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ACADEMIA

Academia is a term for the environment or community where individuals and groups pursue research, scholarship, teaching, and learning. Academia typically refers to activities that occur within colleges and universities and is both a physical location and a sociocultural production—that is, processes that generate norms, practices, and values. While there is much variability within academic organizations within the United States and beyond, across these varied organizational contexts, there are common components, such as being home to fields of study; a hierarchy among students, faculty, and staff; and the multiple missions of academic organizations.

Academia is an important location for knowledge production about trans lives and experiences, although it is not the only source of such knowledge. Additionally, academia is a space for trans community building. Yet, many trans students, faculty, and staff have negative experiences within academia. As a result, academia is a site of both possibility and constraint for trans people. Possibilities for trans people within academia center on two primary areas: knowledge production and policies and practices. Constraints for trans people within academia derive from the presence of multiple systems of oppression and uneven efforts to address the needs of trans faculty, staff, and students. This entry explores the growth of both possibilities and constraints for trans people within academia, specifically addressing the duality of trans knowledge production and trans-affirming policies and practices.

Possibilities Within Academia

Knowledge Production

Academe holds much possibility for trans people, primarily through knowledge production about trans lives in traditional disciplines like psychology and medicine and in interdisciplinary fields like public health, women's and gender studies, and trans studies. Across areas of study, the development of scholarly communities within academia has increased knowledge about trans lives and led to trans experiences being addressed in affirming, life-giving ways. Faculty members, in concert with student activists, have created space for trans-supportive knowledge production, such as through advocating for archives, journals, and academic departments.

Various fields of study benefit from trans archival and library resources. The largest collection is the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, which began in 2007 and consolidated various collections, including the Reed Erickson collection and the University of Ulster's Transgender Archive. Other important collections include the University of Michigan's National Transgender Library and Archives, which was dedicated in 2004, and the Digital Transgender Archives, which began in 2016 and was based at Northeastern University as of 2020. Additionally, some universities, like the University of Houston and Cornell University, have LGBTQ+ archives with significant trans content. These repositories have been instrumental in collecting and preserving the histories of trans people.

But similar to other archives, trans archives tend to consist mainly of the histories of white middle- and upper-class individuals and organizations.

Although trans research is included today in a number of academic journals, few journals focus on trans experiences. Two notable trans-specific journals are *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* and the *International Journal of Transgender Health*. *TSQ* is a peer-reviewed journal that publishes interdisciplinary work on the diversity of gender, sex, sexuality, embodiment, and identity. The *International Journal of Transgender Health* (formerly known as the *International Journal of Transgenderism*) is the journal of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and offers a multidisciplinary approach to the field of trans health.

Trans Studies

Trans Studies represents a significant possibility for trans people, both inside and outside academia. One potent possibility of Trans Studies is the way the field shifts the narrative of mostly cis authors writing about trans lives to trans people creating knowledge, histories, and culture about their own communities. Sandy Stone's 1987 germinal essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" marked a key turning point in knowledge production about trans lives. More specifically, Stone was one of the first academics to speak from her lived experience as a trans person, rather than non-trans people writing about trans experiences. Prior to Stone's work, trans people shared stories via autobiographies, but these texts were not necessarily included in the academic literature. While there was scholarly interest in trans lives prior to the late 1990s, that interest had a cis gaze; in other words, prior scholarship typically examined trans lives from the perspective of non-trans people. A shift in knowledge production began in the late 1990s as a part of the larger sociocultural movement for greater recognition of trans lives and experiences.

Care for Trans Populations

The growth of medical and psychological interventions for trans people in the United States occurred within the context of academic settings in

the 1960s. For those who could access them, these options provided life-saving medical treatment. Innovations in gender-affirming medical care started in other countries many years prior. Although not affiliated with academia, Magnus Hirschfeld began performing medical interventions for trans people as early as the 1920s through his Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin, Germany. Academia—both historically and today—has served as a critical training ground for clinical staff working with trans patients.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, many of the leading voices writing about the emergence of what was called *transsexualism* were medical providers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. These clinicians, including such notable scholars as Harry Benjamin, John Money, and Robert Stoller, were overwhelmingly white and male, and much of what they contributed to the academic literature framed trans people in highly medical and pathologizing language.

In addition to his research and writing, Money was principally responsible for the founding of the first gender clinic in the United States, which began at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. Several other academics and academic organizations also helped create gender clinics. Of the university-based clinics that started in the 1960s and 1970s, only a few, including those at the University of Minnesota, the University of California–San Francisco, and the University of Michigan, remain as of 2020. Some university-based gender clinics began significantly later, such as the one at the Oregon Health and Science University, which opened in 2015. Gender clinics represent an important way that academia has bettered the lives of trans people. While these facilities historically engaged in significant gatekeeping and severely limited access to their services, the development of university-based gender clinics enabled thousands of trans people to receive life-giving care.

Research Projects and Centers

Research projects and centers that address LGBTQIA+ issues generally, and trans issues specifically, bolster knowledge production about trans lives. Within the United States, the Social Cognitive Development Lab at the University of Washington conducts research about trans lives within the

broader context of social psychology and related fields. Similarly, the Social Perception, Attitudes, Mental Simulation Lab at San Francisco State University conducts social science research, of which trans projects are a part. Within medicine, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Medical Education Research Group (LGBT MERG) at Stanford University's School of Medicine conducts research about medical curricula. In terms of public policy and the law, Vanderbilt University is home to the interdisciplinary LGBT Policy Lab, and University of California–Los Angeles hosts the Williams Institute.

There are multiple centers concerned with LGBTQIA+ health issues, including the Center for LGBT Health Research at the University of Pittsburgh, the Center for LGBT Health Equity at the University of Southern California, the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University, the Lavender Lab at American University, and the IMPACT LGBT Health and Development Program at Northwestern University. Additionally, the University of California–San Francisco and Stanford University began conducting a longitudinal study of LGBTQIA+ health in 2015, which is slated to last 10 years.

As of 2020, there are no LGBTQIA+ research centers across the continents of Asia and Africa, and much of the LGBTQIA+ research conducted within African contexts was completed by U.S., European, or Australian universities. For example, a study of Malawians' attitudes about LGBTQ+ people was conducted by a Malawi doctoral student studying at the University of Bergen in Norway. Outside the United States, it has been more common for nonacademic organizations to conduct research about LGBTQIA+ life, such as the Japan LGBT Research Institute, the Center for Applied Research on Men and Community Health in Vietnam, and the Health Education and Research Association in Macedonia.

There are only a few trans-specific research groups. These include the Trans Research Lab at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, which focuses on mental health research with trans people, and the University of Arizona's Trans Studies Research Cluster, which has its own faculty members in trans studies and produces the journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*.

Trans-Affirming Policies and Practices in Academia

Nondiscrimination Policies

In addition to academia's knowledge production, higher education has played a role in advancing policies and practices that lessen discrimination and increase the livability of trans lives. As a result of academic activism and the advocacy efforts of trans and non-trans people, more than 1,000 colleges and universities in the United States have nondiscrimination policies that include gender identity as of 2020. While these policies can be challenging to enforce and do not necessarily change the culture of an institution overnight, their enactment signals an important shift by recognizing that trans people are subject to discrimination and thus in need of specific policies that address the unique forms of oppression they face.

Coverage of Medical Interventions

According to one estimate, as of February 2020, fewer than 100 U.S. colleges and universities cover gender-affirming surgeries and hormones for trans students under their student health insurance policies, and another couple dozen cover only hormones. More than 50 colleges offer transition-related health care for faculty and staff. These policies represent an important possibility for trans students and staff, but the relatively small number of colleges that provide this coverage indicates the amount of work that still needs to be done. The growing number of colleges and universities that cover gender-affirming medical care is another example of how trans and non-trans activists and advocates have worked together to create change within academia. Knowledge produced within higher education spaces, such as the adverse consequences for trans people of not receiving transition-related treatment, is often used in efforts to change policy and practice.

Gender-Inclusive Housing

In addition to providing trans-supportive medical care, at least 272 U.S. colleges offer gender-inclusive housing as of February 2020. These institutions have created housing units, such as suites, apartments, residence hall floors, or buildings,

where students can have a roommate(s) of any gender. Developing gender-inclusive housing can be difficult in some cases because of the physical architecture of buildings and the lack of gender-inclusive bathroom and shower facilities. But, on some campuses, creating gender-inclusive housing can simply involve designating some residence hall rooms as available to students without regard to gender.

Chosen Name Policies

Another important area of possibility for trans students is the ability to have the names they use for themselves, rather than their dead names (i.e., birth names), appear on campus identification, course rosters, learning management and administrative systems, and campus directory listings. As of 2020, at least 260 colleges enable students to use their chosen names on campus records, but most do not allow a similar change to campus IDs. Increasingly, trans students can indicate their pronouns in course software systems and change their gender markers on campus documents without first needing medical intervention. Taken together, trans-inclusive nondiscrimination policies, transition-related health coverage, and the ability to change their names and gender markers on campus records all improve trans students' academic experiences.

Supportive Spaces

LGBTQ students and staff have successfully advocated for the creation of supportive spaces on campuses, particularly for the establishment of LGBTQ centers. In 2020, there were more than 175 stand-alone LGBTQ campus centers and more than 75 within women's/gender equity or cross-cultural/diversity offices. Most of these centers are housed within Student Affairs, and their primary aim is to serve students' needs through advocacy, social and educational programming, support to individuals and campus groups, and leadership development. These centers contribute enormously to the advancement of trans-affirming policies and practices, catalyzing many of the changes described in this entry.

Trans students have also created supportive spaces for themselves by founding trans student

groups and by making LGB student groups trans inclusive. The first LGB student groups to formally include trans people in their names and mission statements and the first trans-specific student groups were formed on college campuses in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Increased trans inclusiveness occurred as a result of greater public visibility of trans people on campuses and efforts by trans activists to change LGB student organizations. However, some of the newly named LGBTQ student groups marginalized their trans members by misgendering them and continuing to focus exclusively on sexuality-related issues. Not until the 2010s did many LGBTQ campus organizations become truly trans inclusive due to the growing number of trans students in these groups and a growing awareness of trans experiences among cis LGB students.

Constraints Within Academia

Knowledge Production

Knowledge production also represents a constraint for trans people within academia. Fields like psychology, medicine, and public health have done significant harm to trans communities. For example, trans people historically and currently report being denied health care, misrepresented in research, and abused by physical and mental health providers. Additionally, trans people are affected by the broader constraints within academe related to knowledge production, including peer-review publication processes and research funding availability. As mentioned earlier, there are few peer-reviewed journals dedicated to knowledge about trans lives, and the most prestigious journals in nearly all fields are unlikely to have any trans or trans-knowledgeable board members. Peer-reviewed academic journals rely on expertise from their respective fields, but there may be few available trans scholars in some fields. This means that scholars producing knowledge about trans experiences often face barriers in the publication process.

In terms of funding, few grants are designed to support trans research. Also, much of the LGBTQIA+ health research in the United States is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Federal research grants like those from the NIH tend to be awarded to larger public and private research universities and prioritize particular types

of research. Smaller institutions and scholars who are in the humanities or using qualitative or emergent methods are disadvantaged by the current design of the research enterprise within academe.

Curricular Exclusion

In addition to the direct harm done by providers and researchers within higher education, academia is the primary training site for professionals in nearly all fields, including medicine, law, public health, psychology, and social work. Yet, few courses include content about trans lives. In most professional preparation programs, there is little LGBTQIA+ content and rarely opportunities to learn about serving the needs of trans people. In some cases, the LGBTQIA+ content for professional training programs is delivered by faculty in Women's and Gender Studies or related fields. This can pose a challenge for these departments, which are typically small and chronically underfunded, so providing "service" courses forces them to forgo offering courses for students within the major. A further problem with the "service" course model is that the content remains at a fairly introductory level, given how little most non-trans students know about trans people. Thus, despite there being a great deal of knowledge about trans life within academe, scant attention is paid to this knowledge within many fields. The little content about trans people that is included within the curriculum provides insufficient information (and sometimes misinformation) and is disconnected from the lived experiences of the trans people whom these fields should be serving.

Anti-Trans "Feminists"

An additional constraint within academe is that even fields that would seemingly be trans supportive, like Women's and Gender Studies, are not necessarily hospitable spaces for trans people and research in trans studies. A small but well-organized group of trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) within British, Australian, and U.S. academe have made it their mission to undermine trans scholars and write scathing attacks on trans people. Often aligned with conservative groups, TERFs seek to delegitimize trans experiences, especially trans women's credibility. Academia continues to employ TERFs, and academic presses continue to publish their work,

despite being clearly discriminatory in their rhetoric and practices.

Lack of Mentorship

A final challenge in knowledge production is the fact that relatively few faculty members have a depth of understanding about trans lives and experiences to enable them to mentor younger generations of scholars. Some institutions do not have any trans-knowledgeable faculty, while others have only a handful in a limited number of departments. The lack of available mentorship constrains the kinds of knowledge that can be produced within academe. Undergraduate and graduate students are often forced to look for mentors and research advisers outside of their fields or even outside of their institutions, which creates obstacles to their work. On the whole, there is great potential for knowledge production within academia, but often it is stalled, fragmented, or limited.

Trans-Negative Policies and Practices in Academia

As much progress as academe has made in terms of creating policies and practices to support trans students, faculty, and staff, too few institutions have taken up the trans-inclusive practices outlined by experts in the field. Academia still has a long way to go to achieve research, scholarship, teaching, and learning communities that provide space for trans liberation and increased life chances. While over 1,000 institutions have added gender identity and expression to their nondiscrimination policies, this represents only about a fourth of U.S. degree-granting colleges and universities, so most trans people in academia still have no recourse if they experience mistreatment. Although nondiscrimination policies have never completely eliminated discriminatory practices, their symbolic function matters. Such policies send a signal that trans people are worthy of respect and inclusion, which can translate to better experiences for trans students, faculty, and staff.

Variable Experiences Within Academia

Trans faculty, staff, and students are subjected to discrimination and harassment within academia in

a variety of ways. For example, trans faculty and staff may experience a hostile work environment because of non-trans students' oppressive behavior. For trans students, non-trans faculty and staff may engage in oppressive behavior that negatively affects their living, learning, and student life environments. Given this variability, efforts to combat anti-trans hostility must similarly take a range of approaches.

But strategies for improving trans people's experiences in academia have been constrained, as the focus has been largely limited to creating policies and practices that address the specific needs of trans students. While such changes are critical to ensuring student success, these efforts must also include staff and faculty. Trans staff and faculty need to have institutional policies and practices in place that can address the discrimination they may experience from students or other employees, and non-trans staff and faculty need to be better trained on trans-inclusive policies and practices to help limit this discrimination.

While a significant amount of education about trans issues and lives occurs within academe, it has not resulted in a fundamental shift in how gender is understood. Changing how non-trans people think about, and therefore engage with, gender as a cultural phenomenon would increase the livability of trans lives and lead to greater liberation for trans people in academe.

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See also Archives; Campus Policies/Campus Climate; Campus Residence Halls; College Undergraduate Students; Gender Clinics in the United States; TERFs; Trans Studies

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