

# ***MOVING BEYOND CIS-TERHOOD:***

## ***Determining Gender through Transgender Admittance Policies at U.S. Women's Colleges***

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*In 2013, controversy sparked student protests, campus debates, and national attention when Smith College denied admittance to Calliope Wong—a trans woman. Since then, eight women's colleges have revised their admissions policies to include different gender identities such as trans women and genderqueer people. Given the recency of such policies, we interrogate the ways the category “woman” is determined through certain alignments of biology-, legal-, and identity-based criteria. Through an inductive analysis of administrative scripts appearing both in student newspapers and in trans admittance policies, we highlight two areas U.S. women's colleges straddle while creating these policies: inclusion/exclusion scripts of self-identification and legal documentation, and tradition-/activism-speak. Through these tensions, women's college admittance policies not only construct “womanhood” but also serve as regulatory norms that redo gender as a structuring agent within the gendered organization.*

**Keywords:** *women's colleges; transgender students; higher education; determining gender; gendered organizations*

**I**n 2013, controversy sparked student protests, campus debates, and national interest when Smith College declined admittance to Calliope Wong—a trans woman.<sup>1</sup> According to Wong, the admissions office

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indicated that as long as her application suggested her *gender identity* as a woman, complete with consistent use of she/her pronouns, her application would be considered. Ultimately, Smith denied Wong's application because her FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form indicated her *sex* as male. Smith's letter to Wong stated, "Smith is a women's college, which means that undergraduate applicants to Smith must be female at the time of admission" (Wong 2014). Smith errantly cited Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972, stating that admitting a trans woman would threaten their historical women's college status and federal funding. The same year, however, Simmons College accepted their first trans woman applicant. Since then, a total of eight women's colleges—Mills, Mount Holyoke, Simmons, Scripps, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Smith, and Barnard—have publicly adopted trans admissions policies that explicitly define who qualifies as a woman (see Marine 2009; Weber 2016).<sup>2</sup>

While concerns pertaining to who a woman is remain part of larger theoretical discussions, less scholarship exists that questions how institutional and organizational arrangements construct, determine, and redo gender as a structural agent (cf. Acker 1990; Spade 2015; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). On the one hand, people communicate their gender through interpersonal interactions to accomplish or *do* gender (West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009). On the other hand, people respond to another's doing by placing them in a gender category, thus *determining* gender at the interactional, legal and policy, and imaginary levels (Westbrook and Schilt 2014). As certain women's colleges change their admissions policies, they "produce various possibilities of viable personhood, and eliminate others" (Stryker 2006, 3) by determining what "woman" means through particular algorithms of gender, sex, and sex category (Hart and Lester 2011; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). This determination is made without regard to how students *do* gender. In this sense, then, organizations are structured through the determination, production, enforcement, and maintenance of gendered policies (Acker 1990; Spade 2015; Westbrook and Schilt 2014).

In this contemporary moment, it is important to consider how gendered organizations, and gender more broadly, are rearticulated and transformed in the course of policy reconstruction. Women's colleges provide a unique lens into these processes, as many are engaging with the central question of *what is a woman* in a new manner, from gender as a social construction to gender as an analytic category; many are asking: *How do we determine who is a woman?*

Drawing upon Acker's (1990) concept of gendered organizations and Westbrook and Schilt's (2014) theoretical apparatus, we examine in two ways the determination of gender through institutional policies and the discourse surrounding transgender admission at women's colleges. First, we investigate the administrative discussions, debates, and discourses about trans admittance issues within U.S. women's college student newspaper articles from 2010 to 2014.<sup>3</sup> Second, examining nine official trans admittance policies adopted by women's colleges, we analyze the ways these policies institutionally determine gender.

### **WOMEN'S COLLEGES, THE "WOMAN QUESTION," AND DETERMINING GENDER**

The question of "what is a woman" is situated within feminism's long-standing struggle to define its boundaries, particularly in women's spaces, such as, for example at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival,<sup>4</sup> Sandy Stone's outing at Olivia Records,<sup>5</sup> women's public restrooms, sports, and prisons (Boyd [1997] 2006; Griffin 2012; Hines and Sanger 2010; Riddell [1980] 2006; Stone [1987] 2006; Stryker 2006; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). The existence and continuity of each of these gender-segregated spaces rely on the relation and opposition to another gender (men), which consequently constructs and defines not only who women are "not" (men) but also who women "are" by drawing upon some state of "being female" (Boyd [1997] 2006; Butler 2004; Weber 2016). Thus, it is important to not only understand how gender categories are created, established, and naturalized, but also how they are institutionalized and structure the very functioning of organizations themselves.

Toward this end, we discuss how women's colleges have historically located themselves within a gender/sex-dialogic *as a gendered organization*. We then position recent transgender admission policy changes within these colleges as one form of institutionalization of gender and discuss how the criteria for gender are determined.

#### **Gendered Organizations**

Thinking of gender as the organizing principle of social relations and the institutionalization of inequalities across groups of people, we can begin to consider the ways in which gender is constructed not only at the interactional level but also at the institutional level. In explaining gendered inequalities within the workplace, Joan Acker's (1990) theory of

gendered organizations highlights that we should not see organizations as gender-neutral or *genderless*, but instead we should see that gender hierarchies are built into the structure of the organization, reflecting and reproducing male advantage. Acker (1990, 146) explains:

To say that an organization . . . is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather it is an integral part of those processes.

Within the gendered organization, gender is constituted through seemingly benign and neutral functions, processes, and policies of the organization, such as the concept of “worker” and “job.” While a “worker” with a “job” appears universal, such concepts are masculinized by excluding and marginalizing women, people of color, people with disabilities, and others who cannot achieve the qualities of a “real” worker—“to do so is to become like a man” (Acker 1990, 150).

Consequently, organizations not only produce gender but also simultaneously employ gender as an organizing principle within policies and practices. As organizational structures change, the gendered organization is not *undone* so that gender no longer exists, but rather gender is *redone* in new forms (Britton 2000; McTavish and Thomson 2007; Stainback, Kleiner, and Skaggs 2016; West and Zimmerman 2009; Williams, Miller, and Kilanski 2012). For example, Stainback, Kleiner, and Skaggs (2016) find that women’s increasing participation in the workforce and holding positions of power serve as “agent[s] of change,” undoing prevailing gender hierarchies by decreasing workplace segregation and increasing diversity policies. But this does little to negate gender as an organizing principle within the workplace. Organizations, through their discursive strategies, structures, and policies, (re)institutionalize how gender is to be *determined* and *used* to regulate belonging within the community.

### Women’s Colleges as Gendered Organizations

Institutions of higher education—regardless of their student demographic—are gendered (Crowder 2012; McTavish and Thomson 2007). Diprete and Buchmann (2013), Mickelson (2003), and others note that despite women’s increasing educational success (with enrollment, average test scores, and graduation rates higher than men), women still face

inequality *qualitatively* on campus. Men and women must compete for the same opportunities, creating a “chilly campus climate” where students work against each other, and systematic hierarchies favoring men prevail (Tidball et al. 1999).

Challenging prevailing essentialist ideologies and gendered inequalities that excluded women from education because they were “intellectually inferior—incapable, merely by reason of being a woman, of great thoughts. . . . [whose] place was in the home” (Tidball et al. 1999, 4-5), women’s colleges were founded as gendered organizations to grant some women (i.e., higher class, white women)<sup>6</sup> access to a higher education comparable to that denied them by “taking women seriously” (Hart and Lester 2011; Kinzie et al. 2007, 160; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2006; Tidball et al. 1999; Wolf-Wendel 2002). While the number of women’s colleges has decreased from 267<sup>7</sup> in 1960 to approximately 50 in 2014, enrolling only 1-2 percent of college-aged women today (Tidball et al. 1999; Wolf-Wendel 2002), their importance remains strong (Tidball et al. 1999). Research finds that graduates of women’s colleges are two to three times more likely than their coeducational peers to be cited in national registers for career achievement and to experience greater gains in cognitive areas (intellectual development, involvement, academic self-confidence, and academic ability), noncognitive areas (self-esteem, confidence, leadership development), and overall satisfaction (Kinzie et al. 2007; Tidball et al. 1999).

Though the historical mission of women’s colleges was to challenge essentialist notions of women’s inferiority, some researchers have contended (drawing upon *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case) that separate education is not equal education (Kraschel 2012). Removing one gender from the institution reaffirms, rather than challenges, gender differences through the forced labeling of individuals as either male or female (Bilodeau 2007).<sup>8</sup> Cohen (2012, 690) explains, “This process of defining gender often determines who is allowed into and excluded from ‘single-sex’ settings—a process through which educational environments may reify false gender binaries and keep educational communities from realizing gender equity.” By segregating education for only women, women’s colleges define “womanhood” through juxtaposition: as different from men. As Acker (1990) would argue, this taken-for-granted, organizational logic of women-different-from-men is ingrained within the college’s construction of symbols, images, individual identity consciousness, and policies. Consequently, women’s colleges consistently depend upon the use of gender as a structural

agent to maintain their very existence. Indeed, women's colleges have always faced challenges to the woman question—from women of color (Horowitz 1984; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2006; Perkins 1998), lower class women (Harwarth, Maline, and DeBra 1997), and religious minorities (Horowitz 1984). As the concept of womanhood changes, these colleges continuously ask: *what is a woman* and *how do we determine that our students are women?*

### **The Woman Question, Determining Gender, and Transgender Students**

Under Title IX,<sup>9</sup> women's colleges are not legally required to admit anyone who is not a *woman*. Consequently, few women's colleges have an institutionalized admissions policy regarding gender; rather, they consider applicants on a case-by-case basis to determine an applicant's success at achieving womanhood (Catalano 2014; Hart and Lester 2011; Marine 2009; Perifimos 2008; Weber 2016). Yet, these criteria are inconsistent. Is a woman defined by biology (and who would verify this, and by what criteria), gender identity, or legal status? While it seems obvious that a woman's college accepts only women, Hart and Lester (2011, 212) argue that it is too simplistic for women's colleges to merely have a general admissions policy for all women, since gender is fluid and is constantly being constructed: "At every moment the essence of a women's college is disrupted because gender performance shifts continuously. This means that a women's college defined by who is admitted may never truly exist." Consequently, the absence of policy, the assumption that all applicants are women, and the evaluation of students on a case-by-case basis institutionally reinforce cultural notions that transgender students need to remain invisible for the institution to maintain its status as a college for women (Catalano 2014; Hart and Lester 2011; see also Marine 2009; Weber 2016). In 2013, when Calliope Wong's application was denied by Smith College, debate arose on if and how colleges should adopt explicit transgender admissions policies. While most colleges have not adopted such policies (Hart and Lester 2011; Marine 2009; Weber 2016), notably nine colleges have adopted policies that codify, formalize, and institutionalize the organization's logic of who a woman is, and consequently, how to determine who a woman is.

Theoretically defined as the response to one's doing of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009), Westbrook and Schilt (2014) argue that people categorize—they *determine*—another person's gender based on

policies, legal cases, everyday interactions, and imaginary scenarios. Within institutions and organizations, “social actors with organizational power devise criteria for who counts as man or woman (and therefore who gains or is denied access to gender-specific rights and social settings)” by how well a person’s gendered interactions and claims *fit* the criteria of these invented categories (Westbrook and Schilt 2014, 36). These criteria, however, differ widely: genitalia (biology-based criteria) determine a person’s “correct” gender in instances of imagined sexualized interactions, whereas a person’s self-identity is generally accepted in spaces defined as nonsexual (see Schilt and Westbrook 2009).

For example, Westbrook and Schilt (2014) analyze three cases where identity- and biology-based determinations clash: anti-discrimination policies, requirements for changing sex markers on birth certificates, and trans participation in sports. They find that in nonsexual gender-integrated spaces, a person’s identity can be used to determine their gender, so long as that identity fits within the binary of “man” or “woman.” However, because of cultural ideologies and panics surrounding women’s vulnerability and needed protection against “men” in gender-segregated spaces—especially in women’s spaces—the presence or absence of a penis is the main factor for determining gender. In gender-segregated spaces, biology-based criteria determine gender, while simultaneously maintaining (as well as conflating/naturalizing) the binary “sex/gender/sexuality system” (Butler 2004; Spade 2015; Westbrook and Schilt 2014).

As women’s colleges reconsider the “woman question,” these institutions rely on various combinations of biology- and identity-based criteria. Grappling with their statuses as colleges for women, the institutional structures and practices that utilize womanhood as an organizing principle adapt, changing the gendered organization and the meaning of gender altogether. Looking at how women’s colleges are contemporarily grappling with trans realities is a good test for both the “gendered organizations” and “determining gender” theories. There currently exists no literature looking at how newly adopted transgender admissions policies serve as a form of organizational logic determining gender and potentially including or excluding trans women, trans men, intersex, and genderqueer individuals (see Weber 2016). As such, we ask: *As gendered organizations, in what ways do women’s colleges discursively determine womanhood through administrative scripts and formalized policies regarding trans admittance?* While most women’s colleges have not changed their admissions policies to explicitly outline criteria determinative of womanhood, the recent and highly publicized adoption of admissions policies at

nine of these colleges—Hollins, Mills, Mount Holyoke, Simmons, Scripps, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Smith, and Barnard—provides insight into how gender is (re)determined and how gendered criteria are institutionalized. At stake in reorganizing such policies is not only the construction of gender but also the *redoing* of the gendered organization that invents, institutionalizes, and reiterates the categories they administer.

## METHODS

To investigate the above research question, we began by building a database of all existing women's colleges in the United States. Online lists of women's colleges were incomplete, out-of-date, and/or inconsistent. We merged multiple online lists, including ones from the Women's College Coalition<sup>10</sup> and *Wikipedia*,<sup>11</sup> resulting in 54 women's colleges. Of our 54 original schools, seven have either closed, become coeducational, or have been subsumed into a coeducational or all-male affiliate, yielding 47 remaining women's colleges for analysis. In this sample, 7 schools are either close affiliates with a men's college or coeducational school ( $n = 5$ ), or accept men but consider themselves colleges "primarily for women" ( $n = 2$ ). We also collected information about school location, student population, school endowment, and Seven Sister (a consortium of historically women's liberal arts colleges in the northeastern United States) or HBCU (historically Black colleges and universities) status.<sup>12</sup>

We then searched each school's website for the name of and online access to their respective student-run newspapers. Of the 47 women's colleges, we were unable to find 8 newspapers and unable to access 12 newspapers either because we lacked the required online credentials, the nonfunctionality of the online site, or the unavailability of the newspaper online, resulting in 27 available newspapers. We initially included every archived article between 2010 and 2014 that utilized the words "trans," "transgender," or "LGBT." This time frame is important because it is representative of circulating discussions at U.S. women's colleges both before and after the highly visible case of Calliope Wong at Smith College in early 2013. This produced 190 potential articles for analysis; however, after reading through these, it was clear that only 81 of the articles discussed transgender admission and enrollment.<sup>13</sup> Articles included in the analysis discussed campus protests and debates, administrative conversations and "fireside chats," teach-ins, letters to the editor, other women's colleges' policies, and opinions regarding trans admission policies

(regardless of whether the school publicly adopted new policies). Table 1 describes each school included in our sample and their relevant articles. These articles allowed us to look at how the campus communities and their corresponding administrations were discussing the issue, and what administrative scripts arose regarding transgender student admission.

In addition to our analysis of the newspapers, we also collected the transgender admission policies of the nine women's colleges that have implemented such policies—Hollins, Mills, Mount Holyoke, Simmons, Scripps, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Smith, and Barnard. While only nine out of 47 women's colleges have official policies (and arguably these nine are the “most elite”) and cannot necessarily speak directly, or universally, to “what women's colleges do,” these schools together offer a collective case where the logic and structure of gendered organizations can potentially be redone; they also shed light on ways that policies serve to determine gender. This is not to say that schools without policies do not regulate or construct womanhood—we are sure they do. However, given the contemporary speed of engagement with trans individuals and the theoretical and empirical importance of understanding how and why some women's colleges have adopted more universal and publicly visible policies, we examined these nine policies.

While our inductive data analysis was closely grounded in the policies, we were primed by taking analytic coding cues from Westbrook and Schilt (2014) and Acker (1990). Together, we coded 25 percent of the newspaper articles by hand utilizing a color-coded system to develop a coding sheet with emergent themes regarding how the administration discussed trans admittance at their college, as well as at women's colleges more generally. Then, we each coded one-half of the remaining articles, taking note of additional themes that emerged with later articles. To ensure intercoder reliability, we traded articles and reviewed the codes; each discrepancy was then discussed and decided collaboratively. With a similar structure, we thematically coded the nine admissions policies for rationale behind the policy change, the meaning of womanhood and the tradition of the college's mission, and the specific sets of criteria (such as biological markers, legal status, or identity) that determine womanhood and, thus, potential admittance.

### **DETERMINING “SISTERHOOD” AT WOMEN’S COLLEGES, 2010-2014**

To begin to understand the administrative scripts surrounding transgender admission at women's colleges between 2010 and 2014, we looked at

**TABLE 1: Relevant Newspaper Articles Mentioning Trans Admission or Acceptance (2010-2014)**

<i>School Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Student Newspaper</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>Total</i>
Agnes Scott College	GA	The Profile	n/a <sup>a</sup>	0	0	0	0	0
Alverno College	WI	Alverno Alpha	n/a	0	0	0	0	0
Barnard College <sup>b,c,d</sup>	NY	Columbia Spectator	0	2	1	1	14	18
Brenau University	GA	The Alchemist	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0
Bryn Mawr College <sup>b,c,d</sup>	PA	The Bi-College News	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cedar Crest College	PA	The Crestiad	n/a	n/a	1	1	1	3
Chatham University <sup>e</sup>	PA	Communicue	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	1	1
The College of New Rochelle	NY	Tattler	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	0
College of Saint Benedict <sup>c</sup>	MN	The Record	0	0	0	0	0	0
Columbia College	SC	The Post Script	0	0	0	0	0	0
Judson College	AL	The Triangle	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0
Meredith College	NC	Meredith Herald	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mills College <sup>d</sup>	CA	The Campanil	2	3	0	5	5	15
Mount Holyoke College <sup>b,d</sup>	MA	Mount Holyoke News	0	0	0	4	4	8
Mount Mary College	WI	Arches	0	0	0	0	0	0
Saint Joseph College	CT	Fortitudo et Spes	0	0	0	0	n/a	0
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College	IN	The Woods	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salem College	NC	The Salemite	0	0	0	1	1	2
Scripps College <sup>d</sup>	CA	The Scripps Voice	0	0	0	1	8	9
Simmons College <sup>d</sup>	MA	The Simmons Voice	n/a	n/a	0	1	1	2

*(continued)*

**TABLE 1: (continued)**

School Name	Location	Student Newspaper	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Smith College <sup>b,d</sup>	MA	The Sophian	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	7
Stephens College	MO	Stephens Life	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0
Stern College for Women of Yeshiva University <sup>c</sup>	NY	The Observer	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0
Sweet Briar College	VA	Sweet Briar Voice	0	0	0	0	0	0
Texas Woman's University <sup>f</sup>	TX	The Lasso	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0
Wellesley College <sup>b,d</sup>	MA	The Wellesley News	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	12	13
William Smith College <sup>e</sup>	NY	Herald	0	0	1	1	0	2
Total			2	5	3	16	55	81

NOTE: Twenty-one colleges have no public or active student newspaper from 2010 to 2014 and are omitted.

a. n/a indicates that there were no data available for these years.

b. Historical Seven Sister.

c. Coordinate College (a women's college closely affiliated with a men's or coeducational college).

d. Public Trans Admission Policy.

e. As of 2015, Chatham University is now coeducational.

f. Texas Women's College and Ursuline College enroll men but are considered "colleges primarily for women."

the patterns across two data sources: (1) women's colleges student newspapers and (2) admissions policies at nine women's colleges: Hollins, Mills, Mount Holyoke, Simmons, Scripps, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Smith, and Barnard.

### **Student Newspapers**

Student newspapers are a unique source of discursive data that engage with administration and emergent collective action on campus (Earl et al. 2004). We looked across the 27 student newspapers to examine how the administrative–student nexus regarding trans admittance was discussed. From 2010 through 2014, there was indeed a dramatic increase in the publication of such articles—2 in 2010, 5 in 2011, 3 in 2012, 16 in 2013, and 55 in 2014. The increase was found especially during and after Calliope Wong's rejection from Smith on March 10, 2013. Using these relevant student newspaper articles, we looked for emergent themes to help understand the key debates and discussions concerning transgender admission at women's colleges.

The campus debates surrounding transgender students at women's colleges are multilayered and complex. For purposes of space here, and because we are most interested in the structure of institutional scripts, we focus on themes that show the institutional/administrative discourse at the women's colleges in our student newspaper sample (see Marine 2009). This approach culminated in four prominent themes across the articles: (1) "We must stay true to the mission and values of the college"; (2) How to document the status of woman; (3) "We already have transgender students on campus"; and (4) Accommodating the transgender student on campus.

A major theme across the articles was the institutional response from women's colleges that, while administrators recognize and acknowledge that transgender applicants desire to attend their schools, it is imperative that they craft trans admissions policies that remain consistent with their college's established values, mission, and traditions. Consistent with Weber (2016), we find that this debate between tradition and inclusion among administrators, trustees, students, and alumni has been a constant balancing act. For example, Scripps's Board of Trustees claim the importance of remaining "commit[ed] to uphold[ing] its legacy as a 'community of women' for current and prospective students, graduates, and partners, while recognizing gender as a social construct that has evolved over time" (Bentley 2014), while a Vice President of Public Affairs at Smith stated,

This is a complex and evolving issue on which people of good intent hold a range of views. . . . Smith is committed to continuing the conversation about transgender students. We are committed to being as welcoming as possible in the context of our mission as a women's college (Admin 2013).

Meanwhile, Barnard College sounded a collective cry of “commit[ment] to developing a policy that truly reflects Barnard's mission and core values” (Bryan 2014).

Closely related to this theme across the student newspaper articles was the institutional response and discourse surrounding how to document the status of “woman.” This issue pulsed at the center of the debates. Consider the variation of institutional responses:

“Barnard accepts applicants only from women” (Bentivoglio 2011).

“The issue of trans admission is dealt with on a case-by-case basis in the admissions office” (Editorial Board 2014).

“Trans women applicants are required to provide government-issued ‘proof’ of their gender” (Anonymous 2011).

“Students who have legally changed their sex to male will not be considered for admission; however, students who transition to male after coming to Mills will be allowed to stay until they graduate” (Nussbaum 2014).

“Any qualified student can apply for admission unless they are ‘biologically born male [and] identify as [a] man’” (Willingham 2014).

Clearly this discussion perseverates on the differing possibilities of requirements that transgender applicants continue to face: documenting, proving, and identifying their status as “woman.” There exists a wide range of policies, from Smith's that states, “Every applicant has to have all female gender markers on four materials: the Common Application, their high school transcript, their midyear academic report, and three letters of recommendation,” (Fraas 2014) to Mount Holyoke, whose President said, “We must acknowledge that gender identity is not reducible to the body” (Weber 2016, 38). As we will see in the policy analysis below, this variation highlights the different ways to determine “womanhood.”

The last two themes, transgender presence and accommodations, were consistent, though less intense and frequent, across the articles. They focus on the fact that transgender students are already on these campuses,

and administrations are discussing how to accommodate for that fact. In most, if not all, of the women's colleges discussed in our sample, transgender students have already matriculated through the system, completed all the requirements, and graduated—most transitioning during their time there. For example, Mount Holyoke “has a long history with trans men and DFAB (designated female at birth) genderqueer students, so we haven't been an ‘all women's college’ for quite some time” (Willingham 2014). This reality for women's colleges has also demanded accommodating these students, from housing issues to gender-neutral bathrooms and signs, and from counseling resources to creating a climate of respect. Mills College “offers healthcare resources and guides for transgender students, as well as instructions on changing names and pronouns with the College and a map of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus” (Nussbaum 2014).

Though transgender students have existed on the campuses of women's colleges and some of these colleges have recognized this fact and provided supportive resources and climates for these students, this recognition does not critically examine the institution's administrative practices that potentially discourage such students from applying and ultimately restricting admission to such colleges in the first place (Catalano 2014; Spade 2012).

### **Transgender Admittance Policies**

The creation of trans admittance policies, as the student newspaper data suggest, is one long, multifaceted discussion on the campuses of the women's colleges in our sample. As such, in addition to the newspaper articles, we also analyzed the policies of the nine women's colleges who have, as of 2016, publicly adopted transgender admission policies. We analyzed each policy in chronological order of adoption: Hollins (2007), Mills (August 27, 2014), Mount Holyoke (September 3, 2014), Simmons (November 7, 2014), Scripps (December 9, 2014), Bryn Mawr (February 9, 2015), Wellesley (March 5, 2015), Smith (May 2, 2015), and Barnard (June 4, 2015). We found institutions rhetorically wrestling between two dialectics: (1) inclusion and exclusion of particular criteria based on the institutional logic of (2) tradition and activism. Interestingly, these scripts closely relate to those that emerge from the student newspaper data, as the conversations on campus regarding documentation and school mission/tradition are also reflected in the policies.

Any college admissions policy is going to include the institutional criteria by which applicants will be judged and, thus, potentially accepted to

**TABLE 2: Transgender Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria at Women's Colleges with Explicit Trans Policies**

<i>College</i>	<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>Exclusion</i>
Barnard <sup>a</sup>	1, 6, 8, 9	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13
Bryn Mawr <sup>a</sup>	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 13	4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12
Hollins <sup>b</sup>	1, 3, 8, 9	3, 4, 5, 11, 12
Mills <sup>a</sup>	1, 2, 3, 8	4, 5, 11
Mount Holyoke	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9	11
Scripps	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13	11, 14
Simmons	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10	11
Smith	1, 6, 8, 9, 13	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12
Wellesley	1, 3, 6, 8, 9	4, 11

NOTE: 1 = Assigned Female Sex, Woman Identity; 2 = Assigned Female Sex, Genderqueer Identity; 3 = Assigned Female Sex, Trans Man Identity; 4 = Assigned Female Sex, Man Identity; 5 = Assigned Female Sex, Male Legal Documentation; 6 = Intersex, Woman Identity; 7 = Intersex, Man Identity; 8 = Assigned Male Sex, Woman Identity; 9 = Assigned Male Sex, Trans Woman Identity; 10 = Assigned Male Sex, Genderqueer; 11 = Assigned Male Sex, Man Identity; 12 = Female Legal Documentation, Man Identity; 13 = Male Legal Documentation, Woman Identity; 14 = Male Legal Documentation, Trans Man Identity.

a. Policies state that people with “conflicts” between documentation and identity (12, 13) or are unsure should contact the college.

b. Hollins is the only college that requires students to leave should they begin transitioning to male/man during their education. Trans women are allowed to apply only if they have “completed the physical sex reassignment surgery and legal transformation,” but not if their transition is in process or they transition only partially.

attend. As such, transgender students simply want to know, “Can I apply to [insert name] women’s college?” Looking across these policies, the first thing that one reads is the dizzying array of potential criteria that these policies outline to explicitly determine who is *included* and *excluded* from the category “woman,” as well as the women’s college community. Similar to Westbrook and Schilt’s (2014) findings, these alignments, what we refer to as *inclusion and exclusion scripts*, comprise varying combinations of biology-based and identity-based criteria. Additionally, we find that colleges rely on legal-based criteria: how other forms of governance determine one’s gender. In all cases, cis women with female documentation are included as potential applicants, and cis men with male documentation are excluded from applying to these women’s colleges. This is not surprising. From there, things get more complex. There appears to be a body–document–identity sociocultural algorithm, represented in Table 2, that produces a complex and potentially confusing policy field used by colleges to determine who a woman explicitly is or is not. We identify up

to 14 different linkages across these three forms of identity that map different combinations of who explicitly are included and excluded for enrollment. For example, some schools explicitly state that a potential women's college student who was assigned female at birth and identifies as genderqueer (linkage 2) may attend their college (Mills, Mount Holyoke, Simmons, Bryn Mawr), while some explicitly state that this combination is not admissible (Smith and Barnard), and while some omit this combination from their policy altogether (Scripps, Wellesley, Hollins). For a student wishing to apply to these colleges, it quickly becomes confusing, frustrating, and potentially demoralizing as they try to understand how they may fit within these varying parameters across institutions.

While all policies grapple with identity, legal status and documentation, and biology, we find an ebb and flow over time regarding which criterion is most salient; Hollins, Bryn Mawr, Smith, and Barnard, the first and last established policies, all voice concerns regarding students taking steps both biologically and legally toward being something "other than" woman. In all four colleges, cis men, DFAB individuals who identify as men, DFAB individuals who identify as genderqueer or whose legal documentation shows a male status, intersex individuals who identify as male, and typically anyone with an identification as male are excluded from applying. Noted as the most exclusionary policy (Weber 2016), Hollins's policy has the additional caveat that if an enrolled student "self identifies as a male" and begins to transition by either undergoing hormone therapy or any surgical procedure, or by changing their legal name (before attaining 64 credits), then the student will be asked to transfer to another university. Meanwhile, Mills (2nd policy), Scripps (5th policy), and Wellesley (7th policy) exclude DFAB individuals who respectively have male legal documents and who identify as male (e.g., trans men).

Beginning with Mount Holyoke (3rd policy), we see a shift in policy structure from focusing on who *cannot* attend a women's college (who is *not* a woman) to inclusive forms of identity (see Weber [2016] calling Mount Holyoke the "gold standard" of policies). For both Mount Holyoke and Simmons (4th policy), only cis men are explicitly excluded, while anyone who identifies as a woman, trans, or genderqueer is explicitly included. Additionally, Scripps explicitly includes people who identify as either man or woman, regardless of legal documentation. Simmons's (2014) policy similarly states, "All applicants to the undergraduate program who were assigned female at birth and/or applicants who self-identify as women are eligible to apply for admission. We do not require government issued documentation for purposes of identifying an applicant's

gender identity.” As Diamond, Erlick, and Wong (2015) outline, in a model transgender policy, an applicant’s self-identification should be regarded as the most important criterion rather than biology or legal status, because many people do not have access to—or desire to use—hormones or the surgery that is often required for change in legal status.

While we may only speculate the source of such anxieties around legal documentation, it is possible that some women’s colleges align their organizational processes with those of other governing systems—if the *law* determines someone as a woman, then they must be—to ensure the college’s legal status as a women’s college. Yet, as we see, other colleges rely on more identity-based criteria, citing the mission and tradition of challenging gender and sex norms surrounding the “woman question.” Consequently, these nine colleges straddle the sociopolitical line between upholding (and explaining) their tradition as a women’s college and facing the twenty-first-century challenges to being a women’s college. We call this *tradition-speak* and *activism-speak*, referring to the expressed role of the women’s college in the twenty-first-century United States. On one hand, these policies focus on the college’s history of educating women to the same standard as men. For example, Smith’s (2015) tradition-speak policy states, “Smith College’s mission—to educate women of promise for lives of distinction—remains unchanged.” Yet, in the same breath, these colleges also engage activism-speak to discuss how the college’s founding was activist at its core, embracing diversity and challenging notions of inferior womanhood. Mount Holyoke’s policy grapples with both its “historic mission as a women’s college” as well as the more activism-based idea that “what it means to be a woman is not static”:

Just as early feminists argued that the reduction of women to their biological functions was a foundation for women’s oppression, we must acknowledge that gender identity is not reducible to the body. Instead, we must look at identity in terms of the *external context in which the individual is situated* [emphasis ours]. It is this positionality that biological and transwomen share, and it is this positionality that is relevant when women’s colleges open their gates (Mount Holyoke College 2014).

Interestingly, the idea that gender categories are linked to “political and social ideologies” is particularly critical: womanhood is neither static nor natural. Rather, the meaning behind womanhood that is so central to the logic and function of women’s colleges can adapt and be redone as social and political ideologies change.

## AFTER CALLIOPE: MOVING BEYOND CIS-TERHOOD AT WOMEN'S COLLEGES

On May 3, 2015, the day after Smith College announced their new trans admittance policy and nearly two years after her initial rejection, Calliope Wong (2015) wrote,

Good game. I applaud you, and I applaud me, together. When I put my story out into the world, I originally just wanted one thing: for those institutions and individuals in power, to recognize that trans oppression is not silent. We will not be this time, are not to be, will never be crushed and silenced by you.

Like Smith College deciding to have an explicit transgender admittance policy, this newest iteration of *the woman question* incites interrogations of biology, legal systems, identity, organizational structure, power, and access. Extending the foundation of Simone de Beauvoir's observation that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," trans admission policies emphasize that "there is no natural process by which *anyone* becomes a woman, and also that *everyone's* gender is made" (Enke 2012, 1). Women's colleges, as gendered organizations, utilize gender as a structuring agent and (re)construct gender's meaning through its institutionalized forms (Acker 1990). *Who a woman is*, then, at women's colleges is both a product of the organization and an integral organizing principle to the organization itself.

We examine how certain women's colleges determine gender through the adoption of transgender admittance policies, as well as the discussions, debates, and discourses that circulated around the administrative responses to trans admittance issues within U.S. women's college student newspaper articles. These policies and scripts, while few in number, serve as an important example of ways in which some colleges are dealing with "the woman question" and how to concretely define their organizational bounds—how to determine gender. As we find, there exists a wide variety of possible combinations between "biology-based," "identity-based," and "legal-based" criteria inconsistent across women's colleges as a unified institutional category. Each college strives to define its historical, traditional purpose, and consequently its population, through various combinations of sex and gender. Informed by the scripts and discourses appearing on campus, we highlight two major dialectics in which these policies vary across colleges: (1) inclusion and exclusion scripts and (2) tradition- and activism-speak. What is "mapped" in the policies, in other words, serves

as the “legible” or “legitimate” type of womanhood at these colleges, and this contextually changes. Women’s colleges, then, are not solely colleges for women; rather women’s colleges, as gendered organizations, are *redone* through the constant tensions and changes surrounding who a woman is.

While it is important to think about these policies, perhaps what is more important is to consider what is *not* mapped in these policies. Spade (2015) highlights that unlike more visible and overtly discriminatory moments such as firing or killing people on the basis of their gender, seemingly “neutral” features of administrative systems, such as organizational policies, also sometimes produce significant harm. These norms and codes of behavior “reach into the most minute details of our bodies, thoughts, and behaviors. The labels and categories generated through our disciplined behavior keep us in our places and help us know how to be ourselves properly” (Spade 2015, 54). In other words, while institutional policies may not directly influence one’s individual identity because it may not depend upon an institution’s gender parameters, that does not mean that the ways gender is institutionally determined have no impact on individuals’ lived experiences (see Acker’s [1990] third-gendered process). Rather, the creation and maintenance of such gender categories—the invention and institutionalization of what a woman is—establishes guidelines and norms that are enforced and legitimated while limiting access to recognition and *subjecthood* to only those who fit these categories (Butler 2004; Enke 2012; Hines and Sanger 2010; Spade 2015; Valentine 2007).

For example, as Hines (2010), Richards et al. (2016), and Wong (2015) note, nonbinary individuals—those whose gender does not conform to an either/or man–woman dichotomy—are often left out of the realm of the imaginary. These policies concretely outline, with few exceptions, that a person seeking admittance must fully transition from one gender (man) to its presumed, and consequently constructed, opposite (woman). As a result, a student who, for the sake of illustration, is born with intersex anatomy, has female legal documents, and has a genderqueer identity not only cannot be admitted to some women’s colleges but also can have their very existence marked as “impossible” (Butler 2004; Enke 2012; Spade 2015; Valentine 2007). Enke (2012, 11) writes, “By having a name, performing a recognized demographic category . . . we also reckon with the fact that we exceed every possible legible node . . . sometimes so much that the institution literally has no place for, or violently misplaces, such subjectivities.” Rather than recognizing that the student’s inclusion may

contribute to the overall goals and mission of the college, these policies, through their reiteration of categories in the institutional context, limit the possibilities of what womanhood can include (Valentine 2007).

Critical trans theory serves as one potential source of insight into how these policies can be—and perhaps should be—shaped in order to create more inclusive policies, and it also can serve as a potential source for imagining how these organizations, as well as gender more broadly, can be transformed. The power behind these theories is not in the invention or organization around one category, or even in the queering of categories altogether (see Hines [2010] for an analysis on trans queer subjectivities), but rather in the reorientation away from identity toward a critique of knowledge production (Enke 2012; Spade 2015; Stryker 2006). This way, we are able to closely examine the “operations of systems and institutions that simultaneously produce possibilities of viable personhood, and eliminate others” by analyzing the legitimation and naturalization of knowledge and “reality” (Stryker 2006, 3). Perhaps this is too strongly stated, but only future research can desubjugate transgender students’ realities from those that have been determined for them (Stryker 2006). Such a transformation in thought would be radical in practice, as it brings the organizational logic and individual impact into conversation and in relation with one another.

While we focus on the recent, and to some extent radical, shifts in some women’s college admissions policies, we would be remiss if we failed to mention the fact that these policies are only one snapshot into the “women question” at women’s colleges—and an end product at that. Most women’s colleges, both in the United States and internationally, have not adopted such policies (or at least not publically), and their lack of policy, or their case-by-case practice, genders the organization as well, perhaps through the refusal to institutionally determine and reiterate such categories. Yet, as we see in the newspaper articles, many colleges are having the same conversations. Further research is needed to analyze the different processes, contexts, and rationales by which such policies are created (or not), including the role of student activism (see Weber 2016), news and media, school demographics and missions, and the role of alumnae and administration (see Marine 2009). Additional research should look into the linear trajectory of such policies: how one school’s policy influences the shape and adoption (or the lack thereof) of others. Finally, further research needs to not only focus on the entrance of trans students into these institutions, but how these policies—how the organizational logic and administrative governance—affects the very livelihood of these students.

As some women's colleges begin to seek the answer, or perhaps the solution, to "the woman question," the assumptions and ideologies about biology, legal status, and identity underlie the documents and policies used to construct organizations (Acker 1990). Simultaneously, the functions and processes of organizations, as gendered entities, construct the very meaning of gender. As the ideologies about gender shift in almost a cyclical manner, we can begin to theorize about ways in which the gendered organization is redone, modifying the organizational logic to incorporate these new ideas of womanhood. In the words of Calliope Wong (2015), "Smith College's inclusion of trans women is one very small ripple in the pond of the world. . . . But it is a demonstration of the fact that there's a lot of power you can't see, propagated, emanating onwards and outwards."

## NOTES

1. While there is no consistent definition to offer, as it is an open, working term rather than an ontological category or stable reference, there are some general agreements about what "transgender" or "trans" mean. We consider transgender to be an umbrella term for an imagined community that crosses socially constructed boundaries that contain imposed gender roles, norms, and expectations, regardless of surgical and legal status. This potentially includes people who identify as transsexuals, trans, drag queens and kings, MTF (male-to-female) and FTM (female-to-male), trans men and trans women, bigender, intergender, two spirit, pangender, third gender, intersex, genderqueer, agender, genderfluid, non-binary, and more. Not all people within these categories self-identify as "transgender" (such as intersex people), and this term, as it continues to be institutionalized, may potentially leave people out; thus, our use of this very category may be limited (Enke 2012; Spade 2015; Valentine 2007). As such, rather than being an "index of marginality" (Valentine 2007, 14), we see transgender as one central site where meanings about gender and sex are being worked out.

2. Hollins College adopted the first known public trans admissions policy in 2007, but unlike the eight that came after 2014, Hollins's policy is trans-exclusive. To our knowledge, no other policies, inclusive or exclusive, have been adopted after 2015. Most women's colleges, as discussed below, consider students on a case-by-case basis and have no official public stance (see Marine [2009] for definition of policy).

3. Our discussion is U.S.-based. Further research is needed to examine trans admittance at international women's colleges. For more, see Renn (2014) and Purcell, Helms, and Rumbley (2005).

4. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (also known as MichFest) was an annual festival held from 1976 to 2015. The festival is noted for its "womyn-born-womyn" separatist politics and attendance policy whereby only women assigned

female at birth could attend. In 1991, Nancy Burkolder was asked to leave the festival after being recognized as a trans woman. See Boyd ([1997] 2006) and Stryker (2006) for more details.

5. In 1979, transexclusionary radical feminist scholar Janice Raymond published *The Transsexual Empire*, within which she accused Sandy Stone, a trans recording engineer at Olivia Records (a women's music label), of dividing and harming the mission of the collective. After many of Raymond's followers threatened to boycott the label, Stone resigned from the collective. See Riddell ([1980] 2006) and Stone ([1987] 2006) for more details.

6. Some colleges (such as Mount Holyoke), on the other hand, utilized students' compulsory labor to enable working-class, white females means to an education.

7. Other sources report slightly different numbers. Miller-Bernal and Poulson (2006) cite 233 women's colleges in 1960, whereas Wolf-Wendel (2002) reports 214.

8. As explained below, there is a noted presence of transgender men at women's colleges. For more, see Catalano (2014), Marine (2009), Padawer (2014), and Weber (2016).

9. Title IX's single-sex provisions allow women's colleges to employ affirmative action to assist "the disadvantaged sex" given that no members of the non-disadvantaged sex are enrolled (Kraschel 2012; Perifimos 2008). Because of these provisions, women's colleges have primarily cited Title IX as the reason why they could not enroll trans (women) students: on the basis of sex. Trans populations at women's colleges have thus been limited to trans men and nonbinary individuals who are *assigned female at birth* and transition *after* matriculation. In 2015, Title IX was clarified to also include gender identity and expression, which includes trans students as a disadvantaged group (U.S. Department of Education 2015), and thus allows for (but does not require) transgender admittance policies that also uphold the legal standing of women's colleges. See Kraschel (2012) for a legal analysis of trans admittance policies and Title IX.

10. <http://www.womenscolleges.org/colleges>.

11. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_women's\\_colleges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_women's_colleges).

12. Data from school websites and U.S. News and World Report college search ([http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/search?\\_sort=school-name&\\_sort-direction=asc](http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/search?_sort=school-name&_sort-direction=asc)).

13. Those articles mentioning "trans" or "transgender" that were excluded did not focus on transgender admittance but rather were captured in conjunction with general LGBTQ issues such as guest speakers, film screenings on campus, etc.

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