Dexies were understood as a drug that facilitated pleasure but it was not culturally appropriate to celebrate the highs that they offered. I then explored how their use with alcohol troubled understandings that participants had about 'safer' forms of drug use. The informal label of dexies as 'kiddie drugs' informed their rationalisation as benign, safer than other drugs and the casualisation of their use. However, mixed accounts about the physical and psychological effects of dexamphetamine challenged the notion that it was safer than illicitly manufactured drugs and complicated its status in relation to harm. Further, dexies facilitated potentially harmful levels of alcohol consumption.

In the following chapter I explore how scenesters negotiated 'mainstream' identities in relation to engagement in a drug practice that was most strongly associated with harm in the broader community – methamphetamine smoking.

– CHAPTER 8 –

‘Meth circles’ and ‘pipe pirates’:

Representations of methamphetamine smoking as ‘social’

In Australia, as in other parts of the world, the use of methamphetamine, particularly crystal methamphetamine, has generated extensive media, policy and research attention. Media coverage has emphasised the destructive, ‘addictive’ properties of the drug and highlighted its perceived associations with violence, physical deterioration and mental health problems. Scenesters were aware of the stigma and poor health outcomes associated with crystal methamphetamine use, as well as the threat that its use posed to the maintenance of a ‘normal’ identity within the mainstream community. This chapter examines the representation and practice of crystal methamphetamine smoking (or ‘meth’) by scenesters in the context of this negative public attention and the proliferation of imagery associating methamphetamine use with addiction. Two themes are analysed: i) the defensive strategies that scenesters used to distance their identities from the devalued social representation of the problematic drug user; and ii) the centrality of a discourse of sociability in the construction of acceptable drug practice. The wide interpretation among scenesters of whether meth smoking constitutes a recreational practice is examined. This analysis contributes to my overall thesis that the micro-level negotiation of “normalised” drug use (Parker, 2005; Parker *et al.*, 1998) is more complex than portrayed in the existing literature.

Analysis is informed by the work of Rødner Sznitman (Rødner, 2005; Rødner Sznitman, 2008), which was introduced in Chapter 2. She explored the ongoing implications of the ‘normalisation’ of drug use and examined how young adults who are integrated in mainstream society negotiate the ongoing stigma associated with drug use. Rødner (2005) argued that the young adult drug users in her sample negotiate the devalued associations of drug use by deploying narrative techniques to

align their identities with mainstream values, such as autonomy and self-reliance. In later work, Rødner Sznitman elaborated on how the process of trying to fit into society despite the involvement in stigmatising practices represented an example of “assimilative normalisation” (Rødner Sznitman, 2008, p.450). This was explained in relation to Goffman’s (1963) analysis of the management of stigma, which by his definition is “the process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity”. Compared with the stigma that may be associated with physical abnormalities (the disabled and handicapped were Goffman’s examples), drug involvement (as with other ‘invisible’ practices or conditions) may not be immediately perceived by the observer and therefore the management of identity is more complex. A ‘normal’ identity may be retained if the association is managed. One strategy employed by my participants includes trying to avoid associations with symbols of stigma.

In this chapter, I explore the way that meth smoking was represented by scenesters and how identity was managed in the social contexts of the EDM scene. This chapter elaborates on Rødner Sznitman’s work by examining impression management in relation to the use of a drug that was stigmatised within the community but also divided the views of the young adults within this social network of functional drug users. The chapter begins with an account of scenesters’ responses to negative public discussion of methamphetamine. I establish that, although ATS use was generally accepted in the scene, scenesters considered meth smoking a risky practice. In particular, the activity of pulling meth-facilitated ‘benders’ pushed the boundaries of recreational practice and required management in order to minimise the toll that it had on the ability to function within the mainstream. Many scenesters disapproved of meth smoking – associating the practice with loss of control and antisocial activity within the scene.

Having established the backdrop of divided opinion about meth smoking, an ethnographic vignette describes how meth smoking was performed. This features a description of a quasi-private style of meth use that scenesters termed a ‘meth circle’. Meth circles refer to the formation of sub-groups of meth smokers within private or quasi-private spaces. This quasi-private and private practice conceals meth smoking from public attention, but also from other scenesters. Meth circles were spoken about by many scenesters, but primarily those who did not smoke, as a response to

disapproval of the practice within the EDM scene. I describe use in three different stages ('pre-', 'during' and 'after-parties') over the course of a typical night out.

Analysis focuses on the ways that scenesters drew from a discourse of 'sociability' to rationalise their views on meth smoking. 'Social' drug use was a key value that was used to frame drug use as recreational, because it was associated with the pursuit of enjoyment of the company of others and experience in the EDM scene. By contrast, 'antisocial' use was associated with unregulated and problematic use because it was detached from those wider values which gave meaning to experiences and negotiated identities that were acceptable within the mainstream. Accordingly, as an identity-management strategy, those who smoked represented their use as social. However, this was a contested interpretation. Other scenesters expressed the view that participation in meth circles and the associated benders was 'antisocial' and represented a move into problematic use.

Rødner's (2005) paper offers a useful analytical framework for interpreting the range of scenesters' responses to methamphetamine smoking. She explained that one implication of her participants' preoccupation with self-presentation of non-deviant identities is that they had very few positive expressions to describe their drug use. She claimed that, as a result, their identities "as drug users [are] weak, not yet accomplished" (Rødner, 2005, p.344). Informed by this work, I argue that the practices that comprise, and the boundaries that delineate, recreational drug use are unstable because the notion of using 'recreationally' is based on a defensive premise (e.g. that they are 'not' junkies) and is very loosely defined.

In the final section of the chapter, I elaborate on Rødner Sznitman's work to consider how the establishment of meth smoking as a deviant practice, both in the community and within the EDM scene, shaped a style of practice where the boundaries of acceptable and recreational use were unclear. Within meth circles, heavy styles of use and group tensions – termed 'politics' – were common. The analogy of the 'pipe pirate' was used to refer to selfish practices that were commonly observed. While this analogy was used to subtly regulate group activity, I argue that, because scenesters were motivated to continually defend their involvement and justify meth

circles as social, they did not openly address negative aspects of the practice. I explore some of the corrosive effects of gossip and unresolved tensions on social cohesion among scenesters.

I begin here by providing a brief background to the history of methamphetamine use in Perth and its treatment in the media around the time of fieldwork. This contextualises the representation among scenesters of meth smoking as ‘riskier’ than other drug-related practices and one that could be potentially stigmatising.

The Ice Age: Public discourse on methamphetamine

The ATS market changed dramatically in the late 1990s in Australia, when amphetamine sulphate became less available and three types of methamphetamine (powder, ‘crystal’ and ‘base’) became widely available (McKetin & McLaren, 2004; McKetin *et al.*, 2005). Studies have indicated that, while overall use of meth/amphetamines did not increase among drug-using cohorts, there was a significant increase in the use of crystal methamphetamine, which was understood to be more potent than powdered methamphetamine and well suited to use by smoking (McKetin *et al.*, 2005). During fieldwork, crystal methamphetamine use – most commonly termed ‘ice’ in the media – was described as the latest Australian drug ‘epidemic’. News headlines (which ran across newspaper, television, web media) signalled the beginning of the ‘Ice Age’ in Australia. The topic was heavily reported throughout 2006 and 2007, and onwards (e.g. Australian Associated Press, Australian Associated Press; Kidman, 2006, October 1), and the level of media attention reportedly ‘peaked’ in 2008 (Ritter *et al.*, 2010). Other drugs that had previously been the subject of considerable community concern, particularly ecstasy and cannabis, paled in comparison to the perceived threat posed by methamphetamine – a drug of reportedly unsurpassed potency, with effects on users reported to be “worse than heroin” (Kearney, 2006).

Western Australia (WA) recorded the highest levels of methamphetamine use in Australia (AIHW, 2007, 2008), and media attention to the issue was prominent. Western Australian news featured a range of alarming headlines such as “WA prey to a violent drug binge” (Eliot, 2006, August 1). The topic became a political issue, as

WA's perceived "health crisis" was linked by police officials to the "drug craze in Western Australia" (Barnett, 2006; Government of Western Australia, 2006; Guest, 2007). It also triggered legislative reform (e.g. banning of the sale of glass pipes) and the relaunch of public health campaigns in 2007 targeting methamphetamine use both by WA state and federal governments (in WA, under the Drugaware campaign and Federally through the National Illicit Drugs Strategy and an inquiry into ATS use George *et al.*, 2008).

Below is an extract from the transcript of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) television program *Stateline* on 23 March 2007:

REBECCA CARMODY (PRESENTER): The misery that drugs can inflict on people's lives has been well documented this week. Around the world one of the biggest problem drugs is methamphetamine or ice. It's no different here in Western Australia. Locally, police and the Health Department are planning a summit to investigate ways of tackling what some are calling the ice epidemic. As those on the front line struggle to cope with the problem, Perth researchers say the impact of the highly addictive drug may be worse than first thought. Elvira Nuic reports:

DR FRANK DALY (ROYAL PERTH HOSPITAL): There are the young people with the acute delirium who are tearing the place apart. We've seen people from the ages of 14 to the age of 60, we've seen people from all levels of education, all different professional groups.

SUPERINTENDENT JIM MIGRO (WA POLICE): What we're talking about is toxic cocktails that people are actually putting into their bodies, they're manufactured in clandestine drug laboratories and people have no control of what these substances are.

ELVIRA NUIC (REPORTER): It's the most potent amphetamine ever to hit our streets. It's highly addictive, cheaper than a night out drinking and a habit that's leading a growing number of addicts to places like this [introducing a guest from a neuropsychology clinic] (Nuic, 2007, March 27).

In this excerpt, several key themes emerge: methamphetamine is a drug that causes destruction and misery regardless of culture, socio-demographic status or age; methamphetamine is a burden on the community due to the violent and psychotic behaviours of users and the stress that they place on the health care system; methamphetamine is highly addictive and potent; and methamphetamine is toxic, dirty and cheap. A combination of these themes coloured the public discussion of methamphetamine.

Scenesters were avid consumers of various forms of cultural media, and the public discussion about methamphetamine was a frequent topic of conversation. In particular, two television documentaries that aired during fieldwork featured heavily in scenester conversations and online discussions. Both programs aimed to give insight into the lives of users. The first, aired on 20 March 2006, was titled “Ice Age” (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2006). In this program, the reporter followed a number of long-term users who he described as “fringe dwellers” and a “tribe of junkies” that roam inner-city Sydney “scoring and shooting up” and “stay manically high for up to a week, without food or sleep”. The second, sharing the same title, aired on 28 October 2006, described methamphetamine users as “paranoid”, “chaotic” and “extremely unhealthy”. It also carried a warning that “Governments and health services are not prepared for the chaos that methamphetamine has just started to unleash” (Ninemsn Pty Ltd, 2006).

A further series of local and international items related to drug use were also discussed among scenesters. On the local level, one of Australia’s most successful professional Australian Football League (AFL) players, Ben Cousins, who played for a Perth team, was accused of methamphetamine (and other drug) use in 2007 and sacked by his club. This attracted extensive media coverage of the addictive and dangerous effects of the drug, and conjecture about the moral status of methamphetamine users (Seear & Fraser, 2010). These public discussions in Australia were reinforced by images from abroad, which were also discussed among scenesters. This included a documentary from the US in June 2006 (SBS Television,

2006) and a UK public health campaign titled *Faces of Meth*²⁹, which was widely discussed on *E-scope* and in popular media. This campaign used mugshots of meth-‘addicted’, repeat criminal offenders arranged to show a severe decline in their physical appearance over time.

Media coverage at this time strongly aligned ice with images of irrational, desperate, compulsive and dirty drug users. The purported danger of methamphetamine was its transformative potential – that is, its ability to transform ‘normal’ people into ‘addicts’ or ‘junkies’. These images and representations were reminders of the threats posed by drug use to maintaining a valued identity within the mainstream.

Against this public backdrop, I explore scenester views of methamphetamine. These views can be categorised into three main positions. The first position is ‘anti-meth’, and it is generally articulated by non-smokers; the second position, articulated by meth smokers, is that smoking meth does not necessarily make them ‘problem’ users; and the third position, also held by meth smokers, is that meth smoking bestows a ‘ghetto cool’ identity. The purpose of this discussion is: (i) to establish that there were a range of diverging views held among scenesters about the acceptability of meth smoking, and (ii) with this variation in views established, to explore how these discourses were negotiated in practice.

Anti-meth views

Among scenesters generally, smoking meth was understood as more serious and riskier than other forms of use. While all 25 key contacts had snorted powdered methamphetamine, three had never smoked it. For some, smoking meth represented a transgression of important boundaries between recreational and non-recreational drug use. There were ten others (of 25) who had ‘tried’ it once or had used it only a ‘few times’ and were cautious about smoking it too often (i.e. more than every month

²⁹ See <http://www.drugs-info.co.uk/newinfo/faceofmeths/facesofmeths.html>.

or two). Scenesters within this non-using and cautious category expressed views that were similar to those represented within the public realm.

Expression of negative views about meth by scenesters in their face-to-face social interactions was rare. Scenesters generally avoided appearing hypocritical or judgmental of other scenesters' drug practices. This was influenced by their own involvement in other forms of ATS use, as well as their occasional use of meth despite having negative or 'anti-meth' views.

Privately, a number of scenesters expressed the view that meth was a 'dirty' and 'addictive' drug that could 'change people'. Additionally, during fieldwork a thread was created on *E-scope* by one scenester that invited conversation about meth. A number of contributors expressed their 'anti-meth' views. For example, Melissa (a key contact who had 'tried' meth smoking) wrote the following comment in this forum:

Crack [another slang term for methamphetamine] fucking disgusts me. The smoking, fiending, pipes, lightbulbs – all the amount of contraptions you can make, the way ppl [people] change, act, think, feel, psychosis, the comedowns, long and short term effects no one thinks about, it affects everyone around you, your way of life and especially your mind. It's an incredibly addictive and fucked up drug. People act like a pack of wolves and seagulls, squarking away 'mine'.

Melissa's reaction to the use of meth in the scene was scathing. Her post focuses heavily on her micro-level observations of the effects on individuals and group activity, suggesting that she has been witness to meth practice, or that she knows somebody whose use is problematic (in her view). Examples of these micro-level aspects include 'fiending' – a term commonly used to refer to women in the scene who repeatedly take advantage of drugs that are 'shouted' (i.e. gifted) by other scenesters, particularly men. Melissa comments on both individual effects (i.e. psychosis and comedowns) and also on group practice. She employs animal imagery in relation to the behaviour of individuals in meth-using groups. For example, she refers to the coastal bird 'seagulls' that commonly fight over food. In response to the post from Melissa, Jimmy, another scenester, wrote:

Agreed. Can't trust a word they say, cant rely on them to do anything, cant predict what they might do next. And its such an easy transition from occasional tweaker to empty shell. Stupid drug with few upsides and more downsides than virtually any other.

Here Jimmy uses the expression, “occasional tweaker” referring to individuals who occasionally stay awake all night. His discussion emphasises the radical change in personality of meth users. Importantly, by emphasising the compulsive and antisocial behaviour of meth users, Melissa and Jimmy both align the drug (and specifically the practice of smoking) with cultural representations of ‘addicts’ and ‘junkies’.

Others within the thread involving Melissa and Jimmy also expressed the view that meth smoking has changed the scene. For example, ‘Captain’ wrote:

Meth has destroyed the house scene and music scene in general if you ask me. Long gone are the days that you can play something a bit more soulful. The meth heads want the hard edge electro shite [...] Argg to meth ... pills in clubs anyway.

Others wrote about how they think the scene has become ‘angry’ and ‘self-conscious’ and they attributed this change to a decline in the use of ecstasy in clubs and the dominance of meth. Thus, scenesters were often ‘anti-meth’ because they believed that the use of the drug affected their experiences of attending EDM events. Below, I consider how those who smoked meth represented their use in the context of the stigmatising associations of meth in the mainstream and negative views about its use among other scenesters.

Distancing techniques: The problematic other

The strong negative public rhetoric surrounding meth practice at the time of fieldwork set the context for defensive reactions to questions about meth use in interviews. A common narrative technique used by scenesters to distance themselves from stigmatising associations was to contrast their use to exaggerated notions of the failed drug user. For example, when asked if she agreed with the way that meth use was presented in the media, Monique said:

Oh, well it's horrible. Like that documentary that came out, they were ex-heroin addicts scratching into their skin for ice bugs. Come on! No-one's ever seen anything like that in Perth.

When asked in the same interview about her involvement in the scene, Monique responded:

The one thing that I've noticed in particular about my group, and I don't know if it's the same across the board, but everyone I knew – despite the hard weekends that we were having – also managed to hold down professional jobs. Their work was not affected. They were all very responsible caring people. It's quite funny when you hear a story in the news about these people with addictions and stuff breaking into houses and beating up people because it's so far removed from anything I ever experienced.

Here Monique asserts the status of her friends as responsible citizens and differentiates them from addicted meth users by emphasising that they hold down professional jobs and are caring people. Her reaction indicates that associations with the potent social representation of the addict and the junkie were threatening to understandings about the identity of her friends and, by association, herself.

Scenesters articulated strikingly similar notions of the position of drugs in their lives. For example, when Henry was asked about whether the negative effects of crystal methamphetamine reported in the media resonated with his experience, he had this to say:

Henry: I think it [meth] has the potential to be what the media's making it out to be. I haven't seen any of that first hand though. I think all of the people that I have regular dealings with that take meth are pretty sort of well to do, middle class, in terms of people that are managing their drug use as part of – it's just a component of the rest of their lives. I think the sort of things you see in the media reflect a class of people that really don't have that, I guess, backing in their lives. There's nothing to really catch them if they have issues ... You just sort of see on the documentaries about the 'ice age', and the sort of typical meth addict is a real lower class, working class sort of, doesn't have any

money, had a really bad upbringing, no family to support them, friends are just sort ... no real friends.

Rachael: And so you just kind of think that the people that you hang out with are not the typical kind of [user].

Henry: It's not so much about class, even though I did use that word specifically, but the people that I hang out with are ... they are intelligent people that just know what the drug is, know how far they want to take themselves with it, and are just sort of managing it as part of the rest of their life.

This interview extract offers an example of two techniques that scenesters used to distance themselves from the problematic drug-using identity associated with meth users. First, class and social status were represented as having a protective function. Henry distinguishes himself from the “typical meth addict” who is lower class. Importantly, status within the mainstream offered resources and support or “backing”. Scenesters emphasised that notions of desperate, violent and criminal behaviour were far removed from their experiences, and they established that drug use was not a fixed or integrated aspect of their identity, but a lifestyle choice (e.g. Henry describes drugs as a “component of the rest of their lives”).

Second, scenesters emphasised their investment in ‘neo-liberal’ values (a dominant discourse of self-governance in Western countries). Performance of a neo-liberal subjectivity involves enactment of values of autonomy, responsibility and risk aversion (Bunton, 2001; Petersen, 1997). Henry uses terms such as “intelligent” and “managing”. These values were asserted in the context of an acknowledgment of the risks associated with meth smoking. Trevor, for example, described meth as:

the only drug that I've ever taken that you just continuously want more and more and more, and if you wanted and if you let yourself, you really could continuously take it for days and days and days at a time.

Among those who smoked, the defining feature of meth use was its association with use over long periods, during which the pipe was passed in a continuous motion among meth-circle members. Trevor describes how “you can continuously want

more and more and more”, and meth was often described as a ‘more-ish’ drug. Meth was also commonly described as having the ‘potential’ to be problematic – distinguished by its ability to keep one awake for “days and days and days”. Notably, scenesters did not draw upon the language of addiction. Terms such as more-ish and potential were used to frame their drug use within a discourse of control and choice. While all acknowledged that the unrestrained use of meth was associated with negative outcomes, they emphasised that they were rational decision-makers and active managers of risk. This is demonstrated in Trevor’s comment: “if you wanted to and if you let yourself”. In a contribution to the aforementioned meth thread on *E-scope*, ‘Oscillate’ similarly said:

I’ve seen it be enjoyed without bad consequences and I’ve also seen crap shit happen as well. But the people I’ve known who’ve done it/do it still, are smart enough not to become crazy junkies.

The discursive strategies presented here represent attempts by scenesters to manage the public associations of meth practice with stigma and harm. Another way that scenesters represented their meth use involved realignment of meth smoking with a ghetto cool aesthetic. Slightly different to the defensive strategies discussed here, this represented a subtle form of resistance to the stigma associated with meth use. I describe this below.

Crack, ghetto cool and risk-taking

The third response to meth smoking observed among scenesters was one that realigned it with glamorised representations of risk-taking and ‘dirty’ practices. This was facilitated by scenesters’ use of the term ‘crack’ to refer to crystal methamphetamine. On the surface, it appeared that the term was misused. Crack typically refers to smokable freebase cocaine in the US context and is rarely used in Australia. Scenesters tended to agree that the term came into circulation among the network because both crack cocaine and crystal methamphetamine are smoked with a glass pipe. Popular cultural representations associate crack with disadvantaged sections of communities and with poverty. Such experiences were foreign to scenesters. For them, associating meth smoking with ‘black’ street cultures and ‘ghetto’ culture (‘ghetto’ being their term) exoticised the practice. The association

realigned images of desperation, dirtiness and risk-taking with a “black aesthetic” (Belk *et al.*, 2010, p.184) that has been commoditised within a global industry and had currency within the EDM scene.

Ghetto cool had particular currency among young men. Max, for example, spoke about novelty of doing something that was ghetto cool:

I’ve got this real sort of fascination with ghetto and hip hop and the whole ghetto kind of scene and I thought it’s going to be really funny to smoke something out of a light globe. So that was really the first time ever ... I just have a big fascination with ghetto hip hop, gangsters, guns, smoking crack, all this sort of stuff. I don’t know, it’s the whole typical white boy into rap.

Max’s account of his “fascination” with the whole “ghetto kind of scene” reflects the novelty value that street culture had, given that he had not experienced poverty or significant hardship in his life. He refers to the practice of smoking crack out of a light globe, which was a substitute for a pipe. This makeshift practice was a symbol of desperate and compulsive use. For example, during observation, one scenester Melissa related to me that “You know when they [people] use too much when there are no light-globes left in the house”. Max experiments deliberately and ironically with the symbols of “ghetto” street culture, and he reflects on it as being “really funny”. He was an occasional user, and this contributes to the casual way that he reflects on his use. However, others were less playful with their identification with ghetto cool and did not joke about it. They attempted to more fully align their identities with a ghetto cool through tough, dismissive attitude, dress style and heavy drug use. Sometimes involvement in drug dealing supported this identity.

The association of ghetto cool with meth smoking was a celebration of risk and subversiveness. It represented boundary-pushing and dissociation from the strictures of mainstream values. This activity was supported by broader cultural references. The film *The Basketball Diaries* (Carroll, 1995), which is the tale of a street-savvy protagonist’s free fall into drug addiction, as well as the drug enthusiast films, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998) and *Trainspotting* (Hodge, 1996), were mentioned frequently among this network. *The Basketball Diaries* (Carroll, 1995)

reflected the appeal of ghetto cool, while *Fear and Loathing* and *Trainspotting* featured narratives espousing the thrill and intensity of flirting with the dangers of drugs and pushing the limits of addiction. Both styles of films lent a certain cultural credibility and ‘cool’ to risky styles of use. Further, these films were all popular in the mid- to late-1990s, when the majority of this group were in their formative teenage years, and this might explain the salience and frequency with which they were mentioned.

Although notions of ghetto cool offered possibilities for the negotiation of alternative identities that celebrated meth user identity and could potentially represent “transformational normalisation” (Rødner Sznitman, 2008), these possibilities were not pursued. For scenesters, ghetto cool was an aesthetic and individualised stylistic choice, and they ultimately acknowledged the potential harm associated with meth use and valued their status in the mainstream over the performance of a ghetto cool identity. Thus, identification with ghetto cool and excessive styles of use were partial and temporary, even among those who used ATS heavily (I discuss transitions among scenesters and negotiation of drug-related negative health effects in the following chapter).

In summary, views of meth smoking were diverse. This diversity was underpinned by the broader concern about methamphetamine in the mainstream community, and alignment of meth smoking with compulsive styles of use that was stigmatised both within the mainstream and within the scene (i.e. becoming an addict or a junkie). Scenesters were aware of the negative judgment of many scenesters of the practice of methamphetamine smoking. They took views of other scenesters into account when pursuing and managing their smoking so protect their reputations. I draw on participant observation data describing the practice of meth smoking in three settings during a typical night out. Later in this chapter, this excerpt provides a backdrop to the examination of how rationalisations of recreational practice featured language about the sociability of meth use. However, I also explore how this discourse was unstable and interpreted differently by others in the network.

A typical night

Andrew, Monique and Gretel were all heavily involved in the scene and typically spent their weekends going to bars, nightclubs and parties. They spent most weekends together attending bars, nightclubs and parties, and using ATS, with other scenesters. This particular Saturday night was a typical night out for them. Their friend Isabelle was holding a house party. During the week leading up to the party, Andrew bought a 'weight' of meth (i.e. one gram) for \$300. Gretel bought two pills (ecstasy) from Andrew, who also bought five pills for himself.

They gathered at Monique's house at around 10pm and I met them there. They chatted over a bottle of wine, while text messaging and phoning other scenesters they planned to meet later in the night. They sat drinking, talking and listening to music, as Monique darted in and out of her room asking Gretel which shoes she should wear.

At around 10:30pm, Andrew produced drugs from his pocket. He placed a small plastic bag containing crystalline methamphetamine on the table and held up another small bag containing two tablets. He told Gretel that the pills were \$30 each. Monique gave him \$100 (her share of the cost of the methamphetamine) and Gretel gave him \$160 (her share of the cost of the methamphetamine plus the additional \$60 for the two pills). Andrew then took a small glass pipe from his pocket and suggested a quick 'toke' (smoke) before leaving. He opened the plastic bag containing the methamphetamine, picked out a few crystals and loaded them into the pipe bulb. He passed the pipe to Monique, saying "you can go first". Monique held a cigarette lighter beneath the bulb, heating the crystals until they released a white vapour. She inhaled the vapour gently through the stem of the pipe three or four times, and passed it to Gretel. There was little talk other than Monique remarking that "this is good gear". It was explained to me (at another time) that good quality meth burnt 'cleanly' – that is, produced an opaque film on the inner surface of the pipe bulb rather than a black resin. They passed the pipe around twice, with Andrew loading the pipe with more crystals for the second round.

Around 10:40pm, there was a knock at the door. It was Bob, a friend of the trio, who was also going to the party. Following greetings, Monique asked Bob, “You want some [meth]?” Bob sat down and had a couple of tokes. Around 11pm, they left for Isabelle’s party. They took another bottle of wine and some beers, and Andrew took the pipe, meth and pills.

They arrived at the party shortly before 11:30pm. The group dispersed and mingled in the crowd of around 50, drinking the alcohol they had brought. While many of their friends were at the party, there were also many people that they did not know. Around 1am, Trevor, one of their friends, said to Monique that he was going to *Club A* (breaks club). She replied “Yeah, we’re going too”. She suggested to Andrew that they leave soon but have another smoke before going to the club (where they did not smoke). Andrew suggested returning to Monique’s house for the smoke. Monique thought it would be more convenient and quicker to use one of the rooms in Isabelle’s house for smoking. Andrew felt uncomfortable with this, saying “Why can’t we just go somewhere else?” Monique replied, “Look, half the people here are on something [have taken drugs]. What are you gonna do if someone walks in anyway? They wouldn’t care”. They decided to smoke in Isabelle’s room, with Monique tapping Gretel on the shoulder on the way to the room. Gretel turned to Siobahn and Ryan and said, “You coming?”

Andrew, Monique, Gretel, Siobahn, Ryan and I sat in Isabelle’s room for around 20 minutes, talking and passing the glass pipe around. Andrew sat on the floor and leant against the door (which did not lock) to prevent others from entering. When they emerged, Trevor said, “Ok, so you’re back – you guys coming [to *Club A*]? We’ve ordered cabs”. They left the party for the club.

They reached the club around 2am and stayed until 4am, leaving after the main DJ for the night had finished his set. They spent the time having two or three more drinks each, dancing and socialising. Andrew also ran into Gavin, who invited the group back to his house.

They arrived at Gavin’s house just before 5am. Around ten people were present, with most having been at both the party and *Lounge* (including Bob and Trevor, who had found their own way to Gavin’s). They occupied three main areas: some were in the

lounge room sitting on couches while two men stood at a table in one corner of the room DJ-ing (playing loud breaks music), a couple of people were standing in the kitchen talking and drinking, and some were outside smoking. After greeting everybody and getting a beer from Gavin, Andrew sat on the couch, leaning over the coffee table while he prepared the meth pipe and checked how much meth he had left. Monique and Gretel sat with him, as did Bob, Trevor, Gavin and an unknown female friend of Andrew's. Andrew loaded the pipe and they passed it around the circle, each having three to four tokes. The pipe circulated two or three times before the bulb was empty. After a short break of about ten minutes, during which people chatted, Andrew packed the bulb again for a second round. Andrew's meth supply ran out at around 7am.

Around 7:30am, Andrew and Gretel decided to take an (ecstasy) pill each. Andrew also offered one to his female friend (she did not pay). Others at the party had already taken pills, with two girls sitting on the couch talking for several hours (under a blanket and wearing hoodies borrowed from Gavin). They did not smoke meth.

Later in the morning, around 10:30am, Gavin, who had been DJ-ing for most of the morning, brought out more meth of his own. The smoking circle re-formed but with different members, including two other friends of Gavin's who had arrived around 8:30am. Monique, who did not partake in this new round of smoking, went home at midday, but Andrew and Gretel both had a couple of tokes. The gathering continued into Sunday afternoon, with Gavin's meth running out around 12:30pm. People started to leave and the party eventually ended around 2pm.³⁰

³⁰ This extract has not been indented because the original fieldnote extract has been significantly rewritten to incorporate additional details of the described occurrences.

Meth circles and transitions: Pre-parties to after-parties

The above description gives a picture of a typical Saturday night and Sunday activities for scenesters engaging in meth smoking. The passage depicts the transitions between various types of setting – private, quasi-private and public – and the styles of drug use deemed appropriate to each over the course of the night. Central to the smoking of methamphetamine is the ‘meth circle’, with the term referring to two aspects of practice: the small, private nature of smoking groups, and the circulation of the glass pipe around the group.

The gathering at Monique’s house marked the first stage of a typical night out: the ‘pre’ stage (often termed ‘pre-s’). This ‘pre-drinking’ or ‘pre-loading’ stage (Martinic & Measham, 2008; Well *et al.*, 2009) usually involved the consumption of alcohol and energy drinks, as well as small amounts of ATS. In the described case, the group had their first smoke of the night; on other nights, when those who did not smoke meth were also present, lines of speed or dexies were consumed too. Among scenesters, pre-s provided a chance to meet up before entering public/quasi-public spaces (which were often noisy and crowded) – to relax, socialise and to organise/exchange money for event tickets and drugs. As described in the ethnographic vignette, the usual practice was to share the cost of purchasing meth between several friends. The pre-stage signalled the beginning of the evening’s activities and contributed to a party ‘mood’ before scenesters moved to more social settings, such as Isabelle’s house party, later in the evening.

The second stage of the night and its main focus was usually an EDM event, club visit and/or house party. When entering licensed premises such as a club or the venue for an EDM event, the illegality of ATS was a significant consideration. If the decision to smoke meth was taken during visits to these public settings, scenesters would adjourn to a nearby house, car or alleyway. It was usual to avoid carrying pipes or large amounts of drugs into clubs.

The rules governing meth smoking at house parties were less clear cut, with scenesters negotiating various social and logistical considerations concerning the perceived acceptability of meth among their peers. This was contextualised by

knowledge about the strong negative views that some scenesters had about meth smoking. This need to balance competing considerations at house parties often led to the discreet creation of private or quasi-private spaces in which to smoke meth. For example, an invitation to join a meth circle in a bedroom usually occurred by simply gesturing with a tap on the shoulder or a nod to friends. Keeping the group small, and using only for a short time, were other ways of avoiding unwanted attention from others attending the party. These strategies also limited the amount of meth that was given away to others in the process.

In the ethnographic account, Monique and Andrew disagreed about the relative importance of privacy in relation to smoking meth at Isabelle's party. Monique was willing to trade off privacy for convenience because she wanted to maximise her time at the club – she often said that clubbing was the favourite part of her weekend. Her claim that “half the people here are on something” and that “they wouldn't care” anyway, makes explicit that one issue being considered by the pair was being judged by their peers. Monique's assessment – that drug use is common and accepted among scenesters – coupled with the knowledge that Isabelle occasionally smoked meth too, made smoking meth at the party acceptable.

Andrew took a different view. The doors to rooms did not lock, and the meth circle would be likely to involve more than the ideal number of people. Therefore, achieving complete privacy was unlikely. However, he agreed to smoking in Isabelle's bedroom because returning to Monique's house to smoke would significantly delay the group's arrival at the club. Like Monique, he traded off privacy for convenience, but he ensured that the smoking episode was relatively brief (around 20 minutes) and attempted to prevent disruption by other partygoers by sitting against the door. However, the scenario was considered less than ideal.

The third stage of a typical night out was the after-party (also called 'afters' or the 'comedown party'). This stage usually commenced between 3 and 7am. As described in the ethnographic account, the move from a club or EDM event to an after-party usually involved the host inviting friends at the club or communicating with them via

text message. After-parties involved socialising, listening to music (DJ equipment was often set up, as it was in Gavin's house) and relaxing.

While some of those who attended after-parties welcomed the opportunity to 'come down' from their drug use (i.e. let the effects subside) before going home, these gatherings also functioned as spaces in which to continue partying – to enter another phase of drug use. As we have seen, smoking meth in public settings was associated with negotiation, anxiety and haste. By comparison, scenesters regarded after-parties as the ideal setting in which to use drugs. Meth and pills were seen as particularly suitable and were often reserved specifically for this stage. The above ethnographic account describes an unconstrained and relaxed style of use, characterised by the sharing of drugs. For example, those who smoked used openly in front of two women (and myself) who were not smoking. This openness was due to the invitation-only nature of the group which meant that those present usually knew one another. The timing of after-parties – which began in early hours of the morning - also meant that there was an assumption among scenesters that most of those present had already used ATS during the evening or were participating in further use.

In particular, after-parties were often characterised by the sharing and gifting of drugs. This was typically practised by males in the group, with no future payment expected, as shown by Andrew in the ethnographic account. Although shouting could occur at any stage of the night, it was more common and more open during this stage. Bob and Trevor also used drugs without paying for them on this occasion, but as regular participants in weekend activities among this network, it was assumed that they would contribute drugs on other occasions.

Another important feature of drug use at after-parties was its prolonged nature. Scenesters attending after-parties often stayed awake for the rest of the day, 'chilling out'. If they did not have to work the following day, they often returned to clubs or parties the next evening, repeating the progression from pre- to public setting to after-party. This repeated engagement was known as 'pulling a bender' and usually occurred over weekends. Benders were viewed as intensely social experiences because they involved multiple settings and different types of social experience (in this case, a small group, house party and club). EDM featured prominently

throughout. Below I explore how a discourse of sociability was central to discussion of the enjoyment of meth, and also set broad parameters for ‘acceptable’ practice.

Social smoking

Scenesters who smoked commonly emphasised the positive aspects of smoking.

Gretel (regular smoker) is one such individual:

Rachael: So I’m quite interested in this difference between smoking drugs and snorting, why do you think you decided to smoke it as opposed to snort it?

Gretel: I suppose it’s more sociable, you can just pass it. You keep talking and keep talking and then it’s your turn again ... Whereas I suppose with the whole ingestion of snorting it you kind of line it up and it’s for yourself and each person has a line and that’s it. You’re done with it. You carry on with what you were doing beforehand.

Gretel’s view, and the associated rationale about why smoking meth was more social than snorting, was common among other meth smokers in the network. She describes snorting as an individualised practice because “each person has a line and that’s it. You’re done with it”. Gretel contrasts this with smoking which, in her view, is a more fluid experience of talking and using drugs simultaneously.

Simon (who smoked meth occasionally) emphasised how meth is a social experience that is suited to the after-party context:

Rachael: So you’d use it more in situations where you were at someone’s house?

Simon: Yeah oh yeah uniquely. We wouldn’t go out and take it out with us.

Rachael: You wouldn’t take it in the car or take it into a club or anything?

Simon: Every now and then it might, someone might take it in the car. We would never take it into clubs. It was really more of a social thing to do with your friends.

Rachael: Yeah and so did you use it kinda before and after?

Simon: Definitely before. Again you’d just go around to a friend’s place have some drinks, pass the pipe around and then again when you got home

in the morning ... not home, I mean, everyone would sort of would go back to someone's house out to an after-party and crack it open.

Simon described how the preferred context for meth use was at after-parties. He explained that the negotiation of the privacy necessary in other contexts such as clubs detracted from its sociable appeal. He also played on the word 'crack' to emphasise the sociability and relaxation associated with the practice. The phrase "crack it open" refers to the activity of starting up a meth circle. It also refers to the common Australian euphemism '[to] crack open' a beer – usually referring to breaking the seal of a beer (typically the first beer at the end of the [work] day).

Henry's (a regular meth smoker) comment also emphasised the sociability of the experience:

It just, it's a really smooth feeling, more so than speed, especially snorting which was really ... gave you a real jump at first and made you really agitated, and that. Smoking meth specifically was a lot smoother and it would just make you feel good and chatty for hours and hours and hours ... I think what I liked most about it was, especially the smoking aspect of it, was, that it was such a social thing to do. You'd just, you and all your good friends would sit around a table chatting, listening to music and you'd just pass the pipe around, and that seemed to be a real communal and social event.

Undoubtedly the shared aspect of meth smoking in meth circles contributed to understanding of the practice as one that was social. However, in this passage, Henry explains how the drug's effects also enhance the social experience (e.g. by facilitating lengthy conversations).

The logic of sociability was also a regulatory discourse – with antisocial use representing slippage into a style of use that was problematic and could damage identity within the mainstream. One of the most important delineators of acceptable use was maintaining use in association with the pursuit of sociable experience in the scene. In particular, 'pulling benders' in the absence of the structure of 'going out' (described in the ethnographic example) stripped the practice of its meaning and function – that is, enjoyment of the offerings of the scene (i.e. the music and the

social experience). Monique provides insight into this attitude in the following extract:

Yeah, there are some people that fall off along the way and they're people that start taking drugs at the after-party and then you can see they don't really want to go out, they'd rather just stay around home and keep taking more drugs and I was like 'no, I'm sorry, if you're going to take drugs you're going out'.

In the above passage, Monique delineates herself as a social smoker. This was also reflected in her practice. For example, in the ethnographic excerpt Monique prioritised the social experience (i.e. going to a nightclub with friends) over the drug experience (i.e. going home to smoke). Simon makes a similar point when he says:

I'm not one of those people that can sit around at somebody's place and smoke rock for a good night. I'd have a bit to stay awake and that sort of thing and a bit the next morning to hang out at a come down party but I wouldn't just sit there on a Friday night or something like that and smoke rock all night with a bunch of people. That wouldn't be my Friday night.

Both Monique and Simon represent their participation as social, differentiating themselves from antisocial users. This process of differentiation echoes Rødner's claim that recreational drug users create "psychological distinctions" between themselves and "drug abusers" (2005, p.334).

Nevertheless, the boundaries between social and antisocial use were not fixed. Scenesters' notions of what constituted social use were slippery. I explore below how some scenesters interpreted meth circles as antisocial practice.

Smoking as antisocial

While Henry, Monique and Simon emphasised the sociability involved in pulling benders and smoking meth in meth circles, other scenesters drew opposite conclusions about these activities – defining them as antisocial. We saw some of these opinions earlier in this chapter. Scenesters often drew on their own experiences in, or their observations of, meth circles and pulling benders in forming their

opinions. For example, Theo (a non-user, formerly a regular user) drew on his own experiences in making the following comments about meth circles:

Theo It's not really a social thing. People will go and hide out in their little meth circles.

Rachael: In a room with the door closed?

Theo: Yeah.

I asked Theo to explain why he thought people smoked meth behind closed doors:

Theo: Because there's a little bit of a ... people frown upon its use and that's fair enough ... not missing out on anything.

Rachael: Is it also like they're doing their thing and it's kind of an exclusive thing?

Theo: Never really the exclusive thing. People don't want to admit they're doing it. They want it because they're chasing a feeling [...]

Theo's argument that participation in meth circles is antisocial focuses on two aspects. First, he emphasises their secretive nature – that people in meth circles “hide out” and thus separate themselves from other scenesters present at the social gathering. He clarifies that while not “exclusive” (in an elite sense), they were exclusionary – particularly when conducted covertly. Second, Theo argues that because meth smokers are “chasing a feeling”, they are prioritising the drug's effects over the social experience. This was a common view among non-smokers, who also emphasised the vast amounts of time spent smoking meth as evidence of meth's addictive properties.

Another criticism of meth circles was associated with interactions observed in meth circles. Meth circles were said to be antisocial and associated with compulsive use, because participants became ‘fixated’ on the pipe rather than focusing on the accompanying social interaction. Those who regarded meth-circles as antisocial spoke about how the focus on the drug created group tensions. Ryan said:

Ryan: Everyone sits around, like staring at the person with the pipe, waiting for their turn. It's antisocial, they don't look like they're having fun,

even though they claim they are. It just gives off a really negative vibe.

Rachael: And you've seen people kind of get into fights and things?

Ryan: Not really fights, never physical fights, just aggressive, aggro, yelling, not being polite citizens, not very nice people to be around.

Ryan's interpretation of a "negative vibe" was linked to individualistic and drug-focused activity. He perceived that meth smoking did not represent a "fun" activity. Disagreement within the network on what constitutes social practice highlights the variability of expressions of recreational drug-using style among scenesters.

In the final section of this chapter, I describe the contradictions and tensions within individual accounts of the 'sociability' of meth smoking among those who participated in it. These arose from the acknowledgment of the potent effects of the drug and the selfish behaviours of some participants.

Unregulated boundaries: Pipe pirates and politics

In this chapter I have established that scenesters negotiated their use of meth in a complex and contested social terrain. By engaging in meth smoking, they willingly ignored public rhetoric emphasising the deleterious health effects of using and claims that the practice cuts across social class and will power to transform users into addicts. The dominant response among scenesters was to align their identities with values of autonomy, control and responsibility. I have shown how they drew from a value of sociability to emphasise the recreational nature of their use.

Rødner Sznitman's work (Rødner, 2005; Rødner Sznitman, 2008) has provided a useful framework for interpreting these representations. Her analysis highlights the defensive techniques employed by socially integrated drug-using young adults to protect their identities. Informed by Goffman's writing on management of stigma, she argues that these represent attempts to assimilate (Rødner Sznitman, 2008). She points out some of the limitations of this strategy by arguing that such individuals are "bound up in processes of passing as normal" (2008, p.452), and they are "forever doomed to the feelings of discredited people" (2008, p.451). In earlier work, she

claims that the identity of her participants as drug users “is weak, not yet accomplished” (Rødner, 2005, p.344) because they define themselves in relation to negative values defining what they are ‘not’. Concluding this chapter, I elaborate on this analysis to consider how the establishment of meth smoking as a deviant practice, both in the community and within the scene, shaped a private style of use with poorly articulated limits.

While scenesters adhered to a shared boundary, which is to only use ATS on weekends (or non-work days), the specific boundaries of use within these broad parameters (i.e. weekends) were not well articulated. This has been described in relation to activities within meth circles, where heavy and continuous use was common. Meth circles both resulted in and facilitated benders. Benders challenged the boundaries of ‘recreational’ practice because they were associated with negative health effects (discussed in the following chapter) and the manifestation of group tensions – termed ‘politics’.

With regards to the ‘politics’ of meth circles, one aspect that was discussed was selfish behaviour. In particular, the continuous use that characterised meth circles was associated with a focus on the drug effects rather than the social experience (an observation also noted by non-smokers). For example, Gretel talks about the negative aspects of meth smoking:

There is always the whole, the whole concept of when you are smoking it in the social situation, people watch the pipe ... and it makes people more on edge [...] For example, it was almost like it was the seagull effect, like just kind of honing in on the drugs because you know, you’re sitting in a circle passing the pipe around and if you’re sitting there talking, [and] you fail to hurry up with your turn, people start getting aggro a lot more. So there was this aggro-ness, this immediate aggro-ness I suppose with the intake of it.

She elaborated on this further:

Being awake for so long I suppose you would generally find that a whole lot of factors come into how people react because if someone was [...] hitting it hard for the entire night um the urge for it comes back a lot quicker and a lot harsher [...] you can become suddenly uncomfortable with the amount or lack of [the drug ...] you

start getting very aggravated with the person who's stopping you or the situation that's stopping you from having more and this is the sort of negative thing that came about with that sort of ingestion [...] which I found really horrible to deal with or I still find really horrible to deal with ...

In this passage, Gretel also associates antisocial activity with the effects of the drug, such as having impulses for continued consumption and feeling “aggravated” with those perceived as preventing further use.

According to Gretel, the continuous movement of the pipe contributed to the perception of the practice as ‘social’. It was disruption of this fluidity, as well as the perception of slippage into greedy styles of use, that were linked to group tensions. The term ‘pipe pirates’ – which references the common understanding of pirates as bad mannered and thieves – was used to refer to individuals who used in this way. A common example was holding on to the pipe for too long – an action that they referred to as ‘hijacking’ the pipe. The term was often used playfully to facilitate negotiation of tense situations and, in this way, assisted with the regulation of individuals who were perceived to become antisocial in their practice.

The ethnographic vignette provided earlier described the fluid and changing membership of meth circles. The loose rules governing participation in meth circles – particularly in the after-party context where membership was usually open and use prolonged – meant that there was some abuse of the shared process. Throughout fieldwork I noticed that joining meth circles without contributing to the purchase of meth was relatively common. However, because membership was not strictly regulated, some individuals contributed more than others, and some were perceived to deliberately take advantage of the situation.

In an interview, Monique acknowledged this practice. She described unacceptable behaviour in relation to group meth practice:

Monique: Well, occasionally people would infiltrate the group and we used to call them pipe pirates. You know, people who weren't really friends but used to come to the after-parties or the pre-s or whatever because they knew you would be going in on a pipe and [it would be] getting

passed around. There was this onus, like it would be quite hard if someone was just there that, you know, I suppose if you've got guests in your house you offer them a drink don't you? So those people were quite quickly weeded out of the group in most situations.

Rachael: So it basically wasn't appreciated.

Monique: I mean it's just general politeness like it would be in any society. I mean if someone's got a bar of chocolate you don't just hover around like a dog waiting for scraps to get a bit do you? You wait to be offered and I suppose there was a real retaliation against people who were quite clearly hanging around and were not willing to put in their own gear or pay for what they were using... it was just respect for your friends really. We didn't appreciate people who were infiltrating the group and acting like arseholes.

While Monique was one individual who did occasionally speak out on these issues, the expression of such opinions was rare. Another implication of the culture of deviance associated with meth circles was that, because scenesters were motivated to continually defend their practice and justify it as social, they did not openly address its negative aspects. This had a corrosive effect on group cohesion, promoting mistrust, suspicion and resentment. I explain this briefly by drawing on the experience of Henry – a regular meth smoker – and one of the individuals who insisted that meth smoking is a social practice. After a period of some months observing Henry, I noted that he seemed to continually 'shout' others in the group. On more than one occasion, Henry contributed a whole weight or one gram (\$300 to 400) to the group, and I was not aware of any other contribution to this purchase.

In an interview, I asked Henry about this, and he reported that he spends up to \$500 on a 'big weekend' on drugs. This was significantly more than most individuals – particularly women, who (on big weekends) typically spent upwards of \$100 to \$150. Henry reflected on the issue of fairness:

Henry: The thing with that is, because you are sharing it [meth], you'll buy a large amount for yourself but you won't use all of it. It will be shared around with other people and on the flip side some weekends you won't buy any but you'll still take a lot of it because other people will shout you and pass the pipe around.

- Rachael: Do you find that it kind of evens out or is there sometimes politics about how much people are contributing?
- Henry: I like to think it all evens out, but I think a few people have some ... karmic debts to pay! I think some people do take that for a ride and just really if the opportunity arises and they were just offered it, they take as much as they can.
- Rachael: Yeah, and ...
- Henry: [interrupts] and really not contribute back.
- Rachael: Have you had ... have there been times when people have confronted other people on that, or ...?
- Henry: No no-one ever confronts anyone. They just bitch about them behind their backs.
- Rachael: Ok, all right, so it's kind of just dealt with through the gossip chain rather than any kind of ...
- Henry: Yeah there's no official judicial process. Well if there is it results in no jail time, so ...

The equity of drug sharing was not openly discussed in social contexts, and it was with some awkwardness that Henry spoke about it. A well-liked member of the group who was rarely involved in any conflict, he describes how he would “like to think” that the cost of sharing meth in a group “evens out” but how he knew some people took advantage of the generosity of others.

Henry's unquestioned contribution to the group was in many ways underpinned by the social expectation that those who earned more, or were able to access free or cheap drugs, should share their drugs with others. This experience was also heavily gendered, with males bearing a disproportionate cost. Seemingly keen to defend his friends, Henry speaks about this issue in a humorous manner and avoids mentioning any names. Further, Henry explained that “no-one ever confronts anyone”. In previous chapters I have mentioned that gossip was rife among the scene and was experienced as negative by many scenesters. This perhaps explains Henry's reluctance to openly discuss the issue of the fairness of the process in an interview. Open engagement in gossip and ‘backstabbing’ undermined friendships and group cohesion.

Henry briefly talks about the how a friendship group ended (in the year prior to fieldwork) because of the tensions that arose during over a period of time after smoking meth together every weekend:

- Henry: ... the sort of group that I'd been hanging around with had self-destructed pretty much.
- Rachael: Why was that?
- Henry: I think it was just too much yeah.
- Rachael: So everyone was smoking meth?
- Henry: Yeah.
- Rachael: Quite a bit?
- Henry: Yeah.
- Rachael: And did that kind of like I mean were people getting paranoid about things or worried about?
- Henry: Not so much paranoid just it tended to get a bit repetitive, nutty after a while.
- Rachael: Nutty in what way?
- Henry: Like people would just be a bit loopy ...
- Rachael: Tell me an example about ...
- Henry: Just really bitchy about their best friends and people that they said they cared about and that they said cared about them. You know as soon as they were gone they would just start bitching about the people in the group and that was all we seemed to talk about was either taking drugs or bitching about other people that were supposed to be our friends.
[...]
- Rachael: And so was it you know like was it kind of just the amount of time you were spending together or was there kind of other stuff going on? Like was there politics?
- Henry: Oh there was politics!
- Rachael: What was going on there?
- Henry: Yeah politics. I think we ran out of things to talk about as well.

This extract illustrates some of the corrosive effects that meth smoking had on group interactions. Notably, both Monique and Henry, in their discussion of the negative aspects of the experience, continued to distance themselves and their friends from

negative public portrayals of meth users. For example, Henry denied that his friends were “paranoid” (as I suggested) and instead chose the word ‘nutty’ to describe their behaviour. He also emphasised that negative aspects were rooted in the style of social interaction (e.g. bitching about friends, boredom) rather than the drug effects themselves. Earlier, Monique continued to maintain representation of her friends as social meth smokers by emphasising that it was outsiders (“people who infiltrated the group”) who transgressed social codes. However, in the process of upholding the reputation of scenesters participating in meth circles, I argue that the preoccupation with justifying practice as social meant that negative aspects of practice were not openly addressed, and, somewhat ironically, this negatively impacted on shared social experience over time.

Summary

More than other practices that were observed among scenesters, meth smoking exposed the tensions that individuals negotiated between their scenester and mainstream identities. The potency of the cultural representation of the problematic drug user – the addict or the junkie – among scenesters was undeniable. These figures represented the ultimate symbol of a loss of control and a state of disrepute. At the time of fieldwork, meth smoking was strongly aligned with this imagery, and this posed a strong threat to identity in the mainstream and within the EDM scene. Scenesters, to some extent, also took on board public messages emphasising the damaging health effects of meth. Many in this network – despite their use of other ATS and the common practice of snorting the less potent form of powdered methamphetamine – were cautious about using meth frequently or they chose not to smoke it. There were a number who expressed anti-meth views both in interviews and on the online forum of *E-scope*. On the other hand, this chapter shows that there were others that did use meth and often did so heavily. For these reasons, meth smoking was a contentious practice among this network.

Drawing from Rødner Sznitman’s (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008) research on identity management among socially integrated drug users, I argue that the recreational style was a defensive one – based on understandings of what

scenesters did not want to become. For these reasons, boundaries of practice were loosely defined. In this chapter I have explored the inconsistent interpretation of what represented 'social' meth use.

I elaborated on the work of Rødner Sznitman (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008) by exploring how the strategies used to rationalise involvement without damaging their identities (I term these defensive strategies) meant that the boundaries of acceptable practice within groups were not well-articulated. This meant that heavy styles of use and activities such as taking advantage of others were common. Further, because scenesters were motivated to continually defend their practice and justify it as social, they did not openly address negative aspects of practice. Tensions were left unresolved or dealt with through indirect strategies such as rumour and gossip. These had a corrosive effect on group cohesion. This chapter contributes to a more nuanced argument for normalisation that fully considers the ways that stigma and identity management are negotiated among young adults. The following chapter takes up this theme through examination of scenesters' negotiation of recreational drug-using identity over time.

– CHAPTER 9 –

Identity and the uncertain path of the ageing scenester

This ethnographic account locates scenesters in the two distinct but overlapping social fields of the mainstream and the EDM scene. A lifestyle of partying and illicit drug use brought with it pleasure, fun and excitement, and it was a source of identity for scenesters. However, the maintenance of dual identities also produced tensions because a drug user identity is devalued and stigmatised in the mainstream. Ongoing and high frequency drug use, and adherence to the demands of a ‘partying’ lifestyle, also compromised emotional and physical wellbeing. These effects were most prominently experienced by scenesters when the lifestyle was sustained over time and threatened the ability of scenesters to fulfil mainstream social expectations and responsibilities that were associated with the performance of a ‘normal’ identity. This chapter analyses the ways that scenesters negotiated these tensions.

Academic discussion about the ways that young adults maintain involvement in recreational styles and negotiate drug-related transitions is limited by the rarity of longitudinal and qualitative research. However, there has been some academic discussion about drug-related transitions of young people. For example, the normalisation literature featured analysis of drug use “careers” among their cohort (Parker *et al.*, 1998). Parker *et al.* categorised their sample by drug use “status” and continued to re-evaluate these categories over time (e.g. Parker *et al.*, 2002). They found that, while there was an overall trend to ageing out of using illicit drugs on a regular basis this occurred at a later age than in previous generations (Williams & Parker, 2001). In their recent review of UK research, Measham and Shiner (2009) argue that the probability of desistance increases with age. Citing the work of Shiner (2009), they report that there is a strong relation between domestic transitions (such as marriage) and drug-related transitions (in Measham & Shiner, 2009, p.506). Drawing on the theory of social control by Sampson and Laub (1993) Measham and

Shiner suggest that the “constraining influence of the social bond” particularly within intimate relationships may explain this association (2009, p.506).

Qualitative research has elaborated on some of these themes. For example, Measham, *et al.* found that “significant transitions” such as marriage and growing older “are associated with differing levels of drug taking in the population, for both women and men” (2011, p.422). They report that the “adoption of adult roles became key turning points in drug careers and led some on the road to desistence” (Measham *et al.*, 2011, p.425). However, they suggest that the picture is complex, finding that others accommodated drug use alongside the demands of changing lifestyles (*ibid*). They argue that these trends were gendered. Specifically, their female participants reportedly faced “greater challenges in how their drug use ‘bedded in’ in adulthood” (Measham *et al.*, 2011, p.426).

Following on from the increasingly nuanced discussion in the literature of the processes of negotiating drug use over the life course, this chapter elaborates on existing understandings of the processes of negotiating transitions by exploring micro-level processes of identity negotiation amongst scenesters. I argue that there was considerable uncertainty about the boundaries of ‘normal’ drug use as scenesters aged. The analysis presented here is unique because it is based on observation and discussion with scenesters over time, as well as their reflections during in-depth interviews. This type of qualitative research is rare in the drugs field, particularly in Australia.

This chapter begins with an examination of scenesters’ negotiation of the negative aspects of using drugs over time – specifically, the effects on health, wellbeing and work performance. Scenesters understood that there were ‘costs’ associated with drug use and accommodated these into their decision-making. Among this network, recreational drug use was not defined by the complete absence of harm, but rather the management of certain types and levels of harm. The process of rationalising the costs and benefits of drug use and accommodating some negative effects has been previously discussed in the literature, and it was also incorporated into the original argument for normalisation (Parker *et al.*, 1998; Parker & Measham, 1994). Studies also suggest that young clubbers may accommodate more serious types of negative

consequences than other drug-using young adults (Measham *et al.*, 2001). In this chapter, I establish that the threat of identity damage – both within the mainstream, and within the EDM scene – was considered to be one of the major ‘harms’ associated with ‘uncontrolled’ drug use.

Impression management was an important consideration when negotiating ongoing drug use in the scene. Scenesters negotiated what they perceived to be the negative aspects of drug use, and commonly reassessed their use in relation to the threat of damaged identity associated with being a failed drug user – a ‘junkie’ or an ‘addict’. I argue that the strategies that scenesters used to negotiate the benefits of using drugs in relation to the negative aspects (such as the effects on health and work performance) also functioned as identity-management strategies. These strategies were used to distance their identities from devalued cultural representations of failed drug users.

I draw on the work of Rødner Sznitman (Rødner, 2005; 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008) who explored the negotiation of identity among Swedish young adults who were socially integrated but used illicit drugs. She argued that her participants were “continuously striving to be understood as normal integrated citizens of Swedish society” (Rødner Sznitman 2008, p.468). They took on Swedish core values of rationality and self-control, and engaged in techniques that shaped their identities in relation to others who did not demonstrate these qualities. Rødner argued that her participants were bound up in the process of assimilating into normal society and, as a result, their own identities as drug users were “weak, not yet accomplished” (2005, p.344). In the previous chapter I explored how scenesters’ engagement in such defensive projects meant that the boundaries of recreational and acceptable practice were not clearly defined. The stigmatised and boundary-pushing practice of methamphetamine smoking exposed this uncertainty. In the current chapter I extend this analysis by exploring uncertainty in relation to understandings of age-appropriate involvement in the scene.

The scenesters’ self-representations of drug use were similar to those detailed by Rødner (2005, 2006). Scenesters also aligned their identities with values of control,

autonomy, and rationality. These values are common across Western countries more generally and are expressions of what is referred to as a discourse of 'neo-liberalism'. Sociologists generally concur that a characteristic of Western societies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is the emphasis placed on individual responsibility for "care of the self" (Petersen, 1997, p.194). Fraser (2004) summarises characteristics of the relationship between contemporary society, liberal individualism and health:

Contemporary liberal democratic society produces the subject as an autonomous, self-governing, enterprising individual who exercises rational thought and choice in managing life. This approach benefits government as it devolves responsibility for maintaining health and wellbeing to the individual subject, rather than to the welfare system or other government structures (Fraser, 2004, p.200).

Bunton (2001) draws from Douglas (1992) to argue that such discourse functions to marginalise, exclude and regulate those who are irresponsible and risk-takers because of the preventable burden that they place on society (Bunton, 2001, p.229).

Among scenesters, the social representation of the addict or the junkie had particular salience and functioned as a potent reminder of the potential for failed self-management. However, while scenesters were clear about what they did not want to become (e.g. a compulsive and antisocial drug user), they were less clear about how to enact recreational drug-using identities – particularly in relation to the claiming of adult status. Indeed, the path of the ageing scenester was an uncertain one.

In the second half of this chapter, I elaborate on how scenesters negotiated and renegotiated their ongoing drug use in relation to their consideration of social roles and interpersonal relationships. I explore how the contrast between the scene and non-scene relationships was critical. Their non-scene relationships reminded them of values in the mainstream and provided triggers for change – which they often termed 'reality checks'. Further, scenesters were sensitive to presenting an accepted image within the scene – of 'fitting in'. The self-assessment that they were 'too old' shaped decisions to cease or down-scale their involvement. However, there were no certainties or fixed rules guiding understandings about exactly when one must cease drug use, and some did not perceive the need to do so at all. The nuanced and

individualised processes of negotiating one's relationship with drugs, coupled with the tendency of scenesters to shift in and out of different styles of use over time, highlight the weaknesses in shared understandings of the recreational drug user identity.

The uncertainty with which scenesters negotiated drug-related transitions as they aged is set against a backdrop of broader cultural uncertainty of the boundaries of 'youth' and the complexity of transitions into adulthood navigated by young adults in contemporary societies more generally. Australian sociologists have described the different political and material conditions within which young people grow up compared to previous generations (Wyn & Woodman, 2006, p.500). They suggest that young people experience uncertainty across a number of life domains and increasingly undertake an extended transition to adulthood that is not necessarily "linear" (Wyn & White, 1997). For example, transitions between education and work may not be straightforward and employment is often precarious. Further, situations of youth-like dependency and adult autonomy may co-exist simultaneously within the same biography (Walther, 2006, p.121). In the context of this general uncertainty about the social roles and expectations of young adults, it is not surprising that scenesters were uncertain about the place of drugs in their lives as they aged. I begin by discussing the way that scenesters represented the negative effects of drug use.

The 'costs' of partying and drug use

The most widely anticipated effect of ATS use was 'comedowns'. Comedown effects included depression/low mood, anxiety, paranoia and the inability to concentrate or to sleep. The experience of comedowns and associated effects were highly variable between individuals. Meth smoking was most strongly associated with mood disturbances. Scenesters emphasised that this was primarily because of its association with heavy use over bender weekends. For example, speaking to me after one such weekend, Trevor commented on my decision to leave the group early on Sunday morning. He said:

You should be glad that you left when you did ... I should have done the same. I just ended up at a crappy after-party. I mean, the people were ok but my phone died and I

couldn't get home. I was just, like stuck there. We were just all smoking rock ... yeah, rock turns me into a psycho. It's not good.

He reflected on his use of meth in an interview:

Um I noticed that I just get random thoughts. I get angry at something and then I'll be like 'what the hell am I angry at?' sort of thing. Whereas using speed just gave me a bit of buzz.

Feeling angry and having "random thoughts" (which I interpret as disconnected from context and sometimes reality) were effects that were specifically attributed to meth smoking. Trevor did not experience these random thoughts as positive. Scenesters also reported anxiety and feeling 'depressed'. These effects became more pronounced over time. This was discussed by Gretel:

I don't enjoy the after effects of it [meth] as much anymore, I do find it's probably a lot to do with the fact that I hit it quite hard after the break up and I was finding that I was thinking things that were a little bit out of the ordinary and just thought 'whoa' I thought I'd put my brakes on it a little bit. I mean I still do dabble in it, um I no longer touch it (meth) with a pipe, smoke it.

Research literature associates benders with acute mental health 'episodes' including psychosis (McKetin *et al.*, 2008). No scenester reported such extreme effects nor did any such incident come to my attention during fieldwork. Further, as in the extract from Gretel above, scenesters often re-assessed their level of involvement if they perceived these effects to be severe.

Scenesters reported not feeling 'normal' – meaning back to full health – until Tuesday or Wednesday after weekend drug use. Recovery often took longer after bender weekends. This was attributed to the combined effect of the heavy use of a range of drugs, including alcohol, and sleep deprivation. Scenesters often missed days at work because of the after-effects of drug use and sleep deprivation. During recovery from weekends, they reported having a significantly decreased ability to function at a high level at work. They also spoke about their problems with concentration, impaired short term memory and a decreased ability to effectively

handle stressful situations. When asked about the effects of drugs on his life, Trevor provides another example:

Umm I think the fact that um I take probably more than the average person's sick days off work – which affects how the company looks at you, you know, seeing you always take Mondays off or something like that, um calling in sick.

It was acknowledged that the scenester lifestyle affected work performance – particularly if drug use was regular, but this was accommodated into an overall lifestyle. For example, for many scenesters, the cycle of weekend partying and recovering from partying was all encompassing. Pursuing involvement in the scene (including time spent recovering and other associated activities such as organising tickets, drugs and making other plans with friends) alongside meeting work expectations did not leave participants much time or energy to pursue other interests.

While there were a range of negative effects of ATS use in relation to health and wellbeing these were typically not emphasised. Rather, scenesters spoke about the increased difficulty they experienced over time in managing their mainstream identities in conjunction with involvement in the scene. I now move on to explore some of the strategies that scenesters used to manage these effects and how they functioned dually to align their identities with mainstream values.

Taking 'breaks' and identity management

Over the fieldwork period individual patterns of drug use varied significantly: the frequency of use fluctuated widely, the amounts used in specific sessions varied and drug preferences changed. Within this variation, however, scenesters generally used in two patterns: regularly and occasionally. 'Regular' use involved the use of ATS at least monthly and encapsulated the majority of scenesters. 'Occasional' use, as the name suggests, involved less-frequent ATS use – that is, use every one to six months. The frequent movement between these two patterns could be attributed to the strategy of taking 'breaks'. This strategy was the most common way of dealing with the effects of partying on emotional and mental health and functionality in normal life.

Breaks were negotiated individually and in relation to a range of concerns. Trevor was one individual who regularly took breaks from smoking methamphetamine. Breaks often began soon after the periodic announcement that he was ‘not having a big weekend for a while’. The end of breaks most often coincided with a music event that he wished to attend. While taking breaks offered a chance to focus on health, work or study, finances, and non-scene interests, taking a break did not necessarily entail cessation of all illicit drug use or scene involvement. For example, on breaks, Trevor used other ATS particularly dexies, or powdered methamphetamine (which was snorted), to facilitate all-night participation in the scene. Similarly, while John and Gretel quit smoking meth completely because of its effects on their mental and emotional health, they continued to use other ATS monthly or more frequently.

I argue that taking a break functioned equally as both a health preserving and an identity management strategy, and provides an example of how scenesters attempted to align their practice with the neo-liberal values of control and self-management.

I explore this theme in relation to Simon’s experience of moving in and out of meth use over time. Prior to the fieldwork period, he had twice stopped smoking meth following periods of regular and often heavy use. He explains how the active negotiation of identity as self-managing was central to these shifts:

- Rachael: ...alright, so you had your time where you just didn’t use [meth] and then you kind of slowly got back into it a little bit?
- Simon: Yeah, and I can’t remember when I got back into it, but it just would have been on a night it would have been like, ‘yeah, well you know whatever they said about It ...’ cause I think at that stage [before I quit] I was worried about it maybe being addictive cause you hear all this propaganda that they force feed you that, you know, you start stealing cars and yeah you turn into a crackhead and all that crap. I think when you realise that’s not the case, it’s like, ‘well I’ve been off this for quite some time now ...’ and you know I feel safe enough to jump back in and start doing it again, and now I’m out of it again, so you know that’s twice now I’ve sort of got off it quite easily, so ...

In this statement, Simon described how he negotiated his meth use in relation to public representations of methamphetamine use at the time. Simon indicates that the

drug's purportedly addictive and transformative potential (e.g. the threat that one might "turn into a crackhead") was of concern to him. Taking breaks from using – that is, asserting his control – was one strategy used to respond to this rhetoric. The emphasis placed on how easy it was to give up drugs reflects a more general understanding among scenesters that a recreational user is somebody who does not 'need' drugs in their life.

Bob spoke about using a similar technique to assert a self-reliant identity:

Bob: [describes entering the DnB scene] ... the funny thing is the addiction to the music is now greater than the addiction to the drugs.

Rachael: So, would you say that you were addicted to drugs?

Bob: I'd say I was for a little while, when I was dealing especially and when I had it there at all times.

Rachael: What was it about it that ... like why would you say that you were addicted?

Bob: For me, I'd probably say speed, because it kept me alert and every time I stopped having a little bit more, I'd kind of like get a little bit more paranoid by what people were thinking, saying or doing about me and I'd be like, fuck, I'm going to have another snort and everything would be okay for a little while, you know, just for that little while.

[...]

Rachael: So was it easy to just kind of ... You said it took a while to get out of the dealing side of things for a number of reasons, was it easy to just kind of reduce your use of drugs as well?

Bob: Yeah, for me it was. Like for me it was really easy because I just went 'Fuck it. Like I've never been one to get actually ... how do you say this ... fully addicted to something.

Rachael: Yeah.

Bob: although, at the moment, music I am, but ...

Rachael: People often talk about drugs as something that you've got to kind of detox from ...

Bob: I never had to do that, I never had to like, you know, do my own rehab or get into ... I just ... something in my brain just went click, 'Listen, you don't need to do this anymore. Fuck it'. And I didn't.

Reflecting on the past, Bob describes pushing the boundaries of 'addiction'. However, in this interview he asserts how "easy" it was to give up – that it was, for him, it was simply a matter of deciding not to use. Bob's expression was similar to Simon's. Bob also asserts his authentic scenester identity, emphasising that he is now addicted to the music more than the drug experience.

These examples demonstrate how scenesters grappled with the public representations of addiction by asserting their status in relation to the negative representations of damaged identity and loss of control. This assertion of control was also made by other scenesters, however, not all sought to actively test their level of control by ceasing use. It was reasonably common for individuals to emphasise that they 'could' (theoretically) give up whenever they choose.

Thus, while taking breaks was used as a practical strategy to mentally and physically recover from the partying lifestyle, it was also an identity management strategy – one that was used to (re)align one's identity with the neo-liberal values of control, rationality, autonomy and independence. I now explore how scenesters employed strategies to rationalise heavy drug use that potentially transgressed understandings of recreational use. I discuss the ways that scenesters used the term 'priorities' to align their drug use with a discourse of control and rationality. The following analysis contributes to the argument that the recreational drug-using construct is unstable and individually and continuously negotiated.

Negotiating life 'priorities'

While scenesters did occasionally experience forms of drug-related harm, they were keen to assert that they were in control of their drug use. The effect that partying and ATS use had on mainstream functionality was managed according to understandings of lifestyle 'priorities'. Andrew illustrates this:

I mean I see a lot of people give up a lot in their lives for their partying on their weekends but it's by no means their entire life, it's just as I was saying before,

they're just having fun on weekends. I don't see a lot of people getting into trouble on meth. Yeah, I think people, I've seen people naturally get to a point where they think 'I need to focus on something else in my life' so they, they cut back on their weekends.

In this extract Andrew responds to the public perception of the transformative and destructive effects of meth on its users. Andrew frames the re-evaluation of drug involvement as a lifestyle decision (e.g. "I need to focus on something else in my life") rather than a problem. Further, he downplays the potential significance of transitions by using neutralising statements such as "naturally get to a point". Demonstrating that drug use is an ancillary part of life (e.g. "it's by no means their entire life" and "fun") and easy to give up reasserts mainstream identity because it draws on neo-liberal values of rationality and control.

The concept of priorities was also used to justify involvement that might otherwise transgress the parameters of recreational use – for example, drug use that significantly affects work performance. The interview data below illustrates how Trevor rationalised a style of drug use that affected his ability to work on a Monday:

Rachael: Do you plan to take Mondays off or do you just ...?

Trevor: Sometimes I do plan to take Mondays off because I do contract work, it was easy. Other times it would be um I just couldn't face going to work on the Monday so I'd take it off in advance and I learnt to adjust that to going out on Friday night, taking drugs on the Friday night so I'd be okay on Monday.

Trevor speaks about how his lifestyle was tailored to accommodate his involvement in the scene. The intentionality of his use illustrates his autonomy and diverts attention from his potential transgression from mainstream values such as responsibility.

The rhetoric of priorities was also used when discussing the place of drugs in scenesters' lives over time. In reflecting on their use over time, scenesters usually commented that partying was only a priority at certain points in their lives; and that as they got older and took on more financial responsibility and developed their

financial aspirations (e.g. for overseas travel, car and property ownership), their career became more of a priority. However, there was no fixed point at which individuals uniformly began to prioritise these concerns over partying. Despite the shared identification with similar values of autonomy, self-reliance and management that they attributed to the claiming of mainstream status, the enactment of recreational use was individualised.

I now explore how, in the absence of clear cultural parameters about the limitations and boundaries of recreational drug use as they aged, scenesters negotiated and renegotiated their ongoing drug use in relation to interpersonal relationships. In particular, the maintenance of scene and non-scene social connections played an important role in drug-related transitions. This is because the contrast between the two exposed a drift away from ‘normal’ identity.

Relationships and change

In previous chapters I have established that scenesters negotiated dual identities within the mainstream and within the EDM scene. Scenesters acknowledged this distinction by referring to the ‘scene’ and ‘normal’ life. They also differentiated between relationships that they had with other scenesters and the relationships that they maintained in their normal lives. Below is an excerpt from an interview with Gavin, who reflected on the often-articulated divide between friends in the scene and non-scene friends:

Rachael: So were most of your friends people that you went out with [in the scene] or did you have a separation between the people that you went out with and other friends?

Gavin: Yeah, I mean, my mates that I went to school with – I’ve known them since primary school and they’re all good mates and they were never really into it then [drugs, the scene] and so I had a separate group of mates that I used to see my other mates and they, they were cool, I think they had a bit of a reputation for always being fucked up and coming down, but they were alright. But yeah it was a different group of mates that I used to go out with.

- Rachael: So the other friends knew about the drug use – and what did they think?
- Gavin: Oh they tried it now and again but they weren't into it, they weren't into the scene of it, I don't think.
- Rachael: Yeah but you had really got into the music scene and were using really regularly?
- Gavin: Yeah and just knowing people and I understood then it's an illusion, it's very cool, always very cool, it was a lot of fun, it was great to know lots of people and the experiences were great – and some of them weren't of course – but yeah, I just, I just really liked the difference of it.

Here Gavin stresses that there was a difference between the scene and normal life. Friendships were often categorised using this distinction. Although most of his non-scenester friends (his long-term friends) had tried drugs, based on what Gavin said here, they did not identify with scene values (i.e. “they weren't into the scene of it”). Gavin reflected on how the scene was “very cool” and he emphasised how “it was great to know lots of people”. This reflects the scenester values of avid sociality and status that are attributed to being socially well connected.

While many scenesters described positive aspects of the scene (e.g. the fun and getting to know lots of different people) they also described negative aspects. Gavin hints at these when he says that the “cool” aspect of the scene is “an illusion” and that some experiences were not great. Scenesters gave an account of how they eventually experienced downsides relating to the types of friendships that were made in the scene. These were associated with the low level of emotional connection and context-specific connections (e.g. socialising within the scene) between scenesters. As Gretel describes:

... some of the cases that you found, you make some really good friendships and you found out a lot out about each other and you formed an excellent bond, but in a lot more of the cases, I was finding that they were really fake friendships. It comes to – and I suppose it's quite a fairly used classification – but ‘party friends’ and ‘real friends’. It came to, well, maybe one out of five people were one of those really cool

people that you meet. The rest of them were just party friends. It's a really hard stage I think for a lot of recreational drug takers to get past because everyone likes to think that, you know, someone spends a lot of time with them and they're your friends – and it turns out that they're not because it's just a party, drug-taking relationship that you've made – not the people that you can choose to lean on ...

While acknowledging that there was some overlap, a key concept in this passage is the distinction between 'party friends' and 'real friends'. This distinction was commonly articulated by scenesters, and it reflected how they separated normal life from the scene. For Gretel, this distinction represented her experience in the scene of forming "fake" friendships or "drug-taking relationships".

Scenesters gave examples of being hurt and betrayed or let down by scenester friends very commonly. These reaffirmed the importance of maintaining friendships outside of the scene. I explore in this chapter the role that non-scenester friends and family had in reinforcing their identity within the mainstream. This was because they provided triggers – or what scenesters termed 'reality checks' – when drug use began to drift outside of more generally acceptable constructs of recreational style. These subjective triggers were instrumental to change.

'Reality checks'

One of the consequences of heavy investment in a lifestyle of partying and scenester identity was how easy it was to lose perspective on values of self-control, rationality and responsibility. This is described by Gretel:

Again like I said it kind of went to a weekend basis where I was at least partaking in some form of drug taking, be it a line of speed, a point of rock, a pill or half a pill, on a weekend basis and I was in an environment where everyone else was doing that as well so it didn't seem crazy.

Here, Gretel describes how her weekly and often heavy use of a range of drugs "didn't seem crazy" in the context of the scene. She concedes that in the normative drug-using environment of the EDM scene she lost a sense of what constituted moderate drug use. This was a common experience among heavily involved scenesters. They used the term 'reality check' to refer to the experience of a

‘realisation’ that their lifestyle of frequent partying and ATS use was causing them to lose perspective on what represented ‘moderate’ drug use within the mainstream. For others, reality checks involved the realisation that their lifestyle had drifted away from one that their non-scenester peers might consider acceptable.

Sometimes this realisation was triggered by non-scenester friends addressing their drug use. For example, Tim reflected on when he ended a period of heavy use:

Rachael: When did things change? What happened?

Tim: A few of my closer high school friends said to me that I was going off the rails a bit because I mixed with a different crowd for a while and then they said, ‘you’re way off the rails’ and then I took that on board pretty quickly.

Presenting as active self-managers and rational decision-makers was the main way that scenesters managed mainstream identities in association with drug use.

Therefore, any suggestion by non-scenester friends that they may have lost control was a very confronting experience. Two other key contacts also described how incidents like these were particularly salient events. Scenesters also commented that friends would not typically speak up about their drug use unless they were sufficiently worried about them.

Nevertheless, the majority of scenesters did not speak about times where friends or family members had directly intervened in their lives. Instead, they spoke about the more subtle ways that friends and significant others provided reality checks. Theo was one such individual, who describes the end of a “party phase” involving heavy drug use:

Rachael: ... okay so for a period of six months or so you were really hitting it hard. Then what happened? Why did you stop? Why did you come to the end of that period?

Theo: It was quite funny. I went to a party and I was just [drug] fucked and everybody else was fine, in good spirits, and I was terrible. Our waitress, I like yelled at her, I looked like shit, and obviously I hadn’t seen natural light for quite some time, it was just all...

- Rachael: ... so you were turning nocturnal.
- Theo: Oh, yeah definitely, yeah, and my room at my place was just like a little cave – it was awesome. But just in there the whole time mixing [music] and just getting fucked basically so ... yeah, and then went to this party and you know, just felt like crap, and I was just sitting there and everybody else, you know, just had jumpers on. I went to the boot of my car cause for some reason I'd rocked up without, just in a shirt or something like that, and it was a cold night and so ... and all I had in the back of the car was like pyjamas and some crazy scrap clothes. So I've just put all those on and I had a stocking on my head and everyone was like, 'oh, my god what are you doing?' And I think I don't know it was pretty soon after that I was like, 'what am I doing? It's just getting a bit much now'.
- Rachael: What made you think about that particular time?
- Theo: That just sticks out, yeah, and I don't quite know why. I guess I saw that night that I think maybe because I was so cold and I could see how thin I was maybe at that point. I just felt really, really bloody cold [...] but that was a turning point where I was like, 'well this is not good, you know I can't even function properly at a party that's ... I've got to stop doing this ... '. I think it was Sunday evening, basically ...

Prior to this story, Theo spoke about how he was using ATS so often that he had become detached from the “real world”. One of the central elements to this story, which Theo describes as a “turning point”, was his perception that he had begun to look and behave differently in relation to his non-scenester friends – that he could not “even function properly at a party”. His departure from a normal or mainstream lifestyle was demonstrated by his lack of concern for adhering to ‘normal’ self-presentation at a restaurant dinner and his disregard for polite norms or consideration of how this might embarrass his friends. He mentions that the dinner was on a Sunday. Using ATS on a Sunday was, even for some scenesters, a transgression of personal boundaries because it would affect their ability to function at work on Monday. Spending time with these friends highlighted to Theo how far his lifestyle had transgressed from what others considered normal. For Theo, this event “sticks out”. Such incidents were described generally by scenesters as a ‘reality check’.

This account is an example of the subtle ways that non-scenester friends, by contrasting their own lifestyle and behaviour, provided a continual reminder of broader societal values and expectations. Henry describes a similar transgression when reflecting on significant transitions in his drug use over time:

Henry: The next transition was November 2005 when it had been a massive weekend, a huge weekend sort of par for the course was go out Friday, stay awake Friday night, stay awake Saturday, go out Saturday night, come back to someone's house Sunday morning, take more drugs, have a few drinks and then maybe go home on Sunday night, go to bed. So it was one of those weekends and I'd taken an awful lot of meth – especially on the Sunday and got into drinking pretty heavily as well. I drank a hell of lot.

Rachael: How much?

Henry: A bottle of vodka and random beers and glasses of wine and then woke up on the Monday morning at my house passed out on our laundry room floor with my housemate kicking me trying to wake me up yep. [...] Yeah, well there was that and then within a few days I started dating this girl who was very anti-drugs. So both of those events helped me to take a break from it all. I took a break for about three months until I broke up with the girl.

In this account, Henry tells how the consequences of his partying lifestyle had begun to spill outside weekends and to affect his ability to function normally. He described how he took a break from using soon after his housemate found him passed out on the laundry floor on a Monday morning. He also mentioned that this event coincided with the beginning of a new relationship with a woman who was “anti-drugs”. This influence “helped” him to “take a break from it all”. I now describe the value of intimate partner relationships in relation to drug-related changes made by scenesters.

Intimate partner relationships

Intimate partner relationships exerted the most influence over transitions both in to and out of heavy styles of drug use. The direction of the influence varied. Some scenesters associated intimate partner relationships with heavier or riskier drug use

and experimentation, whereas others associated these relationships with more moderate or occasional styles of drug use, or quitting. Measham, Williams and Aldridge (2011, p.424) describe a similar effect.

John reflected on the influence of beginning his relationship with Monique:

I was kind of winding down from it and thinking ‘yeah I’ve got to stop again’ coz I’d been doing drugs for quite a bit and starting to get messy and then yeah obviously met [Monique] who at the time was going pretty hard and I was thinking, ‘oh shit, here we go again, better get back on the horse’, and I think she was probably thinking the same thing and so we both got on the horse and you know went really hard for a few weekends there and then sort of it came out one day that maybe she was starting to feel a bit messy as well with the effects. I think she was feeling a bit messy after one particular comedown, and to which I quickly agreed and said ‘you know, well yeah’ and she was kind of like, ‘well maybe we should slow it down’ which I was more than happy to, so ...

Monique and John were two individuals who, towards the end of fieldwork, transitioned out of a lifestyle of using ATS on a weekly to fortnightly basis regularly into an occasional style of use. Explaining this change, John mentions how he’d naturally reached a point prior to starting a relationship with Monique where he believed “I’ve got to stop again” (noting that he had done so previously). He refers to the “messy” effects that drugs were having on them. This is a slightly different use of the term to what has been previously discussed in this thesis. Here, John refers to his emotions or mental health. Both uses of the term invoke a sense of the loss of some control.

John describes how, when he began a relationship with Monique, he expected that he would need to match her drug use in order to have a compatible lifestyle and possibly to maintain her interest and attention. He explains how Monique had a similar expectation and they “went really hard for a few weekends”. However, the transition out of using regularly was made because they both identified that they wanted to “slow it down”. That is, they went through the transition together and this made it less difficult.

Women made stronger links between their drug use and intimate partner relationships. The strong role that intimate partner relationships have in relation to female drug use has been demonstrated in other research (Bennett, 2012). Research shows that this association varies according to drug types, routes of administration (El-Bassel *et al.*, 2005; Newcomb, 1994). Many young women spoke about how relationships with men led to an escalation of their own use. Three women in the network described how they tried injecting after being introduced to this style of use by partners who were regular injecting drug users. Relationships with male dealers were also closely associated with heavier styles of use. By comparison, for many young men like John and Henry, relationships with partners were associated with transitions out of heavy styles of use (albeit a temporary transition for Henry).

Intimate partner relationships most commonly influenced movement out of heavy styles of use when they exposed a drift away from mainstream values. For example, Ange reconsidered her use of meth because of her partner's disapproval of the practice. Beginning an intimate partner relationship with somebody who was not a scenester also challenged the scenester lifestyle. This lifestyle involved staying awake all night and sleeping during the days on weekends. Scenesters were also not commonly involved in activities such as sport, often had unhealthy eating patterns and privately engaged in practices such as using sleeping tablets during the week. Most often, and this was demonstrated by Monique and John, intimate partner relationships provided the support to make the changes they already wanted to make in relation to drug use.

Leaving the scene: Negotiating 'adult' and scenester identities

The presentation of a competent, responsible, and financially successful identity was central to the decisions of some scenesters to use drugs less frequently or to stop using ATS completely. These values are also central to the claiming of adult identity. The general shift away from using ATS regularly (or, for some, at all) was also underpinned by a broader cultural value that illicit drug use is a project of 'youth'.

On the other hand, the persistence of use among many scenesters into their mid to late twenties illustrated that there was considerable flexibility in the interpretation of the boundaries of acceptable drug use. This was illustrated by Ange:

- Ange: But it's quite funny because everyone that was involved back at that point has now really, really scaled back.
- Rachael: Yeah, ok why do you think that is?
- Ange: To be honest with you, I think age is part of it. You know, we have a few friends that are probably in their early 30's and they'd be the older people in our group that are still going out and taking drugs. I remember when I first started, when I was 19, I used to look at some of my older friends and think 'I wonder at what age you grow out of it?' And I know that some people don't, but I think most of them do.

Ange's comment highlights that while "most people grow out of it", they were uncertain about when this should be.

Assessment of age-appropriate drug use was often measured in relation to responsibilities and goals. For example, Ling commented how it is usually people in their early 20s who use "party drugs" (which are typically ATS) and how they "usually stop using drugs once they get some responsibility". She said (in an interview):

- Once you've got a full time job then you just can't do it anymore. Like, when you're studying it's ok, but when you've got a job you can't turn up to work all fucked up.

This view was underpinned by Ling's aspirations to have a successful career, the level of work pressure, and her responsibility to meet her mortgage repayments. For some, cutting down on heavy or regular styles of drug use was driven by the possibility that their employer would find out about their use. This was the case for two scenesters whose workplaces conducted random drug tests.

The majority of scenesters found it increasingly difficult to maintain the energy levels necessary to maintain these dual associations. Bob, for example, described how he began to regret his big weekends:

... but like I'm starting to feel it now, like especially if I've got to work if I have like a huge, hard weekend like on Tuesdays I'll be like, 'Oh, why did I do that'? You know?

Bob's transition involved modifying the quantity of drugs that he used in a session or the frequency and timing of his big weekends. This was common to other scenesters. Monique reflected on a similar type of change, saying:

I think as long as it's no more than probably once every two months now. I probably wouldn't do it anymore than that. And plus, you know, we're not doing as much as we were either, so the quantities have definitely lessened. So what we call a "big night" is not nearly as big as what we were doing before.

Here Monique speaks about using drugs less frequently and in smaller quantities than she once did. Her rationalisation also encompassed consideration of the expenses associated with partying.

In the quotation at the beginning of this section, Ange indicates that looking to others in one's social network was an important way of making decisions about their own involvement. A part of this process was her assessment of personal social fit, and she used to "wonder" when her older friends would stop using. This was accompanied by judgment of those in the scene who were aged in their 30s. For example, one scenester, Siobahn, commented to me about Andrew's continued involvement in the scene "I wonder why he is still doing this? What is he possibly still getting out of it?" Siobahn's comment reflects a view held more broadly among the scene: scenester identity was not a fixed aspect of identity; rather, it was temporary and negotiated.

One of the most common informal measures of when it was 'time' to scale back involvement in the scene and use of drugs was the subjective experience of 'feeling old' or out of place in social spaces in the scene – particularly clubs. Gypsy reflects on this in an interview:

Gypsy: It is getting younger, and I mean for me to say that I feel old when I walk into a club is something, considering the group of people that I go out with, they're all older than me, and they're all older by a couple

of years, at least, and when I start feeling old somewhere, it doesn't feel right, I don't tend to go there much more.

Rachael: So you usually didn't feel kind of like older than anyone there, but now you do?

Gypsy: I felt like I was on the same level as most people there, I could walk into a club and know half the people there, you know, you'd know the bar attendants, you'd know the security guards, you'd know the DJ's, that were working there, you know the regular crew of the club, and I mean the regular crew's still there, it's just shrunk in numbers really.

Rachael: Yeah, and so that's had a big impact on the amount that you go out?

Gypsy: Kind of, I guess a lot of my friends are settling down in relationships as well, they're all starting to get hitched or move away, or they've now got serious partners, and they don't go out as much as they used to, and I'm just sort of slowly falling into the same category, my work's starting to become more important to me, I'm actually trying to get myself into a certain career that I want to go to...

Rachael: ... which is?

Gypsy: I want to become a teacher. So I'm going to start looking at art courses and things like that, and if I'm going to be working full-time and studying full-time, it doesn't really leave much room for anything else.

Gypsy here speaks about "feeling old" – however, she is 21 years of age, which is lower than some samples of clubbers in Australia (e.g. Duff *et al.*, 2007). Her sentiment illustrates that feeling old in the scene may not be about actual age, but a subjective assessment of what friends are doing in their lives. Here Gypsy talks about the feeling that her "crew" has "shrunk in numbers", and this coincides with the consideration that maybe she should focus more strongly on her career.

Monique spoke similarly about the process of negotiating and re-negotiating dual scenester and mainstream identities, but she also talks about the sense of loss experienced when making decisions to move out of the scene:

Monique So, to some extent yeah there are newbs, and I do feel territorial when I hear about this new 'in crowd' down at [*Club A*]. I'm like, 'I need to go back down there and kick their butts, show them who's boss!' But at the same time it's the natural coming and going of things. I have

never wanted to be that 50-year-old chick down in the club going hard on E-s or whatever. That's never been what it is for me, and me and my girlfriend used to always discuss like you know 'What do we do?' because we really loved the music, but nobody wants to be that old lady up against the bar. You know, guys seem to get away with it for a bit longer than girls do but it just starts to look really dodgy after a while.

Rachael: So do you think there is a quite high turnover of people in the scene as they kind of grow out of it?

Monique: It's a hard, hard lifestyle to maintain. My boyfriend was DJ-ing for a bit, unfortunately if you get a late set, it's like, how do you stay energised for that long if you are not getting drunk or taking drugs? So that career goes hand in hand with drug taking unfortunately. It's just really hard not to [use drugs].

Monique demonstrates that, among this network, the subjective assessment of social fit was heavily shaped by gendered constructs. One example of this is the way that women constructed acceptable participation in the scene. As discussed previously, identity and status were integral to gaining social capital and establishing one's place in a social 'hierarchy' within the scene. Older or 'unattractive' women (subjective, but a common measure of attractiveness was body weight) were particularly devalued in the scene; and very few women in their late 20's or older were involved in the scene. This gendered experience is captured in Monique's comment "[B]ut nobody wants to be that old lady up against the bar", and her reflection that "guys seem to get away with it for a bit longer than girls do".

Monique also describes how, in her experience, drugs and the partying lifestyle take their toll over time. She comments about this more generally by saying "it's a hard, hard lifestyle to maintain". Like Monique, most scenesters who decided to quit the scene spoke about balancing this experience in relation to the loss of scenester identity. In this passage Monique asserts her authentic scenester identity by stating "we really loved the music". She specifically talks about her decision to quit using drugs, one she struggled with because it would be very difficult to participate in the scene, which operates outside of usual waking hours for most people. The high

turnover within the scene meant that maintaining scenester identity required continual participation. Leaving the scene meant forfeiting social capital that had been built up through years of social networking. Monique attempted to retain this symbolic scenester status by emphasising how frequently she received calls from those in the scene to re-join them, how people “missed” her and how her friends in the scene said that it “wasn’t the same” without her.

An important aspect of these transitions was the consideration of identity within a scene where youthful image was highly valued – and where participation in clubbing past a certain age was questioned and the subject of gossip. This was demonstrated earlier in Siobahn’s comment about Andrew’s continued involvement, “I wonder why he is still doing this? What is he possibly still getting out of it?”, and Monique’s observation that participation in the scene past a certain point “just starts to look really dodgy after a while”. Scenesters often found it difficult to break with their scenester activities and change was gradual. However, overriding their sense of loss and the continuing attraction of aspects of the scene (such as the music) was the understanding that scenester identity is transitory and that it cannot be maintained indefinitely alongside mainstream identity. Monique viewed her transition out of the scene as necessary in order to achieve broader life goals. She described this difficult shift as “the natural coming and going of things”. This view was also reflected by those who were also less involved in the scene.

Summary

The negotiation of normalised drug use into adulthood is the topic of growing academic investigation, but to date there has been little in-depth exploration of how drug use is negotiated and renegotiated over time in relation to competing values and lifestyles. My ethnographic analysis contributes to a developing literature which explores the micro-level processes of identity negotiation that occur among recreational drug users over time. This analysis has focused on how scenesters negotiated ongoing drug use in relation to the maintenance of neo-liberal citizenship, the enactment of ‘adult’ identity and how they negotiated these claims alongside scenester identities.

I first explored how scenesters negotiated negative aspects of drug use in relation to their identities. I demonstrated that scenesters represented their drug-related decisions in relation to performance of the mainstream values of self-control, rationality, autonomy and responsibility. Moreover, it was particularly important that scenesters defined their own drug use against cultural representations of the 'failed' drug user. Drawing on Rødner Sznitman (Rødner, 2005; 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008), I argued that the defensive projects of 'othering' that scenesters undertook meant that the boundaries of their own drug use were less clear. Recreational style was subjectively interpreted, highly variable, and rooted in experiences and values negotiated within interpersonal relationships. I examined how scenesters drew on their social and relational experiences outside of the scene to assess normal and age-appropriate involvement in drug use.

The analysis in this chapter supports a more general argument that drug use occupies an uncertain place in relation to the fulfilment of normal adult identity. While scenesters held a common view that drug use is a project of youth and a transient part of identity – something that they cannot do forever – there were no fixed understandings about the age at which it should be stopped in order to maintain a normal identity. Furthermore, many did not see the need to give up using drugs entirely in order to fulfil responsible and successful roles in an 'adult' world. I argue that the uncertainty surrounding acceptable involvement in drug use as scenesters aged is exacerbated by their broader uncertainty about social expectations in relation to their performance of 'adult' roles. This uncertainty is discussed by sociologists, who write about increasingly individualised pathways into adulthood in a post-industrialised world (Wyn & White, 1997; Wyn & Woodman, 2006).

– CHAPTER 10 –

Conclusion

This thesis has provided an ethnographic analysis of the social contexts and cultural significance of ATS use among a social network of young adults. The purpose of this final chapter is to restate the empirical and analytical issues presented in the thesis, summarise its main themes, and highlight its contribution to understandings of the ‘normalisation’ thesis and of management of recreational drug use and identity more generally.

This study considered the central proposition offered by Parker and colleagues that the leisure-oriented use of certain illegal drugs has moved “from the margins towards the centre of youth culture where it joins many other ‘deviant’ activities that have been socially accommodated such as excessive drinking, casual sexual encounters and daily cigarette smoking” (1998, p.152). Parker describes their work as a “conceptual framework” and a “multi-dimensional toolkit” within which to consider “the way illicit drugs consumption, particularly by conventional ‘ordinary’ young people, has grown in importance within lifestyles which are themselves evolving in response to structural and global changes in post-modern societies” (Parker, 2005, p.206).

The normalisation researchers drew on a number of key paradigms to contextualise the findings of their longitudinal study. One of their central propositions is that young people grow up in a “risk society” and they take risks “not as an expression of rebelliousness but as a tactic to achieving conventional goals”. That is, they take “calculated risks” (Parker *et al.*, p.30). This framework is clearly informed by the work of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), who theorised the negotiation of risk as a part of everyday life in the context of modern societies. The normalisation researchers also positioned young people as consumers within a market economy where psychoactive experiences are commodities, and where leisure activities are expressions of identity. They also considered their findings in relation to sociological work describing the altered social, economic and cultural conditions in which young people define and navigate contemporary pathways into adulthood (Furlong &

Cartmel, 1997a, 1997b). They write that this “lifespan literature [...] implicitly reminds us that it is not the essential nature of adolescence which is changing but the nature of the terrain and journeys which youth must make and consequently the type of strategies and skills they utilise” (Parker *et al.*, 1998, p.30).

The analytical issues that normalisation researchers raised have stimulated considerable debate in the international academic context. Many researchers have sought to elaborate on under-explored aspects of the debate, or propose that normalisation is too general and an over-simplification. There are three main types of criticism that have been levelled at the argument for normalisation. The first was offered by Shiner and Newburn, who argued that the extent to which normalisation was occurring was overstated and that young people actually subscribed to normative discourses that using drugs is wrong but used techniques to “neutralise” their guilt and shame (1997, p.67). The second was offered by Shildrick (2002) who argued that the parameters and boundaries of the normalisation debate were ill-defined and that is “there is little agreement as to what the concept actually means” (2002, p.40). A third area, taken up by the current study, is the need for greater attention to the “micro-political” implications of normalisation (Rødner Sznitman, 2008).

Rødner Sznitman (Rødner, 2005, 2006; Rødner Sznitman, 2008) conducted qualitative research with Swedish young adults who were socially integrated and used illicit drugs. Informed by Goffman’s (1986) work on stigma, she investigated how they negotiated their identities in relation to the potential identity damage associated with certain forms of drug use. One technique that Rødner’s participants used was to align their identities with Swedish core values, while distancing themselves from the “failed” drug user – the “other” (Rødner, 2005). These techniques have implications for the negotiation of their own identities. As Rødner Sznitman points out, by attempting to align themselves with dominant societal values that interpret drug use as deviant, they are taking on devalued identities and thus are “forever doomed to the feelings of discredited people” (2008, p.451). Rødner Sznitman’s work opened up considerable opportunity for further research into some of the ongoing tensions that young adults negotiate when they engage in illicit drug use.

The theme of identity negotiation is at the forefront of this thesis. Accounts of drug users typically overlook some of the more complex and uncertain processes associated with identity negotiation. The ethnographic method used in this study facilitates the analysis of shared understandings between drug-using peers (rather than exploring their views in isolation), and provides insight into the negotiation and performance of values in social contexts. This study also explores the evolution of drug use among individuals and the values and beliefs that inform drug-related transitions. This approach departs from individualised and static representations of drug-using activities drawn from cross-sectional surveys that dominate the AOD field.

This study also follows on from Pennay and Moore (2010), who raised similar issues when they explored the values shared among a friendship network of young Australians. They analysed the ways that young adults were informed by popular understandings of “excessive” hedonistic experience as a sign of personal failing – or “flawed neo-liberal subjectivity” (Pennay & Moore, 2010, p.557). The current study advances a different area of the literature to Rødner Sznitman (2008) and Pennay and Moore (2010) because it explores drug practices in the context of the values and beliefs shared and negotiated within an EDM scene. This thesis has investigated how scenesters – who are located in a dual position within the mainstream and the scene - - negotiated the complex, overlapping and contradictory values and the boundaries of acceptable drug use in relation to this position of duality. Such issues have been under-developed from an ethnographic perspective and within the Australian context.

In particular, the current study is unique in drawing attention to the integration of dexamphetamine into recreational drug practices among young Australians and the specific practices associated with crystal methamphetamine smoking. I highlight these areas in the overview below. The main contribution that this thesis offers to the academic literature, however, is to understandings of the micro-level and negotiated practices of young adult drug users who identify as members of the mainstream and describe their use as recreational. Sensitivity to the significance that drug use has among young adults and attention to the nuances associated with their cultural practices has the potential to inform more educated policy discussion and appropriate responses.

In this final chapter, I outline two sub-arguments in this thesis which explore the complexities and tensions produced by this project of maintaining dual identities. The first relates to the negotiation of drug use in relation to scenester identity. I argue that the negotiation of drug use that is considered acceptable and also pleasurable is complicated by the beliefs and values that are negotiated during the performance of scenester identity. The chapters that contribute specifically to this sub-argument are Chapter 6, which explored the values that shaped the use of ecstasy, and Chapter 7, which examined the rationalisations and practices associated with the concomitant use of dexies and alcohol.

The second sub-argument relates to the implications of the ongoing stigmatisation of drug use in the broader community. I argue that the devalued identity associated with drug use in the community destabilises the negotiation of practices and boundaries associated with the performance of recreational drug use at the micro-level. This underpinned by the broader cultural uncertainties surrounding the boundaries between youth and adulthood. These issues were explored in relation to crystal methamphetamine smoking in Chapter 8 and the negotiation of drug use over time in Chapter 9.

These sub-arguments contribute to the establishment of a central argument in this thesis, which is that normalisation is not 'finished' or static – it is a negotiated and renegotiated process. To conclude this thesis, I explore two areas of policy consideration raised by this analysis.

Scenester identity and membership

The analysis in this thesis is firmly located in the social worlds that scenesters actively constructed as a part of their involvement in the EDM scene. I have described the highly competitive social environment of the EDM scene. Being well known within the scene and establishing an 'authentic' identity as an EDM enthusiast were central to gaining status among scenesters. I drew from Thornton's (1996, 1997, 2006) work, which explored how clubbers gained 'subcultural capital',

to enhance my analysis of how membership and identity-shaping informed drug practices and the meanings of specific drug experiences among scenesters.

Although post-subcultural approaches such as that offered by Thornton (1996, 1997, 2006) have informed the focus of normalisation researchers on non-deviant forms of drug use, they do not feature strongly in academic theorisation of 'normalised' drug use. The normalisation debate does not significantly utilise or develop some of the themes of post-subcultural work such as individual and collective identity of rave and club-goers. I argue that this has resulted in a lack of sensitivity to some of the more contested micro-level aspects of normalised drug experience.

The types of social connections and the values shared between scenesters has been central to my analysis. The interplay between face-to-face and online forms of social interaction enabled scenesters to form connections with a diverse and large number of other young adults in pursuit of the goal of social networking (that is, establishing a known identity in the scene). Relationships between scenesters arose through styles of interaction and values that were not necessarily based on friendship, but on stylistic affiliations and interests. Social interaction and identity performance online and through digital technology is characteristic of the modern experience of youth and young adults. As well as providing immediate access to a large social network online, these media provided a medium through which scenesters experimented with their identities and created and maintained 'multiple selves'. Importantly the use of photographs and discussion online occurred online had a regulatory function. There was a great deal of importance placed on self-presentation. The emphasis placed on presenting an authentic EDM enthusiast identity had implications for the ways that participants engaged in drug use and the values that they placed on particular drug experiences.

I now briefly discuss two themes that are central to my analysis of how the values and beliefs that were negotiated as a part of scenester membership informed drug practices: first how broader processes of changing fashions, commercialisation and popularisation of particular drug experiences informed the negotiation of drug practice at the micro level; and, second, the tension between the controlled self-

presentation required for the performance of scenester identity and continued desire to experiences the embodied pleasures associated with drug use.

Changing fashion of drug practices

While illicit drugs have been analysed historically in relation to markets and availability, drug use is increasingly discussed in the literature as a consumerist experience that shifts alongside commercial factors, changing tastes and fashion (Measham, 2004a). For example, the normalisation researchers Aldridge *et al.* (2011) recently wrote that, while cocaine use sat outside the parameters of ‘normal’ drug practice for their participants in the 1990s, in the 2000s it became a drug of choice among many young Britons (Williams & Parker, 2001). Aldridge *et al.* contend that while the manifestation of normalised drug practice may change, the characteristics of normalisation remain (2011, p.223). The research reported in this thesis explored expressions of fashionable drug practice scenesters – a social network of young Australians – and how they are negotiated.

I argue that current research literature does not fully consider how the commercial leisure landscape influences drug practices at the micro-level. My study suggests that processes of commercialisation have had a significant impact on scenesters’ representations of ecstasy – which is regarded as the symbol of the global rave and EDM movements as a whole. Analysis of scenesters’ experiences suggests that the popularisation of a drug can erode the subcultural capital (Thornton, 1996, 1997, 2006) associated with the experience. Scenesters represented ecstasy use as passé and uncool – as trying to re-create a raving experience that is ‘over’. They referred to the drug by a generic term ‘pills’ and being seen in public under the effects of ecstasy was associated with anxiety and unwanted feelings of self-consciousness. This contrasts with the rave culture which, according to scenesters and accounts within the literature (e.g. Wilson, 2006), celebrated the pursuit of ecstasy experience within large crowds.

Ethnographic analysis of the ecstasy experiences of scenesters suggests that the parameters of acceptable drug use in a ‘normalised’ drug-using context are far from

fixed. Rather, they are negotiated by individuals in relation to a number of factors including social context, environment and personal preferences. Despite its devalued status and associations, the use of ecstasy at large music festivals at EDM nightclubs among scenesters was common. This demonstrated that while the performance of a 'cool' identity in the scene and gaining status was important to some, it was less important to others.

The next section summarises how the value of self-control, which was central to the performance of an authentic scenester identity, was negotiated in tension with the embodied pleasures associated with particular types of drug use that were associated with experiences of loss of control.

Scenester identity and control

Chapters 6 and 7 explored the ways that drug practice scenesters negotiated their drug practice alongside the performance of authentic scenester identities as EDM enthusiasts. Particular emphasis was placed on self-control in drug practice. I examined how this was expressed in relation to two central practices. The first was the use of ecstasy. The term 'gurning' was used commonly by scenesters to refer to the perceived 'loss of control' effects of ecstasy on self-presentation and emotional experience (perceived by the outsider or the individual experiencing them). The term reflected the categorisation of ecstasy as a 'messy' drug. This devalued status could also be understood in relation to the perception that 'looking like a gurner' (their expression) was uncool and undesirable. Despite its widespread use, alcohol was also understood to be a messy drug. As is common among young Australians more generally, heavy drinking was frequent among the scenesters in this study. However, the decreased motor control, depressant effects and 'drunken' behaviour (e.g. passing out or vomiting) associated with excessive alcohol consumption were seen as undesirable, especially in the context of EDM events.

While alcohol and ecstasy were associated with the devalued state of loss of control, their status was complicated by the pleasures that they offered. For example, the effects of ecstasy were referred to as a 'favourite' drug experience by some scenesters. As mentioned previously, scenesters inconsistently negotiated self-control

associated with the performance of scenester identity and some continued to use ecstasy in public. That is, they placed a different emphasis on experiencing the embodied pleasures of ecstasy use relative to the pursuit of status in the EDM scene.

Scenesters also spoke of the many pleasures that they associated with alcohol use. They emphasised that it is a drug that enhances social experience. Scenesters negotiated the competing priorities of avid sociability and social networking within the scene in relation to the potential damage to their status through the loss of control brought about by alcohol use. I explored how they negotiated these tensions through the practice of deliberately using ATS to counter alcohol's effects – a practice made possible by the availability of the pharmaceutical stimulant dexamphetamine or 'dexies' in Perth. Following Green and Moore (2009), I termed the experience of using these drugs in combination as "controlled pleasure". Having explored the nuances and tensions of integrating dexies into recreational drug practices, I argued that the use of dexies complicated understandings of drug-related pleasure because they were not understood as 'pleasurable' in themselves, but as facilitating pleasure. Dexies also complicated understandings of harm because, while they were interpreted as 'safe' relative to illicitly manufactured drugs, they facilitated risky styles of alcohol use.

In the Australian (as well as international) arena there is an increased research focus on recreational pharmaceutical misuse (Allott & Redman, 2006; Gascoigne *et al.*, 2004; W. Hall & Farrell, 2011; White *et al.*, 2006). However, while several studies indicate that young adults incorporate a range of pharmaceutical products into their recreational drug repertoires, there has been little examination of the specific values that young adults attribute to pharmaceuticals, how young adults incorporate pharmaceutical stimulants into their drug practice in social contexts and the implications for harm. While there is significant evidence suggesting that authorities in WA are aware of the practice of recreational dexies use, and that they link this trend to prescribing patterns of practitioners for Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder(s) (Berbatis *et al.*, 2002; Government of Western Australia, 2004), database searches indicate that this issue has not been investigated in any Australian ethnographic study.

The thesis has explored the inconsistent ways that a value of control was adhered to in relation to ecstasy use and the complex values associated with using dexies to control the use of alcohol. This analysis has contributed to the broader argument of this thesis which states that, at the micro-level of practice, the values constituting 'normalised' drug use are complex, nuanced, and renegotiated. I now elaborate on the second sub-argument of this thesis which is that the ongoing stigma associated with drug use unsettles the negotiation of recreational drug practice.

Stigma and recreational drug-using identity

In this thesis I have described how scenesters were particularly invested in maintaining normal identities within the context of the community alongside scene involvement and drug use. It was important to scenesters to demonstrate that their drug use was social and controlled – that it was an optional part of life and was leisure oriented. These values provided important boundaries and were central to maintaining health and participation in the community. However, they were also central to identity management.

Irrespective of their style of use scenesters asserted their investment in 'neo-liberal' identities which are associated with the values of responsibility and autonomy (Bunton, 2001; Petersen, 1997). They strongly resisted the notions of compulsion and addiction that are attached to all drug users within a mainstream discourse. The 'junkie' and 'addict' discourses provided a salient reminder of what they did not want to become and the representation of their practices as social and controlled were defensive strategies – a response to the devalued status of drug users. On the other hand, as broad values, notions of being social and controlled drug users were open to interpretation and reinterpretation. Aside from their own experiences and advice from friends, scenesters had little to guide them on more specific and micro-level issues, such as how they might engage in practices that are pleasurable but not harmful and the acceptable parameters of practice. My analysis of the negotiation of crystal methamphetamine smoking in Chapter 8 and the maintenance of involvement in drug use over time in Chapter 9 showed that the boundaries of recreational practice are unclear and this was revealed over time and as the negative effects of maintaining a scenester lifestyle became more acute?/were experienced as more

acute. I explored how the uncertainty about the parameters of recreational practice was underpinned by the broader instability of values and expectations of young adults in society more generally.

Uncertain boundaries of recreational drug practice

This study has reaffirmed that even within the same networks, young adults may draw from similar sets of values (e.g. belonging in a mainstream) and have shared interests and social experiences (e.g. EDM enthusiasm) but arrive at different decisions regarding the boundaries of acceptable and desired drug experience. In overlooking micro-level narratives, normalisation research has obscured the multiple, individualised and locally specific ways that young adults engage with and enact values associated with recreational drug use. There has been a good deal of attention focussed on the risks and harms associated with use of crystal methamphetamine use in Australia (Degenhardt *et al.*, 2008; Department of Health and Ageing, 2008; Hayatbakhsh *et al.*, 2009; Kenny *et al.*, 2011; Kinner & Degenhardt, 2008; McKetin & McLaren, 2004; McKetin *et al.*, 2008; Saltman *et al.*, 2008). However, to date scant attention has been paid to the negotiation of this drug's use social contexts, analysis of the values and significance that this practice has for young adults, and how they negotiate the stigma with which it is associated (exceptions include Slavin, 2004a, 2004b).

Smoking crystal methamphetamine was understood by scenesters to be more risky than most other ATS use, with the exception of injecting. Furthermore, there were inconsistent views among participants as to whether meth smoking was a recreational practice. Scenesters' polarised responses to this drug were underpinned by the intense public scrutiny of the practice in mainstream community debates in Australia at the time. The formation of private or quasi-private meth circles could therefore be understood as an identity-management strategy in the context of wider disapproval of the practice within the scene. Opinions on the acceptability of meth circles were divided: some scenesters understood the practice to be 'social' and therefore acceptable, whereas others regarded it as 'antisocial' and an indication of problematic use.

I have considered how the establishment of meth smoking as a deviant practice within the general community, as well as within the EDM scene, shaped a style of practice where the boundaries of acceptable and recreational use were unclear. Meth circles were linked to continuous and heavy styles of use that resulted in ‘benders’. The practice of benders was understood as damaging to health and associated with social conflict. I argue that, because scenesters who smoked were motivated to continually defend their practice and justify it as social (to manage their identities in relation to negative judgment), they did not openly address negative aspects of the practice that arose within meth circles. Unresolved conflict and tensions had a corrosive effect on group cohesion, promoting mistrust, suspicion and resentment among scenesters.

Extending this inquiry into negotiation of identity among scenesters, in Chapter 9 I examined the ways that stigma and the devalued identities of drug users presents ongoing challenges to the negotiation of recreational practice over time. Results established that the threat of identity damage (of being considered an uncontrolled or compulsive drug user) was considered one of the major ‘harms’ associated with ‘uncontrolled’ drug use. However, it was clear that the boundaries of what was considered recreational use were unclear. This was revealed as individuals negotiated their use over time. Findings indicate that, while scenesters represented their drug-related decisions in relation to the performance of mainstream values (e.g. self-control, rationality, autonomy and responsibility), transitions were individualised and the assessment of changes were negotiated within highly personalised experiences, values and within the context of interpersonal relationships. I also examined how scenesters drew on their social and relational experiences outside of the scene to assess normal and age-appropriate involvement in drug use. My analysis of the ways that change was negotiated contributes to the argument that the recreational style was subjectively interpreted and highly variable and follows on from increasingly nuanced discussion in the literature of the processes of negotiating drug use over the life course. The final theme that I summarise here is the uncertainty about the boundaries of ‘normal’ drug use as scenesters aged.

Uncertain 'adult' identities

There is much to learn about the ongoing implications of normalisation with an ageing cohort. A new generation of post-rave clubbers and party-going young people have grown up in the age of 'normalised' drug use, and there are very few studies describing how young adults negotiate their drug use in relation to identity, social experience, and other changing factors in their lives (such as living arrangements and relationships) over time or as they age.

Chapter 9 suggests that, while scenesters were clear about what they did not want to become (e.g. a compulsive and antisocial drug user), they were less clear about how to enact recreational drug-using identities. This issue was explored in relation to the claiming of adult status. I argued that the path of the ageing scenester was an uncertain one. While participants commonly expressed the view that drug use is a project of 'youth', there were no certainties or fixed rules guiding understandings about the age at which it should be given up in order to maintain a normal identity. Some did not perceive the need to do so at all. The nuanced and individualised processes of scenesters in negotiating a relationship with drugs, coupled with the tendency of scenesters to shift in and out of different styles of use over time, highlighted the weaknesses in shared understandings of the recreational drug-user identity.

The uncertainty with which scenesters negotiated drug-related transitions is set against a backdrop of complex of transitions that young adults in contemporary Western societies navigate on the path to adulthood navigated by young adults. Many scenesters were able to maintain a lifestyle of partying in the scene while maintaining identities within the mainstream into their late twenties. This is linked to broader social trends among young Australians to delay having children of their own. More broadly, the work of sociologists suggests that boundaries between youth and adulthood are unclear and so are associated social expectations. I argue that this further clouded the interpretation of scenesters' interpretation of where the boundaries of 'youthful' drug use lie.

Investigating the ongoing implications of normalisation among an ageing cohort – particularly those who are in their late twenties and thirties – is an ongoing area of development within the normalisation literature. While there have been some recent studies investigating adult drug use (Pearson, 2001), and the negotiation of use in relation to specific aspects such as parenting and gender (Malesevic & Mackenzie, 2002), the current study highlights that these are areas where further research is needed.

Policy considerations

My study raises significant issues and questions for public health policy. I focus here on the implications of two issues that emerged in this thesis: the expression of the value of self-control through the combined use of stimulants with alcohol, and the stigmatisation of methamphetamine. I conclude by discussing how the findings presented in this thesis that are specifically related to identity management may be considered in the policy-making arena.

The dichotomy of recreational and problematic drug use

The concomitant use of ATS and large amounts of alcohol observed among scenesters has also been reported among other recent studies of young adults, suggesting that this trend is not unique to scenesters (Black *et al.* 2008). ATS decreases sensitivity to many of the body's signs of alcohol intoxication, and it may increase the risk of acute and chronic alcohol-related harms (e.g. alcohol poisoning, drink-driving and long-term liver damage). Concomitant use of ATS with other licit and illicit drugs may also have unwanted and harmful effects (Gouzoulis-Mayfrank & Daumann, 2006), but specific information relating to these interactions is not widely available and young adults are given a blanket message about the potential negative effects of any polydrug use. This broad message was largely ignored by scenesters, who tended to rely on their own experiences and their friends experiences to learn about drug interactions.

This study demonstrates that consideration of polydrug practices, specifically ATS and alcohol use as well as the social contexts and cultural meanings informing these practices, is necessary in order to inform the development of appropriate and

effective harm reduction messages. The development of harm-reduction messages must be sensitive to local variations in practice. For example, among scenesters, the use of dexamphetamine in conjunction with alcohol to facilitate heavy drinking was widespread and could be understood in relation to a broader pattern of prescribing medications for attention deficit-related problems. Development of appropriate harm-reduction strategies and messages must also consider some of the perceived benefits that may inform drug-using practice. For example, young adults in this study perceived that using a pharmaceutical stimulant had harm-reduction benefits. These benefits included avoiding the ever-present risk associated with consuming illicit drugs with unknown content. Further, when using dexies with alcohol (and similarly with other forms of ATS such as methamphetamine), scenesters also felt that they had a greater sense of control and safety when in public. This informal risk-reduction measure contributed to the appeal of using this polydrug combination.

While AOD research and policy has traditionally treated illicit drugs as separate from alcohol, this study indicates that any separation of alcohol from ATS use is arbitrary. The two are inextricably linked, particularly given that young adults spend the majority of time together in environments where alcohol is available, or its consumption is sanctioned. More generally, however, the use of diverted pharmaceuticals in conjunction with alcohol and other drugs is reportedly common among broader cohorts of young Australians (J Copeland *et al.*, 2004; Kaye & Darke, 2012; Swift *et al.*, 2007). This study suggests that the maintenance of rigid distinctions between licit and illicit drugs may be unhelpful in efforts to reduce drug-related harm.

In Australia, public health campaigns have mainly focused mainly on the use of illicitly manufactured drugs such as ecstasy and methamphetamine (particularly crystal methamphetamine or 'Ice') and related harms. They have also tended to focus on the dangers posed by adulterants in 'street' drugs (e.g. through campaign images of 'backyard labs' and an emphasis on dangerous contaminants) – a warning that is irrelevant in the context of pharmaceutical drugs. Cameron Duff (2004) identifies the flawed logic of emphasising of these aspects of illicit drugs. He argues that Australian drug policy is informed by understandings "that the provision of expert

and scientifically rigorous information will lead individuals to modify their drug behaviour as they become more aware of the risks and ‘dangers’ of illicit drug use and (naturally) choose to avoid them” (Duff, 2004, p.386). My study shows that the emphasis on the adulterated and illicit status of drugs in strategies targeting this group may reinforce the existing belief that pharmaceuticals such as dexamphetamine are benign relative to other drugs – that they are ‘safe’, ‘controlled’ chemicals – and inadvertently encourage greater use.

Stigma and recreational drug users

The data presented in this thesis reassert a point that has been made previously (e.g. Moore, 2008) relating to the stigmatising effects of politico-media discourses on drug use. I have discussed how, at the time of fieldwork, there was considerable attention in Australia focused on the use of crystal methamphetamine – with the practice branded as ‘dirty’ and users of the drug attracting labels such as ‘junkie’. This attention is reminiscent of the public attention towards heroin use and users in Australia in the 1990s (Lancaster *et al.*, 2011). My analysis highlighted how the labels attached to crystal meth smoking enhanced the very appeal of the practice for some scenesters because it provided an opportunity to experiment with the boundaries of recreational use. Others aligned the practice with a ‘ghetto-cool’ aesthetic. More commonly, however, the stigmatised status of the drug directed the practice further into the private worlds of young adults, such as ‘pre’-parties, and ‘after’-parties. Use in these contexts was also directly linked to fractures and tensions in groups, as it was conducted covertly even among friends who were users of other forms of ATS. It was these unstructured and socially controlled environments (where the threat of judgment from outsiders was less likely) that facilitated heavy and prolonged ATS use.

Smoking crystal methamphetamine is most strongly associated in the literature with acute harms, including psychosis and violence (Darke *et al.*, 2008), and it was also understood by scenesters to be the practice that was most harmful and ‘taxing’ in relation to after-effects. Scenesters believed that they were able to successfully self-manage such effects. They demonstrated how ‘easily’ they could quit using, when required. However, the reluctance of most scenesters to discuss the effects of ATS on

their health raises questions about potential cultural barriers to young adults seeking assistance. I suggest that the heavily stigmatised status of methamphetamine and its alignment with cultural representations of addiction have the potential to deter young adults from seeking help, or even to identify the negative effects of drug use in their lives.

The ability of scenesters to regulate their drug involvement and their concern about maintaining a normal identity highlighted the importance of considering the interplay of individual decision making, group processes, social status and opportunity. Scenesters operated from a position of relative social advantage. In comparison to vulnerable groups, they were able to mobilise considerable resources or financial and social 'capital' to provide support, structure and purpose to their time (Granfield & Cloud, 2001). This undoubtedly helped them to manage their involvement in the scene and the often heavy styles of drug use while maintaining a foothold in mainstream society. This finding reasserts the need to consider issues of class and social status when investigating youthful drug use.

However, investment in these ideals also increased the shame associated with seeking help. Among this network, experiences of drug problems were attributed to individualised notions of flawed subjectivity (i.e. a lack of 'will power' or 'self-control'). Further, scenesters strived to distance themselves from notions of problematic use by emphasising that they used socially and in controlled ways – that they were 'not' addicts or junkies. Reinforcement of such dichotomies between recreational and problematic use through representation of extreme outcomes that do not resonate with young adults may indeed function to perpetuate and inform low levels of help seeking. This issue must be considered in the development of appropriate public health interventions designed to respond to ATS use by this group.

Final points

Ethnographers, including those who study illicit drugs, have long concerned themselves with accessing groups at the margins of society in order to comment on marginalisation, suffering and violence (Bourgois, 1995, 2002; Dwyer, 2008; Maher,

1997). However, this study acknowledges that there are other drug-using groups in our society who, though not necessarily disadvantaged, may be subordinated because of the stigma attached to their lifestyle choices.

This thesis has aimed to illuminate the lived experiences of recreational ATS users – giving a ‘voice’ to what may be the dominant experience of drug users in Australia, but one that is often silenced in public discourses. Moore argues that:

[C]onspicuously absent from existing discourses on alcohol and ATS use are the perspectives and strategic practices of young adults. This ‘subjugated knowledge’ struggles for equal legitimacy with the claims made by powerful stakeholders such as the politicians, police commissioners, policy makers, journalists, and researchers (2010, p.494).

Ethnographic studies are one means by which the voice of young adults can more prominently influence policy making processes. This is particularly so because ethnographic methodologies illuminate aspects of lived social context that can often be homogenised or flattened by other methodologies and represents the diverse ways that experience is negotiated.

This study has provided an account of how a social network of young Australians negotiated involvement in potentially health-damaging, illegal and stigmatising practices, while maintaining relatively unproblematic integration in a cultural mainstream. I have considered how this occurred in the context of a cultural environment where illicit drug use has become a common aspect of the mainstream leisure landscape, particularly for young clubbers (Duff *et al.*, 2007). The patterns of drug use noted among this network are unremarkable in the context of involvement in an EDM scene. Further, members of this particular network were involved in a cultural scene that could not be considered unusual or deviant in the context of the experiences of young Australians more generally.

Through analysis of individual and group processes, understandings, tensions, and the ways that these were negotiated in social contexts and over a period of time, this study contributes to a greater understanding of the micro-political implications of the broader cultural processes of normalisation. It has now been over twenty years since

Parker *et al.* began the original UK study on which the normalisation thesis was based. It is clear that, as drug trends and fashions evolve, and as the cultural, social, economic and political landscape in which young adults negotiate their experiences shifts, there remains much to be understood about the ways that young adults incorporate drug use into their lives.

This study offers a contribution to the consideration of the ongoing micro-political implications of the cultural normalisation of drug use. This study investigated the complexity of identity negotiation both in relation to membership of an EDM scene and of the mainstream community, highlighting that this position of duality meant that understandings and practices associated with ‘normal’ drug use were not fixed – even among regular drug users. Duff’s (2004) analysis is useful here. He explores the dominance of neo-liberalist rationales in relation to Australian drug policy, and argues:

... harm minimisation programs have little to offer the vast majority of drug users in Australia because, in a sense, harm minimisation is not targeted at such people. If like most drug users, one’s use is social or recreational, and one doesn’t arouse the interests of law enforcement authorities or treatment services, then essentially one is left to one’s own devices in this country, irrespective of how harmful or problematic this drug use may be at present or in the future (Duff, 2004).

The nuanced and shifting processes of negotiation of drug practice observed among scenesters indicates that there were no fixed guidelines available to show participants where to draw boundaries and what constitutes acceptable practice when negotiating involvement in illicit drug use. My data suggests that they were indeed left to their ‘own devices’ when it came to negotiation of how to be a successful drug user.

In their quest to maintain status in the mainstream while pursuing the use of drugs in conjunction with the lifestyle of a scenester, the young adults in this study defined themselves in opposition to the most accessible and well-described attributes associated with drug users – the failed and problematic drug user. Breaking down the perception that drug users are failed individuals is critical to encouraging young

adults to access both the informal and formal resources available to them should they find that they need support with drug use.

This study has focused on the experiences of scenesters – young adults who did not often view themselves as the likely focus of research, and who strove to represent themselves as normal, autonomous and simply seeking fun experiences with their ‘mates’. Their experiences, however, were far from straightforward. This thesis has discussed the intricate work that they undertook to manage multiple identities and the complexity of discourses that they navigated along the way.

On the one hand, scenesters aspired to futures within the mainstream – to become responsible adults and to have successful careers and relationships. However, they negotiated contradictory cultural discourses that both target young adults as consumers of psychoactive experiences yet increasingly regulate excessive practices. Further, while our society in many ways encourages risk taking, certain forms of risk taking (such as investing in stock markets) are sanctioned while others, such as illicit drug use, are not.

Scenesters negotiated distinct identities among their peers within a highly socially competitive music scene. They sought to distinguish themselves in relation to mainstream young adults and enhance their sense of belonging and acceptance in the scene by performing EDM enthusiast identities, and demonstrating that they were cool, attractive and socially well-connected. Within this scene, they grappled with the tensions between discourses of pleasure-seeking and excess associated with the central pursuit of partying and the emphasis placed on self-control in the performance of an authentic scenester identity.

Scenesters negotiated these tensions against the broader backdrop pressure to be an autonomous, self-governing and accomplished individual – a pressure that is experienced by young adults more generally. They continually shaped and reshaped their identities in a world that is far more complex than when their parents were young adults. Further, though there are today greater possibilities for negotiating unique life biographies (given the resources and opportunities), there is also considerable cultural uncertainty about what is expected of young adults. I have

aimed to do justice to these complexities and to highlight that that their experiences and struggles are worth our attention.

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Appendix A: Extract from fieldnotes

2pm – arrived at [large EDM event]

Got off bus with Theo and five others (Monique and John, Nick, Melissa, Christie). Theo asked us all to wait (waited by entrance gate for others for about 15 minutes, everybody seemed impatient) – he had to give his friend a ticket. Theo apologised constantly, called friend two/three times, told us they were “ten minutes away”. Monique took photos of group, some applied sunscreen.

Theo asked if anybody wanted some pills (\$40 each). Henry said that he wanted two, but had to withdraw money. Nick said he might find Theo later. Theo said that he needs to get rid of them because “I got them off tick” (i.e. credit with dealer). Henry already had two other pills, but preferred to have two different kinds “in case one is shit” (both unknown dealers – told me earlier that “everybody’s gear has been falling through”, meaning having trouble sourcing pills).

Theo also offered dexies to all (free). When Henry said yes, he said “well, I don’t have many...” (not happy to give them to Henry) – ended up giving him two (gave Monique six). He kept them in a chewing gum packet to conceal from security staff standing nearby. Discussion about whether bags would be searched. Monique had drugs ‘stashed’ in her bra. All seemed to have different strategies for concealing (Nick in his sock). Christie didn’t seem to care, had pills in her purse.

December 2006



national drug research institute

Appendix B: Plain language statement, fieldwork component



Recreational Party Drug Use and Related Harms Among Young People in Perth (Fieldwork component)

RESEARCHER: Rachael Green (PhD Student – Curtin University)
Ph: 9226 1614

SUPERVISORS: Associate Professor David Moore (Ph: 9266 1616)
Associate Professor Lisa Maher

The research project 'Recreational party drug use and related harms among young people in Perth', is being conducted by Rachael Green as part of the requirements for her university studies towards the qualification of a PhD.

The overall aims of the project are to gain a better understanding of recreational party drug use among young people in Perth. I am interested in finding out about the kinds of party drugs young people use and what they believe are the effects that party drugs have on their lives, including their health, finances, work/study commitments and their relationships with their friends and family and how they manage these effects.

There are a number of parts to this study. This part of the project involves **fieldwork**. This means that I would like to be spending a lot of time with young people who use party drugs while they are hanging out with their friends and getting to know about their lives and their use of party drugs.

You may choose not to be a part of this study or to let me associate with your group if you do not wish to and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. This means that if you ask me to I will not use information about you and I will destroy any information about you that I have already recorded.

No-one else will see any of the information I collect and I will not talk about the information you give me with anyone else. You will be identified with a made-up name in any notes of mine so that you cannot be personally identified. All the information that I collect will either be stored on a computer and protected with a password or stored in a locked filing cabinet. Normally, researchers cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality with respect to illegal behaviours and I must inform you that while I will take every possible step to protect your confidentiality, I do have a legal obligation as a researcher to provide information if required by the courts.

The results of this study will be used for the preparation of a PhD thesis and may also be reported in scientific and academic journals. False names (including names of places) will be used throughout any reports. Where possible, these reports will be made available to you prior to publication for your comment.

This study has received clearance from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Do you have any questions?

Would you like me to explain any aspects of this study?

Appendix C: Plain language statement, interview component

Recreational Party Drug Use and Related Harms Among Young People in Perth (Interview Component)

RESEARCHER: Rachael Green (PhD Student – Curtin University)
Ph: 9226 3007

SUPERVISORS: Associate Professor David Moore (Ph: 9266 1600)
Associate Professor Lisa Maher

The research project 'Recreational party drug use and related harms among young people in Perth', is being conducted by Rachael Green as part of the requirements for her university studies towards the qualification of a PhD.

The overall aims of the project are to gain a better understanding of recreational party drug use among young people in Perth. I am interested in finding out about the kinds of party drugs young people use and what they believe are the effects that party drugs have on their lives, including their health, finances, work/study commitments and their relationships with their friends and family and how they manage these effects.

You have been invited to be a part of this study because of your experiences and knowledge about using party drugs. There are a number of parts to this study. This part of the project involves a **taped interview**, which will take about one hour. During the interview I will ask you questions about your background (including your family, schooling and employment), your drug use history and patterns of drug use, what you think are the benefits and negative aspects of party drug use, how you try to maximise benefits of use and minimise negative effects, and the impact of your drug use on your health and other aspects of your life including your relationships with others, and work/study, financial and other commitments.

Sometimes it can be difficult to talk about these things with other people. You may choose not to answer any or all questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. This means that if you ask me to I will not use information about you and I will destroy any information about you that I have already recorded.

I will not talk about the information you give me with anyone else and you will not be personally identified in any reports. You will be identified with a made- up name on the tape and I would also ask you that you are careful not to use identifying information about other people or places during the interview. The tapes will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet. I must inform you, however, that while I will take every possible step to protect your confidentiality, I do have a legal obligation as a researcher to provide information if required by the courts. Normally, researchers cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality with respect to illegal behaviours of which they are made aware.

The results of this study will be used for the preparation of a PhD thesis and may also be reported in scientific and academic journals. False names (including names of places) will be used throughout any reports. Where possible, these reports will be made available to you prior to publication for your comment.

This study has received clearance from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Do you have any questions?
study?

Would you like me to explain any aspects of this

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Curtin University of Technology on 9266 2784 or s.darley@curtin.edu.au, or in writing C/-Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845