

Attack the real problem: It's drugs, not raves

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When I interviewed for the pop music critic job last year, I told my potential bosses that I wanted to interpret the American experience through the prism of music. In my head I thought, "I'll get paid to party."

I'm the type of partygoer who starts clubbing at midnight and ends at sunrise, but a new proposed rave ordinance might send me to Atlanta and Washington. I'm an effort to stop drug use at raves, city officials threaten to stifle Charlotte's fled-

dance parties that blast electronic dance music, such as uptempo house music, and are typically held in warehouses.

Some are havens for designer or club drugs, such as Ecstasy; GHB, a general anesthetic known as the date rape drug; and Ketamine, a horse tranquilizer. These drugs can increase heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature; have long-term effects on the brain and motor skills; and lead to kidney and heart failure. Police say cocaine and heroin are also abundant at raves.

Sensationalized media reports have parents and city officials da-

moning to ban raves. But the proposed ordinance would affect not only raves, but all nightclubs that play live or electronic music, charge admission and have space to dance.

It would divide clubs into juvenile and adult dance halls. Juvenile clubs would close by midnight on weekends; adult clubs would close at 2:30 a.m.

In the rush to protect misguided juveniles and young adults, city officials and frightened parents have become confused. Raves aren't the problem. Drugs are.

For decades, we've heard about how crack, marijuana and heroin can destroy lives and communities through violence and addiction. But where is the lady smashing an egg with a frying pan to educate us about Ecstasy? Why isn't she destroying the kitchen to show how GHB can ruin our families? Where's the Ketamine version of the movie "Rush"?

Across the country, designer drugs use is spreading faster than flu vaccinations. In 1997, U.S. customs seized 400,000 Ecstasy tablets, imported from Europe. Agents have intercepted more than 5.5 million tablets this year.

In bigger cities, hustling pills has led to the same type of violence associated with crack, and pills are prevalent in dance and hip-hop dubs. Three Chicago-area teens died of apparent overdoses on PMA, hallucinogens that



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look like Ecstasy.

In Charlotte, one mother believes her son may have died after taking Ecstasy and Ketamine earlier this year, and the club drugs have already moved out of the mostly White rave scene into urban communities.

"It's unbelievably rampant," said Charlotte-Mecklenburg narcotics officer Craig Conger. "you can go into any dub downtown and find it. It's so common now."

Yet, the best we can do is regulate dubs. That's not protecting people; it's deluding ourselves into thinking we solved the problem. Once the ordinance kills the dub scene, the raves and drug use

will go underground.

Education of juveniles and adults, and cooperation between city officials, the media and parents are our best weapons.

In the next year, the drug dealers will see that selling designer drugs isn't a joke. Dealers will start moving through the court system, where they face stiff penalties. In North Carolina, trafficking 100 Ecstasy pills can send you to prison for three years; 500 pills is a six-year minimum; and more than 1,000 pills is a minimum of 14 years.

When those cases move through the system, media outlets that eagerly reported the rave

drug busts should publicize the sentences.

If the City Council insists on passing an ordinance, a compromise should be the one enacted in Hillsborough County, Fla. That ordinance doesn't allow anyone under 18 in clubs after midnight and under 21 after 3 a.m. City police can actively enforce the curfew, which prohibits kids 15 and under from being at clubs after midnight on weekends.

Club owners should perform thorough searches that require partygoers to empty their pockets and take off their shoes. To prevent underage kids from getting inside, dubs should require patrons to present two forms of I.D., such as a driver's license and a bank card or a school I.D.

Parents need to do a better job of parenting. They shouldn't allow their kids under age 18 to go clubbing, and they should know where their kids are going. They shouldn't need a curfew to tell them that their children should be in the house by midnight.

Finally, teens who so desperately want to be treated like adults need to act responsibly and as cheery as it sounds, say no to drugs. Kids are under the impression that because these drugs haven't proven to be addictive they're not dangerous.

One hit can kill—addict or not.

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