

Bodies of Knowledge 2020
REENVISIONING TRANSGENDER
April 9-10, USC Upstate

Call for Papers: 250-word abstracts due Dec. 1, 2019 by email to Dr. Lisa Johnson
(mjohnson@uscupstate.edu)

Mission

Bodies of Knowledge is an LGBTQ-themed event founded in 2008 in memory of Sean Kennedy, a young man who was killed in Greenville in 2007. This biennial event aims to create a safer, more understanding community for everyone by offering high-quality presentations that change the conversation about LGBTQ experience in the Upstate and beyond, thereby improving the climate of the Upstate for its LGBTQ youth and promoting civil and well-informed discussion around sexuality and nonconforming gender identities.

Theme

The 2020 event will focus on the politics, culture, and health issues surrounding the transgender community. According to a 2016 Williams Institute report, there are an estimated 21,000 transgender adults living in the state of South Carolina. Transgender people face significantly more challenges than other members of the LGBTQ+ community. In a 2018 report entitled “Understanding LGBTQ Needs in Spartanburg County,” transgender and genderqueer respondents commented that the Upstate region “needs improved education on transgender identities and improved access to transgender-specific health care needs.” Bodies of Knowledge 2020 contributes to this goal of improving the local climate for transgender people in the Upstate through presentations and dialogue among scholars, artists, and community organizers.

Keynotes

Four stellar keynote speakers will form the core of this special event with back-to-back presentations on Thursday, April 9, from 9:00-3:00. Professionals who wish to receive continuing education credits will be eligible for 5 general CEUs if they attend all four of these presentations.

- Speaker 1 – 9:25-10:40

Dr. Austin H. Johnson

Assistant Professor of Sociology at Kenyon College

“Out Here Now: Trans Life in the U.S. Southeast”

What is transgender experience like in the 21st century U.S. Southeast? While social, legal, and economic barriers continue to create difficulties in the lives of trans and nonbinary people in this region, community organizers are changing what is possible for transgender people in rural southern settings. From the Knights & Orchids Society in Selma, Alabama to My Sistah’s House in Memphis, TN to Gender Benders in Greenville, SC, transformative leaders, organizations, and initiatives across the region are supporting this population in finding ways to flourish through a range of direct services and educational workshops.

- Speaker 2—10:50-12:05

Dr. Marquis Bey

Assistant Professor of African American Studies and English at Northwestern
“*Doing Black Trans Feminism*”

This talk will establish for participants what Black trans feminism is and looks like. After defining each of the terms—Black, trans, and feminism—the talk will provide a holistic understanding of Black trans feminism as a political endeavor, demonstrating what role non-Black/trans/women advocates have in engaging Black trans feminism and offering the insistence on life and action presented by Black trans nonbinary scholar-activists Dr. Kai M. Green and Dr. Treva Ellison. Black trans feminism is not simply “bringing in” Black people to questions concerning transgender people and feminism, nor is it bringing in transgender people to Black feminism. It is how one engages the world when all three converge as a political stance, not simply an identity.

- Speaker 3—12:15-1:30pm

Dr. Tey Meadow

Assistant Professor of Sociology at Columbia University
“*Trans Kids: Being Gendered in the Twenty-First Century*”

Based on Meadow’s *Trans Kids* (U of California P, 2018), this presentation offers a trenchant ethnographic and interview-based study of the first generation of families affirming and facilitating gender nonconformity in children. Whereas previous generations of parents sent such children for psychiatric treatment aimed at a cure, these parents agree to call their children new names, allow them to wear whatever clothing they choose, and approach the state to alter the gender designation on their passports and birth certificates. Sociologist Tey Meadow argues that these parents are negotiating gender in new and significant ways, with everyone and everything, from intimates to institutions.

- Speaker 4—1:40-2:55

Dr. Heath Fogg Davis

Professor of Political Science at Temple University
“*Beyond Trans: Does Gender Matter?*”

Based on Davis’s *Beyond Trans* (NYUP, 2017), this presentation pushes the conversation on gender identity to its limits: questioning the need for gender categories in the first place. Whether on birth certificates or college admissions applications or on bathroom doors, why do we need to mark people and places with sex categories? Do they serve a real purpose or are these places and forms just mechanisms of exclusion? Heath Fogg Davis offers an impassioned call to rethink the usefulness of dividing the world into not just Male and Female categories but even additional categories of Transgender and gender fluid. Davis, himself a transgender man, explores the underlying gender-enforcing policies and customs in American life that have led to transgender bathroom bills, college

admissions controversies, and more, arguing that it is necessary for our society to take real steps to challenge the assumption that gender matters.

The organizers of *Bodies of Knowledge 2020* invite proposals for individual conference papers, panels with 3-5 conference papers, informal roundtable panels, creative presentations (e.g., poetry, spoken word, creative nonfiction, photography exhibits, other art installations), and tabling by community organizations. We welcome participation from undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and community organizers. Proposals may address topics raised by the keynoters—trans community organizing, Black transgender feminism, trans childhoods, trans theorizing about gender-markers on legal documents—or may respond more broadly to the theme of *reenvisioning transgender* lives, cultures, politics, media visibility, and so on.

The sky is the limit. Let your creativity be your guide.

Sample topics include but are not limited to:

- *POLITICS—Transgender Tipping Point and Beyond*: What is the state of transgender politics now, and how has it changed since the tipping point was announced by *Time* magazine in 2014? What key fronts are trans activists currently working on? What role are transgender politics playing in discourse surrounding the 2020 U.S. presidential election? What else?
- *MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS—Live. Work. Pose!*: How has Ryan Murphy's award-winning series, *Pose*, changed the landscape of trans representation on television? What is the cultural work of this show? How does it compare to previous representation milestones (e.g., *Transparent*, *Orange Is the New Black*)? What is to be made of its relationship to its source material, *Paris Is Burning*? And of the cultural shift toward featuring trans actors—the extraordinary Mj Rodriguez, Dominique Jackson, and Indya Moore, in particular—in trans roles? What other contemporary or historical trans media representations warrant attention and analysis? Mattel's Creatable World non-binary doll series? What else?
- *LACK OF SAFETY—Violence against Trans and Non-Binary People: The New York Times* recently reported on the possibility that we are facing an epidemic of violence against trans people, with a special focus on murders of Black trans women and the fear being sown in trans communities as a result of these murders. Others have proposed there is a hidden epidemic of violence against transmasculine people as victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence, and a gap of resources to assist this population. What is being done to address these epidemics and who is doing this work? Can we expect positive change on this public health crisis any time soon? More narrowly, where does the issue of transgender people in prison stand? How have the social problems of putting trans people in prison for self-defense—and in prison with the wrong gender—progressed in the wake of national attention to Cece McDonald's case in 2012? What is the place of Black trans people in the Black Lives Matter and/or Say Her Name movements against excessive policing of Black populations and police violence against unarmed Black people? What else?

- *TRANSGENDER AFFECTS—Trans Optimism vs. Trans Pessimism*: Building on the previous prompt, what is the effect of counting these murders and detailing their gruesome horror? In contrast, what about the effect of stories featuring dreamy portraits of trans love? In other words, how do positive and negative cultural narratives about transgender people serve or undercut the interests of the everyday lives of trans and non-binary people? Drawing on scholarly discussions of queer optimism and queer pessimism, as well as Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism, and never forgetting the purposeful figure of the feminist killjoy, this prompt invites philosophical reflection on trans optimism or trans pessimism, or, more broadly, on the politics and felt-experience of transgender affects. What happens (personally or politically) when we *get emotional* about trans lives? To what uses can we put these emotions? What else?
- *TRANSGENDER U—Problems and Best Practices in Higher Ed*: Are transgender and non-binary students being served well by institutions of higher education? In the classrooms, bathrooms, health services, and residential housing options? Beyond identifying problems, what are some “best practices” in higher ed for this population? What’s the ideal from a trans-inclusive perspective; i.e., what aspirations should universities and colleges be cultivating to improve in this area? Are there affinities to be developed on campus between transgender advocacy and disability advocacy, services, and architectural retro-fitting or universal design? What else?
- *THE LIST GOES ON: Transgender spirituality; transgender health care, health disparities, well-being, and self-care; transgender art, memoir, realist or speculative fictional literary & film representations; transgender linguistics, the institutionalization of “they,” the rise of pronoun indicators on email signatures and name tags; . . . transgender topics beyond our imaginings . . .*