

- Marottoli RA, Cooney LM, Wagner DR, Doucette J, Tinetti ME. Predictors of automobile crashes and moving violations among elderly drivers. *Ann Intern Med* 1994;121:842-6.
- Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators. *National safety code medical standards*. Ottawa; The Council; 1999.
- Canadian Medical Association. *Determining medical fitness to drive: a guide for physicians*. Ottawa: The Association; 2000.

Dancing through time

The excellent article by Erica Weir on dance raves¹ was devoid of any mention of their historical counterparts — the medieval dancing manias. There are numerous parallels. Participants in both activities engaged in prolonged dancing to music and in behaviour deemed as nonconformist or bizarre (but not necessarily pathological) by those outside the subculture. Dancing mania participants typically ingested wine while dancing to achieve ecstatic states; their modern counterparts often take hallucinogenic or mood-altering substances, including the drug ecstasy.

Sigerist contends that St. Vitus' dance was similar to ancient Greek orgiastic rites that had been outlawed by Christian authorities but were secretly practised. (It should be noted that although St. Vitus' dance has entered the medical lexicon as an alternative term for Sydenham's chorea, few modern-day researchers claim that participants in dancing manias were literally suffering from chorea.) Eventually the dancing manias grew more open when authorities realized they could not suppress them.² Modern raves began as clandestine gatherings at secret venues with the location revealed just hours before the event to deter law enforcement surveillance. Six hundred and fifty years ago German magistrates paid musicians to perform for participants and to serve as dancing companions. This was designed to reduce injuries and mischief during their procession to the nearby St. Vitus' chapel.³ Today, volunteer groups attend raves to offer safety advice; some government agencies, including those in Canada, sanction supervised raves.

These measures are intended to prevent these gatherings from spiralling out of control and to reduce harm to participants.

Contrary to popular psychiatric portrayals of medieval dancing manias, women were not overrepresented among participants and episodes were not spontaneous but highly structured, and they involved sects engaging in strange or unfamiliar customs.^{4,5} Modern ravers are male and female adolescents and young adults who espouse counterculture values.

Participants in medieval dancing manias and tarantism worshipped in a discernible pattern. They would typically begin dancing at sunrise, stop at midday to sleep, sweat and bathe and then dance until evening when they would sleep and sweat, eat a light meal and then sleep until sunrise. This ritual was typically repeated over 4 or 5 days, and sometimes over weeks.⁶ Today, a prominent harm-reduction strategy at supervised raves includes taking breaks from dancing and drinking plenty of fluids.

Modern-day raves resemble the dancing manias within a different historical and cultural context, fulfilling similar social and psychological needs.

Robert E. Bartholomew

Department of Anthropology,
Archeology and Sociology
James Cook University
Queensland, Australia

References

- Weir E. Raves: a review of the culture, the drugs and the prevention of harm. *CMAJ* 2000; 162(13):1843-8.
- Sigerist HE. *Civilization and disease*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press; 1943.
- Hecker JFC. *The dancing mania of the middle ages* [translated by B Babington]. New York: B Franklin; 1970 [1837]. p. 4.
- Bartholomew RE. Dancing with myths: the misogynist construction of dancing mania. *Feminism Psychol* 1998;8(2):173-83.
- Bartholomew RE. Tarantism, dancing mania and demonopathy: the anthro-political aspects of "mass psychogenic illness." *Psychol Med* 1994;24:281-306.
- Russell JF. Tarantism. *Med Hist* 1979;23:404-25.

Corrections

A recent Heart & Soul article stated incorrectly that Captain James Cook spent the 4 summers following 1767 surveying the coast of Newfoundland.¹ In fact, Cook spent the 4 summers before 1767 conducting his survey.

Reference

- Ryan B. MD explores hidden history of Captain Cook's journey to Newfoundland. *CMAJ* 2000; 163(5):684.

The health status data were presented incorrectly in Fig. 2 of a recent article by Kue Young and colleagues¹ owing to an editing error. The correct figure appears below.

Reference

- Young TK, Reading J, Elias B, O'Neil JD. Type 2 diabetes mellitus in Canada's First Nations: status of an epidemic in progress. *CMAJ* 2000; 163(5):561-6.

