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# An Analysis of the Experiences and Integration of Transpersonal Phenomena Induced by Electronic Dance Music Events

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Electronic dance music (EDM) events are attended by millions of people all over the world. While prior research uncovered the spiritual and religious elements as well as the transpersonal nature of EDM events, this preliminary study further explored the types of transpersonal phenomena that participants experience at EDM events and their subsequent integration of these experiences into daily life. A semi-structured, in-depth interview was used to explore this topic with 12 EDM participants. A thematic analysis was conducted on the data. Findings suggested that EDM events have the potential to foster interpersonal relationships with the numinous, spiritual beings, and human beings, as well as cause transformative intrapersonal and spiritual experiences, implying an enhancement in psychological and physical health and wellbeing in day-to-day life. Results also indicated that the EDM event environment, dancing, and electronic dance music play important roles in facilitating the induction of experiences of transpersonal phenomena.

**Keywords:** *transpersonal phenomena, electronic dance music, club drugs, altered states of consciousness, spirituality, psychology, integration, qualitative research*

The first commentaries on electronic dance music (EDM) events appeared in the early 1990s, written by postmodern theorists (Melechi, 1993; Redhead, 1993; Rietveld, 1993), public health studies authors (Sanders, 2006), and U.S. and U.K. governments (Hunt, Evans, & Kares, 2007; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008), all of whom sensationalized the hedonism, escapism, drug use, and danger associated with EDM participation. At the end of the 20th century, scholars in the fields of anthropology, sociology, religious and cultural studies conducted qualitative and quantitative research on EDM participation. These studies revealed that EDM events have the potential to serve as liminal spaces that parallel shamanic and indigenous spiritual practices, in that they facilitate the induction of *altered states of consciousness* (ASC; defined as a shift in awareness from ordinary waking states, Laski, 1961, 1980; Tart, 1990, 2008) and provide many participants with meaning, rites of passage, feelings of solidarity, and encounters with the numinous that are reported to be healing and transpersonal (e.g., Gauthier, 2004, 2005; Hunt & Evans, 2003; Hunt, Evans, & Kares, 2007; Hutson, 1999, 2000; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008; Lynch & Badger, 2006; Malbon, 1999; Moore and

Miles, 2004; Northcote, 2006; Olaveson, 2004, 2005; St John, 2004, 2006; Sylvan, 2002, 2005; Takahashi, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003).

Despite these findings, there is still a need for follow-up studies on these transpersonal themes and EDM events participants' experiences of them. Furthermore, aside from research that focuses on the effects of drug use on EDM participants (Halpern et al., 2010; Parrot, 2004), the field of psychology still lacks representation in EDM culture research. In this study, the tools and lenses of transpersonal psychology were used to illuminate the contents of participants' experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events as well as their subsequent integration of these experiences in day-to-day life. The author conducted face to face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. A thematic analysis applied to the data revealed the themes associated with this topic.

## Method

After the ethics committee of Sofia University (formerly the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology) approved this study, the author recruited 12 participants from the San Francisco Bay Area using primarily a

snowball sampling method. The author also recruited participants through social media. The recruitment statement read as follows: *Have you ever had a mystical, spiritual, or religious experience (drug- or nondrug-induced) at an electronic dance music event (rave or club)? If the answer is yes, then you may be eligible to participate in a research study.*

The author initially verified that each participant's description of their mystical, spiritual, or religious experience included aspects of transpersonal phenomena. The author then analyzed the content of their experience based on the following definition of transpersonal phenomena adapted from Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007), Lukoff, Lu, and Turner (1998), and Walsh and Vaughn (1993): An experience of personal identity extending beyond (trans) the individual or personality level to include broader aspects of humankind, life, consciousness, or the world, and access to hidden spiritual dimensions or another realm of existence. This may also include an experience of highest or ultimate potential, a harmonious relationship to the divine and everything in existence, encounters with spiritual or nonhuman beings, unity, transcendence, or an ASC. The author also conducted a confidential mental health screening with each participant in order to assess for mental illness, which often sometimes gets disguised in the form of purportedly spiritual experiences (Lukoff et al., 1998).

All 12 participants signed an informed consent form that explained the study, ensured protection of their identities, stated potential risks involved in participating, and permitted the discontinuation of participation at any time. The author conducted a one to two-hour semi-structured (Wengraf, 2001), in-depth (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), face-to-face interview with each EDM participant outside of the EDM event context. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The author used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework to analyze the interview data and to find repeated patterns of meaning, also known as themes. First, this involved reading the transcriptions repeatedly while simultaneously taking notes and marking codes—aspects of the data that are meaningfully related to the phenomena being studied (Braun & Clark, 2006). Quotes were matched with each code and then codes were sorted into potential themes. Some codes formed main themes that were termed

overarching themes while others formed subthemes. The author documented the characteristics associated with each theme as well as how many participants communicated a theme. A theme needed to be expressed by at least half of the participants in order to be included.

## Results

This section first presents demographic data of participants, the location and type of EDM events that transpersonal experiences took place in, the style of EDM music that was playing, and the drugs that were used. While eight participants focused on sharing one particular transformative transpersonal experience at one specific EDM event, four participants shared a variety of experiences of transpersonal phenomena that occurred at a variety of EDM events, which accounts for the higher number of participants reporting a certain demographic. A wide range of drug- and nondrug-induced experiences of transpersonal phenomena were reported by participants, as well as a wide range of EDM events and styles of music.

Five overarching themes emerged. Each of these larger themes has been broken down into subthemes indicating facets of that theme. These themes aim to capture both the types of transpersonal experiences and their integration. Table 1 provides a summary of the themes and the number of participants that reported each theme. Following this is a more thorough description of the themes, along with quotes from participants. The names of participants used are pseudonyms. Due to the small sample size used in this preliminary study, themes may not have reached a saturation point that would allow them to be generalized to the larger population of EDM participants. Hence, future studies using a larger sample size would be warranted in order to expound on the following results.

### Demographic Data

Of the 12 participants in this study, eight were men and four were women, and all were ranging from 25 to 46 years old. Nine participants were Caucasian: of these, three had Jewish backgrounds, one had a Jewish and Eastern European background, and two had Eastern European backgrounds. Of the other three participants, one was Hispanic, one African American, and one Vietnamese. Nine participants were heterosexual, one bisexual, one gay, and one unlabeled. All participants were employed with varying educational degrees, ranging from GED to Ph.D. Four participants maintained

involvement with organized religion and all participants had eclectic spiritual practices, some embracing more than one type.

Participants reported having experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events in the San Francisco Bay Area (6), Florida (3), Burning Man in Nevada (2), Los Angeles (1), New York City (1), Montreal, Canada (1), Koh Phangan, Thailand (1), and various locations around the Pacific North West (1). Nine participants experienced transpersonal phenomena at outdoor EDM events, five of which were large music festivals featuring electronic dance music. Four participants reported transpersonal experiences at mainstream club events, four at underground club

events, two at raves, one at after-hours club events, and one at house parties. Participants described the styles of electronic dance music as House (11), Progressive House (3), Acid House (2), Tribal House (1), Tech House (1), Trance (7), Psytrance (3), Breaks (2), and Jungle (1).

Four participants stated that their experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events were nondrug-related. Eight participants reported that Ecstasy/MDMA was intrinsic to their experiences of transpersonal phenomena—with two reporting the use of Ecstasy/MDMA mixed with LSD and one reporting Ecstasy/MDMA mixed with speed (amphetamine). Two participants reported using LSD, two psilocybin, one mescaline, and one San Pedro.

**Table 1**

**Summary of Themes**

<b>Overarching Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>N=12</b>
1. Experiences of a spiritual and mystical nature	Direct experience of spiritual realms	12
	Experiences of extrasensory perception (ESP) and other anomalous phenomena	12
	Experiences of altered states of consciousness (ASCs)	12
	Positive emotions	11
	Reinforced preexisting spiritual beliefs	9
	Awareness of purpose	9
	Sense of time altered	8
	Love	7
	Feel connected to the Earth	6
2. Interpersonal relationships with the numinous, spiritual beings, and human beings	Relationships with people at EDM events are encouraged and nurtured	12
	Relationships with people outside of EDM events are encouraged and nurtured	12

3. Transformative intrapersonal experiences	Unity	11
	Relationships with spiritual beings are experienced	6
	Conscious commitment to integrate experiences at EDM events into daily life	12
	Participating in EDM events has a therapeutic effect	12
	Therapeutic effects have a lasting impact on participants' lives	11
	Career path and profession positively influenced by EDM participation	11
	Transformation	11
	Rite of passage	9
4. Electronic dance music and its effects on the mind and body catalyze experiences of transpersonal phenomena	Increased authenticity	8
	Dancing has a powerful effect on mind and body	12
	Electronic dance music has a powerful effect on mind and body	11
5. Significance of set and setting	Enhanced relationship with body	7
	Drug experiences at EDM events are different from drug experiences outside of EDM events	10
	Importance of the EDM event atmosphere	8

### **Pertinent Findings**

Results indicated that having experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events impacts the spirituality, psychology, body, and relationships of EDM participants. It was also suggested that electronic dance music, dancing, as well as set and setting have an effect on EDM participants and play a role in facilitating the induction of transpersonal experiences.

### **Experiences of a spiritual and mystical nature.**

All participants reported experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events to be a direct experience of spiritual realms and nine participants stated that these experiences reinforced preexisting spiritual beliefs. Six participants described their spiritual experiences as ineffable. Characterizations of transpersonal phenomena included experiences of different dimensions of reality

(5), transmission of spiritual knowledge (5), attainment of a deeper understanding of the universe (4), an experiential of quantum physics (2), and feeling “a sense of something more powerful than me” (4). Four participants recounted being able to see spiritual dimensions in the external world while three participants saw spiritual dimensions in their mind’s eye. Three participants stated that they were “transported” to different dimension of reality while three participants reported “traveling” to different dimensions of reality. Terms used to describe these experiences include “sacred” (4), “magical” (2), “a blessing” (2), and “a sense of deep reverence” (2).

All participants reported experiences of extrasensory perception (ESP) and other anomalous phenomena. Four participants disclosed enhanced intuition in daily life following an experience of transpersonal phenomena at an EDM event. Transpersonal experiences entailed synchronicity (3), telepathy (2), precognition (2), and synesthesia (2). One participant reported having an out-of-body experience, two described shape shifting and two recounted turning into a deity while dancing. Tara, who was sober when having transpersonal experiences at a variety of EDM events, stated:

Sometimes while in clubs listening to music I would feel like I would turn into a certain deity, goddess or something like this. Not ego-related. Anyone could feel it. And I would even feel like different arms coming out of me or tubes or different lights. I felt so connected to something that I felt like I was everything, everything at the same time, like some kind of ancient goddess, mountain, even like Quetzalcoatl, feathered serpents from the Mayans and Aztecs. I would always feel through music at clubs, like one of those and the other and the other very fast and it escalated to the point where I felt like all that even exists, that I don’t even know what all even is.

All participants reported altered states of consciousness (ASCs) while having experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events. The ASC was described as a trance by seven participants and as heightened consciousness by four participants. The ASC prompted present moment awareness (2), shamanic states (1), and epiphanies (1). Two participants recounted being drawn to meditate at EDM events. Nine participants reported an awareness of purpose while having an

experience of transpersonal phenomena at an EDM event, communicated by three participants as being “inspired to step onto my spiritual path.”

Love, for both self and others, was a component of seven participants’ experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events. Two participants described being “engulfed in love.” Argus, whose experiences of transpersonal phenomena typically occurred either sober or under the influence of Ecstasy at different kinds of EDM events, articulated his experience of love as the following:

I feel like I learned how to love people in that environment because I realized just how much good intention there is amongst people from a wide range of backgrounds. And that’s something that I experienced in the rave community that I didn’t experience in any other subculture which is a wide, wide range of age and ethnicity and gender identity and orientation and fashion style and socioeconomic status and what not. I never encountered a range like that except, you know, randomly in public somewhere, an equally broad range, from crusty couch surfing hippies to hedge fund managers, you know, bonding. . . . There’s something about the sort of feelings of universality, of humanity that I encountered there that really sort of had me turn a corner in a fundamental way, that had me capable of unconditional love for all of humanity, made that much more tangible an emotional experience and much less intellectual, sort of like, well, that moral rule. . . . I feel like I can feel that in my heart as an emotion and as a bodily sensation in a way that I couldn’t before going to raves.

Eleven participants reported positive emotions during experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events, characterized as happiness (7), joy (5), positive energy (3), ecstasy (3), euphoria (2), and bliss (1). Three participants stated that they were happier in their daily life as a result of EDM participation.

Eight participants explained that their sense of time was altered during transpersonal experiences, which included descriptions of feeling “no time,” as well as feeling connected to something primordial. Connection to the Earth was another subtheme recounted by six participants. Don described being able to “feel the beat of the Earth” during his experience of transpersonal phenomena at an EDM event. Two participants stated

that they are now more environmentally aware in their daily life as a result of EDM participation.

**Interpersonal relationships with the numinous, spiritual beings, and human beings.** Unity was most commonly described by participants as “a sense of oneness” experienced at EDM events. Four participants said that this sense of oneness carried over into their day-to-day lives. Seven participants referred to unity as a “collective spiritual experience.” Five participants described unity as “feeling of being part of a larger whole.” Clyde, who was sober while attending huge outdoor music festivals featuring EDM, elaborated on this sense of unity:

You see people connecting to this larger whole almost through this ritual because our generation’s pretty much lost that kind of spiritual, almost ecstatic ritual that we used to have in one form or another. I mean we got tired of them, some of them grew old, some of them don’t fit us anymore, but this is just one of those things that has been around for so long that it’s like so ingrained in us that we don’t even realize how ingrained it is. We don’t even realize how much part of our history as humans is just getting into that communal trance because that gets everyone on the same level. And if you have everyone on the same level, everyone is thinking the same. Everyone is concerned for each other the same. Everyone is doing the best for everyone. So, literally, like in the Matrix, they’re unplugged, they’re in Zion, and they’re dancing as this communal whole, not plugged into their like individual program. . . . And I think it was a really positive practice and was in a sense wiped out of modern society until very recently. So seeing it come back and be revived on such a grand scale and become so popular and mainstream, I think is like a really epic kind of thing.

Six participants reported feeling a connection with spiritual beings at EDM events, while three felt the presence of such beings, three saw them, and three communicated with them. Spiritual beings were described as other dimensional beings (3), extraterrestrials (3), deities (3), ghosts (2), Jesus (2), ancestors (2) and archetypes (1).

All participants saliently illustrated connecting with other people at EDM events. All participants described relationships formed at EDM events as

being maintained in their daily lives, exemplified in the development of romantic relationships, as well as friendships cultivated and reinforced through EDM participation. Seven participants expressed increased openness to people from diverse backgrounds (e.g., age, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status) and four participants reported that EDM participation has enabled them to connect more easily with people in their day-to-day life. Dima, who experienced transpersonal phenomena under the influence of LSD at psytrance events, illustrated the interpersonal connectedness experienced at EDM events in the following:

I mostly kept going to psychedelic trance parties and my friends kind of came along once in a while. I would even go by myself. . . . I became really moved by it, just the trance music. It was a way to travel to places and reach my own familial patterns and like family systems and things as well as transpersonal and visionary states and relationships and meeting people and being confident as a person and growing at the same time and stepping into different roles and becoming a leader, all within the community framework. All the people that I’ve met . . . each time we come together it would be like a new repositioning of roles and people would take on new roles . . . and kind of growing together as a community and making friends with those people and finding some kind of family or something, some kind of church-like experience.

**Transformative intrapersonal experiences.** Eleven participants stated that EDM participation had a lasting therapeutic impact on their lives. A poignant example is Sharon’s account of transpersonal phenomena at an underground club under the influence of Ecstasy. She reported that her symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder were alleviated following this experience:

I had a sensation, almost like a pitcher was pouring in through the top of my head and down through my body and a lot of the dissociative feelings or lack of feelings I’d had in my body since I was raped started melting away and it was almost like my spirit was being poured back into the shell of my body. . . . I don’t know if this took two minutes or 15 minutes. Time seemed totally irrelevant. Even the space I was in didn’t feel that relevant. I felt kind of

like I was floating and almost like a ghost coming back into a body and waking up to the feeling of what's pleasurable about being in a body and I just danced and danced and it was the first time in my adult life that I was aware of not being afraid to move in a sexual way, of feeling really feminine. . . . Almost like a dakini, like this floating fierce goddess, powerful and sensual and just moving, moving, moving. It felt amazing.

Eight participants emphasized that EDM participation cultivated increased authenticity. Six participants stated that EDM participation inspired them to pursue a life that is a unique form of self-expression as opposed to conforming to society's standards. Five participants described EDM participation as helping them to deprogram familial and cultural conditioning.

Eleven participants reported EDM participation to have positively influenced their career path and profession. Seven participants disclosed that their transpersonal experiences at EDM events instigated a draw to serve humanity and start a career as a healer. Four participants stated that EDM participation assisted them in developing professional relationships and rapport with others at work. Two participants developed an interest towards activism as a result of EDM participation.

Nine participants alluded to their EDM participation as being a rite of passage. Seven participants reported that they attended EDM events during a transitional time in their lives, the varieties of which transitions included marriage, divorce, breaking up with a partner, revealing one's homosexuality, graduating from high school, graduating from graduate school, going through a quarter-life crisis, and traveling abroad. Participants described their transpersonal experiences as a "turning point" (2) and a "marking point" in their lives (2) as well as an "initiation" (1).

Eleven participants proclaimed EDM participation to be transformative. Five participants expressed experiencing a "whole new world" in the EDM scene. Five participants described EDM events as transforming the world, and another five reported transformation of self. EDM participation was described as "a purification" (3), "an inner-shift" (2), "eye-opening" (2), "a breakthrough" (1), "a rebirth" (1), and "life-changing" (1). All participants reported a conscious commitment to integrate experiences at EDM events into daily life.

**Electronic dance music and its effects on the mind and body catalyze experiences of transpersonal phenomena.** Eleven participants described electronic dance music as having a powerful effect on the mind and body. Six participants emphasized the energizing effect of electronic dance music, notably illustrated by Don, who had transpersonal experiences sober and under the influence of Ecstasy at large music festivals featuring electronic dance music:

The music is very energetic music right, so even if you're tired and you're not in the mood, you listen to that, you're still gonna move around. . . . It's really upbeat, getting you up on your feet music. So that brings this joy to the crowd 'cause people are happier when they're moving around. . . . Just moving around already gets your blood pumping, gets your endorphins going, gets your body grooving. You add that drug into it while your body's already in a state prone to be more happy, then it's like the perfect storm kind of effect.

Four participants described the loud volume and the beat of electronic dance music to have a powerful effect. Participants recounted losing themselves in the music (4), being taken on a journey by the music (3), the music evoking a sensation of moving through space (2), and the music as healing them (3). Participants indicated that electronic dance music felt alive, exemplified in their descriptions of the music as "touching me" (3), "talking to me" (3), and "an entity I am interacting with" (2).

Sunny, who experienced transpersonal phenomena under the influence of LSD at outdoor psytrance events, captured the energizing and journeying effect of the music. She also touched on the previous theme of transformative intrapersonal experiences in the following statement:

His parties are always very deep, so some of the deepest experiences were at his parties. A few times, I would dance just a whole 20 hours straight through. I was on acid at that time. And it would feel like it was some kind of journey, and each track had a very different feel to it. It was kind of similar music, but very different, and it felt like, as I was dancing and journeying through the music, I was exploring parts of myself too. Sometimes I would laugh or cry and I would have very emotional experiences and it also felt very therapeutic. I remember in one of them, I



was dancing and I felt, like, so positive. . . . I think that's the first time I thought about that I want to be a therapist, during that experience. I was, like, 'Oh, I want to help people.' I want to help people feel that sense of peacefulness. . . . I wanted to share it with others. I think that's the first time I thought, I want to do this kind of work.

All participants described dancing at EDM events as having a powerful effect on mind and body. Six participants said that dancing provided them with more energy, while four stated that dancing kept them fit. Also, four participants said that dancing allowed them to move their bodies in a new way. Dancing was illustrated as "letting go" (4), "purifying" (4), "cleansing" (3), "flowing" (2), "meditative" (2), "a release" (2), and "a celebration of life" (2).

Seven participants revealed that EDM participation enhanced their relationship with their body. Five participants reported being more conscious about their health and eating habits due to EDM participation. Participants expressed that EDM participation provided "a new relationship with my body" (2) and caused "me to view my body as a temple" (2) as well as "made me more embodied" (3), "more connected to my body" (2), and "more connected to and able to express sexual energy" (2).

**Significance of set and setting.** Ten participants emphasized the importance of set and setting in inducing experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events. Ten participants stated that their drug experiences at EDM events were phenomenologically different from those outside of EDM events, as illustrated by Sally who had experiences of transpersonal phenomena at house parties featuring electronic dance music:

When I did Ecstasy at home and we weren't listening to music or anything it was a way different feel than when we were in the group setting and had the music on. And, you know, you get into the music and you feel like you're part of it and it's a totally different high when you don't have the music, when you're just home hanging out with your friends. You know, you get really lovey dovey and talk about personal things, but it's just a different feeling. You don't feel like you're wrapped up in something else.

Eight participants stated that the EDM atmosphere was crucial to the induction of transpersonal phenomena. Participants described the atmosphere as

including the style of EDM music, the lights, the crowd, the sense of safety, and the lack of predatory behavior from men. Five participants asserted that alcohol negatively disrupts the EDM atmosphere.

Four participants reported that intention was an important factor in generating transpersonal phenomena at EDM events. Zeal, who had experiences of transpersonal phenomena at large and small EDM events typically under the influence of Ecstasy, illustrated the value of both set and setting in the following statement:

At the electronic dance thing, before you've even gotten through the front door, you've made a friend, usually. And it's because everyone goes there for the same purpose: Let's all have fun and let's all be friends and please don't shoot up the place, please don't fight, please don't get too drunk. And so that's the vibe of the community and that's what informs the space, so the space is safe and happy. Maybe if you could make all spaces safe and happy, all places would help innervate that information. But I think music also helps. And I think because the music they play at raves is generally devoid of lyrics, it helps you transform it into whatever you want it to be. Or it's not prescribed. It's not judgmental. It doesn't tell you how it goes or doesn't go. It allows you to bend it and shape it as you want to.

## Discussion

Results from this preliminary study validate and further expand upon the findings of prior research on the spirituality, psychological wellbeing, and relationships cultivated through EDM participation. New findings were also revealed, particularly regarding the benefits on physical health and wellbeing that can be reaped from such events. The following section discusses the situation of this study in the literature.

### Addressing the Research Question

This study attempted to answer the following question: What types of transpersonal phenomena do people experience at EDM events and how do these experiences integrate into day-to-day life? From the participants' accounts, themes reflecting transpersonal phenomena were: a direct experience of spiritual realms; experiences of ESP and other anomalous phenomena; experiences of ASC; unity; positive emotions; reinforced preexisting spiritual beliefs; awareness of purpose; an altered sense of time; love; relationships with spiritual

beings; and a feeling of connectedness to the Earth. These themes support and expand upon prior research (Hutson, 1999, 2000; Gauthier, 2004, 2005; Malbon, 1999; Sai-Chun Lau, 2006; St John, 2006, 2012a; Sylvan, 2002, 2005; Takahashi, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Till, 2006) on the spiritual and religious dimensions of EDM participation, as illustrated in Redfield, 2017 (this issue).

This study welcomed descriptions of the participants' experiences of transpersonal phenomena as mystical, spiritual, or religious. However, while many participants' accounts exhibited elements associated with religious experience, only one participant referred to a particular transpersonal experience as religious. The scarce use of the term religious may be due to the specific sample of participants as well as the association of the term with organized religious institutions. It is also significant to note that many participants' descriptions of transpersonal phenomena reflected facets of mystical experiences as classified by Pahnke (1972).

All participants reported a conscious commitment to integrating their EDM experiences into daily life. Their ability to integrate and benefit from their experiences may be credited to having personal structures that facilitate the integration process, such as a spiritual and/or religious framework through which they understand their experiences, as well as supportive friendship networks. However, the present study did not gather information on the tools, techniques, practices, or methods used to integrate such experiences. Future research should investigate the integration of EDM participants' experiences of transpersonal phenomena into daily life more closely.

Themes indicating the integration of transpersonal experiences at EDM events into day-to-day life included the following: encouragement and nurture of relationships with people outside EDM events; lasting therapeutic effects; a positive influence on career path and profession; reinforced preexisting spiritual beliefs; awareness of purpose; increased authenticity; and enhanced relationship with body. These themes corroborate and explicate past research (Hunt et al., 2007; Hutson, 1999, 2000; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008; Lynch & Badger, 2006; Malbon, 1999; Moore & Miles, 2004; Sylvan, 2005; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003) on EDM participation that touched on integration.

Almost all participants in this study reported positive therapeutic effects during and following their

experience of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events, both drug- and nondrug- induced. This suggests that transpersonal experiences may have a favorable impact on the mental health of individuals. Future research on EDM participation should focus on the therapeutic effect of EDM participation itself, whether an experience of transpersonal phenomena occurred or not. Moreover, whether a transpersonal experience is needed for EDM participation to have a therapeutic effect is a question worthy of further exploration.

Prior research emphasized the central importance of the body in EDM participation (Sylvan, 2005), the embodied nature of EDM participation (Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003), and the "playful vitality" (Malbon, 1999, p. 164) that EDM participants tap into. However, these studies did not indicate that EDM participation promotes physical health and wellbeing, which is a crucial implication of this present study. This effect is captured in the theme reflecting an enhanced relationship with body, and the following characteristics: more conscious about health in daily life; more conscious about what I eat; more embodied; more connected with body; new relationship with body; see body as a temple; and more connected to and able to express sexual energy.

The study results validate prior research (Malbon, 1999; Sylvan, 2005; Takahashi, 2005), highlighting the supremacy of electronic dance music and dancing to facilitate experiences of transpersonal phenomena. Malbon (1999) found in his ethnographic research of London's EDM culture that the context of the dancing crowd and the loud music were the two most significant factors inducing either a drug- or nondrug transpersonal experience at EDM events. Tara, who experienced transpersonal phenomena at EDM events while sober, and Cole, who had such experiences under the influence of MDMA and speed, captured Malbon's finding in the following quotes:

Something about the decibel level and the pitch of the music, it's so strong at clubs that it would impact me even more because the vibration is just so intense along with everyone else around you almost being there for the same mission, or for the same purpose, be there, hear the music, feel it, dance, and we all do this together, whether some people are using drugs, prescription or not, or if they're totally sober.

I like it when the music's too loud, so the crowd can't really talk. If you make the music not loud

enough then people feel like, especially when it's not crowded, like this weird nervous energy like they should talk instead of dancing and it never really reaches that full momentum of shut up and dance for like four or five hours at least.

### **Drug- and NonDrug-Induced Transpersonal Experiences at EDM events**

This study corroborated prior research on drug use at EDM events. Ecstasy/MDMA is the most widely used drug in EDM culture (Groves, Kelly, & Parsons, 2009; Hunt, Evans, Moloney, & Bailey, 2009), a fact confirmed by the participants in this study. Participants also reported using other drugs such as speed, LSD, psilocybin, mescaline and San Pedro, as well as some of these drugs in combination with Ecstasy/MDMA.

The effects of the particular drug(s) ingested may have altered the nature and content of each participant's experiences of transpersonal phenomena. This could be ground for analysis in and of itself. However, this study specifically aimed to look at experiences of transpersonal phenomena and how the setting of EDM events provokes such experiences. A wide variety of drug- and nondrug-induced experiences of transpersonal phenomena were reported by participants in this study, supported by past research that found EDM participants to have both drug- and nondrug-induced transpersonal experiences at EDM events (Malbon, 1999; Sylvan, 2005; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). This points to the significance of setting in altering consciousness and facilitating extraordinary experiences that are powerful and transformative.

For example, Tara's description of her experiences of transpersonal phenomena at a variety of different types of EDM events while sober bears resemblance to Dima's description of his transpersonal experiences at psytrance events and EDM music festivals that occurred most commonly under the influence of LSD. Both participants were interacting with spiritual beings, as was Cole when he took MDMA mixed with speed at after-hours clubs featuring house music. Another example involved Clyde's feeling of oneness when sober at a large EDM festival featuring house and trance while Sharon felt oneness under the influence of MDMA at an underground club playing trance. Sunny also felt a sense of oneness under the influence of LSD at an outdoor psytrance event. The following statement made by Argus captures the potential irrelevance of whether a drug was used or not during EDM participation:

Generally, I would say my level of intoxication didn't determine how amazing an experience it was. I've been completely sober and had totally peak experiences and I've been high on what could be a recipe for wonderfulness and been bored stiff. I wouldn't say there's a direct correlation.

The possible insignificance of drug use related to transpersonal experiences at EDM events may connect to some participants' acknowledging the value of intention upon their entering an EDM event. This also emphasizes the importance of the set, or personality and psychological makeup of each individual participant, in facilitating their experience of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events, the content of these experiences, and the integration of these experiences into their day-to-day life. Additionally, the occurrence of a drug- or nondrug-induced experience of transpersonal phenomena may facilitate subsequent transpersonal experiences at other EDM events (Fritz, 1999; Malbon, 1999; Takahashi, 2004b). Jimmy touched on this tendency in the following statement:

I've gone sober though and just had like an amazing time dancing all night. And I really believe you can almost put yourself in that mind-state, too, like the power of the mind, you can really bring your mind to Ecstasy levels or trance levels, too. So I just think the drug's a catalyst, but I do think that you can put yourself in that mindset, too, without it. But I think it does help to experience it, though, to help you understand. Give you a roadmap.

Additionally, listening to electronic dance music in daily life while sober and outside the EDM event context has the potential to evoke the memory and sensation of transpersonal experiences previously had at an EDM event (Fritz, 1999; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003) and potentially facilitate the integration process. Rox stated, "I can be in the car now and hear music and, if I feel it, then that connection reignites. I'm certainly not under the influence while I'm driving." Sally further illustrated this phenomenon in the following:

Even still, when certain songs come on that I used to party to, I still get that same feeling. It's like, oh yeah, I remember this feeling, I remember this song, like the way it makes you feel. It brings in all this goodness.

In an attempt to further understand how different drugs affect consciousness and interact with

the EDM atmosphere and music, it may be valuable for future research to focus on specific drugs that are used in these settings to investigate whether different drugs and drug combinations evoke different and/or similar phenomenological experiences. Additionally, it would be constructive to focus on nondrug-induced experiences of transpersonal phenomena with a greater number of EDM participants.

Most participants in this study reported that drug experiences at EDM events were different from drug experiences outside of EDM events. Participants emphasized the importance of the EDM event atmosphere, which included the style of music, the lights, the crowd, the sense of safety, and the lack of predatory behavior from men. All EDM events have a similar setting in regard to the auditory stimulation of electronic dance music, the photic stimulation of lights, dancing, the crowd, and the presence of mind-altering drugs. However, each EDM scene subgenre utilizes these components in varying ways. Therefore, future research may want to target transpersonal experiences of EDM participants in different subgenres and conduct comparative analysis. Additionally, since EDM culture exists all over the world, it may be illuminating to examine experiences of transpersonal phenomena among EDM participants in more countries.

### Conclusion

Many EDM participants and researchers advocate that carrying the energy that permeates EDM events out into the “real” world can create positive cultural, political, and environmental changes (Fritz, 1999; St John, 2001; Sylvan, 2005). However, while some researchers (e.g., Hutson, 2000; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008) viewed EDM culture as holding an antigovernment stance, standing in opposition to mainstream society, and presenting an alternative lifestyle, they found that EDM culture does not focus on changing society on a large scale. Hutson (2000) asked, “Are ravers doing any more than having visions of future unity and global communities?” (p. 45) Sylvan (2005) and St John (2012a) responded by pointing to an intentional EDM scene designed to integrate spirituality into EDM events. Also, the data presented in this study indicates that a wide variety of EDM events induce transpersonal experiences, which subsequently motivate many participants to serve humanity in some way.

### EDM Events Experiences and Integration

Participants in this study reported experiences of transpersonal phenomena at EDM events tracing back to the early rave days of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, and up to the present day. The success and continued evolution of EDM culture may largely be due to the fact that EDM events enable ASCs, which humans are innately drawn and biologically driven to enter (Bourguignon 1973; Weil, 1972; Winkelman, 2000, 2004, 2009). As the findings in this study suggest, such states of consciousness have a beneficial impact on EDM participants’ lives, relationships, and psychological and physical health and wellbeing. These effects, in turn, have the potential to bring positivity and healing to the world. Therefore, because EDM events attract millions of people across the globe on a regular basis, it is in the best interest of participants and event organizers to more consciously encourage the creation of EDM event environments that are conducive to profound transpersonal experiences.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

- Tell me about your experience with electronic dance music events.
- When did you begin going?
  - How did you get into it?
  - What does it do for you?
- What is a term you prefer to use: mystical, spiritual, or religious?
- How do you define mystical, spiritual, religious?
- Have you had many experiences of mystical, spiritual, or religious phenomena at rave and club events or is there one experience that particularly stands out to you?
  - What was the experience of mystical, spiritual, or religious phenomena like?
  - Describe the contents of the experience.
  - Describe the sensory experiences (visual, audio, touch, smells, taste, ESP).
  - Describe the state of mind you were in when experiencing mystical, spiritual, or religious phenomena.
  - Describe the style of music that was playing.
  - Describe the rave or club environment.
  - Describe the crowd.
- Were drugs involved?
  - If so, which drugs?
  - In what way do you think the drug affected or contributed to the experience?
  - Have you taken these drugs outside of electronic dance music events?
  - If yes, is there a difference in the effect of the drug outside of an electronic dance music event as opposed to the effect of the drug at an electronic dance music event.
- Were you with friends or loved ones when the experience occurred?
- What do you identify as the catalyst for the experience?

- What about the rave or club atmosphere helped foster a mystical, spiritual, or religious experience?
- What was going on in your life at the time of the experience? Describe the climate of your life.
- What was the emotional, psychological, and spiritual tone of your life before the experience?
- Did you have a spiritual or religious framework or were you involved in a spiritual or religious practice at the time that the mystical, spiritual, or religious experience occurred?
- How has the experience affected your life outside of rave and club events?
  - Relationships
  - Profession
  - Spiritual or religious beliefs and practice
  - Psychologically
  - Physically
- How do you process, understand, or attain meaning from the mystical, spiritual, or religious phenomena you experienced and carry it into your day-to-day life?
- What type of rave or club atmosphere is, for you, most conducive for the experience of mystical, spiritual, or religious phenomena?
  - Style of music
  - Environment/space/structure
  - Lights
  - Crowd

### **About the Author**

*Audrey Redfield, PhD* received her PhD in Clinical Psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (now called Sofia University). Her areas of interest include attachment, intimacy, sexuality, embodied living, consciousness, the divine feminine, the sacred, and ritual. She presented her research at Burning Man in 2013.

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