



**“It’s food for the soul”:  
Connecting through Conscious Clubbing Dance**

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# Background and Method

- An increasing proportion of the population now identify as non-drinkers frequenting normative drinking contexts which strongly encourage consumption.
- Health campaigns often fail to capture complexity of managing non-drinking alcohol positions and contextual features of alcogenic environments.
- Recent emergence of substance-free 'conscious clubbing' events could provide credible alternative for lost social pleasures, away from consumption pressures.
- One of few studies focused on in-depth conscious clubbing event experiences and potential benefits.
- 12 conscious clubbers across Europe aged 25-55 (6 females, 5 males, 1 non-binary) participated in semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews.
- Transcripts analysed using thematic analysis.

# Dancing for Health, Healing and Growth

## *Substance Dependency Recovery and Healing Trauma*

*"I thought sober living was going to be this dull, joyless purgatory [but] I've learned more about myself, it's been mind-blowing."*

*"Two hours on the dancefloor had turned tears of despair into tears of joy, done more work in the last two years than six years talking therapies."*

*"I couldn't ever go back to taking drugs now because I can get to that place without it."*

## *Self-discovery and Transformation*

*"I go there and I dump anything that is not working out for me and I try and dance it off. I go out feeling like I've left it there."*

*"So, you start from where you are, you go on this great mystery, gather some treasure and bring that back. Very, very deep profound transformational experiences."*

# A Modern Ritual

## *Preparing for the Ritual*

*“Everyone walking past on their way to work looking like why are you dressed as a big like sparkly thing on a Saturday morning.”*

*“I was a bit put off by the early morning start, as a drinker I couldn’t function before 11, going from the night before, but I was up, I was out of bed, beaming my face off on a little bit of a floaty cloud. I feel absolutely fired up and buzzing and full of endorphins after one of these.”*

## *Facilitating a Safe and Free Space*

*“Being held in a process, very carefully by the facilitator, means that there is just the right level of freedom to just stomp and dance, enough safety to feel that whatever comes up for you.”*

*“Sometimes the space is not held. You might do things that you wouldn’t necessarily do and sometimes that’s a really good thing, but there’s a fine line, that power can very easily pop into the dark side.”*

## *Unity on the Dancefloor*

*“Gradually the inter-connectedness occurs, the openness, an experience of euphoria.”*

*“You have to stop thinking, that is so hard. I think the ecstasy point [is] where you don’t even realise that you have moved, open your eyes and you are somewhere completely different in the room. Those are magic moments.”*



# Connecting through Conscious Clubbing Communities

## *Belonging within face to face and Digital Communities*

*"I have to post in a million different Facebook groups and try and figure out how to get people through the door."*

*"If you connect to someone, for example, there's always a doubt in your mind whether it was a real connection or whether it was influenced by alcohol or some other substance."*

*"I feels like I'm not alone. I feel connected with the tribe, with the family, they support me."*

## *Identity, Acceptance and Authentic Expression*

*"I'm quite a loud and expressive person and being able to just have a space to do that where it's ok. I always feel like maybe I'm too loud for society, going to those places I was allowed to be completely free."*

*"A friend of mine said that she thought it was for hippy, dippy types. But I mean I'm not, certainly not I eat meat and I don't meditate."*

# Discussion and Implications

- Conscious clubbing disrupts usual alcohol consumption opportunities, provides novel harm prevention implications
- Transformational, collective dance movements enabled temporary disbandment from usual social structures, with far reaching benefits.
- Clothing and event rituals profoundly symbolic and spiritual, grounded in meaning-making and authentic expression.
- Alternative approach and social context, with implications for other contexts (e.g. universities, workplace programmes).
- Future work should address facilitation challenges, participatory barriers and event misconceptions.

*“Let’s get these people while they’re still developing, save them some years. They might be able to choose an alternative path and meet alternative people who are doing life differently.”*

# Thank you – Questions?

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The screenshot shows the journal article page for "Connecting Through Dance: Understanding Conscious Clubbing Event Experiences" in the journal Qualitative Health Research. The journal's impact factor is 4.233 and its 5-year impact factor is 5.762. The article is by Kimberley M. Hill, Mattias Johansson, and Joanne Smith, published on July 21, 2022. The abstract discusses how individuals abstaining from alcohol consumption find themselves in contexts encouraging alcohol consumption, with limited alternative social interaction opportunities. Conscious clubbing events exclude alcohol and drugs, possibly providing valuable social connections, but little is known about event benefits. Twelve conscious clubbing event attendees and facilitators aged 25–55 from across Europe participated in semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews, which were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings suggested that conscious clubbing appears to enhance health, healing and growth, aiding recovery from