

# ‘Muzzas’ and ‘Old Skool Ravers’: Ethnicity, drugs and the changing face of Melbourne’s dance party/club scene

**CHRISTINE SIOKOU**

National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology, Melbourne Office, Australia

**DAVID MOORE**

National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology, Melbourne Office, Australia

**HELEN LEE**

Sociology and Anthropology Program, School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia

## **ABSTRACT**

*The relationship between ethnicity and the use of ‘party drugs’ (e.g., methamphetamine and ecstasy) has received little attention in Australia. This paper focuses on ethnicity and party drug use within the context of dance parties and clubs in Melbourne, Australia’s second largest city. The young people who participated in our research, many of whom are long-time dance party attendees, or ‘old skool ravers’, frequently made claims to the possession of subcultural capital by labelling as ‘muzzas’ those they perceived to be outsiders to the dance scene. Muzzas are defined as heavily muscled young men, commonly of Southern European or Middle Eastern background, who use cocaine and steroids, have ‘no class’ and dance in an overly aggressive way. Although the old skool ravers were often from similar ethnic backgrounds to muzzas, they rarely drew on ethnicity in forming their own identities. They did, however, explicitly invoke ethnicity in the distinctions they created between themselves and muzzas. Their claims to subcultural capital are based on notions of nostalgia and an authentic involvement in the dance scene, and on their perceived distance from a mainstream culture consisting of ‘normal people’.*

**KEYWORDS:** party drugs; dance parties; ethnicity; subcultural capital; nostalgia; sociology

## **INTRODUCTION**

The relationship between ethnicity and the use of party drugs (e.g. methamphetamine and ecstasy) has received little attention in Australia. Previous research has tended to focus on Anglo-Australian, middle-class young people living in inner-urban areas (e.g. Brookman 2001; Green and Moore 2009; Hopkins 1996; Lenton and Davidson 1999; Lenton *et al* 1997; Moore

1995). The few Australian studies that have examined ethnicity and drug use have focused on injecting drug users from Asian backgrounds (e.g. Dwyer 2008; Maher *et al* 1998). Social and cultural research on rave and club cultures, common contexts for the use of party drugs, has also largely neglected issues of ethnicity and race (Anderson and Kavanaugh 2007; Thornton 1995; Wilson 2006; for exceptions, see Collin

1997 and Reynolds 1998)<sup>1</sup>. As Carrington and Wilson (2004:72) argue:

Even today, rave and club culture remains absent from most 'race' and ethnicity-related analyses and, in the same way, studies of dance culture in general seldom engage with issues of 'race' and ethnic identity construction in any meaningful way.

In this paper, we provide an analysis of the ways in which a group of long-term participants in the Melbourne dance scene use notions of ethnicity and party drug use to construct distinctions between themselves – that is, the 'old skool ravers' – and some of those they categorise as 'outsiders' to the scene – such as 'muzzas'. Muzzas are defined by old skool ravers as heavily muscled young men, commonly of Southern European or Middle Eastern background, who use cocaine and steroids, wear tight clothing, have gelled spiky hair, are obsessed with cars, have 'no class', dance in an overly aggressive way and hold extremely sexist views. Although the self-identified old skool ravers were often from similar ethnic backgrounds to muzzas, they rarely drew on ethnicity in describing their own identities. Drawing on the work of Thornton (1995) and Moore (2005), as well as work on nostalgia (Davis 1977, 1979; Wilson 2005), we show how the claims of these old skool ravers to subcultural capital are based on notions of nostalgia and an authentic involvement in the dance scene, and on their perceived distance from a mainstream culture consisting of 'normal people'.

Our use of the concept 'ethnicity' is influenced by the constructivist approach, which acknowledges that ethnic identity is socially constructed and 'ethnic boundaries, identities and cultures, are negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities' (Nagel 1994:152). In recent years, theories of hybridity have drawn on

this approach to describe the kinds of 'cultural mixing' engaged in by young people (Butcher and Thomas 2003). However, we also recognise that ethnicity can be 'imposed, as well as assumed and inherited' (Bottomley 1992:60). As critiques of 'happy hybridity' argue, the power relations impacting on cultural identities need to be acknowledged (Lo 2000). Thus, while ethnicity can be analysed as socially constructed, it may be experienced and perceived as fixed and as associated with particular characteristics. This understanding of ethnicity leads to a focus on the way that ethnic identity is experienced and perceived by young people of 'mixed' heritage and those born to migrant parents.

Victoria is an apt place to undertake research on ethnicity and party drug use because it is a multicultural state comprised of people from over 230 countries (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2007:31). Moreover '43.6% or 2,152,279 Victorians were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas' (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2007:9). Given the ethnic diversity of the state and of Australia more generally, it is surprising how little research has been conducted on ethnicity and the use of party drugs.

## METHODS AND SAMPLE

During 2006–2007, the first author (CS) spent 16 months conducting ethnographic research within social networks of young people who use 'party drugs' at dance parties and clubs in Melbourne. The value of an ethnographic approach to the study of 'hidden' or 'hard to reach' populations, such as drug users, has been demonstrated by a number of studies (e.g. Becker 1953; Bourgois 1995; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Maher 1997; Moore 1993; Slaven 2004). During her fieldwork, CS attended 26 clubs and 10 dance parties, as well as spending considerable amounts of time at post-event 'recovery'

<sup>1</sup> Collin (1997) traces the black, Hispanic and gay roots of the house music scene and Reynolds (1998) discusses the influence of race, black identity and US hip-hop and rap on the UK jungle and trip-hop scenes.

parties and in private residences. CS came into contact with over 100 young party drug users, had regular contact with a subset of 30–40 and spent the majority of her time with a core group of 12 research participants (the composition of which changed during the course of her fieldwork). Many of these people had been attending raves and other dance events since the mid-1990s. Most were in their 20s, had completed secondary school, worked full-time and lived in Melbourne's outer Northern and Western suburbs. While almost all members of the sample were born in Australia, they were ethnically mixed with European, Anglo-Celtic or Middle Eastern family backgrounds. This last feature sets them apart from the majority of samples reported in studies of party drug use.

The vast majority of the larger group of approximately 100 young people were involved in party drug use to some extent. This included 'speed' (methamphetamine powder), 'pills' (ecstasy), 'ice' (crystalline methamphetamine) and 'coke' (cocaine) as well as alcohol. There was minimal involvement in injecting drug use, and most were either employed and/or studying. CS saw most members of the core group between two and four times per week as well as having almost daily contact with several via telephone, text messaging and email. Fieldnotes were made shortly after each episode of fieldwork. CS also conducted 25 digitally recorded in-depth, semi-structured interviews in various locations including her home, the homes of participants and public locations such as cafes.<sup>2</sup> In addition to her professional involvement in this research project, and previous undergraduate research on the Melbourne rave scene (Siokou 2002), CS has been attending dance parties and clubs for over 14 years. This personal involvement positioned her as an 'insider' to the area of study (see Bennett 2002; Marcus 1998; Measham and Moore 2006). Bennett has argued that 'the

use of "insider knowledge" by contemporary youth and music researchers is simply following a current methodological trend in ethnographic work, at the centre of which is an open acknowledgment of the researcher's tiedness to space and place' (2002:461).

### FROM 'RAVES' TO 'DANCE PARTIES'

In Melbourne, raves began in 1988 (St John 2001:11) and their key music and fashion influences included the Manchester warehouse scene, the Chicago house black/gay scene, the Detroit techno warehouse parties and the trance beach parties of Goa. Raves in their early years (1988–92), were part of an 'underground' niche scene whose members expressed an ideology of 'PLUR' standing for 'peace, love, unity and respect'. Common venues included abandoned warehouses and sheds. Over the next few years, raves evolved into a semi-commercial alternative music scene and were held in warehouses and sheds in the city's inner-city industrial and port areas. Flyers promoting events could be found in specialty music and clothing stores, and 'party locations were advertised using the Telecom 0055 recorded message service, enabling the party to remain aloof from media, the police and rival promoters (until the last minute)' (St John 2001:11). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, mirroring international trends, raves evolved into increasingly commercialised and commodified 'dance parties'. Dance parties were held in large licensed nightclubs and entertainment and sporting complexes. Ticket prices for larger events ranged up to \$135, with events being attended by several thousand people. For example, a 1997 New Year's Eve event at Victoria Dock's Shed 14 hosted an estimated 10,000 people. The events were increasingly sponsored by large companies (e.g., Vodafone, Ticketek, Motorola, Smirnoff) and widely advertised through mainstream print and electronic media.

<sup>2</sup> Ethics approval for the project was granted by Curtin University of Technology's Human Research Ethics Committee.

### 'I USED TO BE A RAVER'

The research participants often describe themselves and others who had attended the mid-1990s raves and dance parties as old skool ravers who shared a sense of community. This sense of community was sustained by friendliness, unity of purpose (seeking 'the vibe'), the use of drugs to enhance the rave experience, feelings of safety and the freedom to express oneself (Siokou 2002). Many of the research participants considered themselves participants in an alternative youth subculture rather than being part of the 'mainstream'. However, by the time of CS's fieldwork in 2006–07, this self-identification had changed and statements such as 'I used to be a raver' were common. This is a local example of a more widespread trend across Western dance scenes in which former participants 'seldom use the word 'rave' today largely because the scene has declined or changed so dramatically' (Anderson and Kavanaugh 2007:501). Even though they continue to attend clubs and other dance venues, the old skool ravers do not identify with the current dance scene when creating personal or group identities. They blame commercialisation and the consequent influx of 'normal' (i.e., mainstream) people, which has 'ruined' the dance scene. The arrival of these 'dirty clubbers' has led, in their view, to a perceived loss of friendliness, increased interest in 'picking up' (initiating casual sexual encounters), the use of large amounts of party drugs and alcohol with little concern for safety, and little interest in dance music (Siokou and Moore 2008). Furthermore, dirty clubbers do not identify with the earlier rave ethos, identity markers including clothes and accessories, and associated norms and behaviours (e.g., such as those relating to drug use).

### THE ARRIVAL OF THE MUZZAS

For old skool ravers the worst of the 'dirty clubbers', the epitome of the 'mainstream' crowds against which they contrast themselves (Moore

2005; Thornton 1995), are the muzzas. As noted above, muzzas are defined as being of Southern European or Middle Eastern background. Muzza is possibly a derivative of Mario, a name commonly associated in Australian ethnic stereotypes with Southern European males. 'Muzza chicks' or 'Marias' are the female equivalents. Old skool ravers routinely refer to 'Summadayze', a popular annual Melbourne dance party, as 'Muzzadayze' because of the perceived composition of the crowd at these events. In the eyes of the research participants, muzzas, and other dirty clubbers such as 'beefcakes' (a non-ethnic version of muzzas, who are characterised by their heavily muscled bodies, tight clothing and perceived low intelligence) and 'teenie boppers' (younger attendees), are typical of the people found at mainstream clubs, who began attending dance parties only after they became commercialised.

Old skool ravers generally view Muzzas with contempt. For example, at a dance party in April 2006, Isabel<sup>3</sup> claimed that there were too many 'muzza guys' and 'sleazy beefcakes' trying to 'pick her up'. Surveying the crowd, she commented that 'they should call this place 'Wog Nation' not 'Trance Nation'. In the Australian context, the term 'wog' is a negative stereotype that typically refers to people from a Southern European or Middle Eastern background. Historically, the use of the term began with the waves of migration, particularly in Melbourne and Sydney, of Southern Europeans in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1980s, there were moves to reclaim the label 'wog', for example by some Greek and Italian comedians. Today, the extent to which its use evokes racist connotations varies with context and some of the research participants identify themselves as 'wogs' in their interactions with friends. Furthermore, young people to describe the performance of particular ethnic identities rather than to specify ethnic background, often use 'wog', and the more recently introduced term 'muzza'.

<sup>3</sup> Identifying details, such as the names of people and venues, have been altered to preserve anonymity.

The negative perceptions of the aggressive behaviour of some muzzas is further highlighted in the following fieldnote, made after a dance party in 2007:

Seb, Isabel, Ben, Simon and myself [CS] are dancing upstairs in the side room. I hear a smashing of glass and turn around to see a heavily muscled shirtless man standing in front of two young females who were sitting down. Seb says: 'he smashed the glass table because girls wouldn't get up to dance' and Isabel says: 'that never used to happen, why do they let the muzzas in; seriously I can't party with those people'.

The research participants believed that much of this aggressive behaviour of muzzas was fuelled by a combination of cocaine and steroids. For example, when CS asked Simon what drugs he thought muzzas used, he replied 'the muzzas are all on roids [steroids] and coke and maybe speed, that's why they're like that [aggressive]' (April, 2006). The research participants also considered muzzas to be relatively ignorant about drugs. Paul and Simon often mocked how muzzas used pills, imitating their 'woggy' accents and drug vocabulary:

Paul: Da pills are kicking in re [Greek for 'mate'].

Simon: I need a water man, I need to sit down man, I got some pills on me man and they're fully sick. All my mates are rocking on em, are you peaking or what? (April, 2006).

The exchange between Paul and Simon highlights the perception of muzzas as unsophisticated. It also suggests that although muzzas, like CS's participants, were using ecstasy, their alleged use of cocaine and steroids (and, to a lesser extent, of methamphetamine powder) was blamed for their perceived aggressive behaviour. The

perception that muzzas were 'uncultured' and unsophisticated was also expressed in other ways. For example, discussions often highlighted their use of 'ethnic' words: *malaka* [wanker] (Greek), *ciccio* or the shortened version *chich* [buddy] (Italian) and *chojek* [person], *mochan* [pissed], and *lesh* [lazy] (Macedonian) (see Butcher 2008 on 'ethnolects').

Muzza dancing was another issue regularly aired in derisive discussions of muzzas, particularly when attending dance parties and clubs where muzzas were present. The muzza dance involves shirtless muzzas punching the air and rolling their hands while keeping the feet relatively still. This dance style was often compared unfavourably with one of the 'original' rave dance styles – the 'Melbourne shuffle' (see Coles *et al* 2005). The extract below is taken from fieldnotes made following a dance party in April 2006, when Isabel noticed a muzza chick:

Isabel spots a girl of Asian<sup>4</sup> appearance dancing in front of us and says in a sarcastic voice 'oh please, look at the way she is dancing'. The girl in question was dancing with her arms rigidly in a punching forward motion and moving her feet backwards and forwards.

It was also common for old skool ravers to retell 'funny muzza stories'. For example, Stephanie told Isabel and CS:

Youse are gunna laugh, I spoke to Daniel the other day and he was saying his trainer at the gym says 'come on boys there is only 28 days till Summadayze: work it'. How funny! (December 2006).

These stories also often focused on the inappropriate behaviour of muzzas at dance events:

This girl from work went to the [dance party] and told me I wasn't missing much: a beefcake was on the dance floor with no top on eating

<sup>4</sup> The majority of the research participants agreed that muzzas were commonly from a Southern European or Middle Eastern background but, as witnessed in Isabel's comment, they term could also be applied to those from other ethnic backgrounds.

tuna from a can, so he didn't miss his daily protein. I heard the crowd was really bad, full of muzzas (Ben, March 2007).

The telling and retelling of these humorous stories about muzzas was part of a wider dialogue in which old skool ravers claimed the possession of subcultural capital. They did this through claims that, unlike the unsophisticated, hypermasculine, appearance-obsessed muzzas, they attended dance parties and raves before them for the 'purest' of reasons, such as a love of dance music and culture.

### THE IMPACT OF THE MUZZAS

The arrival of muzzas and other dirty clubbers at dance events has influenced the practices of old skool ravers in several ways. Firstly, many of them choose not to attend those dance parties that have developed reputations for drawing 'bad' crowds, including muzzas. The following conversation between CS and Ben, concerning a future dance party, is illustrative:

Ben: Where is it [the dance party]?

CS: Club B

Ben: Your gunna get all the muzzas that think, 'Yeah let's go to a dance party' just because it's at Club B.

CS: Well, there is another dance party at Club C, the same people that do Daydream parties, so hopefully they will go there. Plus it's \$70 to get in, so hopefully only people that like Sasha and Digweed [UK DJs] are there (November 2006).

Another example, taken from CS's fieldnotes, describes how Isabel preferred not use to drugs with an unsuitable (i.e., muzza) crowd:

It is almost 3 am and Simon asks Isabel 'are you sure you don't want anything maybe it will get rid of your bad mood' and Isabel replies 'I don't want to take drugs with these people' and Simon says 'why did you want to come and get

me to buy tickets you knew what it was going to be like' and Isabel says 'I didn't think they [the muzzas] would be that bad' (November 2006).

Although some old skool ravers continued to visit dance events, muzza displays of hypermasculinity, the way they used drugs and their disrespectful and sometimes violent treatment of women, had led to feelings of unease and a perceived loss of freedom and safety. Consider the following conversation:

Vivienne: Dance parties back in the day I always felt safe, the crowd, you had nothing to fear, there wasn't those big type of characters that were out there looking to pick-up and... Yeah, like beefcakey wogs [i.e., 'muzzas'] you know that are there like preying on young girls, it was a young crowd all sort of your age or my age back in, you know I was 17 or 18, all similar age, all just like, yeah fun-loving, caring not like—they'd be out to help you instead of you know doing you any harm. These days, there is a bit of a fear factor from those type of people, those beefcakes that are there that want to buy you a drink, that want to offer you some drugs but then they want something in return, like a few months back I went to a nightclub and this guy got high on pills, so I asked him and he was the owner of the club [and considered to be a 'muzza'] and he was like 'yeah no worries, come I've got some for youse' you know and I was going to pay him and everything and he took me in the little back room and he was like 'oh here they are', I gave him the money and he expected something in return and I was like, he tried to kiss me and stuff, and I was like 'what are you doing?' and to him it was like he expected and nothing less you know and I was like...

CS: And you paid him the money?

Vivienne: I paid him the money but still he expected more, it was like you know she's come here with me and I'm giving her the stuff so hello. And lucky I quickly lied my way out of

that one, I just said 'oh I need a mint, can you just hang on, I can't kiss you without a mint so let me just run out and get a mint and I'll be back in one second', and he unlocked the door and let me out and I ran to my friends and I go 'help me now' (May 2007).

Unfortunately, Vivienne's experience was not uncommon. Several women in the fieldwork group had experienced unwanted male attention. In some cases, this has led to aggressive behaviour and sexual assault. In the following fieldnote, Isabel describes her experience:

We were all at Club V and I was at the bar ordering a drink and some sleazy beefcake guy pulled my top to the side and bit my breast. I totally freaked out and told him to fuck off and he said 'what baby' and shrugged like he had done nothing wrong. I just ran to my boyfriend and friends. I was so scared and shaking my boyfriend and friends wanted me to point him out but I couldn't remember what he looked like just that he was big, it really done my head in, I couldn't take my jacket off all night. That would never have happened at a rave back in the day. I always felt safe at them, safe enough even go by myself (June 2007).

### NOT ALL WOGS ARE MUZZAS

Interestingly, many of the research participants had kinship or other social links to some of those they considered to be muzzas. For instance, Isabel, Vivienne and Stephanie regarded their relatives Daniel and James as muzzas. In the context of dance parties or clubs, muzzas were seen as intimidating. However, in other social contexts where muzzas were known individuals, they were not considered to be threatening and interactions with them were often light-hearted and humorous.

In addition to their social ties with muzzas, the research participants also shared the muzzas practice of employing ethnic words in their everyday language, including those describing drugs. For example, amongst her Macedonian

participants, 'speed' was sometimes referred to as '*belo*' ('white') or '*berso*' ('fast'). Amongst her Greek participants, speed was referred as '*treximo*' ('run'). These codenames were used to conceal drug use from people of other ethnicities and from parents, relatives and friends who did not use drugs. Therefore, although the research participants ridiculed the muzzas tendency to use 'ethnic' terms and accents, they also engaged in similar linguistic practices.

Although many of the research participants themselves came from Southern European backgrounds, they did not use ethnicity as a primary resource in the creation of their own identities, and ethnic markers had not been a feature of past raves. For example, Vivienne says:

If you were a raver it didn't matter what nationality you were, you were just a raver (June 2007).

Arianne explains how current attendees at raves and dance parties differ from those at earlier raves.

They don't speak, they're not, they're not social. Because ravers used to have that sort of happiness, cause they probably used to take drugs too, but it was more of a community whereas now these chocks [Arianne's term for 'muzzas'] and people that aren't ravers have come in sort of lost that feeling of all that sort of, I don't know, friendliness ... First time I went to a rave it was very different to how it is now.

CS: In what way?

Arianne: It was a lot more empty, not as packed. There was a lot of guys and not as many girls. People were very friendly and there was a lot of Australians I'd say. And it was more, almost like a little fantasy land like everyone used to dress up and do all that type of stuff.... [Now] there's a lot of mixed nationalities, a lot of Europeans now are going. It's almost become cool and in fashion and it's just absolutely packed... it's not something that's underground or more

sort of isolated like in groups you know like how there's grunge people and ravers, there used to be ravers, there used to be ravers who had their own little group.

Now it's like the rave is like the basic night club and there's all sorts. You get chocks, you get people with their tops off, you get little ravers, they're all, they're almost a dying breed. You don't see many of them anymore, you just see marias and show ponies, just show offs and just people that think that they're good (June 2007).

The above examples all show that a key part of how the old skool ravers read muzzas was through their perceived 'undesirable' aggressive behaviour and 'sleaziness' which was mainly attributed to their use of drugs, in particular cocaine and steroids. In earlier rave forms, ethnicity could be considered 'invisible' (even though there appeared to be a diversity of ethnicities present) but, more recently, there has been a noticeable increase in awareness of ethnic difference and in the use of ethnic labelling, including newly constructed labels such as 'muzza'.

In research undertaken by CS in 2002–03, 18% of a sample of 284 participants at Melbourne dance parties identified as being from a 'European background'. Therefore, it would appear that although patrons with European backgrounds were present at previous dance parties, meaning that the identification of ethnicity as an element in discussions over authenticity is a relatively recent development. When muzzas began to be readily identified at dance parties, the research participants were embarrassed and felt their ethnicity had now taken on a negative character. At dance events in the mid-1990s, ethnicity had not been an issue. Subsequently, they distanced themselves from and ridiculed muzzas. Young (2009:139) has argued 'that the enactment of a racial self is not always a

conscious part of one's identity. Rather, we each enact racialised cultural identities that are contextually performed and continuously shifting'. This is reflected in the way the research participants were often comfortable with people referred to as muzzas in social settings such as their homes, where they were more comfortable with their own ethnic identities. Moreover, in these more private settings, the role of muzza was not enacted as it would be in clubs and the term itself was rarely invoked. This highlights the shifting performance of ethnic identity as well as the importance and relevance of context in the use of ethnic labels.

### THE USE OF MUZZA IN WIDER DISCOURSES

The derogatory use of the term muzzas, and assessments of the negative impact of muzzas on the Melbourne dance scene, were not limited to the research participants and their social networks, but also circulated more widely within the Melbourne dance community. For example, while working on this article, CS was sent a hyperlink to a Youtube video featuring the 'muzza dance' at a Melbourne dance party. A subsequent search on the website led her to 40 more muzza videos, some of which had been viewed in excess of 84,000 times<sup>5</sup>.

The topic of muzzas and their drug use, behaviour and general impact on the dance scene was also the focus of a forum entitled 'What are muzzas?',<sup>6</sup> hosted by an Australian dance music website In the Mix ([www.inthemix.com.au](http://www.inthemix.com.au)). Echoing the comments of old skool ravers, the discussion included negative comments about muzza dress, use of steroids and cocaine, dance style, behaviour and ethnicity. The following comments, reproduced as they appeared in the forum, seek to define muzzas, with the second also offering a more nuanced typology of 'ordinary' and 'power muzzas':

<sup>5</sup> The muzza dance link can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvmSCGHWfus&feature=related>.

<sup>6</sup> The forum received 515 posts from October 2005 to 22 February 2007 when it closed because of '1. continual racial comments, 2. attacks on individuals both of which are against ITM forum guidelines' (<http://www.inthemix.com.au/forum/showthread.php?t=143028>).



They are Chapel St faring, man-bag wearing, fully sik car driving, sub woofer pumping, [C nightclub] frequenting mummies boys... of ethnic background<sup>7</sup>

O.k. look some of you are a little confused and to be quite honest bordering on racist. But it's o.k. cuz I'm here now and I can sort it out for you. Sure you have your Muzzas in diesel and politix tops but there is nothing wrong with them there just your standard Muzzas. What most of you seem to be describing is the power muzza. A special 'powered up' version of your common garden-variety muzza. These are the type you find at Summadayze on top of the hill wearing silver hot pants and no shirts. It is unclear exactly how a regular muzza makes the massive transformation from muz to power muz but it is clear that a special diet of cocaine and anabolic steroids will usually enhance the process. Got it? Good. Carry on then.

Muzza dancing was also a popular topic in the forum discussion. For example, one respondent says that muzzas:

are one of the few cultured beings that assume that punching the air while stomping their feet is a form of dancing. Just think... Roid-Rage. Muzzas are the people that you do not want to see at raves... Egotistical coke head, roid munching wogs.

Both the above quotes again make reference to the 'unacceptable' use of steroids and cocaine by muzzas in the eyes of other dance party attendees. Another adds:

Power muzzas actually think that they are controlling the music they are hearing and therefore the crowd. It's hard to break the power muzzas zone once he starts vogueing on top of the hill controlling the entire Music Bowl [dance party venue] with his vacant stare and massive biceps.

Interestingly, a key debate in the forum discussion concerned whether ethnicity was an essential criterion in the definition of muzzas or whether one's attitude, dancing style, drug use and dress sense were sufficient, regardless of ethnic background. Some forum contributors (as we see in the quotation above) argued that a Southern European or Middle Eastern background (commonly referred to as 'wog') was a prerequisite for inclusion in the muzza category, whilst others claimed that ethnicity was irrelevant. For example, one respondent writes:

it is a racist term muzza is short for mario. but anyone can have the power muz attitude.

Likewise, another adds:

I dont reckon it has anything to do with race. I've seen muzzas of all races.

Another respondent who, like some of the research participants, is a self-proclaimed wog, defines muzzas more narrowly:

LMAO!! [laughing my ass off] This thread is pure gold... and this is coming from a wog

Muzzas are the retards of wogs, its actually simple when you think about it... every race has retards associated with it

Like the smacked out Asians at [club B] who enjoy spending their night being G'd out [high on GHB] on the floor of a club, while people trip all of them. Or they think they are part of the Triad, try talking to them and they will properly try and stab you.

Then you have the Australian jobs who you can find at [clubs A, B or C] that are dressed in clown pants, have more lights hanging off them than a Christmas tree, and dance as if they are having some sort of epileptic fit. Ohh and lets not forget the baby powder all over the place<sup>8</sup>... it's like a Johnson&Johnson convention gone wrong.

<sup>7</sup> All extracts from the forum are reproduced verbatim but club names have been changed.

<sup>8</sup> Baby powder is commonly applied to the dance floor to facilitate dance moves.

But alas we come to the Muzzas...these are the guys who wear no tops in clubs (which should be outlawed imo [in my opinion]) and when you walk past them you are covered in their sweat from their topless backs (isn't that some sort of health issue?) To put it frankly, they are a bunch of Wankers who think they are tough because 7 of them bashed the shit out of one bloke.

The most pathetic Muzzas I've ever seen were at the last summadayze, they were 2 brothers who were topless (of course) and were only wearing PINK SPANDEX BICYCLE SHORTS. I wonder what was going through their minds when they both decided they were going to dress the same, and on top of that wear pink fucking bicycle shorts!!! 10 minutes later one of them was doing push ups on the grass, while the other brother was counting how many push ups he had done out a loud next to him.

Earlier, we saw how Ben, Stephanie and Isabel often told 'funny muzza stories' and it appears that many forum participants also had humorous stories to share. For example, one respondent writes:

Best muzza moment: Walking into the male toilets at the old [C nightclub], seeing 5 of them in front of the mirror in various states of distress due to a hair being out of place, seeing another guy with the same shirt, or pecs not looking big enough...Then the ringleader of the crew announces 'Time to get pumped up boys!' and all 5 immediately start doing push ups against the wash basins...Fucking funniest sight ever.

## DISCUSSION

As we have shown elsewhere (Siokou and Moore 2008), old skool ravers claim possession of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) via an 'authentic' rave identity. This claim is grounded in their past participation in an idealised and now defunct golden era, which is

inaccessible to 'young kids today'. In this paper, we have explored another supporting element in this claim to authentic identity and subcultural capital – the deeply negative assessments of muzzas. In their drug use, 'ethnic' language, dancing, attitudes to women and ignorance of rave ethos and practices, muzzas are considered to be the *least* authentic of current dance party patrons, one index of the alleged pollution of rave culture by the 'mainstream'.

Although the analytical use of the term 'mainstream' in subcultural studies has been criticised (e.g., Thornton 1995:93; see also Hodkinson 2002; Muggleton 2000; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Redhead 1997), young people continue to employ the notion in their own categorisations. As Moore (2005:233) has suggested, when 'underground' music and culture is commercialized and made widely available through the mass market, 'insiders' experience a sense of alienation because they no longer have influence in a culture they have helped to produce. Thus they experience a loss of identity because their sense of themselves depends on an opposition to 'the mainstream' against which they define themselves. Subcultural capital is seen as a scarce commodity that can only belong to a minority.

As a result of the arrival of dirty clubbers such as muzzas, the old skool ravers who participated in our research felt alienated from the dance scene and mourned the loss of their 'raver' identities. We can see that for them, nostalgia for past rave and other dance events was an important element in the formation of their contemporary identities (Davis 1977, 1979; Wilson 2005). As Wilson (2005:8) writes: 'In these postmodern times, when so many threats and obstacles to constructing and maintaining a coherent, consistent self abound, remembering, recalling, reminiscing, and the corollary emotional experience of nostalgia may facilitate the kind of coherence, consistency, and sense of identity that each person so desperately needs ... Individually and collectively, the

past is remembered and, in this act of recall, it is often *re-created*'. Furthermore, Wilson (2005:8) notes that whether 'nostalgia's claims about previous times are true or accurate is not as important as *why* and *how* those nostalgic claims emerge. What meaning is being constructed in the retelling? What purpose is being served – individually, collectively, politically, economically?'. For old skool ravers, alienated from the current dance scene, nostalgia provided an avenue through which they could re-establish continuity of identity and a sense of connection to a past cultural form.

Despite their similarities to muzzas, the old skool ravers felt they no longer had anything in common with, or control over, the types of people attending dance parties. According to Aden, discourses of nostalgia emerge when individuals try 'to regain some control over their lives in an uncertain time' (Aden 1995 cited in Wilson 2005:34) and provide a means of temporal escape. Aden considers nostalgic communication as providing individuals with a way of symbolically escaping cultural conditions that they consider depressing and/or disorientating. This communication allows individuals to move through time, and situate themselves in a sanctuary of meaning, a place where they feel safe from oppressive cultural conditions (Aden 1995 cited in Wilson 2005:34).

Furthermore, nostalgia 'always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties even though those may not be in the forefront of the person's awareness' (Davis 1977:420). 'Nostalgia is one of the means – or better, one of the more recently accessible psychological lenses – we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining and reconstructing our identities' (Davis 1979:31). For old skool ravers, the present anxieties and uncertainties about the muzzas and the commercial changes in the rave/dance party scene more broadly (see Siokou and Moore 2008) led to the nostalgic recreation of their identities and to the claiming of subcultural capital.

This paper is the first to examine the way in which ethnic stereotypes are produced and deployed within the Melbourne rave/dance party scene. It highlights the relevance of ethnicity in relation to drug use within dance party and club contexts, an issue that has received little attention in the literature. We have demonstrated how old skool ravers made claims to the possession of subcultural capital by employing ethnicity, drug use and other aspects of style and behaviour in their negative labelling of muzzas. They used nostalgia to mount a critique of the present situation and in doing so claimed subcultural capital for themselves. We hope to have stimulated interest in this area for future research, which might consider how cross-cultural perspectives may generate insights into ethnicity and party drug use. In what ways does ethnic background and the performance of ethnic identity shape the use of party drugs? Such analyses can further illuminate the cultural contexts and social worlds of party drug use.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research reported in this article was funded by National Health and Medical Research Council Project Grant 323212. The National Drug Research Institute receives core funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. A special thanks goes out to all of the research participants (and all 'old skool ravers'); this paper could not have been written without you.

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Received 25 September 2009

Accepted 13 April 2010

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