


**Please cite the Published Version**

Peter, Beate  and Williams, Lisa (2022) One foot in the rave: ageing ravers' transitions to adulthood and their participation in rave culture. *Leisure Sciences*, 44 (7). pp. 808-826. ISSN 0149-0400

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2019.1675560>

**Publisher:** Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

**Version:** Accepted Version

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## **Introduction**

It has been over 30 years since rave culture arrived in Britain taking hold of a whole generation. Many scholars understand raves in Britain as being primarily defined by dance, music, and drugs (Bennett, 2001; Critcher, 2000; Goulding, Shankar, & Elliott, 2010; Jowers, 1999; Malbon, 1999; Marsh, 2006; McKay, 1996, 1998; Pini, 1997, 2001; Redhead, 1993; Rief, 2009; Thornton, 1995; Till, 2010). Moral panics swept the country at the height of rave culture (1988 until 1994) focused almost exclusively on the consumption of ecstasy as pathology (see Redhead, 1993), and, subsequently, rave culture became synonymous with drug culture. As a result, the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act—commonly known as the Rave Bill—criminalized raves. The introduction of this legislation is testament to the widespread assumption that rave culture was dangerous. If we understand a culture as the ideas, principles, rituals and behavior of a particular group of people, its criminalization will not have led to a sudden change of rituals, principles or values. Instead, rave culture evolved, and it did so in different ways. For the purpose of this paper, we refer to both raving and clubbing when discussing engagement with this particular scene through all its permutations (including commercial club scenes, “underground” club scenes and the free party scene).

Recently, in Britain, nightclubs have begun to host an increasing number of successful reunion events originating from the rave scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Manchester, such nights include Paradise (August 2013), Flesh (2010), Havok (October 2015, 2016, 2018), Megadog (November 2015), Herbal Tea Party (October 2016, November 2018) and Tangled (July 2017, September 2018). To date, no research has explored what has happened to the original ravers and how they have fared in respect of making transitions to adulthood, such as, employment, committed intimate relationships or parenthood, or how these have impacted upon their current involvement in club cultures. Intrigued to find out, the first author started

the Lapsed Clubber Project, a pilot project that focuses on Greater Manchester as a city famous for its raves and warehouse parties, its nightclubs and celebrated DJs.

Using quantitative data, we explore the relationship between adult transitions and clubbing among the original ravers of the 1980s and early 1990s. Do they participate in club scenes? Do they take illegal drugs? How have transitions to adulthood, or absence of them, impacted their attendance of club nights? Does this differ by gender? How does the frequency of engagement in the original rave scene impact upon current participation? Our research fills a current gap in knowledge about the original ravers of the 1980s and early 1990s, the extent of their clubbing and how transitions to adulthood influence this.

### **Literature Review**

In England and Wales, as with many other Western societies, regular recreational drug taking – typically involving the consumption of drugs, such as, cannabis, ecstasy or cocaine – decreases from the mid-twenties onwards as age increases (Home Office, 2018). Drawing on control theories (see Matza, 1964) and developmental and life course criminology (see, for example, Laub & Sampson, 2003), drugs researchers have noted how age-graded social controls, in the form of transitions to adulthood and the new identities they create, impact upon levels of drug taking (see Bachman, O’Malley, Schulenberg, Johnston, Bryant, & Merline, 2001; Shiner, 2009; Williams, 2013; Young, 1971). Shiner (2009) explored this premise, using survey data, to offer an explanation for these changes in drug taking prevalence with age. He asserts that regular drug taking declines precisely at the age when adult roles and responsibilities, such as marriage, parenthood and owning a house, start to bed in. This kind of research confirms the idea that recreational drug taking is generally adolescence-limited. Other

research supports Shiner's analysis finding that lower rates of drug taking are associated with marriage, full-time employment or parenthood (see Bachman et al., 2001; Vervaeke & Korf, 2006). Analyzing quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data collected as part of the Illegal Leisure project (Aldridge, Measham, & Williams, 2011) in the North West of England, Williams (2013) developed a more nuanced account of how recreational drug taking changes across the life course. She found that as greater demands are placed on adult lives, recreational drug taking may desist or be moderated. In contrast to Shiner (2009), she adopts a less deterministic view, noting how transitions to adulthood may not immediately have a constraining or permanent effect on drug taking. In respect of gender, she argues that women have to contend with the competing demands of multiple adult transitions, for instance, full-time employment, motherhood and managing a home. In these circumstances, drug taking had to be carefully considered and accommodated (see also Measham, Williams, & Aldridge, 2011a). Indeed, Green (2016), in her study of 'scenesters' consuming methamphetamines in Australia, noted that women may 'age out' sooner than males.

The role of age in determining participation in music cultures has also been considered by researchers. Continued participation beyond adolescence has been linked partly to an extension of youth and the delay of particular life course events (Hodkinson, 2013). In the past ten years, however, sociologists have started to reassess this (Bennett, 2006, 2012, 2013; Bennett & Hodkinson, 2013; Davies, 2006; Hodkinson, 2011; Smith, 2009, 2012). Hodkinson (2013) argues that ageing participants of youth cultures are to be understood as people who negotiate their commitment to such cultures in light of changing "identities, bodies, priorities and orientations" (p. 21). Emerging from current research is the idea that the continued involvement in youth cultures beyond adolescence provides meaning, as such involvement relates to a person's self-image. Age, then, and the social roles and identities that come with it, can help

us understand why the original ravers have either persisted with or desisted from attending club nights.

Raves have been discussed by scholars from different schools of thought. Cultural studies, for example, explored rave culture for its potential to represent a new counterculture, one that resisted a cultural hegemony and could potentially lead to change (Gilbert, 1997; Hill, 2002; Malbon, 1999; Martin, 1999; McKay, 1996, 1998; Redhead, 1993). Today, however, raves are seen to be a historic phenomenon. Although the Rave Bill is understood by many scholars as the enforced end of raves as free, unlicensed events, some argue that the commercialization of raves was not a straightforward hostile takeover by industry, but a development that was also facilitated by forces from within (Hill, 2002; John, 2015). Following John's argument of "rave culture's ability to alternately contest and mimic Thatcherite ideology" (p.162), one can see how there is no single, progressive narrative of the evolution of raves especially given the varying scholarly perspectives. Our sample experienced the moral panics surrounding rave culture. They were also witness to the parliamentary discussion and subsequent introduction of the Rave Bill. The changing character of raves from unlicensed outdoor events to fully commercial and commodified indoor club events during this period means that a number of definitions would be acceptable to use. However, for the purpose of this paper, we describe their engagement with such dance events and related practices as clubbing, in line with commonly used terminology.

The nature of clubbing has been explored by scholars for their potential to provide or facilitate an immersive experience. Turner's concept of liminality, for example, is used in various ways in an attempt to explain what people commonly refer to as 'getting lost'. The ritualistic aspects (Goulding & Shankar, 2011; St. John 2015) are explored in the same way as are characteristics

of bonding and the formation of ‘communitas’ (Goulding & Shankar, 2011; Goulding et al., 2013; Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010). St. John (2008) provides an overview of research that utilizes Turnerian thought when discussing electronic dance music (pp. 149-150), and suggests that what Turner describes as feeling and being communal rather than individual, is what defines the “vibe”. He argues that the liminal character of dance events allows the individual to temporarily ignore reminders/signs of social control mechanisms such as being an employee, parent, or partner. At the same time, however, St. John concedes that this perceived freedom can be disciplined through a complex set of codes of behaviors and an increase of ‘subcultural capital’(see Thornton, 1995), which are related to style and genre and can lead to a high level of commitment.

Scholars researching leisure from a marketing perspective have attempted to measure this kind of commitment through ‘enduring involvement’ (see, for example, Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004; Havitz & Mannell, 2005; Higie & Feick, 1989; Kapferer & Laurent, 1993; McIntyre, 1989; Selin & Howard, 1988). According to Higie and Feick (1989), enduring involvement is defined as “an individual difference variable representing an arousal potential of a product or activity that causes personal relevance. Enduring involvement is intrinsically motivated by the degree to which the product or activity is related to the individual's self-image or the pleasure received from thoughts about or the use of product or engaging in an activity” (p. 690).<sup>1</sup> Although involvement in a Turnerian sense can be understood as active, in situ participation, this definition allows for a broader conceptualisation, one that does not necessarily require participants to physically be present at a dance event. And yet, one has to acknowledge the corporeal aspect of rave culture. To be(come) immersed, one has to have

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<sup>1</sup> This idea chimes with discussions about the persistence of drug taking and its relationship to pleasure (see, for example, Williams, 2013)

experienced the ‘vibe’ on the dance floor . Here, thoughts about the activity have to be linked to memory – muscular and otherwise. It means that, although involvement with an activity could take place in the absence of participation, the pleasure that derives from experiencing the aforementioned immersion has to have been felt. This is particularly important for members of the original rave scene who grew up ‘analogue’. Although social media and virtual platforms might be used to keep in touch with geographically disparate members of the scene, dance (or the memory thereof) is the defining element of this cohort. In Britain, going to a rave would often be the only opportunity to hear the new electronic music from abroad, so music and dance have to be understood as forming a crucial part of the formation of these ‘analogue’ communities. Music cultures that have been discussed with regard to their ageing participants include Northern Soul (Smith, 2009, 2012), Goths (Hodkinson, 2011, 2013), Punks (Bennett, 2006; Davies, 2006; Tsitsos, 2013), and Breakdancing (Fogarty, 2013). Research on the rave community as an ageing youth culture is sparse, mainly qualitative, and relies on small sample sizes (Anderson, 2009; Bennett, 2013; Goulding & Shankar, 2004; Goulding et al., 2010; Gregory, 2009, 2012). However, it offers some useful insights. At the heart of scholarly work on the ageing rave community, if not all ageing youth cultures, seems to be the question of compatibility/incompatibility of youthful practices with the ageing body, mind and life priorities. For the purpose of this article, we selected three relevant studies that used small samples from across the UK, and discuss their findings in relation to transitions to adulthood. Two studies were conducted between 2003 and 2006 (Goulding et al. do not provide that information), and the age in all three ranged from 20 to 55 years.

Bennett (2013) found that ageing ravers had negotiated a continued, yet modified, participation in their scene whilst also being employed, married and/or parents. Bennett (2006) defines this continued commitment as part of a lifestyle choice which needs managing in order to

harmoniously coexist with other demands placed on the ageing raver. Such lifestyle management includes a regular assessment of priorities, a realistic prediction of the sustainability of behaviors, and the impact of practices on other aspects of a person's lifestyle. Bennett's (2013) definition of 'sustainable fun' (p. 98) that is practiced by ageing ravers follows the principle of self-regulation rather than hedonism, and includes a sensible consumption of drugs. Many of the people he interviewed were also involved in the organization of events. He hypothesizes that, "as with more commodified club-based dance party events, the typical representation of the Free Party scene suggests that this is sustained largely by those whose lives are not bound by the strictures of full-time employment, regular working hours, and the demands and responsibilities that come with this" (p. 99). Here, Bennett focusses on core members that sustain a scene by being highly committed. As a result, employment status and area of work can be understood as lifestyle choices in the same way as the continued participation in dance culture is. Finally, Bennett notices an "increased tolerance towards the inclusion of families and children within the dance party scene" (p. 100), pointing towards intergenerational communication about leisure practices, lifestyle choices and inclusivity.

Contrary to Bennett, Goulding et al. (2002) state that, "rave culture is primarily the domain of the 'unattached'" (p. 269). Although the older participants of their study also continue to go clubbing, Goulding et al. argue that they do so because they do not have children and "energies were focused on other priorities" (p. 269). From their perspective, the aim of continued participation in clubbing is to extend youth and delay key life course events such as settling down and having children. This position is confirmed by Goulding and Shankar (2004) when they argue that the ravers who feel young at heart "have deferred or rejected traditional age-related commitments such as marriage and children in favour of a more leisure-centred life-



style” (p. 643). This reading suggests an incompatibility with being in a settled relationship and being a parent, and a continued engagement in rave culture. They go on to argue that although their clubbers do not have family commitments, their professions and careers require them to self-regulate their drug consumption, similar to the clubbers in Bennett’s (2013) study.

Gregory’s (2013) study focused on women who identified themselves to no longer be active ravers, but might not yet have fully lapsed in their behavior (p. 39). This reference to an active raver identity is of relevance here, as the distinction between the ravers is not based on their participation but their self-identity as being actively involved. In Gregory’s study, this active involvement is directly linked to its display/representation through clothing, youthfulness and in the form of ‘pretty’ raver stereotypes. Some of the women’s change of identity took place despite continuing to attend rave events, and this change could potentially be explained by the change of arousal potential (see enduring involvement) clubbing or the desire for it. Gregory, however concludes that it is impossible for women to continue to actively participate in rave culture because of forms of social control. She goes on to argue that parenthood is gendered and that the role of a responsible caregiver falls to the mother. Therefore, when women become mothers, they no longer actively engage with club scenes. Moreover, Gregory shows that women are aware of their gendered roles, particularly in response to expected life course events. In her study, women stopped consuming drugs because they had “concerns that rave-related drug use – as compared to that of their male partners – has directly affected their abilities to conceive (healthy) babies in the future” (p. 42). And yet, the same women reported that they had met fellow ageing ravers whose sensible drug use would not impact negatively on their lives. For women to resist social control mechanisms that are framed through morality is presented here as a question of choice and the women in Gregory’s study chose to mainly desist from clubbing once they were planning to start a family or became a parent.

What unites these studies is their focus on transitions to adulthood, such as, employment, settled intimate relationships and parenthood, to explain persistence with, or desistance from, clubbing. For Bennett (2013), the attainment of adult roles leads to modified participation in club scenes. Gregory (2013) highlights the gendered nature of parenthood which constrains women's clubbing practices, whilst Goulding and Shankar (2004) emphasize the importance of adult transitions, arguing that some clubbers delay these in order to continue to participate in the clubbing scene. The general view is that drug taking and clubbing will decline or desist with age and this is connected to transitions to adulthood.

Despite this general constraint, for a minority, drug taking, and as we shall argue, clubbing, persist beyond the traditional age associated with desistance. Recent government statistics from England and Wales show how overall regular drug use has been decreasing since the millennium. However, there has been a general upward trend for older adults (aged 40-59) (Lader, 2015). Their drug taking is persisting at higher rates than before. Williams and Askew (2016) argue that this is partly explained by a cohort replacement effect, which has seen the young people of the 1990s who were the most drug involved generation ever – a generation from which our sample is drawn - take their drug consumption with them into older adulthood. This is confirmed in all three studies discussed earlier (Bennett, 2013; Goulding et al., 2002; Gregory, 2013).

A further explanation is offered by drawing on developmental and life course criminology (see Laub & Sampson, 2003; Nagin & Farrington, 1991), as well as drugs research (see, for example, Kandel, Yamaguchi, & Chen, 1992). Persistence of any behavior, be that offending or drug taking, is predicted by past involvement in it. Furthermore, Kandel et al. (1992) argue

that early onset during adolescence and frequency of drug use are strong predictors of persistence. Mintel (2006) provides evidence that a number of people continue to engage with club culture beyond adolescence. Their classification of clubbers according to age show that around 19% of 35-44 year olds and circa 16% of 45-54 year olds consider themselves hardcore/occasional clubbers (go out at least every month) or sporadic clubbers (go out on special occasions). A similar picture emerges from Mintel's data in 2008.

Perspectives that assert that crime or drug taking are adolescence-limited account for continued involvement in these behaviors beyond the traditional age associated with desistance, as deviant behavior. In the absence of transitions to adulthood, bonds to society, which can lead to conformity, are weakened (see Laub & Sampson, 2003; Matza, 1964). Persistence across the life course is explained as a result of a lack of informal social controls, via, for instance, marriage or employment, and an absence of social support in a person's life. Although we agree these may account for the persistence of deviant behaviors for some people, Williams (2013) also found that many of her sample continued to take drugs despite having achieved many transitions to adulthood.

Drawing on insights from cultural studies, life course criminology and social science drugs research, we offer a new understanding of the persistence of engagement in leisure activities such as raving and clubbing.

## **Methods**

An online survey was designed<sup>2</sup> to record our participants' engagement with the original rave and clubbing scene of Greater Manchester. It mainly consisted of closed questions and collected demographic information<sup>3</sup>; data about respondents' lives and their experience of raving during Britain's "acid house revolution" (between 1985 and 1995) and also their clubbing experiences at the time they completed the survey in 2016. Data about the sample's experience of raving during the period 1985-95 is retrospective and therefore subject to the vagaries of accurate recall. It is difficult to know whether these data have been under or over-estimated. The survey was administered via the Lapsed Clubber Project Facebook group, a public group that was created in October 2015 as part of a wider project on ageing ravers. Its membership is linked to knowledge of or participation in public engagement activities that were reported on in the local and national press. The members of the Lapsed Clubber Project group are mainly ageing ravers who still show an interest in rave and club culture, and many of them continue to be actively involved. After piloting the survey in February 2016, it was accessible to potential respondents for eight months from March to October 2016. Our sample is self-selecting based on participation in the Manchester rave scene between 1985 and 1995. A convenience sample of 276 respondents was achieved. One respondent who was aged 29 has been excluded from our analyses, as it is unlikely they participated in the Manchester rave scene during this period, especially since they were only born in 1987. We recognize that the sample generated is not representative and this has an impact on how we can interpret some of the findings. For example, later we report that engagement in the original rave scene does not appear to have negatively impacted upon the adult transitions our sample told us they had made. However, it is possible that our sampling strategy has not allowed us to capture those who have not been as successful in this regard and instead our sample reflects a relatively high

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<sup>2</sup> The survey was designed by the first author who has been collecting data about lapsed clubbers since 2015. The second author became involved in the study at the data analysis stage.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, data about ethnicity was not collected.

functioning group of original ravers. The data generated has been inputted, cleaned and analyzed using SPSS.

Table 1 below presents data relating to gender and age of the sample. Gender is evenly balanced with just over half (51.8%) being male. One respondent identified as transgender. Age (n=275) is quite evenly distributed, although slightly skewed towards the lower ages<sup>4</sup>, and ranged from 35 to 61 (mean = 44.31; median = 44; mode = 43; SD = 4.10). Forty-two percent of the sample were born in Greater Manchester. By 1995, 91.9% of those who were not born in Greater Manchester were living in the area. Table 4 below details the transitions to adulthood achieved by 2016. Almost half (48.4%) of the sample had been educated to higher education level and 16.0% to A/A-S Level/Diploma level. A further 28.0% had completed a professional qualification. The majority (93.1%) are employed with a quarter (26.1%) being self-employed. Small proportions were either unemployed, retired or studying. The most common sectors of employment were as managers or directors (21.9%) or working in the arts, media or cultural industries (16.0%), teaching and education (15.6%) or health and social care (13.3%). Almost half (41.3%) of the sample are married, a quarter are in a long-term relationship (25.7%), with just over a fifth (22.5%) being single. The remainder are either divorced or separated. Nearly two thirds (63.0%) are parents. Women (65.2%) are slightly more likely to be parents than men (60.8%). These data indicate that the sample have negotiated many of the transitions associated with adulthood.

**Table 1: Comparison of gender and age of lapsed clubbers, current clubbers and the overall sample**

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<sup>4</sup> This is to be expected, especially because the rave scene was at its peak from the early 1990s to 1995.

	<b>Lapsed clubbers (%) (n=88)</b>	<b>Current clubbers (%) (n=188)</b>	<b>Overall sample (%) (n=276)</b>
<i>Gender:</i>			
Female	47.7	47.9	47.1
Male	51.1	52.1	51.8
Transgender	1.1	0.0	1.1
<i>Mean age</i>	44.36	44.28	44.31
<i>Range</i>	35-61	36-56	35-61
<i>Standard deviation</i>	4.805	3.739	4.098

In their report on nightclubs, Mintel (2006, online) categorized the market into current hardcore clubbers (3%), regular clubbers (12%), sporadic clubbers (25%), lapsed clubbers (36%), and people who have never visited a nightclub (25%). Our analysis of the data relating to our sample's current engagement with the clubbing scene allowed us to identify two groups of participants: 1) *lapsed clubbers* - those who reported they no longer frequented nightclubs, which comprised almost a third (31.9%) of our sample; and 2) *current clubbers* who reported attending nightclubs at least once per year making up just over two-thirds (68.9%) of our sample (see Table 3 below). This classification of current engagement with the clubbing scene has been developed from other research which categorizes current or recent drug takers as those who have consumed a drug in the past 12 months (see Aldridge et al., 2011). Crucially, even though a fifth of current clubbers indicated they go clubbing once per year, they did not identify as lapsed clubbers, suggesting they intend to continue to engage with this scene. These categories are used to analyze the data we present in the following section. They allow us to

assess the frequency of past and present engagement in clubbing scenes, as well as how transitions to adulthood influence this, and drug taking practices. The distributions of gender (see Table 1) are very similar for these two groups, and also mirror those of the wider sample. Similarly, the mean ages are almost identical, and again reflect that of the wider sample. However, the age range for lapsed clubbers is larger, as is the standard deviation, with the oldest lapsed clubber being 61 years.

## **Results**

Our findings indicate that clubbing and drug taking go hand-in-hand. Almost all the sample reported taking illegal drugs when raving and clubbing between 1985 and 1995. Only four percent (n=276), 11 respondents, were drug abstainers and reported never taking drugs during this time or in 2016. It is not known, however, if they did take drugs during the intervening years. Drug abstainers were more likely to be lapsed clubbers and female. By 2016, the proportion of current drug takers, those who had taken a drug at least once in the past 12 months, was 61.2 percent. Current clubbers (73.4%) are far more likely to be current drug takers compared to lapsed clubbers (42.0%). Over time, drug taking patterns changed. The top five drugs typically consumed when the sample went raving or clubbing between 1985 and 1995 in order, were: MDMA/Ecstasy, amphetamines, cannabis, LSD and amyl nitrate. By 2016, cocaine topped the table of drugs consumed followed by MDMA/Ecstasy, cannabis, magic mushrooms and amphetamines. The sample was asked about the frequency of their drug taking in 2016 (see Table 2). Because of potential problems with recall, they were not asked about this for the period 1985-95. A fifth (20.4%) took drugs once per month or more. The most common frequency of drug taking was 2-6 times per year (30.8%). Lapsed clubbers who took drugs, did so less frequently than current clubbers. Almost twice as many current clubbers

take drugs 2-6 times per year (38.3%) or at least once per month (22.9%) compared to lapsed

clubbers (15.3% and 15.3% respectively).

<b>Frequency of drug taking</b>	<b>Lapsed clubbers (%) (n=85)</b>	<b>Current clubbers (%) (n=175)</b>	<b>Total (%) (N=260)</b>
No longer take drugs	60.0	28.6	38.6
Once a year	9.4	10.3	10.0
2-6 times per year	15.3	38.3	30.9
Once per month or more	15.3	22.9	20.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 2: Frequency of drug taking in 2016 by clubbing status**

*Frequency of raving*



Respondents were asked how often they went raving or clubbing during the period 1985-95 and in 2016. Table 3 demonstrates that the Manchester ravers of the late 1980s and early 1990s have not so much lapsed, but continue to go to nightclubs, albeit less frequently. Twenty to thirty years ago, when most of the sample were in their teens or early adulthood, the majority went to raves or nightclubs weekly (84.7%), which, according to Mintel (2006), corresponds with their category, hardcore ravers. Over half (55.1%) did so twice a week or for several days in a row every week. By 2016, almost a third (31.9%) of the sample are lapsed clubbers. When lapsed clubbers and current clubbers are compared in respect of their frequency of attending raves or nightclubs during 1985-95, there are some clear differences. Although similar proportions of lapsed and current clubbers attended raves or nightclubs on a weekly basis during the period 1985-95, current clubbers were more likely to do so for several days in a row every week. Since 1985-95, current clubbers have substantially reduced their frequency of clubbing. In 1985-95, 94.6 percent reported attending nightclubs at least fortnightly or weekly, only 2.1 percent do so in 2016. By 2016, current clubbers (86.7%) attend nightclubs mainly between 1-6 times per year.

### Table 3

Despite the reduction in the frequency of participation in post-rave dance events among our sample, in 2016, a remarkable 68.1% reported attending a nightclub at least once per year, with 9.1 percent doing so monthly. Although there was little to distinguish between gender and frequency of raving or clubbing during the period 1985-95, by 2016 there are some clear differences among current clubbers. Men (44.1%) are more likely to go clubbing 2-6 times per year compared to women (35.6%), whereas women (23.5%) are more likely to do so once a year compared to men (15.4%). Current clubbers were asked how they decide which clubbing

events to usually attend. Overwhelmingly, the type of music (59.4%) played at an event was important, followed by the venue (38.0%), whether friends were attending (35.9%), and who was performing (35.5%). Women were more likely to decide to go to these events if their friends were going. We now turn to explore the relationships between the clubbing status, frequency of clubbing and transitions to adulthood.

#### *The impact of transitions to adulthood upon clubbing status*

The proportions completing higher education (29.5% in 1995 when the mean age of the sample was approximately 23; 48.4% in 2016) or professional qualifications (5.8% in 1995; 28.0% in 2016) increased over time. As Table 4 illustrates, there is little difference in the educational achievements of lapsed and current clubbers. Table 4 also presents the adult transitions our sample have made in respect of employment, intimate relationships and parenthood. As noted earlier, the majority are employed. The differences between lapsed and current clubbers regarding being employed or retired are negligible. However, current clubbers are more likely to be self-employed (28.7%) than lapsed clubbers (20.5%), and lapsed clubbers (10.2%) are more likely to be unemployed than current clubbers (3.2%).

#### Table 4

There are, however, some clear differences in respect of clubbing status and intimate relationships. Lapsed clubbers are slightly more likely to be in a relationship (70.5%), either married or a long-term relationship, than current clubbers (65.5%). Conversely, almost twice as many current clubbers are divorced compared to lapsed clubbers. In respect of both clubbing status groups, males are more likely to be in a relationship than females and this was particularly the case for current clubbers (74.5% males versus 55.5% females). There is also a clear difference regarding clubbing status and parenthood. Lapsed clubbers (72.7%) are far

more likely to be parents than current clubbers (58.5%). Furthermore, lapsed clubbers who are parents are more likely to be female (78.6%) than male (66.7%). Yet, female and male current clubbers are equally likely to be parents. However, when the frequency of current clubbers' nightclub attendance in 2016 is analyzed, more than twice as many respondents who are not parents (20.5%) attended nightclubs monthly compared to those who are parents (8.2%). We also compared the frequency of clubbing in 2016 among current clubbers with their educational qualifications and employment statuses, however, there were no discernible differences. In the next section, we discuss our main findings and the implications of them.

We argue that for ageing ravers, clubbing and drug taking are closely associated. Furthermore, the persistence of raving is linked to the frequency of previous engagement with the original rave scene, the absence of adult roles, such as, being a parent or in a committed relationship, and being self-employed. Disengagement with the clubbing scene is partly determined by age, as well as adult roles as a partner in a committed relationship or a parent. Gender is important, those who no longer participate in club scenes who are parents, are more likely to be female.

## **Discussion**

The second summer of love in 1988 marked a moment in time in which acid house had reached the mainstream and a whole generation responded to this new kind of music. Rave culture became (in)famous for its dance events and its drugs. Although rave culture has contributed to the normalization of drugs in the past few decades (Measham, Aldridge, & Parker, 2001), little is known about those ravers 20 or 30 years on. Our survey of ageing ravers has allowed us to explore the transitions to adulthood they have made, the extent to which they still engage with clubbing and take drugs, and how their engagement with these events is impacted upon by their adult roles in respect of employment, intimate relationships and parenthood.

Over two-thirds of our sample continue to attend raves and club nights, albeit less frequently than in the past, which is to be expected, especially when the demands on adult lives are considered. The high proportion of current clubbers may be a result of our self-selecting sample contacted via a Facebook group for older ravers who continue to maintain an interest in club cultures and, as the data regarding their transitions to adulthood indicate, are relatively high functioning. The results show how current clubbers and lapsed clubbers went to raves frequently in their youth, but current clubbers did so for several days in a row, which offers support for the literature about persistence of behavior being linked to prior frequent involvement (see, for example, Kandel et al., 1992). This is significant with regard to the extent to which ravers are able to immerse themselves in an experience, as social and cultural norms that are linked to day/work and night/sleep are absent, and time is temporarily suspended. These conditions facilitate what some dance music scholars refer to as the liminal experience on the dance floor (Goulding & Shankar, 2011; Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010; Malbon, 1999; Melechi, 1993; St. John, 2006, 2010, 2015). Jaimangal-Jones et al. (2010) argue that ravers escape the everyday, whereas St. John (2015) discusses the liminal dance floor experience as a rite of passage. Understanding rave as a spectacle at which the dichotomy between audience and actor dissolves (Ott & Herman, 2003), helps to create a space in which ravers become less self-aware and start to experience that space on a communal level and to bond with other people, thus responding simultaneously to both notions of flow/liminality and community. The persistence of raving can be understood as a lifestyle choice that facilitates the development of a maturing identity (Hodkinson, 2013). We can conclude that if the level and intensity of engagement with a leisure practice in general is linked to persistence of that practice, we can start to predict such behaviors for a variety of other social leisure practices. Measuring enduring involvement as a way to quantify those predictions is one possibility, but it ignores the complex relationship between a person's participation and their social or physical

restrictions. If we consider leisure practices in response to life course events and age, a more detailed picture about people who continue to be involved emerges.

Our study confirms that rave and dance culture is strongly associated with drug consumption (Measham et al., 2001; Measham et al., 2011b; Ralphs, 2013; Winstock, Barratt, Ferris, & Maier, 2018). Policymakers often cast frequent and persistent drug taking as damaging and negatively impacting upon individual lives (see HM Government, 2017). In respect of our sample, despite their drug taking repertoires including the consumption of Class A drugs, the contrary is the case: the results show an upward social mobility in educational attainment, as well as many being employed, in committed intimate relationships and being parents. In respect of drug and life course journeys, Williams (2013) also found that her drug takers had negotiated many adult transitions as well as continuing to take drugs, albeit less frequently. This finding also appears logical when following Bennett's argument of a continued involvement in one's youth culture beyond adolescence to be understood as a lifestyle choice. Bennett (2013) discusses the level of self-discipline that is required in order for different aspects of an ageing raver's lifestyle to come together: "clubbing is thus regarded as merely one component of a meticulously coordinated lifestyle project in which each element is as important as the next in the maintenance of 'sustainable fun'" (p. 98). The same phenomenon is described by Askew (2016) as 'functional fun.' It can be concluded from our sample that drug taking is managed as carefully as other aspects of the ravers' lives, including their participation in club nights, and has allowed for life course events to not be delayed.

Employment status could also be interpreted as a lifestyle choice. A quarter of our sample is self-employed, but current clubbers are more likely to be self-employed than lapsed clubbers. The self-employment status of current clubbers may facilitate continued engagement in club

cultures as respondents may have more flexibility over their working hours allowing them to take time off work afterwards to recover from attending a nightclub and taking drugs and/or drinking alcohol. Nodding towards Bennett's (2013) claim that the scene is sustained by people who are not tied down by nine-to-five jobs, being self-employed would allow current clubbers to be more involved. Whether or not this is already the case cannot be ascertained by this study, and future research is needed to verify Bennett's claim.

Discussing the findings of the survey so far, persistence in clubbing is presented as a choice that clubbers make, which has had little impact upon life course events. However, as we have found, although many attained the roles associated with adulthood, adult roles can also constrain behavior and are determined by gender (see also Measham et al., 2011a). For some adult roles and responsibilities hampered participation in club cultures and gender played a clear role. Current clubbers are less likely to be parents than lapsed clubbers. Of those current clubbers who are parents, gender parity exists. However, when compared with current clubbers who were not parents, it was evident their parenthood status impacted upon the frequency in which they attended nightclubs. The role of parenthood also affected lapsed clubbers, especially females, who were more likely to be parents than their male counterparts. This finding corresponds with Gregory (2013) who argues that women feel pressured to conform with traditional ideas of motherhood and therefore disengage with clubbing scenes. Likewise, Williams (2013) has argued how the identity endowed with motherhood can constrain drug journeys. It is clear, nevertheless, that some clubbers continue to participate in club cultures despite being a parent and the leisure industry has begun to respond to this phenomenon. Recently, family-friendly raves have begun to emerge in Britain. Such events include Festival No. 6, Just So Festival, Big Fish Little Fish, or Tantrum family rave. They allow parents to continue to be involved in their music culture. Similar to Bennett's (2013) findings that show

how dance events are treated as family outings, family-friendly events not only facilitate intergenerational communication, but also help to destigmatize rave culture. The image of rave culture as a drug culture could be changed with a renewed focus on the music that is played at such events. Echoing St. John's (2008) description of clubbing as a community-forming activity, intergenerational dance events can facilitate such formations and allow younger participants to start a lasting (enduring) positive involvement.

Desistance is not necessarily the result of parenthood alone. As Williams (2013) has argued in relation to desistance from drug taking, it can be a consequence of the impact of a number of adult transitions creating more demands on adult's lives. Relationship status is one of the life course events that also appears to facilitate disengagement with clubbing scenes for lapsed clubbers. Marriage has been shown to be significant for desistance from drug use (Shiner, 2009). We can therefore hypothesize that this is the case for our sample. Lapsed clubbers were more likely to be married or in a committed relationship. It is possible they perceive being in a relationship as incompatible with rave culture. This view is also expressed by the clubbers in Goulding et al.'s (2010) research, in which clubbing was described as a cultural practice of the "unattached" (p. 269). Nevertheless, we also found that male current clubbers were more likely to be in a committed relationship than female current clubbers. Intimate relationships can therefore be important for persistence and desistance of behavior. As Williams (2013) has noted, persistence and desistance in respect of drug taking can be determined by intimate relationships and the drug status of partners within a relationship.

In 2019, it is 25 years since the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. Our survey with ravers who were part of the original scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s shows that, despite the criminalization of raves, people have continued to dance to music and take

drugs. It is important to point out how these practices have not had negative impacts on individual lives, as ecstasy moral panics suggested. Instead, many ageing ravers continue to be involved with the scene, as well as being employed, in committed relationships and parents. Moreover, they have made choices with regard to their lifestyles that facilitate an active involvement in the scene. It is a sign of ageing ravers finding meaning in the activities related to rave culture. Bennett (2013) suggests that ageing ravers could act as role models for the younger generation. By allowing access to rave culture, parents can facilitate intergenerational communication. Furthermore, he argues that age and experience have an impact on how older ravers organize parties. In fact, it “also acted on occasion as a convenient and effective deterrent against interventions from legal and other authoritative bodies” (p. 101). Perhaps this is an opportunity for ageing ravers to help destigmatize rave culture and club culture by precisely staying involved with the scene and lead by example.

The current data set has its limitations. With regard to enduring involvement, the survey did not establish to what extent lapsed clubbers considered their raving history as actively contributing to their self-image. Focusing on ravers who continue to go clubbing, lapsed clubbers were not considered to still be ‘involved’. Future research may establish to what extent original ravers continue to be involved, even if that means not attending club events, and how for those who do participate in the scene, their modes of involvement are informed by previous raving and clubbing experiences. In particular, it would be interesting to see whether ageing ravers continue to engage in the same way as before or whether they have somehow moderated or adapted their behavior. Based on Hodkinson’s (2013) assertion that ageing participants in youth cultures negotiate their commitment, one would expect a form of behavior that facilitates ‘sustainable fun’ (Bennett, 2013). . Further research is needed to establish why many people who are in relationships do not engage with rave culture and the gendered nature of this



relationship, which allows for some men to continue to do so. At a time when academic debate is in some subjects moving from a subcultural framework, which aimed to situate rave culture in opposition to a 'mainstream culture' to a more subjective, post-modern, experience-based investigation, interdisciplinary research can help us to understand the motivations, values and beliefs of groups of people better (see, for example, Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004; Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). Following on from the research undertaken for this article, we need to investigate to what extent raving, clubbing and dancing add to a person's physical and mental wellbeing. Such research can only be successful if it is interdisciplinary.

### **Conclusion**

This quantitative study of ageing ravers' participation in their respective youth culture provides further evidence of the growing trend that youth cultures are "ageing." Youth cultures whose existence was previously explained by their opposition to adult culture are changing because members of those communities continue to engage with that culture beyond their adolescence. What we know about ageing ravers' behaviors and motivations is largely based on small-scale qualitative studies. In this article, we have presented quantitative evidence by analyzing and discussing the results of an online survey (n=275). Based on the evidence, we are able to articulate patterns of participation in raves and club nights. Through the adoption of theories of crime and drug taking, we offer new insights into the persistence of engagement with leisure activities. Not only do we show that such activities are not adolescence limited, but we also argue that the persistence of leisure practices, such as raving, can be understood in the same way as persistence of drug use: frequent behavior in adolescence or young adulthood determines persistence in older adulthood. At the same time, we find evidence that life course events such as intimate relationship status and parenthood constrain participation in club

cultures in older adulthood. We suggest that leisure practices can be predicted, which will impact on the way we understand, provide and evaluate leisure. On the one hand, measures of enduring involvement, from both a social and a psychological perspective help to understand people's investment in a leisure activity (see, for example, McGinnis, Gentry, & Gao, 2008). Theories of immersion, flow and communitas can be quantified through such approach. On the other hand, theories of persistence and desistance take into consideration changes of involvement in club scenes in relation to life course events. A continued participation/enduring involvement may be influenced by the nature of the leisure practice in question and the demands it places on adult lives, as well as the pleasure associated with it. Changes in self-image and a maturing identity, as well as ageing bodies, have to be taken into account when discussing ageing ravers and their commitment to the electronic dance music scene.

In addition, an argument can be made for the leisure market to further facilitate parents and families. There is, for example, space for event organizers to tailor events to ageing ravers. Their commitments to work and/or family have an impact on their drug taking, and ageing ravers could help to change the public perception of rave culture. Designated events for ageing ravers would also help to start break down the belief that raving is a pastime reserved only for younger people. Whether the continued engagement in rave culture is framed as a desperate attempt to extend one's youth, or whether being involved in rave culture is part of a carefully designed lifestyle, ageing ravers will continue to contribute to and shape the current clubbing scene – behind the decks, as organizers and promoters, or on the dance floor.

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