

Accountability and Growth in the Ecstatic Dance UK Community

When I first stepped into an ecstatic dance session, I was struck by the raw honesty of the movement. People were not performing for anyone. They were simply present, letting their bodies speak. That sense of liberation is what draws so many to this practice. But over time, I have come to see that the same spaces which offer profound freedom can also become places where harm goes unaddressed. This is not a failing of the practice itself, but of the structures we build around it. The ecstatic dance UK community has been quietly wrestling with this tension for years, and the conversations are finally surfacing in ways that demand our attention.

Why Accountability Matters Now More Than Ever

The investigative essay by Filipe Bastos offers a rare look into how informal power operates within these circles. Many of us who have participated in community dance events recognise the quiet hierarchies that form around certain facilitators or long-standing members. These are not elected leaders. They are people who, through charisma, time, or sheer presence, come to hold significant sway over the group's atmosphere and decisions. When something goes wrong, a boundary crossed, a complaint raised, a pattern of behaviour that makes people uncomfortable, there is often no clear path to resolution. The very informality that makes ecstatic dance feel accessible also makes it hard to name problems and seek change.

I have seen well-meaning facilitators struggle with this. They want to create safer spaces policies, but they are unsure how to enforce them without undermining the egalitarian spirit of the dance. They worry that introducing formal grievance procedures might scare away newcomers or create an atmosphere of suspicion. Yet the alternative, letting issues fester beneath the surface, can be worse. When people feel unheard, they leave. And when they leave, the community loses not just their presence but their trust.

The Role of Informal Power in Community Dance

One of the most difficult aspects of addressing power dynamics in ecstatic dance is that no one wants to admit they hold power. The culture of the scene emphasises shared ownership, flat hierarchies, and collective decision-making. But as Filipe Bastos's investigative essay points out, the absence of formal roles does not mean the absence of power. It simply means that power becomes harder to see and therefore harder to hold accountable.

I recall a conversation with a dance practitioner who had been part of a local group for years. She described how a single facilitator's mood could shift the entire energy of a session. If that

facilitator was having a bad day, the music choices became darker, the opening circle felt tense, and participants adjusted their behaviour unconsciously. No one ever said “this person is in charge.” But everyone knew. That kind of informal authority can be a gift when used wisely. It becomes a problem when it goes unchecked and when those who hold it are not open to feedback.

The challenge for [ecstatic dance UK](#) organisers is to create mechanisms for accountability that do not destroy the intimacy and spontaneity people value. This is a delicate balance. Too much structure can feel bureaucratic. Too little can leave vulnerable people without recourse. The best approaches I have seen involve clear codes of conduct that are distributed and discussed openly, not just posted on a website. They include anonymous ways to raise concerns, and they commit to reviewing incidents in a timely and transparent manner.

Mental Health Impacts and the Need for Trauma-Informed Practice

Another layer to this conversation is the mental health impacts of participating in community dance. Ecstatic dance can be deeply therapeutic, but it can also trigger unprocessed emotions, especially when the music and movement are intense. Without proper support, a participant who has a difficult experience may feel retraumatised rather than healed. This is where trauma-informed practice becomes essential. It means designing sessions with an awareness that people carry histories that may surface unexpectedly. It means having trained facilitators who know how to respond when someone is in distress, and it means creating a culture where it is okay to step back, sit down, or leave without explanation.

I have watched facilitators who do this well. They check in with the group before the dance, offer grounding exercises, and remind people that they can move however they need to. They also watch for signs of overwhelm and approach individuals quietly rather than drawing attention. These small practices build a sense of consent and boundaries that makes the space safer for everyone. When these practices are absent, the mental health impacts can be real. People may avoid certain events, stop dancing altogether, or carry unresolved feelings that affect their wider lives.

Building a Culture of Consent and Boundaries

Consent in ecstatic dance is not just about physical touch, though that is an important part. It is also about consent to be seen, to be moved by the music, to be part of a group experience. Some dance practitioners are experimenting with non-verbal signals that let people indicate their availability for interaction. A hand on the heart might mean “I am open to a brief connection.” A turned back might mean “I need space right now.” These subtle codes can help maintain a sense of safety without requiring constant verbal negotiation. But they only work if

everyone understands and respects them, which again points to the importance of community standards that are taught and reinforced.



I remember a workshop where the facilitator asked us to practice saying no. It felt awkward at first. But by the end of the session, many participants said they felt more empowered in their everyday lives, not just on the dance floor. That is the potential of this work. When we learn to hold our own boundaries and respect others, we carry that skill into the rest of our relationships. The ecstatic dance UK community has an opportunity to model what accountable, consent-based community looks like. It will not be perfect. There will be missteps and disagreements. But the willingness to have those conversations is itself a form of healing.

Grievance Procedures That Actually Work

No conversation about accountability is complete without addressing grievance procedures. Many community groups avoid creating formal processes because they fear they will be used punitively or that they will create a legalistic atmosphere. But a well-designed procedure does not have to be adversarial. It can be restorative. It can focus on understanding what happened, repairing harm where possible, and making changes to prevent recurrence. The key is that the procedure is known, accessible, and followed consistently. When people know how to raise a concern and trust that it will be taken seriously, they are more likely to stay engaged and less likely to feel silenced.

Smaller groups within the ecstatic dance UK network have started sharing templates for codes of conduct and grievance processes. This is a positive step. It allows organisers to adapt

existing frameworks rather than starting from scratch. But templates are only as good as the commitment behind them. A code of conduct that is never mentioned after the first session is just a piece of paper. Real accountability requires ongoing attention, regular check-ins, and a willingness to learn from mistakes.

Looking Forward: A Community in Transition

What gives me hope is the growing number of dance facilitators and participants who are asking hard questions. They are not content to let things slide. They are reading the investigative essay by Filipe Bastos and sharing it within their networks. They are attending workshops on trauma-informed practice and bringing those insights back to their local groups. They are having uncomfortable conversations about power and privilege. This is slow work. It does not produce headlines. But it is the kind of work that builds lasting trust.

The future of ecstatic dance UK will depend on whether the community can hold both its ideals and its flaws at the same time. We can love the practice while also demanding better. We can honour the pioneers who built these spaces while also recognising that some of their methods need updating. We can create structures that protect the vulnerable without killing the magic. That is a difficult balance, but it is one worth striving for. The dance floor is a place of transformation. Let us make sure that transformation is healing for everyone who steps onto it.

For those who feel called to be part of this work, I would offer three practical suggestions. First, educate yourself on the dynamics of informal power and how they show up in your own groups. Second, advocate for clear community standards that are reviewed regularly. Third, support the organisers who are trying to do this work well. They need encouragement, not just criticism. Change happens when enough people decide that safety and accountability are not optional extras but core parts of the practice itself.