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Immersive and Transcendent Experiences in Underground Clubs: Theorizing the Role of the Elements that Shape the Immersive Experience

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Abstract: This study explores and theorizes the roles of the elements that shape immersive and transcendent experiences in underground clubs. Based on phenomenology inspired interviews the findings show how the immersive and transcendent experiences are marked by both social and introvert aspects. These experiences are influenced by four elements and roles that act in a constellationary manner, namely; security as a foundation to immersion, community as a gateway to belonging and acceptance, music as a medium to transcendence and recreational drugs as an enhancer to the experience. The discussion and analysis concentrate on how these elements affect both the immersive experience itself and how they affect each other. The constellation is presented to the reader in the form of a model in order to illustrate the co-dependencies of the elements.

Key words: immersion, transcendent experience, extraordinary experience, underground club

INTRODUCTION

In society, underground clubs are generally viewed as dangerous places where clubbers engage in illegal activities such as the consumption of illicit drugs. The word underground suggests that it is an alien, dark and detached world. This world is not part of ordinary life where people live by societal norms and routines; rather it seems to be a place where people take the liberty to act and consume in which ever way they like. Underground clubs thus represent venues where people get a chance to escape from everyday life (Goulding, Shankar and Elliot, 2002). The clubbers can let go of everyday stressors and immerse in an experience. Immersion is a concept that has emerged in consumer research during the past decade. It entails an embodied experience, marked by being fully absorbed in an activity, where the distance between the consumer and the situation is eliminated (Carú and Cova, 2007). To date, immersion literature has mainly looked at tourism contexts, such as

river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993), dog sledging (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013) and wild canoeing (Lindgren and Østergaard, 2015). What there seems to be a lack of in the literature is the study of settings that are close to everyday life contextually. By looking at contexts that are placed in a city setting one can achieve such closeness as consumers easily can visit such venues on a regular basis. With the purpose of investigating such a context, this study explores the role of the elements that shape the immersive experiences in underground clubs. In order to prevent conceptual confusion henceforth, it is important to state what is meant by underground clubs. Unlike regular clubs underground clubs are characterized by their unpredictable and secretive locations, the necessity to be ‘in the know’ of when and where the clubs are being held as well as their illegality (Thornton, 1995). The illegality of the underground clubs stems from the notion that they are arranged clubs that do

not have a license to sell alcohol. Underground clubs and raves are most often used interchangeably. In this study however, raves are seen as a sub-category of underground clubs, as raves merely focus on techno music whilst underground clubs entail any genre of music that is outside of the mainstream.

Immersion is commonly defined as, “the feeling of being fully absorbed, surrendered to, or consumed by the activity, to the point of forgetting one’s self and one’s surroundings” (Mainemelis, 2001: Dewey, 1934; May, 1994; Pöppel, 1988). Immersive states often erase awareness of time and self-consciousness (Lindberg and Østergaard, 2015). Hansen and Mossberg (2013:212) describe immersion as a deep involvement in the present moment that is formed by a spatio-temporal belonging in the world. They argue that immersion is ‘one of the key elements to an unforgettable consumer experience’ (p.209).

Carú and Cova (2007) mean that in order for consumers to be able to immerse, the experiential context must involve three elements - the experiencescape has to be enclavized, secure and thematized. The experiential context becomes enclavized when it has specific boundaries that let consumers break away from their daily lives. An enclave limits the possibility of elements that do not pertain to the experience from entering the thematized context (Firat and Dholakia, 1998). The security aspect makes it easier for consumers to immerse as they do not have to pay excessive attention to themselves or their belongings (Carú and Cova, 2007). A thematized context enables the communication of relevant content and values to the consumer in an understandable, meaningful and memorable way (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013:216).

Immersion may be marked by extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013), transcendent experiences (Lindgren and Østergaard 2015) and peak or flow experiences (Hansen and Mossberg,

2013). These concepts all allow for a temporary escape where the consumer is absorbed in an activity or experience.

To date, much of the immersion research has been concentrated on touristic venues that are set apart from everyday life both in a spatial measure, beauty of nature aspect as well as in a novelty of environment aspect. This literature emphasises the role of the physical environment as differentiated from other environments (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013), the role of guides as a facilitator to immersion (Arnould and Price, 1993; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013), the impact of other consumers on the immersive experience (Arnould and Price, 1993; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013), the communion felt with nature as a memorable part of immersion (Arnould and Price, 1993), renewal of the self as an outcome of the immersive experience (Arnould and Price, 1993) and physical objects which facilitate immersion (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). Given the differentiated environments of river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993), wild canoeing (Lindberg and Østergaard, 2015) or dog sledging (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013) it is probable that consumers do not engage with such contexts on a frequent basis. Although these touristic places offer favourable settings for consumers to become immersed, it is likely that the novelty of the settings and the novelty of the experience itself have an impact on the consumers’ immersion.

Little attention has hitherto been given to contexts that are close to everyday life both environmentally, i.e. in a city setting, and in a spatial measure, i.e. in a city. Carú and Cova’s (2005) study on immersion in classical music concerts was methodologically constructed around exploring immersive aspects during the concert for consumers who were not very knowledgeable in the classical music genre. However, immersion is a spontaneous happening and cannot be dictated in advance. As such, what there seems to be a lack of in the immer-

sion literature is the study of a context that both offers proximity to everyday life in a spatial measure and environmental dimension, as well as methodologically considering consumers who have memories of being immersed in an experience. The importance of retrospective self-reports is argued by Hansen and Mossberg (2013). They mean that it is difficult to study immersion directly during immersion itself due to the loss of self-consciousness that occurs during the experience. As such the memorable parts of immersion can only be described in retrospect (Mainemelis, 2001).

Underground clubs may not offer the extraordinary nature settings that wild canoeing and river rafting do, however they are close to everyday life in the sense that clubbers easily can visit such clubs on a regular basis due to their regularity and proximity to cities. Since raves offer a complete contrast to the working week, Goulding and Shankar (2004) argue that they may be seen in the same light as other experiences that provide a form of escapism and transcendentalism. As mentioned above raves are regarded as a sub-category of underground clubs, thus making it possible to postulate that underground clubs are places in which clubbers possibly can immerse into an experience that offers them escapism and transcendentalism.

Further, underground clubs are generally thought of as being dangerous venues without pronounced elements that inflict a sense of security (such as expert guides in the tourism context). Moreover, underground clubs are illegal; as such clubbers cannot expect them to follow certain laws and regulations concerning the safety of a club. These aspects make underground clubs quite different from other immersive contexts that have been studied. Arnould, Price and Moisio (2006) claim that many contexts for qualitative research are extreme and that such extremities are critiqued for their generalizability. However, this study does not aim to discover generalizable results, rather it

aims at deriving theoretical insights. Such insights are enabled by going to extremes and looking at the unfamiliar; this can help in transcending some of the assumptions we have in overly familiar contexts (Arnould et al., 2006). Underground clubs represent such an extreme, as they are illegal and often venues for illegal activities. Following this discussion,

The aim of this study is to explore the role of the elements that shape the immersive experience of underground clubbing.

It is important to investigate this topic in order to gain insight into a context where a differentiated and unordinary physical environment does not expressly impact the immersive experience. As such it is possible to discern new knowledge about the elements that impact immersion. With participants expressing escapist features of underground clubbing (Goulding et al., 2002), underground clubs provide a useful context from which to frame theory construction about immersive experiences. Although underground clubs offer an extreme context, it is by looking at such extremities that we can learn about immersion in a more multifarious manner. Arnould et al. (2006:110) state that, “defamiliarizing in extreme contexts helps theoretically interesting factors emerge more readily”. What we can learn from underground clubs for marketing is embedded in the extremities of the context, which enable a broadened understanding of the concept of immersion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this part, important and relevant literature that pertains to immersion will be cited. The section will offer definitions and concepts that are linked to immersion. These include the concepts of extraordinary experience and transcendent experience, the importance of the

security of the enclave, the immersion model of tourism, the social part of immersion, neo-tribes and emancipation as well as the effects of recreational drugs.

Extraordinary experience and immersion

The concept of extraordinary experience has been highlighted as being closely related to immersion in the academic literature (e.g. Carú and Cova, 2006; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). In their simplest form extraordinary experiences are regarded as being special and particularly memorable moments (Abrahams, 1986). They are set apart from the structure of everyday life (Lindberg and Østergaard, 2015). Arnould and Price (1993:25) define the extraordinary as “intense, positive, intrinsically enjoyable experiences”. They mean that such experiences are commonly triggered by interpersonal interaction and a newness of perception, often attributed to unusual events. Due to their high emotional content, extraordinary experiences may be difficult to describe, even though they are easily recalled for years after (Arnould and Price, 1993). In practice, extraordinary experiences have been found to involve different aspects. Arnould and Price (1993) found that the themes communion with nature, *communitas* with other rafters and renewal of the self linked river rafting to extraordinary experiences. In contrast to this, Lindberg and Østergaard’s (2015:257) study found that extraordinary experiences can be distinguished by paradoxes and ambiguity when consumers move through the various phases of enclavized experiences-capes. Such experiences are not only spiritually enriching and filled with communion, but also challenging and conflicting, only allowing the consumers to be immersed during parts of the experience. Lindgren and Østergaard (2015) mean that transcendent experiences can represent a type of extraordinary experience. Transcendent experiences are characterized by total

absorption in an activity and can be distinguished as either an extreme focus on a particular task (challenge/skill/flow) or as originating from outside the individual (sacred/epiphany/peak) (Privette, 1983). Flow and peak experiences are two related categories of extraordinary experience (Privette, 1983) and both of them lead to a state of transcendence (Schouten et al., 2007). Flow is characterized by a total absorption in an activity, which has the ability to motivate people to contribute to their psychological well being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Schouten et al. (2007:357) argue that flow may produce a state of transcendence, a suspension of temporal reality, a sense of separation from the mundane, and a sense of unity with some higher plane of experience. Peak experiences are characterized by their ephemeral nature, yet they are powerful, personally meaningful and possibly transformational (Schouten et al., 2007). Flow and peak experiences are related to each other as they often overlap in the same activities, which are marked by extreme enjoyment and a transcendent or mystical character (Schouten et al., 2007). The characteristics of transcendent experiences are similar to those of immersive experiences, both mainly dealing with feelings of full absorption. Due to the similar characteristics, a transcendent experience can be viewed as a type of immersive experience. In contrast to the ephemerality of transcendent experiences, Schouten et al. (2007) state that the boundary between the well being of transcendence and the dangers of addictive escapism may be fine. As such, “one person’s path to bliss may be another person’s road to ruin” (Schouten et al., 2007:366).

The importance of the security of the enclave

Carú and Cova (2007) mean that the experience context must be enclavized, thematized

and secure in order for consumers to be able to immerse in the experience. By feeling secure, the consumers can focus their attention on the experience and not so much on their belongings or behaviour (Carú and Cova, 2007). Several studies (Roper et al., 2005; Wong and Wong, 2004; Ladwein, 2007) have found that the guide has an important role in increasing the consumers' feelings of safety and security. The feeling of security can also be obtained by making the experience more predictable via programmes and time schedules, as well as by enabling the consumers to perceive themselves as having control even in potentially dangerous places (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). An enclave and risk-free context provides the necessary conditions (a protective frame) in which the tourist can investigate, challenge, contrast and extend his or her territory away from everyday life (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013:224). This level of security and comfort is argued to be essential in order for the tourists to be able to reach the deepest level of involvement, become immersed and 'let themselves go' (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). In contrast to this, Arnould and Price (1993) find

that tourists do not necessarily need to perceive the enclave to be risk-free. Rather the tourists acknowledge the risk and safety issues, but many times put their comfort and safety in the hands of the expert guides (Arnould and Price, 1993). Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) mean that there needs to be a balance in the risk of the experience in order for it to possibly become extraordinary. They mean that risk is an important factor of extraordinary experiences (Celsi et al., 1993), however a context that is perceived to be too dangerous might devalue the quality of the experience, not making it a very magical one.

The immersion model of tourism

In their study of the immersive aspects of dog sledging, Hansen and Mossberg (2013) present a model where four factors influencing immersion in a tourism context are placed inside the liminal world that is synonymous with the enclavized, thematized and secure experiencescape.

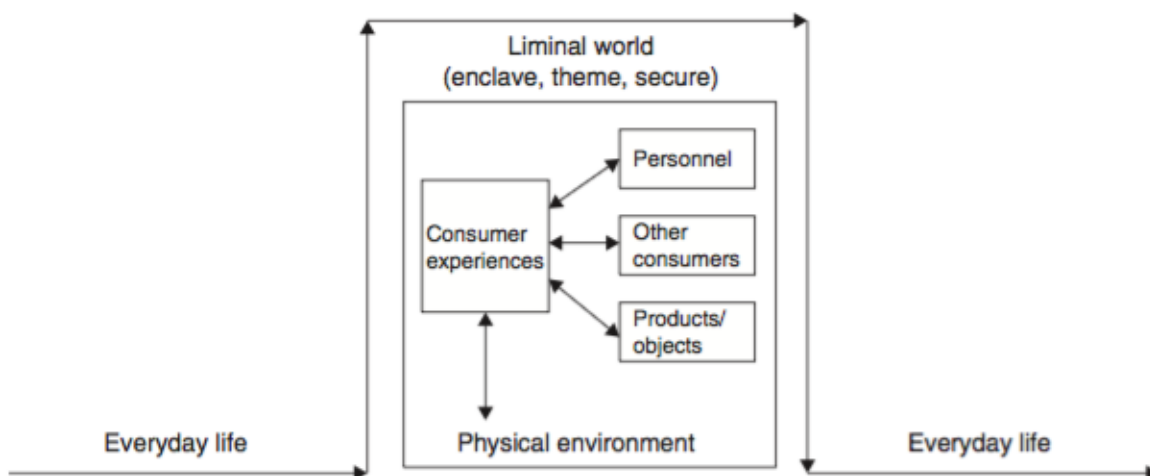


Figure 11.2 Underlying foundations and facilitators for immersion in a tourism context
Hansen and Mossberg (2013:224)

There is a clear entry and exit point to this liminal world and it is within the bubble of the liminal world that the experience takes place (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). The first factor influencing tourists' immersion is the physical environment. It can 'enhance the activities, promote socialization and differentiate the environment from other environments' (Mossberg, 2007:66). Second, the model emphasises the role of the personnel, especially highlighting the importance of guides. Third, the tourists relate to other consumers present in the context. These consumers contribute to the experience by providing social interaction, being part of the audience and possibly providing positive aspects of togetherness. Fourth, the tourists are affected by and relate to different physical objects and products in the context. Hansen and Mossberg (2013:219) state that it is important to keep in mind that the relationships that may facilitate immersion can also hinder immersion; for example lack of information from the guides regarding estimated distance to the cabin hindered some dog sledging participants in their immersion.

Hansen and Mossberg (2013) draw on inspiration from Jafari's tourist model (1987) in their above model. They argue that the transformational aspects of Jafari's work also principally can be applied to other experience contexts. In his model, Jafari (1987) illuminates the importance of the emancipatory aspects of tourism. He means that the tourist is transformed from the ordinary bounds into the realm of the nonordinary via a two-phase process (Jafari, 1987). The emancipation begins by a physical distancing from the ordinary in a mere spatial notion. That is the taking off and travelling toward the destination. The second phase of the emancipation consists of the stepping away from the own sociocultural thresholds, which is upheld by a physical appearance that sets the tourists apart from the natives.

Social part of immersion

Immersion literature has many times highlighted the notion that other consumers are an integral part of the experience (e.g. Hansen and Mossberg, 2013; Goulding et al., 2002; Arnould and Price, 1993; Lindgren and Østergaard, 2015). Consumers taking part in immersive and extraordinary experiences often feel a sense of communion, not only with their friends and family, but also with strangers (Arnould and Price, 1993). According to Arnould and Price (1993) a sense of belonging, linkage, devotion and communion is created within the group taking part in the experience. Here the guides also have a role in inviting the consumers to form a community (Arnould and price, 1993). Goulding et al. (2002) found that raves provide consumers with a sense of community and belonging. Measham et al. (1998) suggest that raves are set apart from mainstream culture as raves emphasise social bonding, a collective dance experience, a communal state of euphoria and a "happy" vibe. In contrast to these findings, Lindgren and Østergaard (2015) found that the notion of such a sense of belonging was not supported in their study of wild canoeing and contend that the social aspect of extraordinary experiences may be too emphasised in the literature.

Neo-tribes and emancipation

To further develop the notion of community it is relevant to consider the tribal aspects of the underground phenomena. Neo-tribes are characterized by collections of people who are connected in a communal way by, "shared emotions, styles of life, new moral beliefs, senses of injustice and consumption practices" (Cova, 1997:301). Henry (2008) argues that postmodern consumers prioritize community and social connectedness over material consumption objects, as we in essence are tribal creatures. He

claims that the reasons for the quest for tribalism are relatable to the familiar things many of us find missing in our everyday lives due to feelings of being socially isolated and disconnected. Tribal belonging represents a core source of meaning, where consumers yearn for old style values such as a sense of local identification that foster re-enchantment with the world (Henry, 2008). The binding source of tribes lies not in demographic labels such as age, gender and social class; rather it is established based on shared passions (Henry, 2008).

Literature on rave settings have emphasised the importance of tribalism (Goulding, Shankar and Elliott, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Thornton, 1996; Goulding and Shankar, 2004). Due to the inaccessibility of raves - news spread by word of mouth and secret locations, Goulding et al. (2002) liken the process of transition into the neo-tribe of the rave culture to the becoming of a member of an exclusive community. In the rave context, the music and the setting helps the clubbers to connect to each other and share something that is mutually valued, which enables them to coalesce and create a neo-tribe (Goulding and Shankar, 2004). Such a neo-tribe does not only provide a context for identity expression and communal bonding, but the nature of the experience is also connected to the music, the laser light shows and occasionally the ingestion of recreational drugs (Goulding and Shankar, 2004). Kozinets (2002) argues that the values shared by the underground community that comes together during the annual Burning Man Festival in California are based around anti-consumerist ideals. Such ideals make room for the consumers' emancipation from constraining forms of consumption (Murray and Ozanne, 1991). Arnould and Price (1993:41) argue that "some authors think the value placed on intense, positive experiences is a reaction against the commercialization of meaning and segmentation and specialization of roles in the work-place (Csikszentmihalyi

1990; Cushman 1990; Ewen, 1988; Giddens 1991, p. 9).

The effects of recreational drugs

Ecstasy is widely used as a recreational drug in many westernized countries (Parrott, 2002). It is the second most used illegal drug in Europe (Cole and Sumnall, 2003). It has become a symbol for the rave youth subculture, one of the largest subcultures of the late 20th century (Cole and Sumnall, 2003). Ecstasy is colloquially used synonymously with 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamin (MDMA), even though not all Ecstasy tablets contain MDMA. Ecstasy is commonly named 'E' and 'X'. MDMA was first synthesized in 1912 with therapeutic intentions (Shulgin, 1990), but it was not until the mid-1980's that the drug became popular for recreational purposes, mostly in the rave youth culture (Cole and Sumnall, 2003). Cohen's (1995:1140) study on the subjective reports on MDMA showed that the effects induced by the drug included euphoria, increased energy, sexual arousal and papillary dilation. The users in the study also reported feelings of "love", "happiness", "peace" and "connection". Parrott (2002:837) means that MDMA elicits feelings of elation, emotional closeness and sensory pleasure. Cohen (1995) found that euphoria is the main reason why people take MDMA. However, the positive effects of the drug decline after continuous use (Parrott, 2002). There are also adverse physiological and physical reactions on the flip side to the elating aspects of the drug. These include trismus (jaw clenching), bruxism (teeth grinding) and post-Ecstasy comedown effects such as poor moods and lethargy (Parrott, 2002). Several studies have also pointed to the neuro-psychobiological damage that may arise in Ecstasy users; including major depression, panic disorder, phobic anxiety and various eating

disorders (Fox et al., 2001; McCann et al., 2000; Morgan, 1998; Schifano, 2000).

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is a prototypical psychedelic drug which alters consciousness in a profound and characteristic way (Carhart-Harris et al., 2016a). Even in micro doses it can produce profound and sometimes life-changing experiences (Carhart-Harris et al., 2016a). Carhart-Harris et al.'s (2016b) study on the paradoxical psychological effects of LSD showed that emotional lability and psychosis-like symptoms increased acutely, however the mid-term (2 weeks later) effect was increased optimism and openness. They contend that improved psychological well being and increased openness are relatively reliable mid- to long-term effects of psychedelics. In their study on LSD experience, Carhart-Harris et al. (2016a) found that all participants reported eyes-closed visual hallucinations and changes in consciousness, typified as ego-dissolution. Kaelen (2015) study on the effects of LSD on music-evoked emotion showed that such emotions were enhanced under the influence of LSD. The emotions that showed strongest enhancement related to "transcendence" (i.e. fascinated, overwhelmed, feelings of transcendence and spirituality), "wonder" (i.e. filled with wonder, dazzled, moved), "tenderness" (i.e. affectionate, in love) and "power" (i.e. strong, triumphant, energetic).

Carhart-Harris et al. (2016a) contend that psychedelics have a therapeutic potential as they may work to break down psychiatric disorders due to their ability to dismantle the patterns of activity which many times become automated and rigid in patients with psychiatric disorders. Kaelen et al. (2015) mean that the psychedelic drugs can be used for therapeutic purposes as music - which evokes, deepens and directs emotion - takes on an intensified quality and significance under the influence of psychedelic drugs. Kaelen et al. (2015) further discuss that the enhancement of emotions of

transcendence and wonder due to the LSD and music combination may contribute to spiritual-type or peak experiences.

METHOD

A two-phase methodological approach was employed in this study. The first phase consisted of on-site observations at underground clubs in Gothenburg, whilst the second phase consisted of in-depth interviews with frequent underground clubbers. The purpose of the observation phase was to familiarize with the context and obtain an understanding of the physical environment of the underground clubs visited. The two observations performed provided a better understanding for the setting of the context and thus enabled a clearer understanding of what was talked about during the interviews. It was thus possible to better conceptualize the interviews with the context. However, this was the only role given to the observation in this study, as the findings presented stem from the interview data.

Seven interviews were conducted, lasting about an hour each. The respondents were approached during the observation phase with the main criterion of them remembering having felt immersed in an underground club experience. The seven respondents participating in the study were aged between 27-37 years, 4 female and 3 male. Most of them work in the arts industries, whilst a couple were finishing off their university studies. Interviews are a powerful tool for attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences (Kvale, 1983). Respondents were selected with the prerequisite of them having a clear and vivid memory/memories of an underground club experience when they had felt fully absorbed and immersed in the experience. The study purposefully focuses on memories of immersive experiences as immersion is a spontaneous event and thus not possible to predict

or dictate. Mainemelis (2001) means that one of the memorable parts of immersion is the feeling of timelessness, which can only be described in retrospect.

The motivational factors behind this research were based on a curiosity of what it is that draws people to underground clubs. This curiosity arose after having visited such clubs a couple of times and getting the impression that there are some complex relations that found the experience of underground clubbing. This impression appeared from the notion that people either seemed to love going to underground clubs whilst others seemed not to be very fond of it. The apparent discrepancy between how people experience underground clubs instigated an interest to find out what the people who love going to such clubs experience. The concept of immersion was then proposed as an angle of incidence to explore the matter. The consecutive process consisted of gaining a deep insight into both the concept of immersion and its cousin concepts of extraordinary experience, transcendent experience, peak experience and flow as well as the literature on underground clubbing and raves. The process included both revising of the literature before and after going out in the field to collect data. As it was an exploratory study this was deemed to be necessary since many aspects of underground clubbing and immersion found in this study have not been written about previously. As such the research logic used in this study has been abduction which encompasses the iterative flow between deduction and induction and is considered suitable for exploratory data analysis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2014). It is possible that there would be other ways of exploring the aim of this study, for example by giving the observational data a prominent role in the findings section, as Kozinets (2002) does. However, the intent of focusing on respondents memories of immersive experiences in underground clubs was deemed to be suffi-

ciently illustrated by the accounts of their lived experiences.

Although the data was not collected on site, the interviews were conducted with a phenomenology inspired approach where the respondents were asked to tell their experiential stories as lived and remembered. Phenomenological interviews aim at attaining a first-person description (Giorgi, 1983), where the course of the dialogue is largely set by the respondent (Thompson et al., 1989). In this exploratory study, the respondents were asked to talk about the immersive experience, but no other a priori questions were constructed in accordance with phenomenology methodology (Thompson et al., 1989). The world of lived experience does not always correspond with the world of the objective description (Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989:135). Objective description oftentimes implies trying to explain a happening as separate from its contextual setting (Pollio, 1982). However qualitative interviews are aimed at understanding the respondent's own experiences, thoughts and emotions within their social reality (Dalén, 2008). As this study seeks to understand immersion in the context of underground clubbing, it was specifically intended that the respondents give their own interpretations of the experience, thus not seeking to establish an objective recount of the happening.

Interviews should be conducted in an atmosphere where the respondents feel comfortable speaking freely (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Kaijser and Öhlander, 2011). In order to do so the respondents all chose to be interviewed in their own homes, which was beneficial as they felt at ease in their own environment. Each interview was conducted in privacy with only the respondent and the researcher present. Eliasson (2013) suggests that the interview setting should be informal; such a setting was constructed by both being in the respondent's home as well as having some coffee

together and talking about general things before starting the interviews.

It was essential that the interviews were conducted in privacy as they dealt with sensitive and illegal topics. Langer and Beckman (2005:190) mean that sensitive topics raise wider issues to the ethical, political and legal aspects of research (Sieber, 1993). Lee (1993:2) states that: "Sensitive research is important too precisely because it illuminates the darker corners of society". In such research, ethical considerations are of utmost importance. It is vital and of first priority to maintain the respondents' anonymity (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). In order to do so the identities and research records are kept confidential. The respondents were all given aliases in the presented material. Furthermore, the respondents' were urged only to talk about things that they felt comfortable talking about, and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish and transcribed and translated to English. The transcribed data was subsequently interpreted by using the respondents' terms in order to stay at the level of lived experience (Thompson et al., 1989). An emic approach was used in the interpretation of the transcribed material. As such the interpretation relied on the respondents' own terms and category systems rather than the researcher's (Kvale, 1983).

The analysis process consisted of three steps in accordance with Christensen et al.'s (2010) suggestions. First, the data was reduced via the reorganization of the collected data. It was then summarized and coded according to key words or sentences that emerged from the material. Second, the key words and sentences emerging from each interview were combined in order to create a pattern in the collected data. Finally, the data was synthesised into a format consisting of themes, making the findings comprehensible to the reader.

Alias	Occupation	Age
Carla	Student	27
Alex	Student	29
Sarah	Shop assistant	32
Paul	Artist	32
Sam	Actor	32
Hanna	Artist	34
Shelley	Actress	37

Table of respondents

FINDINGS

The respondents reported memories of immersion that they classified as being transcendent. The findings suggest that the immersive experiences that the respondents have lived both are transcendent in that they have been totally absorbed in an activity (Lindgren and Østergaard, 2015), as well as extraordinary due to their intense and intrinsically enjoyable nature (Arnould and Price, 1993). The respondents also described the experiences as especially memorable moments, which further strengthens the notion that they have been extraordinary if considering Abrahams (1986) definition of extraordinary experiences as being special and particularly memorable moments.

In order to thoroughly investigate the role of the elements that shape the immersive experience, it is first necessary to look at the nature of the immersive experience itself. This study has found that the immersive experience in underground clubs is marked by a dialectic between the social and the introvert aspects of the experience. The immersion was described as on the one hand being characterized by a felt connection to the other clubbers and on the other hand being characterized by a zoning into the self.

This study has found four roles and elements that affect these concurrently social and introvert immersive experiences in underground clubs. The elements and the roles that were found consist of; security as a foundation to immersion, community as a gateway to acceptance and belonging, music as a medium to a transcendent state and recreational drugs as an enhancer to the experience. The importance of security and community has been highlighted in previous studies on immersion, (Carú and Cova, 2007; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013; Arnould and Price, 1993). In addition to these, this study has found that music and recreational drugs also affect the immersive experience in underground clubs.

The upcoming findings and analysis section is structured according to the elements presented above. The section begins with a description of the social and introvert aspects of the experience and then moves on to the illustrations of the four elements, which allow for the theorization of the roles that they play in the experience. Before all this, a table of the meanings of the roles of the elements is presented below.

Role	Meaning
Foundation	Prerequisite for immersion
Gateway	Passage into a group of people who together create a neo-tribe
Medium	Tool-like characteristic which sets the clubbers into a transcendent state of being
Enhancer	Augmenting the feelings and perceptions during the immersion

Table 1. The meaning of the roles of the elements that shape the immersive and transcendent experience

The dialectics between the social and the introvert aspects of the experience

There seems to be a paradox between the social aspects and the introvert aspects of the experience. The respondents often feel like they are part of a togetherness, even when they do not interact with others. Instead they immerse into an egocentric experience where the other clubbers are part of it in a peripheral manner.

“If you go out and dance to pop music people lip-synch and there is a lot of focus on the dancing, the song and each other. In an underground club you can go into your own zone totally and just dance, there is a word for it... Like you go to the library to study, and you sit on your own and study, but you do it around other people. /.../ And it is that sensation. You are alone in the collective, which makes it totally different from dancing in your living room, just because you feel so connected. And I think that it is something beautiful. I could go to an underground club on my own, but I would not go to an ordinary club on my own because I wouldn't have anyone to dance with. You would really notice that I am there alone. But in an underground club you can go in to your own zone - it is you, the music and the people around you. It is a very allowable experience in that way.” Shelley, 37

“In the end it is not about the social feeling, it is about getting into a rhythm together. It is about your personal rhythm and to be yourself in relation to the others”. Sarah, 32

“At the same that as it is collective, you also go in to an individual bubble when you are at such a dance floor. It is not an interactive dance between two people. If someone tries to dance with me and come close and grind in some way it won't work because the music is more like ‘we are all here together in a sea which moves together in ecstasy, but at the same time we are all very into some kind of other relation to the music and ourselves’. Hanna, 34

“You are with a lot of people, you are aware of their existence, but you don't necessarily need to have contact. It is more like everyone is with each other in a sort of ring; you dance with yourself and maybe a little bit with the others. There is something liberating with it.” Alex, 29

Above Shelley, Sarah, Hanna and Alex illustrate how they zone out into their own ‘bubble’. Shelley means that at the same time as you are having a very personal experience you also feel connected to the other clubbers, making the experience different from just dancing alone in a room. Sarah also points to the notion of being yourself in a collective of people. Alex illustrates how the experience concurrently pertains to the self “you dance with yourself” and the others “you are aware of their existence”. He means that there is something liberating in zoning out into yourself, whilst at the same time being part of a collective. Hansen and Mossberg (2013) suggest that the enclavized, thematized and secure experiencescape in essence provide consumers with a ‘bubble’, that differs from the physical environment of everyday life, which facilitates immersion. That metaphor may also be extended to the experience itself in underground clubs, where it is not only the physical boundaries of the experiencescape itself that enable immersion but also the ‘bubble’ created within oneself which facilitates a zoning out and absorption in the self.

The drugs ingested also have a part in the paradox. The respondents mean that the type of drugs consumed (most often Ecstasy, MDMA and LSD) contribute in the making of an individual immersion. The drugs enable them to dive in to their own ‘bubble’ and many times they come out of it feeling enlightened and renewed. Arnould and Price (1993) mean that intense positive experiences oftentimes provide life meaning and perspective and confer awareness of one's own morality (Abrahams

1986; Celsi et al. 1993; Donohue 1991; Ewert 1988; Ewert and Hollenhorst 1989; Solomon 1988).

“The interesting part is also that I have the time to think a lot and it becomes very meditative. I have the time to think and feel things that I haven’t had time for before. It triggers certain thoughts and it becomes kind of an ‘aha-moment’. It becomes much clearer when you are in such a bubble. You are able to have a dialogue that is outside of yourself” - Sarah, 32

“It [the immersive experience] dissolves some things that stay with you. You become more open to yourself as a person as well, and more accepting. You are a bit kinder to yourself. You don’t just feel love towards others, but you also feel love toward yourself. Like ‘this person is also kind’. You also become more susceptible both to yourself and others. You realise that we are all part of the same blob, we are all one. That’s why you become so loving. We are all in essence the same, just separated by our bodies. You don’t just know that we are all the same species, you also feel it. And that feeling leaves an impression for a long time after the experience. The knowledge stays at least, but the feeling fades after time.” - Hanna, 34

The excerpts above portray how Sarah and Hanna have felt enlightened after having been immersed in a trip induced by drugs. Carhart-Harris et al. (2016a) mean that psychedelics have a therapeutic potential due to their ability to dismantle the patterns of activity within the brain. Both Hanna and Sarah describe therapeutic-like outcomes such as ‘aha-moments’ and an increased understanding for humanity. Carhart-Harris et al. (2016a) argue that psychedelic drugs may alter consciousness in a profound manner, which in some cases may be life-altering. Hanna means that the knowledge gained from having an immersive trip is something that stays with her, insinuating that the experience has been life-altering for her in some ways, at least when it comes to her view

on humanity. Thus it is possible to postulate that the immersive transcendent experiences induced by recreational drugs at underground clubs may result in altered ways of thinking.

Security as a foundation to immersion

“You just feel safer and there are not fights in the same way” - Hanna, 34

Carú and Cova (2007) and Hansen and Mossberg (2013) point to the importance of feeling secure in the enclave in order to be able to immerse. In contrast to what seems to be the general view in society, that underground clubs are dangerous places, this study reveals that all of the respondents feel just as safe or even safer in underground clubs compared to regular clubs. They all mention how important the other clubbers are in order for them to feel safe. The respondents mean that it is due to the notion that the clubbers are all aware of the unregulated setting which makes them act more responsibly than clubbers at regular clubs. At the same time the drugs most commonly ingested at underground clubs do not promote aggressive behaviour; rather they create an open and loving vibe that permeates the atmosphere. Many of the respondents argue that they witness fights and disarrangements in regular clubs a lot, but a lot less so, if even at all in underground clubs.

“I honestly think that the people are essential for the feeling of security. It doesn’t matter where the club is, it is not the location in itself that matters. If it is far out as hell or in some weird place, it doesn’t matter if you get there and it’s full of nice people. Nobody wants people that feel unstable and unpredictable.” - Alex, 29

“In concrete terms the safety is probably quite bad at these clubs. Because there is probably nobody who checks emergency exits, there might be too many people; there are not so many guards. It’s

more of a feeling. It's just a feeling that you are secure, but maybe you aren't. That feeling is based on the people, and that there are a lot of familiar faces.. But also, when you take E or MDMA you are very open. And there are a fair amount of clubbers that are under the influence in that way. You are not afraid of people that are on E, you are much more afraid of drunk people. Because you don't become aggressive on E, MDMA or weed. And it is those substances that are available at the underground clubs. Maybe it is the absence of macho drugs that make you feel safe. Like, you don't do cocaine at those parties. And then there are those that take laughing gas, but they just stand around and giggle. It is pretty fun and unthreatening" - Hanna, 34

"You could imagine that it would be an unsafe environment. But I have never felt unsafe. It doesn't feel like underground clubs are mafia places. Like 'Fuck, Hells Angels hang out where I hang out - fuck it's not safe!'. It's not total chaos, they still have guards. It doesn't feel like people are out for drama. It feels safer than it does in those places where people become way too drunk and you can see in their eyes that they want a fight. I don't meet those kinds of people at underground clubs. They are not as drama-oriented. People are chill and want a chill time. You should think that it is more dangerous, because people could go bananas. Nobody ever goes bananas. A lot less than they do in other places. It has happened that I have been in the middle of a fight at regular clubs, but not at underground clubs. And that makes you feel very safe" - Sam, 32

Alex, Hanna and Sam all illustrate how the other clubbers are essential to their feelings of safety. Alex means that it does not even matter which venue the underground club is located at as long as you get the impression that the clubbers present are nice and stable people. Hanna talks about how the safety at underground clubs objectively might be quite bad, but as a clubber it is not the objective facts that matter. Rather the notion of safety is more based on a feeling that mostly stems from the other club-

bers, but is also dependent upon the type of drugs the clubbers ingest. Hanna explains that a safe atmosphere is created as the recreational drugs used by underground clubbers promote unthreatening behaviours. Sam seems to point to the notion that the feeling of safety also adheres to the attitude of the clubbers. They are "chill" people who are not "drama-oriented". Here two aspects gain importance, firstly feelings of safety do not necessarily pertain to objective measures but mainly revolve around a feeling that is based on the other clubbers and their responsible attitudes. Secondly, the drugs ingested in underground clubs do not evoke aggressive behaviour, something that many of the respondents have experienced in regular clubs due to alcohol. As such a sense of security is created in relation to individuals, their behaviours and attitudes.

The feeling of being at ease in the environment also stems from the clubbers being able to feel comfortable when under the influence of recreational drugs. Here it is evident that the liberal attitude towards drugs makes the clubbers feel that their behaviours under the influence are accepted and not a reason for them to be kicked out of the club.

"You wouldn't take drugs in an environment that makes you feel unsafe. You can reach an elevated state with the help of recreational drugs, but you can also feel more immersed because you can relax. You don't have to feel afraid or anxious about anything or unpleasant people." - Alex, 29

"I was a bit stoned once at a regular club, and that just made me feel worried. You are not comfortable, what if someone catches you? You can't control your face, you become worried. But in an underground club you feel safer and you have fun. It peels of a layer, something happens; it adds a magic filter to your evening and your experience. I feel a lot more relaxed and not like anyone would catch me for something." - Sam, 32

From Alex and Sam's perspective it is easier to immerse in an experience when you are high on recreational drugs. It makes you feel more immersed and it adds a "magical filter" to the experience. But they both also emphasise that the context is important in order to be able to do so. They mean that underground clubs make them feel safe in regards of consuming recreational drugs and the subsequent effects that they have on your behaviour. Sam means that other club-settings impair such immersion, as one feels monitored and mistrusted. Immersion is thus facilitated in underground clubs due to the laissez-faire and liberal attitude of the clubbers, which make it easier for them to relax and immerse.

Although the respondents all talked about feeling quite safe at the underground clubs some of them also recount of instances when they have not felt safe at all. The feelings of insecurity are also based on the other clubbers present. They illustrate situations when the other clubbers send off an aggressive vibe, which made the club feel unsafe.

"I was at an underground club that was not part of the underground club scene in the same way. I don't even know how we got there. It was a whole other kind of clientele, they were super weird, it was really like the underground club of criminal people. There was no electronic music, just regular music. It felt really unsafe. I had taken some drugs and got into a situation with a dude at the club where he took a chokehold on me and pushed me to the wall because I slapped him in the face for fun. I didn't think that it was a serious move at all, it was for fun and not hard at all. I just slapped him very loosely, but the situation just changed dramatically. I feel that I was a bit lucky. If he would've been a crazy dude he could've done anything. He was gone in a whole other way, he was not a good person to joke with or try to initiate some kind of contact with. So it also depends on which type of underground club you end up at." - Sarah, 32

"We got into a club where there was a very hard climate, a lot of shaven heads and wife beater tanks, a lot of muscle. People were psyched in a very hard way. That was the feeling I got when I entered the club. I was high on MDMA and LSD, and then you're not really sure of what is true haha. But I know that it was like that because I talked to the others who were with me the day after and we had all felt the same way, even if they weren't high. It was the kind of place where you could say something wrong and get beat down for it. When you have taken something that is as special as LSD, when you are tripping and don't know what is real and not, then you want to feel safe. You don't want to be around people who you could say the wrong thing to, because you are bound to do it. You will say the wrong thing. It did not feel soft, peppy or curious. It was a lot more aggressive. We left that place very quickly." - Shelley, 37

Sarah and Shelley illustrate situations of clubs that have been perceived to be unsafe because the other clubbers present have sent off an aggressive vibe. The aggressiveness is explained in Sarah's terms as "criminal" and actions such as taking a chokehold on her and pushing her to the wall. Shelley also reacted on the physical appearance of the people in the underground club that made her feel unsafe. They were described to have "shaven heads and wife beater tanks, a lot of muscle". Other than the outright dangerous and distressing situation Sarah was put in, both Sarah and Shelley identify the appearance of the clubbers to be a source of information on how safe the club is, both making reference to appearances that commonly are ascribed to criminal individuals. Fundamentally it can be deduced that feelings of both safety and insecurity are based on the other individuals present with reference points such as their attitudes, their appearance, their behaviours and their use of different kinds of drugs.

As argued by Carú and Cova (2007) the security of the enclave is a prerequisite for consumers to be able to immerse. This study also

found that the feelings of security act as a foundation to the immersive experience. In this context the security does not only relate to regulated safety, but it also relates to a feeling of being at ease with the others clubbers and personnel. For this element, the importance of the other clubbers is highlighted as they account for the most part of the feelings of security by their responsible and undramatic attitudes and behaviours. In addition, the liberal attitudes towards drugs also create a relaxed atmosphere for those clubbers who would like to enhance their experience by ingesting recreational drugs. By comparing aspects of security between regular clubs and underground clubs the respondents illustrate how the underground club context is much less affected by violence, making such an experiencescape easier to immerse into. However, it does happen that the environment feels unsafe. The feelings of insecurity seem to mostly be based on the appearance and attitude of the other clubbers present. In essence, the security found at underground clubs seems to stem from feelings of being at ease with people who are responsible, undramatic and have liberal attitudes towards drugs. Due to the friendly and liberal environment, the clubbers are more readily able to engage in the social and introvert aspects of the immersive experience. The social and introvert parts of the experience are both enhanced as the clubbers feel secure and at ease with each other. Without these aspects of security the clubbers may have a difficulty to immerse in the underground club context.

Community as a gateway to belonging and acceptance

The importance of other consumers in the experience has been emphasised in immersion literature (Arnould and Price, 1993; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013; Measham et al. 1998). The communal experience facilitates a sense of

communion, linkage, and belonging (Arnould and Price, 1993; Goulding et al., 2002). The sense of community emerged as a strong theme in all the interviews with the underground clubbers.

“You are very welcoming in the way [that you behave]. I mean, people are very helpful over all, but you don’t think about that. And it actually is like that, okay, not every one of course, but over all people are just nice. It can be such a thing as the club being quite small, and at times it can be quite tight. People might jump in to one another, but it’s always like ‘oh, I’m sorry’. You are still humane about it” - Carla, 27

“It’s a whole other feeling. People are nice, people are helpful. They don’t know you, but they care. Just such a thing as if someone sees that you are thirsty or need gum they offer it to you, it’s fine, here. There is no ‘this is mine, this is yours’. Of course there are always people who are like that, but if I were to go up to someone and ask for water that would be fine. There is a lot of community in that way.” - Alex, 29

“There is an understanding that everyone’s on different levels, different drugs and emotional states. It [the crowd] is very accepting. You don’t feel like anyone is going to subject you to something, even if you lose your foothold. It is a big factor - the people that are at the clubs.” Shelley, 37

The above quotes illustrate how the respondents describe the underground club scene as a warm, welcoming and caring one. The underground clubs seem to unify people who would otherwise categorize themselves as strangers in daily life. The lack of the notion that ‘this is mine, this is yours’ captures the sense of a certain kind of intimacy amongst strangers. In the Swedish culture, that is otherwise marked by a high level of individualism (Hofstede), underground clubs seem to offer a place where people take care of one another irrespective of how well they know each other. Unlike regular

clubs, the atmosphere at underground clubs is permeated by this loving vibe (Measham, 1998). It appears that underground clubs enable a specific relationship between the clubbers, where the boundaries and cultural norms of comportment between strangers are broken.

Cova (1997:301) argues that members of neo-tribes are linked together by “shared emotions, styles of life, new moral beliefs, sense of injustice and consumption practices”. Goulding and Shankar’s (2004:649) study on age in the rave scene found that “the shared consumption of music, for example, and its ability to link individuals together, not only validates the individual’s self-identity but also helps to coalesce and create a neo-tribe”. The underground clubs appear to create neo-tribes as the clubbers feel relatively free and accepted amongst each other. They share emotions and beliefs during the transcendental experience.

“This can also be derived to primitive. I can imagine that many people in tribes... Whether it’s like fermented alcohol, or whether it’s like drugs, which people have been taking for so long. And dance in a trance like state. I have to say that that sounds pretty tribal to me. You are with a lot of people, you are aware of their existence, but you don’t necessarily need to have contact. It is more like everyone is with each other in a sort of ring; you dance with yourself and maybe a little bit with the others. There is something liberating with it.” Alex, 29

The tribalism, as described by Alex, does not only pertain to modern aspects of neo-tribalism, rather he draws parallels to more primitive and native tribal behaviours. Alex describes that the clubbers dance together in a trance like state, however the dance is not marked by interpersonal interaction but by an interaction with the self. In essence the collective dance becomes a means to emancipate by turning ones energies and emotions inwards.

The emancipatory aspects of the immersive experiences in underground clubs seem to differ from that of tourism as presented by Jafari (1987). Jafari (1987) emphasises the importance of a spatial distance from home as well as a differentiation via the tourists’ physical appearance. In this study it was found that the emancipatory forces derived from the immersive experiences in underground clubs stem from the freedom and acceptance of behaving and appearing as one likes,

“When I go to an underground club I can be exactly as I want to be. I just feel free. I can do whatever I feel like, but I don’t need to do whatever I feel like. But I have the choice to do it, and that’s what’s nice about it. There are no boundaries, everything is very simple. And natural, and genuine.. It can be all from practical things - everybody doesn’t look the same for example, which makes it feel natural that the people are their own selves. People might move in a special way, they don’t all dance in the same way. Someone rocks, someone stands, someone jumps. You don’t see that in the same way at regular clubs. There everything has to be in a certain way, otherwise it immediately becomes weird. But at underground clubs it’s more like ‘oh well, he dances differently’ or ‘he dances like that, well well’. You don’t put up a facade for the audience. Everything is very simple. You can go to the toilet and there is no door, just a drape. It is pretty weird, but at the same time it makes it so much more genuine. ‘We do what we can’, kind of.” - Carla, 27

“It’s more of a fuck-it type of attitude. I don’t really know if it’s okay to fall asleep or dance on the tables, but it feels like it wouldn’t be as big of a problem at an underground club as it would be elsewhere. The less rules you have the better the partying can be. I’m all for respecting people and the place you are in. It’s not like people go ape-shit and destroy stuff” - Sam, 32

The emancipatory aspects of the experience is further illustrated in Carla’s excerpt above. She

emphasises the importance of the feeling of freedom at underground clubs. She means that she is free to do whatever she likes, but does not necessarily do whatever she likes. That is something all of the respondents talked about during the interviews, namely the notion that there is a freedom to do anything and go bananas, but that the clubbers very seldom do so as they all take responsibility for how they behave. Sam explains that the attitude in the underground clubs is more liberal, also emphasising that people are freer to do whatever they like there than elsewhere. However, Sam also states that the liberal setting does not make people behave disrespectfully. It appears to suffice with the mere knowledge of freedom for the clubbers to feel emancipated without them having to act upon it in ways that put themselves or others in danger. Carla discusses how a feeling of freedom and genuineness is created in underground clubs, as people are free to dress however they want and dance however they want without others judging them. She puts this in contrast to regular clubs where one has to conform to certain codes of conduct. In such a vein, it becomes apparent that the freedom felt at underground clubs stem from the lack of codes of conduct and the accepting spirit towards others.

The emancipatory aspects of the underground experience is also expressed by the liberal view on drugs as a shared belief and consumption practice, that bind the tribal aspects of the underground clubbing further. It is not only the mere act of consuming recreational drugs that coalesces the sense of togetherness, it is also the effects of being high on the drugs that bond the clubbers together and submerge them in a trance-like state. The respondents described the experience as the becoming of a togetherness and dissolution of the ego.

"We belong to the same scene. At underground clubs you are even more outside of the norm. Like

you create that bond a lot stronger. And especially when it comes to drugs, because that is really outside of the norm, and it's looked down upon in many ways. But we still say that 'yeah well we think that this is fine'. Then you have made a choice that is outside of the norm and you can feel even more connected through that." - Paul, 32

"I think that there are strong parallels to tribes. That you want to dissolve the ego and come in to a kind of community, also something that is bigger than yourself. That is why the rave and electronic cultures are interesting, you go to be part of a rhythm that is collective at the same time as being outside of yourself". - Sarah, 32

Paul recounts how the underground clubbers feel connected by their liberal view on drugs. Especially much so as they have made a choice that is outside of the norm. This further reinforces the togetherness felt amongst the clubbers as they share a view that regards an illegal matter that is commonly looked down upon in society. Sarah illustrates how this sense of community further facilitates the clubbers to transcend into an experience that is collective at the same time as being outside of the self. It is not only the ingestion of recreational drugs that immerse the clubbers in a transcendent experience, it is also facilitated by the sense of togetherness and collective acceptance that put the clubbers at ease and enable them to transcend.

Similar to Kozinets (2002) findings stating that the Burning Man community share anti-consumerist ideals, the data in this study also reveal anti-consumerist ideals among the underground clubbers.

"If you are anti-consumerist and artsy fartsy you will go to the places where there are such people" - Hanna, 34

"I was at an underground club where the entrance cost between 25-70 SEK depending on how much you were able to pay. Even if you couldn't pay any-

thing you could talk with them and they would sort it out. You could go there with 25 SEK or nothing in your pocket. Also if you could pay more you were welcome to do that in order to keep the club alive.” - Sam, 32

“It’s an anti-market situation. You pay a little for the place to go around, people have been working on it. But it’s not because you are trying to sell something, it becomes a non-consumption.” - Sarah, 32

The above excerpts illustrate how Hanna, Sam and Sarah perceive the underground clubs to promote an anti-consumerist approach. Sam means that some underground clubs enable the clubbers to pay an entrance fee that ranges from zero up to however much they would like to pay. Likewise Sarah means that clubbers pay a small entrance fee in order for the place to go around. The quasi non-existent focus on money in the underground clubs seems to further unite the group of clubbers via a shared belief that purports a sense of being outside of the market. This anti-consumerist ideal may further enforce the emancipatory qualities of underground clubbing as it frees the clubbers from constraining forms of consumption that are based around monetary exchange.

The notion of the underground clubs forming a tribe is further emphasised as the respondents distinguish which ‘type of people’ that frequent the scene. For the respondents drugs such as alcohol and cocaine evoke the badness in people, whilst the commonly ingested drugs such as MDMA and E bring out the loving and caring in people.

“The thing that is good with such places [underground clubs] is that people just invite people that they trust, that are okay and nice. It is like a filter, you get rid of the vermin - that is people that are alcoholized. Many different types of people disappear in that way.” Paul, 32

“There are many people who have taken a substance, like Ecstasy, MDMA, amphetamine. It is not the coke-people that come here; they go to Yaki-Da or the avenue. The MDMA- and LSD-people come to these places”. Sarah, 32

“At ordinary clubs you become irritated because it is not ‘your kind of people’. I don’t have anything in common with people that go to the avenue [a clustered area of regular clubs in Gothenburg], or not very much at least. It happens that you talk to people there and they’re like ‘So what do you do?’ and you answer ‘Art’. Then you have to explain haha. I know that you don’t have to do that at the underground club places. You don’t have to explain that art does not mean that I only paint or make sculptures, because it is those two forms that people know when it comes to art. You become kind of segregated because of that reason, you are from two different planets” Hanna, 34

“Maybe it is the absence of macho drugs that make you feel safe. Like, you don’t do cocaine at those parties.” Hanna, 34

The above excerpts illustrate how the respondents not only distinguished people by their interests and social status, but also by the type of substance they choose to ingest. The people who choose to ingest drugs that are not common to the underground club scene, such as alcohol and cocaine, are talked about in a derogatory way. Paul even likens the people who prefer such drugs to vermin. Hanna also points to the notion that such drugs are “macho”, a personal trait that is often used to illustrate and mock the overly aggressive and cocky nature of the male gender (Connell, 1995). By metaphorically assimilating drugs such as cocaine to a stereotypical aggressive male behaviour, Hanna conveys the idea that such characteristics are not a desired ideal in the underground neo-tribe, which may further coalesce the community. Hanna also points to the notion that she does not feel as much at ease with people who go to regular clubs. This stems

from the notion that the clubbers at regular clubs do not have an adequate understanding of people who do not come from the same background or have typical occupations. In such a way underground clubs also offer a place for people who are in some way outside of the regular conventions and norms in society and who have a mutual understanding for one another's background, interests and field of work to come together. These are the people who prefer the effects of illicit recreational drugs to legal drugs such as alcohol, the people who choose unconventional fields of work and the people who feel segregated in society due to these aspects. Consistent with Arnould and Price (1993) and Hansen and Mossberg's (2013) contributions, it appears that the community created in underground clubs thus works as a gateway to belonging and acceptance, which facilitate immersion into transcendent experiences.

The role of the community in underground clubs is illustrated as a gateway to feelings of belonging and acceptance via shared moral beliefs and ideologies. In this case the term gateway refers to the passage into a group of people who together create a neo-tribe. The emancipatory forces that prevail in this group of people free the clubbers from common codes of conduct and cultural norms of comportment. As a result the clubbers feel more at ease to act and appear as they like, which facilitates the immersion into a transcendent experience. It can be contended that the communal aspects found at underground clubs emancipate the clubbers to both enter an introvert experience, as they do not have to worry about how they are perceived by the others, as well as in a social experience as they share feelings of connectedness, belonging and acceptance.

Music as a medium to a transcendental state

Another element emerging from the interviews was the importance of the music. The respondents described the music as being an integral part to their immersion as it enables them to get into a trance-like state. The music played at underground clubs is oftentimes electronic with repetitiveness to it. It is this repetitiveness that allows the clubbers to get into a state of losing themselves and immersing into their own 'bubble'.

"You easily get stuck in emotional states with normal music. There is a line that says something, and you can emote to it a lot when you sing the lyrics. The dance is characterised by what the song is about. At underground clubs there is an emotion that is communicated by a beat. Your dance is not characterised by the lyrics but by the emotion that is conveyed by the weight of the music. It makes you go in to a collective trance. You go in to that thing, it is that word. Trance-like state. Just you and it, instead of referring back to a line in the lyrics 'I don't want to feel alone' and you do a move to that haha. But when it is only du du du duu you can zone out completely and rinse your head in a way"- Shelley, 37

"The music is more like 'we are all here together in a sea which moves together in ecstasy, but at the same time we are all very into some kind of other relation to the music and ourselves'" Hanna, 34

"It is easier to get into a trance-like situation when the music is electronic and rhythmical" - Sarah, 32

"It is repetitive, with many long segments, so you can get stuck in the loop" - Hanna, 34

Shelley, Sarah and Hanna describe how the music immerses them into a trance-like state characterised by zoning out, rinsing your head and getting stuck in the loop. According to Goulding and Shankar (2004) the communal bonding and music affect the experience at

raves. The notion of being together in a collective trance-like state is illustrated by Shelley, "It makes you go in to a collective trance". This notion is further emphasised by Hanna as she depicts a collective sea-like motion triggered by the music. It appears that the music played at underground clubs, which is often electronic with a certain repetitiveness to it, may immerse the clubbers in a trance-like state that both pertains to an individual experience as well as reinforcing the bond within the community. As such the music does not only have an experiential aspect to it but it also seems to have a coalescing affect.

Goulding et al.'s (2002) argument that the combination of the music and drugs enable the underground clubbers to escape is noted in this study. The drugs ingested were described to enhance the whole experience by augmenting music-evoked emotions. Below Alex and Carla illustrate such music-evoked emotions,

"The music immediately makes you feel inspired and very happy. My experience becomes elevated, I feel the music even more, and it goes into your heart when you have take something". - Carla, 27

"[When under the influence] You feel the music more than usual, just like you feel everything else more; like love, openness and people. Whatever it might be. The music affects you a bit more in that state. It is nice, it is just the lights and laser, different colours and the music that you kind of feel in your stomach. It is totally an immersion" - Alex, 29

"[When under the influence] You realise what the music really means to you." - Carla, 27

Alex and Carla describe how the combination of drugs and music evoke emotions. Alex means that "you feel the music more than usual" and that the music has a bigger effect whilst under the influence. Carla states that the combination makes you realise what music really means to you and that it goes into your

heart. Kaelen's (2015) study on the effects of LSD in combination with music showed that strongest emotion enhancement related to "transcendence", "wonder", "tenderness" and "power". Here it is also showed that transcendental emotions of spirituality (the meaning of music) and tenderness (love and openness) emerge from the immersive experiences. What this suggests is that the immersive experiences in underground clubs may be mediated by the combination of music and drugs.

The role of the music seems to be founded in its ability to act as a medium to a transcendent state. Here medium denotes a tool-like characteristic, in the sense that music acts as the instrument that sets the clubbers into a transcendent state of being. The electronic and repetitive nature of the music commonly played at underground clubs acts as a medium for the clubbers to get into a state of losing themselves and immersing into their own introvert 'bubble'. The music also acts as a medium in coalescing the community and enhancing the social aspects of the experience by its ability to set the clubbers into a collective trance. As such the music acts as a medium in the making of the introvert and social aspects of the immersive underground experience.

Recreational drugs as an enhancer of the experience

Goulding et al. (2002) argue that the use of drugs in combination with the music in underground clubs enable the escaping of the real world. In the underground club scene there appears to exist a normalization process surrounding illicit drugs; they are ingested in a context specific activity separated from routine daily activities (Goulding and Shankar, 2004). The respondents in this study argue that drugs are often a part in their immersion process.

“Those drugs [Ecstasy, MDMA and LSD] dissolve your ego and your own boundaries. You want to hug a lot and see people, you want to talk and make out. It becomes bodily and loving. /.../ The ecstatic stems from you being so full of love and so full of openness, and that permeates those types of events. You are more open to others” Sarah, 32

“It is not like you are fooling yourself that everything is perfect [when high on MDMA], you feel happy, endorphins are released in your body. But you are still in the right state of mind, you don't lose control like you do on alcohol. I still have control over what is going on.” - Carla, 27

“ You can have a dialogue with something that is outside of yourself.” - Hanna, 34

The respondents depict how the drugs consumed immerse them both in a bodily experience as well as an out of the body experience; “you dissolve your ego and your own boundaries”, “endorphins are released in your body”, “you want to hug a lot and see people, you want to talk and make out”, “have a dialogue with something that is outside of yourself”. Cohen's (1995) study showed that people take MDMA in order to reach a state of euphoria. MDMA-users have reported feelings of “love”, “happiness” and “connection” (Cohen, 1995). The respondents of this study also recount these effects, as they describe the effects as “loving”, “feel happy” and “open to others”. As such it appears that the connection and “loving vibe” that stems from the dissolution of the ego and one's own boundaries makes the clubbers immerse both in an experience that takes place within the body and in an experience that has its main focus outside of the body.

Despite the positive feelings enabled by the use of recreational drugs, the transcendent experiences offered at the underground clubs have a potential dark side. As Schouten et al. (2007) suggest there is a risk of addictive es-

capism when it comes to transcendent experiences. In the case of underground clubbing such addiction may be marked by an addiction to drugs. The respondents reason around this topic,

“Drugs are everywhere. And probably more on the avenue than one can muster to think. The attitude towards drugs is more liberal at underground clubs. And that is where you have to separate - when you take things it is not like its about being addicted or anything like that. But it has become a thing in underground clubs in order to heighten your experience. Many people that haven't been at underground clubs have a prejudice that there are only really weird people there, addicts and scum. But if you have been at an underground club you realize that it is not like that at all. It is completely normal people, maybe even people with kids at home” - Carla, 27

“After all of these years partying I have learnt a really good thing. You can use stuff as long as you don't abuse stuff. I think like that about a lot of things that aren't good for you. Everything from sugar, to alcohol to drugs.” - Paul, 32

“I have had long periods when I have just done it every third month, sometimes three times a year. Or once every year. And sometimes every weekend. But I have never felt in the risk-zone to become addicted. Never, and that is considering that I have done it for nearly 20 years now. And it wouldn't bother me if I couldn't do it for the rest of my life either, it's fine. But it is a mood enhancer, and it is fun.” - Shelley, 37

“I was scared of taking drugs before. But I was too curious so I dared to try. And then I thought, ‘what, was this it? It is not at all like what I have been taught about it’. I felt very deceived. You feel shocked that you very easily accept what society has fed you with. Without having questioned it, you have just thought that it is dangerous and that it is bad” - Carla, 27

The above quotes illuminate how the respondents of this study have not experienced the addictive effects of taking recreational drugs. Carla means that recreational drugs are taken in order to heighten the experience and that it does not revolve around an addiction. Shelley means that she uses recreational drugs with various frequencies during different periods and that she would be fine if she could not do it for the rest of her life. Paul likens the use of recreational drugs to other addictive substances such as sugar and alcohol in order to portray a sense of using and not abusing. It is possible to discern a more open-minded approach toward the addictive risks of illicit recreational drug use, as the risk is assimilated to other addictive legal substances such as alcohol and sugar. The clubbers' liberal attitude towards drugs also accounts for the risks of addiction, however these risks do not seem to be experienced by the respondents in contrast to what they have perceived in society. As such the risk of addictive escapism facilitated by the use of recreational drugs might not be as widespread as the discourse upheld in the general public.

Theorizing the role of the drugs it becomes apparent that they work as an enhancer to the immersive transcendent experience at underground clubs. The term 'enhancer' in this case describes the augmentation of feelings and perceptions. The enhancement stems from the effects of the drugs; "feel full of love", "full of openness", "releases endorphins", "dissolve your ego and your own boundaries". As such the drugs seem to act in ways that enhance the bodily experience and connection felt between the clubbers. The social aspects of the experience is enhanced as the clubbers feel dissolved in their ego and boundaries, resulting in more love and openness towards the others. The introvert aspects of the experience are stimulated by the out of the body effects of the recreational drugs. Although these experiences might be expressed outside of the body, they

are conceptualized within the person experiencing them, making them part of the introvert aspects.

DISCUSSION

Underground clubs provide an intriguing context to further explore features that affect immersive experiences. Consistent with research on immersive experiences, underground clubbing seems to offer a state of "feeling fully absorbed" (Mainemelis, 2001:557), "forgetting one's self and one's surroundings" (Mainemelis, 2001:557) and a "deep involvement in the present moment" (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013:212). Underground clubbing is a recreational form that stands out as it enables the clubbers to immerse in an experience where they dissolve their ego and let go of themselves in a transcendent experience. In this study, underground clubbing is described as being a unique kind of experience where the clubbers feel connected to a collective at the same time as having an introvert experience. The data revealed that the transcendental aspects of underground clubbing pertain to certain characteristics that Schouten et al. (2007) state as: a feeling of connectedness to a phenomena which is larger and outside of the self, oneness, separation from the mundane, ineffability and extreme enjoyment.

This study has found that underground clubs seem to provide a place for consumers with common moral beliefs to come together and form a sort of neo-tribe where the members feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. The elements discovered in this study that create a bond between the clubbers are their interest in music, their liberal view on recreational drugs and their anti-consumerist ideals. From the interviews it is apparent that the respondents put a high value on the immersive experiences that they can reach in an underground club. They seek out such experiences in order to

lose themselves, clear their system and dive into their own 'bubble'. At the same time the underground club scene carries anti-consumerist ideals and values that further coalesce the bond between the clubbers. Such anti-consumerist values were argued to be part of creating a community in Kozinets' (2002) ethnography of the "Burning Man" festival. Arnould and Price (1993:41) argue "some authors think the value placed on intense, positive experiences is a reaction against the commercialization of meaning and segmentation and specialization of roles in the work-place (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Cushman 1990; Ewen, 1988; Giddens 1991, p. 9). In this study the respondents indicate that one of the reasons why they seek underground club experiences is because they feel that they are less profit-driven and represent non-consumption. As such these clubs provide the clubbers with a context that is congruent with their self-identity. This may make them feel more at ease, and some of them reported being able to showcase their 'real' selves in the setting. It is not only the security that permits such authentic showcasing of oneself, but also the freedom that exists in these clubs. There are no rules and regulations that dictate how one should dress and behave, leaving the responsibility and control of behaviour to the clubbers themselves. In contrast to what is generally believed in society - that such liberal environments would attract scums and allow for outrageous behaviour - it seems like underground clubs are affected by violence and disruption a lot less than regular clubs. From this study, it appears that it does not necessarily mean that people will go bananas if they are given the freedom to act in disregard from societal norms. Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) mean that people seek out extraordinary experiences in order to feel free and leave behind everyday stress. This study shows that people seek out immersive transcendent experiences in order to break away from super-

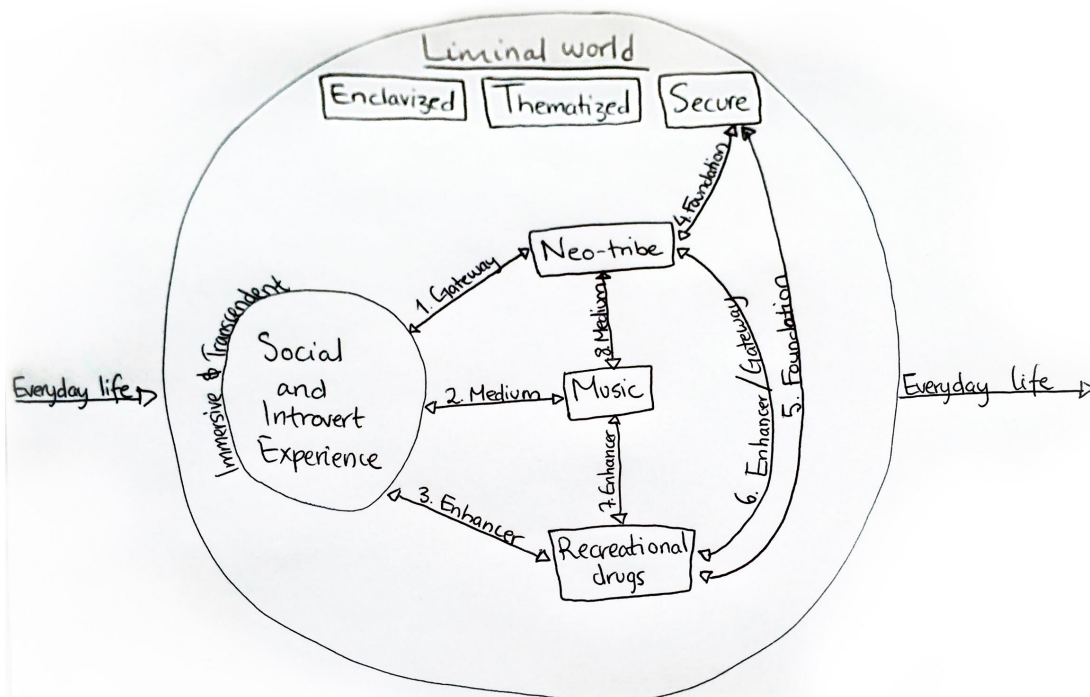
imposed societal norms that pertain to drug use and consumerist ideals. Certainly this makes way for a non-conformist behaviour, which further strengthens the bond felt within the neo-tribal community. In congruence with Goulding et al.'s (2002) findings, this study finds that underground clubbers seek out alternative social arrangements and new communities around common bonds and experiences, something that reinforces the sense of belonging and bonding within the group of clubbers.

Literature on immersive experiences in touristic settings have emphasised the role of the personnel, especially highlighting the role of the guide (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013; Arnould and Price, 1993). From this exploratory study it does not seem like the personnel have a significant impact on the immersive experience within the underground club context. Rather the role of other clubbers was found to have a significant impact on the experience in several ways. One of the ways the other clubbers affect the immersive experience is by acting as integral parts to the feelings of security at the clubs. Carú and Cova (2007) mean that feelings of security are one of the main factors in order for consumers to be able to immerse. In an underground setting, the feeling of being at ease was discovered to stem from a feeling of security, which is based on the other clubbers. Security is a central aspect in this illegal activity as it is not merely the clubs that are illegal, but also some of the activities taking place within the clubs. It was expressed that feeling secure in the illegal setting was of great importance also in regard to the ingestion of recreational drugs. When it comes to an experience as specific as being high on drugs, the respondents meant that one cannot be expected to act within your normal boundaries, thus making it very important that the other people present in the setting have an understanding and acceptance for this.

The sense of belonging was further reinforced by the ingestion of certain kinds of recreational drugs. The respondents discussed how they felt that the clubbers who were high on drugs such as E, MDMA and LSD all were in a collective mood where they felt connected to one another even though they were strangers to each other. It is apparent that one of the outcomes of ingesting recreational drugs is to bond with people. At the same time as seeking an experience where the clubbers feel connected to others, the respondents described how the immersive experience in the underground clubs also is quite introvert. The drugs ingested have the capacity to enable you to zone out and put you in your own ‘bubble’. Here the importance of the music played to the immersive process was emphasised during the interviews. The respondents argued that the repetitiveness of the electronic music also had the ability to let them enter their own zone and transcend into their own ‘bubble’. At the same time the music also promoted a collective di-

mension as the clubbers dance together “in a rhythmical sea”. It is this unique dialectic between being part of a collective experience, whilst at the same time having a very individual experience that creates a special type of immersive and transcendent experience in the underground clubs. At the same time as being in the enclave of the experiencescape the underground clubbers also seem to immerse into an enclave of their own individual ‘bubble’.

The elements emerging from this study were described to strongly interact with each other; as such the exclusion of one of them might hinder immersion. Thus it is possible to contend that the elements affecting immersion in underground clubs are mutually dependent upon one another in such a way that they form a constellation. This constellation is illustrated in the below model that has been inspired by Hansen and Mossberg’s (2013) model on immersion in tourism context.



Model 1. The role of the elements that affect the immersive and transcendent experience in an underground club context

From the model it is possible to discern the co-dependency and the roles of the elements that shape the immersion in underground clubs. The liminal enclavized experiencescape represents the 'bubble' in which the experience takes place. This experiencescape is separated from everyday life due to the elements depicted inside of it; the social/introvert experience, the feelings of security, the neo-tribal aspects, the music, as well as the recreational drugs. It does not mean that these elements cannot be found in everyday life as well, rather it is indicated that the combination of these elements facilitates immersion in an underground context. The immersive and transcendent experience in this study is synonymous with the social and introvert experience marked by the 'bubble' within the 'bubble'. This immersive and transcendent experience is affected by the surrounding elements. Below each arrow that represents the role that the elements play is explained in numerical order.

The model depicts how the neo-tribal aspects, the music and the recreational drugs have direct links to the immersive and transcendent experience by their roles as gateway, medium and enhancer.

1. The neo-tribal characteristics of shared morals and ideologies act as a gateway to feelings of belonging and connection that clearly contribute to the social part of the experience. This element also results in an emancipatory force that frees the clubbers from cultural norms of comportment, which facilitates the entry into an introvert experience.

2. The music acts as a medium to the social aspects of the experience by its ability to set the clubbers into a collective trance. It further acts as a medium to the introvert aspects of the experience by its ability to immerse the clubbers into their own 'bubble'.

3. The recreational drugs have an enhancing role to the immersive and transcendent experience by their ability to augment the social parts

of the experience via their boost of openness and love. They also enhance the introvert parts of the experience by their stimulation of an out of the body experience.

Apart from these direct links to the social and introvert experience, the model also represents how the elements are affected by each other.

4. It was possible to discern that the role of security as a foundation to immersion is affected by the other clubbers present. The undramatic behaviours and liberal attitudes of the clubbers result in feelings of security and ease, which enable the clubbers to immerse in transcendent experiences.

5. It is the same behaviours and attitudes that make the clubbers feel at ease to ingest recreational drugs. As such the security felt among and created by the clubbers establishes an environment where they can feel free to ingest recreational drugs and dance or act in whichever way they feel like. The effects elicited by the use of recreational drugs foster a sense of security due to their loving and caring nature.

6. The sense of security is further enhanced by the communal sense of a shared responsibility in an unregulated setting that adheres to the neo-tribe. The effects of the drugs also enhance the neo-tribal aspects of the underground club community by their augmentation of feelings of openness and love. The shared moral beliefs, liberal attitudes and ideologies that pertain to the neo-tribe also establish a sense of ease and emancipation among the clubbers. As such the neo-tribal aspects of the underground club context act as a gateway also to the ingestion of recreational drugs.

7. It was found that the combination of drugs and music has an enhancing effect on the emotions that they evoke. These emotions pertain to feelings of 'love', 'openness', 'dissolution of the ego and own boundaries' and 'endorphins' which all mark the immersive and

transcendent experiences in underground clubs. As such the combination of drugs and music seem to aid each other in the process of becoming immersed.

8. The tribal transcendent state that the clubbers report is also affected by the repetitive music. As such the music acts as a medium in coalescing the bond between the clubbers as they are immersed in a trance-like dance together.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this exploratory study has found that underground clubbing offer immersive experiences by both offering a context where clubbers can feel part of a collective whilst at the same time transcending into their own 'bubble'. Based on phenomenology inspired interviews, the findings show how security acts as a foundation to the immersion; how the neo-tribal aspects of the experience act as a gateway to belonging and acceptance within the community; the music acts as a medium to a transcendent state and how the recreational drugs ingested enhance the experience. These elements and roles together form a constellation where the co-dependencies of the different elements are illustrated [see Model 1.].

This study highlights the dialectic between the social and introvert aspects of the experience. At the same time as the physical boundaries of the experiencescape provide a 'bubble' for the consumers to be immersed in, there is also a 'bubble' created within the self which allows for a zoning out and absorption in the self. The dialectics between the social and the introvert experience in the underground club setting seem to pave the way for a special kind of immersive transcendent experience. Such an experience may result in altered ways of thinking.

Feelings of security are mostly based on the other clubbers present and their awareness of the unregulated setting as well as their liberal, yet responsible attitudes. Despite the common perception that people under the influence of drugs become dangerous, this study found that feelings of security actually also stem from the effects of Ecstasy, MDMA and LSD which are described as making people loving and caring. Immersion appears to be facilitated in underground clubs by the laissez-faire and liberal attitude of the neo-tribe, which enables a sense of security for the clubbers.

The community created in the underground clubs may be described as a neo-tribal one as it entails shared consumption practices and moral beliefs. The consumption practices that coalesce the group pertain to the context specific ingestion of recreational drugs and dancing in a trance-like state together. The moral beliefs that coalesce the group adhere to a liberal view on drugs and anti-consumerist ideals. These aspects enable the clubbers to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in the underground club context. These sensations make the clubbers feel more at ease in the environment and thus enable them to immerse in a transcendent experience.

The music was found to have a big impact on the experience, both as it by itself often immerses the clubbers into a collective trance-like state, but also because it enhances the emotions evoked during the influence of recreational drugs.

The drugs, most commonly Ecstasy, MDMA and LSD, ingested in the underground clubs are characterized by evoking emotions pertaining to love, happiness, connection and dissolution of the ego. These effects make way for an immersive transcendent experience that both express itself within and outside of the body. In this study it was found that the recreational drugs used were viewed as an enhancer

to the experience as it enables the clubbers to get into a different mind set.

The kind of immersive and transcendent experience offered at underground clubs draws the clubbers back to the underground scene in particular, as they feel that they cannot reach the same kind of transcendence in regular clubs. The findings in this study indicate that clubbers seem to desire to surpass mundane consumerism in order to transcend into something extraordinary. Although the underground club context is quite specific due to the illegal activities taking place at such venues, it provides an illustrative source, which contributes to a broadened understanding of immersive experiences. This study has contributed to the understanding of the concept of immersion by not only looking at the elements and facilitators that shape the experience, but also by analyzing and theorizing the role of these elements and how they affect each other. The elements of security, neo-tribe and music found in this study are likely to be applicable to other immersive context. For example, music might act as a medium in adventurous experiencescapes or amusement parks, whilst community might act as a gateway in concerts or theatres. These elements may also be applicable in virtual reality experiences.

The newly gained insights from this study may inspire further marketing research on immersive and transcendent experiences in other contexts. Such investigation could be focused on how transcendent feelings are expressed in other drug-free contexts. Further, the dialectics between the social and the introvert aspects of the immersive and transcendent experience is emphasised in this study. It would be interesting to see future studies exploring this dialectic further in other contexts. Lastly, given different elements, the theorized roles of foundations, gateways, mediums and enhancers are possibly found in other contexts as well. The presented model in this study may thus be further devel-

oped to represent a more general model of immersive experiences. Like that it could serve as a foundation to explore other roles and elements that pertain to different contexts.

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