

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Media Contact:

Elizabeth Knight, Director of Communications

DA:NCE Awareness

elizabeth@danceawareness.com

www.danceawareness.com

DA:NCE Awareness Names Dr. Tomi-Ann Roberts Recipient of 2026 Leslie Scott Zanovitch Trailblazer Award

Stanford-educated psychology professor and co-creator of Objectification Theory recognized for three decades of research and advocacy protecting children from sexualization

REDLANDS, Calif. — Sept. 30, 2026 — DA:NCE Awareness (Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited), a national nonprofit dedicated to protecting children from hypersexualization in dance, today announced Dr. Tomi-Ann Roberts, Professor of Psychology at Colorado College, as the recipient of the 2026 DA:NCE Leslie Scott Zanovitch Trailblazer Award.

The award, the first of its kind in the dance industry, honors individuals who fearlessly and tirelessly champion children's safety in dance through sustained, action-based advocacy for age-appropriate choreography, costumes, and music.

"Dr. Roberts has spent her career building the scientific foundation that explains, with precision and urgency, exactly why protecting children from hypersexualization in dance matters," said Mary Bawden, Founder of DA:NCE Awareness. "Her research doesn't stay in academics, it reaches into dance studios, classrooms, and communities where children dance every day. We are profoundly honored to recognize her with this award."

About Dr. Tomi-Ann Roberts

Dr. Roberts holds a B.A. in Psychology from Smith College and a Ph.D. in Psychology from Stanford University. As a Full Professor of Psychology at Colorado College, her research focuses on emotion, gender, and the body, and the psychological consequences of the sexual objectification of women and girls. Her early research helped establish the scientific framework for understanding how environments that emphasize appearance, sexual appeal, and body surveillance harm girls' mental health, development, academic performance, and overall wellbeing. Dr. Roberts serves on the American Psychological Association's Presidential Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, whose findings shaped national conversations about the impact of media and culture on the development of young women. She has been working collaboratively to bring evidence-based education and advocacy around sexualization directly into the movement arts since 2013, where children are among the most vulnerable to the effects of an increasingly hypersexualized culture.

-more-

Regarding the cultural forces driving harmful trends in children's dance, Dr. Roberts has stated: "I believe that digital media and the widespread availability of YouTube and our smartphones have changed the culture of children's dance from healthy to more harmful. We have begun to think of dance as something that is to be performed, to be spotlighted on social media, and to be about what it looks like, and not what it feels like. What matters more is helping children understand the beauty of dance and the way in which dance can connect them to their best selves."

A recipient of Colorado College's Presidential Leadership Award in Innovation and Courage and the 2024 Smith College Medal, Dr. Roberts is recognized equally for rigorous scholarship and courageous public advocacy, and an evidence-based focus on children's dance.

About the Leslie Scott Zanolitch Trailblazer Award

The DA:NCE Leslie Scott Zanolitch Trailblazer Award was established to shine a light on cultural heroes who refuse to look away from the exploitation of children in dance and who take consistent, measurable action to change it. The award is named for its inaugural recipient, Leslie Scott Zanolitch, a 35-year dance educator, performer, and child safety advocate who risked her professional career to speak out against the hypersexualization of children in dance.

About DA:NCE Awareness

DA:NCE Awareness (Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited) is a national nonprofit dedicated to bringing international awareness and education to stop the exploitation of children in dance through hypersexualization. DA:NCE provides free research-based resources, including the international Healthy DA:NCE Directory, educational presentations, and the DA:NCE Coalition, to equip parents, dance educators, and communities to protect children in dance. DA:NCE is 100% donor funded and a four-star Charity Navigator-rated organization.

All DA:NCE resources are available free of charge at www.danceawareness.com.

Nominations for the 2027 DA:NCE Leslie Scott Zanolitch Trailblazer Award will open in early 2027. To be notified when nominations open, subscribe to the DA:NCE newsletter at www.danceawareness.com/get-the-dance-newsletter.

Media Contact:

Elizabeth Knight, Director of Communications

DA:NCE Awareness

elizabeth@danceawareness.com

www.danceawareness.com

###