

## Stop the Beat: Quiet Regulation and Cultural Conflict

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores a recent conflict over the youth phenomenon known as “raving” in the city of Chicago. By interviewing participants involved in the conflict, we set out to understand the extent to which the crack down on raves in Chicago was similar to earlier social reactions to jazz, comic books, rock and roll, and Dead Head culture as well as to more recent conflicts over punk, rap music, and raves in other cities. While most previous research on cultural conflict has focused on moral crusades, campaigns and panics, the Chicago conflict represents an example of “quiet regulation.” Opponents refrained from highly visible, morally-charged attacks. Instead, in the absence of media hype and visible public discourse, public officials justified the crackdown in highly bureaucratic terms – avoiding risk, collecting taxes, enforcing codes. Nonetheless, they also drew on cultural schemas that linked raves and raving with drugs, sex, and deviance. As a result, officials selected a course of regulation that criminalized DJs and discredited the art form. In the absence of a highly visible moral campaign, the rave participants were unable to mobilize and resist the regulation and defend their lifestyle. Sociologists must move beyond highly visible campaigns and crusades and pay greater attention to quiet regulation, both because such regulation is likely to increase in the future and because it has significant consequences on power, cultural expression and identity.

**Key words:** raves, cultural regulation, cultural conflict, youth culture

## Introduction

*"Amidst our people here is come; the madness of the dance. In every town there now are some; who fall upon a trance. It drives them every night and day; they scarcely stop for breath. Till some have dropped along the way; and some are met by death"* 17<sup>th</sup> century poem describing the dancing mania that swept through Europe (Sachs 1963).

*"Music gets them into the state of mind and encourages their frenzied behavior. Some people are in a stupor. There are various forms of touching and kissing..."* Quote from a Chicago City Police officer asked to describe what happens at a rave event.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, citizens, activists, and officials have periodically erupted in disagreement over the boundaries of permissible expression (Beisel 1992 and 1993; Binder 1993; Dubin 1992; Epstein 1994; Gusfield 1963; Hunt 1996; Lopes 2006).. Most recently, in 2000 and 2001, the City of Chicago passed two ordinances geared toward shutting down unlicensed rave events – all-night, youth-oriented parties featuring electronic dance music and high tech light shows. Most scholars treat such conflicts as forms of symbolic protest; attempts to legitimate or denigrate cultural expression– from books, to music, food, and sport – in an effort to secure prestige or status for one set of values and lifestyles versus another. Others view cultural conflict less as the result of different groups competing over status and prestige and more as the consequence of the inevitable clash of values that accompany rapid social change. Protest over culture is often cast as a clash between old, middleclass, small town, Protestant values and new, urban, secular, cosmopolitan world views. Protests serve as a way to clarify moral boundaries and affirm the dominant values in a community. There is evidence as well that symbolic politics arise during times of social

anxiety. When citizens feel a “loss of control” due to economic, political, social or cultural change, they create “folk devils” – individuals who embody the latent fear or anxiety and who can be demonized, regulated, or otherwise brought under control. All of these accounts focus on the public nature of cultural conflict – often driven by the media, politicians, and crusaders, who typically traffic in morally-charged and often exaggerated rhetoric.

Alternatively, scholars have approached conflict over cultural expression from a bureaucratic and regulatory perspective. Max Weber believed that in modern society, rationalization and bureaucratization would increasingly expand to all spheres of social life, from economic and political to moral and cultural. As the state intervenes in the cultural sphere, a process of secularization replaces moral rhetoric and reasoning, leaving culture to be regulated through a legal-rational, technical discourse (Thompson and Sharma, 1998; John Evans....). Related, others contend that public space, leisure, and culture was routinely regulated as part of city governance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It served as a means of social control aimed at creating more productive workers and making cities safe and hospitable for businesses and their employees. Still others see cultural and moral regulation occurring through “carceral networks” – forms of discourse, the organization of knowledge, day-to-day routines, institutional practices – that are largely “invisible.” (Foucault 1975, 1981; Dean 1994). In other words, citizens voluntarily curtail and restrict their own cultural activity and expression as a form of self-discipline and self-regulation in order to be perceived as being healthy, productive, attractive, or respectable. Again, in these accounts, attempts to restrict and regulate culture are often depicted as routine, natural, voluntary, and rational. As such, they are less often publicly contested and linked to moral campaigns. Compared to the moral fervor and outcry that accompany “symbolic politics” – this form of cultural conflict is quiet; that is, it takes place outside the glare of a highly-

charged moral crusade or campaign. While there has been considerable research and analysis of various forms of this more quiet regulation, most of the work focusing on cultural expression – especially involving youth culture -- has tended to emphasize cases that are characterized by public drama and highly visible claims making.

This paper argues that sociologists need to pay closer attention to attempts regulate and curtail cultural expression when such efforts occur outside the glare of highly-charged moral crusades and campaigns. Drawing on Chicago's recent attempt to regulate and curtail raves, this paper explores the transformation in the social control of youth culture. It argues that increasingly such control is taking the form of quiet regulation in which crack downs on youth culture consist of zoning, licensing, dress codes, and other forms of regulation that arise from routine and bureaucratic public administration. This form of regulation is very different from the zeal and public drama that characterized past moral crusades and panics over comic books, dancing, television, novel-reading, music, drinking and other forms of sport and leisure. Nonetheless, morality continues to play a role in how the problem of "raving" is constructed by city officials. Further, by comparing the events surrounding the anti-rave ordinances in Chicago with a comparable set of events in Toronto, the paper argues that the relative invisibility of the regulatory efforts in Chicago actually impeded the ability of the city's rave community to resist and mobilize against the new laws.

*Campaigns, Crusades and Panics*

Sociologists have long argued that cultural conflict and moral regulation serves to demarcate acceptable and unacceptable behavior, high and low status lifestyles, in and out group membership and reputable and disreputable values and beliefs. Such conflict arises during times of social change and widespread uncertainty about the dominant values in a community. Following Joseph Gusfield, such conflicts are often referred to as “symbolic crusades.” They are symbolic in the sense that the advocates for reform, restrictions and censorship are not seeking instrumental or utilitarian outcomes (jobs, resources, political power) as much as symbolic outcomes (prestige and status). In his study of the temperance movement, Gusfield argues that the law itself (which was difficult to enforce) was less important than the fact that a style of behavior popular among the Catholic working class (urban drinking and night-time entertainment) was discredited by the law, and more importantly, by the public rhetoric that led up to the law. Gusfield called these social movements crusades because they share the fervor, intensity and visibility of a metaphorical crusade. Since Gusfield’s defining work, others have studied conflicts over textbooks in schools, pornography, and anti-vice efforts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century using the trope of the “crusade” as a defining characterization.

Crusades are often led by moral entrepreneurs, like Anthony Comstock in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, who use a variety of techniques – public speeches, appearances before courts and elected bodies, essays in newspapers – in order to construct a “cultural frame” that links an activity (drinking, reading comic books, purchasing nude paintings) to a lifestyle, a category of people, and a social problem – thereby constructing notions of deviance and harm in the public’s imagination (Beisel 1993).

Moral crusaders and entrepreneurs have been particularly active in trying to regulate youth culture. In 1954, Frederic Wertham crusaded against comic books, leading to a U.S. Congressional inquiry into their role in promoting juvenile delinquency (Nyeberg 1998). Soon after, Congress held similar hearings on rock music; and, in 1973, the Senate issued the Buckley Report -- that linked rock music to substance abuse (Epstein and Pratto 1995). In the 1980s, Tipper Gore and Deloris Tucker waged a campaign against heavy metal and rap music -- arguing that the music was linked to Satanism, violence, misogyny, suicide and other deviant behaviors (Binder 1993). Lopes (2006) argues that such campaigns can often stigmatize a cultural form, creating a link between an attribute (e.g. liking comic books) and a stereotype (e.g., being obsessive, shy and geeky).

Similar to the literature on moral crusades, a great deal of sociological research has attempted to describe and analyze cultural conflict as cases of moral panic. In 1972, Stanley Cohen popularized the term "moral panic" to characterize the over-reaction of the media, politicians and parents to an incident of vandalism by teenage boys -Mods and Rockers- at a seaside resort in England. Like moral crusades, moral panics are thought to arise during troubled, difficult or threatening times as a response to underlying social anxiety or strain. Interest groups or political activists typically incite a panic by directing attention, fear and hostility toward a group of persons that supposedly pose a threat to society, transforming such groups into what Cohen calls "folk devils." Using highly emotive, exaggerated and fear-based appeals, they demand that authorities "do something" about the alleged dangers posed by the folk devils. The media amplify these appeals, turning "an objective molehill into a subjective mountain" (Goode 1990; Goode

and Ben-Yehuda 1994) and creating widespread public concern. Many scholars have used the moral panic framework to understand recent conflicts over youth culture – including raves, punk music, drugs, and video games (Cricher 2000; Epstein and Pratto 1995; Grossberg 1992; Hier 2002; P. Jenkins 1999; McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Redhead 1993; Thornton 1996).

Both moral crusades and moral panic literature, while emphasizing different social dynamics, rely on similar methodologies and approaches. Both are interested, primarily, in the role of public claim making in the construction of social problems and collective definitions of deviance and respectability. They both emphasize the narrative arc of an issue – examining unfolding events over time and changes in rhetoric and framing.

The vast majority of research on cultural conflict and regulation focuses, understandably, on these **public** disputes and contestations. It is the dramaturgical element of conflict – public claim making, moral crusades, media representations – that lie at the heart of most sociological theories. Whether describing conflicts as moral panics or symbolic crusades, or discussing the “collective ritual” aspects of cultural conflict, scholars emphasize how these events help dramatize and clarify dominant values in a community or society. Without the “public display” of approbation or disapproval, cultural conflict, it would seem, would have less sociological relevance. Thus, many of the scholars in this tradition are much less concerned with how conflicts get resolved (e.g., whether laws are created, changed or reformed) and more interested in how conflicts get “framed” and how such discursive practice influences social norms and values. The important point is that a dispute must be highly visible if it is to communicate clearly whose lifestyle is valued and whose is denigrated.

*Codes and Conduct*

But, cultural conflict and regulation does not always unfold with the passion and rhetorical force of moral panics and crusades. Sometimes restrictions on cultural expression are part and parcel of larger efforts of government regulation and control. Cultural expression can simply get caught in the cross-hairs of efforts to regulate and control trade, economic growth, crime, and other areas of public policy. At other times, cultural expression is regulated by politicians for personal gain or graft. And, governments often regulate culture through relatively invisible codes, licenses and permits (Parker 2007). Laws can be enacted in the absence of widespread panic or social movement activity. For example, Paul Chevigny writes about cabaret laws passed in New York City in the 1920s which restricted what types of establishments could present jazz, where in the city the music could be played, and who was allowed to play it. The laws were administered by several bureaucratic agencies – city planning, consumer affairs, police, and fire. And, they were passed and enforced without much fanfare – they were not perceived as “harassing legislation of morality,” but rather as simply “the way things are” – extensions of bureaucratic management.

In addition to regulating specific forms of cultural expression – like jazz – urban governments have targeted sites of leisure and amusement more generally as a way to reinforce the goals and interests of Fordist bureaucratic control and zoning (Lovatt 1996). The night-time economy – drinking establishments, cabarets, parks, and pavillions – has always represented a moral challenge to notions of efficiency, orderliness, and control. Spaces of urban leisure require tight control – through codes and licensing -- so

that the city can remain a safe and productive site for industry. Mary Louise Adams argues that efforts to target spaces of leisure, rather than directly assailing the immorality of specific individuals, are typically “smaller and less glamorous” forms of regulation. Adams provides several examples of “small” regulations in Toronto in the 1940s. In the absence of moral reform crusades, the city enacted several policies to restrict youth culture, including curfews, prohibitions on the mixing of men and women in taverns and pubs, the “sanitation” of parks through the removal of bushes and trees that previously allowed for privacy, destruction or displacement of board walks and other gathering places, Sunday closing laws, and the installation of flood lights in public locations.

Such Fordist-style control also characterized much of the “broken window” policing of the 1980s and 1990s, where city officials in New York, Chicago and other major urban centers, aggressively passed and enforced “quality of life” offenses – including youth curfews, graffiti, loitering, and public assembly laws (Harcourt 2001). In Chicago, the rave ordinances – the subject of this paper – could be seen as part of this larger effort at bureaucratic control; a logical extension of the Chicago mayor’s agenda to clean up the city by dealing harshly with “drugs, gangs and guns.” But as in the cases of graffiti art, street musicians, restrictions on parades, curfews, and codes of conduct in parks, largely “routine” regulation, even if stripped of overt moral rhetoric, has the consequence of diminishing and degrading the cultural expression and lifestyle of certain groups while promoting the lifestyle of others (Chevigny 1991, Malone 2002, Parker 2007).

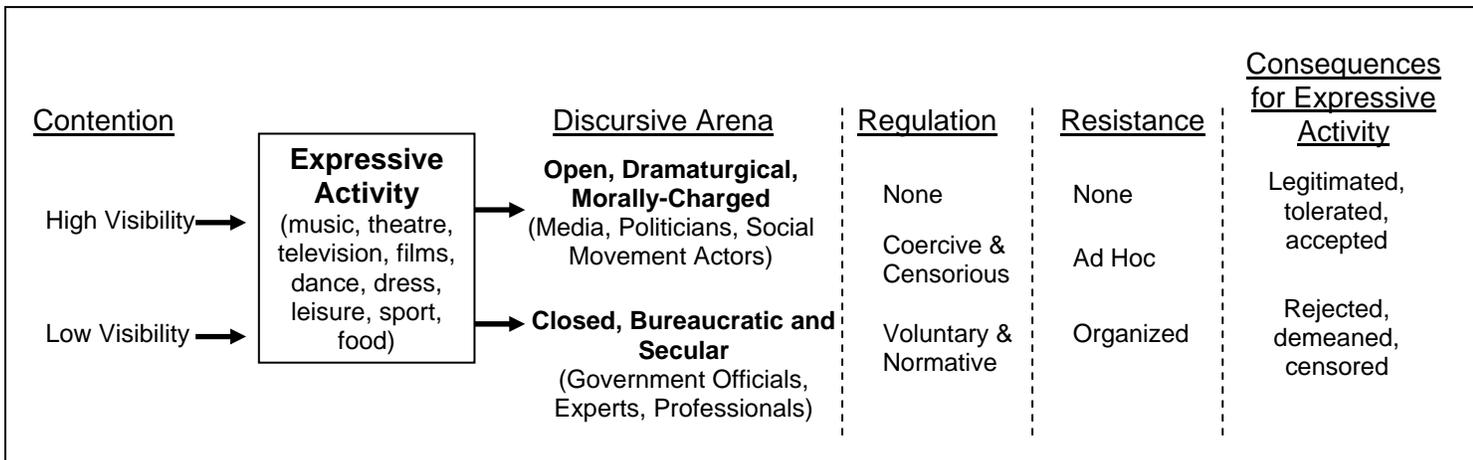
A disproportionate amount of scholarly attention has been focused on the most visible conflicts – *crusades, campaigns and panics*. The argument of this paper,

buttressed by the example of the Chicago anti-rave ordinances, is that *codes and conduct* – or quiet regulation – are equally important features of cultural conflict.

### Clarifying the Approach

The notion of quiet regulation is not new, as noted in the above examples. Nor is it intended as a significant departure from existing scholarship on moral and cultural regulation. Rather, I use the term quiet regulation to draw attention to an overlooked “site” of research – episodes in which cultural expression – especially the expression of young people – is regulated and curtailed in the absence of fanfare and visible moral discourse. The regulation is not quiet, but the surrounding debate is.

Figure 1: Cultural Conflict: Stages of Contention



As discussed above and depicted in figure 1, contention over expressive activity – from music to theatre, books, food, dress – can be either highly visible and noisy or mostly invisible and quiet. There is, of course, a continuum between the two – with some efforts to regulate and curtail culture arising from highly visible moral reform

movements or moral panics and others resulting from the routine activities of government bureaucracies, and still others somewhere in between. Depending on the pitch and visibility of the conflict, the nature of the debate – or the discursive arena -- will differ. As discussed above, crusades and reforms play out in the public sphere and involve considerable media coverage. They are more likely to involve social movement organizations, churches, moral entrepreneurs, politicians, and others who stand to benefit from public claim making and the perception of widespread crises. And, importantly, the discursive arena can be highly moralized – arguments for the public good are couched in terms of right and wrong; virtue and vice; purity and harm; order and disorder. When attempts to restrict art and culture are less visible– originating through the request of law enforcement officers, an administrative order, the recommendation of a government committee, or any other bureaucratic or managerial process – then the discursive arena tends to involve fewer voices and be dominated by experts and professionals. Arguments are couched in technical language, emphasizing such things as efficiency, safety, legality, and other forms of legal-technical rationality (Thompson and Sharma 1998).

The discursive arena influences both the nature and extent of regulation. The language used to describe, attack or defend an activity – say “raving,” listening to rap music, playing video games – shapes and is shaped by certain cultural schemas (Beisel 1993; DiMaggio 1997; Sewell 1992; Steensland 2007). Schemas are conceptual frames or ideologies that help individuals interpret and make sense of cultural events and experiences. In the case of art, censorship and regulation often “involves struggles about which cultural schemas are to be used to interpret art and the role of the state's resources in the conflict” (Beisel 1993, 148). In moral campaigns and panics, the cultural schemas employed are

often derived from notions of religion, community, and tradition and they link morality and immorality with ideas about race, class and gender (Beisel 1993, Adams 1994). For example, underlying the cabaret laws were cultural schemas that connected jazz with urban black youth and unseemly behavior. One leader at the time wrote of jazz clubs, “intimacy is encouraged by the crowding, the drinking, the music and the dim lights.... in such surroundings, a shady character can make hay while the sun is not shining” (Chevigny 1991, 65).

The outcome of regulation will depend precisely on how an issue gets framed and the schemas that come to dominate discussion of an issue. If opponents are able to depict a type of culture as illegitimate, morally suspect, unnatural, dangerous and threatening, then officials may be more likely to take coercive measures to restrict or censor the activity in question. If they fail to produce or mobilize compelling schemas, then leaders and public officials may choose to remain neutral. And, as Gusfield emphasizes, public debate and highly visible moral campaigns may create normative pressures on citizens to self-regulate (stop drinking; denounce certain books; boycott violent music and films) even if the state fails to pass or enforce regulation. What is often overlooked in the scholarly literature is the fact that cultural schemas inform regulatory activity even in the absence of well-articulated public campaigns to construct and promote one schema over another. So, officials and bureaucrats might pass restrictive or censorious laws or regulations based in part on preconceptions about a certain type of culture. These preconceptions are informed by less explicit, but no less consequential, cultural schemas. It is important to recognize that public officials and government bureaucrats do not necessarily retreat from moral discourse. Instead, as

others have found, cultural schemas might involve a mix of technical and rational language alongside moral and normative discourse (Hier 2002; Dawn and Valverde 2000).

Finally, figure 1 draws attention to the fact that regulatory efforts, whether coercive or voluntary, can be contested by targeted groups. Traditionally, the targets of moral panics – what Stanley Cohen calls “folk devils” – are depicted as helpless victims destined to accept collective representations of themselves and their lifestyles that are promulgated by the press and by moral crusaders. More recently, scholars have highlighted the ability of marginalized groups to fight back and reframe a debate or argument to their advantage, deflecting the labels and stereotypes that are directed at them. McRobbie and Thornton (1995) argue that folk devils are less marginalized than they once were, citing single mothers, homosexuals, and fans of Acid House music as recent examples of groups that were able to counter negative images of themselves promulgated by the mainstream press. An important way “folk devils” fight back is through alternative and niche media – e.g., the gay press, non-mainstream broadcasting, mass mailing, electronic mail campaigns. And, even mainstream media are less monolithic than once believed, often providing a forum for competing perspectives and discourses (Gamson 1998). Additionally, targeted groups can become empowered by engaging in traditional political organizing – forming interest groups, circulating petitions, sending out press releases or otherwise advancing their cause, agenda or way of life. In Toronto, Canada, a case we shall describe in more detail later, members of the local rave community were able to reframe the debate about the dangers of raves and successfully overturn an anti-rave ordinance. In this case, resistance was highly

organized, but it can also be ad hoc or absent all together, depending in large part on the organizational capacity of targeted groups, their access to media (both mainstream and independent) and their sense of solidarity and indignation in the face of attacks on their culture and lifestyle. Thus, as Thompson (1997) says, “cultural regulation is always a site of contestation” (p15). In the end, the way in which officials and citizens understand the “problem” posed by all-night electronic dance parties, comic books, fashion, novels, music and any other form of culture, determines not only the nature and scope of regulation, but ultimately the recognition and respect accorded to various forms of cultural expression and associated lifestyles.

### *The Future of Quiet Regulation*

I argue that scholars need to spend more time examining “quiet sites” of cultural regulation because such sites are likely to become more common in the future. First, quiet regulation reflects and reinforces the notion that modern life is increasingly characterized by risk and uncertainty caused by environmental catastrophe, computer viruses, terrorism, fraud, and other unpredictable threats (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990, Lupton 1999). As a result, adherents of this “risk-society” thesis suggest that the way in which social problems are framed and discussed has changed. Rather than using moral language that focuses on individual behavior and deviance, public leaders and the media are more likely to employ practical, bureaucratic and expert discourses, focusing on probability, risk, safety, and prevention (Douglas 1990; Hier 2003; Hollway and Jefferson 1997; Mugford 1993; Thompson 1998; Ungar 2001). This approach suggests that in dealing with deviance and social problems, society has moved from moralizing

discourses (centered around the “folk devil”) to notions of amoral risk management (centered around the capacity of government to protect citizens). Thus avoiding blame or identifying the liable parties is a major preoccupation of public leaders, rather than direct moral assault on a particular deviant group (Hier 2002). This trend is reinforced by what scholars identify as the growing secularization of the public sphere – with public officials and managers retreating from moral judgments and relying, instead, on a techno-rational criteria for decision making (cite Allistair and Thompson).

Second, as several scholars argue (Lovatt 1996, Lloyd 2006, Grazian 2003, Zukin 1995, Boyer 1992, and Hannigan 1998), cities are increasingly being defined and driven by cultural consumption rather than by manufacturing production. In an attempt to be defined as a hip and creative city, urban leaders are investing and supporting the “night time” economy in new ways. The presence of artists and musicians, hip and bohemian art scenes, and a lively space for cultural production and consumption are seen as key ingredients to attract global capital, highly mobile creative class workers, and big-spending tourists (Clark 2004, Florida 2002, Lloyd 2006). From this perspective, cities must either “deregulate” sites of cultural consumption or they must regulate culture with a much softer stick. Highly visible, moral attacks on culture, especially youth culture, are incompatible with the “creative city” brand.

A third potential cause of increased “quiet regulation” is the rise of coalition-style electoral politics in big cities. The decline of traditional party politics has been replaced by media-driven, personality-based campaigns aimed at appealing to a broad-base of constituents rather than traditional party loyalists. This transition accompanies the rise of “majority-minority” cities where ethnic minorities represent more than half of the

electorate. To win elections, mayoral candidates must broaden their coalitions and unite groups around issues that have broad appeal. Sustaining such coalitions requires a rhetorical discourse of inclusion and cultural tolerance, very different from the exclusionary and racially divisive politics of an earlier era (Mollenkopf 1992; Kantor 2002). As a result, big city mayors find themselves attempting to advance pro-growth agendas – including fighting crime, limiting social services, and controlling public spaces – without alienating their multi-ethnic, multi-class coalitions. In this context, quiet regulation avoids highly visible and morally-charged discourses that are likely to fracture fragile electoral coalitions.

Fourth, the rise and status of youth culture more generally has made it a less politically viable target of moral crusaders. Many have documented the recent enfranchisement of youth culture, which has emerged from the margins to take a more prominent place in the mainstream media and the world of commerce and marketing (Frank 1997, Postman 1994, Rushkoff 1999, Taylor 2003). Youth are no longer “protected islands” of innocence or alienated and rebellious miscreants. Today, activist organizations defend the free expression of young people, and parents and leaders recognize that, to some degree, they must be much more careful in how they censor or restrict minors.

Finally, patterns of cultural taste are changing and boundaries between taste and status groups are breaking down. This trend has been described as the rise of omnivorousness – people define their status and identity by consuming a great diversity of cultural goods, rather than by snobbishly consuming only certain “high status” goods. Omnivorousness is particularly prevalent among young people – as global culture

circulates and connects youth across lines of race, ethnicity, class and nationality (Peterson and Rossman 2007; DiMaggio and Muktar 2007). Hip-hop for example is enjoyed by white working class kids in Newcastle, England; by wealthy kids in American suburbs and by Northern African immigrants in Frankfurt, Germany (Bennett 2000). Thus, it is more difficult than ever before to come up with unproblematic stereotypes of specific youth subcultures, whether they are punks, heavy metal rockers, ravers or hip hop enthusiasts. In the past, moral campaigns against youth culture were predicated on being able to identify whose kids are in danger or whose kids pose a threat to society (Binder 1993). But, it is more difficult to identify a clear target when most cultural forms engage a variety of different types of kids from many different social backgrounds.

In the remainder of the paper, I argue that the Chicago anti-rave laws are examples of quiet regulation. I demonstrate, however, that the discursive arena was not emptied of moral language and cultural schema. Instead, city officials used a hybrid discourse, combining moral judgments with rational and technical arguments. Cultural schemas that linked raves to sex, drugs, and danger influenced the scope and nature of the regulation. However, the lack of visibility and moral fervor, I argue, limited the capacity of the Chicago rave community to “fight back.” While ravers felt misunderstood, they did not, for the most part, feel maligned by negative press and unfair moral condemnation. There was no clear, identifiable enemy in their midst.

## Background: Raves, Chicago, and Legislation

Rave parties have been a part of young people's nightlife since the early 90s when they gained popularity among young adults in the nation's largest cities. Then, they were hard-to-find, trendy imports from Britain where DJs performed all night and the party lasted even beyond sunrise. Club drugs, such as ecstasy, were common and used to amplify the music and the experience.<sup>2</sup> Early ravers described the atmosphere as "asexual," "peace-oriented," and "full of positive energy." (Frischling and Quittner 1992)

Despite being received at first as an exotic foreign import, the electronic music played at raves was not so new to the American party scene. In the early 1980s, DJs in Chicago had pioneered a style known as House music by adding heavy bass to disco and lessening its pop sound. Soon after, Techno, a mechanistic and soulful electronic style, was created by DJs in Detroit and in the late 80s became mainstream in Europe. Acid House, another style that was pioneered in Chicago, began to find great popularity in the UK where it was played at the forerunners of British raves, before eventually being brought back to the United States in the 90s with the first underground American raves. (Tomlinson 1998)

By 1998, club drugs—and raves by association—started being blamed for isolated deaths. Among the first reported casualties were a 19 year-old girl at a legal Tampa event and a 15 year-old boy at an underground rave in Chicago, each of whom died from overdoses of laughing gas (nitrous oxide). By the end of the 1990s, ecstasy had become the drug of choice at rave events, and buttressed by national media attention and federal drug prosecutors, officials responded by proposing and/or enacting local anti-rave ordinances in Seattle, San Francisco, New Orleans, Toronto, and Chicago.

While drugs are a big part of the subculture, our respondents – DJs, promoters and ravers – estimated that only a minority of ravers use them and that the music, the space, and the social environment was the main draw.

“At a rave, you walk through those doors and there is no more judging... everyone’s allowed to be themselves and express themselves. Part of the process comes from Ecstasy and other drugs – but I know a lot of regular partygoers who don’t do drugs. People go who are really big dancing fans .. .but you don’t have to dress up [as in clubs] to go to a rave. Also, there is no alcohol, so girls can go to raves and talk to a guy without having their ass pinched 500 times...” “The news cameras go to the kissing. But, it’s not a giant sex party. It’s exciting. You walk into a space that was a warehouse at one time and now has laser lights, pounding bass, and 5000 people – it’s eye candy – I walk in and smile.”

And, focusing on the nature of the event itself and the artistry involved, one promoter noted that:

“It is really about creating an event; it’s not just the music, but the whole environment and the sequence of events. The thrill of turning in old warehouse into a sound and light show. The experience of having people crawl through a hole in the wall to get into the event. Throwing a Rave is like having a wedding. You don’t want to be confined to the same set of 2-3 venues – you want to be able to select a place that will be unique to the ceremony...”

In Chicago, the rave scene is not monolithic – it has changed over time and it differs from party to party. Our respondents noted that in the mid 1980s, raves took place in smaller lofts with 200 to 300 people and a keg in the corner. These events were underground and required a map and instructions to locate them. In the 1990s, parties were held in larger spaces, often illegal sites like abandoned warehouses, with as many as 2 to 3,000 participants. As one DJ described, “It was all about the creative use of space. This was really the hey day, with promoters making really good money.” By 1998, many raves moved out into the suburbs. Professional promoters rented out stadiums or expo center and charged high prices for admissions. During this time, younger kids

started to dominate the scene and drugs became more common. Eventually, clubs and juice bars started hosting all-night dance parties and bringing in famous DJs.

In describing the transformation, a respondent noted, “Before, the party drove the party. Today, the drugs drive the party.” Another noted:

“One day there was something drastically wrong with the rave scene. It had been about having fun and playing music. But, as the scene became larger and larger, promoters began to throw parties with no concept of law, business or professionalism. More and more people began to capitalize on kids – teenagers, young adults, who they could make money on – and part of that had to do with the drug culture.”

While many long-time ravers and promoters with whom we spoke described these transformation with some chagrin, they also acknowledged that there was still a healthy range of events – some more creative than others; some mainstream, others underground; some thrown by responsible promoters, other thrown by promoters who are in it just for the money and who are complicit with the drug dealers. And, all of our respondents felt, in spite of the drug use – which many said was “no different than rock and roll, punk or any other youth music” – that the rave scene was a vital musical subculture. One promoter remarked, “There are world class DJ’s and tons of people who are committed and love the art form. These events (raves) are critical for the electronic music industry – it is where emerging artists test their mettle and where new audiences, young kids, discover the music.”

Nonetheless, by the time Chicago passed the first anti-rave law in 2000 (explained below), respondents described a very fragmented and contested scene. First-generation ravers and promoters – those involved in the early loft and warehouse parties – felt their scene had been captured by “irresponsible party-goers and promoters” – people who are in it for the drugs or for the money. Distinctions were drawn between the racially and economically diverse crowds that attended early parties and the “rich, white suburban kids” – sometimes called “candy ravers” --

who were giving the scene a bad name. “They [candy ravers] are like a couple of rotten apples that are spoiling the scene for the rest of us – they can do whatever they want, but they shouldn’t hurt the rest of us – people are making their living off of doing this and do it for the love of the music, for the love of the culture....not for the drugs at all.” And, the fragmentation and mainstreaming of the subculture created competition, especially between promoters.. As one DJ remarked, “Everyone in Chicago is so competitive and there’s not respect for each other. They’re all fighting for something, but in different armies.”

### The Chicago Laws

On May 11, 2000, the Chicago City Council passed an anti-rave ordinance aimed at halting unlicensed raves; primarily those taking place in warehouses, rented facilities and other noncommercial locations. The proposed ordinance, supported by the mayor’s licensing commission and the police department, passed unanimously as part of an omnibus package, with no floor debate. It required a public-place-of-amusement license for any late night for-profit party, and ordered licensed venues to close by 2 a.m. The anti-rave ordinance mandated fines of up to \$10,000 for promoters, lessees, owners, and DJs who hold “unlicensed” raves. The Chicago law is notable for its method of cultural regulation. It cracked down on the event organizers, not the drug dealers and users, and placed the blame and liability on the artists – i.e., the DJs who perform at these events. Not only could DJs be fined, but they could have thousands of dollars worth of equipment, records and CDs confiscated. As one law enforcement officer remarked, “DJs fly in from around the country... they are the draw. If DJs know it is dangerous to come to Chicago because of the fine, they might think twice about coming here”

(Spielman 2000). It was considered by some to be one of the toughest laws ever passed against raves in the nation.

It is not clear what motivated the first law. It is possible that the most proximate cause of the law was the death of a teenager a week earlier who had ingested what she thought was Ecstasy but which turned out to be the more potent and dangerous paramthoxyamphetamine (PMA). A reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* told us that, "As far as club drugs go, that was the series of cases that got things going. It was the suburban case -- a teen from Naperville that dies on Mothers Day." The teen's death, however, occurred in her basement and not at a rave party. Furthermore, city officials acknowledged that the law was drafted prior to the reported death. The consensus among city officials is that the law was initiated by the police department which was dealing with an increasing number of all-night parties, resulting in nuisance complaints from neighbors as well as underage kids, many from the suburbs, breaking curfew laws and wandering the streets. One official noted, "the police in my district have more important things to do than look after kids from the suburbs...." Still others felt that the laws were initiated by Mayor Daly and were consistent with his prior efforts to shut down seedy clubs, pull liquor licenses, and deal with "drugs, gangs and guns."

Over the next year, the ordinance was invoked four times, including once when a birthday party was mistakenly judged by police to be a rave and the parents of the birthday girl were fined \$10,000. Of the four cases, only one resulted in a finding of liability. Instead of causing raves to disappear all together, the first ordinance simply drove many of them above ground and into existing clubs and juice bars – and therefore still posed a problem for the city. Less than one year later, officials responded by passing

a second ordinance, modeled after the nation's crack house laws, to levy criminal charges (up to 6 months in jail) against building owners, landlords, managers, and agents or employees who knowingly allow raves where drug use is present to be held at their establishments.

Importantly, rather than dealing with drug users directly, the city chose a strategy of active risk prevention: beefing up licensing and holding event organizers and DJs responsible. There is no hard evidence as to the effects of these laws. Several city official and law enforcement officers told us that the problem had largely gone away. Many in the rave community, however, contend that parties still take place on a regular basis, but have increasingly moved back underground or further out into the suburbs to avoid Chicago laws.

## Analyzing the Chicago Case: Quiet Regulation

### Methods

Past analyses of cultural conflict and regulation rely almost exclusively on press accounts and public statements. In this study, we have followed Kenneth Thompson's recommendation that scholars get beyond media accounts in an attempt to understand the "perceptions of those involved, without passing judgment on their beliefs or motives" (Thompson 1998, 9). During the summer of 2002, informal, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were held with individuals who were connected with the conflict over raves in Chicago. We interviewed a total of thirty-one persons over three weeks. We made a special effort to interview a broad spectrum of people on both sides of the issue. We interviewed Chicago alderman who supported the original ordinance; high ranking police officers; drug-enforcement personnel; health professionals; representatives of

the city's law office; representatives of the Mayor's staff; journalists; and parents. We also talked with a lawyer connected to the Chicago music scene; well known DJs; promoters; ravers; and local music critics. Interviewees were either mentioned or quoted in a press report or they were referred to us by people who appeared in the press and with whom we were able to schedule interviews early on. We queried a listserv of people involved in the Chicago rave scene, seeking additional interviews. During each interview, we asked people to describe the Chicago laws; to talk about why they were passed; and to reflect on the laws' consequences or effectiveness. We then asked them to describe in detail their own personal involvement with the conflict, including who, if anyone, contacted them about the issue. We also encouraged them to talk about the rave scene – who attends; what are the characteristics of a rave; and the link between raves and potential harm. We asked respondents to compare the severity of the issues raised by raves to the seriousness of such other issues facing youth in the community as teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, violent crime, and pornography.

## Findings

### *Panic, Crusade or Quiet Regulation?*

Above, we have alluded to the fact that the conflict over raves in Chicago might resemble quiet regulation more than a moral panic or crusade. What is the evidence for this assertion? On the one hand, similar to moral panics, the anti-rave ordinances followed instances of moral condemnation and apparent exaggerated claims of harm and deviance. A few actors quoted in the press and interviewed for this study discuss the dangers of raves and ecstasy use in “epidemic” terms. An emergency room doctor was quoted in the press as saying “the ecstasy epidemic has hit Chicago. It started off as a

party drug, much as cocaine did. Of course, we all saw the wrath of cocaine in the 80s and 90s” (Lynch 2001).<sup>3</sup> In 2001, an article portrayed raves as one-night-only dance parties where “people do drugs, play loud music and engage in random sex acts.” There were also several “undercover reports” from local television investigative teams that emphasized the dangers of raves and clubs in very stark terms, suggesting that normal kids were being drawn into a dangerous and drug-infested culture. And Mayor Daley, standing in front of a boarded up “rave” club, warned parents that their children might be next and that drug pushers were after “all of our children” (Spielman 2001). The characterization of raves and club drug use as an epidemic and reference to widespread sexual deviance (e.g., random sex acts) suggests that the rave conflict in Chicago, like other moral panics, contained exaggerated claims.<sup>4</sup>

However, in almost every other respect, the conflict in Chicago diverged from the traditional moral panic and moral crusade framework. In Chicago, we see no evidence of overblown media attention; there was no collective effort or crusade by interest groups or pressure groups (parents groups, church groups, or health advocates) to regulate raves or club drug use; no apparent mass hysteria or widespread concern; no creation of an easily identifiable “folk devil;” and no repeated attempts by law enforcement to arrest DJs and promoters in a highly visible way. Furthermore, press accounts of the rave scene were not monolithic attacks against the rave scene, but rather included an abundance of stories that provided a more balanced account of the positives and negatives associated with raves. In the the two years leading up to the first rave law, there were fewer than fifteen articles about raves and drug use in *The Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun*, and only

four of these articles were explicitly about local, Chicago raves.. A Chicago reporter told us that the rave issue was only a “media blip.”.

Moreover, as Ungar (2001) notes, the moral panic literature stipulates that there are overheated periods of intense and widespread public concern and an “explosion of fear.” This was simply not the case in Chicago. A respondent in the City’s Department of Law said that the 2001 ordinance came about after a “brainstorming session” in the Mayor’s office that included the Licensing Office and the Police Department. The respondent remarked, “We really didn’t get much pressure from the surrounding community...” And, “raves seem lower on their (citizen’s) priority list...” Similarly, a suburban Chicago county commissioner rated the “rave” issue as “small to low-medium” in terms of problems facing young people in his community (noting that abortions in county hospitals are a much bigger problem). And a police sergeant from the same county told us that when he tried to organize community forums to discuss the dangers of club drugs and raves, “only a handful of parents showed up”...He added, “it’s just not a major problem in this county.” Finally, one of the alderman who sponsored the first rave law said that he was not under very much public pressure, having received only a few calls from concerned parents or community members. Rather than reacting to public pressure, the alderman told us that he introduced the ordinance because “it was the right thing to do” in order to “stay ahead of the public opinion curve,” by passing legislation that provided protection for the community even if residents were unaware of the dangers. As a result, the anti-rave ordinances were passed with no public debate. In fact, one electronic music promoter told us that he was entirely taken by surprise when he learned about the first ordinance. “This must have been passed in the dead of night; we

never saw it coming..." Again, the lack of public concern and visibility suggests that the conflict in Chicago was not a typical panic or crusade.

### *Bureaucratic Response*

In the absence of a moral panic or symbolic crusade, the Chicago case more clearly exhibits the pattern of quiet regulation. For one, as noted above, the legislation was passed without public discussion or commentary. Law makers considered the ordinances to be "ahead" of the curve of public pressure and opinion. Moreover, the way in which public officials discussed the purpose, role and relevance of the laws was in extremely bureaucratic terms, as would be expected of Fordist-style regulation (Lovatt 1996). Officials discussed the anti-rave ordinances in terms of liability, harm reduction, crime prevention, and risky behavior; they downplayed moral arguments. For example, one Chicago alderman, influential in getting the first ordinance passed, spoke mainly of avoiding a catastrophe. Safety was his primary concern and he stressed practical over moral issues. When asked why the ordinance was proposed he responded, "People are operating businesses without paying taxes and without adhering to safety regulations." Another alderman, quoted in the paper, also focused on safety issues, "Let's say you cram 2,000 people in a basement and have some nitrous oxide. Those tanks are highly flammable. What happens if you have a fire? We're looking at hundreds of people in an area without bathrooms, elevators or exits" (Obejas and Townsend 2000). Other respondents emphasized the need to "increase accountability," and improve "enforcement" of existing drug and licensing laws. This emphasis on practical concerns was stated most plainly by a suburban county councilman. "We cannot legislate

morality, but we can regulate industries that cater to youth. We are committed to public safety, not to punishing kids – many of whom are just having a good time. We are putting responsibility on the adults who manage these businesses.”

The opponents of raves did not couch their arguments primarily in moral terms, although they did use some moral language. The people with whom we spoke were not worried about solving the drug problem facing youth in America. They did not talk at length about protecting kids more generally from vice and sex. They did not emphasize the dangers to the larger community as is typical of moral panics. They focused primarily on the “here and now” – solving the problem for a particular district or the city. One city alderman with whom we spoke, for example, was not concerned with the dangers of raves and ecstasy use in the suburbs or the rest of the state. In fact, he was not even aware of a similar law against raves that was pending at the state level. He had fixed “his problem” and had moved on to other issues.

Finally, public officials generally avoided demonizing young people and the rave scene more generally. One lieutenant offered this point of clarification, “The city hasn’t come down against rave parties...it is just that stuff [drugs] goes on and we need to take enforcement action.” Another officer stated, “there is nothing wrong about kids getting together for a good time. But if a rave has drugs, then there are repercussions to pay.” Again, in keeping with the “quiet regulation” perspective, rave opponents avoided sweeping moral condemnations. They talked mainly of risks and couched their actions in terms of avoiding liability and blame for “accidents waiting to happen.” And opponents did not lump all ravers together as drug users and deviants; instead, several recognized that the music and culture might be important for young people, but argued nonetheless

that public safety concerns warranted the new laws. Again, these justifications are consistent with recent theories of moral regulation that emphasize the growing secularization of government discourse, including the use of rational-technical language focusing on risk and danger. (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985; Valverde, 1994; Moore and Valverde, 2000; Hier 2002; Thompson and Sharma, 1998).

### *Hybrid Discourse*

In spite of the largely bureaucratic accounts provided by the rave opponents, important cultural schemas and notions of morality shaped discourse and action in important ways. Public officials, parents and law enforcement personnel would often employ moral language within the bounds of more practical and bureaucratic arguments. So for example, even though one county commissioner we interviewed talked principally about regulating “unregulated” businesses, toward the end of the interview he began to describe the sexual dangers facing young girls who go to raves and after-hour-clubs where “men slip drugs into girls’ drinks in order to assault them.” Similarly, the same Chicago alderman who spoke principally about safety regulations also described the sexual depravity that supposedly takes place at raves. He remarked, “there are people at raves with devious minds,” adding, “I have a daughter that is getting to that age and I don’t want to lose her to some stupid party.” And a health expert told us repeatedly that raves would be fine if there were no drugs— but then lapsed into classic moral panic discourse. She said, “Parents should know more about raves -- the dancing -- it's sleazy. Kids dress weird and there are unhealthy kids there. Underage kids need respectable public behavior.” Again, we find a hybrid style of discourse. On the one hand, when

asked about the problem addressed by the anti-rave legislation, most officials spoke primarily of managing risk, avoiding safety hazards, and controlling locations of drug distribution. However, when asked about what happens at raves and who attends, many could not divorce the behavior they sought to regulate from the venue where it occurred, leading to moral condemnation of the rave scene itself.

This finding supports several recent analyses that argue that moral language is often used alongside more pragmatic and bureaucratic discourses. For example, Moore and Valverde (2000) reveal in their study of efforts to prevent date rape in Canada that authorities used a wide variety of heterogeneous knowledge formats, including the presentation of scientific data alongside moralizing, lurid narratives of sexual risk. She suggests that officials build arguments around notions of rational, calculable risks, but situate those risks within a moral context. Similarly, in studying the rave conflict in Toronto, Hier finds that the events exemplify “converging sites of social anxiety,” where risk society perspectives are co-joined with more traditional moral panic discourse (Hier 2002, 10). Moralizing discourse creeps back into the picture, in large measure, we believe, because raves involve teens and young adults and therefore provoke powerful cultural schemas. Children’s leisure and consumption, especially in an urban context, has historically represented sites of social anxiety (Baldwin 2002; Beisel 1997; Zelizer 1985). As such, even when attempting to provide rational and bureaucratic explanations for the crack-down on raves, and even after acknowledging that many ravers are not themselves drug users or sexual predators, public officials, police, and parents often used moral language to highlight the dangers and threats such activities pose for young people. Thus, bureaucratic and rational discourse might provide the tracks along which

social reformers and officials drive regulatory policy; but, notions of morality still provide the fuel to justify, motivate, or amplify their actions.

*Resistance or Cooperation?*

If we return to figure 1, the Chicago conflict was low visibility and the discursive arena was largely closed, involved mostly experts and bureaucrats (police officers, alderman, members of the licensing commission, staff of the city's law office) and entailed a hybrid form of discourse – with secular and technical language dominating and moral concerns present, but less prominent. The regulation that passed in Chicago was coercive and censorious, focusing on shutting down the rave scene and penalizing artists. Traditionally, scholars who have focused on the top-half of the diagram (moral panics and crusades) have not spent much time discussing resistance. Instead, they have depicted the targets of moral campaigns and regulation – what Stanley Cohen calls “folk devils” –as helpless victims – destined to accept collective representations of themselves and their lifestyles that are promulgated by the press and by moral crusaders. More recently, scholars have highlighted the ability of marginalized groups to fight back and reframe a debate or argument to their advantage, deflecting the labels and stereotypes that are directed at them (deYoung 1998, Hier 2002, Lopes 2006, McRobbie and Thornton 1995, Ungar 2001) and, in some cases, reversing or undermining regulatory efforts.

In Chicago, the rave community was surprised and troubled by the passage of the first law. One rave promoter noted that “it was part of some larger omnibus bill... it was passed with no debate. For ravers and DJs, it came out of the blue...we woke up one

morning to find out that the city had killed our scene...” The city’s actions were perceived by ravers as anti-youth and hostile to their music and subculture. “The city has basically said, ‘screw the promoters and DJs who want to come to Chicago and perform.’ This is an institutionalized attack on a style of music and a culture...” remarked a Chicago-based DJ. Another well known rave promoter added, “It’s simply wrong to demonize a type of music for the wrong things associated with it. How did the war on drugs become the war on DJs?”

In an effort to protect the scene, several leaders in the community launched ad hoc efforts to resist and protest the new laws: They used alternative media to stage a discussion with DJs and promoters on a local music station; they organized listservs; and they circulated e-mail petitions. Chicago ravers also organized a rally outside City Hall, but they failed to recruit more than a few dozen people to picket. Another group created a local chapter of DanceSafe, a grassroots public health organization that sets up tables at rave events to test whether drugs are pure. Finally, in response to the city’s first law, a former raver founded “DJing is not a Crime,” a grassroots organization to defend electronic music. The group called a public meeting, but did not receive much support from their peers, nor were they able to recruit well know international DJs to their cause. Moreover, the few people that did attend their initial meeting were teenagers, who one older raver described as “spoiled rich kids from the suburbs, with no political clout, who just showed up to make noise and whine....” In Chicago, efforts to organize a credible protest failed, and in the end, the laws went largely unchallenged. Though the various groups involved (older and younger ravers; DJs and promoters; suburban and urban

youth) shared a common goal, there was significant fragmentation in the rave scene, spurning feelings of distrust and antipathy, and undermining efforts to collaborate.

First-generation ravers -- now in their 20s and 30s – actually sympathized with the city’s safety concerns and felt that the scene had gotten out of control. As an example, one DJ cited the fact that today’s promoters and organizers no longer stick around at the end of a rave party to clean up and ensure that ravers safely get on their way. Another individual wrote to a Chicago newspaper commenting “We are fed up too. I bet [Mayor Daley] never has paid \$25 to see a disc jockey, only to have the party shut down, sometimes within minutes, because some 15-year old overdosed in the bathroom” (Barnes 2001).

By the time the Chicago laws were introduced, few older ravers were willing to fight for the scene which they viewed as corrupt and drug-centric (Zambreno 2002). In fact, several older ravers and DJs scheduled meetings with key alderman and city officials to explore possible compromises. As a result of this dialogue, the city agreed to support the rave scene by holding a series of small, afternoon electronic music events in Chicago parks.<sup>5</sup> Several leaders in the rave scene came to respect the city’s point of view; or more critically, they came to internalize the city’s claims as common sense (Hier 2001). One DJ recalled the conversation, “He (the alderman) was very open once I got a chance to sit down and talk to him. I was very surprised. He made some very good points. In fact, there are parts of this ordinance that I am for, like the issue of safety” (Kot 2000). In short, the meetings helped to diffuse the protest, leading important members of the rave scene to cooperate with the city and to accept compromise, leaving the original laws unaltered.

### *Comparing Chicago and Toronto*

As noted earlier, Chicago was not the only city to crack down on raves. In fact, anti-rave laws were passed in New Orleans, Orlando, Seattle and Toronto. Toronto is particularly interesting as a comparison case. On the same day that the Chicago Alderman voted unanimously to impose \$10,000 fines on venue owners, promoters and DJs; the Toronto City Council voted to ban raves from city property. The two ordinances are different – one targets privately held raves; the other targets legal raves in city-owned venues.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the rave community in both cities perceived the laws as attempts to undermine their music and their subculture. The two cases differ, however, in two important respects; the visibility of public concern and protest prior to the laws; and the effectiveness of the opposition -- in Toronto, there was a highly visible campaign to draw attention to the dangers of raves; in Chicago, there was almost no public campaign and much less media attention; in Toronto, the rave community resisted mainstream discourse and reversed the ordinance; in Chicago, ravers and promoters failed to organize a credible protest. Not only did the Chicago law remain unchallenged, but within a year the rave community faced a second law that added criminal penalties and expanded the scope of enforcement. Why did Toronto ravers succeed, where Chicago ravers failed?

According to sociologist Sean P. Hier, the conflict over raves in Toronto followed a classic moral panic framework. Hier identifies at least three moral entrepreneurs – Toronto’s Mayor, Police Chief and Ontario’s deputy chief coroner – all of whom used moralizing discourse in highly public ways to link raves with drug use, rendering dance parties and raves as a threat to public safety. Mayor Mel Lastman declared that “when you get 8,000 people there you can’t control the

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<sup>1</sup> The ordinance that passed in Toronto banned raves from city-owned property. However, there was another law that was drafted, but not enacted, that more closely resembled the Chicago laws; it imposed heavy fines on promoters of unlicensed raves.

drugs, you can't control what [people] do and you can't control how crazy people get...It's a place for drug pushers." The chief of police, Julian Fantino was quoted as saying that "raves were threatening the very fabric of Canadian life" and in his public letter to the Canadian Prime Minister, Fantino wrote that "raves bring together thousands of party-goers, 80 percent of which are on drugs..." (Hier 2002, 41-42). In the two years leading up to the rave ban in Toronto, the two leading newspapers, *The Toronto Sun* and *The Toronto Star*, reported a total of 134 articles – compared to only 15 in the two leading newspapers in Chicago over the same period. Moreover, whereas only a handful of articles in Chicago directly attacked raves, in Toronto the vast majority of stories featured inflammatory headlines that directly linked raves with drugs, including: "Raver on Floor in Trance" (Sarah Green, 5/9/2000, Toronto Sun); and "Fantino Invites Prime Minister To Toronto Rave: Asks Chretien to See 'Kids ... High on Drugs'" (Jonathan Kingstone, 5/5/2000, Toronto Sun); and "19 Arrested at Massive Rave: 12,000 Kids Party On Drugs In City-Owned Building" (Byline: Tom Godfrey, Toronto Sun, 03/27/2000, Toronto Sun); and "For Grieving Dad, Rave War Too Late" (Byline: Heather Bird, 05/16/2000, Toronto Sun); "Drugs, Death and Dancing: Jury to Look at Rave Rules" (Byline: Betsy Powell, 05/07/2000, Toronto Star). Finally, unlike Chicago, parents, neighborhood associations and other community organizations were involved in publicly attacking raves, both in the newspaper and at public hearings. Moreover, several city departments were quoted in the press, including the health department and the community services committee. Returning to figure 1, regulatory efforts in Toronto were highly visible and the discursive arena, which featured highly-charged moral language, included a diverse range of actors from the government, the community, and the media. Toronto experienced a moral panic, followed by anti-rave legislation that was coercive and censorious; Chicago experienced quiet regulation that was equally, if not more, restrictive.

In both cities, prior to the laws, there was no identifiable “rave community,” in the sense of a group of leaders and organizations that represented the interests of electronic music, DJs, promoters and ravers in any official capacity. Nor was there a shared sense of solidarity across the scene—raving took place in different types of venues; there was a diversity of musical styles; different motivations for being in the scene; different age cohorts; different types of promoters; and different conventions in terms of dress, dancing and party aesthetics. As an activist who started the Party People Project in response to the Toronto laws remarked,

“when the police started slamming the rave scene and the city council began to consider anti-rave legislation, there was no rave community to speak of in Toronto. People went to parties. People talked about “the scene”. But they were unorganized. so while people may have complained to their friends that the police, the mayor, the media had it all wrong, there was no one, no body that had the authority to speak on behalf of the community, and no self-identified community.”

But, the existence of PPP was not, alone, enough to account for the contrast with Chicago. Leaders in Chicago started an organization called “DJing is Not a Crime” and they, like the PPP, tried to mobilize support through a variety of avenues, including staging a protest downtown. But, in Chicago, 50 people showed up for the protest; in Toronto, more than 10,000 did. It is possible that leaders in Toronto were more talented, more strategic, or more dedicated to the cause; but, in the absence of comparable ethnographic data comparing the two social movements, it is hard to assess differences in the capacity of each protest movement . However, one important difference between Toronto and Chicago was the level of public visibility and the use of strong moral language leading up to the anti-rave laws. As noted, Toronto follows the more traditional moral panic narrative, while Chicago can be characterized more as “quiet regulation.” We believe that by turning up the “moral volume” – Toronto officials and social movement actors provoked the rave community to rally around the flag. An

otherwise underground and apolitical subculture adopted a highly visible and activist position in order to defend their music and lifestyle against what they perceived to be blatant misrepresentations. The leader of the PPP movement noted, “The mayor and police chief were really against raves. They took every opportunity to raise alarm... there were large-scale drug busts and the mayor was grandstanding and making public speeches.. but it was very one-sided and they were very antagonistic and acrimonious making outlandish claims that had no basis...They called all ravers addicts and all promoters drug pushers.. We were villainized and represented as being on the margins of society... somehow corrupting and being a negative influence on youth. They didn’t realize how diverse were.”

She added,

“It was hard for a bunch of middle and upper class youth, not to mention all of the young professionals in the scene, to be told they are marginalized and horrible. We were outraged... it made us angry. We felt besieged at every level... the coroners inquest, the speeches, the testimony, the news coverage... it shined a really big spot light on the rave community. We recognized that if we didn’t respond, the whole scene would be affected...”

Compare this with a statement from one of our promoters in Chicago, “There was no real collective outrage... just a bunch of complaining. People were pretty apathetic if you ask me. The whole movement never took off. I’m not sure why. We never felt under siege... it (the regulation) just sort of happened. A kid dies... the cops get upset... and next thing you know a law is passed” In fact, most of the leaders in the Chicago rave scene that we spoke to were not hostile and defensive, but rather sympathetic of the mayor and alderman’s position. One DJ remarked, “In the beginning I was mad. It felt like a prejudice toward music... but I realized that it was mainly regulation more than anything else....” Another VJ (the person who does lights and computer visuals at rave

events) remarked, “Personally, I didn’t care... it’s not about art and free speech. I’m not surprised at all about the city...it was responsible thing to do...” Visible cultural conflict may not always result in successful “resistance” by marginal groups, as in the case of Toronto; but it does present an opportunity for voice, mobilization and resistance. In the case of Chicago, the lack of visibility and the stripping of moral discourse from public debate, undermined the ability of an already fragmented subculture to come together. In the absence of a moral panic or crusade, leaders in the rave community were less guarded and less likely to stake out an oppositional stance; they attempted to negotiate with the city, and ultimately accepted a meager compromise that provided public support to host a small, one-time electronic music concert in a park. The downside of quiet regulation is that cultural conflict becomes a process of bureaucratic negotiation, at best, and simple acquiescence at worst.

*Implications of the “quiet regulation” framework*

From the above example, it appears that “quiet regulation” poses a challenge to new theories of cultural conflict and moral regulation that emphasize the power of targeted groups to fight back. But, why else should sociologists care about the anti-rave ordinances in Chicago or other forms of routine and quiet regulation? One important reason is because such regulation is as much the product of socially constructed notions of culture and morality as are the more visible conflicts. It is clear from our interviews, that specific cultural schemas are covertly shaping the way in which actors understood the nature of the rave problem in Chicago. Where do these cultural schemas come from if not from the press or the public comments of officials and activists? Are these schemas

connected to and redacted through larger ideologies about youth culture, music and the nature of urban space? How do certain cultural forms become stigmatized and not others (Lopes 2006)? And, where do these broader ideologies come from? While such an examination is beyond the scope of this study, sociologists must unpack how social problems get framed and understood in the absence of visible campaigns and crusades.

Most importantly, perhaps, is the question of how these cultural schemas influence the way cultural expression is regulated and supported. The Chicago laws reflected a punitive approach that criminalized DJs – who could be fined up to \$10,000 for playing at a rave and, perhaps more severely, could have thousands of dollars worth of equipment confiscated and invaluable music collections destroyed. By the new law, rave promoters were required to have public place of amusement (PPA) licenses, the same licenses required for opening up a night club. The time, money and effort required to get a PPA license makes them unattractive for those who wish to hold a one night rave event. Furthermore, the licenses require that events end by 2 a.m. – just when many raves are getting started. As one promoter remarked, “it is a complete misreading of the rave culture.....” (Kot 2000).

From one perspective, the ordinances seem like a reasonable approach to regulating events in a city. Why should raves be treated differently than sporting events, parades, festivals and other public events? On the other hand, we only have to compare raves and electronic music to blues clubs and the Chicago blues scene to see the underlying cultural schemas at work. What would happen if officials discovered that public drunkenness in Chicago was caused, in part, by people attending blues and jazz clubs? In such a scenario, it would be unimaginable for the city to criminalize blues

musicians or to try to shut down blues clubs. As David Grazian describes in his book, *Blue Chicago*, the city has embraced the blues as an “authentic” expression of its identity and heritage. Thus, the city promotes the blues in tourism guides, it subsidizes performances by blues musicians in public spaces; it supports neighborhood tours that bring people to famed blues hangouts throughout the city; and it sponsors Blues Fest, a four-day live musical event held annually in Grant Park. DJs and electronic music fans wanted similar recognition and praise. In fact, many with whom we spoke emphasized Detroit’s recent success at celebrating electronic music and incorporating its techno legacy into its city heritage. Since 2000, the city has organized the The Detroit Electronic Music Festival which has been supported by the Ford Company and which attracts close to 1 million people to enjoy dance music. As one Chicago rave promoter remarked, “It did something wonderful for the City of Detroit. We’ve been trying to get the City of Chicago to do something similar.” Another raver summed it up, “It is just extraordinary that Chicago is so ignorant of the culture troves that we have here whether it's the rave scene or the lounge scene or the Smashing Pumpkins. How can the city consistently turn its back on this art scene?”

So, different cultural schemas or interpretations result in different approaches to regulation and censorship (Binder 1993). In Manchester, for example, city officials recognized dance culture as an important cultural asset and as a resource for regeneration in a Post-Fordist consumption-oriented urban economy (Lovatt 1996). Promoting Manchester as an exciting, fun and creative city, required deregulating the nighttime economy and embracing raves and electronic music – new licenses were granted to entrepreneurs, limits on the hours clubs could open were abolished, and “informal networks and policy forums were established in an attempt to formalize and legitimate

rave culture.” (Lovatt 1996, 160). Similarly, as we saw in Toronto, the mayor and city council reversed an earlier decision to ban raves from city property and voted instead to sanction raves in city-owned spaces so that safe alternatives to “underground” raves could be provided, with city support and supervision. As examples from Detroit, Manchester and Toronto attest, there were many alternatives available to the Chicago city council for interpreting and regulating raves; they chose, however, an alternative that fit with existing ideologies and cultural schemas regarding the legitimacy, respectability and value of “DJ culture.” This finding reinforces Steensland’s (2007) claim that cultural categories or schemas that convey notions of worth and stigma can influence state action, whether the object of such action is welfare mothers, the uninsured, or a musical subculture.

## Conclusion

This paper explored the conflict over the youth phenomenon known as “raving” in the city of Chicago in 2000 and 2001. The Chicago case diverged in important ways from the more visible campaigns and crusades that have been the subject of past scholarship. In Chicago, there were no interest groups that promoted or encouraged the anti-rave laws. Nor were there other moral entrepreneurs who participated in highly visible and public campaigns to demonize the rave culture. There was almost no apparent public concern, outcry or pressure. On the surface, the crackdown was neither particularly moral, nor was it the result of a panic or crusade.

On the other hand, public officials and parents approached the rave problem through a bureaucratic lens – avoiding highly emotional moral claims and focusing,

instead, on very pragmatic concerns of risk avoidance, safety and liability. However, the language of codes, conduct and risk was combined with moral language in an interesting and rather complicated way, suggesting that reformers and public officials are able to draw on what scholars have referred to as to as a “hybrid” style of discourse to justify their efforts. This “back door” moral language suggests that there are powerful schemas or ideologies that influence how regulators evaluate, interpret and act upon cultural expression.

We speculate that the absence of a moral panic or crusade in Chicago actually undermined the ability and inclination of ravers to organize and resist the laws. Without the heat and furry of moral condemnation, the rave community could not overcome fragmentation and inertia in order to defend itself and mobilize for action. This is in stark contrast to a similar sequence of events in Toronto, where ravers were able to resist moral denunciation, emerge in a positive light and ultimately defeat the censorious legislation.

The Chicago example, some may contend, is an outlier. When we examine cultural conflict in contemporary society, we still see examples of highly visible crusades and campaigns, including crusades against the Tony-award winning play *Angels in America* in several U.S. cities; fights over book in libraries, especially ones with homosexual subject matter; the moral outrage over Janet Jackson’s exposed breast on ABC’s televised halftime program at the 2004 Super Bowl; and the ongoing crusade to censor and restrict rap music. And, youth culture remains a site of social anxiety and moral panic, with visible campaigns targeting video games, youth fashion, and music (Binder 1993; Grossberg 1992, 2005; H. Jenkins 1999; Lynxwiler and Gay 2000). We

do not claim that such morally-charged conflicts will disappear. We do, however, argue that “quiet regulation,” free of exaggerated moral claims, is likely to become even more prominent in the coming years as the result of a number of forces – the rise of the risk society; the mainstreaming and validation of youth culture; post-Fordist efforts to brand cities as sites of cultural consumption; the blurring of boundaries between previously distinct cultural “taste groups;” and the rise of coalition-style politics that favor a rhetoric of inclusion and cultural tolerance. As a result, scholars need to pay as much attention to attempts to regulate culture through curfews, mandatory labels on CDs, licensing regulations, zoning laws, dress codes, and noise ordinances as they do to the more highly visible moral campaigns that characterized previous episodes of cultural conflict.

In Chicago, fairly draconian laws were passed with the intention of curtailing, if not destroying, the rave culture. And, all of this happened with little fanfare, public outcry or media attention. This type of “quiet regulation” certainly has implications for sociology and cultural policy – as debates about cultural expression may be less public, with fewer chances for advocates to defend their music or life style. In the case of Chicago, such regulation slipped in more or less undetected, with officials and the public unaware of its potential consequences – such as diminishing an arguably important part of the city’s cultural heritage. As scholars have long known, the social processes and patterns that take place backstage and beyond the glare of the spotlight are critical for understanding how social life is regulated and the nature of power and inequality. As the Chicago case makes clear, we can learn as much from a whisper as we can from a shout.

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Appendix 1:

All interviews were conducted face-to-face during the month of June, 2002. With the permission of the interviewee, most were recorded on a digital audio cassette. We also took handwritten notes. The recordings were used to check the accuracy of quotes. Below are all of the interviewees listed by pseudonyms and general position.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position</b>
Abernathy, Eric	Law Enforcement
Arnett, Julia	Parent
Beckman, Michael	Law Enforcement
Bennett, Anthony	Elected Official
Boddington, Joe	State Lawyer
Capp, Mark	Elected Official
Carden, Tom	Reporter
Carter, Dana	Raver
Dempsey, Cathleen	Official, City Agency
Epstein, Tom	Official, City Agency
Feld, Dick	Elected Official
Felding, Steven	Elected Official
Hackett, Sonya	Official, City Agency
Hanvey, Peter	Law Enforcement
Hill, Chris	Club Owner
Hughes, Jill	Health Worker
Jones, Andrew	Elected Official
Jordan, Kimberly	Parent
Katz, Douglas	Music Critic
Lansing, George	Law Enforcement
Lowe, Debbie	DJ, Promoter
Mondale, Gary	Lawyer, Music Industry
Nixon, Diane	Official, City Agency
Picket, Rene	Parent
Portes, Darien	DJ
Rendick, Paul	Elected Official
Reno, Jack	DJ
Smithfield, Rupert	Parent
Watters, Richard	Reporter
Waxnall, Richard	DJ, Promoter
Wright, Samantha	Raver

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<sup>1</sup> This quote comes from a personal interview with a police officer in the Chicago area. All non-attributed quotes in the paper come from one of the 31 interviews conducted in person in Chicago during June 2002. Most interviews were recorded for accuracy. A list of interviews (with pseudo names) is included in the appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Club drugs generally include Ecstasy, Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB); Nitrous Oxide; Rohypnol.

<sup>3</sup> In 1999, more than a year before the first rave ordinance in Chicago, an article in the *Chicago Sun* suggested an epidemic increase in drug use by citing police reports that 11 “E-tablets” were seized in 1998, compared to 75,000 in 1999. The article also emphasized that at raves, sexual predators mix GHB, ‘into unsuspecting victims’ drinks and assault them after they pass out” (Main 1999).

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that each of these quotes came from press accounts of the rave scene after the first law was passed. So, to the extent that exaggerated or morally-loaded claims were made, they were largely absent from the first phase of conflict in Chicago.

<sup>5</sup> The city’s fear and suspicion of the rave community led them to send more than 50 uniformed officers to these events, which were not well attended by ravers; leading to a situation where there were often more police officers than music fans at the events.