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### Why Is The Culture Surrounding Electronic Music So Attractive

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## Abstract

Electronic Dance Music, also known as EDM, is a musical genre that has recently dominated the current music landscape and industry. However, there is a lack of understanding behind this beloved genre in terms of its culture and the fans that idolize it. In fact, this new culture that EDM fans have created, coined by them as “Rave Culture”, is understudied. This research project is designed to take an exploratory approach into answering questions about this newfound culture and what makes this culture that surrounds Electronic Dance Music, so attractive. Because of this newly established culture, research surrounding this topic is lacking as this genre of music was first recognized as a musical genre in the 1980s. The literature in this project illustrates how Electronic Dance Music (EDM) is tainted with negative stereotypes often associated with drug use and violence, rather than who pioneered and perfected the genre as a whole. This project will then transition into discussing EDM utilizing in-depth interviews with multiple participants to gain insight and provide answers for those outside of “Rave Culture” about this newly established culture and what people who are highly involved in that culture drew them into the genre and what they are passionate about. This project will also aim to recruit popular, world-class DJs and artists to gain their insight on what the music industry has done for them to show contrast to those who just love the culture. Finally, this research will be collected and analyzed. Once this is completed, the project will then describe the potential threats that this culture may soon face and what the future of EDM has in store for its growing fanbase.

Keywords: Electronic Dance Music, Culture, Rave Culture, Music, Social Media, Emotion, Sub-Genres, EDM

WHY IS THE CULTURE SURROUNDING ELECTRONIC MUSIC SO ATTRACTIVE?

By

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B.A Quinnipiac University, 2019

Thesis

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Anyone who has recently started pursuing a job of being a DJ or starting this particular business independently is and was not an easy task. My initial pursuit into the world of DJing began in my senior year of high school. Launching this passion as a profitable business began during my undergraduate years at Quinnipiac University, yet there weren't any "successful" DJs to really look up to. The only example as to what one would call a successful performer is when one of the world's most beloved music producers and EDM DJs, Tiësto, came to perform at the annual Spring concert my sophomore year. Tiësto put on an incredible show as I watch from the front row, equipped with pyrotechnics and songs filled with heart-pounding percussion and deafening basslines, all topped with euphoria-inducing melodies. Unfortunately, the attendance was just short of one thousand attendees. Just weeks later, Tiësto took off from our school in Connecticut to play at what some would call the Mecca of electronic music, known as Tomorrowland. This particular festival draws in hundreds of thousands of electronic music fans all wanting the same endgame: to rave. Like the other music festivals, Tomorrowland hypnotizes its attendees with intricate stage setups and pyrotechnics, in addition to the music.

However, the idea of raving with thousands begs an important question. What really brought them here, and are there really people who really attend these festivals where the music is often deafening? Yes. Every year, thousands migrate to various festivals across the world just to catch a small glimpse of their favorite DJs. However, EDM is often misunderstood by people who may be unfamiliar with this genre due to the lack of lyrics or ability to personally connect with these songs. EDM has also often been associated with drug use and its negative origins, creating a negative connotation of the genre altogether. This genre of music, aside from its

festivals, also begs another important question. Why do these music lovers attend these festivals and what makes them attracted to the sound and or “feel” of it?

### **The Research Problem**

With the variety of musical genres that exist in popular culture and the musical landscape today, one that really sticks out due to its uniqueness and growing fandom is dance music. Electronic Dance Music, also known as EDM, is a unique musical genre in its own way. All music has the ability to make people express a particular emotion based on the lyrics that the artist is singing in their songs, to the way that the instruments that accompany those lyrics are played and manipulated to create a different listening experience per genre. EDM though creates other emotions that genres such as Jazz or Pop music, necessarily cannot replicate. As mentioned above, the songs of EDM consist of heart-pounding and sweat-inducing songs that have the ability to create feelings of excitement, euphoria, bliss, and sometimes sadness for its listeners. EDM does have its fair share of casual listeners, but those who really value and appreciate the music of EDM and culture that surrounds it are benefitting from the genre each time they listen to a specific song from it. However, EDM is commonly misunderstood as there is a lack of understanding and knowledge of the genre, the culture that surrounds it, and what specific traditions are involved.

This newly created genre, however, has also developed a newfound culture known to its members and those who practice it as “Rave Culture”. This new culture has now gained a major level of significance and importance in fans of EDM’s lives. However, when it comes to analyzing this idea of “Rave Culture” and the music that is tied closely to it is important to study as its history and origin story has been negatively affected with stereotypes created by those outside of the culture and negative feelings that are brought upon by those who don’t listen nor

appreciate the music and the expressive nature of the culture. What's also important to note here is that only few aspects about this newly created culture have been analyzed, which may be attributing to one of the many reasons as to why EDM and its fanbase is misunderstood.

When first studying EDM and its newly created culture, it is important to understand on a surface level first, that each rave or music festival where this music is celebrated is gifts the raver or concert and festival attendee a unique and individual experience each time. These experiences are also often never duplicated because of the way that these festivals change the theming for a particular year and the abundance of new music that is constantly being produced. Writer Graham St. John suggest that there is a certain "aesthetic" of EDM that not only surrounds the music that these fans listen to, but to this newly established culture as well. "I saw weird stuff in that place last night. Weird, strange, sick, twisted, eerie, godless, evil stuff. And I want in." (St. John, 2013)

St. John's description of an electronic music concert for the first time seems odd initially as those who are not familiar with this genre of music may lack an understanding of EDM as well as its culture. Additionally, St. John's experience is also subjective, where other first-time EDM concert goers may have varying experiences. These experiences, however, may prevent outsiders from attending these shows because they may perceive his experience as the only experience someone can have while attending these shows. As mentioned, EDM's unique ability to invoke multiple emotions in a person simultaneously also encourages fans of this genre to freely express themselves and connect emotionally with these songs as they are then able to build a unique bond with other ravers when hearing the same song.

Even though St. John's description of raves paints them as these "godless" events, the overall genre of EDM is characterized differently by those who actually celebrate it. The positive

outlooks that EDM fans express are often overshadowed by past negative connotations of the genre when it was first circulated in the 1980s in the United States. Yet, this lack of understanding that has surrounded the genre was caused by past and inconclusive research efforts. In this aspect, Tammy Anderson discusses a study (Hill, 2002 and Redhead, 1993) on the initial establishment of raves and their significance to the Reagan presidency in the United States and the Thatcher ruling in the United Kingdom respectively. “Raves, or grass-roots organized, antiestablishment, unlicensed all-night dance parties, featuring electronically produced dance music (EDM), emerged during the repressive Thatcher and Reagan eras in the United Kingdom and United States via Generation X’s efforts and actions.” (Anderson, 2009, p. 309)

Anderson’s findings here also describe how both the British and American government systems dealt with the rise of underground raves and how they were perceived. One perception was that raves were an act of self-expression or rebellion. Comparatively, modern-day raves are also considered acts of self-expression, even though society has become more accustomed to other musical genres. Regarding what Anderson has uncovered, raves during the 1980s kickstarted a larger and more political issue aside from people complaining about loud, robotic sounding music coming from a basement party or the large-scaled raves that took place in warehouses or dingey nightclubs.

### **Discussion Of Past Studies**

As noted above, past research, including the findings from Anderson’s piece, focused less on the overall “origin” story of the genre and more of the political issues that the raving community dealt with when rave culture was formed. This second aspect that can be highlighted from Anderson’s studies is that rave culture, aside from dealing with political issues, was also

met with wrongful perceptions of not only the music that formed rave culture, but the people who participated in it.

Rave Culture during the 1980s, while allowing those involved to free express themselves through the music, was also met with some stereotypes that wrongfully perceived members of the raving community and the music itself. A common misconception of EDM that the rave community has dealt with is excessive drug use. Music, including dance music, in one way or another has been at the forefront of either promoting or pressuring people into trying or using some sort of drug, whether that would be alcohol or marijuana. And while these substances are bad in excessiveness, electronic music and this newfound culture has been criticized for highlighting and emphasizing the over-consumption of one specific drug. According to researcher Troy Glover, their piece discusses how one drug of choice that was often used at these events was Ecstasy, a strong hallucinogen. Glover then describes how "...raves are associated with the pervasive use of drugs, particularly a drug named Ecstasy, which is purported to enhance a sense of community among those who ingest it..." (Glover, 2010, p. 309).

As Glover describes ecstasy, it creates this sense of community and heightens the experience of person who uses the drug. However, when discussing these types of hallucinogens, the rave community has received and will continue to receive backlash over the use of this drug. This apparent backlash has occurred because outsiders of the raving community claim that some members of the rave culture excessively use and abuse ecstasy. The only real research that backs up this type of claim is from Phillip Kavanaugh. Kavanaugh's research cites a study (Yacoubian, 2004; Johnson, 2001; The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) [2006]) regarding the impact of Ecstasy on "Rave Culture" and the rise of EDM's popularity. This research stated that "Ecstasy use in the United States increased substantially between 1998 and 2001 during the

height of the U.S. rave scene, and demographic research confirms that its use is far more prevalent among rave and EDM participants relative to other populations.” (Kavanaugh, 2008, p. 183)

Kavanaugh’s use of this past research is interesting here as Ecstasy use at these music festivals or raves is only discussed within a three-year timeframe, or 1998 to 2001. However, Kavanaugh never discussed the overall use of ecstasy between 2002 and 2008, the year that his study was published. Additionally, other researchers also mention that violence has become more prevalent in the raving community. This is peculiar because the rave culture is a proponent of love and acceptance, and to be accused of being violent in nature is ironic. One researcher aside from Kavanaugh who claims that the rave community is violent or has experiences bouts of violence is Troy Glover, who above discussed the initial rise of ecstasy use amongst the rave community. Glover states that “While violence is uncommon at raves, several cases have been documented where drug use has led to overdoses and the subsequent death of unsuspecting ravers. Over the past few years, several of these unfortunate incidents have taken place across North America.” (Glover, 2010, p. 309)

While these “stereotypes”, Ecstasy use and violence, were discussed in prior research, those who do not participate in “Rave Culture” cling onto these stereotypes and project them onto members of the rave community, which may end up overshadowing the main selling point of dance music and “Rave Culture” overall. This overshadowing pointed out here is what has since caused damage to the image of “Rave Culture” and members of the EDM community when these studies were first published. Even over a decade after Kavanaugh’s and Glover’s studies,

the rave community has since recovered from these stereotypes and has since created a new era of rave culture. By doing so, the rave community has since been painted a more positive image of itself and its members.

### **The Deficiencies In Research**

The past research that has been provided from researchers such as Kavanaugh, Glover, and even Anderson has also brought upon another issue that “Rave Culture” has to deal with. What these three researchers, and others, have wrote about are the negative aspects of “Rave Culture” from the 1980s up until 2001. Due in part to past research painting a negative picture about the rave community, the issue that has been created is an apparent lack of research on past and present “Rave Culture” and Electronic Music. Since 2001, based on when research suggest that Ecstasy use at these festivals stopped, “Rave Culture” has established a new era of the genre by creating various sub-genres of the music and a mantra consisting of loving and acceptance for members, in and even out, of the entire rave community. This new mission is also heavily highlighted in the music that EDM producers and DJs perform at these shows, which will be discussed further in this project.

While it is extremely important to understand the negative aspects of any culture and the stereotypes that rave culture had to undo to establish themselves again in society, there are members of the rave community who are trying to emphasize this new mission as mentioned above. Abigail Lehner explains how “Rave Culture” has started to expand and evolve from its past. Lehner claims that rave culture has since abandoned its former stereotype of excessive drug use and is starting to focus more on other aspects of this new era of “Rave Culture”, such as self-expression, which is later discussed in this project. “The EDM community has now widely expanded, especially with the variety in styles/sub-genres of EDM, numerous artists, producers,

musicians, and the hundreds of festivals and events that are available for nearly anyone to join.” (Lehner, 2018, p. 23) What’s interesting here is that those who are outside of the EDM community may be unfamiliar with the fact that Electronic Music has sub-genres, meaning that Electronic Music can sound different in multiple ways. Additionally, Lehner claims that there are numerous Electronic Music artists who produce for various sub-genres, yet people still choose to believe that it’s all the same, which frustrates members of the EDM community. This is an additional byproduct of the lack of understanding and research into electronic music. The next deficiency that needs to be addressed is how the current digital age has since impacted Electronic Music. Given the rise of various social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, virtually anyone can be exposed to hearing and or discovering new artists or songs within the overall genre of Electronic Music. The reason why this is considered a deficiency is due in part to the lack of understanding in how EDM fans are connecting online and how they can create online communities that share the same love for EDM as a genre, from the ground up.

### **The Justification For Research**

In addition to the lack of research on this new era of “Rave Culture” and its social media presence, building a rave community is a daunting task. This is why this new era is focused on acceptance and self-expression and less on the use of narcotics, even if some concert attendees take these drugs recreationally. Self-expression, in contrast, is at the core of rave culture’s existence. Additionally, this new wave of rave culture has created a creed or sorts, to help members identify themselves to other ravers. This new creed, or motto, is known as “PLUR”, an acronym for Peace, Love, Unity and Respect. These four “pillars” give EDM fans and rave community members a sense of belonging. So much so that the community acts as one large, universal family. Not only do members of the rave community implement these pillars into their

lives, but EDM DJs and artists also help create a sense of belonging between other artists and their fanbases by utilizing “PLUR”. This mantra can be used various ways, whether it includes offering signs of affection to other raves or even gifting another festival-goer with a piece of clothing or bracelet, called “Kandi”.

Aside from these newfound cultural exchanges that have been created within the EDM community, another justification as to why studying rave culture and electronic music is important is to note how EDM as a musical genre transcends language. Artists, although including lyrics or vocal breaks in their songs, produce songs that do not include lyrics most of the time. Instead of focusing on the lyrics and how they can be interpreted, these artists use the music as the vehicle for invoking various emotions in each listener, even without the use of lyrics. By using this tactic in the production of electronic songs, the songs that EDM fans listen to can provide a more connective and deeper meaning to the song.

The last justification as to why it is important to study the music of EDM and the attraction to rave culture is because there is a large population of people who may have little to no understanding of the culture or music at all. This is important to consider because as mentioned above, there are various sub-genres of electronic music that outsiders of the rave community may have no understanding of. Additionally, those outside the rave community may also be fed with these negative and or past stereotypes of rave culture, without fully understanding it or giving its members the benefit of a doubt for loving and being involved with the culture. The reason why this is a justification is because it would be vital to help educate those outside of the rave community of what actually happens during these festivals or what goes into creating an electronic dance song so that there is a mutual understanding of the history and ideologies behind rave culture. This can also help create a sense of community between an EDM

fan and an outsider so that although an outsider may not particularly choose to listen to songs in this genre, they can still respect and accept the fan that chooses to do so.

### **The Purpose Of This Project**

With creating a research project based on certain interests, it is always important to gain a better understanding of the topic that is being analyzed so that the reader, who may have no idea of what rave culture is, can read this project and understand the information that is being provided. In this case, this project is a qualitative research study with the purpose of helping the reader understand the overall attraction to EDM as a musical genre and its accompanying culture. This study also hopes to provide insight as to why there may be an overall attraction to rave culture as well. As a fan of electronic music, but not necessarily the culture that surrounds it, this study also hopes to help provide insight on my behalf to help develop a fresh idea behind the music that molded my career aspirations.

This study has conducted in-depth interviews that will not only explore, but also investigate, the different aspects of rave culture and the music. The literature in this study, the chapter that follows this one, describes rave culture and the idea of a fan-based culture. First, the literature discusses what is known as the Uses and Gratifications Theory and how fan culture is a byproduct of this theory and how it relates to this research topic.

Additionally, the literature will also go into depth on how Electronic Music is intertwined with fan culture. This literature section also provides a history on “Rave Culture” and the pioneers of the genre, with the hopes of discussing and separating the negative stereotypes associated with it during its initial founding, having introduced new elements of the culture and musical sub-genres that exist in EDM as an overall genre. Following the literature, the next chapter discusses the in-depth interview process and how each interview will incorporate and

discuss multiple aspects on rave culture, social media, the music and how each of these aspects impacted each participant. The last chapter, after the analysis and discussion of the interviews, summarizes what was found within the study and how this study was designed to educate and help shed light on rave culture in society. On top of these results being analyzed, the themes that participants defined were also discussed and how they contributed to the overall discussion of how people feel about the particular aspects of Electronic Music and “Rave Culture”. After these themes were discussed and coded, the final section of this project summarizes how the Literature section compared to what participants stated in each interview and if there were similarities between the two sections. This last section will also incorporate the researcher’s perspectives on issues addressed in certain sections as well.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Why Do People Use Music—The Uses And Gratifications Theory

In order to understand the relationship between Electronic Music and culture, it is important to ask one specific question: why do people use music? Since music, and instruments, was first being performed and discovered, people have always found ways to connect to it whether its attending recitals or festivals, to even learning instruments such as the guitar or piano. Now more than ever, this digital age that we are currently living in allows people unlimited access to discovering various genres of music, and the sub-genres that they are the home to. This digital age has also allowed for various channels of music consumption to exist whether it's burning songs onto a CD to create that mixtape for a friend to streaming service where all the world's music is a touch away. However, the question posed above is tricky. And while this question may seem odd to answer at first, there is a way of breaking it down. This way is by understanding the “use” part of the question with a theory known as the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Developed in the 1940s, this particular theory provided a unique way to figure out what forms of media individuals used to gratify their needs, hence the name. Thomas Ruggiero cites a piece of research (Cantril, 1942) that has provided the theory's first definition, while describing that developing this theory was of most importance. This piece stated that this theory was designed to “study the gratifications that attract and hold audiences to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs.” (Ruggiero, 2000) This early definition of the Uses and Gratifications Theory holds true even today because of this digital age we live in has provided ways for society to communicate with virtually anyone and create

friendships over certain interests. So much so that there are social media platforms with pages dedicated to people or hobbies that gratify a particular individual's needs.

### **Media And The Uses And Gratifications Theory**

As mentioned above, the Uses and Gratifications Theory was developed to help researchers understand what people were interested in and how those particular interests help provide psychological and social relief. While this theory is useful for understanding what people use certain interests for, the Uses and Gratifications Theory can be applied to understanding the attraction to the culture surrounding electronic music in a more modern context by using media. Researcher A. E. Krause conducted a study that used the Uses and Gratifications Theory to help understand media consumerism. Krause recruited 396 participants who were then asked what form of music consumption they preferred to use. Additionally, each participant was asked how each music format functions to them individually. These findings concluded that there were eight different dimensions of music consumption that were uniquely attributed to each participant. These dimensions were then defined as "...usability and intention to use, discovery, functional utility, flexibility, connection, social norms, value for money, and playback diversity, define the uses and gratifications that particular formats serve." (Krause, 2019)

Aside from these newfound dimensions proposed by Krause, this finding is important in terms of Electronic Music. This is because music genres, such as EDM, are now accessible on virtually any popular music streaming service or social media site. More importantly, it is crucial to ask these electronic music fans how this particular musical genre actually gratifies their particular needs and what those needs are. One of those known needs is creating a sense of community among these EDM fans. This is where the idea of "PLUR" comes into effect as the foundation of this newly established "Rave Culture". Additionally, it is also important to ask

why EDM fans create these communities and how this musical genre has created a massive following over the years since the genre's creation.

### **The Current Music Culture**

In addition to creating a community that is based on loving and accepting others through electronic music, there is another aspect of music culture that is often overlooked. Before defining what the term, "culture," really means and understanding this connection that EDM fans have, it is crucial to understand the current state of the music industry in a multitude of ways. The first way of understanding the music industry, without being directly involved with it, is understanding how it has commodified music. In this digital age, music has now been able to not only make people money through physical or digital album sales, but also allow anyone with musical abilities to create a profitable business. This is due in part to the industry inability to compete with the changing times due to how technology has impacted society. One example of this change is seen from when MTV first aired its first broadcast in August of 1981. Since airing the music video for "Video Killed The Radio Star" by The Buggles, this changed the trajectory of the music industry forever as more and more artists were creating music videos that complemented the songs created for them.

Another major change that the music industry had to adjust to was when portable music players were developed and marketed. Traditionally, music was only accessed using the radio and record players. However, music has now become more accessible due in part to the ingenuity of products such as the Walkman, MP3 Player all the way up to the newest iPhone model. While each of these products were used for music consumption, iPhones have recently been revered as the main source of music consumption as the technology within these phones give the user the ability to listen to music on a variety of music streaming platforms. In terms of

commodifying music, streaming services have now created payment plans for users to listen to unlimited music while paying a monthly fee. Some of these services that have created these plans include Spotify and Apple Music, both who are direct competitors. Other services that offer the same kind of service are Pandora Radio and SoundCloud. While this works financially for an audiophile or casual music listener, this actually created major issues for the artists whose music is being streamed on these platforms.

There are two major issues that have to be addressed here. The first is that there is a lack of payment for artists who achieve large amounts of streams on their songs, but the payoff is less than a tenth of what the artist expects. Writer Lee Marshall describes this issue from past research (Smith, 2009 and Marsden, 2012) before streaming services were even created. Marshall states that “The public discussion of Spotify payments first began in 2009, when it was widely reported that Lady Gaga had received a payment of just \$167 for her song ‘Poker Face’, which had been streamed over a million times (for example, Smith [2009](#)). The statistic was misleading but the mud stuck – it is easy to find recent stories repeating the bogus fact (for example, Marsden [2012](#)).” (Marshall, 2015) While this story about the pop star’s payment may seem surprising, it is more relevant than ever considering that the rise of social media platforms are also jeopardizing artists’ opportunities for making money off of their music. Marshall’s point is interesting here though because it is surprising that as successful as Lady Gaga was, and currently is, it begs the question as to why artists are no longer getting paid in the way that physical album sales or merchandise pays.

Another issue that the music industry, as a business, has faced is how some of these social media platforms are growing in popularity. This causes an issue due in part to the way that artists are being discovered and marketed. Writer Kemet High explains how social media

platforms, such as TikTok or Instagram, are acting as avenues for artists to get discovered by record labels. This in turn is causing record labels to lose the old way of finding the “next big thing” or watching artists busking on city streets with a microphone and instruments. When discussing how more feasible achieving a music career is due to social media, High states “If a song is used as background music on a popular YouTube channel or as the soundtrack to a viral meme, it could help a song reach more people, but it could also be seen as money left on the table.” (High, 2019)

This statement is interesting as it relates to how the new music industry is functioning during the age of Social Media. Social Media, in this instance, is also creating a problem for the industry as a whole, much like the payment issue that Marshall described above. Regarding the issue that Social Media has imposed, High questioned that “If a song has two million plays from a tweet, but those plays aren’t monetized, included in official play counts, or properly credited, is it worth it to a publisher whose job it is to capitalize off a song’s usage?” (High, 2019) This is also interesting because while an artist may seem to rise in fame due to their larger presence on social media, those larger followings actually create detriment to the artist’s livelihood if those streaming numbers do not match the number of people who “like” and share their content on social media.

The last issue here that the current music culture is facing is how artists can reach an absurd level of fame from just one song. RollingStone writer Tim Ingham describes how a massive level of fame and popularity is feasible for anyone suggesting that “Three minutes of songwriting inspiration; an influential new fan; an out-of-the-blue pop-culture hook-up — they can all instantly rocket a song, or a star, into the consciousness of millions.” (Ingham, 2019)

There are two aspects of Ingham's piece here that are interesting. The first aspect is the level of fame that someone can reach from just one song. For example, rapper Lil Nas X created one of the longest running chart-topping songs with "Old Town Road" that featured Billy Ray Cyrus. With this being the rapper's most popular track, this newfound fame can scare some artists away and turn them into "one-hit wonders". The second aspect of Ingham's piece that is interesting here is that the industry could be facing a one-hundred billion dollars loss. This massive loss would be due in part to the lack of physical album sales and tours that allowed the industry to boom, but the blame is also on the surge of streaming services. On top of these already pressing issues, the current coronavirus pandemic that has shut down the entire world has also put a pause on live music and closed studios, jeopardizing the industry and artists alike. Luckily, these streaming services, while not decreasing their price to use them, have allowed for digital sales and releases to soar. Yet, these streams will only rise higher for artists if they have a loyal social media following.

With these issues in mind, these writers cited above are important in terms of the state of the current music culture. Marshall's piece, while describing the downside to making money from Spotify, the platform also has major benefits. With Lady Gaga receiving those millions of streams from one song, it catapulted her into years of success where she is one of today's most popular singers and winning awards such as "Best Electronic Album" with her latest album, *Chromatica*. With High's and Ingham's pieces, however, they are not important to those who are outside of the music industry or for those who care about it. Their pieces, however, have created an idea as to why people are invested in the music culture and want jobs within the industry. One of the ways that people can become invested in the industry is by being emotionally connected to it. When speaking about EDM in particular, the emotional connection is strong between not only

the artists that create these tracks for fans to connect with, but these fans also create this emotional connection with each other. This is what also sets apart EDM as a genre from others in the industry. Although it is recognized as a popular and award-winning genre, other genres are not as well known for creating this established connection. This connection is what also sets apart the genre from others because many elements about EDM are not cared about by those who don't listen to it enough.

### **The Emotional Connection To Music**

As mentioned above, a major reason why Electronic Music has established itself as a popular and award-winning music genre is due to the emotional connections that the genre allows people to create for themselves. This connection that EDM fans have created for themselves is yet another way to feel that sense of community or belonging that this new EDM culture has been trying to establish. These connections that fans can make, in addition to the idea of "PLUR" that was brought up previously, is a reason why this genre is dependent on emotion and how all genres of music should include this idea of connectiveness. With this in mind, there are four major aspects to how music, including EDM, creates a sense of community by using emotions. The first aspect is discussing and understanding how music actually makes people truly feel, by understanding that individual and what emotion they are actually feeling.

Researcher Rosie Pentreath wrote a piece that analyzed a study that involves music and emotion from researcher Tim Greer. In this piece, Pentreath discussed how Greer's findings first began with how certain song progressions and the melodies that accompany them carry the song. Additionally, these two elements can then be attributed to the emotions that people are expressing while hearing that particular song. These melodies that are included in these songs that people hear can also be attributed to the way in which people react when they hear a specific

song or album, without relying solely on emotion. Greer states that “Taking a holistic view of music perception, using all different kinds of musical predictors, gives us an unprecedented insight into how our bodies and brains respond to music.” (Pentreath, 2019) What’s interesting about Pentreath’s study is that certain songs, depending on the volume of the song being played at that time, can actually trigger one or more emotional responses. As an example, if a song is played loudly or composed in an aggressive or harshly sounding way, than that individual can then feel those certain feelings solely on the sound without having any premeditated thoughts of anger.

The second aspect of understanding the emotional connections that individuals can have while listening to music is understanding how music itself can involuntarily invoke specific emotions. The reason why this aspect is important to understanding these emotional connections is because EDM has a unique way of letting individuals feel specific emotions, and allowing people to freely react. These reactions, however, are due in part due to specific brain functions, according to research. One piece of research that highlights this phenomenon comes from Malini Mohana. Their study discusses how music has an impact on the way that certain brain functions react when those songs are played, to the point where certain songs can even overwhelm the senses. What’s also interesting about this finding is that the way of consuming music does not matter in terms of how certain songs can invoke these emotions in people.

“Be it within films, live orchestras, concerts or a simple home stereo, music can be so evocative and overwhelming that it can only be described as standing halfway between thought and phenomenon.” (Mohana, 2018)

In relation to EDM, this particular genre of music allows these fans to feel a multitude of emotions every time a song from that genre is played no matter the setting. Additionally, hearing

this particular song or set of songs played live can also transcend the individual's experience, creating a tighter connection to the song. Due to the overwhelming concert antics and surrounding, these songs can cause festival-goers to "head-bang", which is an aggressive way to head-bob to the music, smile and cry all in one song. Another reason why emotion is integrated into electronic music is due to the way that this music speaks to the listener, without even needing lyrics. As Mohana states, music can be described "as a "language of emotion" across cultures." (Mohana, 2018) With Mohana's description of music being language of emotion, this can be a reason as to why people often question the way certain songs make us feel and react differently.

Aside from Mohana's piece on how songs can involuntarily invoke emotions, it is also important to fully understand the way these songs actually make people feel. Another way of discussing how music truly makes people feel is by associating those things with physical objects or images. Researcher Mark Changizi cited a study from researchers at the University of London (Logeswaran & Bhattacharya) that explored this idea of understanding this emotional connection that 30 participants had to music by associating it with visual images:

"30 subjects were presented with a series of happy or sad musical excerpts. After listening to the snippets, the subjects were shown a photograph of a face. Some people were shown a happy face – the person was smiling - while others were exposed to a sad or neutral facial expression. The participants were then asked to rate the emotional content of the face on a 7-point scale, where 1 mean extremely sad and 7 extremely happy." (Changizi, 2009)

Changizi's usage of this University of London study brings up an important aspect to be addressed when discussing the overall emotional connection that people have to music. What

was interesting about this particular study is that participants were actually matching the mood they felt while listening to the song being played during the experiment. This is important to note because while these individuals, at the time of the study, may have not had an established connection to that song, already their brains were creating that connection for them involuntarily. Also, as simple as this association sounds, Changizi discusses one strong finding from this study. “The simple moral is that the emotions of music are “cross-modal,” and can easily spread from sensory system to another.” (Changizi, 2009) With discussing electronic music, this may mean that the genre itself, and the things that festival goers do such as “head-bang”, mean that EDM may in fact be an emotional experience for people to connect with and a genre for people to listen to.

The last aspect regarding this relationship between music and the emotions that people feel is this idea of memory. What is meant by this is that people have the ability to associate certain songs with a particular time period in their lives or a particular memory. Music itself has the ability to unlock certain brain functions, as mentioned above. However, music unlocking past memories, even if the person has not thought of this memory due to it being suppressed, hearing a specific song can automatically trigger that particular memory for that individual. Researcher Hans Baumgartner highlights the importance of how music and memory share an intimate relationship. Baumgartner found that people are able to attribute music to a specific memory automatically, thus creating a unique and individual association to that song. Additionally, these memories that are automatically triggered are sometimes set off from the lyric in the song or even from someone describing a musical element featured in that song. Baumgartner’s piece also cites a past study (Kivy, 1989) that describes how emotions also trigger memories. This piece stated that “...a piece of music may acquire the capacity to arouse emotional reactions through

association with significant personal experiences, but the expressiveness of music, it is argued, is then due to an accident of association and has (or may have) nothing to do with the "real expressive character of the music." (Baumgartner, 2009, p. 157)

The findings that Baumgartner states here (Kivy, 1989) are important because each song, as mentioned, as its own character. This idea of 'character' can be attributed to why people listen to EDM, as these songs create a specific aesthetic that draws listeners in. Yet, this causes a problem for those who do not listen to EDM because those outside of the culture may find the genre to be odd and "out of character" based on their music preferences. The emotional connection that EDM has created for some, however, is unmatched and can even be the reason as to why fans have established it as a prominent music genre and an entirely new and inviting culture known as "Rave Culture".

### **The Definition Of Culture**

One of the biggest proponents for creating this project is to fully understand this newly developed culture called "Rave Culture". This newfound sub-culture went through a rebirth of sorts as the idea of EDM and raving began focusing on acceptance and building a strong community with its members who share this same love for electronic music. However, understanding this sub-culture will not aide in answering the overall question as to what makes the culture surrounding electronic music so attractive. Instead, it is important to first recognize how the overall definition of "culture" is defined, and how this umbrella term can be used and applied to studying this attraction to electronic music and the concerts and traditions that surround this genre.

Researcher Gustav Jahoda from the University of Strathclyde provides a definition that is closely attached to how this idea of culture fits into understanding the overall culture of Electronic

Music. Jahoda's definition comes from a past piece of literature (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952) that states "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts...(Jahoda, 2012). Based on this definition, there are many ways that culture and EDM are intertwined with one another. One of these ways is by understanding the differences between fandoms and a new concept called, "brandoms". A "fandom" is a social identity that is created by a group of people who share the same interests and have built a community around that interest. A couple of examples of "fandoms" are *Harry Potter* fans, and how attached they are to not only the book series, but the lore and the media surrounding J.K Rowling's characters. Another major example of a fandom is describing fans of a particular artist. Fans create these massive fanbases by attaching a name to it such as "Arianators", or fans who enjoy pop-star Ariana Grande's music, to K-Pop sensation, BTS, where their fanbase is called the "BTS Army". When discussing fandoms, however, they can never be commodified in the way "brandoms" are.

The first use of this term, "brandom" comes from researcher M. Guschwan, who described it when discussing how soccer league fans show their support for their favorite teams. This support can be shown by purchasing team and or the soccer leagues' merchandise. Relating this back to "Rave Culture", Guschwan states that "brand managers have recognized the usefulness of fans and are seeking to exploit fan labor." (Guschwan, 2012) This is interesting because these soccer league fans are not only showing their support for their teams, but they end up providing financial growth for the league to continue existing. With popstars such as Ariana Grande, they are not directly financially gaining anything from their fans like a "brandom" would. These fandoms remain intact because of a mutual connection between the artist and fans.

In terms of “Rave Culture”, this is crucial for the culture to stay intact as fandoms are the way that these artists and DJs market themselves to their fans, whether they create merchandise or partner with other brands to get some sort of profit. Additionally, these artists are creating smaller communities, or fandoms, within the larger rave community. These “brandoms” can then occur once these DJs start commodifying themselves to stand out within the culture.

Another way that culture is intertwined with EDM is by understanding what popular culture is and how it has impacted EDM. Popular culture, when discussing EDM, is now acting as a vehicle for introducing this music genre and its many traditions to people who are unfamiliar with the existence of EDM as a music genre and participatory culture. Additionally, popular culture is multi-faceted. With music being a main contributor to what’s ever-changing within popular culture, the many aspects of popular culture have allowed people to fully express themselves and develop new identities. Researcher Patricia Duff explains how important popular culture actually is and how it impacts students, and people in general. This study that Duff conducted was created to see how these students create a sense of identity for themselves. Duff’s study described that, “children (and adults) who have grown up with the same narratives draw freely upon them in their interactions with others as a means of establishing their in-group membership.” (Duff, 2019, p. 482)

Duff’s study brings up some interesting aspects that can be tied back to EDM and this growing “Rave Culture”. First, this same sense of identity creation is how Electronic Music fans relate to each other whether it’s enjoying the same music from a particular artist or sub-genre, or even attending the same music festival. Additionally, this study also relates to the way that fans of Electronic Music are able to show their appreciation and passion for a genre that has been able to lift them up, and to be a part of a culture where music they adore is one of the core values of

that culture. However, Duff's creation of in-group membership within their study is important to how "Rave Culture" is unique. In this context, when an EDM fan gravitates to a particular artist, herds of these fans will often greet visiting producers or DJs at airports or hotels to show their undying support for that artist, even if the show they're supposed to play isn't until the following day. In this case, that group of fans has developed their own "in-group" for that city and that artist will know that group of fans as that city's fandom. In comparison, fans who may not enjoy another artist's music are automatically considered in the out-group. This in turn, creates a negative image of that fan or fans by suggesting that they are members of this "out-group", without understanding their overall identity or who they are actually a fan of within EDM.

### **Origin Of Noise--The History of EDM**

While the newfound rave culture has allowed for various artists to achieve success within the music industry as EDM personalities, understanding where EDM originated from and the performative aspects about the genre will also aid in understanding what makes the culture surrounding electronic music so attractive. Currently, EDM has been known as the musical genre that loving and accepting of people from all cultural backgrounds and sexual orientations. It is now also known as one of the world's most renowned musical genres. However, within this rave culture, many of these ravers and those outside the community are unaware of this rich history that surrounds a beloved music genre. This section aims to educate and explain what this genre actually is and how underappreciated it is today.

The first way of fully understanding the remarkable impact that this genre has made on music as a whole is by understanding how EDM has been able to commodify itself. Musical genres have always had this ability to create financial growth for artists and others involved with the business of music. Yet, EDM is considered an oddity as a musical genre since its initial

creation in the 1980s. While this may seem almost forty years ago with it being 2021, EDM has since developed and evolved, creating various subgenres and styles. This is one of the many benefits of enjoying EDM because it creates a variety of songs and sounds within a genre instead of producing the “textbook” sound of another genre. Some people also associate EDM as a genre that only consists of songs that all sound the same. This idea of a genre having “one sound” has since changed. This is due in part to the rebellious attitude of some EDM pioneers who wanted to establish this genre as a prominent musical genre. Additionally, EDM has stuck around due to people rebelling to the oppressive nature some felt during the Reagan presidency of the United States and Thatcher rule of the United Kingdom respectively during the early years of EDM.

As mentioned, these early years of EDM establishing itself as a genre was met with some issues from outside publics including the political indifference seen here. Additionally, the creation of “Rave Culture” in combination with EDM as a genre had a rocky start due to these issues brought about by the Reagan administration and the Thatcher ruling over the United Kingdom. According to researcher Tammy Anderson, they explain that raves, along with the genre, are considered abnormal to those who exist outside of this newfound culture. Anderson also explains how some individuals thought differently of those who attended these warehouse raves or underground parties where heart-pounding, sweat-staining music was at its epicenter. This in turn, disturbed people causing a growing fear and rise of drug usage at these events. However, those who enjoyed the first wave of “Rave Culture” felt an attraction to the genre as it gave them a sense of freedom. Anderson goes on to say that “Raves, or grass-roots organized, antiestablishment, unlicensed all-night dance parties, featuring electronically produced dance music (EDM), emerged during the repressive Thatcher and Reagan eras in the United Kingdom and United States via Generation X’s efforts and actions.” (Anderson, 2009, p. 309)

When discussing Generation X's attempts to listen to Electronic Music free of judgment from society, there are a few important aspects to consider. One being that Anderson described listening to EDM in the 1980s as punishable by law, depending on which country an individual lived in. Secondly, Anderson's piece notes that while this attraction to EDM gave those a sense of freedom, it still doesn't make sense as to where this resentment from those in charge, or outsiders of the EDM community, was coming from. It also seems that there is this amount of resentment simply because this type of genre was new to people, thus there being a lack of knowledge behind the genre or what was happening at these raves at the time. Also, this resentment in turn created a positive aspect that still hold true to the genre to this day. While this resentment from others was happening, those who enjoyed the music and the parties associated with it, kept coming back as it was the music that brought them there.

In relation to Anderson's discussion of Generation X fighting for their right to listen to EDM freely, the last aspect is that fans of EDM want to share this genre and the experiences they have at these concerts with others. This, along with the goal of being able to express oneself freely, still holds true in today's adaptation of "Rave Culture". Graham St. John's explanation of his first experience at a rave, although being more modern, is still relatable to the first underground raves that "scared" society in the 1980s. "I saw weird stuff in that place last night. Weird, strange, sick, twisted, eerie, godless, evil stuff. And I want in." (St. John, 2013) With all these aspects pointing in a positive direction for the genre, to this day there is still some pushback as this genre is constantly reminded of its past and current stereotypes that can be associated with it.

## **The Stereotypes Of EDM**

Another crucial aspect in understanding how Electronic Music has become recognized as one of today's most listened to and preferred musical genres is learning about and dismissing the stereotypes that have become associated with rave culture. "Rave Culture" in of itself is now built on love, self-love and acceptance for others, but there is a small percentage of people within the raving community that embody some of the harsh stereotypes that the current rave culture has been trying to rid itself of. This isn't an uncommon issue, however, as every cultural phenomenon or musical genre is met with pushback. This can be seen when Rock and Roll Music and Hip-Hop were breaking down barriers for artists, causing people to be upset with these new music genres. However, the EDM has been hit with these stereotypes simply because there is a lack of understanding of what the rave culture is and who embodies it most acutely. Because of these apparent stereotypes, EDM as a genre is permanently tainted with these assumptions.

One over-arching stereotype associated with electronic music and the traditions that occur within this culture is the usage of drugs. While few festival goers utilize drugs at these festivals, the overall message behind PLUR and EDM does not require the use of hallucinogens. However, EDM has been associated with hallucinogens, commonly ecstasy as mentioned in a previous section, because they have the ability to amplify the sound and feeling a person experiences while listening to this genre. Researcher Troy Glover examines this claim stating that these hallucinogenic drugs are the catalyst for the public bashing EDM culture, thus giving the genre a negative connotation as well. Glover's piece also discussed how one of these hallucinogens, ecstasy, was to blame for the apparent lack of appreciation for EDM, in regard to the music that was being produced. Additionally, ecstasy was also at fault for the overall

behavior of individuals who attend these festivals. Glover states that, "...raves are associated with the pervasive use of drugs, particularly a drug named Ecstasy, which is purported to enhance a sense of community among those who ingest it..."(Glover, 2010, p. 309). What's interesting about this past research is that hallucinogens such as Ecstasy is one of the overarching reasons as to why EDM was considered to be a nuisance to society. Yet Glover's research actually introduces an important point to consider. Glover's research here assumes that drug use creates a community aspect within EDM culture. What's not understood here is that this assumption is inaccurate. While there is always a small group of individuals who use these drugs to enhance their experience, the sense of community is brought out by two different groups. The first being the artists and festival organizers, who really try to establish this sense of "PLUR" and community between them and EDM fans. The second group that brings about this idea of community is the "ravers" themselves. This overwhelmingly large group of people have created a universal community where language is not a requirement to join and the music fuels this community's growth.

While Glover's research points to creating a community within the EDM culture, other research provided by Phillip Kavanaugh, as previously cited, puts a "damper" on this assumption. Kavanaugh's research discussed a three-way relationship between ecstasy, EDM culture and politics. This relationship as cited by Kavanaugh (Yacoubian, 2004; Johnson, 2001; The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) [2006]) discussed that, "Ecstasy use in the United States increased substantially between 1998 and 2001 during the height of the U.S. rave scene, and demographic research confirms that its use is far more prevalent among rave and EDM participants relative to other populations." (Kavanaugh, 2008, p. 183)

This statement is brought up more than once for regarding the stereotypes of Electronic Music because of an interesting thing that Kavanaugh has done with their research. This study already established the widespread use of these drugs, but no reports of who suffers a “bad trip” or experience from it. Additionally, both studies from Kavanaugh and Glover, just published two years later, missed the mark as their studies have to emphasize more of what would happen to individuals if they overdosed on these hallucinogens if they wanted to establish a credible argument as to why the raving scene and culture should come to a halt. However, this argument brings about another important aspect about the rave culture and current EDM music that needs to be addressed. While some people are utilizing these drugs, others are focused on actually creating an experience of their own by producing electronic music themselves. Aside from the stereotype of ecstasy use being associated with EDM culture, there is an abundant background to how the genre was created. Additionally, there should be more understanding about what goes into performing EDM as a producer or DJ and how these unique sounds that are associated with it, are created.

### **The Performance Of EDM**

In addition to understanding the stereotypes associated with this genre of music and its early history, the performance aspect of EDM is something that people need to learn in order to understand the process that goes into creating one of these tracks. One of these “trends” that is associated with the performative aspects of EDM is that all songs that are created for the genre sound the same, and that there’s minimal effort in the production of these songs. However, this assumption made by those outside of the EDM community, are the ones who ultimately love hearing these songs being played at events or parties. This “sound” of EDM that is often mentioned by people has a variety of ways of being described. One of the ways that those outside

of “Rave Culture” describe EDM as just “noise”. Those who enjoy EDM and all its sub-genres, comparatively, claim that this music is life changing. The way that mainstream music fans describe EDM however, is that it is music with aggressive, sweat-inducing drum patterns and melodies that carry the song from start to finish. While some of those songs do rely on those few instruments to keep people dancing through the song’s entirety, the genre of EDM has allowed for DJs and artists to collaborate on different ways to capture various sounds. Additionally, artists are including more traditional instruments, such as violins or guitars, into their songs to bend and merge genres to attract different audiences. Nowadays, there are a multitude of computer programs that allow these DJs to replicate these traditional instruments and create these songs EDM fans appreciate and love.

The unique “sound” of EDM would have not been possible without some of the genre’s first pioneers. These pioneers, aside from creating the first sounds of EDM, are also responsible for providing the first use of digital and electronic instruments to create these sounds EDM hears today. Writer David Dunn describes how the pioneers of this genre have not only created the landscape for EDM to exist, but also transformed it. Dunn’s piece also explains that the foreign sounds people hear within these tracks give fans of EDM to freely express themselves through dance and music. The earliest electronic sound, as described by Dunn, dates back to the 1700s, explaining that “One of the earliest documented musical instruments based upon electronic principles was the Clavecin Électrique designed by the Jesuit priest Jean-Baptiste Delaborde in France, 1759. The device used a keyboard control based upon simple electrostatic principles.” (Dunn, 1992, p. 3)

The use of an electric keyboard by Delaborde during the 1700s is an astonishing fact to consider. However, this begs the question as to if EDM initially became popular in the United

States during the 1980s, or before the founding of the country altogether. Yet, the “Clavecin Électrique” that was first played during the 1700s has since been revitalized into the modern-day instrument known as the Synthesizer. This remarkable instrument is described as a large electric piano that has the capacity to play multiple sounds and replicate various instruments. The Synthesizer’s incorporation into modern-day EDM production not only gives artists and producers a variety of sounds to work with, but it also ties into what makes Electronic Music performative.

In addition to the discovery of the Clavecin Electricque that Dunn discussed, more research has also been done on the Synthesizer and how this instrument has impacted EDM. More importantly, this research also shuts down the assumption that there’s little to no musical effort needed to produce Electronic Music. One piece that supports this “shut down” comes from researcher Nicholas Laudadio who claims that playing the Synthesizer does take a certain skill level. This is due in part to it being an electrified piano, and those who want to learn how to use this instrument need to understand the mechanics behind it and the traditional piano as well.

Additionally, the Synthesizer has made a remarkable impact on the film industry as it provides each movie with an amplified soundtrack. Laudadio explains that the Synthesizer was actually used in the film, “Close Encounters of the Third Kind”, as a unique way to introduce the aliens in the film by using “...a simple five-note motif plucked out on an Arp 2500 electronic music synthesizer.” (Laudadio, 2011, p. 304) This is important to note because the viewer is now able to recognize when the aliens are entering the scene based on that Synthesizer’s chord progression. This is similar to how the orchestral soundtrack used in the movie, “Jaws”, introduces the shark whenever it appears on screen.

Aside from the Synthesizer's impact on the film industry, the overall creation of the instrument created controversy within the music industry. One reason for this apparent controversy is due in part to how it was used, thus not being a part of any traditional instrument family such as the Brass or Woodwind section. Laudadio justifies the use of the Synthesizer stating that "The synthesizer became an instrument "in its own right" in concert with the triumph of technological discourse in the 1950s..." (Laudadio, 2011, 307). In addition to the Synthesizer being described as "untraditional", the second reason for controversy is due in part to this instrument's negative connotation that people attribute it with.

In this instance, Laudadio states that "...electronic music pioneer Milton Babbitt confronts such objections from those who consider the synthesizer to be a "soulless machine" and whose arguments depend upon "invocations of musical humanism against the barbarous assault of musical science" and assertions that electronic music "could never be good." (Laudadio, 2011, p. 307) This point here is interesting due to the fact that EDM fans, unless fully aware of the genre's history, may have no idea of who Milton Babbitt was or their contributions. Additionally, fans should also be fully engulfed in the culture and educate those who bring about negative connotations when discussing EDM and the surrounding culture.

The last reason why Electronic Music production is frowned upon is due in part to technological software having the ability to replicate the sounds of physical instruments. This, according to Laudadio, frustrates symphony musicians claiming that "New musical technologies have long been perceived as threats to concepts of musical authenticity." (Laudadio, 2011, p. 307) While new musical technologies allow for Electronic Music artists to establish themselves in the music industry, other studies suggest that EDM's experimental sound is what sets it apart from other genres. Additionally, research suggest that these digital music software programs that

Electronic Music producers use, along with other electronic media, are some of the reasons as to why EDM exists as a genre of music today and has the ability to thrive.

### **The Culture Of EDM**

Along with understanding what makes Electronic Music performative, and knowing its origin story, the next aspect of providing insight to this overall research question is by learning about the newfound culture of EDM. As mentioned, Electronic Music was first built up on the idea of self-expression, while people continually rebelled against what they felt was the oppressive nature of certain governments who claimed EDM supports drug use and acts of violence. While this comes as no surprise, the modern day EDM culture has since learned from its past by promoting a more positive approach on how to build a community and let people express themselves freely.

One successful way that the new EDM culture has done this was by establishing those various sub-genres within the overall umbrella genre that EDM is. These sub-genres have also had their own successes. This is due in part to each sub-genre finding ways to invoke these emotions out of concert attendees and fans based on the specific instruments the artists incorporate in these songs. For example, one of the more popular sub-genres of EDM is known as “Progressive House”. This sub-genre is designed to have a verse-chorus song structure in which the chorus, or the “drop” of these songs feature a melody and bassline that encourages the crowd to either jump or dance the minute that part of the song is played.

Progressive House, however, is not the only sub-genre to successfully invoke emotions. As cited, Abigail Lehner discusses how these sub-genres can promote a person’s spirituality. More importantly, these songs promote these ideas of unity which allows fans to enjoy the variety of sub-genres EDM offers. “The EDM community has now widely expanded, especially

with the variety in styles/sub-genres of EDM, numerous artists, producers, musicians, and the hundreds of festivals and events that are available for nearly anyone to join,” (Lehner, 2018, p. 23). What’s interesting here however is that those outside of the EDM community are unaware of how beneficial this idea of “community” is for these fans. Instead, outsiders of the EDM are using the same arguments, as previously cited (Kavanaugh and Anderson, 2009) that are focused on drug use and violence.

This “richness” that EDM culture has gained now allows fans to expand their song preferences beyond what some would describe as “Techno” music. Because of these sub-genres, many fans can gravitate to a particular sound they enjoy, while still be able to listen to EDM overall. With “Progressive House” being one of the louder, more pop-sounding sub-genres, others offer a more traditional, electronic sound to the EDM umbrella. Some of these sub-genres include “Techno House” and “Future House” in which both styles have technologically produced melodies, while still providing the listener multiple opportunities to feel the rhythm. Additionally, sub-genres allow listeners to enjoy EDM without deviating from its overall sound.

Researchers Brian C. Wesolowski and Alex Hofmann have developed a piece that describes these sub-genres of EDM and how each one is “supposed” to sound based on the listener’s preferences. “These subgenres have characteristic aesthetics containing both similarities and differences in their metrical patterns, accents, and timbres. It is argued that the subgenre labels of EDM are not concretely defined, thereby providing an unclear representation of structural cues based upon genre labeling...”(Wesolowski; Hoffman, 2016, p. 3). With these sub-genres not being “concretely defined”, this allows the overall sound of EDM to continue to grow. This study’s findings can also back up this community aspect of the modern day EDM culture.

“Although EDM can be broadly described as having a repetitive beat based on a 4/4 timegrid and simple phrase lengths of 2, 4, 8, or 16 bars, hundreds of subtle subgenres exist...”(Wesolowski and Hoffman, 2016, p. 3). These two examples only provide more evidence as to how large the EDM genre has become and how large the community is.

### **The New Music Culture**

The last aspect of maybe understanding why the culture surrounding EDM is attractive is due in part to learning about what is called the “new music culture”. As discussed in previous sections, the idea of creating a unified culture within the EDM community is vital for the EDM culture to grow and cultivate itself into a globally recognized culture. With any culture, old or new, it is also important to understand how traditions practiced by other cultures affect those who do not exist within those communities. However, it is also important to help educate those who are unfamiliar with those traditions so that there is no room for negative connotations or comments that can be made about this existing culture.

Researcher Frank McAndrew’s piece highlights why people may not want to associate with pre-existing cultures due to older generations of said cultures judging the type of music being played on the radio or in their homes currently. This study claims that “there’s evidence that the brain’s ability to make subtle distinctions between different chords, rhythms and melodies gets worse with age. So, to older people, newer, less familiar songs might all “sound the same.” (McAndrew, 2019) This is similar to how people outside of the EDM community claim that all songs within the genre “sound the same”. This “hate” described by McAndrew here is due to a biological finding. This study goes on to describe that “one of the most researched laws of social psychology is something called the “mere exposure effect.” In a nutshell, it means that the more we’re exposed to something, the more we tend to like it.” (McAndrew, 2019)

McAndrew's research here touches on two important factors. The first is to understand if older generations of people are actually listening to EDM and if they are opposed by it as it sounds "untraditional" due to this biological finding. Secondly, older generations may "hate" newer genres simply because they choose to not listen to it. This can be attributed to when Elvis Presley and The Beatles arrived onto the music scene. As controversial as Elvis' stage presence was for the time, with gyrating hips and loud Rock music, the younger generations gravitated to this new sound because it was abnormal. Interestingly enough, there is a comparison that can be made here when discussing EDM and how "abnormal" it sounds to older generations.

As mentioned, both British and American government systems weren't fans of EDM due to the harmful effects they believed it had on young audiences. Yet this idea of gravitating to new music is what happened when Electronic Music became popularized during the 1980s, much like what happened to Elvis and The Beatles in their rise to fame. This interest in abnormal musical genres also begs the question as to why there is an entire sub-culture based around a musical genre. Additionally, this project begs the question as to why young audiences gravitate to a genre that transcends languages and incorporates foreign sounds. With this in mind, and understanding EDM's overall impact up until present day, this leads to asking the overall question that prompts this research: Why is the culture surrounding Electronic Music attractive?

### Chapter 3: Research Design

With any research project, those who choose to create them ask multi-faceted and academically challenging questions that require a vast amount of research. However, these projects that involve extensive amounts of time and data cause the researchers to be faced with an unwanted outcome. This research project, however, is one of the few that asks about Electronic Music and the relationship with its surrounding culture. With a question as intriguing as why is the culture that surrounds Electronic Music so attractive, this research project utilized a qualitative approach.

This qualitative project used multiple factors that aided in providing insight on why why Electronic Music culture is so attractive. This approach was taken to not only make sure that each aspect was explained thoroughly, but to allow further research to be easily conducted. Qualitative research, however, has many methods of ways to answer proposed research questions. The method used in this project was that it conducted in-depth interviews. This method was used as it not only helped the researcher understand the perspectives of the study's participants but helped get a better understanding as to what EDM is as a genre and what its culture is about. The use of in-depth interviews was important for this project because it aimed to provide honest answers about this topic. These interviews took place between March of 2021 and ended in the beginning of April 2021. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed so that commonalities from participants could be drawn out, and for themes to be defined and analyzed. This short time frame was also used to see if people were willing to participate in a research project during the current pandemic, while it ensured a safe interview process. With these factors in mind, the first part of this research project that has been discussed here is the method of data collection, and how it differs from other qualitative research methods.

## **Method Of Data Collection**

For this specific project, in-depth interviews were used because they were the best possible method. One of the reasons that this project conducted in-depth interviews was that they were able to create a new dialogue of research that surrounds Electronic Music. Additionally, these interviews also helped the researcher get a better understanding as to why people are attracted to “Rave Culture”, or the now known sub-culture of Electronic Music. Another reason why in-depth interviews were used as the method of data collection for this research project was that it allowed for participants to open up about a topic they were passionate about, which led to enjoyable conversations between the researcher and each participant.

With these interviews, each conversation that took place was unique. More importantly, the themes that are later defined in this project, were readily available for the researcher to define because of how open these conversations were. Researchers John Creswell and J. David Creswell discussed that the use of in-depth interviews for research projects “...involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participant.” (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 187) Tying in Creswell and Creswell’s statement about in-depth interviews to this particular project, these semi-structured conversations were crucial to the project as they allowed a sense of comfortability between the researcher and participant, which made this project act less of a test and more of an on-going conversation.

Lastly, in-depth interviews were important to use for this specific research project because it allowed each proposed question from the researcher to be answered. This aspect of the project was completed after making seven “filter questions” that were the introductory questions for each interview. These questions also provided the researcher with clarity on whether or not a

particular participant was going to provide enough information to achieve saturation. Examples of those questions included, “What’s your all-time favorite EDM track(s)?”, “Where do you listen to EDM? (Car, home speakers, headphones?)”, and or “What platform/service do you listen to EDM on?”

While these questions acted as the introduction to each interview to put the participant at ease for each conversation, this next set incorporated sixteen more thought-provoking questions, which made participants expand their ways of thinking and they allowed them to speak freely on whichever question was asked. Two examples of those questions were “Do you know the origin story of EDM, and the early culture that surrounded it?” and “What is the best way to describe this participatory culture to an outsider?” There were two reasons why these sixteen questions were used in the latter portion of the interviews. One of those reasons was that they also gauged whether or not participants were providing enough information for the researcher to work with, which may have threatened the validity of this research. The last reason why these questions were asked in the latter portion was to really understand if each participant was active in “Rave Culture”, as the research suggested they did. Not only did the perspectives that the participants provided gave the researcher insight into answering the overall research question, but these responses also gave the researcher insight on all the aspects of “Rave Culture”, and what occurs at these festivals. The next step in the data collection process was to describe the strengths and weaknesses of in-depth interviews.

### **Strengths And Weaknesses Of In-Depth Interviews**

When these in-depth interviews were used as the method of data collection, it was important to look at the strengths and weaknesses, and to see how in-depth interviews compared

to using other data collection methods. More importantly, these strengths and weaknesses were looked at to also see how in-depth interviews compared to other qualitative research methods.

### *Strengths*

One strength that in-depth interviews possessed was this allowance of free-flowing conversations between the researcher and participant. This was a strength as these interviews were able to take place in any public location and be scheduled flexibly. Regarding the strengths of in-depth interviews, both Creswell and Creswell stated that these interviews occurred "...in the same room, or virtually via web-based or e-mail platforms." (Creswell and Creswell 2018, p. 189) This strength was important to uncover as it allowed a level of comfortability between the researcher and participant knowing that they had the option to choose the interview location and time and date of each interview.

The settings for each interview changed due in part to the Coronavirus pandemic, which meant that these interviews had the option to be conducted remotely as those adhered to social distancing guidelines. Technology was also a strength for these interviews while the pandemic was taken into consideration. These interviews offered the option for them to be conducted over Zoom or other video-conferencing applications. The next strength that was defined when discussing in-depth interviews was how accessible the themes would be once participants provided similar answers and thoughts to the same questions. The last strength that in-depth interviews had was that there was a level of directiveness that the researcher had. Each interview "...allows researcher control over the line of questioning," (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.188). This strength was important for this particular project as the researcher allowed the participant to be comfortable and speak freely, yet the conversations had to follow the set of questions that the researcher asked, so that tangents were not a threat to the overall research process. The next part

of the data collection process was that the weaknesses of in-depth interviews were analyzed and how they compared to the strengths and what threats they had on conducting this research.

### *Weaknesses*

In contrast, the weaknesses of this research project were important to analyze. One of these weaknesses that came with conducting in-depth interviews was that there was a variance of conversations. This seemed like a positive aspect about in-depth interviews initially, however, the sufficiency of each interview was dependent on the participant, which is why these varying conversations posed a potential threat. Both Creswell and Creswell stated that “not all people are equally articulate and perceptive,” (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 188) when these interviews occurred.

Another weakness that arose when these interviews were conducted was that the overall setting of each interview made an impact on what participants stated. While it was important to adhere to social distancing measures, the use of public spaces was no longer an option, and that each interview took place remotely. The reason why, as stated by Creswell and Creswell, that public settings are best used for in-depth interviews is that they gave the researcher, “information in a designated place rather than a natural setting.” (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 188)

The last weakness that was uncovered when these in-depth interviews occurred was that each answer that a participant provided had the chance of being insufficient according to the researcher. This was a weakness as this caused the researcher to adapt to the conversation and rethink their questions. Changing the questions also posed a threat to the research as it may have impacted the way in which participants were recruited. Additionally, this may have opened the opportunity for new participants to be recruited, which also caused a threat to the data being

analyzed and potentially change the overall results of this research project. Once these weaknesses were taken into consideration by the researcher, the next step to understand how the sampling procedures were created and how this project was able to recruit participants.

## **Sampling Procedures**

### ***Recruitment***

As mentioned, the next step in this research design was to establish the ways in which participants were recruited for this project. What happened first was that it was important to establish who the “perfect” participants would have been for this project. What was done was that the researcher used the social media platform, Facebook, to see if there were any groups or fan pages made that were dedicated to Electronic Music or that shared EDM related content. Once this step occurred, the next step was to gain access to these Facebook groups so that not only was the groups administrators were aware that this project was taking place, but to also ensure that the recruitment message was distributed to meet the time constraints of this research project. Only when the administrators of these groups allowed access of the group’s page and members, the message was published.

For this recruitment process to occur, it was based on two different factors. The first of which was to “check-in” on each group to see if the pages were active during the recruitment process. This was crucial as it made the researcher aware that these pages had potential participants to recruit and adhering to the timeframe of which this project was to be completed by. The second factor that was taken into consideration for the recruitment process to occur was based on how many members each Facebook group had. The initial goal was to use the groups that had a larger number of members, thus more room for potential participants to be recruited.

However, there was a back-up plan for the overall recruitment of this project. If these Facebook fan pages were inactive or shut down by the group's administrators, the plan was to recruit friends of friends and family members to see if they had interest in Electronic Music and its surrounding culture. When the Institutional Review Board application was created, not only was the initial plan to use Facebook described in this application, but this back-up plan of using texts or phone calls to recruit friends of friends or family members was also described. What was done in place of the recruitment message being distributed was that these friends of friends were asked if they were willing to participate, or at least read about, what this project's purpose was. From that point, if one of those friends of friends agreed to participate, they were sent the participant consent form that outlined the procedures for each interview and how their personal information remained confidential throughout the entire project's process. This plan was ultimately what saved this project from not having any participants to interview or ruining the project altogether. Regardless of which plan, or both, was utilized, the goal for this research project was to recruit twenty potential participants as that was the appropriate number of participants for saturation to be achieved.

### ***Recruitment Message***

The next step in this process was to create a recruitment message that not only informed potential participants of what this project was about, but it also provided the contact information of the researcher if there were questions about this process. One reason why this tool was important for the recruitment and data collection processes was that it emphasized that each potential participant's identity remained anonymous and that their personal information stayed confidential throughout the entirety of the project. This tool was also created to inform potential participants of how long each interview lasted, in this case between forty-five minutes to sixty.

This was noted on the message to ensure that these participants were dedicated to discussing EDM and its culture for that allotted amount of time.

## **Availability Of Data and Analysis**

### ***Availability***

After the recruitment message was created and participants were recruited and interviewed, the next step was that the availability of the data was addressed and analyzed. One factor that was taken into consideration when analyzing the data was how social media impacted the way in which participants were recruited. Since this project initially used Facebook as the means of recruitment, this plan came with pitfalls and benefits. One benefit of Facebook being used as the tool for recruitment was that the project became dependent on how many “fans” or group members these pages had, thus ensuring that saturation was achieved. Comparatively, a pitfall of the overall recruitment process was that the project was also dependent on how the recruitment message was distributed, which ended up delaying the time period of when these interviews occurred. This also came into effect when Facebook could no longer be used as a recruitment tool.

Another aspect regarding the availability of the data that was taken into consideration was how the Coronavirus pandemic impacted the ways in which these interviews occurred, and how many participants were recruited. One part of this impact was that participants used technology, such as Zoom, to participate in these interviews as they adhered to social distancing measures. However, this option also prevented participants from being involved in this project as technology has become a recent contributor to someone’s declining mental health. The last aspect that was taken into consideration when discussing the availability of the data was how results varied depending on how much information that participants were able to provide during

each interview. As mentioned, each interview intended on lasting forty-five minutes and no longer than sixty. Given this project's timeframe however, this made that difficult for the researcher to analyze the data as some interviews would have to be shortened in time. This also became an issue as it took some participants longer amounts of time to answer these more in-depth questions that anticipated. With the availability of data in mind, the next step in this process was to record the interviews and transcribe them for the coding process to begin.

### *Analyzing The Data*

Once the availability of the data was understood, the next step in this data collection process was that the data given to the researcher was analyzed. The data was analyzed in an easier way because of these written transcripts. From those transcripts, five distinct themes were able to be coded, which is explained further. Before the coding process began, it was important to note the data's sufficiency. The first step taken to ensure the data's validity was to employ a method developed by Creswell and Creswell known as "winnowing the data". Both Creswell and Creswell cited a piece (Guest, MacQueen, and Named, 2012), that described this trick as "a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it." (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 192)

This trick allowed two things to occur to let the data be coded properly and define the themes more accurately. What happened first was that the filtered questions that participants were first asked were "combed" essentially to see if any responses weren't needed for the purpose of the project. In this case, the data pertaining to the streaming service participants used to listen to EDM, where they listen to this genre, and favorite and least favorite Electronic Music tracks were winnowed away, leaving the majority the responses as the more important data that was coded for these themes.

## **Coding The Data & Themes**

The second thing that occurred once the data was winnowed was that it allowed the researcher focus on more of the unique aspects of each interview, and then start the overall coding process. Some of those aspects that were eventually coded into the five themes were answers pertaining to the participants' overall understanding of EDM Culture, the stereotypes that are associated with "Rave Culture", and what attracted them into this sub-culture.

After the data was winnowed to help define the themes more clearly, the last step that was taken to ensure the validity of the data was to actually develop the themes and give them a title and criteria so that the responses from participants could be categorized more accurately. This is where another principle from Creswell and Creswell was utilized in which they stated that, "Beyond identifying the themes during the coding process, qualitative researchers can do much with themes to build additional layers of complex analysis." (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 194) This was considered when developing these themes because some of the more in-depth responses were first addressed in the earlier parts of each interview. However, as mentioned, some information that the participants provided was disregarded.

### ***Themes***

Once the information that was winnowed away in the earlier stages of coding the data, there were five distinct themes that were defined. The first theme was coded based on how participants were first introduced to this genre and its surrounding culture, as they provided that answer to the question that who either introduced them to the genre or when they first discovered it themselves. This theme was also titled, "Welcome to My Party", which was a direct response from one participant who felt that once they got their friends into EDM, the "party" began. The second theme that was defined was coded based on a few factors. One of those factors focused

on how participants described the atmosphere of raves during these interviews. Additionally, this theme looked for responses from participants who described themselves as fully involved within the participatory nature of “Rave Culture”. This theme was then defined as, “Rave Ready”.

The next theme focused on one of the more intense topics of conversation during these interviews. This theme was coded based on the knowledge that participants had of certain stereotypes that “Rave Culture” is often associated with. The next aspect for coding this theme that the researcher looked at was to really see which participants knew the stereotypes that impacted the genre the most, such as drug use or the idea that Electronic Music “sounds the same”. Also, this theme coded the responses based on who was for bringing a positive change to the culture of EDM by shifting focus away from these negative connotations. For that reason, this theme was defined as, “The Not-So Stereotypical Raver”.

The fourth theme that made itself present during these interviews was coded based on two aspects. The first aspect looked at if these participants felt that Electronic Music impacted them in such a way, and the artists they listen to also add to that overall impact. The second aspect of coding this theme that was looked at was by determining how the music changed the overall perception or behaviors of participants, and if they were changed or motivated in any particular way. This is where the name, “EDM’s Impact”, was defined.

The fifth and final theme that was defined once the data was analyzed was focused on the mantra of Electronic Music that “Rave Culture” members follow religiously. This theme was coded based on how participants felt about this mantra, “P.L.U.R.”, and how it has impacted their lives. This theme looked for any mentions of this mantra or if any of the dialogue fit the overall theme of this portion of the discussion. Additionally, this theme was coded based on this self-expression ideology that was first defined in the Literature section of this project. For this

reason, this theme was ultimately titled after EDM's mantra, "P.L.U.R." After all five themes were coded and then defined, which are also discussed later on in this project, the next step in proving that this method of data collection ensured the validity of the data was to look at the apparent threats to validity and if they had an impact on how the interviews were conducted, what was said during each interview, and if the conversations impacted the entire research process.

### **Threats To Validity**

With any research design, it was important to determine what the threats to validity were when in-depth interviews were used as the method of data collection. Additionally, there were other threats to consider because this project involved qualitative research. With these threats, however, it was important to address them before they had any impact on the data, causing the results to get skewed.

One of these threats that was considered during the data collection process was by addressing how these interviews took place. Due to each interview being a unique and distinct conversation between the researcher and participant, there was always a threat of these conversations becoming one-sided. Because of that, this posed a threat to each interview causing the researcher to either rush each interview or miss important information that pertained to the project or theme that was being coded. Another distinct threat to validity that had to be considered was the level of participation shown from participants during their interviews.

This was important to consider as the participants were able to change the conversation at any time as well as choose which time and date worked best for them to be interviewed by the researcher. This is a threat that researchers have overlooked as the interviews are designed to be flexible in this way to make the participants feel comfortable. Additionally, participants were

also granted the opportunity to skip questions if they chose. This caused another issue as skipping multiple questions, if they chose, would have delayed the research process altogether.

The next threat to the validity of this research that was considered was the overall timeframe in which these interviews took place. The goal was for these interviews, with all recruited participants, to have taken place between March of 2021 and April of 2021. Due to other outside issues such as delays from the Institutional Review Board as well as specific quarantine measures, this resulted in a shortened timeframe. These factors also effected how participants were interviewed, whether that would take place over Zoom or a phone call. With this in mind, the Coronavirus pandemic itself was also a contributing threat to the validity of this method and the research project as a whole.

The last threat to validity that was considered when these in-depth interviews were being conducted was the sampling method itself. One of the reasons that the sampling method was considered a threat was that the two plans used to recruit participants was ultimately skewed due to the pandemic. With the pandemic causing these interviews to take place remotely, the Facebook recruitment plan seemed like the best plan of recruitment. However, this one group that was used proved to be inactive during the research project process. This also caused a lack of convenience as this study initially relied on social media, solely. Another reason why this sampling method, or plans, was considered a threat was due in part to the ethical issues that could have been faced if these participants were recruited directly off of Facebook. With the plan to use friends of friends and their family members as the backup recruitment plan, this was another threat as their availability was unknown.

Additionally, using friends of friends or family members would have presented a bias if close friends were used in place of these selected participants. When these threats were

considered, this then meant that all interviews were transcribed and recorded for the themes, as mentioned above, to be coded. The last step for the research design and data collection process to be understood by future researchers was to establish the overall role of the researcher. This section was also written so that future researchers are able to get an idea of what this researcher's passions were at the time of creating this study as well to reiterate what steps were taken in order to make sure that the project was following all the necessary steps needed to produce a quality qualitative research project.

### **Role Of The Researcher**

As mentioned above, the last step in the data collection process, as well as one of the last pieces of the entire research project, was to establish the role of the researcher within this project. One aspect of this section was that the reasons behind the creation of this research project was written in the section. Within that aspect, this is where the passion for Electronic Music that the researcher had, came into effect as well as the want for the researcher to have understood why people gravitate towards "Rave Culture".

Another aspect of this section is that the popularity of Electronic Music, according to its fans such as the researcher, is unmatched. The appreciation that these participants showed for the genre, as well as the parts of the culture that they assimilated with is what also motivated the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews for this topic. In-depth interviews as the method of data collection for this project was also important for the researcher to use as it helped not only the researcher have distinct and honest conversations with participants, but it also allowed the researcher to build upon this already established love for the genre and the traditions that the culture has created, including this mantra of "P.L.U.R."

When discussing the project's meaning to the researcher, there were a few ways that this project created an impact. One of those ways was that my appreciation for EDM, as noted above, was implemented into the project as it laid the groundwork for wanting to know more about this topic and "Rave Culture" in general. Plus, having a background in music production and being an active DJ since 2015, those passions also fueled this project. One of the other ways that this project implemented by feelings and attributions to EDM as a genre was that it taught the importance of culture, in general, and understand all of its intricacies. With this in mind, this project was also fueled by my initial discovery of the genre itself and "Rave Culture" later on in my life. This discovery occurred in 2011 after hearing music from artists such as Skrillex, who was a tour de force for Dubstep, bringing it into mainstream music as well as Avicii, the late powerhouse DJ and producer for the genre who captivated audiences with every song. The last aspect of the role of the researcher was that this project was created to provide a set of guidelines for people if they chose to continue researching Electronic Music. Not only this, but the hope is that this project will also be added to the existing research of Electronic Music, with the hope that this project has provided a unique approach to researching EDM and to research this topic again in the future.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The next portion of this research project focuses on the results of what occurred during the in-depth interviews. These results were surprising for a number of reasons. The reasons that the results of this study were surprising is due to the number of participants acquired for this study, as opposed to what was intended. Additionally, the timing of these interviews was another surprising outcome of this study. Also, the recruitment strategy was yet another surprising aspect about this study. Lastly, a reason why the results of this study were surprising was due in part to the amount of time each interview lasted.

### **Participants Acquired**

The first reason as to why the results from this study were surprising was that there a difference in the number of participants that this project ended up recruiting. Initially, this project aimed to recruit potential participants from Facebook fan-pages that centered around Electronic Music as well as recruit participants from friends of friends and or family members. These plans were established so that the desired number of participants, which was twenty, would be reached and interviewed between the beginning of March 2021 until the beginning of April 2021.

However, this desired number was not reached as only fourteen participants were recruited. This was due in part to the shortened timeframe for recruitment as well as the Facebook fan-page that was going to be used was inactive during the recruitment process. This shortened timeframe can also be attributed to the Institutional Review Board putting a pause on recruitment as modifications had to be made for the research application. Another reason as to why there were six less participants than anticipated, which will be further discussed, was due to the fact that some participants may not have been as die-hard fans of Electronic Music as the

researcher assumed. The next aspect of the results that is addressed in this section focuses on the timing of the timing of the interviews and what caused them to happen in the ways they did.

### **Participant Demographics**

Another important aspect to consider when discussing the results of this project is by looking at the demographics of the participants to see what commonalities are attributed to that. With these fourteen participants that were recruited, nine of them were male and the other five participants were female. Another important aspect of the demographics of these participants was the range of ages. Ten of the participants were college-aged, meaning between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. In terms of the other participants, three of them were either in some form of graduate school or just entering the workforce. This puts them between the ages of twenty-three to twenty-five. The final participant was aged twenty-eight who has been in the workforce for over five years. Another interesting demographic to note was that all participants, regardless of age, was that they were all from the Tri-State area, mainly New York and New Jersey. One participant was in Indiana when their interview was conducted but is also originally from New York. One of the participants, however, was from Connecticut.

There are some other aspects about these participants that are interesting to note. Four of the total participants are actually involved in DJing and music production, much like the researcher. This is important to note as these were some of the participants provided more insight on the emotional connections that Electronic Music creates for these fans as well as providing insight on the stereotypical aspects of Electronic Music and how those stereotypes should be eradicated. Another interesting aspect about these participants is that a majority of them use Spotify and SoundCloud for their preferred music consumption preferences. This was another interesting aspect to note about the participants as they informed the researcher that certain songs

or remixes of songs are found more on other streaming platforms rather than the internationally known ones such as Apple Music or Spotify. One last aspect about these participants that was considered when looking at the demographics of each participant was the noticing the energy level of each participant. This was an interesting aspect to look at as these interviews took place over the phone, so body language and facial expressions were impossible to read. However, the tone of voice and energy level was able to be determined as excited, as each participant was happy to provide their selective insights and seemed to enjoy each conversation as there were parts in each interview where the participant and researcher would crack a joke or two, which made the experience of these interviews more enjoyable to conduct.

### **Timeframe & Questions**

The next aspect of these results that have to be addressed is that the timing of these interviews, and when they took place, were altered. This was a surprising result because the initial goal was to have these interviews take place over the span of one month (March 2021 to April 2021). This timeframe was established as it felt the most manageable for these interviews to not only occur, but for each of them to be audio-recorded and transcribed for the themes, which are further discussed, to be defined. With this in mind, the intended timeframe as mentioned was cut short due to the modifications that had to be made to the Institutional Review Board's application for this research project to take place. What ended up happening, due to this minor delay, was that these interviews took place from the middle of March 2021 and ending at the original deadline of April 2021. This roughly two-week timeframe also caused the results to be skewed when discussing the length of each interview and what questions were asked during each one.

The next portion of the results that were surprising is broken up into two parts. The first part of these results that was surprising was that the amount of time each interview was intended on lasting was cut short. On one hand, these interviews were supposed to take place between March of 2021 and end at the beginning of April of 2021. Due in part to the Institutional Review Board delaying the overall recruitment process, the timeframe was essentially cut in half. This also caused each interview to last less than forty-five minutes, which was the initial amount of time that each interview was supposed to last. With these fourteen interviews, only one of them lasted the full forty-five minutes. The second longest interviews lasted thirty minutes in length and this happened for three participants. The other ten participants had interviews lasting between twenty-five to thirty minutes in length.

Aside from these interviews lasting different amounts of time, the second part of this result focuses on the questions that were being asked during each interview. As mentioned, each interview started with seven “filter” questions. This was done to gauge the participants’ overall interest in the topic and if they were considered a valuable participant. Interestingly enough, all participants were able to answer these questions. However, these questions were answered rather quickly, which allotted more time to discuss the more in-depth questions that participants responded to. This also meant the participants may have wanted to end the interviews earlier than anticipated or that they were unsure of what the question was asking.

What was interesting about all the questions that were asked during the entire interview process was that they were easily worded so participants had no trouble trying to understand the question for blindly answering. Comparatively, participants seemed to have trouble when answering the more in-depth questions and taking a longer time to answer each of them. This ultimately dragged out the entire interview process for some participants. This may have been

the result from the fact that the questions being asked were either too difficult to give a clear answer to or that the participants knew how to respond to these questions but chose to take longer to answer to speed up the interview times. These in-depth questions also caused the interviews to get side-tracked, which made the researcher rephrase the initial questions that were being asked. More importantly, this actually made the interviews easier to transcribe once these interviews were recorded as participants were able to clearly answer each question.

After taking the shortened timeframe and the questions that were asked into account, there were two other aspects about these answers that were brought about. One of these aspects was that shorter answers are considered sufficient with other research designs. However, with this project being a qualitative research study, the shorter answers that participants gave ended up negatively impacting these results, causing some of those answers to be winnowed during the coding process. However, this second aspect points out that while it was easier for the researcher to transcribe these shorter answers, the overall research project does not benefit from sometimes one-word or two-word answers. This ultimately threatened the validity of the research project as a whole.

### **Recruitment Strategy**

The last part of the overall results that needs to be addressed had to do with the recruitment strategy that the researcher established prior to these interviews being conducted. As mentioned, all fourteen participants were recruited and read the same Informed Consent form that was sent out after they agreed to participate. However, none of the participants that were recruited were members of the Facebook fan pages. This is also a surprising result considering the fact that the desired Facebook group that was going to be used as the main recruitment source was inactive during the recruitment process. This is also why the backup plan of recruiting

friends of friends and family members was used. These participants while using the backup plan were recruited using Facebook Messenger, Snapchat Messaging as well as texting and phone calls.

Another aspect that contributed to the results of the recruitment strategy was the two-to-three-week timeframe in which these interviews took place during. Aside from the delay of approval from the Institutional Review Board, the Coronavirus pandemic also caused each interview to take place remotely. This also meant that using Zoom was the next best option. These meetings also had the potential to be recorded, which would have helped the transcription process. However, these interviews were conducted using phone calls as Zoom gave the researcher the option to have meetings last up to forty minutes. These phone calls ended up being the best mechanism for these interviews as they established a level of comfortability for the participant, but also protected their anonymity.

Another positive aspect about these phone calls was that they were able to last longer than forty minutes, unlike Zoom. However, as mentioned, only one interview or phone call lasted forty-five minutes, which was what each call or interview should have lasted until. The last aspect regarding the recruitment strategy that was surprising was that the backup recruitment strategy ended up being the best way of interviewing participants. Once these interviews were completed, participants were also encouraged to tell friends about this research study if they were passionate about Electronic Music and “Rave Culture”.

One last aspect about the change in recruitment that was surprising was how easier it was to keep track of who was being recruited and where these audio files were kept. As these interviews were conducted over the phone, they were audio-recorded on a laptop voice-memo application. This application also gave the researcher the ability to see the timestamp of when

these interviews took place and how long they lasted. Interestingly enough, these interviews mainly occurred during the first week or so of April, and with multiple interviews occurring the same day. Once these participants were recruited and these results were analyzed, the next step for providing insight into answering the overall research question was to establish these themes that were defined from the answers given by the participants. Not only did these participants define the themes during each interview, but these themes were also coded based on the certain criteria described in the Research Design section of this project.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Theme #1: “Welcome to My Party”

In previous sections, it was noted that each in-depth interview was not only audio-recorded but transcribed as well. These transcriptions were also coded based on the criteria described in the Research Design chapter of this project. These themes that were defined from the responses of the participants have provided insight as to what makes the culture that surrounds Electronic Music so attractive, from the perspectives of each participant. This first theme was coded based on the following criteria. This theme was coded based on how participants were first introduced to Electronic Music, and if they were the ones who introduced their friends and family to the genre as well. This theme was also coded based the feelings each participant described or expressed how this music makes and allows them to feel.

Before delving into how participants responded to these questions posed to them, it is also important to recognize how the perspectives of the participants differ from what was described in the Literature Review chapter of this project. As described in that chapter, research on Electronic Music focused heavily on the negative aspects of what is now considered “Rave Culture”. Regarding how participants were first introduced to this genre, however, researcher Graham St. John had a similar experience after attending a rave for the first time. This piece of literature, as previously cited, described that there was a wave of change happening within “Rave Culture” from how people are introduced to the genre and how the genre is becoming a more mainstream genre. St. John states that, “There are signs that the forms of acceptance, admission and legitimacy mentioned are converging... This speaks to the formation of cultures in which academics play a keen role, as practitioners, brokers, critics, teachers, etc.,” (St. John, 2013). What’s interesting about St. John’s statement here is that he, like other Electronic Music fans,

was “awakened” after first hearing EDM at this rave he attended, instantly becoming a fan of the music and its surrounding culture almost overnight. This is important to consider as prior research only focused on the negative or more stereotypical aspects of “Rave Culture”, which are discussed in another theme. However, St. John’s newfound appreciation for Electronic Music was similar to how the participants were first introduced as the genre gave them the same level of joy that St. John felt. This, among other feelings, was also made clear during each interview.

With this in mind, participants were asked two specific questions that helped give the researcher an idea of how participants were introduced to EDM and “Rave Culture”. This first question asked participants what initially got them into listening to EDM. The next question in relation to this theme asked participants about the overall feeling they got when they were the ones who may have introduced close family and friends to Electronic Music. What’s interesting about these specific questions was that each of the fourteen participants were able to answer these questions. Additionally, when these two questions were asked, it was made clear that this music made an overall impact in each participant’s life given how each of them responded to these questions. This theme is also based on the feelings that participants felt every time they listen to this genre.

While each participant was able to answer both of these questions regarding their introductions to Electronic Music, there were a small number of participants whose responses were more insightful than the rest of them. For example, one college-aged participant who’s attended multiple Electronic Music festivals, as they claimed, described that when they listen to the genre, they stated that, “I feel like I’m at a peak in my life like having fun and having the distraction to forget and have me time is what makes some want to experience a rave or the music live.” This feeling that this particular participant felt is important to note as they strongly

feel that people are able to connect to this music, which is why the genre brought them so much joy when they first discovered it. This participant continued on by stating, “Music allows us to connect with people who love these songs and artists.” These two statements that this participant provided are unique as they were initially a casual listener of the genre, before having a friend introduce them to the genre and its “traditions”.

Another important aspect about this participant is that they were one of two, out of the total fourteen participants, who express true joy when not only listening to Electronic Music but showing friends the genre as well. The other participant that expresses true joy from showing their friends and family this genre was the twenty-eight-year-old participant who has a passion for the earlier years of Electronic Music. This participant also shared that when they are responsible for introducing this genre to their friends and they end up becoming a fan, they used this quote, “Welcome to My Party,” to describe that feeling. This is also the reason as to why this theme is titled after this participant’s quote.

In addition to how these participants were introduced to the genre and the joy they got when introducing other people to Electronic Music, the last aspect of this theme is based on the overall feelings that the genre of EDM gives our participants. When tying in research to this portion of the theme, researcher Mark Changizi’s literature focused on how music, in general, can make people feel. “The simple moral is that the emotions of music are “cross-modal,” and can easily spread from sensory system to another.” (Changizi, 2009) This piece of research, as cited in the Literature Review chapter, ties into this theme as Electronic Music has the ability to transcend that feeling for the individual, thus elevating the overall listening experience. Additionally, this piece of literature is similar to the in which participants responded to these questions about how Electronic Music makes them feel because this genre can transcend

emotions. “Music is exquisitely emotionally evocative, which is why a touch of happy music makes even unrelated pictures seem more pleasant.” (Changizi, 2009)

When discussing how participants’ feel about the genre itself, it was interesting to hear one participant’s insight on the overall feelings that Electronic Music can give someone. This participant described that whether someone was a casual fan of the genre or fully involved with “Rave Culture”, they stated that, “Everyone has the EDM “bug”, but they don’t realize it yet. I think it’ll become universally adopted whether people realize it or not.” In addition to this insight from this participant, another one described this feeling of the genre and introducing their friends and family to the genre by creating music mixes for them. This participant when describing that feeling stated, “...it got me thinking that the joy I give people with putting tracks in a certain way is something so cool.”

Aside from these insights, other participants responded to this question with one-worded answers. One participant simply stated that Electronic Music makes them feel, “happy”. One of the other responses to note was the feeling one participant got when first hearing the genre and wanting to share it with everyone they knew. This participant stated that “I loved the feeling it gave me and I wanted more of that I guess.” This was an interesting response to address because even when this participant was listening to the music, they still wanted to find more music of the same genre or from different sub-genres that allowed them to express that particular emotion more often. After this theme was coded and defined from each participant’s responses, the next theme that was defined focused on what occurs at these raves and how people attend them.

## **Theme #2: “Rave Ready”**

This next theme that was defined from the transcriptions of each participant’s interviews was coded on the criteria described in the Research Design chapter of this project. One criterion

was that the responses had to focus on the overall atmosphere of raves. Secondly, this theme was also coded on how participants described what happens at these festivals and what to expect, including their level of participation in “Rave Culture” traditions. There was one surprising aspect about this theme that has to be addressed before discussing the responses from the participants. This factor was that all fourteen participants were familiar with raves, yet only four of these participants attend these raves or festivals and fully participate in “Rave Culture”. Comparatively, these other ten participants who haven’t attended these events are also not opposed to buying tickets for a concert or attending a rave.

Before getting into these responses of what makes people, “Rave Ready”, which is what this theme is titled, it is important to note how past research describes how many Electronic Music shows exist and what happens at these raves. As previously cited, researcher Abigail Lehner from the University of New Hampshire discusses how these raves or festivals can vary in size. Additionally, Lehner discusses how these festivals are not only localized within the United States. “Many of these events are well known, such as Tomorrowland, Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC), Electric Zoo, ULTRA, and many more worldwide, reoccurring festivals.” (Lehner, 2018, p. 24)

What is interesting about this piece of research is that the participants attend more localized and smaller scale shows rather than these massive shows. Only one participant described attending the Electric Zoo festival, which occurs in the summer on Randall’s Island in New York City. Additionally, Lehner’s research here suggests that these DJs or artists perform in small settings more often than not as it creates a unique experience for an EDM fan. Lehner continues on to say that “There are hundreds of venues and events, specifically aimed at the EDM lovers since its community has expanded so drastically throughout the years.” (Lehner,

2018, p. 24) Another important aspect to compare the responses of the participants to is in reference to the attire, or more traditional ways that people embody “Rave Culture”. Lehner continues on to say that “The colorful craze of rave culture was one of the fashion trends that developed into one of the most important elements of rave culture, along with the ever-evolving progression of its music style.” (Lehner, 2018, p. 23) This trend or “craze” that Lehner discusses is interesting as participants noted that they, for the most part, do not dress in these colorful clothes or wear specific outfits. Those outfits are attributed to the stereotypical side of EDM, which is discussed later in this chapter.

When discussing how participants responded to questions pertaining to being “Rave Ready”, there were some interesting responses. As noted earlier in this section, the majority of the participants are familiar with raves or the festivals that Lehner described above, yet they have never attended events like raves or EDM-centered shows. Another interesting portion of the responses were brought about when participants were asked how to describe what they see at these raves or festivals. This included factors such as the stage setup, the crowds of people as well as apparent drug use. As far as discussing the crowds of people at these events, participants were asked what the attire of raves looked like.

One of the participant’s response to this question backs up Lehner’s research. This participant stated that, “...I didn’t necessarily dress crazy but I’d dress that way because everyone does it. We’d wear neon, short-shorts, glitter, and face-paint. I wore a glow-in-the-dark swimsuit. It’s to be comfortable and it’s really hot and you don’t want to overheat but also for the fashion and fun of people being crazy.” While this may not seem like an abnormal thing to wear from an outsider’s perspective, many of these outdoor concerts or festivals take place in

warmer weather, mainly the summer. This is why the participant above discussed how shorter and lighter clothing was recommended.

Surprisingly, another participant's response to this same question actually contradicts Lehner's research. This other participant described their attire for raves as antithesis of the neon, colorful clothing that Lehner described above. Aside from this "antithesis", another participant when asked the same question described something unique. This participant when DJing themselves emulates the fashion-sense of world-renowned DJ and producer Martin Garrix. This participant claimed that "When I look at the clothing, like Martin Garrix wears all black with white sneakers. That's the look I go for with my live performances but it's kind of hard to keep track of it now."

In addition to how, clothing wise, participants are "Rave Ready", another aspect that was defined by participants focuses on how they best described "Rave Culture" to an outsider, or out-groups. One participant, when asked about their own rave experience, stated that "The scene could be described as a lot of people dancing and a lot of crowds, and a sweaty environment. I'd definitely describe it as sweaty. I find it gross but when you leave the raves, you really can't believe you were in that atmosphere. Like, "I can't believe I just did that." This was an interesting response as it contrasts from what St. John described during their experience attending a rave, calling it "godless" and or "twisted". This was also a surprising response to hear because of how often people voluntarily choose to attend these shows where thousands of people crowd together to enjoy a particular DJ's set or concert.

One particular element to point out when discussing how people dress for raves or what the atmosphere is like, there are traditional aspects to "Rave Culture" that add to this overall theme. The one aspect that the participants were familiar with was the beaded bracelets that

festival goers wear, known as “Kandi”. Going back to the Literature chapter, Lehner again describes this crucial aspect of “Rave Culture”, saying that these bracelets “soon became a signature token to be exchanged amongst new friends within the rave culture.” (Lehner, 2018) To back up this research, participants described “Kandi” as a way to create a bonding experience with fellow festival goers. When one participant was asked about what “Kandi” was, they answered, [it’s]“...like little beaded bracelets and you can write anything in them and you can trade them with people during the show and there’s a special hand movement that goes with the trade and allows people to be closer together...when I look down at my “Kandi” I always remember the person I traded it with.”

This aspect of “Rave Culture” is unique because it shows that these festival goers will wear anything that not only makes them feel comfortable or avoid overheating in the summer during these outdoor shows, but to also create a connection with other EDM fans. More importantly, it is important to recognize, in this instance, that there is a massive amount of these fans, so much so that some of these shows attract up to 500,000 people, all there to fulfill their “fix” for Electronic Music. The last aspect about this theme that has to be addressed is understanding the perspectives of participants who consider themselves, “Rave Ready”, but have never attended a show, as mentioned at the beginning of this section. Interestingly enough, the other participants who have been unable to attend one have actually spoken more highly of it than those who have been prior to being interviewed.

One participant, when asked if they’ve been to a rave or plan on attending, they answered, “No, but if I was to go see someone, aside from wanting to go to Burning Man, it would be at Electric Forest. It’s just a forest and there’s a lot going on. It’s like you go there for a weekend and it’s just multiple music genres and it’s a big event....I would love to walk around

and explore and hear some true EDM music.” While this section shows that there are many positive aspects about the rave culture, this leads into the next theme as to how stereotypes are portrayed in EDM.

### **Theme #3: “The Not-So Stereotypical Raver”**

#### ***Ecstasy & Rave Culture***

This next theme here that was defined by participants after each transcription was coded focuses on the opinions and reflections of the stereotypes that EDM fans and aspects of “Rave Culture” are associated with. When coding this theme, however, there were certain things that were considered. One aspect was that this theme was coded based on what stereotypes each participant had prior knowledge of leading up to these interviews. In addition to having a prior knowledge of these stereotypes, this theme was coded on how well-versed participants were on the overarching stereotypes of “Rave Culture” such as drug use or that every song within the genre “sounds the same”. The last way that this theme was coded was that responses had to have provided insight on how people within “Rave Culture” can bring a positive change to the culture of EDM by shifting focus away from these negative connotations. For that reason, this theme was defined as, “The Not-So Stereotypical Raver”. Additionally, this theme was one of the most common themes present out of the five themes that were defined by each participant.

Before discussing how participants responded to the questions that discussed these stereotypes, it is important to note how much prior research influenced the participants’ thoughts on certain stereotypes. An example of prior research that impacted the ways in which participants discovered what stereotypes are associated with Electronic Music and its culture comes from Phillip Kavanaugh and Tammy Anderson’s study that was cited in the Literature chapter of this project. This joint study cited a past study (Drug Abuse Warning Network

(DAWN), 2003) that described that there was an apparent use of the hallucinogen, Ecstasy, and how its use led to what the researchers considered to be an alarming rate of emergency services being used during the early years of “Rave Culture”. The joint study, in that regard, noted that, “Between 1995 and 2002, there was an 856 percent increase in the number of emergency department visits associated with ecstasy in the United States (DAWN 2003).” (Anderson and Kavanaugh, 2008) What’s interesting about this research, as alarming as it sounds, was that the excessive use of Ecstasy at raves they discuss has yet to be concluded. This joint study also cited sources (Bolla, McCann, and Ricaurte, 1998) that supports this idea that there is still inconclusive data that contributed to Ecstasy use at these raves. This study added, “While the effects of long-term ecstasy use have not been conclusively established, some research indicates the effects are similar to that of amphetamines, such as cocaine, and include memory loss and severe, chronic depression.” (Anderson and Kavanaugh, 2008)

What’s very interesting about these two studies that Anderson and Kavanaugh cite in their research is that there is no explanation as to why there was a crackdown of Ecstasy use at raves to protect children. More importantly, these festivals were not, at the time, designed for children to attend as they took place in warehouses or other discreet locations, or even outdoor settings where children could be separated from families. However, tying in the political concerns of Ecstasy use to this stereotype, researcher Troy Glover’s study suggested that there’s a heavy focus on raising awareness of the use of Ecstasy, including other substances, at these raves. “Given the recent interest in raves by municipal officials across North America, my intent here is to explore the various policy alternatives that government might consider in response to rave culture and the “threat” of Ecstasy on youth.” (Glover, 2013, p. 309) While it was beneficial for these researchers to provide this information on the harmful effects of Ecstasy use, and other

substances, these results of their collective studies are the opposite of how the newfound “Rave Culture” perceives drug use at raves or festivals. Additionally, members of “Rave Culture” feel that these stereotypes have not only created a negative impact on the genre, but on the members themselves as a small minority of festival goers partake in recreational drug use.

With these studies in mind, participants were then asked to identify what they felt some of the stereotypes of Electronic Music were. Surprisingly, all participants noted that drug use, as mentioned, was the most commonly associated stereotype. When discussing this particular stereotype, participants had some interesting answers during this portion of the conversation. One participant noted that drug use at raves for them, “...became a known stereotype in high school. Everyone who’d go to these festivals would just talk about that.” This is surprising considering how this participant recognized this stereotype when they were younger and they still recall how common this stereotype actually is. Another participant when asked about raves and their relationship with drug use, responded by saying “...I show my friends the people dancing to EDM at these festivals, they always go like “Oh there’s not a single sober person there”...it’s just another opportunity for them to take these drugs.”

Similarly, other participants were also made aware of these stereotypes before exiting high school. Another participant answered this question about this stereotype by saying that they are “...not the kind of person who can party all day. I don’t have the tolerance. But I’m also not willing to take drugs and the crowds.” This was a common answer amongst the other participants. Additionally, another participant added to this dialogue by stating that “I know a common misconception is that everyone is there to do drugs, and I’ve never done any festival drugs but I do love the festivals.”

With these two participants describing the more negative side of drug use at these events, other participants chose to advocate for debunking this stereotype. One participant responded when asked about why these hallucinogens are taken by people at these raves, by saying "...in retrospect, people like taking them because it makes them feel like they're inside themselves and it elevates their experience...I think the right amount is okay but I don't think people should be abusing them just to go to these things or going to these places just to abuse them." This participant's response to this question was an interesting take as it shows that there is room for educating people on the positive aspects of "Rave Culture", such as saying that many of those who attend these events do not have the need or overall desire to use these drugs as they can enjoy the experience without using narcotics to amplify it.

Another participant took a similar approach when answering this question by noting the small number of festival goers that actually use these drugs recreationally. This participant, who considered themselves as a more involved member of "Rave Culture" answered this question about drug use at raves by saying that "A lot of people don't think that the fact that a rave means—they associate it with drugs often and this is something—I read that 1 of 4 people do drugs, but there are people who go to just get messed up. These responses from these participants were interesting as while they themselves would not use any substance at these festivals, they also show no judgment to people who choose to use them.

In addition to the participants agreeing that drug use is still considered an apparent and harmful stereotype of "Rave Culture", there is also a constant effort to eradicate this stereotype made by members of the Electronic Music community. In regard to breaking this stereotype, one participant replied, "...the stereotype should be broken and as it becomes more popular, it will become very easy to break that stereotype and appreciate the genre." Another participant also

spoke about appreciating the genre rather than focusing on this stereotype by saying “The real EDM community are fully sober and to enjoy the music”. One last remark that a participant made about defending “Rave Culture” in this way stated that, “The reputation it often gets comes from people who experiment with drugs and there’s so much more to the scene from what I experienced.” The next portion of this section focuses on another stereotype that participants addressed but was less common than drug use at raves.

### ***Electronic Music & Ambition***

The second stereotype that was addressed, but less common than the drug use that occurs at raves, was that those who engage with “Rave Culture” tend to be more laid-back and live a modest lifestyle. This is interesting as prior research has never tackled this part of “Rave Culture”. This also shows again that EDM and its culture is understudied altogether. Another surprising factor about this stereotype is that this can be attributed to fans of other genres of music. One participant when asked about this laid-back mentality of EDM fans, replied by saying that “I feel like people who don’t or do listen to it, they think the consumers are party animals and don’t have ambition or drive and just want to have a good time.”

This was an interesting assumption made by the participant as they described that there is an actual purpose to attending raves, but it also goes against this idea that there is a lack of ambition amongst EDM fans. They added, “In a sense, that’s the whole purpose to absorb the moment but the stereotype isn’t true because there are successful people who probably listen to this music.” This is also an interesting take as another participant’s response adds to this context of “living in the moment”. They replied, “...in my opinion, almost it makes me feel like it’s for people that party or those who don’t care about much else or self-progress. It’s not true but it’s a self-conscious thought.” These statements from multiple participants are interesting as they both

seem like an internal idea or assumption these participants have made prior to each interview, but also feel this way about fans of Electronic Music subconsciously. The last aspect about the lack of ambition amongst EDM fans was surprising to hear from participants.

Some of the participants described that other outside media, including film and television, are at fault for instilling this assumption, and the other known stereotypes about EDM, in the zeitgeist of society. More importantly, those who exist outside of “Rave Culture” have created an inaccurate depiction of this culture as they have never experienced a rave or listen to this genre in general. One participant, who was cited earlier in this project, described the reason as to why they felt that other media is to blame for establishing these false assumptions. This participant noted, “EDM is portrayed in movies that have Spring Breaks and the ways it’s portrayed is that it’s for partying. Not just for the audio but the visual media out there makes it appear that that’s how it is to people and how the culture is portrayed.” This response is peculiar as there is a lack of awareness for content that focuses on the positive aspects of “Rave Culture”. With this in mind, this leads to the fourth theme that these interviews have been able to define.

#### **Theme #4: EDM’s Impact**

This theme, and the fourth, that has been defined by the responses from the participants describes the overall impact that Electronic Music has made on each participant. This theme was coded in the following ways. The first way that this theme was coded was by looking at how Electronic Music fans made them feel and if the artists they listen to added to that overall impact. The other way that this theme was coded was by looking at the way participants felt about how this genre changed certain aspects of their lives and if the surrounding culture also added to that change in any way. Regarding this first way that this theme was coded, one participant when asked how they felt EDM had impacted them in any way, they responded by saying, “...it made

an impact because if I'm having a bad day, I'll listen to this playlist and it makes me forget. It's not like a regular song, you're listening and feeling it and feel every part of the song. You're in the music and it's inside you." This response is unique as it ties back to this emotional connection that music can have on someone. Additionally, this also shows that someone can attach an emotional connection to any song and impact a person, even if it was technologically made.

In addition to how this genre has impacted the way that it makes the participants feel, others suggested that the variety of music that the overall genre of EDM has is what impacted them, which allowed some participants to broaden their music consumption. One participant in relation to this idea stated that "...listening to EDM as a genre has allowed me to explore the genre and other mainstream genres as well." Participants also noted that this music, aside from allowing them to explore other genres, actually encouraged one of the participants to get more active and create a more positive change each day. When asked about this notion, they replied, "My body doesn't let me simmer down when I hear this music. Like if I'm starting to feel lazy or like I'm not doing my work, EDM will like motivate me...It makes me want to do something besides lay around. It's like a self-realization." Another participant also described the impact EDM had on their life as a "realization" as well. This participant, when talking about this "realization" replied by saying "... it was a very life-changing thing for me when I heard it—it hits different hearing it live and within a large community of people and experiencing that made me realize what true peace and happiness it."

### ***EDM Artists and Their Impact***

Another aspect of this overall theme that was brought about from participants was that these Electronic Music artists are responsible in part for creating this impact as well. When asked

about how artists have made this impact within EDM culture, participants spoke about what they would say if they were given the opportunity to speak to a favorite artist or DJ of theirs. One participant's touching response stated, "I would just thank them for giving me life and giving me something to wake up in the morning for. And to thank them for teaching and me and giving me the music what it has. It taught me perspective and has done a lot for me."

What's important to note about this portion of this theme is that the artists do in fact play a major role in creating this impact as they not only create the music for fans to listen to, but also produce music for other genres, which allows these fans to broaden their music taste. When discussing EDM, however, one participant noted that this genre has "...given me a lot to listen to over the years and a lot of positive vibes. It's feel-good related." In addition to these "vibes" that this participant felt, another suggested that this genre impacted their memories as they attributed certain life events with these songs. This participant replied by saying, "I would say thank you for the memories and all the good times that your songs have given me and my friends." The fact that this participant discussed this idea about creating memories of these raves with friends speaks back to this community aspect that the current EDM community is trying to push, and push against these opposing stereotypes as mentioned prior.

This section of this theme focuses on a more internal aspect of the impact of EDM. As mentioned, participants felt that this genre has allowed them to change their lives in various ways. One of those ways was by pulling participants out of mentally difficult times for some participants. One participant who suggested this stated that "A lot of songs have those messages and it's very positive and it helped get through some hard times. There were times I'd be truly down and EDM brought me back out." Aside from pulling participants out of a difficult time in their lives, other suggested that EDM acted as a distraction from "real life". One participant

added to this idea saying that they would thank EDM and all the artists for "...providing an escape and distraction for people to just live the life they're living. Artists may not realize the impact they've made on many people, including me." Similarly, another participant added to this conversation by saying that they would thank artists and the genre for "...saving somebody's life. Like thank for literally saving my everything."

### ***EDM's Impact on Community***

The last aspect of this theme, which makes this also one of the more common ones presented throughout this project, was that there was a highlighted sense of community that included EDM artists and fans. This community aspect is also emphasized when one participant noted how much of an impact the EDM community and artists alike are leaving on the world. They went on to say thanks for "...revolutionizing the world and dropping music for people to hear this message and spread whatever message you're spreading. Thank you for being true to your character and not being someone else. Thanks for being true to who you are." Other participants who considered themselves more involved with EDM culture also provided insight into how this community aspect impacts fans of EDM. One participant stated that "The community and the way everyone acts with each other has taught me so much about giving and being a nice person and being positive and what it means to be happy for me. It changed my outlook."

Another aspect of this portion of this overall theme was that there was a huge sense of EDM's established mantra, "P.L.U.R.", which is discussed in the next theme. However, this same participant cited above described the community aspect of EDM saying that "Everyone is welcoming and willing to be a friend." This response was important to add in this section as prior research has yet to recognize and study the impact that Electronic Music has made up to this

point, and that scholars are not aware that the rave scene and elements of “Rave Culture” have drifted away from secrecy and has grown into a popular music genre on its own.

#### **Theme #5: P.L.U.R.**

The last theme that was defined by the participants focuses on the central mantra or motto that the current rave community uses, known as “P.L.U.R.”. This mantra stands for Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect, which can be attributed to why the new “Rave Culture” emphasizes a more positive outlook of life and the music. This theme, however, was coded based on the following factors. The first factor focused on how any of the dialogue from the participants fit within the overall idea of “P.L.U.R.”. This theme was also coded based on what participants responded to when asked about the self-expression ideology that surrounds Electronic Music, and this ideology that was first defined in the Literature chapter of this project.

Before understanding what participants had to say about “P.L.U.R.”, it is important to note some research that centers around this mantra. More importantly, understanding this mantra also shifts focus on the more positive aspects of Electronic Music that should be focused on more, rather than stereotypes such drug use and or the lack of ambition. Researcher Laura Villalobos discussed how “P.L.U.R.” was initially created during the early years of EDM when it was on the rise to popularity in the 1980s. This mantra, and genre included, has now erupted thanks to the variety of artists that produce Electronic Music but also for the creation of these sub-genres. Regarding the resurgence of this mantra, Villalobos states that, “The four pillars behind P.L.U.R. are incorporated as standards on how to behave at raves and have transgressed to also define how the culture should treat interpersonal relationships,” (Villalobos, 2015, p. 1).

An interesting part of this theme to discuss is this idea of community being established within “Rave Culture”. Participants during this portion of the interview expressed that there is a

more positive approach to get people more involved in “Rave Culture”, and also wanting to create a tighter sense of community within that culture. This idea that was discussed by participants is similar in which the way that this mantra, as described by Villalobos, should be a guide to how people treat each other. Comparatively, prior research only focused on excessive drug use and or instances of violence within a small population of festival attendees. Regarding “P.L.U.R.” however, Villalobos also states that, “This acronym is not only supposed to represent a standard on how ravers should behave and treat one another during a dance event, but in most cases transcends to also become a life philosophy.” (Villalobos, 2015, p. 10)

Regarding this idea of treating people with respect at other events is common sense, however this communal aspect is what separates other genres from EDM, according to participants. When asked about what people outside of the EDM community think of “P.L.U.R.”, one participant replied, “They think the rituals are cheesy such as sharing “Kandi” or sharing bracelets and all the crazy outfits.” This is an odd aspect of wanting a community within a genre of music because there seems to be this duality between the rave community and those on the outside of it. In other words, those outside of the EDM community seem to have negative interpretations about this mantra and music but aren’t exposed to the community enough to understand the importance of this music for some people. This same participant continued their statement by adding, “People think it’s often out of attention but don’t understand the extent of what the community provides and what PLUR means.” This is an important aspect to consider because those who are more involved with the current “Rave Culture” are always taken aback by all the negative connotations made from people outside of the EDM community.

When discussing the more positive side of wanting a community within “Rave Culture”, those who are more involved in it strongly believe that there should be an established level of

respect for people and a sense of community. In this regard, one participant noted that “P.L.U.R.” is always applied at these festivals and should also be applied to every-day life scenarios. This participant stated, “It’s a great environment and created unique ways to spread PLUR. It’s a great community.” Other participants who are less involved with “Rave Culture” also provided some positive insight on this matter. One participant when talking about the ways in which the EDM community and the music can make a person feel, they stated that, “Once you put on little clothing and the glitter, you feel like brand new...you can take on the world. The liberty it comes with...It’s a feeling of freedom and independence.”

### ***The U&G Theory and the EDM Community***

While analyzing the positive aspects of “Rave Culture” and participants wanting a positive environment or community to be a part of, this idea can be traced back and compared to the way in which the Uses and Gratifications Theory ties into “P.L.U.R.”. When comparing this theory to “P.L.U.R.”, one part of this theory that can be attributed to the EDM community is known as “Interactivity”. Research Thomas Ruggiero, as previously cited, cites a source (Ha and James, 1998) in which this idea of “Interactivity” plays a key role in the overall Uses and Gratifications Theory, as it deals with media consumption. This piece of research, when discussing media consumption, claimed that “Playfulness, choice, and connectedness were viewed as lower levels of interactivity.” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 15)

This is important to note when talking about “Rave Culture” as participants expressed how they wanted to establish a sense of “connectedness” within the EDM community, much like how media consumption establishes a level of “connectedness” within this previous study (Ha and James, 1998). Another additional aspect about how this mantra ties into the Uses and Gratifications Theory actually comes from one of the pillars of “P.L.U.R.”. As participants have

expressed, there is an over-arching sense for unity or community within “Rave Culture”. Oddly enough, the “U” within “P.L.U.R”, as mentioned, stands for Unity. In a similar way, this theory relates to this “Unity” aspect because the EDM community is the “use” for someone who is missing a sense of belonging. This becomes gratified for the person when said community welcomes them as active members or allows them to express themselves freely and connect to the music more.

### ***The Impact of “P.L.U.R.”***

The last aspect of this theme focuses on how participants felt about this new mantra and what they felt in regard to “P.L.U.R” receiving varying forms of backlash. This is an interesting aspect to discuss as those who are more involved with “Rave Culture” are aware of the backlash that the EDM community receives. These members are also aware that members within the EDM community, artists included, also receive some form of backlash. However, those within the entirety of the EDM community care more for the experience and feelings that this genre gives people and how it impacts their lives. When asked about how participants react when met with backlash for either enjoying Electronic Music or participating in “Rave Culture” traditions, they actually don’t care for the opinions of others, as long as their happiness isn’t affected.

This participant, when asked about this perceived backlash, stated that “...I don’t really care though, I don’t think about it. I don’t give it a second thought. I’ll go to the festival to enjoy it if I want to. I don’t need someone else’s opinion to sway my decision into doing something that I enjoy.” This shows that these participants, much like other “Rave Culture” members suggest that what matters is that they attend raves or festivals for the overall experience and put the opinions of others behind them. This last theme also showed that when discussing this mantra of “P.L.U.R”, the EDM community is attractive for people as it is almost a law that members

follow where kindness and unity are at the core of this community, while enjoying music to dance to and connect with overall.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Electronic Dance Music, more commonly known as EDM, is a genre of music that has erupted into popular culture, taking over the music scene since its arrival in the United States and the rest of the world in the 1980s and 1990s. This project, however, has demonstrated that this genre of music is able to transcend lyrics and create a way for people to connect with each other. However, this project also showed how prior research has negatively impacted the way that “Rave Culture” was perceived at the time of the genre becoming popular due in part to political indifferences and health concerns. Additionally, the most important aspect of this project was that it provided insight as to why people gravitate to not only a genre of music, but why they found the culture surrounding it attractive.

One main concern that this project touched on during the Introduction chapter was that Electronic Music and its surrounding culture is understudied. What was found was that the genre was studied, but in negative ways. This starts with by addressing how the Reagan administration and Thatcher ministry in the United Kingdom ignited this initial backlash of the genre. This was also one of the contributing factors to research focusing heavily on the drug use or violence that occurred at these shows, even though this was proven to be inconsistent from other researchers. Plus, what these government systems were unaware of was that these raves acted as rebellion for people who felt as if their government, depending on location, was oppressing them in some manner.

Another concern that was addressed in this project was to shift focus from the negative research that was available and provide positive research on how impactful Electronic Music is for people. This is where this project became qualitative as it explored how the Uses and Gratifications Theory and music have a distinct relationship. This relationship, as mentioned,

works because of “Interactivity”, which allows people to develop a connection to a certain medium and received gratification from it. In addition to people being gratified from listening to Electronic Music, the emotions that people express at these festivals or raves are unique. This aspect was important to touch on because a majority of Electronic Music is instrumental. What is meant by this was that because music is, according to Rosie Pentreath, “...using all different kinds of musical predictors, gives us an unprecedented insight into how our bodies and brains respond to music.” (Pentreath, 2019) This is also the reason why it is easy for Electronic Music fans to develop an emotional connection to this genre.

Regarding the ways in which these songs can sound, research was also done on some of the most important instruments of Electronic Music including the Clavecin Électrique, which was developed in the 1700s. Additionally, the Synthesizer was also described as one of the most commonly known Electronic instruments used for technologically producing music. This was also discussed as how there was backlash from orchestral musicians who claimed that those instruments are not “organic”. To combat this, it was mentioned that if it was not for these technological advances, some of today’s most popular songs would not exist as a lot of music is composed and produced using electronics and digital producing software.

After this background information was provided, this qualitative research project introduced that in-depth interviews would be the method of data collection for this project. Participants were asked a variety of questions relating to the genre of Electronic Music itself, the impact it has made, as well as the stereotypes associated with the genre and its surrounding culture. These interviews were then recorded and transcribed, where five themes were uniquely defined and coded. These results, as shown in the Results chapter of this project, varied on topics from discussing the stereotypes of EDM culture to their own experiences at these events.

One of these results that stuck out was that there was a known deficiency in how many of the fourteen participants knew about “Rave Culture”, with only four of them being fully involved. Additionally, these four participants also seemed to care more about the music they listened to rather than what drives people to attending raves. This is attributed to not only the unique ability Electronic Music has by transcending lyrics, but to the emotional connections people have made with this genre. Another aspect of this attribution is that Electronic Music is experimental in how these songs are composed as they can incorporate various sounds that invoke those emotions directly. Comparatively, these producers are also able to make EDM fans cry during a happy-sounding song as well as make people happy or jump for joy while listening to a sad-sounding song. This duality is unique as other genres, while being able to invoke emotions, cannot replicate this irony of emotions in the way that EDM is able to.

Another surprising result that was found was when the data was being collected. This result showed that it was hard to maintain the initial timeframe in which these interviews were to take place, but how long timewise each interview was supposed to last. This resulted in only one of the fourteen interviews reaching that forty-five-minute benchmark. Additionally, these interviews were also conducted within a timespan less than one month, which created conflict for coding the data and recruiting participants. However, this ended up becoming a benefit of the project as these fourteen interviews, provided unique responses from the participants as these insights added to answering or understanding the overall attraction to Electronic Music’s culture.

The last result that this project discovered was that certain aspects of the role of the researcher matched how some participants felt about certain artists and other Electronic Music related topics of conversation. One similarity was how a majority of participants were first introduced to EDM between the years 2011 and 2014. Including these years, these participants

also described that one of the first EDM songs they heard was “Levels” by the late DJ and music producer Avicii. The researcher’s first introduction to the genre was also because of this song produced by Avicii. However, this passion for the music soon turned into a business venture after establishing a DJ business since 2015. This then transitioned into producing music for upcoming musicians and fulfilling my own desire to become involved within the music industry. What the researcher has learned ultimately from completing this project is that there is no definitive answer as to why people are enamored by EDM culture, yet the attraction to the traditions of it as well as wanting to hear the music mixed live are contributing factors of this overall question that still needs to be answered in full.

## Appendix A: Recruitment Script for Social Media



**Joe Monopoli**

Public ▼

Hey there! My name is Joe Monopoli and I am a Master's student at the Newhouse School at Syracuse University. I'm conducting research on what makes the culture surround Electronic Dance Music, or EDM, so attractive, and the history behind the genre. This study will incorporate in-depth interviews in which I will be asking questions about how the culture surround Electronic Dance Music (EDM) has impacted fans of the culture and what the genre means to them. If you, or someone you know, is interested in participating in this voluntary study, please email me: [jhmonopo@syr.edu](mailto:jhmonopo@syr.edu) for more information!

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

**Protocol Title:** Why is the culture surrounding Electronic Music so Attractive?

**Principal Investigators/Key Research Personnel:**

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**Professor Imraan Farukhi**

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### **Introduction:**

This form is to provide you with information about the study being conducted and offer the opportunity to participate. This exploratory study is voluntary, and you may opt out at any time before, during or after the research is completed.

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this exploratory study is to gain an understanding and to provide insight as to why the culture surrounding Electronic Music, EDM, is so attractive. This study also intends to educate people on the traditions, sub-genres, and overall ideals behind EDM culture, not just the music.

### **Requirements:**

This study will consist of fourteen in-depth interviews with approximately fifteen questions per interview. These interviews will also be conducted via Zoom. Because of this, each participant will be emailed this consent form to sign and send back to the researcher also by email. Each interview will last from forty-five (45) minutes to sixty (60) minutes maximum. An example of the types of questions being asked in this study is, "What impact has EDM, either the music or the culture, made in your life?"

### **Risks:**

With any research design, there are always risks that can be involved. One risk is that due to the topic of discussion, some questions may be personal and may cause a participant to feel uncomfortable during the interview. Any participant who is uncomfortable may opt out of the study.

### **Benefits:**

One benefit of participating in this research study is to have a unique and interesting conversation on a musical genre that both the interviewer and participant have interest in. Another benefit of this study is having participant input, that may help answer any questions posed while designing the study. One last benefit is that the participant has the ability to help further the researcher's knowledge on EDM and its surrounding culture.

### **Privacy:**

This study respects the privacy of the participants who choose to be a part of this study. For this reason, any confidential information such as the participant's name, contact information, or any

other extraneous information will remain anonymous. Whenever one works with email or internet; there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/ or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

**Data Confidentiality:**

The way that this data will be collected will be through the transcription of the interviews being conducted. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms for reporting purposes.

**Statement on Identifiable Private Information:**

Because the personal and private information will remain confidential, this means that those identifiers will be removed.

**Compensation:**

For this study, no compensation will be offered.

**Rights as a Research Participant:**

As a research participant, this means that your participation throughout this entire study is voluntary. If for any reason during the study, you may skip and or refuse to answer any questions asked. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

**Further Information:**

For questions, concerns or more information regarding this research you may contact Professor Dennis Kinsey and or Joe Monopoli. All information is listed at the beginning of this form. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at (315) 443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and by signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this form for my personal records.

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Printed Name of the Participant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Participant

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Printed Name of the Researcher

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Researcher

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

### Filter Questions:

1. Have you listened to any EDM track(s) prior to this interview?
  - a. If so, what was that track/were those tracks?
2. What's an EDM track that you currently have on repeat?
  - a. Why this track specifically?
3. In addition to your current favorite track, do you have a favorite EDM artist? And if so who is it?
4. What's your all-time favorite EDM track(s)?
  - a. What about this/or those track(s) is your favorite?
  - b. Do you have a least favorite track?
5. Where do you listen to EDM? (Car, home speakers, headphones)
6. How often do you listen to EDM, in a given day?
7. What platform/service do you listen to EDM on?

### Main Questions:

1. How old were you when you first discovered Electronic Music?
2. What was the first EDM track that you heard?
  - a. How does that track now compare to your current favorite EDM track?
3. Are you aware of/involved EDM's growing culture?
  - a. Can you explain what EDM culture is to someone who is unfamiliar with it?
4. Do you know the origin story of EDM, and the early culture that surrounded it?
5. Do you think that there are stereotypes that are associated with EDM and the culture?
  - a. If so, what are they?
  - b. Are any aspects of EDM culture perceived as negative?

6. Putting these stereotypes aside for now, what drew you into joining the participatory side of EDM culture?
  - a. Did that particular element draw any friends of yours in to EDM?
  - b. What takes you away from the culture?
7. Have you ever attended an EDM concert/festival? And where was this?
8. What is the best way to describe this participatory culture to an outsider?
9. How many sub-genres of EDM do you know of/listen to?
  - a. Are there ones you listen to the least?
10. What impact has EDM, either the music or the culture, made in your life?
11. Has these artists you listen to also created impact within the EDM community that those outside are unaware of?
12. Who within the EDM community has created the largest impact?
  - a. What kind of impact did this artist create?
13. Are these artists that you listen to active on social media?
  - a. If given the chance, what you would want to say to them/thank them for?
14. Do you play any instruments/produce music digitally?
15. Are you aware of the mechanics and time it takes to create some of EDM's biggest/popular hits?
16. Is there anything you would add to the current EDM culture? Take away?

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## VITA

### EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Master of Arts Student in Media Studies at Syracuse University, August 2019-May 2021.  
Thesis Title: "Why Is The Culture Surrounding Electronic Music So Attractive?"

Bachelor of Arts (May 2019) in Media Studies at Quinnipiac University, Hamden, Connecticut

### ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Peer Catalyst, The Learning Commons at Quinnipiac University, September 2016-December 2016. Responsibilities include: working with Freshmen students to develop their career aspirations, assist the professors in teaching/moderating the course, and create in-class activities for students to participate in.

### ACADEMIC AWARDS

Dean's List, Department of Academics, Quinnipiac University,  
Fall 2015, Fall 2016, Spring 2017, Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019

Media Studies Media Enthusiast Award, Department of Communications, Quinnipiac University, April 2019.

### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Intern, Hamden Chamber of Commerce, Hamden, CT, January-May 2019.

Summer Camp Counselor, Woodmont Day Camp, New City, NY, 2013-2019.