

Episode: [Centering Transgender and Gender Expansive People in Social Work and Social Work Education](#)

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:00:10] From the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Welcome to the inSocialWork podcast. I'm Peter Sobota. Hi everybody. Good to have you on. When our team talked about a podcast that address the needs and challenges of transgender and gender expansive people, it was very tempting to focus on the legislative attacks and social political manipulation that's employed against them. This is concerning enough, but as our team reviewed the literature and popular media, our questions became larger. We found a response to the big picture when we found our guests, Dr. Meg Pacey and Dr. Candace Christensen, two social work scholars who met in common interest and formed a professional and personal alliance that resulted in them co editing a special edition of the Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare. Seeing and hearing them in action, it's clear that power and genuine solidarity are the results of their collaboration. Doctors Pacey and Christensen will cover a lot of ground. They will tell us how they came to this work, define what it means to be transgender and the challenges they face. They will address the policy, discrimination and political exploitation, but go beyond that and ask some very hard questions about the response or lack thereof of the social work, profession and social work education to the needs of transgender folks. Our guests will conclude with a call for action and talk about what can be done to improve and support transgender people in social work, education and in communities. Candace Christensen, PhD., is an associate professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work, And Meg Pacey, PhD. is associate professor at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Hi, Meg. Hi, Candace. Welcome to inSocialWork.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:02:10] Hi, Peter. Hello.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:02:12] I always start off by asking folks how they came to the profession. And if I could, I'd like to ask how you both found your way here and also how you found yourself working and producing scholarship related to transgender persons and community. So it's a tall order for a short period of time, but would you be willing to give it a crack?

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:02:38] Go ahead, Meg.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:02:40] Sure. So, yeah, thanks again for having us here, Peter. I think the question of how I got into social work is always both an easy and a hard one for me in that, like I was always sort of leaning towards a helping profession and not really sure what that would be and started my academic career in psychology and took quite a bit of time off to do work and kind of explore what I was interested in. And as I was ready to move back into graduate programs, I was also coming into my own queer identity and really excited about the thought of macro social work, even though I don't think I fully understood what it was until I was really in it. So did a macro MSW that really and really focused a lot of my own self-directed learning around LGBTQ populations and communities and had that wonderful experience to start an LGBTQ community center at the end of my MSW program, which has just really changed the course of my life and informed the work that I do now and my academic career. And so, yeah, that's a little bit of sort of how I got started and then thinking about working with trans communities and for me specifically trans youth within my research and students within, so short of education, really arose out of students coming to me about their experiences in social work education

and saying, you know, it's not awful, but my pronouns aren't being used or I'm being gendered or the way that it's coming up in class is not always in the most affirming way, which I would often reiterate. All of that is actually awful and could be worse, of course, but it can always be worse, right? And so started organizing and advocating alongside them. And that led up to the town hall, which we'll talk about in a little bit. And that's where Anderson met. So that's like a 20 year overview in about 60. So.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:04:35] Yeah, it's like the greatest hits, right?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:04:38] Yes.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:04:39] Thank you. But before we go on, did you say you started a center at the end of your MSW program?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:04:48] Yeah.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:04:48] Oh my, talk about ambitious.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:04:51] Well, it was it was like not part of my practicum. It sort of like followed the end of my must be program. But my practicum was at a campus based LGBTQ resource center and the Women's and gender. Center on campus, and a colleague who eventually became a colleague reached out and said that they were interested in looking at the possibility of community based programming for queer and trans people in the community because there just wasn't anything outside the campus community. And was anybody interested? And so my practicum supervisor said, You're interested, you go to that. And so I gladly went and it just became this thing. I didn't I always wanted, not always, but throughout my MSW, I wanted to explore the possibility of starting a community organization. But of course, I'm like brand new, you know, not even graduated yet and didn't really. Think that that would be a possibility. And then. And then it was. So a group of us co-founded this organization in 2010. It's still there providing resources to the community. And there was just such a huge, impactful experience for me. And I did it while I did my PhD. program. So yeah.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:06:02] Oh, wow. What a nice legacy. All right, Candace. Well, you covered 20 years in a very short period.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:06:10] I have to say, I am just so impressed with how fluidly Meg covered that ground. Yes. And so concisely.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:06:17] I know. Yeah.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:06:19] So my father was a community psychologist, and I think working in the community gave, you know, I mean, he certainly provided a social justice lens on mental health care particularly. And unfortunately, as a young adult, I did not really see myself pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology. So I did a master's in social work. And it was during my advanced practicum, and this is where my path overlaps with Meg as well. I did my practicum with the Women's Resource Center on campus, and we did a lot of partnering with the LGBTQIA+ Center as well. And that's why I really started to question my sexual and gender identities. That awakening was really starting to crack open for me and then zoom forward many years later. I'm an assistant professor in San Antonio, Texas, and I reached out to an organization that supports queer and trans youth, and I

volunteered for the organization. I was a board member and eventually conducted an ethnography with them and realized that the majority of the youth identified as transgender or gender expansive. And there was a discrepancy with the board members who were mostly cisgender. And there were a lot of actually transphobic attitudes among the board members. And so just seeing that in the community and then of course that is reflected in unfortunately, in social work classrooms as well. And then, you know, Meg reached out and said, I'm holding a town hall. And of course, at the time, Texas was passing laws to ban gender affirming care. And I said I have to be a part of.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:07:57] Right.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:07:58] The governor. Greg Abbott. Yeah. Yes. Is at that time it was forcing child welfare social workers to report.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:08:07] Care.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:08:09] That provided gender affirming care to youth. Yeah, that was the big one at that point in time. And now so much more has happened.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:08:16] That was the tip of the iceberg, unfortunately. Right.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:08:19] I got to meet Meg through the town hall and then Linda McCormick reached out and said, "Do you all want to do a special issue in the journal Sociology and Social Welfare?" And Meg said yes. Meg was like, I need a co-editor. And I said, I would love to do that. So here we are.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:08:33] Fantastic. Thank you both. Essentially what I want to talk with you about is transgender folks. And in the context of social work, profession and especially in social work education. But before we do, I guess I'm not entirely confident that everyone who might be listening might have the best idea of what the term transgender really means. So if it would be okay, could we just start by one or both of you kind of just laying out what that means for you? And when you're talking about transgender, what what are you really like?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:09:12] This is Meg. I can start. And Candace, please feel free to jump in or add to what I share. I would say first that, you know, there's a lot of importance in terms of self-identification and that I would never tell somebody how to, like, define their own identity. Right? Generally, when I'm talking about transgender as an identity or community, I'm talking about anybody who identifies outside of a gender identity. So cisgender is somebody whose current gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth. So they're born, the doctor says it's a girl or it's a boy. Usually those are the two, right? And as they've grown up, they still identify with the one that the doctor said. Right? Trans would be anybody outside of that. So somebody who the doctor identified a sex at birth and now they identify as a different gender. So they said it's a boy. And now they're like, nope, I'm a woman. But it can also be outside of that binary, too, in terms of people who are nonbinary or gender, queer, age, gender, etc. So in that sense, it's really an umbrella term for anybody outside of a cisgender identity.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:10:17] Mm hmm. Thanks, Candace. You want to add to that?

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:10:21] I think that was an excellent description in definition. Yeah, and I totally agree. I would add that the term cisgender in that definition really comes from queer theorists and critical feminists, really, you know, decades of work, of theorizing and research showing that gender is a social construct. Right? That the gender binary is something that we made up. And the question is, who does the gender binary benefit? And for the most part, we research shows that it doesn't benefit most of us to operate within a binary. Mm hmm.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:10:55] Actually. That's helpful. I'm glad I asked that. To get going. Can we agree that the social work profession and maybe social work education as part of that, despite our stated values and our our mission, we haven't exactly been on the forefront of addressing the needs of the trans community and even responding, I don't think, to the really kind of negative rhetoric. And, you know, even the legislation that you mentioned earlier that's directed at trans folks. Is that a fair assessment? Folks can't see. I can, right. There's heavy sighing and heavy eyerolling.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:11:46] I was waiting for Candace. No, I think that.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:11:49] Take a second and just share your thought. That's what I think is important here.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:11:58] This is Candace. In general, schools of social work, departments of social work are not affirming environments for transgender and gender expansive people, and they consistently don't provide transgender or gender expansive content in courses. And this isn't, I would say for most part it's not intentional, but is a huge oversight. And it is incongruent with the social value of social justice and really working towards addressing oppression of historically marginalized communities.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:12:30] Or human rights, for that matter.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:12:32] Human rights. And we we have research that shows that, unfortunately, faculty share transphobic beliefs in the classroom, and they don't intervene when students make transphobic comments, just as an example. So yeah.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:12:47] Meg Yeah, I would agree. And I think there are of course social work educators and social work practitioners out in the community doing really important work. And we also know that like that's not the majority, right? But the research shows us that and that, you know, Candace talked about social work, education, even thinking about social work practice. There's research articles, but also anecdotally the stories that I've heard of a parent taking their child to a social worker, that even somebody that was reportedly LGBTQ friendly and having a really negative experience, particularly related to gender, that maybe, maybe they were more LGB friendly, right? But not so knowledgeable or skilled related to diverse gender identities. And so it's a huge area of growth that we have in social work and that we've often been behind the curve when it comes to making public statements sort of condemning harmful practices. So when you think about the practice of conversion therapy, which is unethical, harmful and for four years prior to social work as a profession, kind of condemning it, other professional organizations can. So we think about like the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and it took a lot of advocacy really to get national social work organizations to come out against it. So I think that, you know, our values and our ethics

are in the right place. It's just a matter of like having us practice what we preach. You know?

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:14:18] Yeah. We haven't really distinguished ourselves. According to our ethics and our stated values with a number of populations. I mean, where we don't really have a lot to be proud of with indigenous folks and issues of race in general. So. I this Did you did you want to weigh in on this?

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:14:38] Yeah. I agree with everything that that mag said know. And it it really the the issues permeate all levels of practice. Right. We see in it from interpersonal interactions to kind of the mezzo level within schools, but then at the macro level. An example is CWE which accredits schools of social work that have anti-trans policies. And so it's like. You know. You know, questioning integrity around those choices.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:15:08] Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:15:11] So, Peter, you were kind of getting it. Something that made me think of what I tell my students is that I love being a social worker. I love the social work as a profession, and that's why I'm critical of it, right? Because I know that better. And I know that I was drawn to social work, having a psychology background because of our values and ethics. And that's why I like I'll go on a podcast or host a national town hall that is really critical of social work and social work education, because we should be the ones out there in the lead of doing this work. And in some times we are. In many times we're not. Right. So yeah.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:15:45] Yeah, I often refer to that as a lover's quarrel because I think, much like you said, I'm proud of being a social worker. It's very a deliberate choice. But that doesn't mean, you know, we've got this all figured out. Yeah, we have to have the uncomfortable conversation in many ways. So before we get to I think what I'm going to refer to is kind of the nuts and bolts. I'm going to invite you to weigh in and and really honestly respect, if you'd rather not. But I'm curious what you make of pretty much the political weaponization of trans folks. In the culture wars that are alive and well here in the United States. And and specifically. Why trans people? What? What do you think that's all about?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:16:38] Yeah, it's a big question. This is Meg. And I think there's not a simple answer. I think one reason that we're seeing this is a backlash to some progress that's been made. And the broader LGBTQ community we think about like marriage equality and some states passing nondiscrimination legislation across the country. So I think that's part of it. And I also think within some of that organizing, trans people, we're left behind, right? When we think about marriage equality or trying to pass a national nondiscrimination law, which of course didn't happen, but there was organizing around like, let's let's get let's work for some equality and equity for people related to sexual orientation. And then we'll because it's more like it's more palatable, it's more likely to get passed. Like I'm using air quotes and all of this for folks who can't see me. What that happens is there really is no trickle down social justice, right? It doesn't trickle down to people who experience greater and more intersectional forms of marginalization. And so while we may have seen an increase in equality and equity for particularly white LGBTQ people, we haven't seen that for people with other forms of intersecting identities and also for trans people of all identities. And so I think that's one reason. Caused her to let Candace jump into.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:18:03] Yeah, that's that's such an important overview. Meg, I really appreciate your emphasis on looking at who is most marginalized, you know, and within that who's benefiting from these policies. And so that's definitely a concern within the queer community. And I. I think there are two political pushes here. I think there's increased the visibility of the transgender community. I'm going to say in general, not not everybody. Gen-X parents are overall more affirming of LGBTQ plus positionality in their children. And so we're seeing more and more children come out of the closet as being transgender or gender expansive. And and so that's become an issue within schools. Right? We're still seeing bullying. We're still seeing, you know, and then questions about bathrooms and locker rooms and which name a teacher uses are starting to emerge. Okay. And the second is that going into the 2024 election, we have I hope it's okay to talk about politics. I think everything's political, but we have a Democrat in office right now.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:19:07] It's okay.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:19:08] Okay, good.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:19:08] Okay. I was hoping we would. Yeah.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:19:12] Wow. Good. I don't think it's an accident that we started to see these anti-transgender bills come out. After 2021. That's when there was a shift in the White House in terms of. Political parties. I think the Republicans are being really strategic as to what issues they focus on. They are really trying to solidify the evangelical voter base for the 2024 election. And so they are focusing on issues of particular interest to that base. So abortion, gender issues, critical race theory, which affects children in K through 12 and universities. So yeah, transgender issues are part of that.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:19:55] Yeah. And the heavy artillery seems to be all of that. And the focus on children no less. Which just seems to be the dirtiest of dealings. That's probably another podcast. All right. So now, thanks. Let's talk about your collaboration center with the town hall and then the special issue that you did in the Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare. This is going to be, I think, a silly question given I think everything you've said so far. But how easy or not was it to find authors who were willing to contribute?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:20:35] Well, so can I can I back up a little bit from that question? Please do. So, yeah, because it relates to the development of the town hall. So the first idea was in March of 2022. So we're talking about a good couple of years, but at least one year. I mean, probably in our second really intense year of anti-trans policies and legislation across the country. And it was I don't know, I think it was summer, late fall, I think was late fall. No, it was early. We only we planned this on like 30 days, the first one. So it was late January, February of 2022. And a group of queer scholars and students, mostly in social work, kind of just got together to really provide support for each other. Like this is going on. We're struggling to navigate it in our own department. These are happening in our states. And, you know, depending on what school we were at or what state we were in, some universities or programs were saying really quiet about it. Others were being more vocal. But a lot of them were public state institutions. And so there were challenges sometimes with calling out these oppressive pieces of legislation. And so the

idea for the town hall came out of that meeting, which was a really support based like how can we support each other? After a really successful first year, we decided to do it again, and that's when Candace and I co-organized it. And it was not hard to find people willing to speak out either. When we tried to have a mix of students and faculty as well as people in the community doing organizing and advocacy work, whether they were social workers or not, and really focused on social work education as a space where we needed to be addressing the policies of impact, the work we do as social workers. And so like we have to be talking about and about their impacts, but also how we advocate against them when they're when they're oppressive. And so that was really the focus of both town halls so far. And so we got together to do this special issue and first reached out to other authors and offered co editorship to them first that said sorry, not to the authors, to the people who had been involved in the town halls previously. And this was in between the first and the second town hall. So everybody was supportive of doing a special issue but didn't want to leave it. So Candace and I agreed, which was fine. We were very comfortable with that. It sounds.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:22:57] Familiar.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:22:58] Yeah, We put out a call and we initially put the call out just to have people affiliated with the town hall because we wanted to make sure their voices were prioritized and heard and then opened it up beyond that to anybody else doing work in this area and got really amazing contributions. And so they really ran the spectrum of like student experiences to understanding faculty, something we had much on staff in general, but faculty and programs to do a field education and. And kind of, you know, calling in and out our national bodies governing body, things like. So, yeah, it was not hard to get people to contribute. And they were just such a wonderful group of authors to work with. Did you want to add anything?

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:23:45] Yeah, I agree. Overview. I just. I have to just read about Meg as a leader. Like just I just make a rock star. Like just taking on this town hall and bringing people together just seamlessly. And then that evolving into the special issue and again, seamlessly bringing people together. I just have to say, the sense of community that's that's been created through both town halls. And the special issue is, is just unlike something I it's very unusual in academia to have that sense of camaraderie and sense of relationality. Everybody pretty much knew each other at the town hall and stayed with the special issue. And we were all helping each other. We were all advocating for for this topic and sharing this knowledge. It was just a very rewarding experience overall. You?

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:24:37] Yeah. Okay, let's talk about social work, education. Let's go there. How about this? This is going to be tough because I'm going to ask a broad question. So you go in the direction that you want to go with that. Let's start with students. What have they been telling? About their experiences. And I would imagine once you ask. You're going to work students who.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:25:08] I mean, it really mirrors a lot of what is shared in the special issue, right? I mean, there's we're providing empirical data that illustrates the barriers and challenges transgender and gender expansive students are experiencing. So really, it's at the micro level, right? It's it's small things like not using somebody's pronouns and not using their name, not using or even imposing like dress requirements on them in their practicum settings or.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:25:36] Oh, wow.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:25:37] Yes. Or even. Yeah. Content in in courses. Right. Many courses that focus on the the DSM, for example, there's a gender dysphoria diagnosis. And so if if somebody doesn't take a critical lens to that discussion, it's it can be really harmful to students. So that's a few examples. Yeah. Meg.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:26:01] I would add like all of those. And Candace kind of said this at the beginning, but. Instructors for whatever reason, not responding when microaggressions happen in the classroom. So students experiencing, I won't say microaggressions or sometimes like outright aggressions or somebody. Not just misgendering them, but like refusing to use their pronouns on purpose. Were saying transphobic things and, you know, giving the benefit of the doubt. I think most of the time it's not knowing how to respond. But the impact is still the same, right, on the trans and non-binary, gender expansive student. And so. That's another way that it comes up. During the last few years of anti-trans legislation. What I was hearing from students as I'm experiencing this trauma. Yeah, that's what it is, right to hear people deny your humanity on upon this public level. I'm experiencing this trauma in my state or neighboring states or across the country, and I'm going to class and there's silence. You know, the instructors aren't bringing it up. Maybe they don't even know if people are aware of it. And so it's this like kind of incongruence, I guess, of like this thing is so present in my mind right now and it feels so harmful and yet everybody around me is just silent about it. And that silence speaks volumes and really is a form of transphobia or sexism, right? And so that was another thing we're hearing from students. Yeah, I think a lot of problems in practicum.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:27:35] That was the one thing that I was thinking about before this morning when I was thinking about about talking with you. Is that. I think even if we meaning social work, education, we're doing things a lot better than we are now. There's always that part of the field practicum that we just don't have that much control over. Sometimes I wonder really what goes on there. And have we really not only prepared students, but have we built in the avenues of support? Unfortunately, when it does, my hunch is probably not. Would be my guess.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:28:16] Yeah, there is some really good advice. Or action steps. And a lot of the articles in the special issue and some of them are related to practicum, included teaching our students self-advocacy skills so that and advocacy for cisgender students who were out in the back to come and see these things happen. Right? That doesn't have to just be trans students advocating for themselves. But, developing some of those strategies. And I think it's not just teaching students these strategies herself advocacy, but by doing that, it sets sort of a culture that like it's okay for you to advocate. And if there's a problem and you do this, well, we'll support you. And of course, we have to back that up with action right when there is a problem. But I think making it visible and this go this applies to students from many marginalized backgrounds, not just trans students. But also training practicum sites, having contracts set up about what kind of behavior is expected for our students. And I had another thought, but I lost it.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:29:19] So I'm so glad that happens to other people. Very reassuring. Candace, do you want to comment there or go ahead.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:29:28] Yeah, I appreciate what Meg is saying about teaching students to self-advocate. Right. That that is a skill set. Absolutely. And and



within that also to organize as well, teaching them basic grassroots organizing skills. So it actually at one of the institutions I worked at as a faculty member. There was a grassroots student effort focused on equity issues, and they were very concerned about the way transgender and gender expansive students were being treated in some of the practicum settings. And so they wrote a list of concerns, took it to the field office and. And so I think what happened is we ended up moving towards a field instructor training.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:30:11] Mhm.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:30:12] On issues. So and I, I'm not sure if that was actually implemented or not, but yeah, I think students have more power than they realize and that's not to diminish the power differences between them and faculty members at all, which are very real.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:30:29] Yeah. It's almost like the I don't know if I can explain what I'm thinking here, but there's especially when it comes to field placements in practicum, there's almost like this scaffolding of almost like sensitivity because the microaggressions can come from your field educator or your professional colleagues. But then there's also clients who will walk through the door and bring, you know, everything that they learned and not to that setting and. That seems like a heavy lift. Actually, that seems like a ton of support would be needed. And obviously, you know, when we're not at our best, you know, the default position is always to turn to the person who is the target of the microaggression to fix it for everybody and to explain why this is not the right thing to do.

**Prof. Meg Paceley** [00:31:28] I'm really glad you brought that up, Peter, because I think that that's something else that we. I wasn't hired as a budding social worker and. But I think a lot of students aren't as sort of navigating this in practice. Like, I'm putting the client's needs first. I'm being client centered. But what if the client is being racist? And what if they're being racist towards a student who is a person of color? What if they're being transphobic, like all of these things and sort of navigating when is it appropriate to say something and intervene? And when is it not? And how do I navigate that? And, you know.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:32:03] Especially when you're being graded. Right.

**Prof. Meg Paceley** [00:32:06] Right. Yeah, absolutely. But even out when they're practitioners, right? Like. What do you do when your client is? Openly transphobic or racist or whatever it might be, right? Yeah. It's hard to finding, say, for teaching students how to navigate those situations.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:32:24] Yeah. And you know, listening to both of you, I'm also I'm thinking about a lot of things in terms of. You know, I'm thinking about our school and some of the other schools that I'm familiar with. And you whenever you kind of respond to something that you were doing that well in your curriculum. I'll speak for myself. Our tendency is we focus almost too much or exclusively on our explicit curriculum. You know, like what goes into the course description or what what content. What book, when. When really all the things that you were just talking about, including what happens at film and the culture in which this all occurs, is the implicit curriculum. And, you know, how do you change that? That's that's that's one of those kind of glacial movements, I think that you just have to stay at it. I don't think there's any other way.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:33:26] And that that progress is so slow, Right? Even when it feels like we make big policy or practice changes within our programs or across social work education more broadly. You know, I have students that I worked with years ago come to me and say, this thing just happened. I thought we were beyond that. You know, we did all of this organizing, all of this advocacy, and then this just happened. You know, this being kind of insert your anti-trans event the day. And that's, it's disheartening and it's frustrating. And it's of course, part of organizing work is that it's never done right. Unfortunately, it's never done. And the progress is there. But it's often slow and hard.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:34:16] And I also think it is incredibly important for leadership and administrators to be on board. In my sense, if leaders and administrators are not on board, it's very difficult to change the culture of a community or organization. And so. If, you know, if leaders and administrators are listening, you know. I'm speaking to the importance of your position in and supporting these social justice grassroots initiatives focused on historically marginalized communities. So, you know, as a leader or a minister, if you feel like you're not equipped to address these issues, then I you know, there are so many resources that exist to to get that ball rolling, to crack that open. I don't see us We have we have many colleagues that created a wonderful guide on how to infuse queer and trans topics and issues into social work education. Of course, we have the special issue. You know, just yeah, I would say make it a priority.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:35:21] I completely agree. And it made me think, too, that the recognition from leadership that so much in the labor around this work comes directly from queer and trans students and faculty and staff, and that a lot of that is unrecognized labor, right? Like we can put committees on our side, things can get very clear volunteer work on their CVs, but they're sitting in a Zoom room or in an instructor's office and and alternating between crying and organizing, like, where does that go, right on your CV or your resumé? Not that it always has to, but I think it is sort of it is invisible, unrecognized labor. That happens across and marginalized groups in academia.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:36:06] Actually I think it's a good segway. Maybe it is, I hope it is, to my next question. How much dialog did you have and what did you learn from trans faculty in schools or social work?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:36:21] Yeah, that's a good question. I mean, I started organizing with trans students before I kind of became into my own gender identity as genderqueer. And so, you know, I think a lot of what I learned in terms of working directly with trans students was centering their experiences and their knowledge in terms of. You know, at the time as a queer, obsessed person. And we know now about that identity has shifted. But. How to begin understanding right of way the trans community, what my trans students were experiencing. But of course, like not having had those experiences myself. And so my lens was always going to have to defer to their lived experience. I think what I've learned from talking with trans faculty echoes what I learned in talking with students.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:37:11] I was afraid you were going to say that, now?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:37:13] Yeah, well, it's it's, you know, experiences of microaggressions is most gendering. I mean, often, again, not always intentional, but like intent doesn't matter in that setting. And so impacting people and it's so harmful. Right. And so and again, that invisible labor of if somebody out. And students know they're more likely to come to them because they are they're a safe person or they're essentially safer.

Right. And so. Yeah, just the amount of like harm and labor also that's being experienced from faculty. Candace, you have more. I felt like.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:37:50] I'm and pretty much, I mean, if I could just if I could just come in here as I listen to. So unnecessary like there's not enough bright the challenges of academia I think are. And. Than to not have to deal with everything that you just said, quite frankly. Sorry, Can I just. Go ahead.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:38:14] Yeah, I agree. I think this is an interesting question. When you first asked it, Peter, I was like, oh, my gosh. Transgender, gender expansive faculty. And then I thought, you know, it's interesting because to me, I just realized that. I think the people I work with who also are members of these communities are our friends in a way too, you know. And so the personal is political is professional, right? It's I feel very lucky that I'm able to work. And be colleagues with, you know, amazing faculty like Meg, like Shannon Guattari at Michigan. I've been doing some work with Libby Klein and and there are many, many others. I'm not dating right now, you know, And I'm really excited for the students I've been working with who are part of this community. Like they're going to be amazing faculty members, you know? So I. I think it's our our obligation to create affirming spaces for them. And and I think right now, at least the spaces I've been able to traverse have been very healing, have been very.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:39:21] What I want to add, I think one of my discomfort with like how I was talking about farm before too, is that like there is so much harm and there's so much trauma that's happening for. I would say queer and trans predominately trans students and faculty and staff and social workers out in the world. And there's also so much like joy and like pride and like Candis said, healing that comes from being in community. And I think about that, meaning that we had that experience. I think about it, that. A meeting we had at the town hall came out of. And sort of like how impactful it was to be in that space. I'm feeling very emotional. It was just being in community with people who all understood what was going on. Nobody was being silent about it. There was this absolute recognition of. State violence really against our community and people that we love. And it's like. So hard, right to sit with that. But it was also just so beautiful to have people come together. And it doesn't mean we always, like agree on every little thing, but like, that's how unity works, right? We work together is the best possible thing. Even when you know there's disagreements or different thoughts about how we do that. So then again, that's how Candace and I met. So we became friends through that process.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:40:38] Yeah. All right. Both of you have been talking about this and referring to it all along the way. But I do want to. Make sure that before we kind of run out of time, that we get as specific and as practical as possible. Because I know that you and some of the authors who contributed to your issue have thought and written about this. So what? In the most practical terms can be done to support and improve. Transgender folks experience and sense of community in at least social work settings. That's the part that we have the most control over right now, perhaps, but that's my really broad question. Either you want to take a shot at that one.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:41:32] A quick response, and then maybe expand later. I really think that Council on Social Work Education should only accredit schools that have affirming policies for the LGBTQ community.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:41:45] I'll go, expand. No, not expand. But like, in addition to that, all of our national bodies, accrediting bodies, national organizations and state organizations. It's part of our code of ethics. I understand that in some way we nonprofits can't be political in the sense of like, advocating for or against certain candidates. But that's not what this is, right? This is policies that are harmful to the populations that we work with, that are antithetical to our ethics and values. And so being on the forefront of calling out those pieces of harmful legislation. And providing resources for social workers for how to navigate if those pieces of legislation are passed. I think, you know, taking the taking it down somewhere individual like organization or or educational department level, we can re reviewing all of our policies and procedures and practices for where where are we using binary language? Where do we have a policy about using. Affirming name and gender right in class or our intake forms today have. Now I understand we need legal gender for our legal name and legal gender for insurance purposes. Got it. We can be really clear about why we need that information while also asking what made people want to be called using electronic systems that. Had that built in so that people aren't accidentally being mis gendered or mis named in the waiting room. If we're talking about like a mental health agency or something along those lines.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:43:22] Mm hmm.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:43:23] And we're going to keep going centering, right? Like the experiences of trans students, staff and faculty. Just say like, we want to know what the experience has been so that we can do better. While also not automatically assuming that labor is welcome. Right. Which isn't naming that. But that's important. I'll stop there for now. Candace does you have more even regard.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:43:48] I agree with all of that.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:43:50] Yeah.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:43:51] So I, you know, yeah, I think they're pretty simple ways.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:43:56] To, you know, I'm sorry for interrupting, but that was my exact thought while Meg was speaking is that it seems relatively simple as signaling, signaling your willingness and welcome. To acknowledge and to talk. I mean, we've known for a long time that if you just have, you know, a couple of decals on your bulletin board that are within view of the people you're talking to, that that can change the nature of the conversations. Right? So in the most practical way, I mean, I just hope with what you're saying, I'm sorry. And just go right ahead.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:44:38] No, I. I agree. Yes. Don't underestimate small acts. Absolutely. And I think one that stands out to me is and this goes for any historically marginalized community and and this isn't just social work. This is, you know, academics in general. We tend to create these categories like, oh, this week we're going to focus on the African-American community and racism. You know, this week we're going to focus on the queer community, you know, and it's really we need to be focusing on these communities throughout the course of a semester or throughout the course of a program. Right. And instead of siloing them, you know, really this effort needs to be intersectional. Yes.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:45:26] And I would I completely agree. A lot of it is, you know, these small changes that we can make that are really important and that like, I would encourage us to take risks to when it feels risky to name that a piece of legislation in a state that it particularly for a state university that gets funding from the state right at Pulaski to say this is harmful, we don't condone this or we condemn this policy. Right. That feels like a risk. And it's one that I think that we're required to do as social workers. And so, yes, most of the things that we can do, I think, are small things like using someone's name and pronouns should be like basic expectations like that. We're not we're not even getting into like radical change right now. We're just like basic respect for humanity, right? And some of the things are bigger and more risky. And I use that word sort of cautiously, but like or feel risky that are still really important. And they. They do send a message to our students in our community.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:46:26] Absolutely. So, okay, we're starting to get close. And I'm embarrassed that I'm asking this question at the end. But I'm going to we can take a shot at it and see what happens. So can you offer some examples of what would a trans affirming pedagogy. Look like what would be involved? I mean, some of the things obviously you just talked about. But I want to be specific if we can.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:46:56] I mean, it sounds joyful, right? I think one that doesn't like take the binary as like a given. But like for both like centers and centers, gender at the same time, which sort of sounds like I'm conflicting myself, but like center is an understanding of how gender and gender socialization and the binary have like impact that all of us and how important that is. And also so that we can go beyond that. Like we can think about all of that things that we teach in social work from a trans-affirming lens, even if we're not specifically talking about like, issues affecting trans people, right? I mean, one thing we haven't even talked about is how we're preparing all students to go out there and work and practice and all of our students, regardless of where they work or whether they ever know it or not, will work with trans people. Right. And so what we're doing in the classroom or modeling is how to do that. And so if I have a student that is struggling with trans related issues, I don't mean they're trans, they're struggling with it individually, but like they're struggling to understand gender in this like non-binary sort of way, or they're struggling with pronouns or something along those lines. Like it's really my job as an educator to help them. I do my best to help them learn how to incorporate this information so they can go out and not do harm. Right. So again, bare minimum, I go out and I do harm. And so I think a trans affirming pedagogy does that. It helps us do that in terms of helping our students and our students as well. Go out and be good practitioners regardless of who their clients are. Right. Candace, I would love to hear your thoughts on this.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:48:40] I mean, I love that you start off by saying it would be joyful because that's the first thing that came through my head, is that centering queer and trans was centering joy, centering the joys of this community, also centering the strength and the assets this community brings. And really highlighting that, focusing on that, developing it. Looking at how it is intersectional, how it bleeds into all these other communities and actually benefits everybody, right? By centering these strengths and these stories, we are raising the level of life like the quality of life for everybody.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:49:20] Well. That seems to be like a good place. Human humanity with a capital H, I think would be a nice place to end our conversation. However, our graduate production assistant, Nick De Smet, was integral to identifying this gap in our podcast and also in helping us meet both of you and Nick. I want to acknowledge your

work. And. Invite you to be the co-host here at the end. Do you have a comment or a question that you would like to run by Meg or Candace here at the.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:50:06] I mean, I have so many and I, you know, I'm thrilled. Thank you, Peter. I guess the last point you made, Meg, was one that is very close to my heart and one that I have been writing about.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:50:21] In in.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:50:22] Class. Trans and queer people are overrepresented in therapeutic environments and I don't feel that enough is said for people to, I guess, really take on clients and and do that well. But there's another point, I guess. You know, part of. Social work. We are taught biology, you know, so that we can understand addiction, so that we can understand human development and other aspects of communities. But biology is also being taught as binary, and that is. A fallacy. And it's one of those things where it's so just entwined with everything, the literature. I'd love to know if there's any movement that you have seen in social work, because I know that there are, you know, other people in other academic communities pushing against that. Nick, I hear you. That is a sticking point for not only in social work, but just I think in the general public, they really get hung up on biological differences. And the reality is we have science that shows that biology is a spectrum, right? Sex hormones are on a spectrum. Right. And that just having that all of us, it really exists somewhere on that spectrum realistically, right? Like even though we're born with certain body parts, our chemical makeup, who we are, our bodies are all very different. And so I think social work definitely needs to lean into this research that critiques the biological binary. Absolutely. Nick?

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:52:19] No, I would agree completely. You said it, I think better than I could have. Both of you did. I don't know of any specific movements or like those. I mean, it's not out there. It's not something that I've specifically heard about, but I think there's a ton of room for that to come in to the organizing and advocacy work that we're doing. I just we like Candace and I like we as an queer and trans faculty and scholars and students doing this work. It's so important. Thank you both so much. Well, and maybe you, Nick, for bringing us together. Surely like us is. Yeah. It's been really fun and hard. It's hard to talk about these things, I think. But it's so important that we do it more publicly when we can.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:53:00] Absolutely amazing. Candace, Nick, thank you all for joining us. Thanks very much.

**Prof. Meg Pacey** [00:53:08] Thank you.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:53:09] Thank you so much.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:53:13] Thanks again to Candace and Meg for joining us. The Social World Podcast Crew is our technology and website guru Steve Sturman. Nick Decimate, our graduate production assistant and guest coordinator and who played an important role in securing our guest today. Say hi, Nick.

**Prof. Candace Christensen** [00:53:32] Hey, everyone.

**Prof. Peter Sobota** [00:53:33] And me, Peter's about it. Unless you comment on our podcast web site or drop us a line at in social work, dawg. We don't know what you think

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about the ideas we're putting on our show. Thanks again for listening and let us know what you think. See you next time, everybody.