I.D.?" asked the bouncer standing outside of NocNoc, a popular nightclub in downtown Seattle. “Ahh, fresh meat,” he joked as he noticed that I had recently turned 21. “Come on in.”

After being thoroughly patted down by the club’s security guard, I was beckoned to step past a thick black curtain. Once through, a mixture of smells--alcohol, cigarettes, food and sweat--made their way to my nose as loud techno music pounded hard against my eardrums.

NocNoc, unlike many other Seattle nightclubs, stays open well passed 2 a.m., when the serving of alcohol is prohibited. This state law, however, doesn’t affect business. In fact, customers who come at this hour don’t even want alcohol; most are apparently already high on Ecstasy.

“This is a very popular spot for young people,” said Brian Vo, a frequent patron of the club. “They like to come here and get lost in the music.”

Vo, a close friend of mine for many years, heard that I was writing a story on a current trend. He offered to bring me along, insisting that Ecstasy is a growing trend among many young adults today.

“Over there,” he said as he pointed past a bar heavily decorated with glass bottles.

Behind the bar was a crowded dance floor with people performing fantastic dances of light by maneuvering glow sticks through the air. From my vantage point, the dance floor was one massive ball of mish-mashing colors moving rhythmically to the bass of techno music in the background.
“It’s called raving,” said Vo. “Believe it or not, but all of those dancers are on E. Almost everyone in here is.”

Unfortunately, Vo wasn’t exaggerating when he told me that Ecstasy is becoming a popular trend among young adults.

According to voiceofthevictims.com, a site devoted to decreasing drug use among young adults, over 8 million people have reported trying Ecstasy at least once since 2001. Over two 2 million of those 8 million people were between the ages of 18-25.

Molly Flannagan, an online blogger, wrote, “Ecstasy use has become fairly widespread on college campuses and in rave and nightclub settings.”

Ecstasy, also known as E, is a hallucinatory drug that works by increasing the body’s natural level of serotonin by preventing the re-absorption of excess serotonin that our brains tend to release. The result is a euphoric state experienced by the user.

“Feeling good?” asked a young man standing next to me near the dance floor.

“Oh, he’s clean,” Vo told the young man while pointing to me. “He’s not rollin’.”

The young man, I later found out, was Frank Leuong, a long-time user of Ecstasy.

“I first tried Ecstasy when I was 16 years old,” he said. “I’ve been rollin’ ever since.”

“Rollin’” is a slang term used to describe the mental state caused by Ecstasy.

“I know I am rollin’ when I am happy,” said Leuong. “E makes me feel love for everyone around me and vice versa--like nothing else matters in the world.”

The “happy state” Leuong referred to is a direct effect of the increase of serotonin created by the drug. It is this “happy state” that most Ecstasy users aim for when taking it.

“Life is depressing sometimes,” said Yumi Hernandez, another frequent club-goer.

“Sometimes I just want to not be sad anymore and be happy and using E helps me get there.”
This type of psychological dependency adds to the addictive nature of the drug.

“Pure Ecstasy is not addictive,” said Khang Ngo, a chief pharmacist at a clinic located in Ocean Shores, “but it may be mixed with drugs that are.”

Pure Ecstasy, known as methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), is a powder that is mixed with drugs such as cocaine, meth and heroine to create its solid pill form. Because of these other drugs, users have a higher risk of becoming addicted to Ecstasy.

“I’m not addicted to E,” said Hernandez. “I’ve gone months without using it before and plan on quitting for a while. Besides, I know that Ecstasy is one of the safest drugs out there.”

Although users like Leuong and Hernandez do not consider Ecstasy as a dangerous drug, they have admitted to experiencing some side effects.

“The day after I use Ecstasy,” said Leuong, “my mouth blisters all over and I usually have a persistent migraine for the next couple of days.”

“Yeah, I’ve gotten sick from using E before,” said Hernandez, “but it’s nothing ever serious and it’s worth it.”

Because Ecstasy causes uneven serotonin levels, side effects such as nausea, migraines and depression can take place for up to a month after taking the drug.

“It is this time frame that most people will go through the withdrawal phase,” said Ngo. “The withdrawal phase consists of depression, anger and anxiety as serotonin levels are low. Because of this, people will be inclined to use more Ecstasy to reverse these side-effects, causing an endless cycle.”

Although there have been many studies on Ecstasy use, there are no accepted conclusions on the effects of Ecstasy on humans since most test subjects were animals. However, according
to Sandy Miller, an on-call triage nurse at Harborview Medical Center, there are about 5,000 Ecstasy-related admissions in the emergency room each year.

“We get a lot of people coming in because of injuries incurred during the time of drug use,” Miller said. “Deaths from Ecstasy are relatively low compared to alcohol-related deaths.”

According to TheDEA.org, in 2001, there were 76 Ecstasy-related deaths. In most cases, users die of hypothermia or heatstrokes.

Making my way through the dance floor, I came up to a small table near the back of the club where a couple of the employees were hanging out. I proceeded with asking them if they were aware about the use of Ecstasy in their club, but neither answered my question.

“Oh they know about it,” said Hernandez. “Just last week, one of them covered me while I was taking a line of E.”

On a typical night, Leuong admitted to taking anywhere from three to eight pills.

“I try not to take too much in one night,” said Leuong. “But sometimes I need more to keep my high.”

Leuong explained that Ecstasy pills can cost from $5 to $20 depending on the quality of the pill. The more expensive the drug, the cleaner it is and the longer the high will last. When asked where he gets his pills, Leuong refused to answer.

“I get my pills from people I know and trust,” said Leuong. “I need to respect them and keep them anonymous.”

As my night at NocNoc came to an end, I realized that no matter what decade we are in, drugs will always be a trend among young adults like the ones I’ve met. It’s a lifestyle that they have chosen and one that they are happy with.
“I don’t go to sleep at night hating myself,” said Vo. “I don’t regret ever starting Ecstasy. I think of it as another hobby that I have.”