Dancing Politics:
Connecting Women’s Experiences of Rave in Toronto to Ageism and Patriarchy

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ABSTRACT

Based on a critical analysis of recent Canadian and British media, academic, and political representations of rave, in conjunction with the author’s and ten female interviewees’ past experiences as active rave participants, the purpose of this thesis is to show the ways that rave can be understood as political. Drawing on a post-structural understanding of politics, which understands macro social issues and micro personal experiences as intimately linked and inseparable, this thesis fills a gap in the existing rave literature by explicitly drawing out (a) the ways that active rave participation is entangled in dominant understandings of age and gender-appropriate activities, and (b) the implications that these entanglements have on the ways that some women experience and construct their past active rave participation. Specifically, the author examines the ways that age and gender intersect and inform the discourses on which research participants drew to describe and rationalize their experiences of becoming, being, and ceasing to be active rave participants in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. At the same time that the majority of research participants’ introductions to rave followed heterosexualized and heteronormative patterns, they also constructed active rave participation as a way to challenge popular representations of rave as an inappropriate activity, especially for young women. When rationalizing the cessation of their active rave participation, however, these women reproduced depictions of rave participation as a transitory and juvenile phase where older women are particularly misplaced. The various ways that these women simultaneously challenged, experienced, and facilitated dominant ageist and patriarchal discourses about who does and does belong in rave are interpreted as evidence that micro rave experiences cannot be divorced from macro discriminatory discourses, and that “the personal is political.”
Chapter One: Locating the Author in Rave

To say that ‘everything is political’ is to recognize the omnipresence of relations of force and their immanence to a political field; [...] it is to set oneself the barely sketched task of unravelling this indefinite tangled skein.

— (Foucault 1979: 72)

Since 1994 I have been a rave enthusiast, participant, and researcher. Over the past twelve years, I have gone from listening to electronic music with female friends, to dating an older male deejay and going to my first rave events, to attending raves regularly with a girl friend to find solace from a broken heart, and finally, to relinquishing my active participation to study rave within the academy. During my period of most active rave participation – from the spring of 1999 until the summer of 2000 – I spent most weekends and some weeknights losing myself in the “vibes” created in Toronto-area after-hours clubs/spaces.¹ Since 2002, I have spent a lot of time contemplating these experiences in relation to some of the subculture and rave literature.

My examination of the rave literature has led to the realization that questions about the political and resistant qualities of rave participation often are entangled with binary representations of rave as either a liberating subculture or as a co-opted mainstream club culture. Thinking through my past rave participation in relation to the subculture literature leads me to conclude that not much has changed since Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1991 [1975]) argued that women’s experiences are often omitted from accounts of cultural activities. Women continue to be marginalized in terms of participation in, and representations of, contemporary sub and club cultures – including rave. To address some of the problems with simplistic and partial readings of rave, and to contribute to ongoing debates about the political characteristics and implications of membership in youth subcultures, in general, and women’s rave participation in Toronto, in particular, I elected to interview ten women about their movements in, through,

¹ In Chapter Five I discuss the use of the term “vibe” to describe intense feelings of being connected to the lights, drugs, music, and/or participants at particular rave events.
and past active rave participation in Toronto. As I spoke with my ten research participants about their rave-related experiences, discourses of age and gender emerged as significant influences in shaping their stories about becoming, being, and ceasing to be active rave enthusiasts. These women’s stories, in conjunction with my own personal and academic understandings of rave, informed my central research question: *in what ways can rave be understood as political?*

When scholars interrogate the political and social significance of rave, their focus tends to be on “Politics” with a capital “P” (for example, Thornton 1995). Some scholars ask: have ravers ever organized in a way that *directly* challenged governmental policies (for example, Wilson 2006), and can rave be understood as a social movement (for example, Carrington and Wilson 2001)? Still others speak of ravers’ social activism as political yet “subconscious” insofar as their styles of dress, music, dance, and drugs may be interpreted as evidence of a rejection of social norms, and resistance to “the highly codified [read sexualized] wardrobes of the club world” (McCall 2001: 140). In fact, there are a few documented examples of Toronto-area ravers rallying against proposed laws that would restrict their rights to dance in particular time/spaces (for example, Hier 2002; McCall 2001, Wilson 2006); however, I suggest that the political significance of rave participation can be found at deeper, more subtle, and fundamental levels than *some* ravers’ social activism.

Despite popular claims that rave has very little to do with “real” politics, I argue that *interviewees’ descriptions of moving in, through, and out of active rave participation are deeply embedded in political discourses about what it means to be aged and gendered subjects.* For example, in Chapter Two I explain that the prevalence of media and academic discourses that

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2 The term “discourse” is used here according to Sara Mills’ (2004) understanding that “discourses are sanctioned statements which have some institutionalised force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think” and understand themselves and others (55). According to this view, people’s understandings of themselves and others are continuously shaped by, and shape, discourses in such a way that we are in a constant state of creating and recreating ourselves and others as specifically located subjects.
represent rave spaces as nothing more than hedonistic playgrounds for “deviant” and “naïve” youth do nothing to uncover my finding that at the same time that my ten female interviewees and I construct rave as offering a much needed escape from everyday social pressures, we also experienced raves as spaces where discriminations related to age and gender abound. Before I outline my specific findings, below I situate my project in relation to my academic and political understandings of subcultural participation in general, and my own and interviewees’ rave participation in Toronto more specifically.

Rewind: Locating the (Academic) Text

In an effort to challenge interpretations of deviant activities – often conflated with subcultural participation – as resulting from individual actors’ inherent physiological, pathological and/or physical deficiencies (for example, Lombroso-Ferrero 1972 [1911]; see also, Lombroso and Ferrero 1958; Lombroso and Ferrero 2004), some early Chicago School (CS) sociologists hypothesized that urban areas with high rates of crime and deviance are characterized by social disorganization (for example, Park 1915; Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1925; Thrasher 1927; Shaw and McKay 1942). This re-conception of “deviance” as emanating from one’s social environment (as opposed to personal or biological characteristics) may have been an attempt to exonerate individuals of equations between “deviance” and “illness.” Nevertheless, as later CS scholars pointed out, this explanation only transplants “illness” at the micro individual level to a larger scale – stigmatizing and condemning not only the individual, but also her/his social environment. To counter such (mis)understandings, in the second half of the twentieth century, second-wave CS scholars like Howard Becker (1953, 1963) began to re-conceptualize “deviance” as a social construction and “deviant” activities as evidence of diverse ways of living in the world (see also, Cohen 1972; Fine 1995). Deviant acts, thus, were re-
interpreted not as irrational, hedonistic, or disorganized, but instead as alternative lifestyle choices made by individuals without the authority or “power to make knowledge consequential with respect to their own and collective needs” (Giroux 2002: 7; see also, Orcutt 1983).

Beginning in the 1970s, scholars working from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Britain re-worked the CS hypothesis that deviant subcultural participation is “normal behaviour in the face of particular social circumstances” to focus more directly on class status as the predictor of subcultural membership (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 5). Counter to arguments at the time that improvements in the socio-economic status of British youth following the Second World War meant that class boundaries would soon disappear, CCCS scholars argued that class struggles do not dissolve with increased purchasing power. According to this perspective, augmented economic independence and the development of a youth-targeted consumer market might mean that (British) youth can now symbolically purchase middle and upper-class identities, but it does nothing to alter larger, structural “problems which at the concrete material level remain unsolved” (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 6). Rather than signifying a classless society, CCCS theorists argued that young people’s subcultural activities represent working-class resistance to unjust socio-economic conditions (Bennett 2000).

This tendency for CCCS scholars to theorize subcultural activities necessarily as illustrations of youthful working-class resistance is often criticized for producing stereotypical and partial representations of participants and their activities. There are six major critiques of CCCS works that inform my research and which emphasize the need for researchers to explore the reasons for, and influences of, cultural participation in the lives of people who fall outside of the strict categories of white, male, working-class, British youth.3 Firstly, as mentioned, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1975 [1991]) argue that CCCS scholars ignore women’s

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3 I heavily rely on Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris (2004) for this overview.
particularly located subcultural experiences. Secondly, David Muggleton (2000) criticizes the CCCS focus on *working-class* resistance as presupposing participation of poor youth and denying the reality that many middle and upper class citizens also have participated in post-war “subcultural” activities. Thirdly, Andy Bennett (2000) argues that to deny the possibility that some people are involved in “subcultural” activities for fun, and not as any means of resistance, is to ignore “the meanings and intentions [of] young people themselves” (22). Fourthly, Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris (2004) point out that CCCS scholars often prioritize sensational cultural activities without addressing the reality that most people grow up without ever having belonged to a particular group, gang, or subculture. Fourthly, CCCS works have been criticized for being too particular to post-war Britain, and thus, inapplicable to youth activities outside of the UK (Waters in Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004). Finally, the argument has been made that CCCS scholars tend to ignore *youth* as a primarily discursive category, denying the likelihood that many people retain *youthful* characteristics and ideologies well into their adult years (for example, Bennett 2006).

A common thread that flows through these critiques of CCCS works is that to conceive of any activity or group of people as “subcultural” (often conflated with “youthful”) is naïve and flawed. Such a conception, it is argued, stagnates people into cohesive and categorical groupings based on their perceived similarities and denies the likelihood that people who participate in similar “subcultural” practices are diverse and that their actions and identities are not restricted to any one “subcultural” affiliation or age cohort (for example, Muggleton 2000; Bennett 2006). The argument that people's participation in, and affiliations with, cultural activities are multiple, ephemeral, fleeting and continuous informs many contemporary scholars' use of terms such as

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4 Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris (2004) explain that this critique is based on the works included in Geoff Mungham and Geoff Pearson's (1976) edited volume, *Working Class Youth Culture*, in which they focus on some of the unspectacular, everyday actions of British youth.
club culture (for example, Redhead 1990; Thornton 1995), neo-tribe (for example, Malbon 1999; Bennett 1999a), or lifestyle (for example, Bennett 2006; Chaney 2001) rather than subculture (see also, Blackman 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2005). What these post-subcultural approaches share in common is the belief, as Steve Redhead (1990) explains, that post-industrialization has had two main consequences in terms of people’s cultural activities: (1) people, perhaps especially young people, have increasing amounts of unstructured free time, and (2) this abundance of time has culminated in the emergence of “new type[s] of ‘clubbing culture[s]’,,” which do not restrict participation according to age, class, race and/or gender divisions (11).

The above post-subcultural critique that conceptions of subcultures are outdated draws out the view that most people’s commitments and ties to their leisure activities are unstable, or at least that people are not bounded by any one leisure activity. Following my research however, I find it difficult wholeheartedly to extend this argument to theorizations about rave participation. I agree that it is naïve to conceive of rave as a subculture because rave scenes have spawned around the world, transcending age, gender, sexual, racial, and class differences, but my own and interviewees’ past rave participation in Toronto were very much influenced by some of these same “structural” divisions – notably, age and gender. Thus, while theoretically we may be able to argue that contemporary dance and club cultures abolish “structural factors such as class, race and gender as the dance floor crowd [becomes] collectively immersed in the club experience” (Redhead 1990: 11; see also, Malbon 1999), my thesis research reveals that some people’s experiences of moving into, through, and past active rave participation are shaped by age and

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5 I place quotations around “structural” because I understand age and gender – like all categories of identity – to be fluid discursive constructions – not stagnant realities, as the term “structural” suggests. An in-depth examination of this debate is not within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is important at least to note that while these categories are often discussed as inherent and unchangeable structural “realities” (i.e. you are a male or a female; you are young or old; you are heterosexual or homosexual), following thinkers like Judith Butler (1993), I disagree with such assessments. These categories may enter into people’s senses of self as gendered and racialized subjects, for example, but subjectivity is also a matter of how people engage with and enact these categories and discourses (see also, Chapter Seven).
gender, which themselves intersect with people’s time and money constraints, geographical locations, ability, sexuality, racial, and ethnic differences.6

In my three analysis chapters I examine in depth some of the ways that age and gender emerged as significant influences in my own and interviewees’ stories about becoming, being, and ceasing to be active rave participants in Toronto. For example, I explain that attending rave events was something many of us once did with our closest female friends, and something that connected many of us both to these friends and to our respective, and often older, male partners. At times, we all constructed our past rave participation as a way to resist normative gender and age-related social constraints, and for many of us, Toronto’s rave scene was something to which we felt we belonged. Indeed, we all tended to understand this sense of belonging as positively affecting our self-identities in ways that continue to shape our current relationships and values.

For me, during my period of most active participation, rave offered an avenue for self-expression, an opportunity to feel part of a community, and a way to escape academic and employment pressures. Over the course of the past two years, my experiences within Toronto’s rave scene have also become a site of important social scientific analysis. As such, it would be irresponsible and dishonest of me to focus solely on the ways that my rave participation allowed me to feel liberated and to omit the more negative experiences that I and my research participants have had during our active years of rave participation: from stigmatization as a “drug addict,” to sexual harassment, and the reproduction of sexist and ageist discriminations. At times I offer very pessimistic readings of rave’s political significance. Nevertheless, as you read the next six chapters, please remember one participant’s explanation that within Toronto’s rave scene

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6 In Chapters Four and Five I explore some of ways that these categories of difference emerged as significant themes when I spoke with interviewees about past active rave participation in Toronto. My main focus throughout this thesis is on the ways that age and gender are discussed and constituted by interviewees, however. This is because these discourses emerged most prominently in our conversations.
I have experienced some of the lowest points in my life, but I have [also] experienced some of the highest points in my life [...] There is a dark side to it but there's also so much positive from it [...] Be open-minded about it and try not to stereotype [...] based on] what [you] just hear in the media. (Grrrl)

Fast Forward: Foreshadowing Rave's Political Implications

I am reminded of the stigma associated with being an active rave participant each time I am asked the dreaded question: “so what is your research about?” It took me some time to become comfortable with the patronizing stares I often receive from people who suddenly think they get me when I refer to the political aspects of rave. The two most common ways that people have responded to my research are: (a) to laugh and ask if I think raves really are political, or (b) immediately to assume that by political, I must mean drug (ab)use and legislation. On these occasions, it seems to me, I have been judged according to these people’s preconceived assumptions about what my being a “raver” says about my values – or lack thereof. This hostility also seems to me to be informed by a narrow definition of political – one that equates politics only with legislative bodies and macro-level social issues, or “Politics” with a capital “P”.

The definition of political that informs this project does not draw an unbridgeable divide between macro-level social issues and micro-level personal troubles, however. Instead, following C. Wright Mills' (1959) Sociological Imagination, I argue that it is problematic and faulty to distinguish between “troubles [,] which occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his [sic] immediate relations with others” and “issues [that] have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his [sic] inner life” (8).

In this benchmark work, Mills urges scholars from all disciplines to dismantle this distinction because, as he argues, “no study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey” (6). Mills argues that only those scholars who uncover – or at least imagine – intersections between
micro personal biographies and macro social histories can successfully produce research that is both intellectually and politically stimulating (12). This understanding of the development of a "sociological imagination," in conjunction with the well-known feminist adage that "the personal is political," drives my interpretation of my own and interviewees' experiences and representations of age and gender-related discriminations within rave as both responses to, and evidence of, more socially embedded gender and age-related inequities – thus, as political.

During the conversations I had with ten female past active rave participants, my understanding of the political aspects of rave participation swelled to include – much to my own and interviewees' bewilderment – not only the ways that rave does not escape dominant ageist and sexist discourses and experiences, but also the ways that it may be entangled in reproductions of these same discriminatory discourses and experiences. In the following pages I draw out links between rave participation and drug use, sexual assault, ageism, and patriarchal social relations. These often embedded aspects of rave are discussed in light of a broadly Focaultian reading of power [and thus, resistance] as a thoroughly entangled bundle of exchanges dispersed 'everywhere' through society, as comprising a 'micro-physical' or 'capillary' geography of linkages, intensities and frictions, and as thereby not being straightforwardly in the 'service' of any one set of peoples, institutions or movements. (Sharp, Routledge, Philo and Paddison 2000: 20)

From my understanding, the above description of the intricate sources of power – much like Mills' (1959) *Sociological Imagination* – can be read as a critique of established structural and interactionist understandings of the relationships between macro-level social structures and micro-level social processes insofar as social structure theorists tend to conceive of young subcultural participants as victims of structural oppressions such as inequitable distributions of wealth (for example, Merton 1968), and social process theorists tend to focus on the ways that our day-to-day interactions may lead to the acquisition of non-conformist and/or resistant values, which then may lead to subcultural membership (for example, Sutherland 1939, 1940).
Entrenched in the above elementary summaries of structural-functionalist and interactionist explanations of subcultural participation are difficult causal discussions about the interactions between structure and agency, where *structures* are equated with *causes* and *processes* are equated with *effects*. This is to say that structural discussions about why people join "subcultures" are often couched in explanations of their being oppressed by their locations along axes of age, race, and gender, for example – locations conceived of as unchangeable "realities" or "forces," as structures and not as morphing discourses. On the other hand, social process theorists usually describe subcultural participation in relation to people's interactions within their respective subcultural arenas and the ways that these interactions/actions attempt to resist oppressive structures/powers. As I explain throughout this thesis, in light of my understandings of power and resistance as ever-present at all levels of society, and my conception of our "realities," structures, and interactions as socially and discursively constructed, I consider both interpretations to be partial because a singular focus on *either* structural power *or* micro processes of power/resistance fails to acknowledge the interplays between structure and agency. Neither model adequately explores how the meanings and experiences people attribute to their subcultural affiliations and social locations are constituted. Nor does either model offer adequate explanations of the relationships between these meanings and larger processes of meaning-making (i.e. the discursive construction of particular subject locations/structures).

This failure to excavate links between individual experiences of a phenomenon (i.e. rave) and larger social issues (i.e. ageism and sexism) equates to a failure to produce studies that point to the political nature of everyday life (Mills 1959). This absence is apparent in rave scholarship insofar as scholars mainly focus on *active* participation without interrogating the various structural and personal factors that sometimes lead people into and out of active rave
participation, and which provide participants with both opportunities for resistance and limits to that same resistance. This is to say that rave scholars rarely acknowledge the complexities of how and why people’s reasons for rave participation may shift “at different points in their subcultural careers” (Wilson 2002: 376). Nor do they offer tentative links between such shifts and broader understandings of people’s entanglements in both dominating power and resisting power and discourses (Sharp, Routledge, Philo, and Paddison 2000). Continuing to draw on my own and interviewees’ personal, academic, and political readings of rave, in the chapters that follow, I maintain that rave spaces are

sites where resistance is never a complete, unfractured practice, but [...] ones where practices of resistance always become entwined in some manner with practices of domination such as marginalisation, segregation or imposed exile [particularly as women ‘age’... they are] sutured and structured by intersecting and interwoven spatialities of power, whether this is primarily power from above (dominating), power from below (resisting) or even power from within (spiritual). (Sharp, Routledge, Philo, and Paddison 2000: 30)

Play: Structure and Main Argument

To reiterate, there are three main reasons why I elected to talk to ten women about their experiences of moving in, through, and past active rave participation in Toronto. First, it is an attempt to add to the scant amount of literature about Canadian rave experiences. Second, it is a response to Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber’s (1991 [1975]) call for scholars to make room for women’s subcultural experiences to be heard and valued. Finally, it is an attempt to expand narrow definitions of political in ways that connect people’s everyday actions and experiences to processes of power and domination.

In relation to the first of these reasons, I begin Chapter Two with a discussion of attempts by journalists and politicians in Britain and Canada to define and regulate rave. I then review

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7 I appreciate Brian Wilson’s (2002) use of the term “subcultural careers” because I believe it highlights the necessity for contemporary researchers to interrogate the various reasons why people attend and cease to attend raves (for example, Chapter Four and Six) and the various influences that rave participation has in people’s micro, day-to-day interactions and what this says about more macro level social processes (for example, Chapter Seven).
some of the rave and post-rave literature and link these academic representations of rave to discussions about rave’s resistant and political potentials. I end the chapter with a consideration of the main Canadian academic rave texts and link these few Canadian examples to the predominantly British literature discussed in the first half of the chapter.

In relation to McRobbie and Garber’s (1991 [1975]) call for women’s subcultural experiences to be valued, in Chapter Three I explain my reasons for choosing to conduct interviews with women, my conversational approach to conducting interviews, and the ways that I approached the task of analyzing and (re)presenting my interview data. I also provide readers with an explanation of the ethical and epistemological implications and limitations of my research project generally, and of my research methods specifically. Essentially, my argument is that there is a need to let research participants – especially women – speak for themselves because their particularly located subject positions tell us something significant both about rave participation and the politics of everyday life.

In relation to the issue of politics, in the three analysis chapters that form the core of this thesis (Chapters Four, Five and Six), I consider some of the ways that gender and age intersect with geographic location, finances, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability and how these intersections coalesced in interviewees’ opportunities and decisions to become, be, and cease to be active “ravers.” In Chapter Four I examine the specific roles age and gender played in the social networks and activities that led interviewees to their first rave events, and which encouraged them to develop more embedded active rave lifestyles. In Chapter Five, I explore some of the ways that interviewees understood their being active rave participants as a form of resistance to gender and age-related social expectations. It is here that I consider some of the ways that – in addition to age and gender – race, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality influenced the
ways that interviewees both experienced rave and constructed other rave participants. It is within this context that I maintain that rave offers participants with opportunities both to resist and reproduce dominant injustices and discriminations. In Chapter Six I focus specifically on interviewees' tendencies to reproduce sexist and ageist discourses when rationalizing the “necessary” relinquishment of their active rave participation. In my conclusion I (a) reveal links between interviewees' past rave participation and their current career choices, and (b) reiterate that women's rave participation is political not only because interviewees constructed their past active rave participation as marginalized both in practice and representation, but also because this same participation continues to shape the ways that they understand themselves and others even after they have ceased to be active rave-goers.

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8 It is important to note here that although I address issues of sexuality and ability in Chapter Five, my comments in relation to these axes of exclusion appear only in footnotes, not because they are any less significant than age, gender, race and ethnicity, but because I did not have sufficient data in these areas to elaborate, thereby suggesting that these may be important sites for future research.
**Chapter Two: Situating (Toronto’s) Rave**

With the proliferation of media channels and the saturation of media markets, moral panics have become both dangerous endeavours and marketable commodities, and folk devils now find themselves both stigmatized and lionized in mainstream media and alternative media alike.

– (Ferrell 2003: 74)

In Chapter One I situate my study of ten women’s experiences of rave participation in Toronto in relation to my personal, academic, and political readings of rave. I also foreshadow my methodological argument that to offer just and valid representations of contemporary cultural participation, we must make room for the voices and experiences of female participants to be heard (for example, McRobbie and Garber 1991 [1975]). I begin the current chapter by defining rave via an exploration of the ways that British and Canadian media and politicians have represented rave during recent attempts to regulate rave events and participants. I then present the dominant ways that predominately British academics have discussed rave: as either mainstream and compliant or underground and resistant – as fostering peace, love, unity, and respect (PLUR) or promoting hostility, antagonism, tension, and elitism (HATE).⁹ I conclude this chapter with a review of the key Canadian rave studies (all of which focus on Toronto) and locate these studies within their larger academic contexts.

**What is Rave?**

In “Power Play and Party Politics: The Significance of Raving,” Daniel Martin (1999) describes rave as “the largest, most dynamic, and longest lasting sub or counterculture of the postwar era” (77). He defines rave as “an event/space in which people – usually but not always young – gather to listen to electronic music” in abandoned and unused public and private spaces (78). Martin argues that rave spaces are to be understood as political wild zones “where the law is subverted or avoided, [and] resistance or escape can take place” (83; see also, Bey 2003 [1985];

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⁹ I have devised the acronym “HATE” to highlight my argument that raves do not escape dominant discriminatory practices and discourses, and as a direct challenge to overly optimistic readings of rave as epitomized by Peace, Love, Unity and Respect (PLUR).
Stanley 1995). Using a post-subcultural framework, Martin argues that rave is political because it makes room for people of various class, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientations to interact. He thereby understands raves as offering participants opportunities to challenge dominant axes of oppression and thus, to cultivate “values and morals counter to dominant norms” (85; see also, McCall 2001).

I appreciate Martin’s (1999) description of rave because of his emphasis on politics and because he does not make normative assumptions about the types of people, places, or spaces that constitute a rave; however, my thesis research inspires me to revise it. For example, Martin’s post-subcultural emphasis on the harmonious coming together of people from various racial, economic, cultural, and gender backgrounds within rave spaces fails to acknowledge – at the very least – that those who participate most actively, especially in the upper echelons of the rave business (i.e. club owners, deejays and promoters), tend to be thirty-something white men (see also, Thornton 1995; Weber 1999; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006). In this respect, at the same time that I appreciate post-subcultural arguments that rave may be better understood as “post-subcultures” or “club cultures” than “subcultures,” I do not agree that within these spaces class, race, and gender distinctions are blurred or disappear (for example, Redhead 1990).

Notwithstanding the above criticism of his overly optimistic representation of rave, I agree with Martin’s (1999) main argument that there are clear political processes involved in the stigmatization and regulation of rave(ers) by media and politicians (see also, Hier 2002; McCall 2001; Spring 2004). To substantiate this belief, below I examine some recent attempts by journalists and politicians in Britain and Canada to define and regulate rave.

Since its emergence in British tabloids in the late 1980s, the term “rave” has been used by media, politicians, and academics in increasingly general ways to describe any activity where
people—usually between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five—come together to listen and dance to “techno” music and take drugs (see also, Hutson 1999, 2000). During the past two and a half decades rave scenes have spawned in urban nightscapses around the world and have sparked media, political, and academic interest. In Britain and Canada, this increase in interest paid to rave has led to (a) negative, stereotypical media portrayals of rave events and participants, (b) proposed and passed legal sanctions against rave which further stigmatize rave-goers, events, and music, and (c) confusion about what constitutes a “real” rave and what does not (see also, Hutson 1999, 2000; Martin 1999; McCall 2001; Stanley 1995; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006).

In the British context, media coverage of rave in the mid 1980s in relation to (a) and (b) is well-documented (for example, Gibson and Pagan 2001; McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Redhead 1990; Thornton 1994). Focussing on such things as the use of the term “Acid House” by journalists, some scholars have pointed out that early British media often represented rave(r)s in a favourable light, describing them as new age hippies embodying the ideals of peace and love (see also, McCall 2001). There seems to be a general consensus, however, that in the late 1980s and early 1990s there began a media-driven “moral panic focused mainly on the drug aspect of [rave] culture” (Martin 1999: 79). At this time, headlines touting ravers’ peace and love ideologies began to be replaced by captions such as “Ban this Killer Music” (Redhead 1990: 3) and “Love Pill Kills Perfect Son” (Martin 1999: 75).

As J. Ingham, M. Purvis, and D.B. Clarke (1999) point out in their study of rave events in Blackburn, England, conflicts over “rights of ownership and access to [private and public] premises” quickly began to play out in the local press and “hostile reporting and sensationalist headlines […] consolidated opposition to the parties, and media coverage played a role in

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10 As Scott Hutson (1999) points out, even the term “techno” has been used as “a catch-all term for any type of ‘electronic’ music dominated by percussion rhythms and averaging 120 beats per minute” (53).
recruiting local politicians to the cause” (295, 296). They suggest a direct link between media treatment of rave, ensuing support from laypeople and politicians, and the introduction and passing of the *Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act* in 1990, which “dramatically increase[ed] the penalties for those who organised unlicensed events, or who ignored the restrictions placed by licensing authorities upon the size of events” (298; see also, McCall 2001).

For example, they maintain that police and fire officials were aware of the occurrence of rave events in local abandoned warehouses long before the enactment of the Act, but originally had refrained from imposing formal sanctions against rave organizers because until then rave events had been represented by media personnel as small, well-organized, and non-violent parties. Nevertheless, Ingham, Purvis, and Clarke (1999) explicitly link conflicts between rave organizers/promoters and the owners of the abandoned warehouses where the events were being held to the subsequent ratification of the *Entertainments Act*. According to this view, owners of the warehouses where these events transpired were angry that people were generating profits from events held on *their* privately owned premises, and thus, they used their economic and social assets to rally support against rave organizers and promoters.

Enactment of the 1990 *Entertainments Act* did not put an end to rave events, however. As a result, in 1994, British policy makers introduced *The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act*. Section 63 of this act is titled, “powers to remove persons attending or preparing for a rave” (Her Majesty’s Stationary Office 2000, emphasis added). Here – as can be inferred from the title – rave participants and organizers are conflated under the category “offender.” What was most significant about the passing of this new legislation was that it provided a formal definition of rave. According to paragraph (1) of section 63 of this Act, a rave is:

a gathering on land in the open air of 100 or more persons (whether or not trespassers) at which amplified music is played during the night (with or without intermissions) and is as
such, by reason of its loudness and duration and the time at which it is played, is likely to cause serious distress to the inhabitants of the locality; and for this purpose—(a) such a gathering continues during intermissions in the music and, where the gathering extends over several days, throughout the period during which amplified music is played at night (with or without intermissions); and (b) "music" includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats. (Her Majesty's Stationary Office 2000)

Note the focus on locale, number of participants, and type of music played. Following the above definition, any "gathering on land in the open air of 100 or more persons (whether or not trespassers) at which amplified music is played during the night," constitutes a rave. The Act thereby gave police the authority to convict organizers and attendees of any festivity where "a succession of repetitive beats" are being played – carnivals, concerts, wedding receptions, wine and food festivals, for example (see also, Hier 2002).

The relationship between negative media attention and legal sanctions against rave in Toronto, Ontario, Canada (which constitutes the geographical area of my research) has been similar to the above-discussed British process. Like the British headlines quoted above (e.g., "Love Pill Kills Perfect Son"), many Canadian media depictions of rave infantalize ravers, constructing them as victimized children. Consider the following caption taken from The Toronto Star in August of 1999: "Man missing after rave: Just a boy who loved books" (DiManno 1999). In this instance the person in question is granted adult status ("Man missing after rave"); however, immediately after the mention of rave his adult status is revoked and he is recreated as a good child who has been victimized ("Just a boy who loved books").

In this same context, consider the headline of Thane Burnett’s (2000) article that appeared in The Toronto Sun five months later: "It's 'just about fun': Worries about rave drug Ecstasy are overblown, kids say." In her title, Burnett seems to dismiss the experiences of some ravers by demoting them to the status of irresponsible, naïve children unable to appreciate the social costs of their leisure-time activities. In the story that follows, Burnett also represents
ravers’ parents as irresponsible because of their lack of knowledge about what their children actually are doing at rave events – knowledge with which Burnett will provide them. She says,

if your kids [aren’t] fast asleep, they may [be] wincing through red eyes as they [trudge], baby pacifiers clenched between their teeth, from one of many all-night dance parties... or perhaps they [are being] carried out on an ambulance stretcher – bound for a hospital where overworked doctors [will] try to figure out just what concoction of drugs... ferried through their young veins. (Burnett 2000: ¶2)

Here we see Burnett play on readers’ emotions, exaggerating the “problems” associated with rave to the point of absurdity – a tactic typical in the creation of moral panic discourses (see also, Cohen 1972).

When examined within the context of the number of reported deaths at raves around the time that these articles were published, the hyperbole is glaring: no deaths related to Ecstasy were reported in 1997, and only one such occurrence was reported in 1998 (see also, Hier 2002; Weber 1999). In 1999, in Southern Ontario, according to another journalist, “nine men between the ages of 20 and 30 years old died after taking the drug [Ecstasy]” (Puxley 2000: ¶3). What these discrepancies suggest is that the risks associated with Ecstasy may be quite low. More significantly, however, what Chinta Puxley’s (2000) above claim highlights is that rave-goers are not all young children who would otherwise be safely fast asleep in their parents’ homes.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of some ecstasy-related deaths at rave events in Southern Ontario in 1999, media coverage intensified, depicting ravers as a homogenous group of naïve, irresponsible, and juvenile drug-users (see also, Kingstone 2000; Nolan 2000).

The construction of ravers as hedonistic and naïve youth has been accompanied by patronising, paternalistic discourses of social moral responsibility, and these discourses seem to be the driving force behind official discussions and definitions of rave participation (as criminal and deviant). As Martin (1999) explains, one consequence of such infantalizing depictions of rave-goers is that their voices often are ignored and/or considered of marginal importance:
null
Although advice from experts, such as police and the government's own officials, have recommended a line of cooperation and mediation with ravers, the law continues along a path more in line with the moral panic tone of the tabloid press. This would suggest that the government's actions are based on a rationality built on a perceived political necessity to be seen as upholding law and the moral order of society. This moral duty, and the threat which raving poses to it, is closely linked to the use of drugs in rave culture, which has fuelled—and been used to justify—the moral panic of the media and government actions against rave. (Martin 1999: 81; see also, Hier 2002; Spring 2004)

As Martin points out, in an effort to appear to be upholding "moral order," law and media officials often devalue and ignore the experiences and advice of ravers themselves, relying instead on sensationalist headlines and scare tactics to create an image of action in the face of moral panic. As opposed to considering some of the more positive aspects of rave participation, or asking people why they participate in such activities, legal and media personnel in Britain and Canada have tended to ignore these valuable insights, instead (re)creating discourses about ravers as immoral youth.11

In "Raves, Risk and the Ecstasy Panic: A Case Study in the Subversive Nature of Moral Regulation," Sean Hier (2002) insists that the entanglement of power struggles involved in the temporary prohibition and subsequent sanctioning of rave events in Toronto during the late 1990s and early 2000s must be understood within a framework of blame-avoidance tactics used by local medical, political, and legal specialists, and rave enthusiasts (and documented by various popular and niche media). Hier insists that the medical, legal, and media-led moral panics that followed the drug-related deaths of three Ontario rave attendees in 1999 centred not on drug use per se, but "on the risks and dangers associated with designer drug use [by youth] at raves, with the ultimate intention of regulating raves in an effort to distance the city from the responsibilities—and liabilities—associated with the potential hazards surrounding designer drug

11 This discussion lends support to Henry Giroux's (2002) contention that young people's voices are rarely "heard in those spheres where public conversation shapes social policy and [they are] refused the power to make knowledge consequential with respect to their own individual and collective needs" (24).
use” (39, emphasis in original). Importantly, Hier also explains that it was this same discourse of “youth at risk” that rave entrepreneurs and participants used to protest the prohibition of rave events in Toronto. They did this, Hier explains, by arguing that if legislation banning raves in city-owned and regulated spaces was passed, raves would be driven back “underground” and the dangers associated with rave attendance (i.e. poor ventilation, impure drugs, and over-crowding) would be intensified. The significance of this line of argumentation, which did lead to the decision to sanction rave events in local nightclubs, was that “liability would still rest with the city” if politicians banned them from city property (50).

This finding is consistent with Mireille Silcott’s (1999) contention that, as in the Blackburn, England context, local Toronto police knew about the occurrence of rave events long before public outcries encouraged their formal control. Both Hier (2002) and Silcott (1999) maintain that despite protests made by local police and politicians in Toronto in the late 1990s – almost a decade after rave came to Toronto – that raves are immoral spaces in need of social regulation, it was not until the occurrence of a few “ecstasy-related” deaths that “raves made it onto the political agenda with a central priority concerned with interrogating the dangers and moral indignation associated with designer drug use” (Hier 2002: 38). To substantiate this point further, following a 1992 investigation of rave events in Toronto, one police sergeant is even quoted as saying, “It’s going to be a long, hot summer. Unemployment is high. People need something to do. Raves don’t need to be a problem. They can be a solution” (Silcott 1999: 83).

What all of this suggests is that the regulation of rave was a political resource used by local politicians to represent themselves as having the “rave problem” both figured out and under control.

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12 Thus, the words “rave” and “drug-use” (or more specifically, Ecstasy) became closely-related in the minds of many people, thereby stigmatizing any person (presumably a young person) who attends rave events as a drug-user.
Despite any initial lax opinion of the occurrence of rave events held by at least some police officers, during the excitement surrounding rave that played out in local media in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Toronto police created a task force aimed at regulating rave events. Also, in May 2000 the Raves Act, which aimed at monitoring and controlling rave events in Toronto, was read in the Canadian House of Commons.\(^{13}\) As in Blackburn, England, defining the “social problem” was an important first step in efforts to understand and control rave (for example, Ingham, Purvis and Clarke 1999). Also, as in the British context, locale and type of entertainment, not the prevalence of drug use, were key foci of the ensuing definition of “rave.”

The Canadian definition of rave reads as follows:

“rave” means an event with all of the following attributes:

- Any part of the event occurs between 2 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.
- People must pay money or give some other consideration to participate in the event
- The primary activity at the event is dancing by the participants
- The event does not take place in a private dwelling. (Legislative Assembly of Ontario 2006: ¶1)

Again, following the above definition, any dance party that transpires in the early hours of the morning may be dubbed a “rave” and anyone who attends a “raver,” thereby creating confusion among the general public and rave enthusiasts about what constitutes a “real” rave and/or “raver” (see also, Wilson 2002).

This brings us to the third consequence I mentioned above of the increase in attention paid to rave in recent years by media, politicians, and academics: as more people have begun to study and define rave, debates about the nature and origins of rave have intensified. In this context, some scholars argue that because of increased legal sanctions, media attention, and accompanying efforts to co-opt rave, “the traditional rave – semilegal and located in makeshift,

\(^{13}\) Please refer to Sean Hier’s (2002) article “Raves, Risks and the Ecstasy Panic: A Case Study in the Subversive Nature of Moral Regulation” for an in-depth and chronological discussion of the efforts made by various medical, legal and political professionals in Toronto to regulate rave.
secretive locales – is a rarity” (Huston 1999: 54; see also Brewster and Broughton 2000; Gibson and Pagan 2001; Ingham, Purvis and Clarke 1999; Martin 1999; McCall 2001; Reynolds 1998, 1999; Silcott 1999; Weber 1999; Wilson 1999, 2000, 2006). Others argue that the traditional rave is not just “a rarity,” it is dead, or non-existent (for example, Redhead 1990, 1993). Still others are unsure whether or not rave has ever been any different from previous recreational activities where predominantly young people come together to listen to electronic music, dance, and perhaps take drugs (for example, Thornton 1995).

The difficulties associated with defining rave – especially after the enactment of the above-discussed 1990 Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act, the 1994 introduction of The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act in Britain, and the reading of Bill 73 in the Canadian House of Commons – are made clear by the difficulties most of my interviewees had when asked to distinguish between rave and club events. In most instances interviewees, like some scholars mentioned above, questioned whether or not a “real” or “authentic” rave still exists, or if it ever did. One interviewee – Princess – articulated this point cogently when she explained that the distinction between rave and club “started to become not so clear around 2000-2001 […] when they started cracking down on raves.” She continued, “it was probably different even around ‘98. Before ‘98 there was […] never any alcohol [at rave events], there was a couple of cops, [and] you did get frisked, but not very intensely.” Similarly Mystic – another interviewee – explained that the difference between a rave and a club might reside in the size and location of an event. From her understanding, “rave” events tend to rotate weekly between locales such as empty warehouses, airplane hangers, and fields that can accommodate large numbers of people, whereas “club” events are stationary and are smaller than raves both in terms of locale and number of attendees (see also, Wilson 2006). Mystic went on to complicate this potentially
useful distinction between rave and club, however, when she explained that some venues in Toronto – like the Government and the Warehouse – are used for both “rave” and “club” events.

While the lines dividing rave and club are becoming increasingly blurred, there appear to be at least three similarities between governmental, academic, journalistic and participant descriptions of rave: large spaces, electronic music, and drug use – especially Ecstasy (see also, Chapter Four). Reading literature on rave, one habitually encounters accounts of “the wave of ecstasy-influenced music that emerged from the Manchester [...] warehouse scene in the UK” (Gibson and Pagan 2001: 10) and ensuing “media-led moral panic[s] focused mainly on the drug aspect of the culture” (Martin 1999: 79; see also, Connell and Gibson 2003; Gibson and Pagan 2001; Reitveld 1994; Reynolds 1998; Silcott 1999; Ter Bogt and Engels 2005; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006). In the following two sections of this chapter I review some of the arguments that inform distinctions drawn between rave and club. First, I consider Sarah Thornton’s (1994, 1995) post-subcultural argument that there is no distinction to be drawn between raves and clubs, and it is therefore wrong to conceive of rave as a resistant subculture. I then consider an opposing position, one which conceptualizes rave, because of its close association with drug use and non-traditional forms of communication, as separate from mainstream culture, and therefore as both subcultural and resistant (for example, McRobbie 1993; Pini 1997a, 2001, Stanley 1995).

Is it Mainstream and Compliant, Promoting Hostility, Antagonism, Tension, Elitism (HATE)?

In “Moral Panic, the Media and British Rave Culture,” Sarah Thornton (1994) argues that there is no antagonism between various media sources (whether conceived of as mainstream or not) and youth cultures (whether conceived of as subcultural or not). She rationalizes that without media exposure such cultural arenas would not – in fact, could not – exist. Therefore, she maintains, invalid representations of rave and post-rave cultures abound:
The idea that authentic culture is somehow outside media and commerce is a resilient one. In its full-blown romantic form, the belief imagines that grass-roots cultures resist and struggle with a colonizing mass-mediated corporate world. At other times, the perspective lurks between the lines, inconspicuously informing parameters of research, definitions of culture and judgements of value. Either way, scholars of youth and music culture are among the most tenacious holders of the idea. One explanation for this is undoubtedly that their studies reproduce the anti-mass media discourses of the youth formations they study. While youth celebrate “underground,” academics venerate “subculture;” where one denounces the “commercial,” the other criticizes “hegemony;” where one laments “selling out,” the other theorizes incorporation [I argue that there is] no opposition between subcultures and the media, except a dogged ideological one. (176)

Thornton claims that attempts to construct and separate underground, resistant subcultures from dominant processes of hegemony and capitalism are naïve, unfounded, and purely ideological.

Following this perspective, she argues that negative media attention only glorifies and “baptizes transgression” as defiance, social upheaval, and revolt (Thornton: 1994:181). In this respect, she counters arguments made by academics who blame increased media attention for the creation of new categories of social deviants (for example, Cohen 1972; Hutson 1999, 2000; Ingham, Purvis, and Clarke 1999; Martin 1999; Stanley 1995). Instead, according to Thornton (1994, 1995), deviant people and categories pre-exist media representations; media condemnation only helps to lure people into cultural arenas by reproducing and supporting romantic representations of these activities as hip, rebellious, and somehow separate from a mundane mainstream (i.e. as “underground”).

Thornton (1995) further develops this position in Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital where she argues, “contrary to youth subcultural ideologies, ‘subcultures’ do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious ‘movements’ only to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather, the media [...] are there and effective right from the start” (117). Thornton maintains that media attention shapes club cultures “as much as the participating dancers and drug-takers” (187). According to this view, there is such an integral interrelation between media and the popularity of rave and other club activities that it is
impossible to distinguish between *mainstream* and *underground*, between *resistant* and *compliant* cultural activities. Rave/Ravers and media support and sustain one another, each giving the other added momentum, and growing in relation to one another (see also, Spring 2004). In other words, for Thornton (1995), media attention plays an integral and complimentary role in the representation, and thus discursive construction, of rave/ravers, not only for "mainstream" media, but also for rave-goers themselves.

I consider Thornton's attempt to fuse together conceptions of *underground* and *mainstream* useful, especially when read within a Foucauldian understanding of power and resistance. While Thornton does not identify her work within this specific framework, I read her contention that *mainstream* and *underground* are two sides of the same coin – i.e. always joined and mutually productive – as parallel to Foucault's argument that *power* and *resistance* are inseparable. Just as Foucault (1990 [1978]) argues "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power [...] One is always 'inside' power, there is no 'escaping' it, there is no absolute where it is concerned" (95), Thornton (1995) argues that understandings of *mainstream* and *underground* activities are always "entangled in a series of value judgements, political associations and journalistic clichés which hardly do justice to the youth in question" (114). In this respect, Thornton’s claim that club cultures emerge out of, support, and reproduce the various socio-political power relations/structures that surround, infiltrate, create, and drive them substantiates my argument that interviewees’ representations of their past rave participation cannot be separated from dominant discourses and processes of meaning-making.

Where Thornton and I differ, however, is in our understandings of what constitutes "political." While she does not argue that club cultures are apolitical, she does very
condescendingly insist that rave and post-rave club cultures and participants are political only: insofar as they draw attention to, and re-create categories and hierarchies of difference, which “usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of others” (Thornton 1995: 10, emphasis in original). Informing Thornton’s conceptualization of rave events as indistinguishable from a “mainstream” is her analysis of contemporary post-rave club cultures as spaces reserved exclusively for hip individuals who “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” (3; see also, Thornton 1994, 2005).

Thornton (1995) laments, “the fondness that youth subcultures have for appropriating political rhetorics and frequently referring to ‘rights’ and ‘freedoms’, ‘equality’ and ‘unity’” (167, emphasis added). From her perspective, this rhetorical appropriation is nothing but “a strategy by which political issues are enlisted in order to give youthful leisure activities that extra punch, that added je ne sais quoi, a sense of independence, even danger” (167). She continues in an equally patronizing tone, “youth appropriate the ‘political’ as a way of making their culture more meaningful” (167). She goes so far as to say that despite claims made by many rave-goers that rave is empowering and political, these personal accounts are necessarily misguided and exaggerated because they fail to distinguish between “feelings of freedom fostered by the discotheque environment [and ‘real’ or] substantive political rights and freedoms” (21, emphasis in original). In this way, Thornton’s work is consistent with some people’s failure (as discussed in Chapter One) to value – or even to imagine – the interconnections between macro structural and micro interactionist theorizations/significances of subcultural participation.

I agree with Thornton (1995) that rave and post-rave events do not escape – and in many ways comply with – mainstream discriminatory experiences, but I maintain that there are many
more ways that these experiences are political than the mere "aestheticization of politics" (167). Consistent with my political reading of rave (as presented in Chapter One), and unlike Thornton, I do not distinguish between "Politics proper" and "politics with a small 'p'" (167). Unlike Thornton, I do not (a) understand politics as an exclusively "adult" arena, or (b) consider my interviewees as ignorant, duped, or misled in their interpretations of the meanings that rave has in their lives.

It is within this context of rave as facilitating hostility, antagonism, tension, and elitism – or HATE – that Thornton and others counter claims that rave crosses gender and class divisions (for example, Martin 1999; Hutson 1999, 2000). For example, John Connell and Chris Gibson (2003) extend this argument to contend that rave participation maintains and re-produces discriminations on a larger level than in-group/out-group cliques. In their discussion of "rave tourism," these authors link rave to everyday corporate interests and to the production, re-production, and condoning of deeply entrenched injustices associated with capitalism and cultural appropriation. They do this by problematizing the emergence of rave tourism, whereby – often young – backpackers travel to far-off lands to procure "artefacts, images and cultural experiences such as music, in a range of locations that accrue value due to their associations with 'alternative' economies, pre-capitalist, non-Western lifestyles and spirituality" (233; see also, Gibson and Pagan 2001; Hutson 1999, 2000; Luckman 2003; Reynolds 1998, 1999). Similarly, Arun Saldanha (2000) draws out some of the more embedded and global injustices associated with rave participation when he compels readers to contemplate the following:

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14 Please refer to Scott Hutson (2000) for a discussion of the use of "future and primitive" imagery within rave. Here Hutson argues that the use of these seemingly contradictory images on rave flyers is not the result of the "superficial play of postmodern expression" (41). Instead, according to Hutson, in so far as both images "share a sense of distance from and disdain for the present age and reveal an attraction to alternative possibilities," rave enthusiasts use these images to describe their frustrations with contemporary life (41; see also, Luckman 2003).
The space in which music is enjoyed has to be constructed on top of other people's suffering. How many backaches go into building an opera house? How many peddlers jailed for you to enjoy your E? Seasonal workers in Arjuna earn less in a month than foreigners spend in one night. Free raving in a Third World Village is accompanied by corruption, insomnia, paranoia, competition, conspiracy and exploitation. (59)

From the point of view of these scholars, and consistent with my political reading of them, rave spaces are infiltrated by HATE both from inside and outside.

OR is it Underground and Resistant, Fostering Peace, Love, Unity, Respect (PLUR)?

The above illustrations of rave and post-rave club cultures and participants as so imbricated in their social surroundings that they cannot be understood as separate from, or resistant to, “mainstream” norms and discourses run counter to Angela McRobbie’s (1993) discussion of raves as resistant subcultures. Where Sarah Thornton (1994, 1995) insists that “subcultures” are constructed ideologies, McRobbie (1993) contends they are lived realities. McRobbie argues that young rave-goers (like her daughter) use pleasure to escape and resist their marginal statuses in society (see also, Pini 1997a, 2001). She describes raves as spaces of pleasure and empowerment where participants can creatively use the commodities/products created and fostered by rave to further both their recreational and employment opportunities.

Speaking directly to the works of subcultural theorists, McRobbie (1993) argues against the belief that for activities to be conceived of as resistant and subcultural, they must be understood as separate from mainstream consumerism. She explains,

buying and selling and participating in subcultures as consumers represented to subcultural theorists only the moment of diffusion, the point at which the oppositional force is incorporated or ‘recuperated’ back into society through the processes of commodification. As the subculture is commodified for a mass market so also is it de-politicised and made palatable for popular consumption [...] The assumption implicit in subcultural theory was that those who [...] sold subcultural items [such as clothes and music] were simply ‘hustlers’ who pushed their way into subculture from outside [...] Subcultures are often ways of creating job opportunities [for both insiders and outsiders] as more traditional careers disappear. (McRobbie 1993: 6-7)
In the above quotation, McRobbie warns readers of the problems associated with narrow understandings of authentic, underground, and resistant subcultures as only those that remain “untainted” and un-co-opted by capitalist mainstream endeavours (see also, Hebdige 1979).

Instead, McRobbie (1993) argues that club cultural activities – including rave – may be conceptualized as both underground and resistant. They are underground and resistant insofar as they offer participants with opportunities to experience their social environments in new ways (see also, Martin 1999; McCall 2001). These may include new and innovative economic endeavours, and thus, may ultimately mean that the same aspects of rave that make it resistant may also open up opportunities within mainstream economic flows and consumer markets. From this perspective, raves can be understood as mainstream and compliant insofar as participants may use their insider/subcultural knowledge/experiences in ways that make room for new economic opportunities, and which help them to survive in a consumer-driven, capitalist society (see also, McRobbie 1994; Pini 1997a, 2001; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006). Bringing her argument full circle, McRobbie (1993) claims rave also offers young (female) participants ways to resist their economic marginalization through the provision of new economic opportunities. Thus, according to McRobbie, rave is necessarily both resistant to mainstream values and compliant with dominant processes of capitalism.

Both McRobbie (1993) and Thornton (1994, 1995) acknowledge that youth activities – like all other cultural arenas – are embedded in and emerge from their surrounding social contexts (i.e. capitalism). This similar claim leads each woman to a very different conclusion, however. As Brian Wilson (2006) succinctly explains,

McRobbie’s work [...] is characterized by optimistic descriptions of the ways that contemporary youth seek and use pleasure as a symbolic escape from the social tensions of their times. McRobbie views these pleasure-seeking and pleasurable behaviours as up-to-date versions of subcultural resistance. (58)
Where McRobbie (1993, 1994) understands youth's pleasure-seeking activities as resistance to turbulent contemporary social realities, Thornton (1995) understands them only as evidence that youth have become “well versed in the [neo-liberal] virtues of competition” (166).

Anticipating readers’ difficulties with the term “resistance,” McRobbie (1993) clarifies, if, for the moment, we deconstruct the notion of resistance by removing its metapolitical status [...] and if we re-insert resistance at the more mundane, micrological level of everyday practices and choices about how we live, then it becomes possible to see the sustaining, publicizing and extending of the subcultural enterprise. (7)

Following this nuanced and micrological understanding of resistance, McRobbie maintains that rave and rave-related activities can empower marginalized people by offering new and creative ways to earn a living and/or temporarily evade “the responsibilit[ies] they are being expected to carry out” (17). Thus, again, where Thornton (1995) discredits participants’ assertions that cultural activities represent any form of resistance, focusing instead on the ways that these activities reproduce normative categories and hierarchies of difference, McRobbie (1993, 1994) uses and values participants’ reasons for participating in certain cultural arenas to make room for an understanding of rave and post-rave activities as resistant – and I would add, political, at both micro and macro levels (see also, Chapter Three).

McRobbie (1993) is not the only scholar to conceptualize raves as offering participants opportunities to resist and/or change dominant conceptions of public/private space, moral/immoral behaviours, and distinctions drawn between art and politics. Other proponents of this view argue that, together, the concealed positioning of rave on the margins of society and its links to underground pirate communication networks help to facilitate escape, or “tactic[s] of disappearance” (Bey 2003 [1985]: 126, emphasis in original; see also, Maffesoli 1996, 2001; Malbon 1998, 1999; Melechi 1993; Pini 1997a, 2001; Reynolds 1998, 1999; Richard and Kruger
1998; Stanley 1995). Within this context, consider Christopher Stanley’s (1995) description of rave spaces as “wild zones,” or as

fenced-off spaces of urbanisation signifying a postmodern wilderness. These spaces exist as deregulated spaces and become nominated as “wild zones” by the state. They are not spaces without law but they are spaces of the without-laws. They are, in one sense, spaces which have always been with us and which are therefore of the everyday and the continuous […] These disordered and deregulated areas open up alternative spaces within the urban for creative (even through, or necessarily, through destruction) use of individuals and bondings […] The wild zone is both a tactical subversion of rationalised space and also the becoming of alternative space signifying the presence of systems (signs, symbols, forms) and representations (discourses and narratives). (91)

Although Stanley does not mention them, the above reading of rave is reminiscent of Hakim Bey’s (2003 [1985]) musings on Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ), and thus, of the works of other scholars who allude to rave as TAZ (for example, Connell and Gibson 2003; Gibson and Pagan 2001; Ingham, Purvis and Clarke 1999; Martin 1999). In each of these accounts, TAZ is used as a theoretical frame to describe rave as possessing some latently oppositional – if not overtly resistant – qualities.

Stanley’s (1995) description of rave events as “wild zones” also suggests links between conceptualizations of rave as TAZ and Michel Maffesoli’s (1996, 2001) use of the term neo-tribe to describe the “micro-groupings that develop as a result of the constant comings and goings between social situations that occur in society and which are premised upon a superseding or submerging of identities” (Maffesoli in Malbon 1999: 56; see also, Chapter One). This argument is especially apparent in Maffesoli’s (2001) work on techno (rave) cultures where he invokes very collectivist imagery to describe the techno phenomenon and experience. Maffesoli says, “dans le ‘creux’ que représentent tous ces rassemblements, ce qui prévaut est la communion,

15 According to Hakim Bey (2003 [1985]), TAZ is “an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area […] and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it” (99, emphasis in original).
l’engloutissement, la néantisation du sujet” (¶1, emphasis added; see also, Jordan 1995). He emphasizes, the “impression de stabilité dans le mouvement” often felt by people communally listening and dancing to techno music (¶7). According to this view, when people come together in groups, individual identities submerge and re-surface as inseparable from a group identity.

In his work on post-rave club cultures, Ben Malbon (1998, 1999) acknowledges links between TAZ, neo-tribes, and post-rave club experiences as offering participants opportunities to consume and perform a “release from many of the accepted social norms and customs of the ‘civilised’ social spaces of everyday life, such as social distance, conformity and reserve or disattention” (Malbon 1998: 271). Malbon describes going out dancing/clubbing as a fleeting and temporary – neo-tribal – experience, which rarely produces stable, concrete social or individual relationships and change. Following this rationale, he argues that while “dancing might be seen as an embodied statement by the clubber that [s/he] will not be dragged down by the pressures of work, [and] the speed and isolation of the city,” according to strict definitions, post-rave club participation is non-political because it neither directly challenges social norms and legislation nor involves a stance on social issues such as capitalism and consumerism (271). This leads Malbon to a similar conclusion as Angela McRobbie (1993): raves and post-rave experiences are resistant, “not as a struggle with a dominant, hegemonic culture […] but

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16 Translated as: “in the ‘hollow’ which all these gatherings represent, that which prevails is the communion, the engulfment, the self-destruction of the subject.”

17 Translated as: “impression of stability in the movement.”

18 Please refer to Michel Maffesoli’s (1996), The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society for a discussion of the ways in which the postmodern era is characterized less by class than by “the plethora of small groups and of temporary groupings which we are members of at different times during our day” (iv). From this perspective, “social life can be determined only in relation to the group” and in this way, Maffesoli argues against claims that postmodernists are concerned only with the individual. In fact, contrary to this claim, Maffesoli maintains that the individual is nothing without the group and that it is in these constant coming and goings between and within various group settings that individual and social identities are constructed and maintained (79; see also Muggleton 2000: 33-53). In so far as we are living in a capitalist society, Maffesoli (1996) does not ignore the effects of class on people’s everyday lives and interactions. However, in his analysis of “neo-tribes” as “distinguished by their members’ shared lifestyles and tastes” class is but one of several factors that may bring people together and form the basis of a social grouping (x).
resistance as located in the most minute subtleties of clubbing” (Malbon 1998: 280). Yet, unlike McRobbie (1993) and me, Malbon (1998, 1999) refrains from explicitly equating resistance at this more minute level with larger macro political issues and processes.

Scott Hutson (1999, 2000), an avid believer that rave participation provides people with other-worldly and spiritual experiences of PLUR, recognizes that crowd control strategies (euphemistically referred to as door policies) are sometimes used at raves/clubs to “facilitate the congregation of people with like tastes – be they musical, sartorial or sexual” (Thornton 1995: 22). Despite this, Hutson (2000) argues, in order to draw out the PLUR aspects of rave, we must examine the intentions of rave participants who are subject to discriminatory door policies, not the corrupt motives of some “connoisseurs of rave authenticity” whose job it is to “uphold […] hierarchies of subcultural capital to be successful” (43). According to Hutson, outside rave spaces people may experience discrimination, but inside rave spaces participants experience intense and holistic feelings of peace, love, unity, and respect. As opposed to conceptualizing rave as a rigid business structure, Hutson understands rave as a temporal experience that begins once participants pass through the queue and move into the rave space. It is inside these spaces, according to Hutson – like Daniel Martin (1999) and Steve Redhead (1990) – where “remaining differences are slowly eliminated through dance, drugs, and other rituals that transform structures of subcultural capital into anti-structure” (Hutson 2000: 44; see also, Hutson 1999; Pini 1997a, 2001; Rietveld 1998, Malbon 1998, 1999, 2005).

Other recent scholars also have described rave participation as a challenge to: (a) conventional ideologies of sexuality and gender roles (for example, Hammersley, Kahn and Ditton 2002; McElrath 2005; McRobbie 1993; Pini 1997a, 2001; Rietveld 1998); (b) unjust

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19 Scott Hutson (2000) includes club owners, promoters, and professional DJs under the umbrella of “rave connoisseurs.”
racial relations (for example, Brewster and Broughton 2000; Rietveld 1998; Carrington and Wilson 2001); and (c) discriminations based on socio-economic status (for example, Reynolds 1998). Even Thornton (1994, 1995), who (as discussed in the previous section) argues that club cultural participation is exclusionary, concedes that rave/club participation does produce an illusion of “cross[ing] boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality” (Thornton 1995: 15; see also, Thornton 2005). What Thornton’s above comment elucidates is that even pessimistic scholars of rave and post-rave events must agree that for some participants rave is about emancipation from categories of difference – even if only temporarily, or “falsely.” At the same time, however, optimistic scholars of raves and post-rave cultures also acknowledge that in some respects rave participation is exclusionary (for example, Hutson 1999, 2000; McRobbie 1993; Richard and Kruger 1998). Scott Hutson’s (1999, 2000) discussions of rave participation illustrate this point.

Above I have reviewed the predominant ways that rave has been represented as either resistant (i.e. PLUR) or compliant (i.e. HATE). Most of the above-reviewed research, and the majority of the rave literature in general, has been conducted by British scholars. This is likely because of rave’s clearly British – or at least British influenced – roots.\(^\text{20}\) Below I consider recent Canadian interpretations of rave’s political and resistant qualities. Drawing on the works of Mireille Silcott (1999) and Timothy Weber (1999), I consider the argument (contra McRobbie above) that in the Canadian context, rave’s resistant potential to offer new avenues for social justice have necessarily been absent because Canadian rave scenes emerged long after rave had become a co-opted business. Also, following the works of Brian Wilson (1999, 2002, 2006), Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson (2001, 2004), and Brian Wilson and Michael Atkinson (2005), 1

\(^{20}\) Although rave is most often described as originating in Britain during the late 1980s, some scholars root the music and drugs associated with these events elsewhere/when (for example, Brewster and Broughton 2000; Reynolds 1999; Saldanha 2000).
situate Canadian studies of rave within larger bodies of subculture and rave literature in order to evaluate the claim that because Canadian scholars tend to rely on classic American and British theoretical models, the cultural activities of Canadians continue to be poorly theorized (see also, Hollands 2003).

Searching for Resistance and Politics in Canadian Rave Literature

Rave America, by Mireille Silcott (1999), was the first book published about North American raves. As a music journalist, and not necessarily an “academic,” Silcott offers an anecdotal overview of the development of raves and post-rave events in the United States and Canada from the 1970s to the late 1990s. She explains that the purpose of her book is to recount “what happened after American music was imported to Britain, mixed with the drug ecstasy creating a cultural explosion, and then returned to American turf looking very different from the way it did when it left” (12; see also, Brewster and Broughton 2000). Substantiating the claim that Canadian scholars tend to rely on imported American and British studies to theorize contemporary cultural activities, Silcott (1999) describes the development of North American rave scenes in the early 1990s as contingent upon the entrepreneurial skills of “expat Britons or people who had travelled to Europe and wanted to replicate what they had seen there” (75). She identifies early rave promoters, deejays, and participants in Toronto as predominately English and Scottish businessmen who came to Canada knowing that “there never seems to be any great leap of faith involved in absorbing anything British here” (77).

As for resistance and politics, Silcott (1999) makes her opinion clear: Toronto’s rave scene never had anything to do with resistance in terms of fighting the powers that be. Similar to Sarah Thornton’s (1994, 1995) ‘hip’ thesis discussed above, Silcott (1999) maintains that from its inception Toronto’s rave scene was “exclusive and fashiony and bent on the whole cool-
underground thing” (79). According to Silcott, rave was co-opted long before it surfaced in Toronto and as a result, any sort of political “party purpose” was supplanted by a desire to have “a wicked time” and was “based upon the twin aspects of hedonism and sheer grandiosity” (85).

The same year that *Rave America* was released, Timothy Weber (1999) published the first academic study of rave in Toronto under the title, “Raving in Toronto: Peace, Love, Unity and Respect in Transition.” At the time of publication, Weber estimated that approximately 10,000 Toronto-area youth identified as ravers (319). Following the findings from his fieldwork, Weber offers four defining features of rave in Toronto, believed to be the same elements that draw people into the scene. In ascending order of importance these are: (a) changing venues; (b) community of like-minded people; (c) non-commercial music; and (d) a safe, friendly space where experimentation with both legal and illegal narcotics is acceptable (323-324; see also, Chapter Four). He also groups Toronto-area rave participants into three distinct categories based on their clothing styles: (a) people who do not dress in any costume and who tend to dress androgynously and modestly; (b) older “clubbers” who dress more formally; and (c) people in eccentric costumes (322-323; see also, Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006).

Aside from a few findings that Weber (1999) claims are specific to Toronto (i.e. that there is an unspoken etiquette that participants dance in parallel rows facing the deejay), his findings are harmonious with preceding studies on British rave scenes, especially with respect to: (1) the spiritual aspects of rave (for example, Hutson 1999, 2000); (2) a sense of peacefulness at raves (for example, Malbon 1998, 1999); and (3) an absence of alcohol at these parties (for example, Hammersely, Kahn and Ditton 2002). To describe rave’s resistant and political qualities, Weber (1999) borrows the term “stylistic non-conformity” from British scholar Ben Malbon (1998) to argue, “while they [ravers in Toronto] may be challenging their parents’ or
others’ norms for behaviour during the weekends, they are quite satisfied living in their middle-class homes during the remainder of the week” (Weber 1999: 332). According to this view, people attend rave events for a “mini-vacation […] a chance to leave everything else in their lives behind for at least 8-12 hours” (326). Weber reinforces the importance for researchers – like myself – to interrogate the reasons why people attend raves and the factors that may contribute to decisions to relinquish their active rave participation when he concludes his article by questioning the “shelf life” of rave participation.

**Locating Toronto’s Rave within the Subcultural Literature**

In 2002, Brian Wilson published a condensed version of his Ph.D. thesis (1999) under the title: “The Canadian Rave Scene and Five Theses on Resistance.”21 Consistent with my above discussion, he emphasizes the utility of Angela McRobbie (1993), Steve Redhead (1990), and Sarah Thornton’s (1995) works to the study of Canadian rave participation. Notwithstanding the above, Wilson (2002) concludes that there are three reasons why these ‘benchmarks’ are not entirely useful for understanding the emergence of rave in Canada.

First, he maintains, subcultural scholars rarely explore the ‘internal complexity’ of “the range of interpretations that youth make at different times in their subcultural careers, and the diverse ways that similarly located youth understand their ‘shared’ experiences” (Wilson 2002: 376, emphasis in original). Secondly, he argues, most theorists overlook the vastly different ways

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21 For his PhD research, “Empowering Communities or Delinquent Congregations?: A Study of Complexity and Contradiction in Canadian Youth Cultures and Leisure Spaces,” Brian Wilson (2002) examines two youth cultures in Southern Ontario: rave and a youth drop-in centre. He chooses these groups as a way to argue that despite their different social class positions, middle-class ravers and low-income drop-in attendees successfully resist and reproduce (in)formal power structures. At the same time, however, Wilson’s research feeds into many of these same “power structures” (or what I call “discourses”) by only peripherally addressing the existence of race, gender, sexuality and age discriminations within rave (because of his interviewees’ foci on togetherness and PLUR), while focusing exclusively on gender (specifically women’s experiences) in his examination of the drop-in centre. He explains this discrepancy by reproducing the same classist and sexist discourses he claims to be challenging. For instance, he “reasons” that ravers tend to be more educated, middle-class citizens than the youth who attend drop-in centres, and therefore, according to Wilson, they are more exposed than their lower-class drop-in counterparts to “proactive stances on social inequality”(241). I elaborate on this point in Chapter Three.
that youth behaviour can be interpreted (376). In order to remedy this absence, to offer just and valid theorizations of youth activities in Canada, Wilson insists that scholars must apply strands of critical theory, symbolic interaction, and models of “distinction” to test resistance hypotheses (376). Finally, according to Wilson, Canadian scholars must apply “post-subculturalist” strands of theory in their analyses of rave participation in order to allow them to focus less exclusively on class and more on the diverse feelings of marginalization and alienation that some ravers experience (377; see also, Chapter One).

Following his reading of the relevant subcultural, rave, and post-rave literature, in conjunction with the ethnographic research conducted for his PhD dissertation, Wilson (2002) identifies five “analytically close” ways that rave participation might be conceptualized as resistant (399). By “analytically close,” Wilson means that what one person might interpret as ‘purposeful-tactical’ resistance another may read as a form of ‘trivial’ resistance, for example. In addition to acknowledging that different theorists can interpret the same data in various ways, Wilson’s readings of rave highlight my finding that as interviewees moved through their “subcultural careers,” the resistant elements of their rave participation could take any one or more of these five forms at any given time depending on their current life circumstances. The five theses that Wilson offers are:

1. Rave participation as an intentional – ‘purposeful-tactical’ – act of resistance against feelings of alienation and frustration with daily life (400-401);
2. The hyper-consumption and adaptation by some ravers of technology, although not necessarily directly oppositional, can be understood as a form of ‘adaptive-reactive’ resistance insofar as Canadian ravers tend to be middleclass youth who are able to draw on their familiarity with computers, for example, to create spaces/opportunities for escape, enjoyment and employment (401-402);
3. Although in theory it is possible to argue that rave participation is about slowly changing the ways that we interact with other people, Wilson notes rave participation does not disrupt dominant hegemonic forces. In this way, Wilson also understands rave participation as a form of ‘trivial’ resistance, which ‘makes no difference at all’ (403-405);
(4) Rave may also be interpreted as a form of 'self-aware or oblivious' resistance because while people may rationalize their rave participation in terms of pleasure, many of them are also aware of the dangers associated with active rave participation (405-406);

(5) Finally, Wilson acknowledges Sarah Thornton’s (1995) argument that rave participation has nothing to do with resistance by maintaining that it reproduces and ‘actively supports [the] reproduction of the dominant culture’, especially categories of difference and discrimination (406-407).^22

It is important to note that in both the rave-related literature and in his research on rave in Toronto Wilson finds support for each of these theses. This leads him to rationalize that there is no one straightforward reading of rave or rave participation. What is important, according to Wilson, is not to provide “proof” that rave is either resistant or compliant; instead, it is more significant to explore the various ways that people interpret and explain their rave participation in ways that both support and complicate existing academic explanations.

Locating Toronto’s Rave Scene within a Larger Academic Context

Brian Wilson’s (2001, 2004) later, co-authored works are not specific to Canada. Yet they are significant to the current study because in these pieces he considers rave’s potential political implications. For example, in “One Continent Under a Groove,” Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson (2001) draw out links between rave, tourism, and worldwide economic flows (see also, Connell and Gibson 2003).^23 They complicate notions of “authentic,” “global,” and “local” through their application of Arjun Appadurai’s (1990) “scapes,” and their accompanying argument that “to see the political implications of club cultures […] we have to look at how

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^22 In Fight, Flight or Chill: Subcultures, Youth and Rave in the Twenty-First Century, Brian Wilson (2006) offers a sixth reading of rave’s resistant qualities, which attempts to make room for politics. Wilson explains that in Toronto there have been some instances where ravers have rallied for their rights by protesting proposed legislation against rave. From Wilson’s perspective this attempt by Toronto-area ravers to challenge laws is evidence that rave may be understood as political. It is important to note that while this view is valid, it is also limited insofar as it points to the tendency for scholars to consider rave as political only when it represents a challenge to “Politics” with a capital “P” (see also, Chapter One).

^23 Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson (2001) refer to rave tourism especially in terms of the movement of deejays, promoters, and participants who “travel to foreign countries, [and] are exposed to fresh varieties of music and nightclubs,” which in turn influence how music is made and listened to in different parts of the world (1).
formations of post rave tourism fail or succeed in negotiating new spaces on contested terrain of popular culture” (Carrington and Wilson 2001: 1). They argue that ravers’ activities involve both local and global production and consumption patterns. Rave tourists, for example, may hear something in Helsinki, which they will later seek or reproduce in Toronto. This leads Carrington and Wilson to insist that current understandings/theorizations of rave that do not adequately get at the complexities involved in rave or post-rave club activities fail to acknowledge existing relationships between the ways that people develop, enjoy, interpret, and use their musical tastes (see also, Bennett 1999a, 2000, 2001).

Carrington and Wilson (2001) extend this discussion of cross-cultural flows of commodities – such as music – afforded by rave to include the increasing popularity (and thus, flows) of youth cultural studies by “authors who adopt a cross-cultural view of youth cultures” (3). Yet they are critical of such authors’ inconsistent engagements with “theoretical issues related to ‘the global and the local’ as part of cross-cultural analyses, beyond pointing out that local cultures interpret mass media in distinct ways” (3). Ultimately, in line with the fifth critique of CCCS works presented in Chapter One, Carrington and Wilson call for more geographically-situated analyses – which may complicate understandings not only of the ways that cultural commodities are received and re-used in different localities, but also the means by which these same commodities are re-circulated and re-appropriated within global networks. Also, similar to the scholars discussed above who describe rave participation as a challenge to mainstream values of HATE, Carrington and Wilson are interested in the ways that local manifestations of rave may

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24 In “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” Arjun Appadurai (1990) argues that with increased globalization, cultural processes are formed on a global stage through the intersections of and disjunctures between multiple “scapes,” which play key roles in the production of cultural ideas, values, products, and patterns. Appadurai’s five scapes are: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes.
defy (constructed) boundaries between producer and consumer, performer and audience, politics and play, here and there.

Following this interest, Carrington and Wilson (2001) offer at least two ways that contemporary dance music cultures – such as raves and post-rave clubs – may be read as overtly political. First, they argue, the dance scene, by the extent and degree of its normalization of drug use, has challenged the hegemony of the anti-drug discourse such that a number of governmental agencies and States are having to radically rethink the [efficacy] of the ‘war on drugs.’ (Carrington and Wilson 2001: 5)

Second, and more aligned both with my political readings of rave presented in Chapter One and my understanding of power and resistance as intimately linked, they argue that rave’s potentials to develop into a global social movement will continue to go undetected until scholars acknowledge the situatedness of rave (and other cultural activities) in social fields “constituted by multi-various power relations between different social groupings, none of which have an a priori claim to determinacy” (5, emphasis in original). In other words, it is necessary to recognize that, like any other social phenomenon, rave takes place at the intersections of several power relations, all of which help to co-constitute it. Carrington and Wilson end their discussion about globalization and youth cultures by adding that our main concern as researchers of youth activities should not be with how likely dance culture is to bring down capitalism or patriarchy, but at what precise points it succeeds or fails in negotiating new spaces. In particular, it is not a simple question of dance culture being ‘for’ or ‘against’ the dominant culture, but of how far its articulations with other discourses and cultures – dominant or otherwise – result in democratizations of the cultural field, how far they successfully break down existing concentrations of power, and how far they fail to do so. (Gilbert and Pearson in Carrington and Wilson 2001: 5)

In his most recent co-authored work on rave, Brian Wilson – this time with Michael Atkinson – (2005) focuses on technological developments as potential tools of resistance. Like Sarah Thornton (1994, 1995) discussed earlier, Wilson and Atkinson (2005) challenge uni-
dimensional beliefs that the relationship between cultural activities and media attention is one in which “groups viewed as threatening/resistant to the status quo are initially censored and labeled and later incorporated into mainstream culture” (278; see also, McRobbie and Thornton 1995). Wilson and Atkinson (2005) use the Internet as their primary illustration of the ways in which people – often youth – may adapt to and use newly emerging technological forms as a way of forming communities of like-minded activists (see also, Wilson 2002). They describe (some) ravers as pro communication technologies because of their tendency to create (electronic) niche media to (a) promote their ideologies, communities, events, and products, and (b) respond to “negative mass-mediated mainstream portrayals of their subcultures and to attempts to incorporate their scenes” (303). Within this “pro-technology” context, Wilson and Atkinson consider rave’s overtly resistant and political potentials to coalesce into a large-scale movement via (a) the globally transient and adaptable nature of rave participation and communication, and (b) the ability of (some) rave participants to adapt to ever-changing global and local circumstances (see also, Maffesoli 1998, 1999; Melechi 1993; McRobbie 1993; Richard and Kruger 1998; Stanley 1995).

Rewind and Re-play

In this chapter I have reviewed the relevant subculture and rave literature and identified the two major ways that scholars have theorized rave in the past: as either (1) an underground, resistant subculture or (2) a mainstream, compliant cultural activity. I explain that people (scholars, participants, and media personnel) who describe rave as an “underground subculture” tend to emphasize the ways in which it fosters peace, love, unity, and respect – values, which are constructed in opposition to those that abound in “mainstream” society (for example, Hutson 1999, 2000; Martin 1999; McRobbie 1993; Pini 2001). Other people, I explain, understand the
existence of dominant discriminations within, and surrounding, rave spaces as evidence that rave is not resistant to, or separate from, “mainstream” society and/or values at all (for example, Connell and Gibson 2003; Saldanha 2000; Silcott 1999; Stanley 1995; Thornton 1994, 1995).

My intention in presenting these seemingly opposing positions on rave’s resistant and political potentials and significance is to point out that depending on one’s focus, both readings are possible and valid.

This is to say that if one focuses on rave as an institutional structure, run mainly by business-minded (male) entrepreneurs, then it is difficult to deny that rave is imbricated in so-called “mainstream” processes such as capitalism and HATE. Following this line of thought, scholars like Sarah Thornton (1994, 1995) and Mireille Silcott (1999) argue, while perhaps temporarily resistant, raves are non-political because they are necessarily co-opted into, and thus do nothing to alter, macro level hegemonic and capitalist processes and institutions. Despite some efforts by rave enthusiasts to challenge the passing of laws in Britain and Canada to restrict their rights to rave, these scholars maintain that such efforts have been futile in terms of effecting change on a larger level than some participants’ false senses of escape (see also, Weber 1999).

On the other hand, scholars who focus on the micrological levels of rave experiences – Angela McRobbie (1993), for example – argue that despite being entangled in their social surroundings, rave spaces can be understood as empowering, escapist, and resistant. Following this same rationale, Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson (2001) maintain that if scholars draw out the ways in which rave offers participants new ways of experiencing the world (i.e. via the promotion of PLUR ideologies), then it is fair to describe raves as “underground” arenas that challenge dominant values, and thus, as political (see also Hutson 1999, 2000; Martin 1999; Stanley 1995).
What these discrepancies highlight is that rave and post-rave club participation can be interpreted in various ways, and that various interpretations depend on a scholar’s analytic starting point. For example, scholars who place primacy on the structural effects of rave, and use those as a measure of rave’s resistant and political significance, often overlook experiential intents and effects of rave participation. At the same time, scholars who measure rave’s resistant and political potentials by analyzing its micro, experiential effects tend to ignore relationships between these personal experiences and larger social structures.

What I have shown throughout this chapter is that these dichotomous readings of rave call attention to different, yet concurrent, aspects of rave’s political and resistant implications. This is to say that rave structures and experiences both resist and reproduce dominant oppressions simultaneously (see also, Chapter Five). More than this, I have argued that if we are to draw out raves’ political implications, we must consider both the structural and experiential effects of rave. One way to do this is to consider the ways that various categories of difference (often constructed as “structures”) intersect and shape people’s experiences and representations of rave (see also, Chapter One). In Chapter Three I engage this discussion in the context of the efficacy of interview methods to make room for the often-omitted experiences of female rave participants to be heard and valued.
Chapter Three: Reflexive Ethnography and In-Depth Interviews

As we listen to someone else's life story, we are struck by how this story hits us, by how it moves us, by how it connects with something that we are directly familiar with.  

– (Atkinson 1998: 22)

Following Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1991 [1975]), in Chapter One I argued that too often women’s voices and experiences are omitted from studies of youth cultures and that rave is no exception. This under-representation of women’s experiences leads to partial understandings of rave in general, and reflects the continued subordination of women in rave spaces more specifically. In Chapter Two, I elaborated on this point, arguing that rave is political not simply because of its close association with illegal drug use, but also because it is embedded in ongoing power struggles both in terms of the degrees to which women participate in rave and in the ways that ravers and their experiences are infantalized and trivialized by academics, politicians, and media personnel. Below I link my position (as presented in Chapter One) that scholars must strive to imagine connections between macro and macro social phenomena with my understanding and use of reflexive research methods (Ellis and Bochner 2003).

Research Sample and Methods

After receiving clearance from the Research Ethics Board (REB), I began my fieldwork in January 2006. Between early January and late April I conducted ten semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with women over the age of twenty-five years who actively participated in Toronto’s rave scene for at least one year, but who no longer understood themselves as active rave participants. It is important to note here that each woman’s understanding of “no longer active” varied from not attending a rave event in the last eight years to still going to “rave-type” events, but on a less regular basis than they had in the past.

My sample of ten women was generated through opportunistic sampling methods. I initially contacted women in my social circle who fit the criteria of my study. After asking these
women if they would be willing to participate in my research, I asked them to pass along my Letter of Invitation to at least two other women who they felt might also be interested in participating.\textsuperscript{25} This process generated my first six interviews. I then sent out a mass e-mail to everyone on my e-mail contact list describing my research project and attaching a copy of my Letter of Invitation. I received responses from twelve women, four of whom I subsequently interviewed. The majority of the women who contacted me were women living in Toronto; however, I also had a response from one woman in Nova Scotia and one in Australia.

Interviews ranged in duration from one to three hours. Each interview took place in a location that interviewees chose because they were considered safe spaces to meet with me (in some cases a complete stranger) to discuss sensitive topics (i.e. drug use, sexual assault). With participants’ permission, all ten interviews were tape-recorded. During each interview, I asked participants general questions about their relationships to rave in Toronto. Interviewees were asked to describe their movements into, through, and out of active rave participation. As anticipated, a number of women talked extensively about the use of drugs at rave events, and in many cases the interview emerged as a vehicle through which to attribute new meanings to their past rave-related experiences, especially drugs use – a point to which I return below.

In addition to identifying as female, my research sample is quite homogenous in terms of how they identified themselves to me in terms of age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, martial status, and level of education.\textsuperscript{26} In terms of past rave participation, participants’ ages and geographical locations during their periods of active rave participation varied. For example, although they all identified as once actively involved in Toronto’s rave scene, only four women were living in

\textsuperscript{25} Please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the Letter of Invitation I used to recruit research participants.

\textsuperscript{26} Please refer to Appendix B, Table 1.1 for a list of participants’ social locations at the time of their interviews. Regrettably, I did not ask participants about their class locations at the time of their interviews, or during their periods of active rave participation. Nevertheless, in Chapter Five I draw tentative links between active rave participation, financial constraints, and the development and cessation of an active raver identity/lifestyle.
Toronto during their periods of most active rave participation. In addition, while some participants had been attending rave events for well over ten years at the time of their interviews, the timeframes and ages discussed by each woman ranged drastically, with Kickin' attending her first event in 1995 at the age of fifteen and Serendipity going to her first rave in 2000 at the age of thirty-three. It is also important to note that not all interviewees were *active* rave participants from the moment that they went to their first rave right up until they attended their last (see also, Chapter Six); for five of the ten women it took at least one year before they became *active* rave participants (meaning that they attended raves on a regular basis and began to identify themselves, to varying degrees, as “ravers”). There was also a great deal of variation in terms of the length of each woman’s active participation, with four women attending raves regularly for one year (Kickin’, Curious, Molly and Penelope), three women attending regularly for two years (Princess, Serendipity and Grrrl), two women for four years (Pink and Mystic), and one woman for six years (Cosmic).\(^{27}\)

All ten women were asked to choose a pseudonym. This task proved more troublesome than I had anticipated. Five women found it difficult to decide on pseudonyms that they felt suitably captured their rave-related experiences and so they asked me to choose suitable names for them. In addition, three women originally chose names that were quite revealing, either because they were current cyber-identities (i.e. current or past e-mail names) or because the names chosen were their past “raver names.” When I raised this as a possible issue of concern in terms of anonymity, only one woman chose to modify her original pseudonym.

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\(^{27}\) See Appendix B, Table 1.2 for a breakdown of the ages, geographical locations and timeframes discussed by interviewees in relation to their past active rave participation in Toronto.
Epistemology

During moments of intense reflection, I often considered using my own life history as the main source of data for this thesis because from my understanding life history methods help to identify the key structural (familial, institutional, religious, historical) contexts of a person’s life, paying special attention to the processes by which people respond to major life transitions (for example, Atkinson 1998). However, without collecting other data, I felt that I could not be sure that my own experiences have anything to say about the experiences of other female rave participants. I began the research for this thesis with the belief that the life history of a single individual is useful only to the extent that it can be compared with other data. Throughout the research process this point of view changed. I now agree with Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2003), Carolyn Ellis (2004) and Maria Pini (2001) that individual people’s personal narratives are important and valid in and of themselves because they “open up the possibility of dialogue, collaboration, and relationship” (Ellis 2004: 195).

Notwithstanding this belief, I began this project with the view that my story – presented on its own – would not be read as valid, or as having anything ‘significant’ to say. I began the research process from the position that in order to establish a set of general social patterns, or tendencies, it is necessary to explore the ways in which different people experience and react to social phenomena in similar ways. Following this rationale, I decided to conduct semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten women to compare the ways that age and gender influenced their movements into, through, and past active rave participation in Toronto. What I looked for when analyzing my interview transcripts were patterns in participants’ responses to my questions, and similarities and differences in the ways interviewees narrated their past and present rave-related social worlds. In this way, my goal was to get at the range of interpretations,
and the *range* of experiences, that past active rave participation offered and continues to offer these women without losing sight of the importance and influences that their social locations as particularly gendered beings (i.e. *women*) had in terms of shaping these same experiences and interpretations.

Initially, traces of my own rave-related experiences could only be found in (a) my choice of research topic, and (b) the construction of my interview questions. Using my own past rave experiences as a way to generate my interview guide, I reasoned, would help to (a) locate me implicitly in my research project, and (b) make me feel comfortable conducting interviews (this thesis represents the first set of interviews I have ever conducted). Asking women to talk about issues that I had already considered in relation to my *own* past rave experiences also ensured that I could participate in the interview process by sharing my own stories. Thus, allowing interviewees to ask me questions about my own experiences was not only a way to position myself as a past active rave participant, but it also helped interviews to emerge more as friendly conversations than as formal interrogations.

I quickly began to envision my research project not as just *either* a personal and reflexive project *or* as a study of other people's experiences. Instead, I began to conceptualize my project as what Ellis and Bochner (2003) generally call "autoethnography." They explain, autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations [...] As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. (209)

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28 Please refer to Appendix C for a copy of my interview guide.
The particular form of autoethnography to which I most closely align myself is the *reflexive ethnographical approach* to studying participation in cultural activities, which Ellis and Bochner (2003) describe as studies wherein the researcher’s “*personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study*” (211, emphasis in original).

Oftentimes, they explain, reflexive ethnographers use their own experiences as starting points for their research. From this general description, autoethnographers are subjects of their own studies insofar as they explicitly locate themselves in their projects. In addition, reflexive ethnographers, like me, make every effort to link their personal experiences – and the experiences of those around them – to larger social and cultural processes and structures of interaction, including the interview and research processes. In this way, I understand the use of reflexive ethnographic research methods to be congruous with what C. Wright Mills (1959) calls the development of a *Sociological Imagination* and the production of politically and intellectually challenging studies, with the “reflexive” reflecting the need to examine micro aspects of a given phenomenon, the “ethnographic” exploring macro socio-cultural aspects, and the two together highlighting the importance of drawing connections between macro and micro processes and effects of a given phenomenon (see also, Chapter One).

In his book *Symbolic Interaction and Cultural Studies: The Politics of Interpretation*, Norman Denzin (1992) draws out links between micro and macro processes of meaning-making. He explains, “experiences become political when the actions and emotions they express connect to the political economies of everyday life in ways which reinforce class, race, and gender stereotypes” (135, emphasis in original). Denzin continues, “in the aesthetic experience turned political, [...] individual experiences [...] are] often coded in masculine-feminine, in-group, out-group terms. Such moments produce feelings of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility”
This understanding of politics supports my argument that rave and post-rave club cultures are political because they do not escape dominant tendencies to re-produce discourses and discriminations based on categories of difference such as age and gender, for example (see also, Thornton 1994, 1995). It also supports my methodological decision to employ reflexive ethnographic methods – in addition to face-to-face interviews – as a way of linking my own micro experiences and those of my ten research participants to macro social issues and processes (i.e. ageism and sexism) whereby dominant discourses (and therefore, stereotypes) are experienced, re-produced, and maintained.

In harmony with my belief in the value of reflexive ethnographic research methods, I begin each analysis chapter with (a) an epigraph, taken from interviews, which summarizes the findings presented in that chapter, and (b) a personal narrative that shows how my own experiences in Toronto’s rave scene support those findings. My reasoning for doing so is two-fold: (1) to position myself as a past active rave participant in the minds of readers by giving them insights into the ways in which age and gender have significantly shaped my relationship to rave over the past decade, and thus making me subject to claims I make in each chapter of this thesis, and (2) to point out that while theoretically I appreciate the value of any one person’s story to say something significant about our social worlds (i.e., I would have drawn similar conclusions had I used only my own rave-related experiences as my only source of data), the sharing and comparing of various people’s stories and experiences opens up new room for dialogue, and creates the possibility for new affinities and interpretations to be formed.

This belief in the value of a dialogic process was reinforced by an incident that happened during my fieldwork. On this particular day I had two interviews scheduled. The two women I was to interview were friends. They had met in Toronto’s rave scene and had subsequently
become very close. They had many mutual friends, most of whom they knew through the scene, and they had attended a number of rave events together. Because of time constraints (i.e. other work and social commitments) and as a way to cut down on travel times, we decided to conduct both interviews in the same location. Initially the women had suggested that we could further minimize our time constraints if I interviewed them both at the same time. I declined this suggestion because I was concerned about (a) doing one group interview when all of my others were individual interviews, and (b) the difficulty a group interview might pose when it came time to transcribe. After completing the second interview, the three of us began to talk about some of my questions and each woman's various responses to these questions (off-tape). At this time I quickly began to re-think the advantages and drawbacks of one-to-one interviews as opposed to focus groups.

On the one hand, one of the women noted differences between her female and male friends' rave participation – thus, getting excited when I asked questions about gender differences within the scene. On the other hand, the other woman claimed that she and her male and female friends (the same group of friends about which the other woman spoke) experienced rave in the exact same way. As the two women shared and compared their responses to my questions, each began to modify what she had told me, especially the woman who claimed that my questions about gender were irrelevant. After talking with her friend, this woman began to re-evaluate her refusal to engage my suggestion that rave is aged and gendered in specific ways.

The above incident has important implications in terms of the ways that we conduct our research, and the methods we choose to gather our data. For instance, I chose to conduct face-to-face, semi-structured interviews in order to make room for the voices and experiences of individual women to be heard and validated. At this moment I began to wish that in addition to
personal interviews, I had elected to conduct focus group sessions because, as the above incident suggests, focus groups may allow for the creation of “new insights about the [studied] phenomenon from those who have experienced it” (Palys 1997: 162; see also, Morgan and Kruegar 1993). This is to say that focus groups may have not only allowed me (as the researcher) to “gather alternative interpretations […] and generate additional hypotheses and/or research questions to be addressed,” but more importantly, it would have allowed interviewees to compare their experiences in a group setting, thereby facilitating new insights into the significance they attribute to their past active rave participation (Palys 1997: 162).29

What the above incident also highlights is that we represent ourselves somewhat differently depending on the social context. It was during this interaction that I began fully to appreciate the argument that our “selves” are discursively constructed, and the claims we make, just like the selves we present, are always partial, fluctuating, never complete, always in process. Knowing this, my goal in writing this thesis is not to tell the “truth” about rave, or to delineate a representative “female raver” or “rave experience” (see also, Chapter Seven). I acknowledge that this is impossible for a number of reasons, including the logistical difficulty that interviewees had with accurately remembering the details of (especially the feelings they associated with) their past active rave participation (see also, Ellis and Bochner 2003). More than this, as I talked with interviewees about their past rave-related experiences, it became clear that their present senses of self began to overshadow, and in many ways contradict, their past views of themselves and the significance they attributed to their past rave-related experiences and activities at the time of the interview. In this context, consider my finding that interviewees tended to construct

29 Despite these potential benefits of focus group interviews, I do not regret my use of personal interview methods. Given the sensitive nature of some of the issues discussed by interviewees (i.e. drug (ab)use, sexual assault, sex trade work), it is likely that in the focus group setting – where interviewees are not necessarily in the presence of their close friends, and where anonymity is compromised – I would have lost some very significant findings of this research.
their own past rave-related drug use as a vehicle for positive and enlightening "other worldly" experiences, but when talking about their reasons for ceasing active rave participation and about the potential future participation of their children, a number of interviewees reproduced moral panic discourses about drug use as inherently "deviant," dangerous, and inappropriate (see also, Chapter Six).

The Necessity of Actively Listening for Women's Voices

Maria Pini (2001) contends that women are often written out of studies where scholars seek to describe subcultural activities as resistant (see also, LeBlanc 2001; McRobbie and Garber 1991[1975]). She argues that with increased academic and media attention paid to rave, especially on the production end of such activities, women have been further relegated to the margins of subcultures. This, she argues, has led to the "almost regulated denial of the place and practices of girls and women within club cultural criticism" (5, emphasis added). In Club Cultures and Female Subjectivity, Pini (2001) maintains that this un-writing of women's subcultural experiences is three-fold. As she says,

(i) Women's experiences in [rave], are not located at the more visible and traditionally more 'significant' levels of club cultures. These are predominately male sites of experience;

(ii) Once reconstructed within pop[ular] and academic histories, rave is retold mainly in terms of these sites of experience. Male experience tends, then, to be reconstructed as the significant object of history;

(iii) Any claims suggesting that women may actually get something positive out of their involvement in this male-dominated structure, are frequently dismissed as unsupported. (44-45)

This three-fold exclusion of women's voices leads Pini to argue that methodologically we need to shift our focus in order to ensure that the stories and practices of female club cultural participants are valued as 'significant,' as having something important to say about the state of women's perceived place within contemporary British (and I add Canadian) society.
I agree with Pini (2001) that the goal in focusing on the experiences of female rave participants is “not about exploring women’s club cultural experiences, simply for the sake of it, or simply because we do not hear enough about such experiences. The motivation [... instead should be] that the stories raving women tell say a lot about available and emerging fictions [read “discourses”] of femininity” (15, emphasis in original). A failure to address and value the experiences of female ravers can, as Pini continually argues, “mean that the study of today’s dance cultures, ends up being a study of today’s masculinities” (51; see also, LeBlanc 2001).  

Thus far I have argued that rave is embedded in political discourses and efforts to know and to regulate it (for example, Chapter Two). Here I add that when our focus is on the experiences of female rave participants, the political significance of such efforts are heightened because they point to the continued importance that academic, media, and political institutions place on regulating women’s bodies and constructing those women who stray from expectations about what they should and should not be doing as “deviant” (see also, Chapter Five; Redhead 1993).

According to this view, it is not enough to point out that contemporary cultural activities like rave continue to be male-centered because a

failure to go beyond the levels of [rave] production and organization, to say more about other levels of event participation and other experiential sites, amounts to a failure to address the significance of club cultural involvement for the hundreds of thousands of women who regularly participate in dance cultures, and who claim that such participation is central to their lives, their friendships and their identities. (Pini 2001: 7, emphasis in original)

In fact, following the above argument, I maintain that a focus on the male-centeredness of the production end of raves causes some scholars to silence the voices of female participants further, thereby reinforcing many of the very hierarchies of oppression which they seek to untangle and challenge. Given the historical tendency for women’s voices to be ignored and belittled, this is a

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30 I appreciate the argument that Maria Pini (2001) is making here, but I am troubled by the emphasis that she places on unequivocally equating women with “femininity” and men with “masculinity,” categories that I understand to be socially and discursively constructed.
problematic finding, especially when some of the researchers imbricated in this silencing are often the same people who claim to be actively listening to these voices (for example, Thornton 1995; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006; see also, Chapter Four).

The epistemological implications here are that women – by virtue of them identifying and being read as such – experience the world differently than men and for this reason, their voices and experiences (and the voices and experiences of other people who identify along other axes of gender) are excluded from knowledge-claims produced and reproduced in academic and lay representations of rave (see also, Chapter Two). This argument clearly has implications for research and researchers who claim to be ‘feminist’ because

a given epistemological framework specifies not only what ‘knowledge’ is and how to recognize it, but who are ‘knowers’ and by what means someone becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated and some rejected in favour of another/others. (Stanley and Wise in Pini 2001: 23)

From this perspective, researchers who relegate women’s voices to the margins of subcultures, and who do not value their experiences as having something significant to say are imbricated in the construction of not only ‘partial’ knowledges, but of intentionally partial, biased, and unjust processes of oppression and domination.

It is this argument that informs “the feminist standpoint approach” to studying lived experiences. According to Dorothy Smith (1987),

a sociology for women should not be mistaken for an ideological position that represents women’s oppression as having a determinate character and takes up the analysis of social forms with a view to discovering in the lineaments that the ideologist already supposes she knows. The standpoint of women therefore as I am deploying it here cannot be equated with perspective or worldview. It is rather a method that, at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence of the spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds. (106-107, emphasis added; see also, Harding 2004)

From my understanding of it then, to adopt a ‘feminist standpoint’ involves a re-writing of women and their experiences back into the history of our knowledge, thus making
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their conspicuously absent voices and experiences visible and audible. As Pini (2001) explains, “it is not only that we can, but – as feminists – we must find ways of connecting ‘theoretical’ insights to popular cultural practice and discourse” (61, emphasis in original). As feminist researchers we must connect theory with practice and discourse.

More importantly, we must emphasize what these connections mean in the lives of the people who are affected by our research, and what these connections reveal about our social worlds.

Dispersing Power

I sent each research participant a copy of her interview transcript asking her to read it over and to contact me if she wished to make any changes (including omissions) to her story. Only one research participant contacted me, and asked me to omit all references to certain locations and names of people that she felt may be too revealing. I also sent each woman a copy of my three analysis chapters, with all references made to her highlighted, so that she could read it over and easily identify herself, and again make changes as she saw fit.\footnote{Only two interviewees took me up on this offer. I will discuss their feedback in Chapter Six.} I felt that this was a necessary step in the research process because, theoretically, it (a) helps to decrease the amount of power that I, as the researcher/interviewer, may be perceived to hold, (b) helps to ensure that these women are comfortable with the ways that I have represented their experiences, and (c) provides me with what Jill McCaughan, Robert Carlson, Russel Falck, and Harvey Siegal (2005) call a “social validity” test whereby I could “check [my] results [and interpretations] against the experiences [and interpretations] of research participants” (1506).

The importance I place in such a task is consistent with my adamant belief that in order to offer grounded, adequate, and just representations of contemporary participation in cultural activities, we must seek to put the voices of participants – especially women, given the above
discussion that their voices too often are excluded from the creation of knowledge – at the fore of our analyses. It is also consistent with my belief that obtaining informed consent from research participants is not a process that ends when an interviewee signs the Informed Consent forms required by the Research Ethics Board; instead, informed consent is an ongoing process (see also, van den Hoonard 2002). In this way, I do not consider the research process as an opportunity for me to manipulate interviewees’ experiences to my advantage; instead I envision the process as “a dance, in which one partner (the interviewer) must be carefully attuned to the other’s movements” (Esterberg 2002: 82). This collaboration between researcher and participant is contingent upon the listening skills and willingness to engage in open dialogue of both parties. As Atkinson (1998) reminds us, “a key to establishing rapport is to be able to find your own balance between guiding and following and knowing when it is more important to let the pace and direction of the process be set by the person you are interviewing” (28). This process not only forced me, as the researcher, to relinquish some control over the interview setting, but it also allowed interviewees’ stories to guide both the interview and the research findings.

Notwithstanding the above, I do not deny that as the researcher who conducts interviews I am in some position of power insofar as I necessarily interpret interviewees’ words and represent them and their rave participation in particular ways. Nevertheless, it is equally important to acknowledge that (a) interviewees also are in a position of power insofar as they have control over the ways that they represented themselves to me, (b) both their representations of themselves and my interpretations of those representations are partial and never complete, and (c) both their representations of themselves and my research findings are open to various interpretations. It is for these reasons that I was adamant to give interviewees the opportunities to

32 Consistent with my belief that consent is an ongoing process, I also confirmed with the two participants who provided me with feedback on my three analysis chapters that I had their permission to integrate these comments into my final draft of Chapter Six.
review my analysis chapters, to make changes as they saw fit, and in essence, to have the final says in how they and their experiences are represented in this thesis.

**Rewind and Replay**

Following my review of Canadian literature on rave in Chapter Two, I consider my research as a response to: (1) the general consensus that the amount of specifically Canadian literature on cultural participation is scant; (2) Brian Wilson’s (2002) call for Canadian studies that interrogate the “internal complexity” of the meanings that people give to their movements through subcultural participation (376; see also, Wilson 1999, 2006); and (3) Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson’s (2001) call to consider rave’s political potentials in relation to whether or not it succeeds in creating alternative spaces for participants and how far it challenges dominant discourses along other dominant axes of social inequality than social class. I also understand my current project as a response to Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber’s (1991 [1975]) call for more attention to be paid to the experiences of female (sub)cultural participants. While I acknowledge that there is no one, definitive “female rave experience,” my discussions with ten women who once actively participated in rave in Toronto suggest that women do experience rave in similar ways, and these must be understood as different from most men’s rave experiences.

In the following three analysis chapters I weave in and out between my own, interviewees’, academic, and media representations of rave to show that despite claims that rave spaces are all-inclusive, people’s locations along various axes of age, gender, race, and ability, for example, cause them to experience and construct rave in particular ways. Because they emerged as most prominent, I focus most of my attention on the ways that age and gender intersected in my own and interviewees’ narratives about our past active rave participation. Our stories are divided — not so neatly — into themes that continually emerged during our discussions
of (a) becoming active members of Toronto’s rave scene via established and fledgling social networks, (b) sustaining a rave identity for a prolonged period of time and moving through intense moments of pleasure and resistance; and (c) ceasing active rave participation because as we got older, pressures from the “outside” world began to pull us further and further away from active rave participation. I have developed each one of these chronological themes into separate chapters. They are not meant to be read as discrete phases or stages of rave participation; instead, I use this temporal, yet messy, framework to emphasize the extent to which our experiences of pleasure, escape, resistance, and discrimination within Toronto’s rave scene blended in with one another as we moved (read “aged”) into, through, and past active rave participation. More than this, my goal in dividing these chapters temporally is to highlight that at each “stage” of our past rave participation, interviewees and I had to contend with our own and dominant understandings of ourselves as particularly aged and gendered subjects.
Chapter Four: Age, Gender, and Becoming a Rave Participant

I think that drugs have a more ageing effect on women and prettier women come and the guys get older and they bring in the young pretty girls [...] The men can age because they can always attract the pretty girls, who brought us into the scene, and it just goes like that, or [they] bring the little gay boys into the scene and then they grow up really fast and the little girls grow up really fast.

-(Cosmic)

In Chapter One I explained that my interest in rave was sparked in 1994. I was fourteen years old and in the ninth grade. During my first semester of high school I developed a friendship with another fourteen-year-old woman. She was an active participant in Toronto’s rave scene. She introduced me to the scene by narrating her rave-related experiences to me every Tuesday morning when we went out back of our high school for a cigarette before our second period class. She told me stories about the crazy outfit she wore to her most recent event, about the outlandish characters she saw there, and about the quality of the drugs she ingested over the course of the weekend. On occasion, I would go to her home after school and she would continue narrating her weekend-long escapes to me. It was during one of these visits that she gave me my first “rave” tape – Ritchie Hawtin (a.k.a. Plastikman).

I fell in love with the music. I made copies for my close girlfriends and told them that they had to listen to this music; it was unlike anything I had heard before – and it was good! When my girlfriend began to see that my interest in rave really was piqued – about halfway through the school year – not only did she continue to add to my music collection, but she also began bringing me event flyers and phone numbers in hopes that I would attend an event with her.33 Over the course of the next year and a half of our friendship, I became entrenched in rave: listening to the music, wearing the clothing, experimenting with the drugs, and associating with other “ravers” – mostly her much older male friends. Yet I still did not attend an event with her.

33 At this time niche media (such as flyers) and hotline numbers (which were transmitted through word of mouth) were the main ways that people learned the exact location of rave events.
It was not until I “hooked up” with one of these older men that I went to my first event in the summer of 1996. As I reflect on my initial rave participation, I now understand it as a process of immersion through an extension of my female-dominated friendships.

In Chapters Two and Three I maintained that if we are to offer valid representations of cultural activities, we must analyze the “internal complexity” of people’s movements in, through, and past subcultural spaces and experiences – especially those of women and other often silenced groups of people (Wilson 2002: 376). I argue that if we are to draw out rave’s political characteristics, it is necessary to link people’s rave-related experiences to their broader social contexts. In the present chapter I foreshadow the argument (made more fully in Chapter Five) that although rave offers young women opportunities to challenge and/or resist dominant expectations about “appropriate” behaviour, such opportunities often rely on accommodation to normative gender roles. I do this via an exploration of the specific ways that age and gender intersect in, and thus shape, interviewees’ rave-related activities. These activities are (a) drug use practices with female friends, (b) pre- and post rave event activities with male and female friends, and (c) pursuing romantic – mostly heterosexual – relationships.

Following my interview data, I make these categorical divisions because they draw out a particular aspect of the gendered and sexualized (read “political”) nature of rave at different points in participants’ “subcultural careers” (Wilson 2002). For example, while drug practices with female friends appear significant in terms of my own and interviewees’ initial knowledge of and connections to Toronto’s rave scene, the development of an active rave lifestyle appears contingent upon our past participation in rave and rave-related activities with female and male friends. In addition, following my own and interviewees’ experiences, I suggest that getting to

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34 I explain my use of the term “lifestyle” in the section of this chapter titled “Co-ed Rave-Related Activities: Deeper Immersion.”
one's first rave event seems to rely on having older male connections to the scene, particularly for women who are under legal driving age, and who live outside of Toronto.

Female-Dominated Drug Activities: Initial Attractions

Like me, a number of interviewees understood their past active rave participation in Toronto in highly social terms, as an extension of their female-dominated social activities, especially drug use. For example, Curious rationalized:

I think I got involved in the drugs before I got involved in raves, so I think when I met the [girls] that were going to the raves and invited me, I was already doing the chemicals so it was just to me like going to a club and then I was like, 'wow this is where all these people go; this is fun' [...] I think mostly how you get into it is depending on if you do drugs or not and who your friends are. (Curious, emphasis added)

Curious then explained that she began attending rave events at the age of sixteen after she was re-united with a female friend:

In grade nine she came back to the same high school as I [...] we started talking a little bit, realizing that we had interests. She was friends with these girls that went to raves and I wasn’t. And then her and I started doing drugs together, and we both got invited through her other friends. (Curious, emphasis added)

Above, Curious highlights drug use as a bridge that re-connected her with a childhood girl friend. Their common drug use practices were what connected these women to female peers who later invited them into Toronto’s rave scene.

Kickin’ also described her introduction to rave in terms of (a) past participation at dance events, (b) an expansion of female-dominated social circles, and (c) previous drug use practices:

Kickin’: I first started going to clubs young, twelve. I remember [this roller rink in my hometown] had a dance night, so I started doing that when I was twelve years old [...] Then I met up with [another girl] in high school and she took me to my first rave.

Julie: Was she older, younger?

Kickin’: She was a year older, no two years older, no a year older. I was in grade ten [and fifteen years old]. She was in [grade] eleven. It was in Toronto [...] It was a Syrous party, now I remember [...] I remember that it was some guy who drove that was a friend of hers [...] I honestly don’t remember if it was my first time doing E or not, but I had done
acid and stuff before.

As in the above examples, drug use with female friends figured prominently in most interviewees' narratives about their introductions to Toronto’s rave scene (see also, Kelly 2005; Krebs and Steffey 2005; McCaughan, Carlson, Falck, and Siegal 2005; Ter Bogt and Engels 2005). This finding is in keeping with other research, which, although it posits drug use as “deviant,” suggests that people tend to form friendships with people who enjoy similar activities (for example, Kandel and Davies 1991; Warr 1993). Particularly, Mark Warr (1993) argues that young people tend to spend more time with friends (often of the same gender), and thus to undertake more activities together, especially when they are between the ages of seventeen and eighteen, dropping drastically thereafter (24). Drawing on sociological studies of the relationships between peer association and patterns of crime, Warr further suggests, “adolescents are commonly introduced to delinquency by their friends and subsequently become more selective in their choices of friends” (36). This is one viable interpretation of Curious’ suggestion that she and her childhood friend could later rebuild their friendship because of their mutual “interest” in drug-taking – an interest which later led them into active rave participation.

For most interviewees, drug taking was a highly social activity, and one that figured prominently in their rave experiences.35 For instance, when I asked interviewees how they would describe rave to a friend interested in joining the scene, a number of them took drug use for granted. Serendipity’s response is worth quoting at length:

I would let you know about my experiences, but I think it would all be kind of in a positive way, but I think I’d also want you to know that the next day these are kind of the

35 Pink was the most adamant of all interviewees that her rave participation was inseparable from drug use. She acknowledged that this is not true for everyone, however. For example, she explained that a close girl friend of hers would “wait until the bitter end, when she was so exhausted but wanted to stay to dance” to ingest narcotics. She continued, “I was the opposite. When I got there I would be like, ‘please give me something.’” Similarly, Curious told me that she never went to a party sober because, as Pink and Mystic explained, the drugs made the music more accessible for her. Contrary to these other women, Grrrl and Penelope both said that for them rave participation was always first and foremost about the music.
things you might feel, so let's prepare you for [that] – not in a kind of scary way [...] I'd let] you know it’s kind of like a hang over when you drink; you feel lousy if you drink too much, kinda the same sort of thing – you might not, but you might, feel a bit lousy the next day and you might want people around you, so ‘hey’, you know, ‘come back [to my place] afterwards and sort of plan it that way’ [...] I might say this is what I typically do, I typically do a half, you might want to start doing that way, see how you feel and if you’re feeling pretty good after a couple hours, you can, you know, take another half. (Serendipity)

Similarly, Pink replied: “If you do drugs, it’s going to be the best time of your life!” and Kickin’, Curious, and Molly immediately responded by asking if “this friend” uses drugs or not, because if not, they would likely advise her against going; if she did go, they would be sure to monitor her drug intake.

Even Penelope, who was the most adamant of participants that drug-taking played only a minor role in (her) rave participation, highlighted the relationship between friendships and drug use when she explained that she and her husband used drugs at raves until

it became so prevalent and there were so many people just passing out and people were dying and we just said, ‘you know what, we don’t want to be part of that’ [...] We got back into it later when our friends were; it would only take one of us to cave for the night. (Penelope, emphasis added)\(^{36}\)

Although some scholars painstakingly argue that drug use is of peripheral importance to rave participation (for example, Hutson 1999, 2000), my argument that rave participation and drug use are intimately linked with one’s social networks and activities should not be surprising in light of other studies that intimately associate rave participation and drug-taking (for example, Barrett, Gross, Garand, and Pihl 2005; Kelly 2005; Krebs and Steffey 2005; Malbon 1999; McCaughan, Carlson, Falck, Siegal 2005; Ter Bogt and Engels 2005). My findings suggest that drug use is significant in terms of interviewees’ introduction to, and sustained participation in, rave. At the same time, following Denise Kandel and Mark Davies (1991) and Mark Warr (1993), I acknowledge that while in some cases rave participation may be understood as a

\(^{36}\) Similarly, Molly explained that she “never really went [to a rave] for the purpose of getting high, it would just happen.”
progression of participants’ female dominated friendships and drug-related activities, both are especially contingent upon sharing these activities with current friends – regardless of gender – and developing new lifestyle choices/activities.

**Co-ed Rave-Related Activities: Deeper Immersion**

Interviewees did not simply describe drug use with female friends as a major aspect of their initial attraction to Toronto’s rave scene. A number of these women also constructed mutual drug use as an activity that *enlarged* and *anchored* their rave-related friendship networks, and linked them to men in the scene. Thus, rave events were described as places to go spend time and bond with both old and new friends, and in which to further cement fledgling romantic (mostly heterosexual) relationships. Princess spoke directly to the importance of rave participation in terms of strengthening bonds with people in one’s pre-existing social circle when she explained that what attracted her to Toronto’s rave scene was the desire to have “just a really good time [...] with [her] friends.” Plus, she added, “when you’re on drugs, you feel more bonded to your friends” (emphasis added). Penelope highlighted the importance of forming friendships in the scene when she explained that she hated her first event, but she really enjoyed her second because:

> [she] ended up in [...] a little back room in the warehouse and just ended up talking to people and that was the first time, because [the first event] was just so big that [she] didn’t really talk to anybody. (Penelope)

Following these accounts, a heightened sense of sociality (i.e. social interactions, a sense of intimacy and bonding with members of a like-minded community, particularly one’s group of friends) is an especially enjoyable aspect of rave participation. In fact, all ten interviewees cited

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37 This finding is also in keeping with the work of authors who argue that one’s feelings of closeness to friends may be “heightened [...] by the special camaraderie that comes from sharing illicit adventures” (Warr 1993: 35; see also, Hammersley, Khan, and Ditton 2002; Kandel and Davies 1991; Levy, O’Grady, Wish, and Arria 2005; Malbon 1998, 1999; Ter Bogt and Engels 2005).
spending time with friends, interacting with new people, and listening to "good" music as the most gratifying aspects of rave participation (see also, Weber 1999).

Penelope further drew out the importance of friendship networks within Toronto's rave scene when she explained (as did Princess) that for her the choice to attend one event over another was more about supporting the (male) deejay and promoter friends whom she met while active in the scene than about a preference for one venue over another. From this perspective, there are at least two ways in which friendship networks within rave may be significant in terms of both active rave participation and the maintenance of rave scenes. First, according to interviewees, spending time with friends was a major reason for initial and sustained rave participation. Second, (and somewhat hypothetically, yet implicit in Penelope's above comment) it is probably through these same friendships and the social and economic networks and flows that develop from them that a scene – in this case Toronto's rave scene – is developed, supported and maintained.38

Equally important, according to interviewees the social networks and interactions that rave participation cultivates do not dissipate once outside of immediate rave events. When I probed interviewees about their typical rave experiences from beginning to end, many of them described participation in a number of rave-related activities which extended beyond the time-space of an individual event and which allowed them to bond with co-rave participants – male and female. For instance, Kickin’, Curious, Pink, Cosmic, Mystic, and Grrrl described spending time with female friends before events to choose hairstyles, make-up colors, and/or make “rave”

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38 Penelope, Pink, Princess, Cosmic and Grrrl offered an additional possible effect of the development of friendships within Toronto's rave scene when they explained that because of their various friendships with rave deejays and promoters, they were more familiar than other rave-goers with what goes on “behind the scenes” and what goes into making an event happen. In a number of instances this intimate knowledge of the scene was also linked to a better or “true” appreciation for rave. Please refer my discussion of subcultural capital in the section below titled, “Male Links: Be(com)ing “His” Raver” for a more detailed discussion of why it is that these women may want to represent themselves as truly “in the know.”
clothing to wear. Other pre-rave event activities included drinking alcohol at someone’s house (Pink, Molly), drinking coffee before-hand to increase energy (Mystic), finding drugs for the night ahead (Serendipity, Kickin’, Curious, Pink), and according to Penelope, spending the morning before cleaning so that she and her partner (and oftentimes their friends) “came home to a nice clean place.” According to interviewees, then, preparation for an event is an integral component of the rave experience (see also, Malbon 1999; Pini 2001; Thomas 2003).

Interviewees also narrated post-event activities that allowed them to bond with friends, partners, and other fellow rave participants. For example, Penelope remembers the

bright sunny [... ] Sunday morning[s, when after leaving an event she]’d go back to [her] car and there’d be people playing music in their cars and dancing around their cars or on the top of their cars [...] It was a fun time to just kind of hang out in the parking lot as everybody was kind of winding down in the morning. (Penelope)

She also explained,

[her] place was always the place that people came back to afterwards and it would carry on well into the next day and the day after. [Her partner] got into buying vinyl and had turntables for a while so people would typically come back [...] and] play tunes all day long. (Penelope)

Molly, Pink, Princess, Mystic, Kickin’, and Curious recounted similar stories of leaving an event only to continue the “party” elsewhere. For instance, Pink explained that oftentimes she and her friends would leave an event only to

go back to [a friend]’s house [...] and] spend all day snorting the little bits of pills that [they] had [left...] Then finally come noonish [she]’d be like, ‘ok, I’m going to try and sleep now’ [...] For the next few days, [she]’d sleep a lot, and not really do anything ‘cause [she was ...] coming off the high from the weekend. And then [she’d] start the process all over again the following Friday. (Pink)

There appear to be a number of things going on here in terms of the development of, and commitments to, rave-related activities.

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39 In this instance I use the term “party” following Pink’s definition that “to party” means “to take drugs.”
According to the above discussion, interviewees describe their various social relationships and activities as both intersecting within rave spaces, and broadening through shared experiences that extended outside the time-space of rave events. Moreover, as suggested by Pink, some rave participants’ various social networks may become so intertwined that it becomes difficult to disassociate from any one of these networks, or accompanying activities – perhaps especially drug-use – and this may lead to further commitments to rave. In other words, as rave activities and related networks expand and commitments increase, rave may become an entrenched *lifestyle* for some participants.

David Chaney (2001) distinguishes between a *way of life* and a *lifestyle* when he explains that since Max Weber began his work on statuses and lifestyles, “it is conventional to think of lifestyles as a form of status that derives from the mastery of expenditure on consumption or leisure time, rather than [as] a structure of stratification based on the ownership and/or organization of means of production” (82). According to Chaney, a *way of life* is characterized by “a more or less stable community [… with] shared norms, rituals, patterns of social order, and probably a distinctive dialect or speech community,” whereas *lifestyles* are “based in consumer choices and leisure patterns [… which are] integral to a sense of identity but not as a stable or uni-dimensional characterization” (82). Following these same distinctions, Andy Bennett (2000) offers a refined understanding of *lifestyles* as those instances in which people use the resources and commodities available to them to “actively construct” their identities and to “mark themselves off from the wider society by establishing distinctive forms of collective identity” (25; see also, Chapter Five). This understanding of *lifestyles* emphasizes the role of individual agency in terms of how people exercise the options available to them when constructing *local*
and individual identities (Chaney in Bennett 2004: 171; see also, Bennett 1999b, 1999c; Carrington and Wilson 2001; Malbon 1999).

As I discuss further in Chapter Five, this model of local (read “group”) and individual identity construction is useful when thinking through some of the ways that interviewees discussed their rave-related experiences and identities. For example, a number of interviewees talked about the process of developing a generic “raver” identity. At the same time, they also talked about constructing more localized and specific “raver” identities through their clothing styles (for example, Cosmic and Grrrl talked about wearing “fun fur”), their musical preferences (for example, Princess and Cosmic mentioned enjoying jungle music), and their drugs of choice (for example, Molly identified herself as “a meth baby” because her drug of choice was crystal methamphetamine). Interviewees then aligned each of these identities with specific ways of performing the various roles of Candy Raver, Junglist or meth baby, respectively.

Male Links: Getting There

So far I have shown that all ten interviewees described raves as fun places to go with both men and women in their social circles; however, the social networks they described were gendered and sexualized in very specific ways. For example, nine out of ten interviewees described going to their first rave events with either (a) female friends who were themselves connected to the scene by older males or (b) older male rave-goers themselves. In addition, all ten women narrated being taken to their first rave events by male friends, partners, and/or acquaintances. This was especially significant in the case of the seven interviewees who initially travelled to rave events from outside of the Toronto area (Kickin’, Cosmic, Curious, Molly, Pink, Serendipity, Grrrl), and in particular, for those who began attending raves at a relatively young age.

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40 In Serendipity’s case the men with whom she went to her first rave event were significantly younger than her.
age, before they could legally drive (Curious and Kickin’). 41 It seems that one consequence of being more likely to have to depend on (older) men to drive them to rave events was an intensification of gendered (and heterosexualized) power relations, thereby suggesting that geography plays a significant role in some women’s experiences of being introduced to the scene by older, more experienced male “gatekeepers.”

For instance, unlike Mystic and Princess who lived in Toronto at the time of their initial rave involvement, women travelling to rave events from outside of Toronto were less likely to take shuttle buses that travelled to events from meeting points in the city because for this to be a viable option, they had to first find a way into Toronto. 42 Secondly, both Mystic and Princess described rave participation as a popular thing for people in Toronto to do and because of this, they tended to describe their rave-related social networks as larger groups of both men and women than their non-Torontonian counterparts. 43 Thirdly, and related to the first two reasons, women getting into the scene from Toronto likely could draw from a larger pool of friends (and parents) than other women when trying to find a ride to an event. 44 Thus, while all ten interviewees considered going to raves as a fun thing to do with female and male friends, for interviewees who travelled to events from outside of Toronto getting to events appeared to depend on having some male connections to the scene. This is not a trend that is explored in the

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41 Although Grrrl was living in Toronto during her period of active rave participation, when she first began attending events in Toronto, she was living in Barrie.
42 Penelope also was living in Toronto when she began attending rave events. Unlike Mystic and Princess, she had just moved there from another province with her male partner who introduced her to the scene and drove (with) her to events. Please refer to the below section titled, “Male Links: Be(com)ing “His” Raver” for a detailed discussion of the significance of heterosexual romantic relationships in terms of some interviewees to rave in Toronto.
43 Curious, Kickin’, and Pink also described attending raves with friends from high school, but they did not construct rave participation as common among their peers; instead it was a popular thing because only those people “in the know” went (see also, Thornton 1995, 2005).
44 Mystic further drew out the significance of geographical location when she explained that when her mom finally learned about her rave participation, because “there were a lot of raves that were a ten minute drive from [her] mom’s house [… often] she would drive [her] there.”
rave literature, but it is a significant finding because it highlights one of the ways that rave participation is embedded in gendered power dynamics, and thus is politically inflected.\textsuperscript{45}

Above I suggest that geographical location played a significant role in determining both the size and gendered nature of the group of people with whom interviewees attended rave events, and that being under-age may compound one's dependent position. This is not to say that the experiences of interviewees who were older and/or living in Toronto when they began attending rave events were \textit{not} gendered or sexualized; instead, what I am suggesting is that their experiences, while also gendered in similarly specific ways, were less (explicitly) sexualized. For instance, Princess went to her first rave event at the age of seventeen. Unlike interviewees attending from outside of the city, she traveled to the event on a shuttle bus from downtown Toronto with a co-ed group of friends. Nevertheless, she explained that the women in the group were neophytes to rave, and were going with their more seasoned male friends and partners who introduced them: "I went with the guy that I was dating at the time, one of my best friends and her boyfriend, the two guys had been going for a little while, and four other girl friends, \textit{it was all their first time}" (emphasis added; see also, Wilson 1999).

As I suggested in Chapter Three, some interviewees (initially) refused to accept my thesis that involvement in Toronto's rave scene is contingent upon having (older) male connections and thus, that rave participation is aged, gendered, and sexualized in specific ways. Nevertheless, this \textit{is} something that emerged during all ten interviews – albeit to varying degrees. One participant – Cosmic – even argued forcefully, "it's almost like it's an androgynous scene [once you're in it],

\textsuperscript{45} Brian Wilson (1999) is the only rave scholar of whom I am aware who even alludes to this finding when, in his very brief section titled "Learning to Rave: Introductions to the Scene," he explains that there are various reasons that his interviewees gave for their initial interest in raves, which included the belief that rave spaces are safe and optimal places to experiment with drugs, and "a boyfriend or girlfriend was already involved and influenced the decision to try it" (126). Importantly, although he does not pursue this finding, Wilson points out that in all of the interviews he conducted, "\textit{it was always a male who was involved first}" (126, emphasis added).
but how you’re brought into it is very sexualized.” Consider the following exchange about the series of events that led Cosmic to her first rave:

Cosmic: It was 1994. I was eighteen because I couldn’t drink. I remember that. I actually went there because me and my friend were in Toronto buying coke [...] We were partying there all weekend. And we were driving by and on the street there was this guy [...] He came over and started talking to us, and apparently he worked for pimps that were watching the girls on the streets so they wouldn’t get beat up or robbed or anything like that. So we started chatting ... and he said, ‘do you want to come to a party’ and my best friend was like, ‘no, no, no, I don’t want to go’. And he’s like, ‘well why don’t you’, to me, ‘come up next weekend and we’ll go to a party?’ And I’m like ‘ok.’ And I went to my first party with him.

We continued,

Cosmic: He was older than me. He was like twenty-five, I was eighteen. He tried to make out with me on several occasions and I just clearly wasn’t interested [...] but when you are in that scene and you have someone who’s just being so nice to you and you’re on these heavy drugs that he’s just feeding to you, it’s so easy to get wrapped up and becoming, that’s your little sugar daddy, and you’re his little princess.

Julie: It’s true, and so many people like to idealize it and romanticize it, but this is coming out a lot. It’s not that I want to say that the rave scene is shit and that it’s bad, but I think that we need to be honest and admit that this stuff is going on.

Cosmic: Oh, for sure. Even with gay boys. These big gay men are coming along and scooping up these little boys, and my friend [...] was run into prostitution because he got so caught up in that lifestyle and so many girls just got caught up in that.46

During this exchange Cosmic offered extreme examples of how some people’s experiences of rave are highly gendered, sexualized, and aged.

Grrrl also repeatedly drew close connections between Toronto’s rave scene, severe drug use, violence against women, and long-term illnesses. After she alluded to “some traumatic” aspects of her past active rave participation, I asked Grrrl if she would elaborate:

Well the one was being so messed up on drugs that I wanted to kill myself [...] Also] my friend, one who was in our circle, he was jonsing so bad for [crystal] meth one night that he let someone have sex with him and he ended up contracting HIV. This one girl, she had leukemia and she had a child and she kept on doing it [drugs and partying] and she died [Also,] just being so out of my head that I would just find myself in places that I didn’t even know how I got to them; [...] being so sick and just pushing myself to do

46 It is interesting to note that Cosmic’s discussion of “these little [gay] boys” who get brought into the scene by older men reaffirms the importance of age here.
more and more; being in countless numbers of car accidents cause I was under the influence; [...] seeing the pain that I caused my parents and then just seeing, how I was just running from place to place. I got into other things like the sex industry – it took me there for money, and ripping people off – ripping my family off, ripping friends off for money. (Grrrl)

In the above accounts, both Grrrl and Cosmic emphasize some of the highly sexualized and “dangerous” aspects of some people’s rave experiences, perhaps especially those female participants who began participating in Toronto’s rave scene at young ages and who, through their male contacts, became entrenched in the drug aspect of rave (see also, Chapter Six).

Male Links: Be(com)ing “His” Raver

A number of interviewees understood rave participation as an opportunity to (a) solidify pre-existing romantic relationships and (b) pursue new love relationships. In terms of the former, Serendipity, Molly, and Penelope all linked their rave participation to their respective long-term romantic relationships with men already active in Toronto’s rave scene. They understood their past active rave participation as a major component of these relationships and as a way to spend time with these men in their lives. Serendipity even candidly labeled her past active rave participation as “following the boy […] to Toronto.” To further substantiate this point, consider the following responses from these same women about the relationship between their past active rave participation and their relationships with the men in their lives:

Penelope: it was our thing to do on a Friday night, or a Saturday night [...] It was a place where we could go and not worry about anything else, and listen to music all night and we just had a good time.

Molly: I was definitely rebelling. I think. I was, yeah, I was rebelling and I desperately was in love with my boyfriend and he loved, loved to go.

Serendipity: What did I enjoy most about going? I enjoyed the connection with him. It was a connection with another person that I’d never experienced before so when we stopped […] we broke up three times just trying to [figure out] ‘what do we do?’

In each above excerpt, interviewees place their male partners at the centre of their rave participation and related pleasure. They understand rave as at least initially providing a common
interest around which their relationships could be built. In Serendipity’s case, going to raves with her partner was such a central part of their relationship that to cease rave participation meant that she and this man would have to re-anchor their relationship in some ways.

In terms of pursuing new romantic relationships, Mystic explained that she dated a male rave attendee for a long time and Cosmic, Princess, and Pink described wanting to date well-established men in the scene. Mystic and Princess described their respective romantic relationships as cemented in a common appreciation for music and rave. Pink and Cosmic constructed their feelings for some men in the scene as more about fascination than anything else, however. In this context, Cosmic described her relationship with her “gorgeous deejay [ex-] boyfriend” as misguided because, as she explained, “I’m queer. I should have never been with him because I knew I was and I think that I was with him because […] he represent[ed] this piece of this underground, dark piece, that I just want[ed] to be a part of.” In a similar vein, Pink divided the relationships she developed in Toronto’s rave scene into the “hey how are ya” friends and the relationships that she once thought were love, but retrospectively considers “more as infatuation.” In the context of this latter group, she narrated pursuing one man for “probably two years […] but he was not into it – he was a promoter and all these girls wanted him.”

In both instances, Pink and Cosmic seem to have desired the men in question precisely because of what they symbolized; to date a (more often than not male) deejay, promoter or club owner emerges as a possible avenue for upward social mobility within rave; it becomes a form of what Sarah Thornton (1995, 2005) calls “social” and “subcultural” capital – or more precisely what I understand as a desire to accumulate socio-subcultural capital. Thornton (2005) describes

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47 Similarly, Pink, Curious, Molly, and Princess explained that while they would talk to new people at rave events, they never developed any lasting relationships with any of these people outside of the scene. This is a clear contradiction to the finding that Kickin’ met her life partner at a post-rave event and that most of Penelope’s “closest friends now are people [she] met through partying.”
social capital, on the one hand, as “stem[ming] not from what you own or know, but from who you know (and who knows you). [In this way,] connections in the form of friends, relations, associations and acquaintances [...] all bestow status” (186, emphasis in original).\textsuperscript{48} She distinguishes this from subcultural capital, which she describes as a matter of not only what you know about the specifics of a particular subcultural scene, such as the music, dancing, or drugs, but also how much of this you own and embody as “second nature”:

while subcultural capital may not convert into economic capital with the same ease or financial reward as cultural capital, a variety of occupations and incomes can be gained as a result of hipness [which she conceives as the form of subcultural capital]. DJs, club organizers, clothes designers, music and style journalists and various record industry professionals all make a living from their subcultural capital. Moreover, within club cultures, people in these professions often enjoy a lot of respect not only because of their high volume of subcultural capital, but because of their role in defining and creating it. In knowing, owning and playing the music DJs, in particular, are sometimes positioned as the masters of the scene. (Thornton 2005: 187)

Thus, while social capital is dependent on one’s relationships with other people, subcultural capital is objectified and/or embodied as a marker of true ‘hipness’ (see also, Thornton 1995).

From this perspective, the particular men of whom Pink and Cosmic speak – who are respectively a DJ and a promoter – possess large amounts of subcultural capital: they are "the masters of the scene," they are the people who really “know.” These men are ultra “hip” because more than knowing the scene, they actually produce it, thereby conferring them with incomparable amounts of subcultural capital (i.e. their clothes become the clothes, their music, the music). On the other hand, Cosmic and Pink’s is a form of social capital because they know these men. However, if they are able to intimately connect with these men, if they are able to “own” them – to wear them on their arms – then their relationships with these men also become a form of socio-subcultural capital insofar as the men come to symbolize their knowledge of,

\textsuperscript{48} Following Pierre Bourdieu, Sarah Thornton (2005) further distinguishes between social capital and cultural capital, explaining that unlike the former, cultural capital is “knowledge that is accumulated through upbringing or education which confers social status” (185).
commitments to, and mastery over rave. According to this reading, the implicit argument I have made thus far that women are often objectified and exploited in rave scenes is too simplistic; women may also use their subcultural and socio-subcultural capital to their advantage. Clearly there is some degree of self-objectification going on here, but as I discuss in Chapter Six, this self-objectification can also be understood as accommodative resistance.

More than just being the deejays and clubs owners, according to a number of participants, men are also more likely than women to be the drug dealers. In fact, all ten interviewees described getting their first doses of MDMA (a.k.a. Ecstasy) from male acquaintances (see also, Hammersely, Kahn and Ditton 2002). This is interesting, especially (a) in light of Tom Ter Bogt and Rutger Engels’ (2005) claim that men are more likely than women to report taking MDMA to lure sexual partners and to increase sexiness, and (b) when juxtaposed with Cosmic’s description in the previous section of “get[ting] wrapped up and becoming [...] his little princess,” especially “when you’re on these heavy drugs that he’s just feeding [...] to you.” What I am suggesting here is that more than ingesting MDMA and other drugs so that they may feel sexy/alluring, some male rave participants may also use these drugs as a tool to lure potential sexual partners. Ter Bogt and Engels highlight the two-fold (al)luring aspects of MDMA when they point out that women generally use the drug to enhance energy and euphoria while “male ravers [a]re motivated more heavily towards sexiness” (1490).

Within this context, consider Serendipity’s first Ecstasy/rave experience:

They [the two men I went with] were having trouble finding something and I was actually feeling quite relieved [...] and then they did, they found something and I remember going and sitting down in a corner. [My partner...] said what he’d do is test it out for me, let it kick into him first, see what it’s like and then, I could take [...] After a while he’s like, ‘yeah, you should be ok.’ So I was so scared, but I took a whole one [...] after a little while I got some energy [...] I’m thinking ‘this is great’; I’m thinking ‘that’s it, here it is, this is what it is’ [...] Then suddenly whoa [hand across face], everything became slow motion [...] I felt like I couldn’t really see anymore. [My partner] came up and asked ‘are you ok’ and I’m like, ‘I don’t think so’ and he goes, ‘this will pass, you’ll
be fine, just give it fifteen minutes, you'll be fine' [...] I just kind of hung on to those words and then after [...] felt like about fifteen minutes, I started to be able to move a little bit again, but I couldn't see, I was blind. [...] It just became the music; it was like I had heard music for the first time [...] I remember just hanging on to the music and it was just incredible. And then the [male] friend that [we] were with [...] took my hand and gave it to one of the fellows that was there and he did a hand massage [...] It was just like I had never felt anything that good. And then [partner] took me forward and he kissed me while his brother massaged me and I remember just melting; it was just unbelievable. (Serendipity)49

A clear heteronormative pattern of dependence emerges in Serendipity’s above narration.

For example, Serendipity described her very sensual experience as mediated by the different men around her. Her male partner inducted her into the MDMA experience only after acting as a gatekeeper and protector: if he decided it was safe, she could do it. Serendipity clung to his words in order to work through the immediate anxiety she felt from her first Ecstasy-related rush. In a sentence omitted from the above excerpt, Serendipity named a male deejay as the author of the "incredible" music to which she clung in an effort to savor every facet of the experience. More striking, is her description of the three men around her (her partner, his brother and another "fellow") as the architects of her highly corporeal/sensual MDMA experience.50

Rewind and Re-play

Brian Wilson (1999, 2002, 2006) describes Toronto’s rave scene as patriarchal only insofar as women are less likely than men to be deejays and promoters. What he fails to theorize are the different levels and concrete consequences that such gate keeping tactics have in terms of the ways that some people – particularly women – experience rave and the ways that these same people may respond to these experiences. In this chapter I have highlighted some of the ways that rave experiences are gendered, sexualized, and oppressive. I have also explored some of the

49 Mystic, Kickin’, Pink, Curious, and Cosmic narrated similar stories of the hyper-corporeal effects of taking MDMA, where their perceptions of time, vision and music were drastically altered.

50 I acknowledge that Serendipity likely constructs and understands her first MDMA experience as a sensual – not a sexual – experience. Nevertheless, her above description highlights the everyday, concrete power relations which may cause some women’s rave experiences to be gendered and (hetero) sexualized, and which may lead to incidents of sexual assault (for example, Chapter Six).
factors that led my ten female interviewees to their first rave experiences. For instance, I have argued that the majority of interviewees were invited and/or driven to their first events by older men. Following Cosmic, I suggested that it is common for women to rely on men in the scene for the drugs they may ingest. Thus, not only do female rave-goers tend to dance to “vibes” predominantly created by male deejays, they also tend to dance at venues owned by the patriarchs of Toronto’s rave scene, and may rely on male drug dealers/users for “full” rave experiences (see also, Hammersley, Kahn and Ditton, 2002). Following all of the above, I am arguing that “on the one hand [rave] gave us a place to protest all manner of constraints; on the other hand, the subculture put many of the same pressures on us as girls [read “women”] as did the mainstream culture we strove to oppose” (Leblanc 2001: 6, see also, Chapter Five).

I am aware that the findings presented in this chapter may be used to support discourses that scorn young women’s rave participation. I argue that women’s rave participation needs to be understood in more complex and less moralistic ways, however. None of the women in this sample constructed rave participation in solely positive or negative terms. Interviewees described their very ambivalent feelings towards rave, especially when talking about some of the ways that they understand rave participation as resistance to age, gender, and class-related discriminations. It is this argument that forms the core of the next chapter.

51 Serendipity’s explanation that when at raves it was her task to go buy drugs because it was usually men selling the drugs and thus, she (and her male partners) rationalized “it was easier being a girl [...] to go do that” because she could use her sexual appeal to coax these presumably heterosexual men into selling her their drugs. Grrrl also rationalized that it was easy for her to get drugs without having to pay for them because she was a small, cute female getting drugs from men (see also, Chapter Five; Hammersley, Kahn and Ditton 2002).
Chapter Five: Resistance, Difference, and Being a “Raver”

[When I was raving] it was the first time in my entire life, other than when I was a little kid, that I was me and was doing exactly what I wanted to do [...] as opposed to having a boyfriend and doing what he wanted to do, or trying to be [...] somebody who I thought he wanted me to be. [My ex-boyfriend] was the clubber, Gino type, so that’s what I did. I dressed up a little bit more like a clubber and went to clubs that I probably would have never went to and talked to people that I probably never really would have. So then, as soon as [my girlfriend and I] hooked up and [she was] the same way, we were just like, ‘fuck everybody else, we’re gonna do what we wanna do.’ It was just so much more fun than a club. I didn’t want to go to a club to get picked up on. I was sick of that. I didn’t want to have to do that anymore. I was sick of guys.

- (Kickin’)

In Chapter Four I considered some of the reasons for my own and interviewees’ initial attractions to, and subsequent active participation in, Toronto’s rave scene. I interpreted our past active rave participation as contingent upon having female friends who shared our drug-taking practices and who often were connected to the scene by older men. Also, following Pink and Cosmic’s descriptions of their infatuations with some men in the scene, I argued that rave participation often reinforces dominant heteronormative and ageist power relations. In the present chapter I argue that it is naïve and inaccurate to describe our rave participation simply in terms of a desire to “be his raver;” instead, I re-read my own and participants’ “following [or in a different interpretation from Serendipity’s, accompanying] the boy[s...] to Toronto” as a direct challenge to normative expectations about what we should and should not be doing as young women (see also, Chapter Four).

As I continue to reflect on my past rave experiences, I notice clear patterns in the degrees to which I participated in Toronto’s rave scene. As previously stated, my exposure to the scene began in 1994 when I befriended a female peer who was an active participant. Yet, it was not until the summer of 1996 that I finally attended my first events when I began dating a man who was active in the scene and he brought me to my first rave events. It was only after he and I stopped dating for a few years that I became an active rave participant, attending events regularly
with a female friend to (a) escape the pressures of juggling my university workload and two part-time jobs and (b) find solace from a broken heart. Rave participation – especially dance – provided me with an outlet to vent my frustrations and helped me feel empowered and confident.

Like the women in Lauraine LeBlanc’s (2001) sample of forty female punks, I, and the ten women with whom I spoke, all understood our past active rave participation as contingent upon factors such as “rebellion against [our] parents; attraction to the music, style and lifestyle; agreement with its political ideologies; rejection of mainstream conventions; [and] desire for a support network” (79). Following this finding, I argue that while some people’s initial decisions to become active rave participants may not be a conscious and direct response to their gender and age related oppressions, “becoming a [raver] [i]s a gradual process involving equal parts [of] rejection, rebellion, conformity, imitation, and boredom” (66). Thus, again, like LeBlanc’s sample of female punks, my interviewees and I may not have “woke up one morning, fired with the passion of resistance” (66); instead, as Cosmic explained, we serendipitously “tripped [ourselves] into” the scene, thereby becoming active rave participants – an identity which many of us construct as inseparable from contrapuntal readings about what it means to be young and female. In this respect, at the same time that rave participation may adhere to dominant heteronormative and ageist power relations, it can simultaneously be read as challenging some of these same dominant masculinist and patriarchal discourses.

Questioning Resistance

In Pretty in Punk: Girls’ Gender Resistance in a Boys’ Subculture, Lauraine LeBlanc’s (2001) review of some of the subcultural and feminist literature on resistance leads her to two conclusions. First, following Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1991 [1975]), LeBlanc (2001) maintains that scholars rarely seek the voices of female participants in their accounts of
subcultural participation (see also, Chapter One, Chapter Three). Secondly, Leblanc (2001) argues that it is not enough to acknowledge women’s presence in various subcultures; feminist subcultural scholars must both explore the reproduction of gender norms in subcultural spaces and “young women’s resistance to and reformulation of these norms” (8; see also, Pini 2001). In fact, LeBlanc’s (2001) summation of the treatment of women by subcultural scholars inspires me to complicate a number of the readings of interviewees’ initial attraction to, and subsequent active participation in, Toronto’s rave scene that I offered in Chapter Four:

A number of researchers have argued that, due to the male-domination of these subcultures and the masculinist norms, or due to the girls’ adherence to norms of femininity, girls’ positions within the subculture replicate their positioning in mainstream culture: their participation is ancillary and they are subordinate to the males. *Girls’ subcultural participation has thus been described in primarily sexualized terms, with their constructions of deviance assumed to be sexual and conducted primarily through affiliation with a male member.* And yet it is hard to imagine why girls would join, and remain, if they were only accepted as toys for the boys […] When researchers focus specifically on gathering first-hand accounts of girls’ and women’s positions in male-dominated subcultures, they find that [their motives] are much more complex and central than was previously thought. (Leblanc 2001: 68, emphasis added)

Following interviewees’ interpretations – and thus consistent with the importance she places on letting research participants speak for themselves – LeBlanc concludes, just like their male counterparts, women join subcultures “to resolve status and other frustrations” (101).

After considering James Scott (1985) and Henry Giroux’s (1983) works, LeBlanc (2001) determines, “whether conducted as individual acts or as part of a larger constellation (i.e. subculture) of resistance, […] oppositional acts cannot be viewed simply as deviant, but should be recognized as political protests by members of disenfranchised groups” (17). According to this view, a resistant (and from this reading, political) act requires three elements: (1) an experience of oppression, (2) a desire to defy that oppression, and (3) an action (word, thought or deed) that directly challenges that oppression (18). Importantly, LeBlanc acknowledges that due to her focus on the dual requirement of intention and action, this definition of what constitutes a
resistant act “may fail to capture some instances of resistance” (18, emphasis added; see also, Raby 2005).

This latter point speaks directly to an important debate that emerges in the resistance literature: how is one to measure and delineate acts as “resistant” and to what extent is intention necessary? According to David Butz and Michael Ripmeester (1999) a significant result of this controversy has been to polarize ‘resistant acts’ into two camps: “struggle[s] geared specifically towards transcendental social change on the one hand, [and] everyday forms of evading the effects of power on the other” (2). Picking up on the argument I made in Chapters One and Two that it is fallacious to separate macro social issues from micro personal troubles, below I argue that while it is instructive to include under the umbrella of “resistant” those acts which do not directly and intentionally challenge an ominous power, it is equally erroneous to separate resistance from power and vice versa.

According to my Foucauldian understanding, resistance exists within all power relations. Power is not something that one holds or owns; instead power and resistance are themselves relational, and as such, they are present in all social interactions, structures, and experiences. As Michel Foucault says (1990 [1978]), “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). Following this rationale, to call “resistant” only those acts that attempt to usurp power from those who are understood as “holding” it is to misunderstand power. In the same way, to say that an act or a person is resistant is to acknowledge that they are also imbricated in power relations; “power and resistance are ontologically inseparable, […] they exist as conditions of possibility each for the other” (Butz and Ripmeester 1999: 2). Thus, “to limit our conceptualization of
resistance [and politics] to that which is confrontational or direct is to deny the more nuanced and creative ways in which subordinate peoples engage power” (4; see also, Raby 2005).

The argument that for an act to be political it does not necessarily have to directly and intentionally challenge a stable power returns us to the claim that what is significant about (sub)cultural participation (in terms of its politics and resistance) is not “how likely [it] is to bring down capitalism or patriarchy, but at what precise points it succeeds or fails in negotiating new spaces [and] how far [it] successfully break[s] down existing [asymmetrical relations] of power and how far [it] fail[s] to do so” (Gilbert and Pearson in Carrington and Wilson 2001: 5, emphasis added). Instead of conceptualizing power and resistance as binaries, Butz and Ripmeester (1999) argue, we must acknowledge that “complete removal from a field of power relations” is impossible (3). Like Carrington and Wilson (2001) above, Butz and Ripmeester (1999) argue that it may be more useful to seek those instances of “off-kilter” resistance which make manifest “subordinates' ability to recognize power relations (at least at certain points) and to act creatively towards them” (3). Doing so may not necessarily or immediately dissolve asymmetrical power relations, but it may chisel out new crevices in which to challenge and offer new readings of these relations. The goal then is not to win the power-resistance struggle, but instead to make room to “fight another day” by challenging uni-dimensional conceptions of power and domination (9).

In fact, by definition, “off-kilter” forms of resistance do not directly challenge anything; instead they make room – a Third Space – for the complication and disruption of normative ways of conceptualizing social relations and the social world (Butz and Ripmeester 1999). “Off-kilter” resistant acts “haunt” our normative binary assumptions through the recognition that innumerable alternative readings are possible (Butz and Ripmeester 1999; see also, Butz 2002;
Raby 2005). In this way, "off-kilter resistance exists in the creation [and use] of discourses that step around authorized readings of both power and resistance to imagine and describe alternative, contrapuntal socio-cultural realms that do not deny authorized discourses, but rather disrupt them through supplementation" (Butz and Ripmeester 1999: 5, emphasis added). Following this view, "a Third Space sensibility can allow the radically disempowered to discursively reconstruct actual spaces in ways that allow them to engage more productively in directly oppositional resistance" (9-10). At the same time, because power and resistance are inseparable, actions that may be read as ‘resistant’ may simultaneously have – or be read as having – power-laden/oppressive effects.

Butz (2002) draws out this latter element of the relationship between power, resistance, and domination when he explains that although “it is important to recognise, and legitimise, certain sub[cultural] practices as resistance, this surely needs to be done without relying on the figure of an autonomous subject who operates against, but outside, the field of domination” (21). This leads Butz to maintain that we cannot “rely on a belief in practices or spaces of resistance that are not also practices or spaces of accommodation to power” (21). Given this discussion, below I offer alternative readings of interviewees’ movements into, through, and past active rave participation as resistant and political insofar as they can be read simultaneously as responses to normative ageist and patriarchal discourses and as reproducing discriminatory discourses based on financial constraints, race, ethnicity – and to a lesser extent sexuality and ability.52

52 I am not claiming that sexuality and ability affect people’s rave participation less than race, for example. Instead, I am pointing out that I did not collect sufficient data to explore these particular social locations in-depth. It is significant to point out that Pink did allude to links between rave and ability issues when I probed her about a comment she made about two of her three sisters being “ravers”. She replied: “Yeah […] both of them did […] Not my oldest one – my deaf one – she has a total different lifestyle.” What is interesting about Pink’s response is not her recognition that her eldest sister has a “total different lifestyle” than her and her other sisters. Instead, it is the immediacy with which she dismissed the possibility that her eldest sister may be included in my question. My point here is to highlight the obvious finding that raves are likely spaces reserved for able-bodied participants. This is an issue that is only peripherally addressed in the rave literature (for example, Thornton 1995).
Financial Constraints and Age

Social inequality as linked with interviewees’ changing economic responsibilities and resources as they aged through Toronto’s rave scene emerged as a theme in many women’s descriptions of their past rave participation, especially in relation to the costs associated with developing and maintaining an active “raver” identity. For instance, when I asked Penelope if there were any patterns to her past active rave participation (i.e. did she go to more rave events when she was stressed, on vacation, etc.), she laughed,

It was pretty year-round, more it was based on money; if we had enough money we went and then when we did have enough money, we would pick the events that we wanted to go to and I would say that we certainly probably partied more in the summer than in the winter because we were on break and we didn’t have school. (Penelope)

Penelope (as did Princess) described attending rave events more frequently during the summer months because this was when she was out of school and, thus, had more free time and lower costs of living (i.e. tuition, books, etc.).

Curious also highlighted some of the financial and time constraints that interviewees described as obstacles in terms of the development and maintenance of an active rave identity/lifestyle in the following explanation:

If you’re a regular at a bar, your lifestyle is the weekend and people that you deal with in the bar. So I think that your lifestyle is that you want to scrape up enough money to go this weekend; you wanna have a cute little outfit to go out in, you might have to lie a little bit to be able to get there because of your age and your friends are in that lifestyle.
(Curious, emphasis added)

During our conversation, Curious explained that as a sixteen year old from a working class family, she often had to lie to “scrape up enough money” to be able to go out with her friends on the weekend, to get “a cute little outfit” and to get “a bit of a buzz.”

53 This discussion is interesting juxtaposed with Mystic’s confession that she lied to her mom about where she was going because she thought she would disapprove of her rave participation and that she found a job “a few months after [she] started doing E, [...] because [...] she was not comfortable with [her] mom funding [her] drug habits.” Penelope’s explanation that “people will set aside as much income as necessary to participate in the rave scene
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Immediately following this exchange, Curious clarified that lying to her parents about her lifestyle choices included finding creative ways to make money: “I remember [...] one friend actually selling her cds to my parents [...] and then using that money [to buy drugs]. I just remember you’d find ways to come up with a hundred bucks for the weekend.” In this context, in addition to the costs associated with the development of a raver identity and/or lifestyle, some interviewees also highlighted the prices of admission, drugs and water at events as particularly constraining hurdles towards active rave participation.

It is likely due to the high costs associated with being an active rave attendee that scholars consistently represent North American rave-goers as middle-class (for example, Hier 2002; Krebs and Steffey 2005; Weber 1999; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006). Absent from these discussions are the creative ways that working-class ravers (and youth without incomes that are separate from their parents’ generosity) reconcile financial constraints and the desire to develop and maintain a “raver” identity. This is something to which a number of interviewees spoke directly. For instance, Curious, Cosmic, Grrrl, Mystic, Molly, Pink, and Kickin’ all described borrowing, altering, and making clothes to wear to rave events (see also, Chapter Four).

This is not to say that these women never “bought” a (co-opted) rave image. In fact, these seven women also mentioned specific name brands of clothes that they once purchased and wore to events because they were what Kickin’, Pink, Molly, and Curious refer to as “raver-ish.” Nevertheless, it is significant to highlight the finding that some interviewees did make their own “rave” clothes at one time or another because this finding suggests (a) that people can find ways to work within their financial constraints in order to develop, maintain, and “actively construct” a desired image/identity/lifestyle and (b) that Angela McRobbie’s (1993) claim (as presented in

regardless of where [they]’re at on the pay scale” is also interesting in this context because it both supports and complicates claims that rave participation evades class boundaries (for example, Redhead 1990).
Chapter Two) that subcultural participants can use their insider knowledge/status to their economic benefit is reasonable.\(^{54}\)

For some interviewees, time and money issues not only constrained the ways they participated in Toronto’s rave scene, but also were the very reasons why they ceased active rave participation. In this context, a number of women described no longer having disposable amounts of income to spend on rave clothing, drugs, and admission because of the costs associated with “growing up”: mortgages, student loans, childcare costs.\(^{55}\) Penelope succinctly substantiated this claim when I asked her how/why she became less active in Toronto’s rave scene:

> I just ended up having more job responsibilities. When I was working shift work it was fairly easy to schedule time off after events, and then when I started working Monday to Friday, it became much more difficult. I ended up having important Monday morning meetings that I thought, ‘I can’t be fuzzy for’, so that certainly curtailed going. (Penelope)

In fact, like Penelope, all interviewees described their current employment and familial responsibilities – which they cannot jeopardize by being “fuzzy” after a weekend of partying – as taking precedence over any lingering desires to attend a rave (or post-rave club) event.\(^{56}\)

According to this finding, claims that raves are spaces where – among other things – class divisions are evaded emerge as naïve (for example, Redhead 1990). As we see above, financial issues play a key role in determining (a) who has access to “full” rave experiences, identities, and lifestyles and (b) the ways and degrees to which people participate in rave scenes.

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\(^{54}\) In this context, Cosmic narrated a very interesting story when I asked her how she dressed for events. She responded:

> I made a lot of my own clothes [...] I made a pair of fun fur overalls – blue ones, with a pink stripe down the side – and I used to make visors. I’d take visors and put fun fur on them and then [a store] on Queen Street started doing that themselves. First they asked me if they could buy mine, and I said ‘no’; like I just made it myself right – it matched my overalls, my pink ones: my pink visor and my blue overalls, and [...] then a few months later they had them there, same thing. (Cosmic)

\(^{55}\) Kickin’, Penelope, and Serendipity, who were the only women in the sample who have children and/or were pregnant, talked about these issues extensively.

\(^{56}\) Discussions of hangover-type symptoms and short-term depression following a weekend of ecstasy use are common in rave literature and among participants (for example, Hammersley, Kahn and Ditton 2002; Kelly 2005).
Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

During all ten interviews, women described divisions within Toronto’s rave scene—divisions which predominately revolved around musical styles, but which were further “divided into relatively homogenous subgroups” according to participants’ drug choices, clothing styles, age, gender, ethnicity and, to a lesser degree, sexual orientation. Taste distinctions within rave scenes and spaces are well documented (for example, McCaughan, Carlson, Falck and Siegal 2005; Reynolds 1999, 1999; Ter Bogo and Engels 2005; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006). What is absent from most of these accounts is an examination of the ways that these divisions both are entangled in and reproduce discriminatory discourses.

During the course of each interview, research participants identified themselves not just as once “active ravers,” but also as particular kinds of ravers: as junglists, fans of house music, and “meth babies,” for example (see also, Chapter Four). In many instances, interviewees vocalized these distinctions in what can be interpreted as very racialized and ethnicized language, as suggested by Kickin’s description in the epigraph of her “Gino” ex-partner who, from her depiction, presumably “dressed up a little bit more [than a raver and …] went to clubs.”

During the course of our respective conversations both Kickin’ and Cosmic constructed the

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57 Princess was the only interviewee to address the potential for sexual orientation to be an axis along which rave spaces might be divided. This issue was raised when I asked her about differences that she may have noticed in some of the ways that men and women might dress at rave events. She responded:

Um, sometimes, but when I was wearing baggy shirts, that was obviously what a boy would wear, but then when I grew up a little bit then I would just start wearing like a tube top. Um […] I’m trying to think of men in the house room. Yeah, also often a lot more gay people in the house room [because] somebody wearing silver pants and a tight shirt [presumably a gay male] wouldn’t be accepted in the jungle, drum ‘n’ bass room.

(Princess)

When I asked her why this person would not be accepted in rooms where jungle/drum ‘n’ bass is being played, she rationalized: because I guess there is something about toughness in the drum and bass [music that is] a little more aggressive and that’s just, I don’t know they would think that was gay.” It is unclear here, however, how Princess was using the term “gay” because in the first instance she seems to use it to talk about a stereotypically dressed (and feminized) queer man, while in the second instance it appears to be used it pejoratively to mean something akin to “un-cool” or “trivial.” There is so much going on in this exchange that is of significance, yet somewhat tangential interest, not in the least of which is Princess’ equation of gender, age and sexuality with specific styles of clothing. These are issues that are not addressed in the rave literature and which are somewhat outside of the scope of this thesis, yet which merit further research in terms of links between discourses of age, gender, sexuality, and discrimination.
infiltration of “Ginos” into Toronto’s rave scene as evidence that the scene was becoming more “mainstream.” When I asked for clarification about who exactly can be classified as a “Gino,” Kickin’ and Cosmic explained, respectively: “Ginos were the ones who came in afterwards […] Ginos: the Italian, guys dressed up, with the collared shirt, yeah, greasy hair” and “these big Italian guys, Gino guys, like nasty guys.”

As we see above, in many instances, interviewees rejected and criticized other rave participants’ specific identifications as strongly as they embraced “their own.” This trend emerged most prominently in interviewees’ descriptions of Junglists and Candy Kids (see also, Chapter Six; McCaughan, Carlson, Falck and Siegal 2005; Wilson 1999). I take up the discussion of the intersections of age and gender in relation to discriminations faced by “Candy Ravers” in Chapter Six. In the context of Junglists, however, consider Cosmic’s response to my question about if she ever went to a rave event where the vibe was bad, where people were not friendly:

I would go to jungle parties that […] were very [Asian] gang focused and the ethnicity was different. They were like that. Girls would try to show me up dancing. Guys would try to show us up dancing. My friends were really good dancers and it was more of an ‘I’m better than you. I can do more than you. You could sit here and die and I wouldn’t care.’ […] They’d drive up in their big cars, nice cars. They’d be wearing all of this crazy ridiculous clothes and it started to, it became about material things and it started to become more like a fashion show. Here we are fun furred up, looking to party with my visor and my soother in my mouth and there’s these other people that are wearing, all this crazy Kango stuff and I’m thinking, ‘why are you here’, and they are looking at me, ‘why are you here; this isn’t your party,’ but then, it was our scene – we felt like it was our scene, they were infiltrating our scene, they were ruining our vibe. (Cosmic, emphasis added)  

When I asked Cosmic specifically if she noticed racial and gender divides within the scene, she responded:

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58 While at times Cosmic snubbed jungle music and junglists, at other times during our conversation she identified as a junglist. One explanation of this seeming contradiction is offered by Jill McCaughan, Robert Carlson, Russel Falck and Harvey Siegal (2005) who explain that “individuals may experience transitional phases in their self-identification, as their attitudes towards life, music, and drugs change, thus claiming and/or disclaiming membership in any of the subgroups at a given point in their experience in the rave subculture” (1508-1509).
Definitely. The jungle crowd – the majority of them were guys and they were more like Asian style gangs. And in the other crowd [the house crowd], there were guys, but the girls were like hardcore sexy. You either had these little girls who were totally like babied out, you know soothers and stuff – which was me, I was totally like a little baby, always dressed up – and then there was other girls that were just so fucking sexy that [...] I would be like ‘oh my god’, drooling, ‘I love you’; ‘I don’t know who you are, but I am in love with you’ [...] That’s the house crowd: really sexy, very, very sexy. The junglist crowd was rougher, like gangster [... They were] like ‘we’re better than you. We’re junglists. We’re better than you, and you suck.’ (Cosmic)

While other interviewees were less explicit about the specific identities they attributed to Junglists, they did draw on racialized and ethnicized imagery to describe other rave participants and music.

For instance, Princess, Molly, and Penelope all referred to Asian participants as “blobs,” “puddles,” and/or “herds” and Kickin’, Mystic and Penelope all said that they preferred house music to other forms of music, especially jungle, because it is “happier” music.59 In this context, Penelope explained that when she attended rave events she preferred to spend time in rooms where trance and house music were played and not in rooms where jungle music was played because “the jungle room wasn’t nearly as friendly.” She rationalized that jungle music is “pretty dark music” and so she preferred trance and house music, which she also constructed as “fluffy, happy music[s]” (see also, McCaughan, Carlson, Falck and Siegal 2005).

When I probed her about the different people one may see at rave events, she responded:

I’d say that you could see all kinds of people there. We were always fairly normal ravers, you know; we were never the candy kids, we were never the jungle kids and so that was sort of what we used to hang around with and I would just say that you could find all sorts of people there. (Penelope)

What I find troublesome about the above statement is the distinction drawn between being “fairly normal ravers” and being “candy kids” (young) or “jungle kids” (dark and

59 Even Princess, who identified as a lover of Jungle music, described it as aggressive music, but she explained this is precisely what attracted her to this musical genre; she said, “I really related to the music – some of it – how aggressive some of it is, but also how nice and calming some of it can be at the same time. I just really connected with it. I could just really get into it and dance to it for like, hours, and just feel really good; really feel like myself.”
aggressively masculine). The point here is that many interviewees drew on exclusionary, normalizing discourses of “raver” identities, which they constructed not only along racial and ethnic axes, but also along lines of age and gender.

(Re)Insert Power, Resistance, and PLUR

In Chapter Four, I suggested that those of us who participated in Toronto’s rave scene from outside of the city when we were sixteen and younger, often had to rely on older men for rides to rave events. I noted that eight of ten interviewees went to their first rave events (both from inside and outside of Toronto) when they were under legal drinking age (all except Penelope and Serendipity). Of these eight interviewees, five (Cosmic, Molly, Kickin’, Curious and Mystic) constructed their past active rave participation as a direct response to being under legal drinking age; they could not get into bars and clubs because they could not legally drink, but they could go to all-ages rave events and experiment with drugs. The normative reading of these findings would likely be that these women were “toys for the boys” and/or deviant (LeBlanc 2001: 68).

Below I offer a supplementary reading, one which “haunts” this normative interpretation: we were simultaneously rebelling against normative parental and social regulations of our activities and asserting our independence by finding new ways of doing what we wanted (i.e., using our often older male acquaintances as means to achieve our desire to attend a rave event). Following interviewees’ own interpretations, I argue that many of us understood our initial and sustained rave participation as ways to resist normative social conventions that try to tell us (as mostly young women) that because of our young ages we could not experiment with mind-altering substances such as alcohol, and because we were women, we were not to stray too far

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60 Molly explicitly constructed her active rave participation as a direct result of what she called “hatred” for her parents and her knowing that they would not approve of her attending these events.
from home, especially late at night. According to these alternative readings, by actively participating in Toronto’s rave scene, we were challenging social regulations of our aged and gendered bodies (for example, Chapter Two).

Not only did interviewees construct raves as places to go experiment with illegal and legal drugs despite their young ages, but they also all described their past involvement in Toronto’s rave scene as a way to participate in, and feel part of, a community that is separate from, and resistant to, mundane mainstream (read “everyday”) life. In most instances, interviewees linked the desire to “become part of a collective [...] culture that’s going on underground” to the desire to find a sense of belonging (Cosmic). This same argument led Curious and Kickin’ to explain that, from their experiences at least, rave participants are more likely to become addicted to the sense of belonging that rave participation facilitates than to the drugs associated with rave:

Kickin’: I didn’t really know anybody who was addicted to E. I think people were addicted to the feeling of E, and I think people were addicted to [...] the scene and the acceptance and [...] having fun and feeling like they belong[ed] somewhere

Curious: I think that if you have anyone [who] loves to dance, [who] likes to do drugs, and you put them in a room full of people [who also enjoy those things], you feel like it’s your family, that you belong there.

While their above explanations may be conducive to readings of rave participation as hedonistic, Curious and Kickin’ directly challenged this narrow normative reading by linking the pleasure derived from dance and drug use at rave events to (a) a desire to connect with people in a way

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61 Molly and Curious explicitly attributed rave participation to their inability to “do anything else” (i.e. go to clubs) because they were under the legal drinking age. Curious even said that once she could go to bars and drink in her hometown, she became less active in Toronto’s rave scene – partly because the amount she had to pay to “get a buzz” and travel to a club decreased significantly. Mystic explained that when rave events first moved into clubs, she often had to wait until almost three o’clock in the morning to get in because that was “when they would get all the booze off the tables.” In a similar way, Pink explained that she had never been to Toronto prior to attending her first rave and she said that one of the most exciting aspects of rave participation was travelling to Toronto with friends at the age of eighteen. Curious also explained her rave participation in terms of the excitement she felt travelling to Toronto when she was sixteen years old.
that is not permitted/available outside of rave spaces and (b) as a response to feelings of alienation (i.e. in terms of PLUR).

According to this alternative – or “off-kilter” – reading, (media-led) moral panics about drug use at raves are ill-directed (for example, Chapter Two). Rave participants are not necessarily hedonistic drug addicts. Instead, they may simultaneously be read as people who wish to withdraw from a non-accepting, dull and HATEful world. From this reading, the “rave problem” lies not only at the micro level of the drug user, but also at the macro level of a society that causes such extreme feelings of alienation and therefore helps to produce drug users and active rave participants (for example, Elias 1993; Giroux 2002; see also, Chapter Seven).

In a similar vein, Kickin’, Princess, Molly, Pink, Serendipity, and Grrrl all told me that some people attend raves because they are social outcasts who seek refuge in a subculture often described (by media, participants, and scholars) as a peaceful, respectful, and “non-judgmental environment [where you can] just go and have a good time and it didn’t matter what you wore and what you looked like” (Penelope; see also, Chapter Three; Weber 1999; Wilson 1999). Yet, it was uncommon for interviewees to construct their own rave participation as a response to being a social outcast – probably due to the undesirability of being understood in these terms. Grrrl was the only interviewee who constructed her past active rave participation in these terms. Reminiscent of Kickin’s desire to “say fuck you to everybody else,” from Grrrl’s experience, rave participation is political because it gives a “bunch of people [herself included] who felt like loners and [who] weren’t accepted” a place where they could come together and say, “fuck everyone else.”

The ways that age and gender intersect with financial constraints, race, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality to influence rave participation are interesting, especially when juxtaposed with
Daniel Martin (1999), Christopher Stanley (1995), and Maria Pini’s (2001) interpretations of rave participation as facilitating and fostering challenges to mainstream conventions and ideologies of HATE (as discussed in previous chapters). In this same context, Pink’s construction of her self-defined “over use” of drugs as a way both to compete with and to impress men in the scene and Molly’s explanation that what attracted her to rave was that it allowed her to prove her superiority over her “loser” brother also are interesting. On the one hand, the above examples substantiate my claim that rave participation does not escape “mainstream” values of competition, and HATE. On the other hand, the latter two examples also challenge readings of female rave participants as submissive “toys for the boys” and highlight rave participation as interviewees’ conscious, intentional, and direct responses to stereotypical understandings of femininity (Leblan 2001: 68; see also, Pini 2001). Raves thus emerge as spaces that simultaneously reinforce and challenge normative discriminatory discourses of difference (see also, Chapter Four).

Readings of raves as offering female participants opportunities to disrupt normative gender roles and expectations emerge both in my interview transcripts and in much of the rave literature, especially in discussions about raves as alternatives to clubs and pubs (see also, Chapter Two; Hammersley, Kahn and Ditton 2002; Pini 1997a, 2001). For instance, many of the women in Richard Hammersley, Furzana Kahn and Jason Ditton’s (2002) sample of ecstasy-using rave participants construct rave as an alternative to hetero-normative “meat markets” such as clubs. Likewise, in the epigraph to this chapter, Kickin’ explains her rave participation as “so much more fun than a club [because she] d[id]n’t want to go to a club to get picked up on [... She] was sick of guys.” In fact, Kickin’ consistently narrated her past active rave participation as
characterized by enjoyment, freedom from social expectations and the development of a strong sense of personhood, detached from parental and male approval.

Molly also spoke to this aspect of rave participation. Contrary to Kickin’s interpretation of rave participation placing her outside of heterosexual relations, however, Molly did not represent herself as responding to the “meat market” element of the typical club and pub experience. Instead, she described rave spaces as sexually empowering because at rave events, as opposed to “mainstream” club events, her petite frame was read as beautiful; it was hyper-sexualized:

"Being little, and going to a bar, you don’t really get looked at ‘cause everybody then would feel like a pedophile [...] I mean I was 5’ 1” and I was 80 pounds soaking wet and when I went to raves, guys loved that. Ravers love little girls [...] I never had so much attention that I did at raves. I’ve always had a knack for getting things I want ‘cause I sweet talk people, but at raves it was so easy! (Molly; see also, Chapter Six)"

Here Molly draws out the argument that age, gender, and sexuality categories and preferences do not disappear inside rave spaces. Instead, she suggests, age and gender (which she seemed to conflate with height, weight, and general appearance) may intersect in ways that cause some people to be hyper-sexualized.

Again, this finding can be read in competing ways. According to Molly, rave may empower some female participants by simultaneously inverting normative “everyday” assumptions about what it means to be beautiful and conventional readings about women’s “proper” place in subcultures (see also, Malbon 1999; McRobbie 1993; Pini 2001). At the same time, Molly’s allusion to “pedophiles” suggests that the hyper-sexualization of young (looking) girls (and women), while completely unacceptable in one context (i.e. “mainstream society”), may be completely appropriate – even desirable – in another (i.e. the subcultural context) (see also, Chapter Six).
In relation to Lauraine LeBlanc’s (2001) claim that their participation in male-dominated
subcultures allows women to challenge normative social rules (particularly those concerning
women’s safety), a number of interviewees constructed rave spaces as playful and safe where,
unlike the “everyday world,” women can “take off by [themselves] and go wandering for an
hour” (Princess). In fact, interviewees and rave scholars alike (re)construct raves as safe, non-
judgmental – PLURistic – arenas where experimentation with drugs and non-normative forms of
sexuality are acceptable (for example, McElrath 2005; Weber 1999). In most instances,
however, interviewees and Canadian scholars use the term “vibe” rather than PLUR to describe
hyper-pleasurable moments and feelings of togetherness facilitated by rave participation.

In fact, discourses of Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect emerged prominently within
interviewees’ discussions of good rave “vibes” (as a culmination of lights, drugs, music and
people). For example, consider the following:

Cosmic: Vibe is just, there’s this camaraderie between people that cannot be broken. You
could not know the person beside you, but if you needed anything from them, they would
give it to you. If you needed the last sip of water that they had, they would give it to you
because that’s just the way they were. [It’s like] ‘you’re here partying beside me and
dancing. We’ve been beside each other for the last three hours, you want the rest of my
water, you drink it’.  

Princess: Just like, if a really good song came on, everybody would be dancing,
everybody would be happy, looking around smiling at each other because the music just
got really exciting and you’d form a little bond with the person beside you because you
just really enjoyed how the music just got really good and you’re really dancing a lot [...] 
It’s just like a communal feel to enjoying yourself in a really communal way.

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62 In the context of my question about whether or not men and women participate differently at raves, Penelope
explained, “I think that was one of the things that we [my husband and I] really liked about it; we could go to a party
together and we could be separated for six hours and he never really worried about where I was or who I was talking
to because there was that perception of safety, that it was a safe environment to be in” (emphasis added).
63 Kickin’ was the only interviewee explicitly to talk about her own experimentation with alternative forms of
sexuality at rave events. She told a story of kissing a female friend at an event and she attributed this to rave
environments where “it’s perfectly acceptable to experiment with things.”
64 This comment is interesting in light of Penelope’s response to my question about if she ever experienced any form
of sexual harassment, as a number of other interviewees indicated:

Nope, never [...] When we started hearing about those kinds of things we started partying sober, [...] When
that started happening we [my husband and I] spent a lot more time together and [...] you know, I always
watched my bottle of water, I never shared my bottle of water, and so I think that we did a lot of things to
make sure that stuff like that never happened. (Penelope)
Given the very collectivist imagery on which both Cosmic and Princess draw (i.e. “camaraderie,” “bond,” “communal feel”), it would seem then that the *neo-tribal* model of rave as a “post-subculture” and not a “subculture,” which I discussed in Chapters One and Two, may be fitting.

Recall from Chapter Two that some *post-subcultural* scholars use the *neo-tribal* model to draw out their understanding of the fluctuating and temporal nature of *social* relations that characterize *individual* experiences of contemporary dance activities (for example, Bennett 1999a, 2000; Maffesoli 2001; Malbon 1998, 1999, 2005). Like Bennett (2006), I tend to prefer the term *lifestyle* to *neo-tribe*. This is because from my reading, use of “*lifestyles*” emphasizes people’s abilities to develop particular identities – though still considered as fluid and ever changing – through the *purchasing* and *consumption* of particular styles of drugs, music, and clothing, for example (see also, Chaney 2001; Chapter Four).

Inherent in the adoption of the *lifestyles* model and what I think is often glossed over, however, is an investigation of some of the barriers people may experience when attempting to “actively construct” their *lifestyles* (see also, Malbon 1999). For instance, at the same time that the majority of interviewees (all except Penelope) described their past active rave participation in Toronto in terms of being part of a subcultural community “on the fringe” of society (Mystic), they also constructed their abilities to maintain and “actively construct” their “raver” identities as contingent upon having the time, money, and energy to do so. Also, while Kickin’ and Grrrl suggested that feeling as though one is part of the rave family is often mediated by *similar* choices and a general feeling of wanting to say “fuck you” to the outside world, in this chapter I

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65 Ben Malbon (2005) states, “although it takes place within a social context, the dancing that is so central to clubbing is a highly personal experience” (491). He uses the terms “oceanic” and “ecstatic” to describe those clubbing experiences where people are overcome by “the sensation of oneness and liminality of self/wider group” (492-93). He argues with (ecstatic) and without (oceanic) the aid of narcotics, clubbers experience feelings of being “in-between spaces (outside/inside, inner night-life/outside everyday life, spaces of work/spaces of play) and in-between times (night/day, work/play, and even outside time, or between ‘real’ times)” (493).
have suggested that taste divisions among rave-goers and constraints to active rave participation do emerge according to participants' age, finances, gender, and racial distinctions, for example.

It is in relation to this finding that I find Sarah Thornton's (1994, 1995) *subcultural capital* argument (as discussed in Chapter Four) most useful because at the same time that interviewees described themselves as part of a rave community, it became clear that they only understood their membership as validated and "authentic" insofar as they purchased and performed an "appropriate" raver identity (i.e. a Candy Raver wears fun fur, looks young, and carries glow sticks). However, to describe rave and post-rave club cultures and experiences only as elitist and "hip," as Thornton (1995) does, is too condescending and simplistic. In addition to diluting and dismissing the more empowering and resistant qualities that some interviewees attribute to their rave participation, overly pessimistic readings of rave leave no room for the existence of multiple rave experiences, identities, and lifestyles.

Rewind and Re-play

My aim in this chapter has not been to label interviewees as offensive, but rather to substantiate my overarching argument that rave is political (in part) because it is neither discursively nor materially cut-off from dominant discriminatory or oppressive discourses. This is an argument that logically flows from my understanding of power and resistance as intimately linked, as co-constructive and ever-present in all interactions, structures, experiences, and processes. More than this, to say that domination and resistance are intimately linked is to recognize that resistant acts may simultaneously rely on and reproduce oppressive/discriminatory discourses. Throughout this chapter I acknowledge the dangers associated with adhering to loose conceptions of what constitutes "resistance", while at the same time maintaining the importance of hearing and recognizing oppositional and resistant discourses where they are posed (i.e. in
interviewees' challenges to normative discourses that suggest that active rave participation in Toronto is not a viable option, especially for young women living outside of the city).

According to Sara Mills (2004), “the categories and narratives which discourse constructs for subjects are not simply imposed, but are subject to negotiation by those subjects. It is the process of engaging with discursive structures that constitutes us as particular types of individuals or subject positions” (86; see also, Hall 1992). In this chapter I have offered examples of some of the ways that interviewees understood themselves to be resisting dominant understandings of ‘appropriate behavior’ for young women (i.e. a category of identity that is constructed through the specific intersection of dominant discourses about age and gender). In this way, I argue active rave participation was a way for interviewees and me to negotiate normative discourses about our particular subject positions (i.e. young women). I have also shown that alongside such negotiations, interviewees drew on and reproduced normative and oppressive discourses of difference, namely those constructed along axes of race and ethnicity and (ironically) age and gender. When read against the context of increased social control and regulation of raves and the social stigmatization associated with media portrayals of particularly visible ravers – as discussed in Chapter Two – the reproduction of these discourses may be interpreted as attempts to negotiate the very ageist and sexist discourses which they constructed as constraining them in the first place. I elaborate on this point in Chapter Six. Suffice it to say here that through their engagements with, and challenges against, dominant ageist and sexist discourses, interviewees simultaneously disrupted and reproduced other socially constructed subject positions.
Chapter Six: Age, Gender, and Ceasing to be an Active Rave Participant

I came home from a party and I looked in the mirror and I thought I was, I thought I was an old lady – I had gray and green hair. I just looked at myself and that was when I made a decision to not do it anymore, and if I did, it was going to happen very, very rarely, which it has since then.

― (Pink)

In Chapter Five I explained that in many ways interviewees and I understand our past active rave participation in Toronto as rebelling against, and resisting, “outside” oppressive gender and age-related processes of social control. Following this finding, I agree with Angela McRobbie (1993) and Maria Pini (1997a, 2001) that rave spaces have the potential to open up room for pleasurable moments of self-expression and liberation for women through dance, music, and sometimes drugs. I also agree to a certain extent that raves can be understood as neotribal moments of community insofar as interviewees described intense moments and sentiments of PLUR in relation to the “vibes” felt at certain rave events (for example, Maffesoli 1996; Malbon 1998, 1999, 2005). From my perspective, these are not inherent aspects of rave experiences, however. As Maria Pini (1998) points out, a “rigorous management of time, energy, money and pain […] goes into the production of […] moments of ‘freedom’” felt by some female rave-goers (172; see also, Chapter Five).

When I stepped foot inside my first rave experience, I was enveloped by the booming funky bass emanating from the decks and filling the dark, humid warehouse space. For the duration of the night I was overcome more by a sense of anxiety and bewilderment than by comfort and peacefulness. Contrary to Michel Maffesoli’s (1996, 2001) pledge that I would become one with the crowd, my sense of self did not dissipate; it was heightened. The music did not make my feet move. Instead, it tingled my skin and moved through my body while my feet remained firmly anchored on the floor. I spent a large portion of the night sitting on the floor, staring around the room and trying to make sense of what was going on around me. Given the
first-hand descriptions of rave I had received prior to attending this first event, I was confused by my inability to completely “lose myself” in this so-called “other-worldly” space. I could not understand why instead of feeling connected to the dancing bodies around me, I felt alienated from them.

Despite my feelings of estrangement from the people I saw at my first rave event, I continued to go to raves occasionally with the older man I was dating at the time because rave provided a foundation on which we could build our romantic relationship. However, as previously stated, it was not until he and I stopped dating that I became an active rave participant—attending events on a weekly basis with a close girlfriend. Admittedly, an underlying motive for my ensuing active rave participation was that it allowed me to continue to feel connected to this man who was no longer in my life, but for whom I still very much cared. As I began to attend rave events with my girlfriend, my feelings of alienation began to disappear. Through dance, music, and sometimes drugs, I began to feel empowered and confident. As I became more entrenched in what can be understood as the development of a rave lifestyle (i.e. buying the “right” clothes, listening to the “right” music, dancing the “right” way) I became more comfortable with my dancing body and those of other rave participants. Despite the sense of freedom it had facilitated, I relinquished my active rave participation in Fall 2000 when this same man and I reunited and I began to put more energy into this relationship (and into academically studying rave) than into actively maintaining my “raver” identity.

In this chapter, I present the finding that our moves away from the category of “active rave participant” were closely linked with our abilities to reconcile active “subcultural”

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66 Pink narrated a similar experience of feeling overwhelmed and scared at her first event. She explained that, like me, it took her a while to feel comfortable enough to dance at rave events. In this same context, Serendipity explained that she befriended a younger female co-worker and, after finding out that this woman was a “raver,” she asked her coworker to teach her how to “rave dance.” Molly also explained that she felt like an outcast at raves until she started dressing like “a raver.”
participation with our increased senses of attachment and responsibility to our “outside,” “mainstream,” “grown-up” roles as partners, parents, students, employees, etc. Talking to interviewees about their reasons for relinquishing active rave participation, I noticed that for many of us feelings of alienation and non-belonging in rave re-emerged as our “everyday” social responsibilities increased. With our increased senses of belong outside of rave, we ceased to think of ourselves as youth, and many of us began to understand our newly emerging “adult” identities as conflicting with our identifications as “ravers.”

Reproducing and Internalizing Ageist Discourses

As mentioned in Chapter Five, oftentimes interviewees rejected and criticized other rave participants’ specific identifications as strongly as they embraced their own. In the previous chapter I discussed this finding in relation to some of the ways that discourses of race, ethnicity, and gender intersected in interviewees’ constructions of other rave participants as “jungle kids,” “Ginos,” and “Asian blobs,” for example, only alluding to the discriminations faced by “Candy Ravers,” who are often constructed as young – or at least young looking – rave-goers who wear brightly coloured androgynous clothing (see also, Weber 1999). Below I analyze the HATEful discourses on which some interviewees drew to describe Candy Ravers.

In most instances interviewees’ constructed themselves as different from Candy Ravers through the use of language that suggested that – unlike themselves and as evidenced by their clothing, dance, and musical choices – Candy Ravers are “juvenile”:

Mystic: You’d see people [Candy Ravers] wearing all these multi-coloured bracelets and lots of fun fur and – very childish stuff – not childish but, toys and stuff like that, like they would carry a toy, like a doll with them or whatever. They were really [...] more into happy hardcore music, and lots of jewellery on and bright colours really big, baggy pants.
Princess: Well there’s Candy Ravers who often wear brighter colors, and had pacifiers and wore fuzzy pants, and liked glow sticks and stuff and they were more often listening to house or trance, or happy hardcore, and our friends definitely never liked trance or happy hardcore, maybe some house. So, those people were over here, and we were over here, you know?

Kickin’: Candy Ravers were the ones who were completely dressed up [...] They were the ones who made it mainstream I think. (emphasis added)

Molly: The clothes were probably the biggest thing for me. I got way into the fashion, and started dressing like a raver and wanted a piercing of course. Plus you always distinguish different groups of ravers and, you know, you identified yourself. I identified myself with the hard-house ravers, the real dancers that liked to get out and move, hated the Candy Ravers, hated them — couldn’t stand them. (emphasis added)

Because Molly was the most vocal and passionate of all interviewees in her responses to my questions about Candy Ravers, below I use her comments to illustrate the tendency for interviewees to draw on ageist and gendered discourses about who does and does not belong at rave events.

In this context, consider Molly’s response to my question about why she “couldn’t stand” Candy Ravers:

They were just so young and so fragile and I found it sad that they got into so many drugs so early in their life. I don’t know why. We were all into the drugs, but they were such lost innocence. [They were] so young and should’ve been home playing with their Barbies, not snorting coke and taking E. (Molly)

The condescending nature of Molly’s above comments are made apparent by her reference to “Barbies” a quintessential – though not necessarily – young girls’ toy. In this same context, consider Molly’s account of how PLUR is not to be understood as part of her past experiences at rave events:

Well you can quote me that [PLUR’s] the biggest crock of shit I’ve ever heard [...] PLUR? Ah, no. You would talk to people at raves, but I found that some people would be really bitchy though – like some of the girls were absolute bitches, and especially [to] me, like I’m little. I look like I could be a Candy Raver, but I’m not a Candy Raver. And some of these girls would show up done to the nines, and I mean, they’ve got make-up everywhere and they sort of stand around looking snotty and they’re high as a kite [...] then you would find some people that were there, the nubies, and they – the new kids – were always like ‘hi, I’m new. This is fun.’ You’d be like, ‘loser.’ (Molly)
The exclusionary nature of Molly's comments appear paradoxical, especially when juxtaposed with her explanation in Chapter Five that – contrary to her disdain for "Candy Ravers" emanating from her perception of them as young (or at least young looking) – her petite frame and young appearance are what made her feel empowered within raves spaces. As the above discussion suggests, Molly was not the only interviewee who constructed Candy Ravers as "juvenile," however.

Most interviewees rationalized their negative attitudes towards this group of ravers by insisting that their problem with Candy Ravers was simply that they were perceived to be too young to be taking drugs. In analyzing this explanation of the Candy Raver "problem," I want to draw readers' attention to three points. First, there is the ironic contradiction that of the four women who began participating in the scene at the age of sixteen or younger (Curious, Mystic, Grrrl and Kickin'), one (Grrrl) was extremely concerned by the very thought of her own future daughter joining a similar (sub)culture at a similar age. Likewise, there was a unanimous consensus among the six other interviewees – who began attending when they were older than sixteen – that drug-taking is okay when one is older than nineteen years of age – which is, perhaps not so coincidentally, the legal drinking age in Ontario. Despite repeated stories of their own and

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67 In fact, it was this same rationale that caused some interviewees to speculate that they would be upset if their (future) children (whether female or male) joined a "subculture" akin to rave (see also, Chapter Three).
68 The other three women drew on PLUR discourses to speculate that they would be happy if the had a sixteen-year-old daughter who joined a rave type scene. For instance, Kickin' explained that she would be glad that her child was "going out and meeting people from completely different cultures, completely different ethnic backgrounds, because there's just a million types of people there [at raves]; so she's not going to be a snob [...] she's going to accept people for who they are and she is going to get to experience different cultures and different ethnicities." Similarly, Mystic said, "I would be glad that she found something that she really enjoys doing that was a positive environment where people weren't getting into fights and for the most part weren't harassing her sexually." Curious said she would prefer if her future children are going to experiment with drugs, that they do it at when they are young because, she rationalized, "people get really sucked in [to drugs] when they're older and experiment down the road". She continued, "I think, people who try drugs when they're 14, 15 and 16, they stop when they're 18, 19. People who start at 18, 19, they don't really stop, I don't know why, but this is what I've seen in my friends."
friends’ problematic “over-use” of drugs (all of whom were over the age of nineteen), these six interviewees claimed that people tend to be more responsible drug-users when they are in their late teenage years. In this way, many interviewees drew on stereotypical, ageist discourses of (ir)responsibility and age-appropriate behaviour to describe Candy Ravers.

The third point to which I wish to draw readers’ attention is that interviewees project a particularly young age onto Candy Ravers. Unless they spoke to the individuals constituting this category of ravers, however, participants could not be sure of the actual age of any particular Candy Raver; they could not “know” this person’s age simply based on her/his physical appearance. The point is that Candy Ravers were discursively constructed as especially young, and this construction flowed partly out of the symbolic value attributed to certain aspects of their appearance: brightly coloured, androgynous, baggy clothes, pigtails, toys, glow sticks, and/or candy (see also, Chapter Four). Candy Ravers were thus read and represented as embodying a young age, or at least a youthful/naïve outlook on life, which stated that they refused to grow up. Ironically, in other aspects of my discussions with interviewees, this refusal to grow up was represented by interviewees as one of the more attractive aspects of rave participation (for example, Chapter Five). In these discussions, rave participation was constructed as attractive because it evoked certain aspects of childhood: a sense of carelessness, a desire for fun and play, and an illusion of safety, for example; active rave participation was a way to evade adult responsibilities – as a way symbolically to return to childhood.

This notion of rave participation as a symbolic “return to childhood” is particularly interesting in the context of Candy Ravers because although it is this group who most forcefully represents this discourse and desire, many interviewees were alarmed by the
young appearances of Candy Ravers. In this instance it seems that when the people doing the raving are understood not as symbolic children, but instead as actual children, their rave participation becomes a social problem; by constructing Candy Ravers not as embodying a desire to “return to childhood”, but as “living childhood,” they became the objects both of moral repugnance and social control. Molly makes this point most cogently in an e-mail she sent me in response to an earlier draft of my analysis chapters.

She began her e-mail mourning the loss of “that feeling of invincibility” her past active rave participation had facilitated. She then explained that she “didn’t actually hate Candy Ravers because they were young.” Instead, she rationalized, “I hated the idea of them.”

My thoughts on the younger ravers were more jealousy than anything else. What the hell did they have to ‘escape’ from? Nothing. They hadn’t felt responsibility [...] So I guess what I was trying to say was that they didn’t really understand the rave scene. Actually – they didn’t understand what it meant to my generation and people like me. They used it as rebellion and they didn’t have anything to rebel from when they were so young. Does that make sense? I just don’t want you to think I hate them because ‘hate’ was more definitive of ‘felt sorry for’ and ‘was annoyed by.’ I raved to escape responsibility and in my opinion – 12 and 13 year old girls should fit in with their families and have absolutely no responsibilities. I felt sorry for them if they never experienced the happy-go-lucky childhood that I had and I was annoyed if they were rebelling for no good reason. (Molly)

Here we see that Candy Ravers become the source of contempt because of what they represent. In this sense, while interviewees – like Molly – may have once touted the ideals represented by Candy Ravers (i.e. PLUR, blitheness, etc.), they seem to reject and envy others’ abilities to embody these ideals in their day-to-day interactions.

This discussion is clearly linked with Molly’s above explanation that as people age through active rave participation and begin to feel the weight of outside social pressures (i.e. having to manage their finances on their own), their stress manifests itself in feelings of contempt and resentment for those rave participants they perceive as “too young” to
appreciate that strain. Despite the reality that Candy Ravers may in fact, be “old enough” to face the same “rigorous management of time, energy, money and pain” necessary to produce and manage their rave-related social worlds/experiences (Pini 1998: 172), their specific “raver” identities are read as symbolizing a freedom from social constraints; they are read actually as free from the pressures of adulthood. For this reason they became both the objects of other ravers’ contempt and envy and the objects of media-led moral panics. In this case, the difference between themselves and Candy Ravers is constructed along the axis of age, which interviewees seem to conflate with class and social responsibility.

When read contrapuntally against the media-led moral panic in Southern Ontario in the late 1990s and early 2000s as discussed in Chapter Two, interviewees’ distancing themselves from Candy Ravers can also be read as a desire/attempt to dissociate themselves from the objects of moral and social control: “young,” “naïve,” and “immature” ravers. Her desire to distance herself from stereotypical and stigmatized media representations of ravers was evident in Kickin’s explanation that Candy Ravers “were the ones who were completely dressed up [...] They were the ones who made it mainstream I think” (emphasis added). Kickin’s comment is especially interesting given the negative connotations rave-goers and scholars tend to associate with the “mainstream” aspects of rave. When asked if she ever “dressed up” for raves, Kickin’ explained that although she put “sparkles in [her] hair, [and ] did the whole chunky necklaces, big and chunky beads,” she never thought out herself as that kind of “raver:”

I just didn’t think of myself that way I guess. I didn’t wear the clothes that the typical media raver would: the big baggy pants, the low cap, and the glitter everywhere, chunky necklaces – that was a kind of raver, a Candy Raver. Well, I guess I would have been a raver, but at the time I wouldn’t have called myself that. Now, looking back [at] it [...] if
I saw somebody who was like me, yeah, I would say, ‘yeah, you’re a raver’, but at the
time I wouldn’t have said that [about myself]. (Kickin’, emphasis added)\(^6\)

Kickin’s above comment clearly links popular media representations of Toronto-area raves
during the time she was an active rave-goer (1999-2000) with a stigmatized, stereotypical
image of “a raver.” Her doing so suggests that my reading of the discrimination faced by
“Candy Ravers” as resulting from attempts to distance oneself from paternalistic and
stereotypical depictions of ravers as juvenile and naïve may be correct.\(^7\)

Not all interviewees understood “the problem” of Candy Ravers in this way, however.
For example, at least three interviewees (Princess, Serendipity and Grrrl) explained that feelings
of HATE dominate some people’s feelings and representations of other ravers, especially those
they perceive to be younger than them, because as people become more “seasoned” ravers they
consequently become “jaded.” Like Molly above, Grrrl claimed that one thing that she
particularly missed about her past active rave participation was “the newness [of it all] and not
being jaded.” Princess similarly explained that she “talked to more people” when she was a
neophyte raver, but

I think you start to become more jaded the longer that you go on. When you’re new and
you’re doing drugs and it’s all new and everything’s just so great, you want to talk to
everybody, but then as time goes on, you start to become a little bit of a snob, I guess.
(Princess)

Princess clarified what she meant by “more jaded”: “As time goes, [you think] ‘oh, I’ve
seen this before’, or, ‘oh look at how high that person is’, and I guess you just kind of get
over the all respecting lovingness of it.”

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\(^6\) Serendipity, Penelope, and Princess also explained that their rave participation was something that they hid from
people who (they believed) were not part of the scene themselves.

\(^7\) In a similar vein, when Penelope and I talked about increased efforts to regulate raves, she told me that many
parties got shut down because of some participants’ \textit{immaturity} and lack of self-control: "as sort of mature partiers
we understood that if people had been acting more responsibly about it [how they were taking drugs], I don’t think
as many events would have been shut down.”
In order to draw out the importance of age as a reason for ceasing active rave participation, I asked Princess if she would attend a rave event this year if a friend invited her.

Princess explained that her decision would depend on the location of the event, the deejays spinning at it, and “if it was all-ages or not.” When I probed her about the importance she placed on the event not being all-ages, she explained, “I don’t like feeling ten years older than these people, or older. You don’t want to see all these young kids like super-high, it’s just kind of like weird, and upsetting.” She explained,

It makes me feel that this is something that I did at that age and maybe I shouldn’t be doing it anymore even though I am going to see usually somebody spinning good music [...] It’s also just that people just look really high all the time too, especially when you’re not high, and it kind of makes you feel gross and sick, especially younger kids. (Princess, emphasis added)

We continued:

Julie: Do you feel the same way if you go to an event and there’s people there who are ten years older than you?

Princess: No, and when I was younger, I didn’t think that. I think it’s more about just being conscious of your age. (emphasis added)

From my reading, this finding highlights the prevalence and pervasiveness of ageist discourses that construct rave participation both as a definitively “youthful” arena, and as an inappropriate option for people who are “too naïve and youthful.”

Despite this irony, a number of interviewees explained that they relinquished their active rave participation in Toronto because as they got older, the crowd became much younger. Instead of interpreting the influx of younger participants in PLURistic terms (i.e. people joining the scene because of a shared appreciation for the music and related activities), interviewees tended to interpret the participation of younger participants as the cue they were becoming “too old” for rave. For instance, Penelope explained that because of the age gap between her and some other participants she had a horrible time at the last event she attended:
I was in the bathroom and there was a whole bunch of really young teenagers there who were talking about how they fooled their parents into being out for the night. I went out and I said to [my partner], ‘you know what, we’re just getting too old for Hullabaloo’; there wasn’t that same connection with other people that there was [before]. (Penelope)

When I asked her if her bad experience was due to the Hullabaloo crowd specifically, or the rave crowd more generally, Penelope responded: “I think the Hullabaloo crowd was generally younger anyway, but it came to be the overall crowd; we were just getting to be older.”

Aware that her discomfort may come from feeling that these other participants are too young to be at raves – not that she is too old – I directly asked Penelope if this experience made her feel as though she should not be attending these events. Her response was telling:

Well not that you shouldn’t be there, but just that, you know, I mean, we were living on our own and had our own house and our own mortgage and we both had jobs that we had to get up and go to on Monday morning so it’s a very different partying environment. (Penelope)

She later explained, “it was a good time while it lasted but, we’ve grown up and moved on.”

In this context, Penelope and other interviewees constructed rave participation as an option (only) for those people who do not have “serious” jobs to go to Monday morning; it was time to get a “real” job, find a partner, start a family, and/or pay a mortgage (see also, Chapter Five). According to this rationalization, rave participation (whether or not active) is constructed necessarily as a phase. At some point, we must, as the dominant discourse goes and as Cosmic put it, “entertain the real world” of property ownership, paid labour, and (especially for women) social reproduction. What is both interesting and troubling about this explanation is that it points to the argument that popular discourses of rave and rave-goers as definitively and necessarily

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71 It is important to note that Hullabaloo parties are also known as “Candy Raves” (see also, Wilson 1999). Mystic also pointed this out when she explained that the only time she ever dressed extravagantly for a party was when she went to the last Hullabaloo party. She constructed this particular event as a “special event, like Christmas almost.”

72 In her response to an earlier version of this chapter, Penelope explained that her feelings of disconnect at this event (and eventually from the scene) “wasn’t so much that [she] thought the people there were too young;” instead she explained, her disconnect from the scene was prompted by realizing she and her husband had “very little in common” with the younger ravers around them because their “ages were too different.”
“youthful” are so prevalent that rave-goers themselves may begin to internalize them. These discourses are clearly exclusionary on the basis of age and the internalization of such exclusions may cause some women (like my ten interviewees) to abandon something that they once understood as central to their senses of self, their relationships, and their lives.

**Experiencing Ageist and Sexist Discourses**

The argument that one *has* to become less active in rave (or leave it completely) because it is an expensive leisure activity that is not commensurate with a “responsible” life *may* be a valid one (see, Chapter Five). However, what I found most significant about interviewees’ comments was that in most accounts these concerns were understood as arising much later for men, if at all. For instance, Pink explained that she ceased to be an active rave participant because of her desires to “have a career [and...] a baby.” She explained, as she got older, she began thinking:

> What am I doing to myself? What if I can’t have kids because of what I’ve done, you know what I mean? Like, I think women tend to start thinking about those things a lot more. I think they can only take so much. I think women at some point are like, ‘OK, I’ve got to think about the rest of my life here. Men, it takes them a lot longer, a little bit longer yeah, to think that way. (Pink)

From the above account men are not *necessarily* exempt from having to think about children and careers outside of rave. Nevertheless, like other interviewees, Pink reproduced the dominant explanation that men *are* more likely than women to remain active in rave scenes – even as they age – because they have better chances of moving up the rave hierarchy into positions as deejays and promoters, for example. This was a common discourse drawn on by interviewees.

Cosmic, Princess, Pink, Penelope, and Grrrl substantiated this patriarchal discourse – a discourse which supports the belief that men are less likely to have to give up rave participation to pursue their careers because, contrary to their female counterparts, their odds of having their career and rave activities coincide are relatively high – when they
explained that they have friends and acquaintances who hold positions “behind the [rave] scenes,” the large majority of whom are men. Penelope, Pink, and Princess were unable fully to articulate the reasons for this trend, but Cosmic and Grrrl offered very telling explanations. Cosmic explained that men can “make it” in rave by becoming deejays and promoters, but, she rationalized, “the girls […] fall by the wayside because women age terribly bad in the scene.” When I asked her to elaborate, she continued:

[W]omen look used up. I think that drugs have a more ageing effect on women and prettier women come and the guys get older and they bring in the young pretty girls […] Women don’t look good older in the scene. The men can age because they can always attract the pretty girls, who brought us into the scene, and it just goes like that, or [they] bring the little gay boys into the scene and then they grow up really fast and the little girls grow up really fast […] Women do not age [well] in the system. They do not age in the party scene at all. Men can age and continually bring more and more girls into it. Once the girl’s looking used and abused, nobody wants her anymore. They cast her out. And unfortunately, it happens, and girls get lost. It’s unfortunate. (Cosmic; see also, Chapter Four)

From this account women’s rave participation necessarily has a “shelf life” (see also, Weber 1999). In order to stay in the scene, women must avoid (or reverse) the “ageing effect[s]” of drugs; they must strive to be “the young pretty girls” and they must avoid “grow[ing] up really fast.” Where these goals are not attained, women’s entitlements to, and senses of, belonging within rave are drained – or “used up.”

This finding highlights the tendency for some women to internalize popular discourses, which suggest that older women do not belong in rave scenes – especially within what Scott Hutson (2000) refers to as the hierarchies “of rave authenticity” (43; see also, Chapter Two). These discourses must be read as more than simply highlighting the finding that men have better chances than women of moving up the rave hierarchy from participants to deejays. Discourses that construct older women as particularly misplaced as rave and post-rave club owners,
promoters, and professional DJs — and even participants — also must be understood as reinforcing ageist and patriarchal power relations.

On the flip side of this interpretation, Grrrl — when talking about her experiences as a female deejay — explained that despite ongoing gender discrimination within Toronto’s rave scene, being a deejay was one of the most positive aspects and impetuses of her past active rave participation. She further told me that her experiences of gender discrimination within rave made her more aware of discriminations faced by women, more generally, outside of the scene. In response to my question “could you tell me about your best experience in the scene — or one of,” she laughed and exclaimed,

being a female deejay and the empowerment that’s brought me and an awakening for how much of a struggle women still have and being woken up to that has been one of the most positive experiences in showing me something I wasn’t really aware of and [that’s] something that’s given me power and has been able to let me help other people and make an impact. (Grrrl, emphasis added)

In previous chapters I explained that based on the finding that women appear invisible at the production side of rave institutions (i.e. as producers, promoters and deejays), rave is often described in the literature as sexually oppressive (for example, Thornton 1994, 1995, 2005; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006). Grrrl challenged this reading by maintaining that discriminatory gender-related discourses and experiences within rave occasionally can be flipped on their heads and used by female rave enthusiasts of all-ages to feel empowered (see also, Chapter Five).

What is interesting here is that more than being an exception to “the rule” that women do not tend to move up the rave hierarchy, in some ways Grrrl also seems to be the exception that proves the rule. This is to say that Grrrl described her position as a rave deejay as empowering —
a position usually reserved for men. Thus, in this sense the feelings of empowerment that this position facilitates can also be understood as usually the preserve for male “rave connoisseurs.”

Grrrl drew out this argument that rave cannot be understood as escaping dominant patriarchal discourses as we continued,

Julie: Ok, so if you are comfortable with it, can you tell me about some of the struggles that you have had as a female deejay?

Grrrl: Just always having to try that extra harder; always having to prove myself; always having to know that I’m being judged ten times harder. Having guys say, ‘oh [...] do this for me’ or ‘do that.’ [...] Being pushed aside so the guys can do it. Still seeing line ups and it’s all men and still seeing that the scene’s still all run by men [...] It always seems like it’s a constant battle like you’re constantly having to make your mark; you’re constantly having to prove yourself over and over and over again, you know? [...] It’s a constant thing where it’s ongoing and it’s not equal yet.

Again, Grrrl’s experiences are interesting because they highlight the argument that women tend to be less empowered than their male counterparts in both “dominant” and “subcultural” arenas.

Throughout this thesis, I have repeatedly maintained that some interviewees’ comments helped to support and reproduce exclusionary discourses about rave experiences and participants; however, this is not to deny that many interviewees – like Grrrl – were also the victims of some forms of discrimination. For instance, a significant number of interviewees described witnessing or experiencing what they deemed to be incidents of unwanted sex while active rave participants. Three of the ten interviewees narrated being raped while they were active rave-goers by men they described also as “ravers.” Of the other seven women who did not personally experience this form of sexual discrimination, five told me that they knew women who had been sexually assaulted within the scene, and two acknowledged the high probability of occurrences of sexual abuse at rave events.

73 While other interviewees also described past active rave participation – especially dance – as empowering, it seems that Grrrl’s privileged position as a deejay allowed her, unlike other interviewees, to connect her feelings and experiences with larger political issues (i.e. the general subordination of women in dominant power relations).
I foreshadowed this finding in Chapter Four when I presented Cosmic’s and Grrrl’s stories about links between rave participation, sexual exploitation and violence against women.

In this same context, consider Cosmic’s explanation that she ceased active rave participation because Toronto’s scene was “just starting getting dirty:”

It wasn’t dirty in the sense like that there was soot in your nose for a day and a half later — those were the good old days. I mean like people having sex in the bathroom and in front of you and not having a care in the world. I mean the sex part was always there because the Ecstasy made you feel very sexy and alluring and sensual and whatever but, it was getting rougher. Like I saw this guy grabbing this girl’s head one time, pulling her hair back and giving it to her from behind, like hard! I just sat there and I thought: 

‘what are you doing? Why are you letting him hurt you like that?’ But she was so screwed out of her mind that like I don’t even think it was phasing her. (Cosmic, emphasis added)

Here Cosmic recounts her experience of witnessing what she interprets as “hard” and violent intercourse, which seems to be straddling the border of rape because the recipient “was so screwed out of her mind that [it didn’t seem to be] phasing her.”

Curious narrated a similar experience in an exchange she and I had about why, unlike some of the women discussed in Chapter Five, she did not feel comfortable wandering around raves spaces alone:

Curious: Yeah, like you don’t want someone to overdose, you don’t want someone to slip and crack their head and some other guy finds her, you do worry even though it’s such a good vibe, because stuff does happen right?

Julie: Yeah, for sure. And did you ever hear of things like that happening?

Curious: No, not really, no [but] I remember we went to a club — it was a club, a bar-club [because] they had booze — and everyone was dancing [...] There were some people [who were] just really, really high, you could tell, and I remember there was a VIP section closed off and you could tell the type of people in there were previous ravers and they were having sex and she did not look impressed or happy — like they’re doing it right in front of everybody [...] It honestly looked like she was somewhat being raped, but not really, she looked too high to care or notice [...] and it just made me think, oh I’m very,...

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74 In this same context of Toronto’s rave scene “getting dirty,” Cosmic explained that as raves became more popular, or “mainstream,” the crowd became “super young” and there were a lot of “over-the-top strippers” and “big Italian, Gino guys, nasty guys” (see also, Chapter Five).

75 Most times, interviewees rationalized the likelihood of being sexually victimized in these same terms of “being too screwed out of minds.” I briefly analyze the significance of such “victim blaming” comments below.
very lucky that I survived all of those years without any of my friends having anything horrible happen to them or [to] myself. (emphasis added)  

The above discussion is disturbing for a number of reasons. First, the occurrence of unwanted sex (whether or not conceptualized as “rape”) is disturbing no matter where it takes place. Secondly, the occurrence of rape within spaces that are (often) constructed as safe havens for social outcasts, as sexually liberating spaces (perhaps especially for women), and as arenas where discourses of PLUR and gender equality prevail only heightens the shock that many people feel when hearing about this form of sexual assault (for example, Martin 1999; Pini 2001). Thirdly, both Curious and Cosmic explained these incidents in terms of drug use. The women in question were “too screwed out of [their] mind[s]” and “too high to care or notice” that they were being victimized. In this way, Cosmic and Curious can be read as drawing on discourses that help to blame victims of sexual assault by implying that if these women had been more cautious, they could have avoided becoming “victims.”  

What I am suggesting here is that the tendency for some women to blame female rave-goers who experience sexual assault seems to reflect and confirm dominant power relations and patriarchal structures that surround and infiltrate rave scenes. In fact, in this section I have presented other findings that support my argument that rave is entangled in dominant patriarchal power relations that help to condone women’s subordination. For example, following interviewees’ stories I also have shown even within rave spaces, which are often constructed in terms of PLUR, women are excluded – or at least discouraged – from becoming deejays. In addition, I have revealed the finding that the occurrence of rape within rave spaces, and among rave-goers, is relatively common.

76 Curious repeatedly said that you can tell by people’s clothing if they used to be ravers because “raver style” clothes are like skateboarders’ clothes, but she added, “there’s drugs related in them.” When I asked her to explain, she said a raver can be spotted by “the colours they wear, the way that they walk, the size of their bag, [their] eyes.”  
77 This reading especially is facilitated by the way Cosmic frames her reaction: she asks, “why are you letting him hurt you like that” – and not, “why are you hurting her like that?”
Internalizing Discourses of Age and Gender

In *Club Cultures and Female Subjectivity: The Move from Home to House*, Maria Pini (2001) argues that women’s growing presence in cultural activities that cause them to stray from "home" is evidence that our conceptions of femininity are in a current state of flux; they are expanding, Pini maintains, in ways that facilitate women’s access to new ways of being and acting as women in contemporary society. Pini reasons, "if [...] raving can feel like being ‘at home’, then home is no longer a place of stability, familiarity or enclosure" (15). It is true that the majority of my ten interviewees constructed the fleeting sense of community facilitated by their past active rave participation in “familial” terms. According to Pini what findings like this suggest is that “within [rave] lie the opportunities for challenges to the confines of normative heterosexual femininity,” which upset “traditional ideas about heterosexual femininity’s ‘life course’” (16).

Pini (2001) is adamant that rave participation is about undoing – or at least challenging – normative notions of femininity’s “life course.” Nevertheless, there is a sub-text in her work that suggests that at the same time that rave may (temporarily) challenge normative gender roles, it may also reproduce and maintain those same dominant discriminations. In many ways, by not explicitly acknowledging this alternative reading, Pini fails to recognize the ageist and gendered nature of the discourses that figure into the ways that her female interviewees experience and construct rave. Because the data I collected for my current research are similar to Pini’s in many respects, I want to consider her data in relation to my findings in order to produce a reading that expands Pini’s analysis of the significance of women’s rave participation

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78 Following Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson (1999), Maria Pini (2001) acknowledges that raving “men too can experience [...] a sense of liberation from the strictures of gender” (40). Nevertheless, she argues, while rave offers men with yet another arena to challenge oppression, it represents one of the first of such sites for women.

79 Maria Pini’s (2001) focus on discourses of “heterosexual femininity’s lifecourse” is interesting given that she does not explicitly discuss sexuality.
My goal in presenting this alternative reading is consistent with my ongoing commitment to describe social interactions, particularly women’s rave participation, in terms of ambivalence, as in constant states of flux between expressions of power and resistance – as political.

One of Pini’s (2001) interviewees’ stories is particularly fascinating because it reinforces the idea that rave participation has, and should have, a “shelf life” (Weber 1999). Amy, a 32-year-old woman who participated in Pini’s research describes her rave participation as the only thing that brings pleasure and satisfaction to her life. Amy is torn by wanting to remain an active rave participant despite her knowledge that people tend to understand and represent rave participation as “juvenile.” Notwithstanding the gratification she receives from rave, Amy rationalizes that to avoid looking like a “saddie,” she knows she will soon have to quit raving (100; see also, Pini 1997b). This belief in “having” to quit raving emerged in both Pini’s and my own interview data, especially in interviewees’ explanations of having to relinquish their rave participation when they get pregnant, married, and/or find steady employment (see also, Chapter Five). In this sense, both my own and Pini’s interviewees understand rave participation as a “phase,” a stepping stone, a transitional activity where at the other end they will find “happily ever after.”

As the argument (read “normative social discourse”) goes, when women get older, their responsibilities and priorities must change, partly because, according to many interviewees,
women's ageing bodies just cannot handle active rave participation. In this context, consider the explanation that one interviewee offered me as to why she ceased to be an active rave-goer:

I'm twenty-six [...] and I think that I don't have the ability as I did back then [...] The way I got out of it was because physically on my body it was very draining. Emotionally, I realized that I hadn't even made any true friendships besides the ones that I went into it with [...] I just think that there's an age. (Pink)\(^3\)

When probed further, Pink explained:

Physically, yeah, I wanted my career to take off [...] I was doing a bit of soul searching [...] I wanted a relationship, a real relationship too; I didn't have a boyfriend throughout the whole thing and I was twenty-three, twenty-four coming out of it [...] I just wanted to find somebody who I was going to fall in love with and start thinking about my future and being in that scene I didn't think I was capable of moving on with the rest of my life. I thought that if I continued on anymore, it was going to be bad for me and that I would end up lonely and, [have] a sad life. Depression too a little bit, I came out with a little bit, not depression, but just sadness because I had done so much damage to myself and financially I put a lot of stress on myself going to parties and trying to live on my own. (Pink, emphasis added)

There are a few issues that Pink raises, which resonate with my interview data as a whole.

First, according to all interviewees, rave participation of any degree is not conducive with parenthood (often described as the goal of adulthood).\(^4\) For example, Penelope stated that "there were a few people that we knew who did have kids and would still go out and party and we never thought it was a responsible thing to do; so I think it's just one of those things that ends when you have kids." A second and clearly related argument made by a number of interviewees (and suggested above) is that rave participation must be understood and experienced as a phase; as Pink said, "I think that you should get out of the scene at a certain age and that it's a phase, I think that it should be a phase" (emphasis added). A third argument that emerges from my discussions with interviewees is that although rave participation and related activities may be more appropriate for older, more mature participants than for younger ones, there nevertheless

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\(^3\) Interestingly and contrary to Pink's suggestion that older women's bodies just cannot handle the same amount of drugs as they once could, Tom Ter Bogt and Rutger Engels (2005) find that in terms of women's drug use, "age was a relevant factor, with older women experiencing less negative outcomes" (1492, emphasis added).

\(^4\) Although Serendipity may seem to be an exception to this belief because she was a mother when she began attending raves, below I discuss that she also felt this way, albeit to a lesser degree than other interviewees.
comes a time when participants – especially women – become too old for rave. According to this discourse, to avoid living a “sad life” (i.e. not being socially productive and/or socially reproductive), older female rave participants need to “move out.”

Far from suggesting that rave participation offers participants opportunities to destabilize dominant gender roles, this notion of becoming a “saddie” implies that it may be more realistic to think about women’s rave participation not as a “move from home to house,” as Pini (2001) suggests, but instead as a “move from home to house” and back to home. The point is that while raves may be positive and liberating spaces for women who, either by physical appearance or actual date of birth, can be easily categorized as “youth,” once past this category, women may begin to internalize dominant ageist and sexist discourses to such an extent that they begin to rationalize – even argue for – the necessity of older women (including themselves) leaving rave.

I am not suggesting that interviewees’ understandings that eventually they will have to leave rave are invalid (see also, Chapter Five). What I am suggesting is that it is problematic that interviewees see their situated identities as aging women – as eventual mothers, wives, and/or partners – as necessarily incongruent with rave participation. The so-called “necessity” of relinquishing their identities as “active rave participants” to become more “responsible” and “productive” members of society especially gets called into question when I consider my own and Pini’s findings that some women can, and will, balance their rave and non-rave activities.

For instance, analyzing her interviews with two women in her sample who are mothers, Pini (1998) finds,

One aspect of these women’s self-management in relation to drug use becomes clear in their descriptions of how their time (their weekends) is organised so as to allow an appropriate period during which to ‘come-down’. The management of ‘come-down’ is most clearly manifest in their negotiations of the cross-overs between raving and motherhood. Both organise childcare in advance and stress the importance of not having their children around during ‘come-down.’ (175)
Turning to my interview data, of my ten interviewees, only one – Serendipity – had both children and a full time career during her period of active rave participation. Serendipity explained that when she first began participating in Toronto’s rave scene, she had been “all mommied out.” In support of Pini’s (2001) argument that rave participation can offer women a much needed move from home (i.e. the domestic sphere) to house (a reference to house music, a genre of “rave” music), for Serendipity rave participation provided a break from her “home” life – a chance to evade the responsibilities associated with motherhood, even if only temporarily.

Rave participation also provided Serendipity with a foundation on which she could build a fledgling romantic relationship (see also, Chapter Four). Nevertheless, she admits, attending raves was also a source of serious concern for her.

In particular, she explained, the stigmatizing media portrayals/moral panics surrounding rave (particularly Ecstasy use) always stuck with her (see also, Chapter Two). She explained that because when she began attending raves media representations were her only source of knowledge, she constantly felt concern about what she understood as her conflicting roles as a mother and a “raver” – an identity she conflated with “drug user.” Despite these concerns, because rave provided her – and other interviewees, particularly Mystic – with intense “spiritual” feelings of being connected with herself and the people around her, she strove to find ways to manage these two aspects of her life (see also, Hutson 1999, 2000; Malbon 1999, 2005).85

Eventually, she found that being a mother and an active rave participant were not necessarily incongruent – although she did tell me that trying to decipher if other rave participants knew her age became almost a playful game of wondering if others could “guess [her] secret.” What this

85 Mystic even linked these intense feelings of togetherness she felt within rave to the need to draw connections between our rave experiences and larger social issues in order to draw out the need for social activism. I elaborate on this point in my concluding chapter in relation to the ways in which past active rave participation continues to shape interviewees senses of self.
latter comment suggests is that while Serendipity may be an obvious anomaly in my sample, she, like the other nine interviewees, also internalized dominant “moral panic” discourses that rave participation, parenting and other “adult” responsibilities are incompatible – she was just more aware of it than other interviewees.

The tendency with which my own and Maria Pini’s female research participants reproduced patriarchal, sexist, and ageist discourses about who does and does not “belong” at rave events and the ease with which they directed these same discriminations not only at other rave participants, but also at themselves, is disturbing. Pini (1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2001) does not delve into these readings of her interviewees’ comments because what is important to her is the sense of adventure and ecstasy that rave participation offers women in terms of challenging dominant modes of femininity. Her focus is not on the ways that age and gender intersect in these women’s experiences of rave. This is an important omission because as my analysis of the intersections of age and gender (and other axes of social oppression) illustrates, these factors all shape one another, each adding different layers of meaning to the ways that interviewees understand and represent themselves, their past rave participation and that of other people.

As I have suggested throughout this chapter issues about ageing through rave tend to be more directed at, and internalized by, women so that men can (a) be exempt from these same concerns, or (b) it may take longer for men to begin to feel these same discourses “pushing them out” of active rave participation. Interviewees tended to represent these findings as matters of biological and “natural” differences between male and female participants (as a difference of the sexes) rather than as matters of socially constructed ideals and understandings (or as gendered differences).
For instance, my ten interviewees seemed to share a belief that drug-use, which is often equated with rave participation, has more of an ageing effect on women, which in turn makes them less desirable to the older men who recruited them into the scene. As Cosmic suggested, older men may lose interest in older women in the scene and therefore, they try to “bring in the young pretty girls” (see also, Chapter Four). In this way, interviewees often reproduced and internalized “moral panic” discourses in ways that may have caused them excessive anxiety. What this tendency suggests is that dominant understandings of age and gender intersect to give social (and personal) meanings to rave participation, and to participants’ bodies. At this intersection, a number of interviewees represented their rave participation as inherently and necessarily different from, and more temporally limited than, younger men’s.

Moreover, many participants discussed their fear that rave participation, specifically the drug use aspects of it, may effect their fertility and/or may make them less “responsible” mothers. In this context, recall Penelope’s claim from earlier in the chapter that she and her husband knew some people who still went to rave and post-rave events despite being parents and they that “never thought [that] was a responsible thing to do.” In her feedback on my analysis chapters, Penelope elaborated in a way that succinctly draws out some of the contradictions to which I have referred in this chapter:

The arrival of these chapters was quite timely!!! We [my husband and I] just went out Friday night to a club for a friend’s CD release party and were discussing many of the issues that you raise. Most obviously perhaps was my experience of going out 7 months pregnant. I certainly felt uncomfortable and like I no longer fit in (my perception or a result of the way I was received I’m not sure). Most surprising was the feeling both my husband and I had (irrational though it is) that we were ‘corrupting’ our [baby] in utero! Perplexing that we felt too old to be there, yet the people we were with are in the same age bracket and deejay and promote and party as hard as ever and don’t feel the same disconnect. Intriguing that so many of us [who] so much enjoyed that part of our lives and wouldn’t trade it for anything still view it as dangerous and risky and have mixed feelings about our children (or potential children) participating. (Penelope)
Rewind and Re-play

Barbara Bradby (1993) argues that what we are now witnessing within rave is a prolongation of youth, which challenges normative links between femininity and motherhood. Maria Pini (2001) argues that what rave offers is a re-formation of understandings of “adult femininity” (16, emphasis in original). The above analysis leads me to argue that both women are correct in their interpretations because when interviewees gave reasons for their past active rave participation they described raves as places to experiment with new forms of sexuality, places to feel liberated from “outside,” “mainstream” expectations about “appropriate” and/or “safe” behaviour for women, thereby substantiating Pini’s argument (see also, Chapter Five). When rationalizing the relinquishment of their past active rave participation, in accordance with Bradby’s above thesis, interviewees reproduced paternalistic, sexist, and ageist discourses of rave participation as an infantile phase that older women must leave behind if they are to be respected as “good” mothers, wives, or partners (see also, Chapter Three). According to this latter finding, there is, and there should be, a shelf life to women’s active rave participation.

In a move that is reminiscent of media representations of rave participation, some interviewees constructed those they understood as “too young” to rave (especially Candy Ravers) as “lost innocence” (see also, Chapter Two). Moreover, nine of my ten interviewees ceased their active rave participation because they began to internalize dominant discourses that suggest that rave participation necessarily has a “shelf life,” especially for older women (see also, Weber 1999). As participants began to feel “too old” for the scene, they discursively constructed older women, including themselves, as particularly misplaced within rave. At the same time that they constructed rave participation as offering a sense of belonging to an “alternative” community, interviewees also tended to construct rave as a community with age and gender limits.
What this finding suggests is that while some interviewees understood their past rave participation as allowing their youthful selves to explore different/changing forms of femininity (Pini 2001; see also, Martin 1999), many of them also reproduced and internalized dominant discourses about what it means to be a “socially responsible” female adult. This inability to imagine a lasting, alternative “femininity” within rave is not surprising because, as I have repeatedly shown, rave participants and their activities are not cut-off from “outside” power relations. Dominant power relations permeate every aspect of social life, and enter into all socio-cultural activities, including rave.

My discussion of interviewees’ tendencies to internalize, experience, and reproduce dominant discriminatory discourses in relation to their past rave participation is not meant to dismiss the abundance of literature, which describes raves as pockets of time/space that allow for teenage rebellion, and even perhaps resistance (for example, Chapter Five). Instead, it is to acknowledge that once outside – and oftentimes inside – the time/space capsule of rave, women have to contend with the social meanings given to their specifically aged, gendered, racialized, classed, and drugged bodies. What I found as I analyzed my interview transcripts was that while rave spaces are often constructed (and experienced) in terms of release, escape, and empowerment, many women continue to find themselves in subordinate roles to their male counterparts, even in these spaces often constructed as disrupting dominant values of HATE and injustices based on age, gender, class, and race divisions (for example, Martin 1999; Stanley 1995). In some instances, as my findings suggest, discriminatory discourses infiltrate both macro rave institutions and micro rave experiences so much that my ten female research participants began to internalize and reproduce them as they aged towards the end of what they began to understand as a necessarily transitory subcultural “phase” of their lives.
Chapter Seven: Dubbing Politics EXPLICITLY into the Mix

Dancing is political, stupid. You think you’re just having fun, but when you’re on the dancefloor, you’re rejecting the rules and responsibilities of your daytime life, questioning the values that make you wait for the bus and smile at the boss every morning. Dance in a club and you are rebelling for awhile. Your escape might come in a pill, a smoke, some beers. Or the music might be enough. Your escape might be from yourself. You’re dancing with hundreds, maybe thousands of people; you’re no longer just an isolated individual. A dance floor is about collective action, making you an active participant, a vital component. You’re creating the event, not just consuming it – the spectacle doesn’t exist without you.

– (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 362)

Like many of my research participants, I understand and construct my past active rave participation in Toronto as a method of “losing [my]self paradoxically to find [my]self” (Malbon 1998: 281, emphasis added). Rarely do I meet people who appreciate the value of the “simple act of dancing” in a room filled with people who share my appreciation for “techno” music and the feelings of release and freedom I associate with this music. Nor does it seem, from discussions about my research with people over the past two years, that many can imagine the influences that my rave and rave-related experiences have on the ways I understand myself as a discursively located subject. Notwithstanding my desire to respond to dismissive reactions to my research in ways that re-create optimistic discourses of rave spaces as inherently liberating, during the research process I continually had to recall and acknowledge experiences that I and my ten female interviewees have had that call rave’s liberating potentials into question: from rape, drug addiction and theft, to “simply” being told that going out dancing is a “childish” thing to do, or that the desire to go to rave and post-rave clubs reveals older women’s “sad” and/or “sleazy” characteristics.

As I considered interviewees’ rave-related stories and experiences in relation to my own, I was struck by how their experiences resonated with my own (Atkinson 1998; see also, Chapter

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86 Similarly, Cosmic explained that often she would wander through rave spaces looking for friends, but reflecting on these incidents has made her realize that she was actually looking for herself. I will elaborate on this point in the last section of this chapter.
Three). Like many of the women who make up my research sample, as I move further away from the category of “active rave participant,” I become acutely aware of the ways that rave institutions and participation are entangled in – and reproduce – dominant power relations and discourses. What I find especially disturbing is that in many cases interviewees and I internalized dominant exclusionary discourses to such an extent that we were willing to – and in some cases, felt we must – completely relinquish our past identities as “ravers.” It is partly in relation to this finding that I maintain that rave participation is political – both in terms of the ways that interviewees and I experienced it and in terms of how rave is represented by academics, media, politicians, and participants (see also, Chapter One, Chapter Two).

In this chapter I review the major findings of my research. I then discuss the lasting influences that rave participation continues to have on interviewees’ current identities, relationships, and career choices as a way to enlarge my reading of the ways that rave is political. I end with a discussion of the implications that these lasting influences have in terms of notions of subjectivity, generally, and future knowledge production practices about rave, specifically.

Rewind: Reviewing the Text

In each chapter of this thesis I add a new layer to my “rave is political” thesis, continually weaving in and out, back and forth, between my own and interviewees’ personal and political readings of our experiences of becoming, being, and ceasing to be active rave participants, on the one hand, and relevant academic literature, on the other (see also, Chapter Three). At the core of this thesis is my understanding that, as Michel Foucault (1979) says, “everything [including “the personal”] is political”(72). From my reading of it, this understanding of what constitutes “political” parallels C. Wright Mills’ (1959) contention that people’s micro troubles and experiences (i.e. rave participation) are inseparable from larger
social issues such as discriminatory discourses that construct ‘otherness’ along axes of age, gender, sexuality, ability, race, and ethnicity (see also, Chapter Five).

Despite claims that rave experiences foster peace, love, unity and respect (PLUR) by blurring (or dissolving) gender, race, and class boundaries (for example, Hutson 1999, 2000; Martin 1999; Pini 1997a, 1997b, 2001; Redhead 1990), my findings suggest that rave is embedded in historical and political processes and discourses of exclusion and discrimination (see also, Saldanha 2000; Thornton 1994, 1995; Wilson 1999, 2002, 2006). Recall from Chapter Two, for example, that one consequence of increased media, political, and academic efforts to know and regulate rave over the past two decades is that rave(r)s’ PLURistic ideologies have been replaced by hostility, antagonism, tension, and elitism, or what I have called “HATE.” Moreover, my review of the subcultural and rave literature, in conjunction with my discussions with ten female interviewees, reveals that like other “youth subcultures” raves continue to be represented and practiced as “deviant,” male-dominated arenas (see also, McRobbie and Garber 1991[1975]; Pini 2001).

As I talked to interviewees, I found that they constructed active rave participation as an alternative to hyper-(hetero)sexualized “mainstream” nightclubs, and as a way to resist normative paternalistic and patriarchal discourses that rave and related activities are inappropriate, especially for young women. Notwithstanding these optimistic representations, interviewees also described their introductions to Toronto’s rave scene in very gendered, aged, and (hetero)sexualized terms. In addition, when rationalizing the necessary relinquishment of their previous active rave participation, interviewees reproduced exclusionary discourses that constructed older and younger (female) rave participants (including themselves) as misplaced within rave (for example, Chapter Six). In this way, just as age and gender were major factors in
terms of interviewees’ initial involvement and subsequent active participation in Toronto’s rave scene, so too did their intersection play a major role in decisions to cease that same participation.

My three analysis chapters demonstrate some of the ways that age and gender – or more specifically, ageist and patriarchal discourses – influenced interviewees’ movements into, through, and past active rave participation in Toronto. So why is it that so many people understand rave as having little – if any – political and/or social significance? Is it simply a matter of scope and definition?

It is likely that most people are pessimistic about rave’s political potentials because the promised utopianist/PLURRistic claims that raves were going to change the world – or at least participants’ experiences of that world – have not resulted in any “significant” macro level changes. The lack of “real” success that rave has had in avoiding co-option into “mainstream” capitalism, and effecting Political (with a capital “P”) change leads scholars like Sarah Thornton (1995) to argue that despite facilitating feelings of escape, raves are apolitical. From this perspective, rave does not escape – rather it reproduces – hierarchies of difference. What I have argued, however, is that it is irresponsible to separate personal and structural effects of rave. In order to draw out rave’s political implications, it is imperative that we link structural and experiential effects to one another, and to the ways that rave institutions and participation both facilitate and challenge dominant discriminatory discourses of exclusion.

In this context, it seems fitting that Henry Giroux (2002) should claim that if we critically analyze the power struggles involved in the marginalization of youths’ voices and experiences, we will unveil more than the “mere” processes by which people and their activities become stigmatized.\footnote{Importantly, Henry Giroux (2002) acknowledges youth as “a complex, shifting, and contradictory category” (24). I return to this point below.} According to Giroux, studying these processes will also unveil strong critiques of
a society wherein stigmatized identities and discourses are constructed and perpetuated. From this perspective, when we seek to understand why some people are drawn towards cultural practices that devalue them (i.e. why so many youth participate in activities that valorize drug use), we must also question what this says about larger social processes rather than just focus on the individual people and/or activities involved. In other words, it is important to understand how particular disadvantaged segments of the population (and their activities) come to be stigmatized as social “problems.” An important way to do this is to examine the processes by which discourses of exclusion are constructed, reproduced, maintained, and challenged.

Following this same rationale, analyzing interviewees’ stories and media, legal, and academic portrayals of rave led to the conclusion that as rave has been co-opted into “mainstream” society, its political implications have been amplified. This is to say that increased efforts to know and regulate rave have had effects on structural and experiential levels. For instance, increased attention paid to rave by scholars, journalists, and politicians has informed popular representations of rave events and participants as “youth” – or at least “youthful” – and as “deviant social problems” (see also, Chapter Two). These negative portrayals of rave have been the impetuses for proposed and passed legal sanctions against rave in Britain and Canada, which themselves have informed and shaped discriminations that interviewees and I perpetuated, experienced, and challenged within and outside of rave spaces (see also, Chapter Five).

Following Maria Pini (2001), I also have pointed out that scholars who describe rave as patriarchal tend to focus on the business end of rave, which is male-dominated, while ignoring the impacts that such structures have in the everyday lives of (particularly female) participants (for example, Thornton 1995; Wilson 2006; see also, Chapter Four). This narrow focus has meant that women’s particularly situated rave experiences often are overlooked, and/or that
female participants are labelled as "toys for the boys" (Leblanc 2001: 68; see also, Chapter Three). In relation to this notion of female participants as boys’ toys, I revealed that the majority of interviewees were introduced to rave through their pre-established drug-taking habits with other women, and that either they or their female friends were introduced to rave by (often older) male friends and partners (for example, Chapter Four). At the same time, however, I also found that interviewees constructed their gendered and sexualized introductions to rave as both a way to be close to the men in their lives and as a way to resist dominant discourses that construct (young) women as misplaced in rave scenes (for example, Chapter Five). In this context, women’s rave participation must be understood as a form of accommodative resistance insofar as it simultaneously facilitates and challenges heteronormative and patriarchal structures and processes (see also, Butz and Ripmeester 1999).

I have offered numerous examples of some of the ways that interviewees described themselves and their past active rave participation as directly challenging normative discourses that told them that as young women they should not: (a) partake in illegal substance (ab)use (for example, Chapter Five); (b) stray too far from home (for example, Chapter Four); and (c) in fact, cannot, move up the ranks of rave into positions as promoters and/or decjays with the same ease as men (for example, Chapters Six). Despite these constraints, it is important to recall that interviewees strategically used who and what they know and own to amass socio-subcultural capital as a way to feel empowered within Toronto’s rave scene (for example, Chapter Four). Thus, although rave spaces are by no means arenas in which dominant oppressive structures and discourses are absent, some interviewees were able to use these same aspects to their advantages.
Fast Forward: Re-locating Rave’s Political Characteristics

So, can raves be understood as political? It should be evident by now that my answer is an emphatic “yes.” To reiterate the reasons for this response, I return to the claim that when speculating on rave’s political implications, our main concern as researchers should not be with how likely dance culture is to bring down capitalism or patriarchy, but at what precise points it succeeds or fails in negotiating new spaces. In particular, it is not a simple question of dance culture being ‘for’ or ‘against’ the dominant culture, but of how far its articulations with other discourses and cultures – dominant or otherwise – result in democratisations of the cultural field, how far they successfully break down existing concentrations of power, and how far they fail to do so (Gilbert and Pearson in Carrington and Wilson 2001: 5, emphasis in original).

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed at length what rave participation fails to do: it fails to cross or erase boundaries and discriminatory discourses of ability, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and age (for example, Chapter Five). What I have not discussed are the lasting influences that past active rave participation have in interviewees’ current lives. This is an important issue because such findings reiterate some of raves’ more “macro” political aspects, while opening up room for understanding rave participation as leading to significant micro-macro change.\(^8^8\)

For some people, like myself, past active rave participation facilitated and promoted PLURistic ideologies that challenge dominant values of HATE (see also, Hutson 1999, 2000; Martin 1999; Stanley 1995). It follows that such profound experiences continue to have an impact on people, even after the relinquishment of their active rave participation (see also, Bennett 2006).\(^8^9\) Indeed, interviewees discussed at length how the experiences they had as active rave participants continue to inform and shape their current identities, relationships, and career choices. For example, Kickin’ explained that rave participation – particularly dancing – helped to

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\(^8^8\) I use the term “micro-macro” to reiterate that these spheres of sociological analysis (and social life) are not mutually exclusive, and that they inform and reflect one another.

\(^8^9\) Following the same logic that it is naïve to assume that people’s past experiences as active rave participants cease to influence them once they have relinquished that same participation – and by extension that active rave participation is merely a “phase” – it is equally invalid to describe rave as an apolitical “subculture” because it is entangled in “mainstream” discriminatory discourses (for example, Chapter Two; see also, Bennett 2006).
increase her self confidence, and this heightened confidence has translated into greater respect for others:

Dancing helped me find myself [...] Absolutely. Because I think before I was snobby [...] and then as soon as I starting going to that scene and everybody was so accepting and everybody was so loving and just happy and that’s who I became [...] and that’s totally who I’ve turned into now. You know, growing up with parents who are just so cynical and so judgemental of everybody, I was worried that I was going to turn out like that, but I think that scene completely made me not be that way. (Kickin’)

Like Kickin’, other interviewees also talked about feelings of PLUR – which they attributed to their past rave participation – entering into their current senses of self and daily interactions. For example, Cosmic, Penelope, and Serendipity, who all work in fields where past rave (and drug-related) experiences help them feel some sense of connection with their clients, attribute their more grounded, non-judgmental, harm reduction approaches to interacting with young mothers, “juvenile delinquents,” and street youth to their past drug experiences and/or interactions with people who have used drugs.90

These same three interviewees also alluded to conflicts between themselves and co-workers who do not support their “lax,” “soft” views about drug (ab)use. In this respect, Penelope explained,

I think [my past active rave participation] made me a lot more non-judgmental about drug use because I used to be fairly judgmental about it; you know, [I once] bought into the perception that people who used drugs all became crack addicts and had to hit bottom [...] That has definitely changed and it affects the way that I interact with [clients...] I’m not nearly as judgmental I think as [some of my] other [co-workers are] if their [clients] used marijuana or they’ve used Ecstasy in the past. A lot of [my co-workers would think] ‘oh well they must be hardcore addicts if they’ve used Ecstasy’. (Penelope)

My point here is that interviewees’ past identifications and experiences as active rave participants clearly enter into the choices they make in their current lives, the ways they interact with other people, and how they understand themselves in relation to others.

90 As Andrew Hathaway (2001) explains, “harm reduction education urges safer drug use practices as opposed to the elimination of all drug use” (128).
The document contains a block of text that is difficult to read due to the image quality. It appears to be a page from a book or a report, with multiple paragraphs discussing a topic, possibly related to science or technology. However, the text is not legible enough to transcribe accurately.
To substantiate this point further, consider Cosmic’s assertion during our debriefing where she explicitly draws out some of the ways that her past active rave participation continues to shape her current sense of self:

it was nice to actually do some self-reflection and look at how it [my past active rave participation] has shaped my life today. I never realized, like I knew it had a big impact on me, on my self-concept, but I didn’t realize [...] how it has actually persuaded me to go into my field, as well as giving me the tools to have the self-confidence to excel. At my work, I’m the youngest [employee] there and one with the heaviest caseloads, which I can handle and that, that scene has given me the knowledge base, the emotional stability and just the confidence to do it. (Cosmic)

What these findings reveal is that interviewees’ past rave experiences influence and shape their current understandings of their social worlds and their *selves*.

Final Rewind: Reviewing and Re-locating the Text

My central finding is that ageist and patriarchal discourses which prevail in contemporary Canada and infiltrate even those spaces constructed as inclusive spaces where Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect abound (i.e. rave). Thus, I agree with Sarah Thornton (1994, 1995, 2005) that because “mainstream” power relations and discourses infiltrate rave institutions and experiences, it is inappropriate to theorize rave as a “subculture” (see also, Chapter Two). Contrary to Thornton, however, I do not interpret this finding as evidence that rave participation is political *only* insofar as it draws attention to, and re-creates, HATEful categories of difference between “hip” insiders and “nonhip” outsiders. I especially do not agree with Thornton’s (1995) claim that youth “appropriate” political rhetoric only to give substance and meaning to their activities (see also, Chapter Two). Instead, I also understand rave as political because interviewees’ descriptions of becoming, being, and ceasing to be active rave participants in Toronto both reproduced and challenged normative discourses about what it means to be particularly gendered and aged subjects.
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Notwithstanding this argument, throughout this thesis I used the term “youth” as an adjective to describe rave. In many instances I described rave as a “youth culture,” or as a “subculture.” Part of my reason for doing so is because I concur with the general observation that Toronto rave events are attended predominately by fourteen to twenty-five year old participants (for example, Weber 1999; Wilson 1999, 2002). This is not to say that all rave participants fall within this age range, however (see also, Pini 2001). While I found that older rave participants tend to be those people – usually men – who have successfully found avenues within their respective scenes to move from participants to more entrenched roles as deejays, or promoters, to describe raves as “youthful” is also a matter of definition and ideology (see also, Chapter Six).

Gill Valentine, Tracey Skelton, and Deborah Chambers (1998) point out, the term “youth” has a highly contested and ambivalent history. These scholars note that while “the term ‘youth’ is popularly used to refer to people aged 16-25,” this normative definition “bears no correlation with any of the diverse legal [or popular] classifications of childhood and adulthood” (5; see also, Adams 1997; Giroux 2002; Lesko 2001; Mazzarella 2003; Wyn and White 1997). Andrew Ross (1994) makes this argument about the discursive nature of the category “youth” in relation to (sub)cultural affiliations most cogently when he says, “it is not just Mick Jagger and Tina Turner who imagine themselves to be eighteen years old and steppin’ out; a significant mass of baby boomers partially act out this belief in their daily lives” (8).

Within this post-structural framework, at the same time as it is important to note that gender is a shaky concept, too often equated with biological sex and/or exterior physical appearance, it is equally significant to acknowledge that discourses that underpin notions of youth often are restricted to one’s (perceived) age (for example, Chapter Six; see also, Butler 1993). Following this same rationale, just as gender is a discursive concept, so too is age a
discourse, often used to marginalize and stigmatize certain activities and identities as inferior and/or “deviant.” In this way, age and gender are not unchangeable and self-explanatory structures. Instead they are discursive formations, which categorize people and structure society in certain ways. From this perspective, age and gender are not inherent “truths” or “structures.” Instead, they are normative ideals and discourses constructed and maintained through our everyday practices and interactions, and challenged and resisted through these same interactions and constraints (for example, Chapter Five; see also, Butler 1993; LeBlanc 2001; Mills 2004).

I have made this argument implicitly in previous chapters. It is necessary to make it explicitly at this point to avoid the dangers of being read as suggesting that there is an archetypical, singular “female rave experience.” At the same time, however, I do not want to be read as someone who interprets categories of difference (i.e. age and gender) as so relative that they are invaluable. In this respect, I concur with Maria Pini (1997b) that “the category ‘woman’ [i]s a term which enables us to hang on to the sexual specificity of bodies [who identify as such] whilst at the same time acknowledging that this sexual specificity is not enough to assume a sameness between all women” (117; see also, Hier 2002; McRobbie 1993; Pini 2001).

While I have made efforts to show the range of interviewees’ experiences and interpretations of rave (i.e. differences in the ways they understood and constructed their past active rave participation), I have also argued that because of their age and gender interviewees’ rave and related experiences overlapped in ways that they understood as different from their differently located younger and/or male peers. This is not to say that other people (i.e. who do not self-identity as women) are not susceptible to discriminatory discourses that read and construct them in particular ways. Instead, my focus on some of the past rave experiences of people who identify as “women” is meant to (a) give voices to one group of subjects whose
experiences are often overlooked in academic, media, and political discussions of rave, and (b) to acknowledge that people's discursively located subject positions enter into the ways that they experience and interpret their rave and post-rave selves.

The notion of rave participation as an avenue by which to discover one's self is something to which I have alluded in previous chapters (for example, Chapters Three). Within this context and in relation to the present discussion of the lasting influences of active rave participation, interviewees consistently talked about having "found their true selves" in Toronto's rave scene (see also, Malbon 1999). I do not wish to deny the importance of what interviewees described as their true selves. I do, however, want to end with a discussion of how this idea of "finding one's self in rave" might be interpreted within a post-structural framework, which conceives the categories and structures of social location that inform and shape our senses of self (i.e. age, gender, race, sexuality, ability, etc.) as constructed, ever-changing, and morphing discourses.

Contrary to my reading of age, gender, and subjectivity, for example, as socio-cultural processes, implicit in interviewees' discussions of self-discovery is the notion of an already formed, anchored, and unchangeable subject waiting to be discovered once conditions permit doing so. This implicit reading runs counter to my understanding of subject formation (i.e. subjectivity) as an ongoing process - one that is always becoming, that is never complete, or fully formed. Thus, when interviewees said they found themselves in rave, I understand this to mean that rave participation shaped, and continues to shape, their senses of self.

The difference between my post-structural interpretation of subjectivity as an ongoing process of becoming, and interviewees' (implicit) humanistic readings of themselves as static and complete beings is an important one. Where interviewees tended to describe themselves as
complete projects waiting to be discovered in Toronto’s rave scene, I understand their current selves as being partly shaped and informed not only by their past rave experiences, but also by the experiences and interactions that they had before and after that same participation. In this way, just as interviewees’ experiences of rave have shaped their senses of self, so too do their senses of self (i.e. where they understand themselves and others in relation to discourses of social location) shape the ways they experienced and remember their past active rave participation.

From this reading, both our senses of self and our interactions with discourses that shape our experiences are perpetually influencing the ways we understand ourselves and our social worlds.

This understanding of subjectivity and subject formation leaves room for the ambivalences that interviewees expressed when discussing past active rave participation in Toronto. For example, as interviewees moved (read “aged”) through active rave participation, their senses of self were shaped by discourses with which they had not previously had to contend. As the discourses of youthful pleasure which once helped them to make sense of their experiences seemed less pertinent, discourses of social (ir)responsibility and the necessity of social production and reproduction entered into the discursive spheres of their experiences (for example, Chapter Six). As this began to happen, interviewees began to internalize discourses that suggested that rave participation – particularly for older women – necessarily has a “expiration date.” This understanding of subject formation as a process also allows for nuanced understandings of why interviewees’ understandings of the significance of their past active rave participation sometimes shifted and contradicted other comments they made, especially as they began to speculate on their future children’s potential rave participation (for example, Chapter Six). What I am suggesting is that at the same time that these contradictions can be understood as matters of interviewees’ changing social contexts, responsibilities, and accompanying values,
they can also be read as a matter of interviewees’ interacting with, internalizing, and incorporating new discourses into their senses of self (see also, Chapter Six).

My analysis illustrates how our understandings of ourselves as particularly located subjects (i.e. young women, older women, friends, partners, mothers, etc) shifted in relation to our experiences of becoming, being, and ceasing to be “ravers.” My focus on the ways that my own and interviewees’ past experiences of rave overlap is not meant as a statement that there is a definitively “female” experience of rave. Instead, it is to acknowledge that in the context of a social world where discourses of ageism and patriarchy prevail, our locations as ageing women have influenced the ways we experienced and constructed rave. In relation to this finding, I suggest, because older women’s voices and experiences are particularly overlooked in our knowledge production practices about rave, and other so-called “youth” activities, it is important that we explore how they, as particularly located subject positions, experience rave in both similar and distinct ways; how older women who continue to be active rave participants negotiate ageist and patriarchal constructions of their active rave participation.
APPENDIX A

Dear Potential Research Participant,

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a study titled, “Passing Through Subculture”. I am conducting this study as a student in the Social Justice and Equity Studies Master’s program at Brock University. I am working under the supervision of Dr. David Butz, from the Department of Geography. My overarching interest in the rave culture is the intersection between youth activities and categorizations of deviance and/or resistance. The purpose of this particular study, to which you are being invited to participate, is to explore and compare the past and present rave-related experiences of a small sample of women. Participants who agree to be a part of this study must be women, at least twenty-five years old, who actively participated in the Toronto rave scene from 1996-2004 for at least 2 years.

The general purpose of this study is to explore how gender mediates women’s movements into, through, and out of the Toronto rave scene. Specifically, interviews will be conducted with a small sample of women in order to discuss potential changes in their values and senses of self from the time they attended their first rave event up to the present day. Via interview methods, I will analyze the various ways that women’s past participations in this scene may continue to inform aspects of their current lives. This focus on the experiences of young women as they move through the Toronto rave scene enables narrow definitions of “participation” and “youth” that are so prevalent in existing literature on youth culture and activities to be enlarged. This research is meant to further discussions about the political characteristics and implications of membership in youth cultures in general, and the Toronto rave scene in particular.

If you choose to participate in this study, all information that you share with me will be confidential. You are in no way obliged to participate in this study. You will not be penalized in any way for declining this invitation. A decision not to participate in this study will have no direct negative consequences for you, or me. I understand that there a number of reasons why someone may not want to, or be able to, participate in a study of this nature, and you can be assured that there is a large pool of other potential research participants with whom I can engage in these discussions.

Should you accept this invitation to participate, you will be asked to arrange an appropriate time, date and place during which we can sit down and discuss these issues in the form of a one to two-hour, face-to-face, conversational interview. When choosing the location for this interview, I strongly encourage you to consider the reality that we may be discussing highly private and/or sensitive issues about which you may not want other people to be aware. Before the pre-arranged interview begins, I will ask you for your permission to audio tape our conversation. I will also repeat and explain the purpose and objectives of this study to you. I will review, and give you a copy of, the Letter of Invitation and Informed Consent Form that accompany this study. In these documents, you will find a list of the potential risks and benefits associated with participation in this study. At this time, I will also inform you that you may stop the recording of the interview at any time and that you may decline answering any questions posed during the interview process.

Interviews will begin with some general questions about how you became aware of raves, when you attended your first raves, and with whom you went to raves. In essence, you will be asked to describe and discuss your movements into, through, and out of Toronto’s rave scene. In accordance with semi-structured interview methods, there will be list of guiding questions to which I may refer during the course of each interview. This list will include both potential interview questions and possible follow-up questions. Despite the use of this list, interviews will be guided more by the particular responses and interactions that develop during each interview, than by any pre-determined interview questions.

At the end of each interview, there will be a Debriefing Process. During this time, you will have the opportunity to tell me if there was anything that was not discussed during the interview that you think should be mentioned. Approximately one month following each interview, you will receive a copy of your interview transcript. You will be encouraged to read this transcript and to contact me if you would like to edit, revise
and/or omit any part of the interview data, or if you would like to discuss any aspects of the interview process or the rationale of the study.

I encourage you to pass this Letter of Invitation along to female friends and/or acquaintances of yours who you feel may be interested in participating in this study, or to male friends and/or acquaintances who may know someone who may be interested in participating in this study. My reason for asking for referrals is to help ensure that the number of potential research participants is as large, diverse, and discrete as possible. This will help to ensure higher degrees of research participant anonymity. You are not required to do this in order to participate in this study, and you will not receive monetary reimbursement for participating in this study or for suggesting that other people participate in this study. Please contact me via e-mail or telephone if you are interested in participating in this study, or if you would like to find out more about what the study entails.

I would like to thank you for the time that you have spent reading and considering this invitation. In closing, I would like to remind you that you are in no way obliged to: (a) participate in this study, and/or (b) to invite other women to participate. Again, I encourage you to contact me at any time by telephone (905-688-5550, extension 3205) or e-mail (jg04xp@brocku.ca) if you have any questions or concerns about this letter and any information contained herein. You may also contact my research supervisor, David Butz, at 905-688-5550, extension 3205, or dbmarley@brocku.ca. Any further concerns related to this study may be directed to a Research Ethics Officer in the Office of Research Services at 905-688-5550, extension 3035.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Gregory
MA candidate, Social Justice and Equity Studies
Brock University

This project has received clearance from the Research Ethics Board (File # 05-107). In the event that you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, please contact me at 905-688-5550, extension 3205, or by e-mail at jg04xp@brocku.ca. Concerns about your involvement in the study may also be directed to a Research Ethics Officer in the Office of Research Services at 905-688-5550, extension 3035.
# APPENDIX B

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Mom/Retail Manager</td>
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<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Common-law</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Case Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Indian/Irish</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>PhD Student</td>
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<td>Princess</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Bi-sexual</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>PhD Student</td>
</tr>
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<td>Pink</td>
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<td>???</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Bartender/Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Jewish</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>French</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Therapist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grrrl</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>???</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<td>College</td>
<td>DJ/Office Manager</td>
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Table 1.2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age Introduced</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Attended First</th>
<th>Years Most Active</th>
<th>Year Attended Last</th>
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<tr>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1999-2003</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*When Grrrl first began attending rave events in Toronto, she was living in Barrie, but she moved to Toronto shortly after and was living there when she was an active participant (see also, Chapter Four).
APPENDIX C

1) General
   a. I would like to begin this interview with some questions that will help me to get a feel for you as a person outside of the rave scene. This said, can you tell me a little bit about yourself, focussing on your political values and social commitments.
      i. Social activism
      ii. Hobbies
      iii. Occupation
      iv. School
      v. Family
   b. How would you compare these values/commitments that you just described to those that you held 10 years ago?
      i. Social activism
      ii. Occupation
      iii. School
      iv. Family
      v. Drugs

2) Getting into Raves
   a. Tell me about your relationship to the Toronto rave scene for the past 10 years, beginning wherever you feel most comfortable.
      i. Total number of events attended (categories of “active”)
      ii. Age/years most active
      iii. How you learned about raves
      iv. First impressions
      v. Compatibility of expectations to first experiences
      vi. Where attended most events
      vii. Comparison to scenes other than Toronto
      viii. Role music played in this relationship
      ix. Important people
   b. One of the things that I am most interested in is how people, especially women, get involved in the rave culture, so here I would like to focus a little more closely on your introduction to raving. Could you describe for me how you became involved in the Toronto rave scene?
      i. Sequence of events
      ii. What attracted you
      iii. Important people
      iv. Anything else that you would like to say about your early involvement, especially in terms of being a woman?
3) **Understandings of Raves**

a. Imagine that it is 19__. You and I are close friends. You have been to a few raves events, but I have never gone to a rave. You know that I am considering attending the next one with you. In order to prepare myself for this, I ask you to describe the rave event to me. What would you say?
   i. Kinds of events/music/participants
   ii. Relationship between drugs, lights, music, participants
   iii. Location, facilities
   iv. Difference between rave and club or pub
   v. Narrate your typical rave experience, from beginning to end

b. Now imagine that it is 20__. A friend of yours from back in the day calls you to tell you that she has just heard about some great taking place in Toronto next month. She wants you to come with her. How would you feel about that?

   **How would you respond to that?**
   i. Would you go? Why (not)?
   ii. Changes in scene over the years
   iii. What do you think going to a rave event would be like for you at this time in your life?
   iv. What aspect(s) of the rave experience do you miss the most? (music, dancing, drugs)
   v. Do you think you would experience these at a rave event today?
   vi. What did these aspect(s) represent to you?
   vii. Are these aspect(s) of the rave experience fulfilled in any areas of your current lifestyle?

4) **Actively Raving**

a. Now that I have a sense of what attracted you to the rave scene, I’d like to get a better idea about the specific aspects of the rave culture that kept you going back. Could you describe for me, in as much detail as possible, the nature of your participation in the Toronto rave scene during the time of your most active participation?
   i. What did you enjoy most/least about attending rave events?
   ii. During this time period, would you say that you were "raving" or that you were a "raver"? Explain… (clothing, music, hairstyles, piercings…)
   iii. How did you dress in and out of rave? (different categories of ravers)
   iv. Best/Worst experience
   v. Commitments to school and work during this time period
   vi. Relationship to the music/dancing/DJ

5) **Perceptions about Ravers and Non-ravers**

a. Describe for me the nature of the relationships that you formed during the time in your life when you were most active in the Toronto rave scene.
   i. Describe good/bad interaction in and out of rave
   ii. Interactions with wo(men) in and out
   iii. What was the importance of raving to these relationships?
b. How did your family members and friends who did not rave feel about you going to raves?
   i. What were their reactions? (example)
   ii. What were their beliefs about the rave?
   iii. Where did they get their information? (media coverage)
   iv. How did other people react? (peers, co-workers...)

6) Raving and Politics/ Social commitments
   a. What did being a raver/having been to raves mean to you?
      i. Any patterns to your participation? (busy time at school, stresses at home)
      ii. How can raving be understood as a method of coping with life stresses?
      iii. How did aspects of the rave culture reflect the values that you held/hold?
      iv. What does PLUR mean to you?
      v. Please narrate for me your best PLUR moment?
      vi. How did these experiences extend outside of the rave setting?
      vii. Did you understand your participation at raves as political in any way?

b. Rave participation has been described in a lot of different ways. For example: some people consider going to these events as an escape from daily stresses; some people have theorized raves as a direct expression of resistance against capitalism and biased laws; and still others consider rave participation as simply a youthful leisure fad and/or activity. I am very interested to know how you feel about each of these beliefs.
   i. So, I wonder if you can talk a little bit about how, at the time that you were actively going to rave events, you understood your participation in terms of escape, resistance and/or leisure time.
      1. Examples of daily stress
      2. Examples of resistance against capitalism/biased laws
      3. Examples of why it can be understood as “just a fad”
   ii. In what ways do you now understand your past active participation in this scene in these same terms?

7) Trans Out and Lingering Attachments to the Rave
   a. Describe how it was that you came to be less active in the rave culture
      i. When did you attend your last event?
      ii. Did you know that this was going to be your last event?
      iii. Do you ever plan to go to another rave event?
      iv. How did your social networks change when you stopped going to raves?
      v. Still have connections to rave scene/people/lifestyle?
      vi. Do you continue to purchase rave-related items?
      vii. Have you been to any rave-related events in the past 3 years?
      viii. How active in the rave scene are you now?
      ix. What attachments/commitments to rave culture do you still have?
b. Considering that going to raves was a major part of your lifestyle for a significant period of your life, I am curious about your current relationship to the Toronto rave scene in particular, and the rave culture in general. Can you talk for a little while about what this past time period of your life means to you today?
   i. How have your rave-related experiences changed your ideas about future career/ deviance/ resistance/ politics/ women/ subcultures?
   ii. How do you remember the period in your life during which you were most active in the Toronto rave scene?
   iii. With whom do you reminisce about raving?
   iv. What stories/anecdotes do you tell about your rave experiences?
   v. What do these experiences mean to you today?
   vi. What concerns arise when you reflect on your rave participation?

8) Perceptions about Women in the Rave
   a. Now that we have discussed your past and present rave participation in general, I would like to spend the remaining interview time considering the role gender may play in patterns of rave participation. To begin, I would like to reflect now on the conversation that we have had for the past __ hour(s) and consider, what difference your being a woman has made in terms of the ways in which you experiences in Toronto rave scene.
      i. Why do you think women attend raves, as compared to men?
      ii. Did you notice differences in the ways in which men and women participate in this scene?
      iii. Did you ever experience any form of harassment while in the rave space?

b. Based on your knowledge, are women and men likely to leave the rave – or weaken their ties to their respective rave scenes – at similar points in their lives (i.e. in terms of age, school, work, and relationship responsibilities)?
   i. Do you know any women (or men) who are still active in the rave scene?
   ii. Do you continue to go out dancing? Why (not)?
   iii. Can you talk a little about how you experience/feel about “going out dancing” now as compared to your rave days?
   iv. Relationship between drugs and child-rearing practices

c. Imagine you have a sixteen-year-old daughter who began participating actively in raving. In what ways would you be glad about this? In what ways would you be concerned? What about if it was a son?

9) Gaps
   a. Are there any other aspects of your relationship to the Toronto rave scene over the past 10 years that you would like to discuss?
      i. Changes in your musical preferences
      ii. Changes in the way that you listen to, and enjoy, music
REFERENCES


Burnett, Thane. (2000, January 31). It’s ‘just about fun’: Worries about rave drug Ecstasy are overblown, kids say. The Toronto Sun, pg. 10.


McCall, Tara. (2001). This is not a Rave: In the Shadows of a Subculture. New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press.


The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of December 2, 2005 to August 31, 2006 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. The study may now proceed.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form Continuing Review/Final Report is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb

Brenda Brewster, Research Ethics Assistant
Office of Research Ethics, MC D250A
Brock University
Office of Research Services