7.2 Control... Release: Dance music scenes' reflections on a pandemic

Richard Anderson[1]

Abstract

This paper chronicles the reflections of participants within dance music scenes regarding the impact of COVID-19 regulations. Drawing upon analysis of et*hnographic* data from Facebook Group discussions, an online survey, and interviews conducted during the UK's 'lockdown' it reveals the extent of dancing's significance and value at a time when prohibited. The paper also looks in depth at the discourses surrounding reactions to illegal raves in UK warehouses and fields during the summer of 2020 as some people sought ways to dance, and illicitly escape pandemic restriction's social controls. Such discussions are framed within *societal* theories surrounding the broader, oppositional et*hical* stances which underpinned the pandemic experience. The paper also examines dancing's importance for well-being in the lives of clubbers and their articulation of an anticipation of release, and a *return* to the dancefloor.

Keywords: social dancing, covid-19, pandemic.

Introduction

This paper arises from doctoral research investigating the persistence of 'the underground' within dance music scenes carried out during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The paper draws on analysis of ethnographic data from Facebook group discussions, online surveys and interviews conducted during the UK's 'lockdown'[2]. The findings presented here voice the reflections of Liverpool-based clubbers, promoters, venue owners and dancers within the context of an unparalleled prohibition of social dancing in the UK, at a time when illegal, unlicensed dance music events were singled out as representing the nadir of irresponsible behaviour during a pandemic. Dancing was portrayed in the media as both the worst thing one could do, revoking it as a folk devil *cause celebre*, and simultaneously as representative of freedom, as a signifier that its (legal) return would mark the end of repressive restrictions.

Control...

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the UK entered a 'lockdown' in late March 2020 which legally enforced the entire population to 'stay at home' and brought about an immediate cessation of all social dance activities. Clubs were shuttered and all events were cancelled. These latter restrictions remained in place for over a year (UK Government, 2020b). Initially there was little contesting that to be indoors, in a warm, poorly ventilated environment, dancing in tight proximity with other people, would be amongst the worst places to be in a viral pandemic (Christakis, 2020). News of nightclub super-spreader events (Kanga et *al.*, 2020) solidified the notion that dancing, and its associated sociality must remain prohibited. It was evident that clubs would be among the last places to reopen on the other side of the pandemic.

1. University of Liverpool, United Kingdom. E-mail: r.anderson5@liverpool.ac.uk

2. A lockdown entailed all citizens except key workers staying at home, only leaving to shop or exercise.

With all arenas of physical social contact largely unavailable, online communities found their significance amplified as sites of virtual gathering as people retreated into individual households. Consequently, the fieldwork research presented here essentially followed participants into online realms, focusing on the discourses emergent within dance music centred social media. It also draws upon reflections of respondents to an online survey (n=183) and semi-structured interviews with dancers and those involved in the local dance scene infrastructure (n=28). Survey results showed Facebook's dominance as an information source for event details. Nearly 70% of respondents discovered events through Facebook feeds and 55% were members of Facebook Groups[3].

I mean, I've mainly use Facebook, just because that's usually where events get posted. And sometimes I see like promoters and stuff that I follow on Instagram posts, but I would still go to Facebook to go to the event.

With their focus around shared interests such as genre and locality, Facebook Groups exist not only as information resources for upcoming parties but also as nurturing places in which members garner a sense of support and community. In the absence of physically being on the same dancefloor, online communities helped as surrogate sociality. One research participant when referring to a DJ's online presence described how such sociality blossomed during the lockdown,

> *"*it started off from him doing live streams. There was quite a little community in the chats... there's active discussions on stuff related to music. There's a book club... there is like a literal I would say community... I definitely have looked for more of them since not being able to go out and speak to the people who I would call my circle of friends.*

Yet for all the comfort they can provide as public forums such groups were as wide open to occasional disagreements and the toxicity characteristic of general online discourse. Tensions naturally reflected the divided rhetoric prevalent across society in relation to COVID-19 and its impacts. This could be generalised into a trio of essentially conflictual ethical positions pitted against each other. These ranged from a dutiful acceptance of the control measures enacted to suppress COVID-19 transmission; a fear that such controls threatened the economic survival of dance music event infrastructures; and a resistance and weariness to the controls in the face of diminished freedoms. Before examining how these positions were articulated in response to the absence of a physical scene, it is worth considering societal and moral frameworks into which such discourses can be situated.

Keeping it Locked(down)

Recognition that the UK's National Health Service's (NHS) operational capacity was at risk of being overwhelmed whilst facing an exponential rise COVID-19 cases, led to the lockdown and attendant messaging, 'Stay Home, Save the NHS'. This sought to focus attention on the primacy of the NHS as a 'public good' - a service all members of a society benefit from (Smith, 2003). Despite commonly held beliefs that collectively funded, non-exclusive service provision widely benefits societies and their economies (Sekera, 2014), opposition to centralised public goods is central to neoliberal economic policymaking (Adam Smith Institute, 2021; Cornes & Sandler, 1994). Given the prevalence of neoliberalism within the UK government during the pandemic, control measures adversely impacting business and consumer markets were deemed highly undesirable.

3. Consequently, the project's methodology was expanded to identify relevant Facebook Groups; select appropriate conversation threads; and then scraped anonymised data from these. All quotations used here are paraphrased from their original form to preserve the anonymity of sources.

The UK government's calamitous and divided response to COVID-19 in both structural alleviation measures and within public discourses is reflective of the observations put forward by Beck (1992) which describes contemporary societies as characterised by uncertainty and risk. As Giddens (1999, pp. 7-8) similarly argues, rather than seeking collective solutions to social risks, problem solving is delegated to an individual level, as is the responsibility to act, 'in and ethical or accountable manner' in the face of uncertainties. As the pandemic atomised populations into household units, it brought such theories into tight focus. Nina Power suggested, people were forced to,

> *balance the relationship between their individual desires, their concern for people they know, concern for people they don't, their general appreciation of risk and the laws, rules and guidelines. (2020)*

Within the context of dance music scenes what were these 'individual desires', and in what way did ethical dilemmas manifest in such communities?

"Dancing's part of our basic needs"

Whilst venue owners, promoters and DJs suffered economic impacts of operational closure during lockdown, the experience and reflections of dancers represents a clearer view on the implications of not dancing, unhindered by financial concerns. In its absence, the lockdown experience revealed just how much dancing is valued. Survey respondents described themselves drawing from dancing a sense of community. An older male commented, "As someone who has thought quite a lot about this over the years, I have been grieving for the loss of the scene and my emotional release outlet since the start of Covid". For a younger female clubber, "My life just revolves around it really... it's my favourite thing in the world". It was however older female respondents who most clearly articulated dancing's importance as identity affirmation (Hall, 2013, p. 106), "It is part of my character to dance"; "I'm a mum of two and it makes me feel like I'm me again". These verbalised associations of dancing's life affirmation were most fundamentally defined by another older respondent as representing, "part of our basic needs". This attribution to dancing as a *need* reflects an appreciation of concepts first outlined in Maslow's (1954) motivational theory. Despite lacking a foundation of empirical evidence and subjected to critique (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976), Maslow's hierarchy of needs has persisted as one of psychology's most influential ideas (Kremer & Hammond, 2013). Subsequent motivational theorists have expounded the idea that humans have innate motivational needs (Abulof, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000). A recent large-scale global study by Tay and Diener into the fulfilment of needs and subjective well-being largely vindicates Maslow's hypothesis that once basic safety needs (such as health) are met, individuals seek out fulfilment of 'higher' or psychosocial needs (Maslow, 2011, p. 361). Dancing, in collective, mutually supportive environments as described by Malbon (1999) and Pini (2001) can be considered as constituting the means to fulfil psychosocial needs within the 'social support and love' and 'feeling respected' categorisations outlined by Tay and Diener vindicating the research.

COVID-19 constituted a disruptive force to the security of health as a basic safety need. However, this risk was not equally shared. COVID-19 primarily impacts the elderly. Younger healthy people are significantly less likely to experience serious complications or death. This distinction complicated the social response. Seemingly less-threatened youths could consider themselves, individually, as facing a low risk. Their reflexive approach to the pandemic would require an empathetic recognition of social risk (Giddens, 1999, pp. 7-8). Circumstantial context subsequently played its part as to what aspects of lockdown were tolerable and contributed to a disjunctive field of tension. What some perceived as selfish hedonisms, others considered inalienable rights towards their realisation of psychosocial needs. Within dance music scenes, the physical closure of venues meant most clubbers did not really have a choice. Until the weather got better. An unseasonably warm April coincided with the phrase 'illegal rave' reappearing within local and national media vernacular as dance music events contravening lockdown's legal restrictions began to take place throughout the UK.

Raving's Return

The term 'illegal rave' term entered the UK public consciousness in the late 80s as London's black diaspora communities requisitioned vacant docklands warehouses for parties playing House music utilising dub reggae sound systems (Melville, 2020, pp. 111-115). By 1989 these had spread throughout the city and

beyond into abandoned and rural locations accessible from London's M25 ring road (Reynolds, 2013, p. 74). Subsequently outdoor raves were established across the UK as traveller communities' mobile festival culture adopted dance music (Collin & Godfrey, 1998, p. 185; Malyon, 1998, p. 192). For few summers in the early 1990's the UK police battled to shut down unlicenced events. Such raves were subsequently criminalised under the 1994 Criminal Justice Bill (CJB) (Keeler, 2017, p. 162), though many sound systems simply continued the free party ethos away from the media gaze (Crisp, 2020; Wolfson, 2016). As in the 1990s, 2020's media embarked on a crusade against such parties. Within a pandemic context however, their rhetoric was supercharged by tapping into a moral outrage against the "sheer irresponsibility" of social gatherings within a pandemic. For the tabloid Daily Mail, illegal raves represented "one of the ugliest and most disturbing by-products of the nation's 14-week coronavirus lockdown" (Boyle, 2020, n/p).

Coronavirus Parties

2020 pandemic parties took advantage of technological advances. Encrypted messaging applications allowed organisers in some instances to vet prospective attendees through examination of their social media timelines before sending PayPal ticket links and secret location maps (Marshall et *al.*, 2020). Batteries powering Bluetooth speakers, enabled smaller, more mobile events. Larger scale raves in the countryside did occur, most notoriously in Greater Manchester where two events over the same weekend made national news due to a fatality, a reported rape and three stabbings. An estimated 6,000 people in total attended these (BBC Manchester, 2020). In London, proliferation of events in derelict spaces began to take place from June onwards involving organised security and contactless card payments entry systems on the door[4] (Boyle, 2020). One interview participant discussing their friend's attendance at lockdown parties on, "disused train tracks" found that punitive measures to disincentivise their organisation[5] contributed to their profitability,

> *"*Some were ticketed, especially when the fines got bigger (...) before the ten-grand fine I'd say it's less ticketed. But after that, some people were charging thirty pounds a head for an event that could start at nine o'clock and get shut down by ten, which happened quite a few times.*

Furthermore, the potentially lucrative nature of these event for organisers was recognised as they hooked into traditional marketing strategies around scarcity,

> **They seem to follow the same format as legal rave where two, three weeks before the event, it would be five pounds then it goes to ten pounds, or twenty pounds one week before. That definitely seems to be more prevalent when the fine started increasing.**

In Liverpool, one DJ described in an interview that they had been booked to play at a seated event later in the summer 2020 when some UK restrictions had been eased to allow seated drinking with table service. Dancing remaining prohibited until mid-July 2021.

4. Credit card processing infrastructure at illegal events carrying a high risk for organisers is unlikely to be unusual. One respondent noted this, 'wouldn't surprise me one bit (...) I've seen that with people outside clubs selling NOS [Nitrous Oxide] balloons with card readers. (see Frank, 2021).

5. An on-the-spot £10,000 fine was introduced for anyone found guilty of organising social gatherings under the Coronavirus Act.

> *It was sold as a socially distanced gig where there were tables and stuff... there's like an outdoor area where there are loads of people, no one was wearing masks. The tent area where the decks were, there was a crowd of like a good 150 people all crowded around the decks. I think people bought tickets, thinking it was socially distanced... [There was] a tonne of young scousers who just wanted to dance (...) it wasn't like the bouncers were trying and were overrun. They didn't even bother. The staff were really like, pleased because they were selling so many drinks.*

Online Commentary

As soon as illegal raves were reported, conversations began in dance music focused Facebook Groups. Whilst survey data demonstrated all age groups used Facebook for event discovery, student focused groups gravitate towards noticeboards for ticket exchange rather than forums. Consequently, debates prompted by posts featuring pictures taken at 'illegal raves' tended to involve predominately older participants, few of whom were likely to have attended such events. In fact, over the course of the year from March 2020 no commentators openly discussed their own attendance. Yet within debates strong opinions were ever present. Occasional post replies suggested approval, such as "Can we have one where I live?!" and "it looks great!", however, most were condemnatory: "If these nobheads weren't shopping in same shops as us, I'd be happy for natural selection to take its course... but it's prolonging the pandemic and could kill their grannies". Yet within comment threads strewn with messages of disapproval, there was recognition of why they were taking place, "Total idiots. Yet I can sympathise as to why they want to get together". For older scene members a question frequently posed in Facebook groups was, "What would me at twenty have thought?" There appeared an appreciation that younger generations may simply feel little risk from the virus. Attendance at an illegal rave representing the fulfilment of their individual psychosocial needs without rationalising this through a prosocial perspective to protect the collective public good. Consequently, there was a hesitancy to cast judgement as one older female clubber described in an interview contextualising this ethical dilemma,

> *I think for the kids, there's always going to be that rebellious streak. There's always going to be 'a fuck you I won't do what you tell me'. The risk of Corona to the kids was minimum (...). I think in their minds, they probably weighed up and thought why should I put my life on hold for something that isn't really going to affect me? And the whole bigger picture of well, 'you might take home to your Nan' or whatever. I don't think that's probably coming into their reasoning at all.*

For organisers of illegal parties, some of whom went public, there was an attempt to draw upon nostalgic analogies with the 1990s and the rhetoric of 'raving as rebellion', and as a release from restrictions.

> *Going to an illegal rave is a statement of the person saying: 'Hell to your rules and I am going to break them,' and you get that extra buzz from doing it. It gives illegal raves that real edge over legals. (organiser of Rave Events UK Facebook page quoted in Bloodworth, 2020)*

However, within the Facebook Group commentary examined in this research, such historical parallels were met with swift retorts from veterans, "When we went to the Blackburn parties, we didn't risk our families lives though". The disdain for the parties in May and June 2020 extended beyond their obvious viral transmission risk. One notorious event which made national news near Manchester met with the disapproval of those who would normally be organising free parties in the summer,

> *Message to attendees of last night's events: stabbings, leaving the place an absolute tip and annoying local people ruins the reputation of sound system crews. Our scene doesn't stand for this behaviour (...) This is only going to make things harder for everyone in the future, even licensed events.*

There was a sense that many of the media reported events were opportunistic rather than mobilisations of pre-existing sound systems where people tended to know each other and "understood they'd need to get involved in clearing up the site afterwards". Events during the pandemic often appeared to be more akin to annual festivals in which attendees, "assume someone's getting paid to clean after them, so places get left in a right state".

A prevalent theme throughout debates was that if illegal parties became in effect 'super spreader events', then the lockdown would be prolonged, "More these go on, cases rise, clubs remain shut, we all lose". Such sentiments were not entirely down to personal inconvenience but also a recognition that the livelihoods of many involved in the scene (club owners, workers, DJs etc) were at risk. "The picture is not like it was in the 1990s. People's work is on the line if the lockdown goes on longer because of events like this". Many commentators probably knew people economically affected by the lockdown's impact on dance music ventures and recognised that the ensuing negative media attention arising from 'illegal raves' did little to help this infrastructure be financially compensated throughout the lockdown.

The Return of the 'Folk Devil'

As illegal raves gained media amplification, their threat to the public good of health elevated media reaction to that of a moral panic. As Cohen observed in his book 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics', "sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight" (Cohen, 1972, p. 1). Whilst Cohen's study on adolescent delinquency observed that dance halls were often locations of Mods and Rockers subcultural sociality in late 1960s UK, the activity of dancing is not mentioned in the book.

Yet throughout history social dancing has been considered a representation of 'ways we should not behave', as decreed by hierarchical powers. In her book, Dancing in the Street, Ehrenreich traces a lineage of repression against dancing dating back to ancient civilisations. Early Dionysian cults using dancing to achieve communal pleasure were violently purged. European medieval social history is characterised by an erosion of collective celebrations under the auspices of the church authorities. As early as the Fourth Century, church edicts aligned dancing with heresy and proclaimed it a confessional sin (Cohen, 2006). Across the entire European continent from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries carnivals were suppressed by ecclesiastic authorities. Protestant reformations banned festivities which had no redeeming economic value as emergent capitalism required obedient full-time workers (Cohen, 2006, p. 100). And as European powers expanded imperiously across the globe, their distaste for dancing rituals discovered amongst aboriginal peoples in the colonies led to repressive missionary zeal and genocidal brutality (Cohen, 2006, p. 179). This hostile drive against collective dancing continued into the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

The UK government's implementation of 1994's Criminal Justice Bill (CJB) was a clear response to the moral panic surrounding early 1990s 'illegal raves' (Alwakeel, 2010; Huq, 1999). The CJB expanded and explicitly criminalised collective trespass, and in effect enshrined into law the centuries old fears held by authorities that through collective dancing, sociality posed a threat to public order.

The 2020 pandemic's unprecedented lockdown was enforced through emergency legislation in the form of the Coronavirus Act 2020 which granted powers enabling the, "prohibiting, or imposing requirements or restrictions in relation to, the holding of an event" (UK Government, 2020a). This proscription of all gatherings subsequently framed all sociality within the realms of ethical debate and law-abiding decisions, as sociality posed a threat to public health.

Before the pandemic there was unequivocable agreement around free/illegal parties. For the tabloid media these were always folk devils to pursue. Within dance music scenes, free parties were semi-mythologised, markers of a heyday era endowing significant subcultural capital to those who participated (Thornton, 1995). COVID-19 disrupted this binary opposition. It was now no longer simply the media who viewed dancing as the nadir of irresponsible pandemic behaviour; people within dance music scenes also found themselves condemning illegal parties. One prominent voice condemning Manchester's illegal parties was Sacha Lord (2020), night-time economy adviser for the region and co-founder of The Warehouse Project club nights who described attendees in tabloid terms as 'morons' and 'selfish idiots'.

Within the Facebook groups investigated, condemnation was the dominant, though not a universally held view. Whilst 'headline' comments bore similarity to enraged letters to traditional newspapers, there was nuance to the discourse present within group commentary. There was anger: "Total tools. This will lead to us going into higher tiers[6] and get fully locked down again"; alongside insightful recognition of the potential perils of short-term satisfaction: "Just be sensible and hold out instead of making the scene something

6. Tiers refers to differentiated levels of regionally specific COVID-19 restrictions. Higher tiers were more restrictive.

people can say, 'those selfish twats spread the virus'". Some expressed a sense of sadness, "I can't wait to go out again, but there's too much risk with these events"; "this is how the virus starts its travels to the elderly". In opposition various commenters celebrated video footage of illegal warehouse parties extolling, 'life is for living'. The scene was far from homogenous on such issues, and disagreements cut deep as described by one interviewee:

> *It's quite a wedge issue (...) I really feel like it cleaved people into like, one branch of sort of libertarian, and one branch of community minded, shall we say. The people who really felt they, er... needed to be 'not all in this together'. I don't want to demonise or judge anyone. But that felt like the wrong thing to do at that point. And I was aware of it and I was like, fair enough. I'm not gonna let it disrupt our friendship, but there were moments where people stopped being friends because of this disagreement.*

And those who danced?

Unsurprisingly, mainstream media coverage of illegal raves focused solely on the reactions of authority figures and their condemnatory response to "mindless' behaviour" (BBC South East, 2021). What was not present in the examined social media conversations were the voices of those who danced during the pandemic.

Online articles in which journalists had managed to speak to attendees of illegal parties were illuminating. Lauwd magazine captured the opinions of some attendees whose thoughts revealed an initial trepidation towards going out,

> *The experience of partying during lockdown has been, interesting. In the beginning obviously there was a lot of hysteria and people weren't really willing to go out. And for the first two, three months I definitely was not partying. But like the first party I went to it was packed. It's like everyone was just dying to go out. (2020)*

Very few of those I interviewed had attended illegal events or chose not to admit this. Several alluded to their friend's attendance. There was an understandable avoidance of self-implication in what might be considered anti-social activity. As social geographer Marie-Avril Berthet observed, "Now just being closer to someone is illegal. That says a lot about what's being negotiated in today's raves" (Barrett, 2020, n/p). However, one interviewee had partied, and described their entrance into an illegal event, hidden in plain sight in a UK city centre:

> *Their downstairs area made it look like the place was shut. So, you walked in and then there'd be a girl at the bottom of the stairs and she would be cleaning and she'd say, 'Oh, who are you with?' And I was there to see my mate, and she went 'Oh, yeah, go upstairs'. And at this point you can hear faint music, but you don't think there's a party upstairs. Walk up the stairs. And it's a full-on party. Sweaty walls, and everyone's just dancing, and there's DJs on. They were doing that the whole way through the end of lockdown. When it was really bad as well.*

The recognition expressed here that, at this point the COVID-19 situation in the UK was "really bad" reveals something of the inner tension within this dancer. The same interviewee expressed their experience of fragmented and conflicted feelings as to their own participation, and a certain disrespect for the organisers of the event they themselves had attended and been part of:

> *I was like, this is hilarious. But it's also like, what are we doing? And I remember feeling really happy to be there. To be honest I was like, this is amazing that this is going on. And then like, after I'd got home, I was like, that was so wrong that they were doing that. But everyone in there was just so excited to be able to dance again. And you could really feel it in the air. But yeah, they really were naughty, and they didn't get caught.*

Dancers in the Lauwd article similarly recognised the ethical balancing required of themselves to take part,

> *Parties at the moment is difficult because you have people on one side telling you that it is bang out of order as you might be affecting vulnerable people, and then the people on the other side that just want to dance, enjoy themselves and go back to their normal life. Parties exist to bring people together, but people are divided. There's too much conflict. (2020, n/p)*

Such inner conflicts reflect that decision making in the face of risk is increasingly manifest at the individual level (Bauman, 2013, p. 29). The context of dancing in a pandemic has made this starkly obvious, and the stakes were high, as one dancer admitted, "If I was responsible for someone's death, that would be awful" (Kale, 2020, n/p).

Reports from some party-goers attending events on the continent captured an ambivalence towards the disease, "I don't give a damn. Of course, this virus scares me, but I've got to enjoy my twenties", and "The desire to party is stronger than the disease" (Marshall et *al*., 2020, n/p). These reports suggest that very few events took any anti-viral precautions in terms of mask wearing or social distancing, "No one is physical distancing. There's a sense of nihilism now, like: whatever will be, will be" (Kale, 2020, n/p). One interviewee who had not attended illegal raves pointed out that their decision to dance had little to do with either their own health, or consequently any appreciation of a wider public health:

If the clubs are open, and it was still quite dangerous I would still probably choose to go at this point. But yeah, it's not like a moral issue. Yeah, it's more of just a legal issue rather than a scare of the virus or what it could do.

A further theme that emerges from the recollections of 'illegal dancers' is that their justification for deciding to dance often reflects a perception that the act of dancing is an important contributor to their sense of wellbeing. As one UK raver described,

> *For me dancing and socialising with like-minded people is a very important therapy in my life. I know what I'm doing is illegal and appreciate some people can see it as being selfish in this current climate. But [raves] are a huge part of me keeping my sanity if I'm completely honest. (Lauwd, 2020, n/p)*

This experience many found impossible to replicate in any form of online surrogate. When asked whether they danced online, one interviewee explained

No dancing online. I have done lots of dancing through the pandemic, though. Yeah, I've danced around the coffee table. I've danced in the kitchen. I've danced in the garden, in the rain when I was feeling quite sad. And my other half came out and we danced in the rain. And we could hear the music and it felt better. And it made me feel a little bit more alive. Because I've missed it. I felt like a part of me soul has been not killed, but part of the soul is missing.

What was evident throughout social media conversations, despite morality debates was a sense of humour and periodic posting of messages of communal support around themes such as "we will dance together again soon" and "can't wait to see you on the dancefloor". These anticipate an explosion where "sociality is its own goal and purpose", an urge towards 'being-for' togetherness (Bauman, 1995, p. 47) upon the release of COVID-19 controls. As one Facebook poster summarised, "I aim to snog everyone's face off when I get out again".

...Release

This recognition of social dancing's vitality and contribution to mental health and happiness goes some way to explain the significant risks people were prepared to undertake to dance during the pandemic. As Holm wrote regarding the 'the politics of partying during a pandemic', "the pull of fun would seem to be such that it can motivate citizens to defy the will of the state and even risk exposure to a potentially fatal illness". Whilst

police broke up a party in Liverpool, students protested they just "wanted to have fun" whilst being handed out a £10,000 fixed penalty notice (Croll, 2021). Even pre-pandemic, clubbers were prepared to accept a lot to dance. Entry restrictions into select clubs involved official ID, being photographed, metal detectors, as this participant observed, "Fold [in London], which is maybe I'd say he most underground club I've been to. Even they scan your ID on the door".

What many participants articulated in both the survey and in interviews was that the club experience itself, once inside, in that space, constituted a freedom and release from the controls of everyday life (Griffin et *al.*, 2016).

> *"*For me, a lot of the reason why I go clubbing and I like to dance in nightclubs, is because it gives me that sense of kind of freedom and also being carefree.*

In that sense dancing's equation with freedom became part of the UK's wider release rhetoric. When discussing the ending of COVID-19 restrictions the media invariably stated, 'this will be the date when nightclubs can reopen'. In effect social dancing would signify the ultimate measure of freedom from restrictions. As one interviewee who spent three years in prison remarked,

> *"*I know when people get back to that dance floor, they will just be overly ecstatic. It will feel better than before, It really will. And we'll all be feeling it at the same time. So it's gonna be a massive surge. I think it's gonna be fantastic.*

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