

Let's Dance, Let's Dance All Night, Let's Party Hearty: Implicit Religion in Electronic Dance Music Culture

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“Implicit religion” is Edward Bailey’s concept that humans possess an inherent realm of spirituality that may or may not be allied with formal religious practice. Akin to Thomas Luckmann’s “invisible religion,” implicit religion involves researching people’s “commitments,” “integrating foci,” and/or “intensive concerns with extensive effects.” Utilizing this definition, it is clear that Emmanuel Levinas believed that humans possess an implicit religion that not only is other-directed, but also patterned on Judaic notions of exile and nonvolitional election. This paper reports on a study of a contemporary phenomenon that is frequently characterized as religious, electronic dance music (EDM).

EDM is a category of music that is several decades old and comprised of a large number of subgenres. The growth of EDM culture was characterized by illegal and quasi-legal gatherings known as raves, now represented in urban nightclubs and multi-day festivals. EDM culture is now enshrined in mainstream culture, and insofar as business is concerned, EDM’s global value in 2015 was \$6.9 billion; the same year 1.4 million people attended EDM festivals in the U.S, and millions more attend throughout the world. One significant accompaniment to both the advertisements for, and histories of, EDM is an emphasis on EDM culture as religion, guided by “PLUR,” peace, love, unity, and respect.

This qualitative study initially involved surveying 300 people (using Amazon Mechanical Turk and Turk Prime) about the importance of music, music preferences, and music event attendance. Seventeen of these people – who stated that music was very important, that they preferred EDM, and who attended EDM events - were recruited to each write four short essays; three of these essays were focused on music and Ludwig Binswanger’s modes of existence: *Eigenwelt*, one’s personal world, *Mitwelt*, the social world, and *Umwelt*, the world as environment. The fourth essay addressed Deurzen-Smith’s addition, *Uberwelt*, the religious dimension, using Bailey’s definition of implicit religion. Participants were asked to write on their commitments and focuses in life and how music affects them.

This paper will discuss the themes in these essays, the limitations of the study, future avenues of research, and what these EDM aficionados understand to be the important parts of their lives.

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