

Dancing on drugs: Risk, health and hedonism in the British club scene

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Abstract

Nothing brings home the alienation of ageing better than finding a subject of considerable medical interest about which you know nothing. I mean not a thing! So let it be confessed that I found much to learn in this volume in which the research of a dedicated team of clubbers from the University of Manchester exposed themselves to the risk—though it was probably not quite like that as the book's dedication is to "all clubbers . . . who have felt that moment when music, dancing, atmosphere and experience have melted into a moment of pure pleasure".

The authors studied three clubs, confirming that the youth of the UK are the most drug experienced of Europe and that many are amphetamine, cocaine and ecstasy users. One of the most striking of their many findings is the significant morbidity in the days following drug exposure; as most of the group are in work and some in positions of seniority, the reduced performance and the well-described midweek depression are matters of concern. As the drugs taken varied from week to week, it is difficult to obtain correlation between cause and effect. This uncontrolled consumption of unidentified, uncalibrated substances remains difficult for the pharmacologically trained to swallow. The legal aspects of the problem are well ventilated; the dealer, the retail specialist, seems often to be recognized and accepted by both management and client, and the gangsters are often armed. The role of the police appears to be marginal and, even then, not happily accepted by any. Raids appear to have minimal effects on distribution, sale or consumption. The client, also subject to the Misuse of Drugs Act, appears to be in receipt of little in the way of help and there are grounds for the proposition that GPs need better education in the diagnosis of the related problems and to have better resources for treatment. Note that these are not the down and out, sleeping rough group, but often professional groups in full-time employment; the fall-out of this clubbing behaviour, given the size of the problem, must be considerable. This text, well written, meticulously referenced, is a valuable introduction to an area little researched and far from well known; readers with adolescent youngsters will sleep less easily but lie awake with greater understanding.

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