



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (University of Victoria, 2012)

“Determining the Purity of Ecstasy (MDMA): Strategies Utilized by Recreational Ecstasy Users in Victoria, British Columbia”

Department of Anthropology

Wednesday, November 23, 2016

1:00PM

Graduate Students Building

Room 108

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Eric Roth, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Andrea Walsh, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Timothy Stockwell, Department of Psychology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Dennis Hore, Department of Chemistry, UVic

Abstract

The illegal drug *ecstasy*, chemically known as 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), sometimes contains additional chemicals which can pose health risks to users. This thesis examines strategies that recreational ecstasy users in Victoria, British Columbia utilize to determine the purity of their ecstasy. It also examines why they use these strategies and if they are concerned about impure ecstasy affecting their health because this information can help explain the use of these strategies. I performed a quantitative analysis of data collected by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC's survey, the *Canadian Recreational Drug Use Survey*, to determine the strategies participants utilized to minimize potential harms caused by ecstasy use. This analysis revealed that 73.9% of survey participants discussed purity of ecstasy with friends, 33.3% checked drug information websites, 17.4% used an ecstasy testing kit, 2.9% asked harm reduction services for advice, and 0% owned a testing kit. In addition, the data revealed that the participants were more likely to take ecstasy from a friend than a stranger. Next, I developed an interview guide based on these findings and I interviewed 10 female recreational ecstasy users. The most common strategy the women utilized to determine ecstasy purity was to discuss ecstasy with friends. They preferred this strategy because it was a convenient, practical strategy. Also, they perceived their friends to be a trusted source of ecstasy and ecstasy information. Half the women analyzed how they felt after ingesting ecstasy to determine its purity because they believed different chemicals caused different effects. Others assessed the physical characteristics of their ecstasy to try to determine purity because they believed these characteristics could reveal its chemical contents. One participant used an ecstasy testing kit, but the rest cited multiple barriers to their use. Some women also had negative attitudes towards testing kits and felt no social pressure to use them. I asked the participants about their use of ecstasy testing laboratories, but none used this service because they did not know it existed. Overall, none of the women seemed concerned about ecstasy impurity harms. This could be due to four factors. First, their ecstasy use patterns made them feel safe from harms related to ecstasy use. Second, recreational ecstasy use was "normal" amongst young adults in Victoria who attend parties, raves, or clubs. Third, they primarily obtained ecstasy and ecstasy information from trusted friends. Fourth, they had never suffered significant harm caused by ecstasy impurity, even though all of the women believed they had ingested impure ecstasy.