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“HOW ASIAN AM I?” ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH CULTURES, DRUG USE, AND ETHNIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the construction of ethnic identity in the narratives of 100 young Asian Americans in a dance club/rave scene. We examine how illicit drug use and other consuming practices shape their understanding of Asian American identities, finding three distinct patterns. The first presents a disjuncture between Asian American ethnicity and drug use, seeing their own consumption as exceptional. The second argues their drug consumption is a natural outgrowth of their Asian American identity, allowing them to navigate the liminal space they occupy in American society. The final group presents Asian American drug use as normalized and constructs identity through taste and lifestyle boundary markers within social contexts of the dance scenes. These three narratives share a sense of ethnicity as dynamic, provisional, and constructed, allowing us to go beyond the static, essentialist models of ethnic identity that underlie much previous research on ethnicity, immigration, and substance use.

Keywords

Ethnicity; Asian American Youth; Drug Use

Introduction

Despite a growing Asian American studies literature on Asian American youth groups (e.g., Danico, 2004; Kibria, 2002; Lee, 1996; Lee & Zhou, 2004; Maira, 2002; Min, 2002), the experiences of young Asian Americans remain marginalized or absent in most studies of youth cultures within sociology, cultural studies, and drug and alcohol research (Zhou & Lee, 2004; Maira, 2002, 2004; Yang & Solis, 2002). The reasons for this overall neglect, as Asian American researchers have noted, are rooted in the long history of racism and legal exclusion experienced by Asian Americans since their first arrival in the U.S. in the 19th century. Historically, social science research has focused predominantly on deviant, problem, or troubled youth (Griffin, 1993); the contemporary stereotype of Asian Americans as a model minority has contributed to the invisibility of Asian American youth in social and cultural studies.¹ The work on Asian American youth that has been done too often treats this category as unitary or homogenous, while Asian Americans comprise a diverse, multifaceted grouping of multiple constituencies. In response to this lack of attention, we focus on the experiences of one particular group of Asian American youth. We examine the role of drug use and participation in dance-music scenes in the way a group of young Asian Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area understand and express their ethnic identities.

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¹The stereotype of Asian Americans as a “model minority” has been widely criticized by Asian American Studies scholars as misleading and divisive (see for example Kibria, 1998; Lee, 1996).

Within the San Francisco Bay Area, which is the home of one of the largest populations of Asian Americans in the United States, Asian American youth have become a prominent feature of the music, dance, and club scenes (Mills, 1998; Nishioka, 2000), reflected in the large number of Asian American DJs, promoters, and Asian American –specific nightclubs. The role of music in the lives of young people is a key aspect of their identities and a defining element of youth subcultures (Christenson & Roberts, 1998; Epstein, 1994). Moreover, the association between popular music, dancing, and drugs has had a “long and diverse history” (Shapiro, 1999, p. 18) in the development of youth cultures. Yet the connections between the music and dance scenes, drug use, and Asian American youth identities have yet to be explored by scholars. Therefore we wish to examine, using qualitative interview data, the relationships between the ethnic identities of Asian American youth, their involvement in the dance scene, and their drug use. Our analysis examines illicit drugs and music as cultural commodities in the context of other commodity consumption such as clothes, cars, and drinks, which are chosen and consumed to create a specific and particular lifestyle (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; O’Malley & Mugford, 1991). *How does their general lifestyle, their participation in the dance scene and their consumption of commodities, particularly illicit drugs, within this scene shape their negotiation, construction, and understanding of their ethnic identities and their position as first- and second-generation immigrants?*

The San Francisco Bay Area Dance Scene

The San Francisco Bay Area has long been associated with dance clubs and raves. Its importance in the dance club scene (Beck & Rosenbaum, 1994) has been attributed to a number of elements, including its role in the 1960’s acid rock and psychedelic movement, the strength of its gay community and their involvement in the club scene, and even to Silicon Valley and the development of “cyber/tech” culture (Silcott, 1999). Due to its diversity and its ever-changing nature, documenting and mapping the scene is a difficult process. Between 2001 and 2003, we identified and documented 126 different club venues that host events with electronic music. The venues in San Francisco range from more traditional nightclubs to “DJ bars” and restaurants. Of these 126 venues, 14 hosted Asian clubs or Asian nights, some of which occur on a weekly or monthly basis. A total of 475 clubs (individual events which take place in venues) were also identified, of which 61 clubs catered specifically to Asian American communities. The promoters of these clubs are mainly Asian American and we identified 44 individual promoters. In addition, we also tracked over 500 separate dance events, including raves and dance parties that occurred in the Bay Area. The venues in which these events take place can vary widely and include large exhibition halls and auditoriums, as well as warehouses, commercial buildings, private residences and outdoor private and public land. Our research revealed that almost all of the Asian American respondents attended both raves and clubs, those active in the club scene attend a variety of clubs rather than one specific club, and many Asian Americans prefer to attend Asian clubs (though most attend mixed clubs at least part of the time and some prefer mixed clubs entirely). The Asian dance scene is itself quite diverse —encompassing a variety of music styles and genres, events both underground and commercial, and overall styles of the scenes that vary considerably. While there are a few nationally-specific clubs (such as “K clubs” frequented by Korean Americans), most of the Asian clubs tend to draw a diverse, pan-Asian clientele. Asian Americans in our sample choose the different clubs they attend based on a number of characteristics, including the ages of attendees, the type of music they prefer (hip-hop vs. trance vs. house), the style of the club (casual versus dressy), the type of people who attend the clubs (e.g., a college crowd, an “elite” crowd, or a more general population), and the organization promoting the event.

Though raves are generally described, both in the popular press and in scholarly accounts, as a primarily white, middle class phenomenon (Measham, Aldridge, & Parker, 2001; Yacoubian & Urbach, 2004), in our previous research on ecstasy and the dance scene (Hunt, Evans, Wu, & Reyes, 2005; Hunt, Moloney, & Evans, 2010), we kept hearing from respondents about the prevalence of Asian Americans in these scenes; white and Asian American respondents alike described this as a significant turning point in the rave and dance club scenes. This belies two popular misconceptions. First, that the rave and electronic dance music scenes in the U.S. are completely white-dominated affairs; Asian Americans have generally been ignored or invisible in media and scholarly analyses of these scenes (see Maira, 2002 for an important exception). Second, that Asian Americans cannot be drug users. Stereotypes about Asian Americans as a “model minority” tend to preclude an understanding of drug use among Asian American youth and the drug literature has tended to replicate this pattern. The available research data on Asian American drug use is relatively limited in comparison with the availability of research on other major ethnic groups; the available data on Asian American *club-drug* use is even scantier. Our previous research on the rave/club scenes more generally, and other local reports, indicating an increasing prominence of Asian Americans within club-drug scenes was a major motivator for beginning this project, which focused specifically on Asian Americans within these scenes.

Immigrant Youth, Identity, and Substance Use

Because the majority of Asian Americans in the U.S. are themselves immigrants,² analyses of Asian American ethnicity and identities are often deeply intertwined with issues of immigration. Drug and alcohol scholars have primarily examined Asian American youth through this prism. Their approach tends to be rooted in assimilation theory, via their focus on the relationship between acculturation and substance use. Conventional assimilation theory, based on functionalism and drawing primarily on the patterns of European immigrants, tended to present the process as automatic and linear (Kivisto, 2005). Changes in immigration flows to the U.S coupled with new theoretical developments led researchers to question the applicability of these more traditional theories of immigration to the experiences of contemporary non-European immigrants. While later revisions (such as Portes and Zhou’s [1993] “segmented assimilation” approach) have added important nuances to the earlier models, assimilation perspectives today still tend to suffer from many of the drawbacks of the earlier unilinear model: over-simplifying cultural complexities (Conzen, Gerber, Morawska, Pozzetta, & Vecoli, 1992), portraying the culture of inner city youth as static and immune to outside change (Alba & Nee, 2003), and conceptualizing young immigrants as passive actors caught up within the process of assimilation. Yet assimilation remains the driving organizational concept within scholarship on drugs and immigration. Such work tends to focus on the relationship between acculturation and substance use, positing either that Americanization/acculturation leads to increased substance use (e.g., Johnson, VanGeest, & Cho, 2002), or that the stresses associated with acculturation (such as the experience of culture clash) leads immigrant youth to drug use (e.g., Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987).

Recent sociological and anthropological scholarship on youth cultures, ethnicity, and immigration have significantly questioned static and essentialist notions of ethnic identity (which underlie much of the drugs literatures) and in so doing have provided us with a different set of conceptual tools for examining the relationship between ethnic identity, lifestyle, and substance use. This literature emphasizes “the fluid, situational, volitional and

²About 60% Asian Americans are foreign born or “first-generation immigrants,” over a quarter are the children of immigrants, or “second-generation,” and only about 10% are third-generation or beyond (Zhou, 1997).

dynamic character of ethnic identification” (Nagel, 1994, p. 101; see also Jenkins, 2002; Okamura, 1981; Roseneil & Seymour, 1999; Song, 2003). These social-constructionist models of ethnic identity are in opposition to more culturally essentialist notions of ethnic identity as unitary, fixed, and unchanging. In the field of Asian American Studies, researchers have also emphasized this more fluid and dynamic framework, demonstrating how different Asian ethnic groups negotiate identity through interaction within and outside their communities (Kibria, 2000; Maira, 2002). Asian Americans can choose from “an array of pan-ethnic and nationality-based identities” (Nagel, 1994, p. 104; see also Espiritu, 1992), though such choices are made within the context of structural racisms and more constraining categorizations by outsiders. This new approach questions the cultural assimilation model and its stress on the notion of “core” and unchanging Asian values, cultural continuity, and the gradual linear change in the ethnic group’s adaptation to their new home (Joe-Laidler, 2004; Thai, 1999; Wu, 2003; Zia, 2000). While this more dynamic model may be ascendant in contemporary sociological research on ethnic identity and racial and ethnic formation and in Asian American studies, it has not been fully integrated into the drug and alcohol literatures’ inquiries into immigration, ethnicity, or identity. The drug literatures instead retain a focus on assimilation via their use of the concept of acculturation and continue to display more static or essentialist models of ethnicity and identities.

In traditional drug and alcohol/immigration literatures, researchers have focused on the effects of immigrant or ethnic identity upon the propensity to use drugs or alcohol. The dynamics of the formation and transformation of these ethnic identities themselves are generally taken for granted or treated as static rather than dynamic. Our research seeks to reverse this relationship, to query the ways in which drug use itself and participation in drug-using scenes shapes young Asian Americans’ ethnic identities, and to query how these practices mediate the ways in which they understand and speak about their lives as Asian Americans or as first-or second-generation immigrants. *How do consuming practices—and particularly drug use and participation in the dance/club/rave scenes—shape the Asian American youth identities? How do their understandings and interpretations of their drug consumption or their involvement in these scenes converge or diverge with their understandings of themselves as Asians, as immigrants, as Americans, or as youth today?*

While much of the existing research in Asian American studies has rightly emphasized the importance of ethno-national or generational differences in determining or influencing ethnic identity (and these are important issues in our respondents’ narratives), we argue that other micro-level factors, such as lifestyle and taste, are also pertinent in understanding ethnic identity and the experiences of our respondents in navigating identities and the dance and drug scenes. Though our respondents discuss the importance of immigration-generation and of national background, neither their levels or types of substance use nor their patterns of involvement in the dance scenes can be easily broken down along the lines of generation or country of origin; to our surprise, common patterns among different Asian American groups were often more striking than discrete differences. Commodities—whether they be clothes, music, cars, drinks, or drugs can be important symbols of an individual’s identity and boundary markers between his or her social group and other groups (Miles, 2000; Sharma, Hutnyk, & Sharma 1996). For example, Thornton (1996) points to these markers of lifestyle and taste in her concept of “subcultural capital,” which confers status on club-goers who define themselves as authentic members of a rave subculture, distinguished from the homogenous and indiscriminate mainstream. These approaches suggest that drug consumption be viewed in the context of other commodities consumed by people in establishing their identities, as opposed to most epidemiological drug research in which the social context of drug consumption has generally been understudied or ignored (Hunt, Moloney, & Evans, 2009). Thus we examine drugs not as unique commodities of youthful consumption, but instead as merely one commodity among a whole series of others used and

consumed by our respondents in order to construct their overall lifestyle as young Asian Americans. Within social and cultural analyses of identities, consumption, and youth lifestyles, though, the experiences of Asians or Asian Americans have been largely missing (see Maira, 2002 for an important exception). While that research has primarily focused on white, and to a lesser extent African American, youth, we use these concepts for examining and understanding the construction of identity for our young Asian American respondents.

Research Methods and Sample

The data used for this article comes from the second phase of our ongoing study on the San Francisco Bay Area electronic music dance scene, Asian American youth, and drug use. Data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The 100 interviews for this article took place in 2005 and 2006 and were conducted by the project manager and four interviewers. A brief, quantitative questionnaire was used to collect various sociodemographic characteristics and drug-use data. For the rest of the interview, a semi-structured guide was used to collect primarily open-ended qualitative data on the respondents' background and family life, current everyday life, drug and alcohol use, and involvement in the dance scene. We asked questions about family expectations and the influence of Asian culture and traditions within their family and about their sense of identity and culture.

Using respondent-driven sampling (Heckathorn, 2002), initial respondents were recruited using several methods, including advertisements, referrals from other respondents, and through contacts of the project staff, and were given a \$50 honorarium for their participation. Flyers were placed in local record/music stores as well as handed out at dance events. Announcements were posted on web sites and with local Asian American interest groups, for example college fraternities, sororities and clubs. Though we cannot claim that this is a "representative" sample of Asian American youth, or even of Asian American youth in the dance scenes, we were able to generate a diverse sample of Asian Americans involved in the dance/drugs scene, with diversity in the types of clubs and venues frequented, the variety of dance and music styles preferred, level of involvement in the scenes, and the degree of experience with club drugs. Each potential respondent was screened and included if they had used at least one of the six National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) defined club drugs (ecstasy, LSD, methamphetamine, GHB, ketamine, Rohypnol) or mushrooms and were involved in the electronic music dance scene in the San Francisco Bay Area. Involvement in the scene was defined as attending dance events such as clubs, raves, and warehouse parties. We interviewed people with a wide range of experiences with club drugs, from those who were "new users," to those who were frequent users, and to those who had used in the past but were not currently using.

The sample of 100 self-identified Asians was divided between 46 males and 54 females. The median age for both males and females was 24, with ages ranging between 14 and 35. The respondents were of twelve different ethnic groups/national origins, with even numbers of Chinese and Filipinos (30% each), in addition to Indian (8%), Korean (7%), Cambodian (6%), Vietnamese (3%), Taiwanese and Indonesian (2% each) and Japanese, Laotian, Mien and Pakistani (1% each). Another eight respondents identified themselves as having mixed ethnic or racial backgrounds, with all but one indicating their Asian ethnic group as their primary ethnic identity. Seventy percent of the respondents were born in the US (51 in California), and 29 of the 30 foreign born respondents were born in Asia, the Philippines, or Indonesia. Immigrants had spent between 4 and 31 years in the US, with a mean length of time of 18 years. Eighty-five percent of all respondents indicated that both parents were born in Asia.³

All of the respondents had tried some form of alcohol in their lifetimes, and more than 4 out of 5 had consumed beer in the last month. Lifetime prevalence of marijuana was close to that of alcohol, and nearly two-thirds of the sample used marijuana in the past month. Although alcohol and marijuana were the most widely used substances (which is also true in the general population), lifetime ecstasy rates were almost as high, used by 90% of our sample, though most had not used in the past month. Mushrooms was the only other drug that more than half of the sample had tried, with more than two-thirds of respondents having tried it. Forty-six of our sample had tried at least five or more drugs. Although the extent of respondents' use of some of the drugs varied, the most common five drugs that users experimented with included marijuana and the recreational use of prescription drugs, as well as ecstasy, mushrooms and cocaine. These figures indicate that while many of the respondents have experimented with and tried a variety of drugs, the extent to which they use these drugs is limited and only marijuana is regularly used by the majority of respondents.

Analysis

Negotiating Asian American Identities

The fluidity and dynamism of identity emphasized by contemporary theorists, but so often missing in the drug and immigration literatures, is apparent in our respondents' narratives. Far from their ethnic identities being static or timeless, our respondents present their identities as uncertain and in flux. The extant literature tends to separate Asian American youth from the social context and milieu in which they operate and within which they seek to make sense of who they are. As Maira has noted, "[m]uch research on second-generation youth has tended either to use a decontextualized psychological approach to ethnic identity or to emphasize quantitative analyses and render the subtlety of individual narratives invisible" (2002, p. 24).

One indicator of the provisionality and fluidity of identity can be seen in our respondents' choice of verbs that emphasized the processual and changing nature of how they viewed their identities. In describing their ethnic or Asian American identities they used verbs such as saving, keeping, retaining, finding, searching, discovering, losing and reclaiming. These verbs highlight both the fluid nature of ethnic identity and the extent to which our respondents actively sought an identity. As one Filipina remarked, "In the Bay Area, Asian culture or Filipino culture is really trying to find itself ... Everybody is trying to find an identity for themselves, like establish some kind of cultural identity" (055). While the fluidity of identity is often celebrated by some theorists, the changing nature of identity was not always portrayed as positive by our respondents; some expressed anxiety about who they were. Many described a fear of "losing" their ethnic identity and the need to take steps to "find it" or "regain it." They also talked about needing to "guard" their identity and did this by being vigilant about who they associated with and the lifestyle and consumption choices they made, including their musical tastes and activities, their styles of dress, and their drug use.

³Due to the great diversity among Asian American communities in the Bay Area, it was important to us that we recruit respondents from a variety of ethno-national backgrounds. The term "Asian American" can at times be problematic, as it risks homogenizing such a heterogeneous category. We found that most of our respondents identify primarily along national-lines and only secondarily, if at all, with the categories "Asian" or "Asian American." Yet the major differences between respondents' participation in the dance scenes, their drug use, or the formation of identities and social networks, did not tend to break down easily along the lines of national origin. While relatively large by the standards of qualitative research, our number of 100 respondents divided into numerous smaller ethnic groups does not allow for sub-groups large enough to make direct comparisons or generalizations about these groups. So, throughout our analysis, we identify individual respondents by their self-identified national backgrounds, but frame our overall analysis around the larger category of "Asian American" —a compromise that we feel does greatest justice to the data and to our respondents. None of this implies that the Asian American youth we interviewed comprise a homogenous category —indeed, our analysis of the multiple narratives that emerge from our analysis show quite the opposite.

Although notions of identity as fluid or in flux, as produced and continually recreated, came up again and again in interviews, we did not discover one single, monolithic narrative about ethnic identity or what it means to be an Asian American today. Some describe a precarious struggle to attain an identity, distinct from both Asian and American cultures, while others describe gaining strength from the “in-betweenness” of their identity. Cross-cutting these competing narratives are the respondents’ discussions of the relationship between their involvement in the dance scene and/or their consumption of commodities, particularly club drugs, and their sense of who they are.

We divide these narratives into three major sets. First, some respondents describe a disjuncture between being Asian/Asian American and being involved in the dance/club/rave scenes or using drugs. Second, other respondents, far from describing a disjuncture, instead portray a natural connection between their identities as Asian Americans (as both Asian *and* American) and their involvement in these activities. Finally in the third group, these narratives did not suggest an explicit or immediate connection between ethnic identity and drug use or scene involvement, but rather respondents offered more subtle associations. They took for granted the predominantly Asian American networks in which they used drugs and went clubbing and distinguished themselves from other Asian Americans largely in terms of subcultural taste and commodity consumption, of which drugs and scene involvement were a part. Consequently we cannot provide a single, unified or homogenous answer to our questions about Asian American identity and club/drug involvement, but instead must examine the nuances of all three of these discursive strategies, displayed by our heterogeneous group of respondents.

1. Can an “Authentic Asian American” Use Drugs?: Narratives of Disjuncture

—In some cases, the concerns about Asian authenticity and the dangers of losing one’s Asianness become directly connected to issues of drug consumption or being in the dance scene. In these narratives, respondents describe a disjuncture between being Asian American and using drugs or being active in the rave or dance club scenes. These respondents explain that “typical” Asian Americans do not engage in these activities. Intertwined with the respondents’ narratives about their own, often extensive, participation in the dance scene and their use of drugs they describe a lack of this behavior by other Asians. In this discourse we can hear echoes of dominant stereotypes of (other) Asian Americans as either the “model minority” (who wouldn’t use drugs as a result) or as utterly foreign (and thus not involved in the “American” pastime of drug consumption).

A young South Asian man (081), for example, describes his drug consumption as being one of the significant consuming practices that differentiates him from other South Asian youth. Indian culture and traditions, including food, language, and marriage customs, are less important to him and played less of a role in his home while growing up. “I don’t talk about that stuff. I talk about like... what I think just normal American kids talk about. I almost feel somewhat isolated from my Indian brothers and sisters, metaphorically speaking.” “Normal” and “American” in this narrative are juxtaposed to, possibly irreconcilable with, “Indian” or “Asian.” Also isolating this respondent from other Indians is his consumption of drugs. Compared to other Indians, he says “I think that I might be unique. I think that I may have used more drugs and alcohol than others.” He describes the stigma surrounding drug use at South Asian parties and events. When asked how other Indians might view his use, he responds:

As, like, a heathen ... in the same way they judge me for not knowing Hindi, and that represents my assimilation into American culture, I feel like they would also judge me for assimilating into hip-hop culture or assimilating into drug culture (081)

In this narrative, drug consumption, lifestyle practices like participating in the hip-hop club scene, assimilation into American cultures, and losing his Indian or Asian identity are all deeply intertwined and separate him from other South Asians.

In some of these narratives, the disjuncture appears to be a source of anxiety or shame, leading the respondents to question whether or not they are really “authentically” Asian. They worry that they have lost their culture or are “whitewashed” in some way, and they hide their behaviors from other Asian Americans. They further discuss having a difficult time reconciling the perceived disjuncture between being Asian American and their drug consumption or their involvement in club or rave scenes.

A young Filipina American lesbian (076), for example, did not seek out the Filipino community on her college campus, in large part because of her drug consumption. She speculates that maybe she was “ashamed of [her] substance abuse” and ashamed of her “lifestyle.”

Seeing, you know, the straight Filipinos on campus, and I remember thinking, ‘God, I wonder if they=re using, too.’ ... >I wonder if this is something that=s acceptable ... Do other Filipino kids do this?= I remember thinking that, like, >Am I being less Filipino because I=m hanging out with some White people and Vietnamese people and doing drugs with them or... I kinda had a hard time with that, didn=t know if I was being true to my people. (076)

She equates consuming drugs with losing one’s Filipino or Asian culture, identity, or heritage. In addition, conflicts over drug use, sexual identity, and ethnic identity become enmeshed. The respondent specifically describes what she calls a “correlation” between her coming out as a lesbian and her drug use. But in addition the way she describes her use of drugs within and around the Filipino community sounds much like a narrative of closeting: actively closeting herself as a drug user, hiding this part of her identity from Filipinos and other Asian Americans. She eventually discovered at a rave other Asian Americans using drugs— an eye-opening experience for her.

I just kept looking at all these Asian kids... that was just a first for me. >Cause I sorta formulated my own stereotypes of Asian kids, like they don=t do this, they don=t do drugs and all that. Seeing all these Asian kids in San Jose at this rave, all on drugs, was like really sort of mind-boggling to me. (076)

But in spite of this, she still highlights the need to manage multiple identities in different contexts and the feelings of disconnect between her Asian American identity and her drug-using identity that still persist.

As Song (2003) discusses in her analysis of the situational construction of identity and ethnic options, pressures to conform to dominant scripts of behavior for one’s ethnic group can be intense and can come not only from outside but also from within one’s own ethnic group. She argues that one reason why discourses of ethnic authenticity can be so powerful is that there is often a perceived moral basis for racial or ethnic solidarity, particularly in the case of historically oppressed groups. Engaging in behaviors that seem to deviate from these scripts (or “recognized norms of behavior” [Song, 2003, p. 49]) can be seen as rejecting or betraying one’s ethnic group or undermining solidarity within it. For many of the respondents in our first group of narratives, drug use or participation in the dance/party scenes appears to be incompatible with these expected scripts for Asian Americans. Their deviations from the scripts they described as governing Asian American behavior thus helped generate for some respondents intense crises of authenticity. In the narratives of these respondents, we see many of the classic behaviors of stigma management (Goffman, 1963) such as “passing” and “covering,” as the respondents attempt to deflect the stigma they

associate with drug use by Asian Americans by attempting to pass as nonusers, or by covering their drug-using activities.

Some respondents describe a bifurcated identity or the experience of leading a double life. They emphasize the dual identities they receive from their drug and party activities vs. the norms and values of their parents and their Asian peers. Consequently many maintain two separate social networks. This can take the form of having one group of friends with whom the respondent shares an Asian ethnic identity but not their involvement in the dance/club/drug scenes and another non-Asian group of friends with whom the respondent parties. For example a young Indonesian man has a very ethnically and racially diverse group of friends—but the one group of friends with whom he does not consume drugs is his Indonesian friends; he assumes that they do not use and he does not want to give them the impression that he does. “Because they would always criticize me. The way they give me that...judging look ... ‘Why are you wasting your time?’” (064) Though the respondent is heavily involved in the drug and party scene and also maintains many connections with fellow Indonesian immigrants, he feels that he must keep separate these aspects of his life, that these two sides of his life are irreconcilable.

Some of the respondents who invoke narratives of disjuncture between Asian identity and drug- and dance-scene consumption, discuss it as a crisis that must be resolved. Other respondents, however, describe this disjuncture more defiantly, or even positively, as a source of pride. In these narratives, respondents present their involvement in dance or drug scenes as proof that they are unique individuals, that they are not simply following the pack or being typical Asians, that they are defying stereotypes.

This tendency has been noted by Song (2003) who noted that some Asians in the UK attempt to “opt out” of one’s ethnic group, by using a variety of “disidentifiers” (Goffman, 1963, p. 44) including the adoption of non-traditional lifestyles, developing social networks outside their assigned ethnic groups, or fully integrating into mainstream cultural practices (Song, 2003, p. 57). Within our own sample of Asian American respondents we do not find the full-scale language of opting out that Song notes, in which people disavow their ethnic identity entirely, but we do find some of these disidentifying practices. These respondents actively use their drug use or clubgoing to disidentify from other Asian Americans.

For example, a young Chinese American man (020) explains his uniqueness among Asians as reflected in his drug use and participation in a rave subculture. According to him, these are things that typical Asians do not do.

It just wasn’t something that I saw other Asian kids as interested in as I was ... So...yeah, I can’t just call myself Chinese. Cuz when I think of just a Chinese kid, I don’t think of a person like me basically ... definitely not a kid that like...does like psychedelic drugs (laughs), or does like drug education volunteering that’s not like anti-drug. (Laughs.) Who goes to like the streets of San Francisco and like protests the Iraq war. And does all these things that ... I associate with ... White kids or White people. (020)

His use of hallucinogens and his involvement in the rave scene lead him to question whether he can call himself “Chinese,” as his view of himself is different from his understanding of what it means to be Chinese. His preference for raves over clubs, such as the hip-hop clubs that he associates with other Asian Americans causes him to question his Asian identity.

I don’t really enjoy going to those events. So that’s why I always question...this whole “how Asian am I?” Cuz that’s like where you would think an Asian kid would go ... I don’t like the environment of clubs ... But it’s where all the young

Asian kids go. And if I don't like to go there, am I not like them? You know, where do I fit in, basically? ...that's the identity crisis I've had, I guess (laughs). (020)

But while this respondent like the Filipina American (076) invokes the language of “identity crisis” in describing the disjuncture between his rave involvement and drug use and his Asian American identity, he, unlike her does *not* describe this difference as negative. Indeed, he embraces the difference and seeing more Asian American faces within his dance and drug scenes would not be a positive or welcoming change for him. When increasing numbers of Asian Americans started to attend raves a few years back, he began to lose interest in the scene. According to his narrative, it is not the increased numbers of Asian Americans in the scene that are the problem per se, but more that the discovery of raves by Asian American youth means for this respondent that the scene has become more mainstream or “less underground” and the danger for him is that *he* will become more mainstream and less unique.

Whether viewed positively or negatively by the respondents, the common thread in this first set of narratives is a disjuncture between Asian American identity and drug use and engagement with the rave scene, as something that sets them apart from other Asian Americans. Throughout these interviews we can hear echoes of dominant stereotypes about Asian Americans as the model minority, with their non-involvement in drug scenes, as well as with the idea of Asian Americans as the eternal other, always foreign, never fully assimilable into American culture—with the important caveat that these stereotypes apply to *other* Asian Americans, not themselves.

2. Maintaining a Balance - Asian American Hybridity, Drugs, and the Dance

Scene—Unlike those in our first group, most respondents do not present Asian American identity and drug consumption or dance scene participation as contradictory or at odds. Instead, many present their Asian American identity—being both Asian *and* American and having an identity that transcends and/or fuses the two—as intimately connected to the trajectories of their consumption of drugs and other commodities within the dance scenes.

Again and again in our interviews, respondents described intense parental pressures to excel academically or in the workplace and the need to be, or at least appear to be, a dutiful, obedient, or “golden” child—a figure which would seem at odds with that of a drug user or someone heavily involved in the dance scene. These expectations get linked, in the discourse of our respondents, to Asian culture more generally; in many interviews these expectations get cited by the respondents as the primary example of Asian culture and traditions practiced in their households growing up.

However in this second set, unlike those narratives discussed in the previous section, drug use or going to raves or clubs is not discussed as a *source* of identity disjuncture, but instead a *response* to it. Drugs or dance are ways to deal with issues respondents describe as rooted in their Asian American identity—whether that be the experience of reconciling the expectations of their parents and Asian culture more generally with the expectations they associate with being a young American, or with their finding a balance and grounded identity within the context of inhabiting a liminal space as Asian Americans. One striking example of this pattern is a Chinese American woman who presents a type of narrative that came up in many of our interviews. She describes her parents as somewhat progressive and assimilated, but nevertheless retaining many key aspects of what she describes as Chinese culture. These include an emphasis on family and academic achievement, as well as reluctance to express emotion, feelings, or personal opinions. She contrasts this with American culture, which emphasizes individualism and personal expression,

Just figuring out who you are and being able to express yourself, like that is completely contradictory of...typically what Chinese culture is about I think in American culture, being rebellious, like when you're an adolescent, is like acceptable ... part of growing up. But in Chinese, like it's never acceptable to be that way. (025)

She has felt torn between the two, which has led to her experiencing what she calls "culture clashes." She describes feeling like she has "lived a double life," trying to retain an image of herself with her parents as "angelic in their eyes," and keeping them in the dark about her drug use and her partying. Unlike respondents in the first group, she does not attribute to her situation a uniqueness among Asian Americans; in fact, she sees these culture clashes and rebellions as intrinsic to the experiences of young Asian Americans who have to try to navigate between the community ideals of Asian cultures and the individual ideals of American culture. She explains that within Chinese culture there is intense pressure not to disappoint one's parents and that she has felt this weigh heavily upon her. She describes disappointing her parents as "one of the most painful things" she could ever experience.

Furthermore, she specifically connects all of this to her use of drugs over the years, which she describes as having been problematic:

I think that if I wasn't so repressed maybe ... I think that if I was able to talk to my parents or have conversations with them about concerns I was having ... I think it did contribute to, you know, drug usage ... Repressed like...not being able to say what's on my mind or how I'm feeling. ... like I know if I said it, I would get in trouble. ... standards that I would have to follow. And then abiding by like Chinese traditions. Like we have a term called like *howsuin*, which is being like an honorable son or a daughter. (025)

Consuming drugs is not a cause of culture clashes in this narrative, but rather a response to them. She speculates that if she had not been raised within Chinese culture, if she had been raised in a more open, communicative environment, she would have been less repressed and hence less likely to turn to and have problems with drugs. What is most significant about her narrative, however, is not necessarily whether or not she's accurate in her assessment of what causes drug use among Asian Americans generally, but rather, what her discourse reveals about her understanding of what it means to be a young Asian American today — torn between two cultures, attempting to reconcile community and individualistic ideals, two different ways of expressing identity and affect, and the difficulties of achieving this balance.

This respondent is far from being the only one to present such a narrative. For example another Filipina American (010) discusses using drugs to aid self-exploration. She explains that she received no help from her family to develop a strong ethnic identity, something that she recently has begun to prioritize, for example with a forthcoming trip to the Philippines. Like the Chinese American woman above, she struggled to find a balance between American and Asian identities and describes drug consumption as a response to this, a form of self-medication:

There's a strong...definitely a connection between...my ethnic background and not having community within that and my drug use ... I think that really...was the motivation for me to seek...or self-medicate, in a way, to...to combat the feelings that I was having of confusion or anxiety or...feeling alone ... maybe I wouldn't have been so...out there with ... like abused [drugs] so much. [but] I don't regret having had my experiences with all those drugs and heroin, and I really don't, because it really forced me to go inside myself to understand. (010)

Despite her assertion that she has no regrets, throughout her interview narrative we encounter a discourse of problems —drugs are presented as a problematic response to the difficult situation of navigating identity as a young Asian American. However, in other interviews we find a different form of this narrative. In these examples, substance use or involvement in the dance scenes are again presented as a response to the pressures of life as a young Asian American, but instead of being viewed as problematic responses they are seen as natural and even helpful. For example, a young Chinese American woman (043) describes her first experiences with raves and ecstasy as “pivotal” in her life, in that it helped her to “balance out” the way she was raised. She explains that in her home growing up, she was raised to be unemotional and introverted and that raves allowed her to talk more, be more affectionate, and express her emotions. Furthermore a Chinese/Vietnamese American man also points to what he sees as the positive sides to substance use and dance scene involvement for Asian Americans. He explains that people in general today, but especially Asians, need a release, due to the pressures and stress of school and work:

I think Asians tend to be very stressed people, we tend to be very...you know... confined, we need to get our job done, we're very kind of anal-retentive...Type A personalities, when it comes to our professional lives. So we definitely need kind of...you know, a little...an outlet ... they could be ...straight-A students... at Stanford and, yeah, at night...they party like, you know, it's the end of the world ... we...Asians definitely have that dichotomy of... studying...you know...very hard, but yet being able to let loose. (054)

He argues that Asian Americans are stressed out and that they need an outlet —and using ecstasy and dancing can provide this. In his narrative, this is not a problematic response, nor does partying preclude success; the two can coincide and indeed facilitate one another. While this young professional, like most of our respondents, does not want his parents to know about his behaviors —their “hearts would explode” if “they knew the stuff I do in my free time” —he asserts nevertheless that there is no reason to feel shame for any of his behaviors.

In this narrative, drug use and engagement in the dance/party scenes is not shown to be at odds with stereotypes of Asian Americans as a model minority studying and working hard, achieving academic and occupational success (echoes of which resound throughout his narrative); rather the two are presented as being naturally in tandem. In these narratives drug use and being in the dance party scene are not presented as stigmatized behaviors that the respondents need to manage by covering over or through disidentification, but rather as accepted features of everyday life for Asian Americans.

In the discussion of Asian Americans living a dichotomy of partying and working hard, we find another feature of Asian American life common to many of our respondents' narratives: overcoming a dualistic experience. Others discuss the dualism of being both Asian and American and the need to achieve balance between the two.

Participation in the dance scenes or engagement with drug-using subcultures helped to anchor some respondents who felt unmoored without fixed identities. One South Asian respondent (065) remarked that because he was insecure in any ethnic identity, he felt as though he was “floating in-between” identities and did not feel “fully Indian.” As a result, he decided to “embed” himself within the South Asian dance scene because he was “desperate to belong to something” (065). Other respondents discuss their “in between status” as Asian and American. This in-between identity is noted by Song (2003) as one of an array of options for ethnic minorities facing the difficulties of conforming to expected scripts of “ethnically appropriate” behaviors. In many of our interviews with Asian American youth, these issues of in-betweenness and balance continually recur. As we will see in the next

section, issues of style, taste, and commodity consumption are key tools used by our respondents to try to achieve this balance within the dance scene. While maintaining this balance may be difficult for some of our respondents, it is nonetheless possible. Though for some the sense of in-betweenness, of liminality, is presented as a negative, as a source of anxiety, tension, or a feeling of precariousness, in other narratives this same in-betweenness is presented as achievable, even as a source of strength.

Our first two groups of narratives present contrasting explanations of the relationship between Asian American ethnic identity and drug use or participation in the dance party scenes. The first group sees these two as at odds, and they present their own blending of the two as somewhat unique or unusual. This second group sees these as going hand in hand, presenting their use of drugs or dance scene involvement as naturally growing out of their experiences as Asian Americans, due to the need to reconcile conflicting expectations of multiple cultures or to achieve balance in their lives. Despite the divergences of their explanations, what these two sets of narratives share in common is that they both posit some kind of explicit relationship (whether positive or negative) between Asian American (vs. non-Asian) ethnic identity and club/drug involvement. In addition, within both sets of narratives we find discourses of *problems*—either drug use, club scene involvement, or their status as Asian Americans (or, in many cases, the combination of these) are presented and discussed by our respondents as problems in need of resolution or management. Even among those for whom there was evidence of *drug use* normalization (Parker, Aldridge, & Measham, 1998), *Asian American identity* often continued to be framed within a discourse of problems, as a condition in need of solution or treatment. Within the third set of narratives, however, we do not find these problem-discourses, nor do the respondents make the same kind of direct connections between their drug consumption and their Asian American identities or immigration experiences.

3. Style, Taste, and Consumption: Constructing Differential Asian American Identities—For many of our respondents, even after our long, qualitative interviews discussing their ethnic identity and their histories of involvement in the dance scenes and use of club drugs, no explicit narratives about necessary connections between their Asian American identity and their drug use or dance party scene involvement emerged. These respondents were generally content to treat these as entirely separate issues. And in these narratives we did not find narratives of tension around reconciling their ethnic identity with their consumption practices, but rather evidence of normalization, not only of drug consumption but, significantly, of Asian American identity and Asian American drug consumption.

It is not the case they denied a connection between Asian American ethnic identity and drug or dance-scene involvement. Rather, it seems that they simply found nothing *remarkable* about it. But, we can find implicit connections in the more subtle distinctions made by respondents as well as in the aspects of their scene involvement that these respondents seem to take for granted. Indeed many of these respondents consume drugs or go to raves or clubs in overwhelmingly Asian American contexts, in often rather ethnically homogenous social networks. In fact it is taken for granted in these narratives that there are Asian-dominant clubs, that raves are increasingly Asian American, and that the respondents would participate in these activities. Neither drug use, nor being Asian and American, nor being an Asian American drug user are seen as unusual, deviant, or problematic, but rather integrated into the lifestyles of these respondents as part of normal, everyday life. For some, it seems that an Asian American identity and club/rave involvement or club drug consumption are so easily connected, so natural and inseparable, that this connection is necessarily unspoken because it seems unremarkable. Yet what seems unremarkable is not necessarily unimportant.

When connections between ethnicity and drug/dance scenes do arise in these narratives, it is often not at the broad level of contrasting Asian from non-Asian Americans, of participating or not in the dance scene, or of using or not-using drugs, as was often the case in the first two sets of narratives. Instead in these narratives, we find much more fine-grained and non-polar distinctions. These include narratives about which particular drugs Asians prefer and why, and what respondents see as the varying club/rave/scene practices and styles of different *types* of Asian Americans. Such typologies break down along a number of different lines in our respondents' discussions, including the familiar lines of immigration-generation or of different Asian-national groups (Chinese vs. Southeast Asian vs. Filipino vs. South Asian, etc.), as well as the perhaps less familiar ones of lifestyle, culture, and consumption, including drug consumption.

These narratives, then, highlight the importance of interpreting drug use within the social context of consumption (Hunt & Barker, 2001) and of understanding drugs as one of a number of commodities consumed within the dance scene. The consumption of particular drugs themselves, as commodities, can be used to mark different modes of ethnic identification for these respondents. For example, within this group of narratives, we find discussions not so much of whether or not Asian Americans use drugs (of course they do, they say) or why, but rather discussions of which particular drugs are most appealing to Asian Americans —discussions that are themselves somewhat revelatory of the respondents' own senses of ethnic identity. Numerous respondents noted that club drugs are particularly accepted among Asian Americans, as opposed to other drugs, such as crack or heroin, which continue to be stigmatized within Asian American youth cultures. For example, a Filipino American (008) argues that ecstasy and other club drugs seem safer, cleaner, and less threatening, which consequently makes them particularly appealing to the Asian community, especially those in the suburbs. But it is not solely due to perceptions of safety that respondents argue for an affinity between Asian Americans and ecstasy. Rather, drugs as a marker of taste, style, or lifestyle are key factors too. In those discussions, where drugs are treated as only one of many different commodities marking out the style of an individual, drug use can be argued to have become normalized (Parker, Aldridge, & Measham, 1998; Parker, Williams, & Aldridge, 2002). Another respondent (054, a Chinese/Vietnamese young man) discusses the perception of ecstasy as an "accepted" or "sophisticated" drug. He argues that within the Asian club scene ecstasy is "equal to alcohol," explaining that many people think that because ecstasy is a pill and you don't snort it, smoke it, or inject it, it "almost seems benign" and more simple, surgical, or clean. This narrative implies, that cleanness, safety, scientism would all be particularly appealing to Asian Americans, perhaps indirectly revealing the respondent's own stereotypes of Asian Americans.

Issues of style, taste, and culture are central to our respondents' social mappings and interpretations of not only drug consumption, but also of their understandings of the broader social context in which these drugs are consumed, the ways respondents navigate the dance scene and construct their (ethnic and other) identities within it. Some of these narratives of style and taste cultures get connected to a desire to appear neither "whitewashed" nor "FOB" ("fresh off the boat" a derisive term for recent immigrants that was frequently used in the interviews. One example is that of a young Chinese American woman, whose parents emigrated from Vietnam shortly before she was born. As a participant in both the rave and the Asian dance club scenes, she is very careful to distinguish herself and her group of friends from other groups of Asian Americans she encounters, especially recent Chinese immigrants, the "HK [Hong Kong] crowd." Dimensions of style, lifestyle, and consumption are central to the differentiation she engages in. In disparaging terms, the respondent refers to the way they dress as "cute," noting that one can tell if someone belongs to the HK crowd by their hair and clothes, which she describes in elaborate detail, noting they have accessories one would "totally see in an Asian magazine" (053). It is in opposition to this

picture that she presents herself and her own Asian American friends as they explore the Asian club scene. Another young Chinese American woman (018) also argues that though Chinese culture and “Asianness” is important to her, and she has primarily Asian American friends, she does not want to be confused with the “fobbier” Asians who frequent many Asian-nights and events at clubs. She describes these people as more “Chinesey” or “Asiany.” They dress up more, have a “superficial look,” dance a particular way, drive luxury cars, such as a BMW, Lexus, Mercedes versus “Americanized Asians” who tend to drive Honda Civics.

Here we can see a disidentification not with Asianness, as found in the first set of narratives, but perhaps a disidentification with foreignness, something Kibria (2000) also found in her study of second-generation Korean and Chinese Americans, in which respondents used various markers to provisionally establish their Americanness and deflect perceptions of Asians as eternally foreign.⁴ Respondents interpret not only recent immigrants through the prism of style, taste, and consumption, but second- and third-generation Asian Americans as well. Chinese American respondent 055, for example, describes some American-born Chinese as “Twinkies,” “bananas,” or “sell-outs” who can be spotted by their pretty clothes, their White girlfriends, or their preference for BMWs or Mercedes cars instead of Hondas or Toyotas.⁵

The extent to which the consumption of a particular food, car, or clothing brand can serve to undermine or enhance one’s “Asianness” points to the fluid nature of ethnic identity. A lifestyle, according to Miles, is “the outward expression” (2000, p. 26) of an individual’s identity. Clothing style is frequently cited by our respondents as evidence of particular modes of Asian American identity and expression. These issues of style, taste, and clothing as markers of identity become particularly acute within the dance club scenes, which many respondents charge are “all about the clothes.” While our respondents were sometimes less clear about their own tastes and styles they were nevertheless quite clear about the style of others who they criticized. A young Korean American man, for example, provides a map of the Asian dance club and party scenes and the different groups, largely through citation of style and taste. “Well, it depends. Certain of them, you know, everyone’s wearing black. Other ones it’s very...you know, everyone’s hip-hop. You know, there’s...a lotta souped up cars, a lotta music. A lotta girls with big hair. A lotta hoods...” (015).

At Asian American social events, he explains, one group that’s ever-present are the “hoods” and “gangsters,” who one can spot “by the way they dressed, by the way they acted.” “Everyone has their own uniform,” he says. He contrasts the gangsters with those wearing what he calls the “Asian hipster uniform”: “guys wearing...’80s clothes, really skinny... You know, a lotta floods [cropped pants], a lotta red socks... Girls in the big hair and, you know, little pumps and... you know ... the little mini skirts” (015). While not all of these respondents give as detailed of accounts of the different style markers of different groups of Asian Americans, his narrative is resonant throughout many of the interviews, in which the lifestyle and taste of *other* groups of Asian Americans provide the basis against which the respondents define and construct their own identities and social groupings. A Cambodian American teenager (083), for example, explicitly wants to distinguish himself from many other Asian American groups he encounters in the dance scene, who he charges as trying

⁴It is worth noting, though, that there is nothing necessarily intrinsically foreign about the styles that these American-born respondents are differentiating themselves against—indeed some of the elements (lightened hair for example) might to an outsider seem to be evidence of assimilation to a Western/American beauty ideal, and not evidence of being more Asian or “fobby.”

⁵Interestingly this is the exact opposite alignment of car-style taste and immigration-generation as was presented by respondent 018. What’s important here, then, are not the particular brands or styles in themselves, but rather the ways that these are used and interpreted by respondents to demarcate different ways of being or becoming Asian and the way that consumption of commodities are seen as key markers of this.

“too hard” or being “wannabes” —including Chinese, Filipino, and Indian Americans. He explains that at parties and clubs, people drink and smoke marijuana, except for “square Asians” (as opposed to cool Asians) who don’t consume drugs and who don’t know how to dance. He further elaborates that “square Asians” (whom he also refers to as “Chinamens”) wear tight jeans, PayLess brand shoes and “big ass” backpacks. Markers of ethnicity and national background, social class, differing masculinities, and taste and style are inseparable in these respondents’ narratives.

The questions facing these respondents in this third set of narratives is not so much *whether* or not they, as young Asian Americans, would use drugs, or engage in the dance club scenes —that is either taken for granted or normalized —but *how*. What type of Asian American identity do they want to project and construct within these settings? What groups of Asian Americans do they align themselves with or in opposition to? And how do the commodities they consume help them construct these identities and these lines of demarcation? The experiences of this third group of young Asian American drug users in the dance scenes are very difficult to analyze if we remain confined to the drug/immigrants literatures’ focus on drugs as a (problematic) response to the (problem of) acculturation, an approach that is too often divorced from the social/cultural context of these youth cultures.

Conclusion

Choosing a particular lifestyle allows young people to make a statement about who they are or who they wish to be. Like other young people, young Asian Americans construct a lifestyle and an identity that reflects their own sense of who they are. By identifying with a particular group an individual defines who they are. Consequently, the development of a lifestyle “produces a tacit sense of belonging which works to define the boundaries” (James, 1986, p. 159) for the self, the other, and the group as a whole. Furthermore, adopting a particular lifestyle allows our respondents to distinguish themselves from other social groups within the scene. However, like other young people, their ability to choose a particular lifestyle is constrained by wider structural characteristics in this case being Asian American. In other words, while young Asian Americans can choose to appear more or less “fobby” or more or less American, these choices occur within the wider society in which they are defined as Asian (Kibria, 2002; Song, 2003). Consequently, although our respondents describe the “other” in cultural terms, similar to Thornton’s (1996) research on the dance scene, in the case of Asian American youth, notions of the “other” are attached to additional structural issues such as first- and second-generation and length of time in the U.S. and ethno-national differences. In other words, while for researchers like Thornton the currency of subcultural capital is knowledge of the scene, the cultural currency for our respondents includes ethnic identity or cultural practices related to establishing a particular ethnic identity within the scene, what Kibria (2002) calls “ethnic identity capital.” Like Thornton’s clubbers, our respondents interpret different forms of ethnic identity as more or less “cool” and “hip” (See also Maira, 2002). Our respondents use different ways of being Asian, different Asian lifestyles, as key symbolic markers which are then used to position themselves in relation to others within the scene and especially in relation to other Asians.

All of this points to the futility of trying to determine what *the* relationship is between Asian American ethnic identity and participation in this youth subculture and/or drug consumption, or for that matter attempting to characterize *the* experience of Asian American youth today. Neither Asian American youth generally, nor even the smaller group of Asian American youth engaged in the dance club scenes, can be characterized accurately in such a unitary or homogenous manner. Perhaps the most striking finding from examining the respondents’ interviews as a whole is the incredible diversity of Asian American experiences that emerge. This can be seen from respondents’ cataloging of the myriad forms of Asian American

cultural expression within these scenes and the multiplicity of differing Asian American subgroups within them. This diversity is also apparent in the existence of competing, even contradictory, explanations of the relationship between being Asian American and using drugs or participating in the dance scene offered by these respondents. Some find Asian American drug consumption or presence in the dance scenes to be unusual or extraordinary while others find this to be normal, natural, even something to take for granted. Some display discomfort about the liminal space occupied by many Asian Americans vis-à-vis Asians and non-Asian Americans whereas others are quite confident in their ethnic identity and cite their multiplicity of identities as a strength to be cherished. What these various narratives do share in common, is the indication of human agency revealed in their discussions. While these young Asian Americans, like all people, are in part shaped and constrained by the social structures and institutions within which they live, these respondents are no mere pawns, passively shaped by forces of assimilation, peer influence, or family pressures. Rather, they (sometimes tentatively and not necessarily fully successfully but always actively) shape, create, and negotiate their identities, their senses of self, and their projections of what it means to be an Asian American today. They accomplish this through their participation in particular social networks, through their displays of taste, style, and consumption, and through the insightful interpretations that they themselves offer in their narratives. This highlights the need for further scholarship to understand more fully this richly diverse (and growing) group of Americans, to get beyond the one-dimensional, and often omitted, presentation of Asian Americans that has been the result of the years of neglect of studying this population.

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Biographies

Geoffrey Hunt is a social and cultural anthropologist, who has had nearly 30 years experience in planning, conducting, and managing research in the field of youth studies, and drug and alcohol research. Currently he is a Senior Research Scientist at the Institute for Scientific Analysis and the Principal Investigator on three National Institutes on Health projects. Two of these projects are on youth gangs in the San Francisco Bay and the third is on Asian American youth, club drugs and the dance scene in San Francisco. Dr. Hunt has published widely in the field of substance use studies in many of the leading sociology, anthropology and criminology journals in the United States and the UK.

Molly Moloney is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Scientific Analysis in Alameda, CA. Trained in sociology, cultural and media studies, her primary research today focuses on youth and drug use. Along with Hunt and Evans, she is co-author of *Youth, Drugs, and Nightlife* (Routledge). Her recent publications focus on: gang fathers and desistance from crime; ethnicity, identity, and drug use among young Asian Americans; the roles of epidemiology and cultural studies in scholarship on club drugs. Her current research is focused on gender, club drugs, and raves, and on Asian American gay/bisexual men and club drug use.

Kristin Evans has a B.A. in sociology and psychology from the University of California at Berkeley. While employed at the Institute for Scientific Analysis in San Francisco, she worked as project manager of the NIH funded project on dance clubs, Asian American Youth and Ecstasy.