

# Transgender Awareness in Dance



## INTRODUCTION

This educational guide provides foundational knowledge to increase awareness of transgender identities and issues within the dance sector. This resource will cover terms and identities to know, the potential challenges faced by transgender dancers, concluding with some key steps that can be taken to foster an inclusive space for transgender dancers.

Transgender people are the experts of their own experiences, and as such One Dance UK encourages all within our sector to engage in dialogue with the trans community to better understand matters arising and how best to support them alongside doing the individual work.

## SEXUALITY, SEX AND GENDER – TERMS AND DIFFERENCES

Often, we may conflate sexuality, sex and gender with one another, using them interchangeably. However, there are key differences to be aware of, with the introduction of terminology that are now more widely used in the mainstream.

### GENDER (and beyond)

**Gender identity** can be understood as a person's deeply held sense and experience of their gender. This may or may not align with their assigned biological sex at birth.

**Gender expression** describes the ways in which people display, present, and manifest their gender identity. There are several signifiers that help people in expressing their gender identity e.g., their appearance, social behaviour, mannerisms, etcetera.

**Gender non-conforming (GNC)** describes people who exhibit gender variance. Other descriptors for this include gender-variant, gender-diverse or gender-atypical.

**Transgender** is a term to which its meaning has evolved over time. It is used as an inclusive term to describe all those whose gender identity differs from what they were assigned at birth. This term might also be used by some GNC people.

**Cisgender** is the term for individuals whose gender identity and expression align with the sex assigned at birth.

**Non-Binary** goes beyond the binary margins of gender and gender identity. It is a term used for individuals whose sense of their identity pushes the binary and as such, they may consider themselves as neither male nor female.

**Gender dysphoria** is the feeling of distress and discomfort some individuals may feel when their gender identity doesn't align with their assigned biological sex. It is imperative to note that gender dysphoria is not a prerequisite for being trans nor is it a mental illness.

## SEX

**Biological sex** is about the medical term that is used to refer to the biological (i.e., chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical) make-up of an individual that is then used to categorise them as 'female', 'male', or 'intersex'.

## SEXUALITY

**Sexual orientation** describes the intrinsic emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to another person.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY TRANSGENDER DANCERS

The challenges and experiences that transgender dancers face will always be known best and better explained by the individual. Like all diverse groups, transgender people are not a monolith and as such not all of the challenges mentioned below will have been experienced by all. We, however, believe it to be important to shed light on a few common challenges.

**Body dysphoria** is a mental health condition and an experience anyone can have, but it is especially prevalent within the trans community. It can be described as the feeling of distress and discomfort with the body and appearance when it doesn't align with the sense of self i.e., the gender identity. Within the dance space, this experience could be especially challenging if dancers are made to wear clothing that draws attention or clings to parts of their body that they feel dysphoric about, which in turn could inhibit their ability to perform as they may feel constricted.

**Access to facilities** can be a substantial stumbling block for many transgender dancers as changing facilities tend to be categorised according to the gender binary. As such, this may bring up feelings of discomfort as to which is appropriate for their gender identity but also questions on if the space feels welcoming and safe for a, for example, trans woman to make use of the facilities designated for women without fear of unwanted conduct.

**Stigma and discrimination** are, unfortunately, a significant challenge that permeates the dance sector. The vilification of transgender people in mainstream media spills over into our sector and as such, transgender dancers may have to navigate how to express themselves authentically with how best to keep safe in a potentially hostile environment. Creating and fostering inclusive dance spaces is key to helping encourage a sense of belonging.

## INCLUSIVE DANCE SPACE: BEST PRACTICE

*“To dance is a chance for trans people to rediscover our bodies.” - Jo Troll, 2017*

There are various ways to create an inclusive dance space for transgender people. Here are some best practice tips to implement into your practice:

- **Language** – the use of inclusive language in your dance studio, schools, or organisation, is important to creating a feeling of belonging. Gender-neutral pronouns (they/them for English speakers, for example) are a good start to help avoid making assumptions about an individual’s appearance and identity.
- **Inclusive policies** – think about implementing inclusive policies that focus on gender and gender identity within your dance space. What actions could you take to ensure that everyone feels welcome within your studio, school or organisation? If you have the means, consider a dedicated Trans-Inclusion Policy.
- **Training** – workshops and training are a great place to learn more, ask questions, and outline key actions. By investing in training opportunities for yourself (and other parties e.g. partners, staff members), it leaves you equipped with knowledge and insight into what more could be done.
- **Speak to transgender people** – as mentioned in the introduction, alongside doing your own individual research, transgender people are the experts of their own experiences. It is important to underscore that there is no key spokesperson for transgender issues and we must endeavour to keep learning and evolving past what we once knew.
- [Erica Best – A Gap in the Narrative: Exploring the Experiences of Trans Dancers Today](#)

## FURTHER LEARNING

- [Gender Bread](#)
- [Jo Troll – Trans People Dance](#)
- [Gendered Intelligence](#)

One Dance UK hopes to increase awareness of access barriers in dance spaces, and highlight methods to enhance inclusion and promote independence and autonomy for all users of dance spaces. To find out more about Considering Difference – Making Dance Accessible, an ongoing project that aims to address a gap in dance-specific policy and practical guidance for dance venues [click here](#).

If you are a member of One Dance UK of trans experience and would like to speak to a member of the team about this resource (or more), please do not hesitate to reach out to us at [accessandinclusion@onedanceuk.org](mailto:accessandinclusion@onedanceuk.org).