

Dancing to a Different Beat

By Lauren-Olivia Eastwood

It's no secret that raving has skyrocketed in popularity in the last few decades, legal or not. Club culture is gradually becoming a thing of the past, primarily due to women feeling the need to cover their drinks and an overwhelming demand for the 'angel' shot at the bar. Not to mention the sad decline in music quality, the steady increase in entry fees, and the mysterious wandering hands of security. When you're past the age of 18, the smell of sick-soaked bathrooms and £12 doubles eventually loses its bitter-sweet charm. "Sweet Caroline" and "Come on Eileen" ultimately meet their demise, burning in winsome hot embers alongside your dignity and pride.

Now, I'm not saying that your run-of-the-mill rave is completely devoid of all things stinky and diabolical, but beneath it all, there is always something richer pulsing through its veins: history.

Underground raves were sparked to life by the misfits, the minorities, the marginalised. England's dance floors are built on the legacy of queer and non-white dancers who crafted a world we still strive to protect. These spaces became sanctuaries, not just for them, but for anyone who feels out of sync with the 'ordinary', all holding that same desire for connection, freedom, and stimulation.

Neurodiverse people have been part of these circles longer than any history book could date, even if research only traces back 130 years in the UK. I believe that long before then, countless neurodiverse adults and children sought self-expression through music and art, though their stories remain untold. What I can share is a detailed and thoughtful look at why these weird and wonderful raves can be a lifeline for neuro-ravers, helping them find what they have always longed for: true community and liberty.

For someone with ADHD, your mind can feel like it's racing at 100 miles an hour, thoughts and images bursting through in a constant, deafening rush. Or sometimes, life feels flat and unstimulating, leaving you restless. Raves can offer a rare kind of focus: the thumping music and swirling lights create a euphoria that hushes the chaos, bringing a surprising sense of calm to even the most humming of thoughts. For people with ASD, lights and sounds can become tools for emotional balance, allowing their senses to take in their environment in a healthy way and offering both relief and a sense of belonging, a warming feeling that can feel so hard to reach at times. Here, the familiar sounds and steady lights offer a sense of safety, a welcome contrast to the unpredictable rush of a busy street or a bustling high street shop.

Raves pulse with possibility for anyone searching for their tribe or longing to widen their circle. Even neurotypical ravers know that forging new friendships as an adult can feel daunting, words sometimes slipping away in all the noise. Yet, raves are far from strange

places to seek connection. For many neurodiverse people, the energy of a rave awakens a primal, authentic longing for connection, transforming the crowd into a vibrant, instinctual force of nature. In these moments, barriers fall and confidence blooms, making it easier to reach for romance or lasting friendship. Within these musical gatherings, neurodiverse people often discover not just friends, but entire communities built on shared passions. When you are neurodiverse, it is easy to feel out of place or pressured to hide your true self just to avoid loneliness. Spaces like raves offer a rare sense of fellowship, reminding neurodiverse people that there are places where their true selves are not only welcome, but truly valued.

Too often, society offers few welcoming spaces for neurodiverse individuals to express their passions and quirks without the risk of ridicule or exclusion. For those who are neurodiverse and also queer or non-white, the barriers to acceptance can feel even higher. Yet, raves stand out as a rare, vibrant community where judgment is checked and authenticity is the dress code. Here, whether you shine boldly or carry a shy and subtle vibe, no one gets turned away at the door. Whether you're a baby raver or a nostalgia hunter, all are invited and endorsed. Within these inclusive environments, neurodiverse minds are free to experiment and flourish. Raves become creative incubators; think music production, DJing, avant-garde fashion, or photography. The artistic possibilities are endless, and can aid in leading the individual to their potential career. Where possibilities expand beyond traditional limits, not everyone has access to creative opportunities early in life, especially where resources are scarce, but raves level the playing field. Through workshops and collaborative support, they offer accessible and empowering creative outlets for all.

This is radical acceptance.

In conclusion, raves benefit neurodiverse minds because they open doors to many things that general society does not. For the diagnosed and undiagnosed, there is little accessible support that grants this kind of freedom, along with limited research, so these places that make you feel safe, comfortable, and creatively stimulated have to be fought for. No matter how your brain works or how many outside factors try to impose the agonising stigma that pollutes the media and some typical minds, you ARE loved. You DO have a home where you can unlearn what society taught you about who you are and embrace who you have always wanted to be. Just remember, if you're neurodivergent and want to experience your first ever rave: bring earplugs, stay hydrated, always say hello to strangers in the smoking area, and STAY SILLY!

