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Transgender Students and New Admission Policies at Historically Significant Women's Colleges in Twenty-First Century United States and Japan

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INTRODUCTION

On July 10, 2018, Ochanomizu University held a press conference in order to explain their decision, effective 2020, to accept transgender students who were identified as male on their family registers but self-identified as female. This was the first case of such a decision in Japan. In this article, I would like to explain the historical background of this decision from both American and Japanese perspectives.

I was a Fulbright visiting scholar at Wellesley College in the United States from September 2013 to March 2014. The main purpose was to investigate historical developments and contemporary strategies at the Seven Sisters, a collection of leading women's colleges, in twenty-first-century United States.¹ While many of the women's colleges founded at the end of the nineteenth century have become coeducational since the 1960s, my study aimed to explore the strategies of those institutions that are prevailing in the twenty-first century. I conducted a seven-month participatory survey to gain an understanding of their missions and their models for developing educational good practices. Of the seven institutions,

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I focused on those that have maintained their status as women's colleges, namely, Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and Wellesley College, and attempted to understand their keen roles of leadership education in developing new and innovative strategies to empower women students and alumnae as well as women around the globe in women's colleges today.²

Within that context, the issue of admission of transgender students arose. This was an extremely controversial issue that occurred precisely at the point where the *raison d'être* of women's colleges and leadership development for women intersected and that demanded a decision on where to draw the line as a women's college from the perspective of body and identity. While these five prestigious Seven Sisters colleges attach importance to their identities as women's colleges, it is no longer possible to identify "female" as a "gender" in the framework of gender binarism as before. The new policies were released in 2014–15. Through exploring these new admission policies, the *raison d'être* of women's colleges is critically reconsidered. By examining the policy of each college, we can tell that the gender binary is critically questioned not only in theory but also in practice under the settings of higher education, particularly in women's colleges in the United States. At the same time, however, the needs and significance of women's colleges are reconfirmed and emphasized through these controversies and have led to discussions on women advancing in diverse fields. This issue became, so to speak, another "coeducation" controversy facing women's colleges in the twenty-first century. Bearing in mind the differences from the coeducation debates of the second half of the twentieth century, my discussion will attempt to reveal how the gender binary has presented itself as a very real issue around admission policies for women's colleges, while also emphasizing the keen characteristics of women's colleges in the United States today. In doing so, I aim to provide a perspective that reconsiders the category of "gender" while focusing on the diversity of gender identity.

This article consists of five sections. After briefly reviewing media coverage of women's colleges in the 1970s and 2010s regarding issues related to single-sex institutions in section 1, I will touch on some findings based on my research conducted at Wellesley College and Barnard College in 2013–14 in section 2. Section 3 illustrates new admission policies regarding transgender students adopted by five women's colleges and examines how these institutions managed to maintain their institutional identities as women's colleges. After looking at some perspectives on

student support and exploring the concept of “trans inclusiveness” in section 4, I conclude with an overview of recent developments in admission policies for transgender students at women’s colleges and universities in Japan.

I. *NEW YORK TIMES* COVERAGE OF WOMEN’S COLLEGES IN THE 1970S AND 2010S

The “Coeducation Controversy” in the 1970s

The April 17, 1971, edition of the *New York Times* published an article on coeducation. Under the eye-catching headline “Wellesley Trustees Reject a Plan for Men’s Degrees,” it reported that the Commission on the Future of the College had made recommendations on coeducation based on the findings of a twenty-two-month survey, which included increasing the number of students from 1,750 to 2,000; allowing 500 male students, half of them for the purpose of earning a degree and the remainder for credit transfer; maintaining a female faculty ratio of at least 50 percent; and, furthermore, recommending coeducation under the condition that half of the upper decision-making posts be held by women. The board of trustees, however, overturned the Commission’s decision to award degrees to male students, which triggered controversy in the field of higher education and among the general public.

Details related to this research report are stored in the archives of Wellesley College, which allowed me to examine the decision-making process of the Commission thoroughly. It is apparent that, at that time, the relatively young generation of faculty members perceived a coeducational environment to be more “natural” and that there was a difference in views between the faculty and the board. At the same time, collaboration with coeducational universities in the Boston area, such as Harvard University, Dartmouth College, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was also sought. Although the opinions of minority faculty and students were heard, it is also clear that the opinions of these minority members on campus were positioned at the periphery during the survey process. Incidentally, an African American woman was appointed president in July 2016, the first since the opening of Wellesley College, and I attended her inauguration ceremony in September 2016.

“Admission Controversy” regarding Transgender Students in the 2010s

While investigating the relevant archives at Wellesley College, I was informed through informal meetings of faculty members that the use of terms such as *she* and *sisters* to refer to students was not “politically correct” at Wellesley College because there were some female-to-male transgender students on campus. In fact, it was possible to interview faculty and staff at Wellesley College, as well as a trans man student who had transitioned from female to male. In retrospect, it became clear that in 2014, college administrators had finally found themselves in a situation where creating a new admission policy in written form had become necessary.

On May 24, 2014, after my return to Japan, an article titled “Who Are Women's Colleges For?” was published in the *New York Times*. This article was written in reference to Title IX, which was enacted in 1972 and prohibits sex discrimination at educational institutions. The report included an announcement made by the US Department of Education on April 29, 2014, that transgender students must be protected from discrimination under Title IX, and it cited the case of Calliope Wong, a male-to-female transgender high school student whose application had been rejected by Smith College in 2013.³ It also noted that Barnard College had started a project to provide free legal counseling for transgender students and had invited a transgender woman writer to teach creative writing courses. Through these examples, the article made the case that women’s colleges should accept transgender women.

In addition, an article about transgender students at Wellesley College titled “When Women Become Men at Wellesley” was featured in the *New York Times Magazine* on October 15, 2014. Introducing numerous transgender students and different voices demanding what a women’s college should be, it depicted a conflicting and complex relationship between transgender students, especially trans men—that is, those who were assigned as female at birth but who self-identify as men—and the traditions and policies of women-centered colleges.

Because women had been excluded from the space of academia, women’s colleges were founded with the mission of providing them with the same academic opportunities as men. Coeducation at the most prestigious higher-educational institutions developed in the latter half of the twentieth century, seeing more women gaining places in Ivy League schools. However, the importance of women’s colleges as educational spaces and communities has been keenly noted because they took women seriously and welcomed them

wholeheartedly, and truly expected them to play an active role in society.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, controversy has arisen over the admission of transgender students. There are cases in which students who declared themselves to be female at the time of admission have selected the gender of male after being admitted. In particular, the discussion raised the issue of whether to include or exclude sexual minorities such as transgender or gender nonconforming students, who do not choose either gender, and women's colleges had to face the issue of determining whether to include "men" or "diverse women" from a completely different angle than that of the "coeducation controversy" that occurred around 1970.

While the value of women's colleges as safe spaces where women could fully exercise and develop their leadership was emphasized, there were questions about what to do if a trans man student, who had changed gender from female to male, became a leader on campus. Moreover, if a white man, already overwhelmingly dominant in US society, were to become a leader at a women's college, how would the significance of women's leadership education at women's colleges be affected?

II. RESEARCH AT WELLESLEY COLLEGE AND BARNARD COLLEGE

Students

At Wellesley College I was able to speak to a trans man student.⁴ The student said that in high school he had applied only to women's colleges. Asked to give a reason, he mentioned first and foremost that women's colleges were "safe spaces" for sexually marginalized students and, furthermore, that they were educational institutions where gender-related issues were always at the center, both inside and outside the classroom. In other words, there was no place where he could feel more comfortable and secure than at a women's college, and as such he felt he gained the strength to change genders and become a trans man. He admitted that women's colleges were spaces for women and that it was understandable that there was a need for spaces that he should not be permitted to enter, possibly such as some meetings in the dormitories. He also mentioned that, although it seems contradictory, having women-only spaces was very important. However, as a safe space for transgender students, where cutting-edge research into gender issues is well-developed both inside and outside the classroom, Wellesley College was his choice because he desired to be

nurtured in such a community.

Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff working in the offices of admission and other areas at Wellesley College and Barnard College offered their insights. For example, when recruiting students, there is the issue of referring to Wellesley College as a *women's college*. There is some controversy around this. On the one hand, there are female-to-male transgender graduates who have a sense of resistance to those words. On the other hand, college faculty and staff believe that promoting the institutions as women's colleges is important for school branding. Wellesley College is known as a women's college, so some female-to-male transgender graduates who wish to keep their transitions private refuse to receive the alumnae newsletter.

Regarding the controversy surrounding the application of a trans woman student at Smith College, mentioned previously, universities do not use birth certificates, driver's licenses, passports, or other government-issued documents to confirm the gender of applicants. Basically, if the applicant chooses *female* when submitting the application documents, the criteria for admission to a women's college is said to have been met. In the case at Smith College, however, there was a checkmark indicating *male* in the federal application documents for financial aid. This led to a discrepancy with the gender chosen in the admission application, and the applicant was therefore excluded from the selection process.

From the talks with the above-mentioned college faculty and staff members in the latter half of 2013 through the beginning of 2014, I learned that the five women's colleges were exchanging opinions on such matters, including admission policies. Faculty and staff at both colleges shared the recognition that it was an important issue requiring a prompt response. It became clear from each college's official website, thereafter, that the time to release new admission policies on transgender students in written form was imminent.

III. ADMISSION POLICIES REGARDING TRANSGENDER STUDENTS ANNOUNCED BY FIVE WOMEN'S COLLEGES

Mount Holyoke College

From 2014 to 2015, policies regarding admission qualifications for

transgender students were released one after another on the websites of the five women's colleges. Mount Holyoke College was the first of the Seven Sisters to explicitly state that trans women (who were assigned male at birth but self-identify as female) and nonbinary (neither male nor female) students were eligible to apply.⁵ At the opening ceremonies, or convocation, of the new school year in August 2014, President Lynn Pasquerella mentioned in a speech that she had considered admissions for transgender students during the summer vacation and had decided to grant eligibility to women or students who identify themselves as women. She insightfully stated: "We recognize that what it means to be a woman is not static. Just as early feminists argued that reducing women to their biological functions was a foundation of women's oppression, we acknowledge that gender identity is not reducible to the body. And we are mindful that exclusion from the category of 'woman' based on contingent properties of birth is nothing new." She continued by quoting Sojourner Truth, the nineteenth-century African American activist for the emancipation of enslaved people, in asking, "Look at my arm. I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns. . . . And ain't I a woman?"

The Mount Holyoke College website contains a detailed section on transgender student admissions. At first, it affirms that "Mount Holyoke College welcomes applications for our undergraduate program from any qualified student who is female or identifies as a woman" and lists ten frequently asked questions. Other universities had not described their policies in such detail at that time, so some notable points are introduced here. The first question and response are:

1. Is Mount Holyoke College still a women's college?

Yes. Mount Holyoke remains committed to its historic mission as a women's college. Yet, we recognize that what it means to be a woman is not static. Traditional binaries around who counts as a man or woman are being challenged by those whose gender identity does not conform to their biology. Those bringing forth these challenges recognize that such categorization is not independent of political and social ideologies. 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. It is this positionality that biological and transwomen share, and it is this positionality that is

relevant when women's colleges open their gates for those aspiring to live, learn, and thrive within a community of women.

In addition, for the purposes of clarifying who is qualified for admission consideration to Mount Holyoke College, the following criteria are provided:

- Biologically born female; identifies as a woman
- Biologically born female; identifies as a man
- Biologically born female; identifies as other/they/ze
- Biologically born female; does not identify as either woman or man
- Biologically born male; identifies as woman
- Biologically born male; identifies as other/they/ze and when "other/they" identity includes woman
- Biologically born with both male and female anatomy (intersex); identifies as a woman

Such students who are academically qualified are eligible to apply. It is also clearly stated that an academically qualified student who was "biologically born male; identifies as a man" cannot apply for admission consideration.

Bryn Mawr College

On February 9, 2015, a letter from Bryn Mawr College chair Arlene Gibson regarding application qualifications for transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming applicants was posted on the college website.⁶ It includes the following announcement: "During its meetings this past weekend, the College's Board of Trustees discussed and approved a recommendation from a Board working group that was created at the September 2014 Board meeting to examine the mission of the College with respect to transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming applicants."

First, the working group unanimously agreed, in a sense, that "the mission of the College at the undergraduate level is to educate women to be future leaders." The announcement further reveals that "Bryn Mawr's identity as a women's college is fundamental to its distinctive environment, one in which women are central, faculty assume and expect excellence from women, and women assume positions of leadership. The working group also recommended that the College use language that affirms [their] institutional identity as a women's college (e.g., use of gendered language) while

respecting the diversity of individual identities in the community.”

Specifically, “in addition to those applicants who were assigned female at birth, the applicant pool will be inclusive of transwomen and of intersex individuals who live and identify as women at the time of application. Intersex individuals who do not identify as male are also eligible for admission. Those assigned female at birth who have taken medical or legal steps to identify as male are not eligible for admission.” On enrollment, however, it was made clear that “within the context of [their] mission as a women’s college, all Bryn Mawr students will continue to be valued and supported members of the community, no matter how their gender identity shifts during their time at the College.”

This is the admission policy of Bryn Mawr College. The main difference between Bryn Mawr College and Mount Holyoke College is that Bryn Mawr does not include individuals who self-identify as male, even if they were assigned the gender of female at birth, while Mount Holyoke does.

Wellesley College

In the case of Wellesley College, a document titled “Reaffirmation of Mission and Announcing Gender Policy and FAQ” was released in the names of both Chair of the Board of Trustees Laura Daignault Gates and President H. Kim Bottomly.⁷ Foremost, it reaffirms Wellesley College’s status as a women’s college. It clearly states that “every aspect of Wellesley’s educational program is, and will continue to be, designed and implemented to serve women and to prepare them to thrive in a complex world.” Moving forward, “Wellesley will consider for admission any applicant who lives as a woman and consistently identifies as a woman.” While the college will continue to use female pronouns and the language of sisterhood, it also promises to offer guidance and resources to assist students who change their gender identity while enrolled in making various choices.

As for the meaning of the phrase, “live as a woman and consistently identify as a woman,” it is clearly explained by saying that “Wellesley invites applications from all those who live as women and consistently identify as women and who are prepared for a rigorous academic environment that challenges them to achieve at their highest potential.” Therefore, those assigned as female at birth yet who self-identify as male at the time of application, that is, trans men, are not eligible for admission consideration. On the other hand, students who identify as women are eligible to apply even if assigned as male at birth. Furthermore, regarding

those assigned as female at birth but who identify as nonbinary, they are eligible to apply if they “feel they belong in [their] community of women.”

For students who change gender after enrollment, Wellesley College stated that it would offer continued full support to students, whether they maintained enrollment or transferred to another school. It also added that “the necessary procedures and guidelines” were developed and implemented under this admission policy for students entering in the 2016 academic year, that is, Wellesley 2020 graduates.

Wellesley College and Bryn Mawr College are similar in that they do not accept trans men applicants, as Mount Holyoke College does. An important delineating indicator is that applicants demonstrate their willingness to belong to a community of women and retain their identity as women.

Smith College

Smith College released its admission policy, signed by both President Kathleen McCartney and Elizabeth Mugar Eveillard, chair of the board of trustees, on May 2, 2015.⁸ It states that “in keeping with our tradition and identity as a college of and for women, Smith will continue to use gendered language, including female pronouns, in institutional communications.” It also articulates that “the mission of Smith College is to educate women of promise for lives of distinction,” noting that although concepts of female identity have changed since Smith’s inception, Smith’s graduates have played a leadership role in expanding their freedom to work in diverse fields, embrace their ambitions, and express themselves. It emphasizes that “at the same time, educational settings in which women are central remain powerfully transformative” and adds, “We will be called, in changing times, to consider anew how we will choose to be a women’s college. . . . Our clarified admission policy reflects a women’s college that is steadfast in its founding mission yet evolving to reflect a changing world.”

Smith College has also created a Frequently Asked Questions page to provide clarity on various issues. Here again, it is reiterated that Smith College is a women’s college, declaring that trans women can apply while trans men cannot. Since Smith College’s application policy is one of self-identification, applicants need to select *female* on the Common Application form. In response to the question of whether gender queer or gender nonbinary students are eligible for admission, neither a *yes* nor *no* response is given. It states, “Our focus on women’s education means that we consider for admission applicants who identify as women and who seek entrance into

a community dedicated to women's education." Although *no* is not explicitly stated, the response is similar in meaning.

However, it clarifies that students who change their gender after admission will receive full support and notes that the same is true for trans men. Those who meet the college's graduation requirements, no matter what gender they are, will be eligible to receive a degree from Smith College and will be welcomed by the Alumnae Association of Smith College. (Note the use of the word *alumnae*, a plural female form.) It also noted the policy would be in effect for any students applying in the fall of 2015 onward.

Barnard College

Following a decision by the board of trustees, on June 4, 2015, Barnard College posted an announcement on its website addressed to "Members of the Barnard Community" regarding its admission policy for transgender students.⁹ At the beginning of this announcement, the significance of being a women's college is clearly articulated: "Since its founding in 1889, Barnard's mission has been to provide generations of promising, high-achieving young women with an outstanding liberal arts education in a community where women lead." It confirms that "every aspect of this unique environment is, and always will be, designed and implemented to serve women, and to prepare [their] graduates to flourish and make a difference in the world." Such women-centered education is even more important today.

Based on this mission, Barnard College declares that "in furtherance of our mission, tradition and values as a women's college, and in recognition of our changing world and evolving understanding of gender identity, Barnard will consider for admission those applicants who consistently live and identify as women, regardless of the gender assigned to them at birth" and that "[they] will also continue to use gendered language that reflects [their] identity as a women's college." In addition, it clarifies that individualized support will be provided to students who change their gender after enrollment, regardless of whether they maintain enrollment or choose to transfer.

Among the various opinions of students, faculty, graduates, parents, and staff, there was clear consensus on two points: "Barnard must reaffirm its mission as a college for women" and "There was little debate that trans women should be eligible for admission to Barnard." Regarding implementation of this policy, it was noted that preparations would be

undertaken for one year, starting in 2015, and that the policy would apply to students enrolling in fall 2016, that is, the Barnard Class of 2020 and beyond.

Similar explanations to those found at the other four women's colleges can be found in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the page. In response to a question about the meaning of "to consistently live and identify as a woman," it states that it is a self-identification system and that all submitted documents must match the declaration. Any discrepancies should be discussed with an admissions counselor or described in the essay or personal statement to be submitted. Trans women are eligible for admission, but trans men are not, as at Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, and Smith. Regarding the eligibility of nonbinary and gender nonconforming applicants, it does not respond with *yes* or *no* but, rather, states that Barnard College is for those "who consistently live and identify as women," and only explains that the application documents must meet this self-identification. This is the same style of explanation given at Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, and Smith.

Summary of New Admission Policies of Five Women's Colleges

Following is a summary of what has been learned through the review of documented admission policies of these five women's colleges since 2014.

First, all of them have emphasized their mission and positive characteristics as women's colleges since their respective establishments and their policies of adhering to their identity as historically significant institutions of higher education for talented women of promise.

Second, all five women's colleges declared that they would continue to use female-specific gendered language. It was confirmed that even if there were students with male identity on campus, the college identity is that of a women's college, and they would continue to use feminine nouns, such as *sisterhood* and *alumnae*, and feminine personal pronouns. This is deeply related to making women the central focus of their college. It is premised on the idea that the mission of women's colleges cannot be fulfilled if the campus culture becomes similar to that of coeducational universities.

Third, at the time of application, the student makes a self-identification of gender identity, and individual identity is emphasized. All five women's colleges also agreed with the policy that gender should not be determined by government-issued documents such as passports or birth certificates. This suggests that gender identity is widely perceived as being fluid by these

institutions.

Fourth, the colleges have clear policies of supporting students to meet their individual needs once they are admitted, even if their gender changes to male. Specifically, they will award degrees to students who meet graduation requirements and will also provide necessary individualized guidance to those who wish to transfer to another school.

One major difference among the five colleges is that Mount Holyoke College is the only one that considers those who were biologically born as women but self-identify as men at the time of application as eligible. In other words, only Mount Holyoke accepts trans men at the time of application, whereas the other four colleges do not.

IV. PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT SUPPORT

Apparently, it is crucial for women's colleges to provide transgender students with effective student support once they are admitted. Mills College in Oakland, California, and Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, were among the earliest women's colleges to accept transgender students. Mills College has published "Report on Inclusion of Transgender and Gender Fluid Students: Best Practices, Assessment and Recommendations,"¹⁰ which serves as a reference for good practices on inclusion of transgender students at women's colleges. Revised in April 2013, it was initially prepared by the Gender Identity and Expression Sub-Committee of the Diversity and Social Justice Committee.

The introduction to the Mills College report states that in response to women being historically excluded from higher education, "women's colleges in the U.S. and beyond have their roots in the passionate interest of a small number of educators in providing opportunities for post-secondary study to students who were excluded from or marginalized within mainstream colleges and universities on the basis of their gender."¹¹ It points out that while women still remain marginalized within the setting of higher education, "academic institutions have also come to recognize transgender and gender fluid people as similarly oppressed by cultural, economic, and political systems." Since the mission of women's colleges has been empowering those students marginalized and excluded from full participation in higher education, "the education of transgender and gender fluid students seems a logical and natural fit for women's colleges of the 21st century."¹² It further emphasizes that "trans inclusiveness is in keeping with Mills' long history of countering gender oppression by centering the

experiences, contributions, and leadership of women.”

In other words, “trans inclusiveness represents not an erasure but an updating of this mission.” The oppression of transgender and gender-fluid people has its roots in a binary gender system from which “both misogyny (female subjugation and a hatred or fear of the feminine) and patriarchy (male supremacy)” originated. As such, Mills College takes the stance that the oppression of sexual minorities is an issue that should be addressed in a progressive manner at women’s colleges in the twenty-first century.

The report advises in detail not only on how to deal with transgender students in classrooms but also with regard to dormitories, bathrooms, and athletic competitions. Of particular importance is the handling of name changes and preferred personal pronouns or PGP (preferred gender pronouns) in the classroom. For example, it suggests “allow[ing] students to self-identify the name and pronouns they prefer. Faculty might solicit this information in writing from students or through introductions on the first day of class.”¹³ Although usually used in the third-person plural, it advises using *they*, *them*, *their*, *theirs*, *themselves* in the third-person singular. Instead of using *she/he*, *her/him*, *her/his*, *hers/his*, or *herself/himself* to indicate gender, some individuals may wish to use gender-neutral pronouns such as *ze*, *hir*, *hirs*, and *hirsself*.¹⁴

In the space of higher education for women, women’s colleges have played a leading role in gender equality and social justice since the mid-nineteenth century. In that sense, it can be said that they have pursued the issues of women’s rights and social equality as issues of social justice and human rights. In the twenty-first century, the perception of gender identity has become more diverse, and the category of “woman” cannot be viewed as it was before. The growing number of transgender students and those who choose to identify as nonbinary or gender nonconforming is reflected in the fact that women’s colleges and universities have had to dare to explicitly state that they are institutions of higher education targeting those who “always live as women and self-identify as women.”

At the same time, it is important to note that the mission of women’s colleges, that is, their necessity and *raison d’être*, has nevertheless been reaffirmed even more strongly. This discussion of the inclusion of transgender students has critically reaffirmed the need for a place that gives women the positive experience of being at the center, where they can develop the strength and confidence to participate in diverse fields both locally and globally.

These five Seven Sisters colleges declare that they will continue to

identify themselves as *women's colleges* using gendered language, bridging the historical context of their foundation in the late nineteenth century with their mission in the twenty-first century. In other words, this is a testament to the fact that while they emphasize the values of trans inclusiveness and diversity, they also see the educational benefits of women's centrality in higher education as a prerequisite for women's colleges and universities in the twenty-first century.

In the case of coeducational universities, where issues surrounding dormitories, bathrooms, and athletics need consideration, women's colleges as a whole need to determine admissions policies and whether to include or exclude transgender students, right from the first step, that is, through their admission policies. This is a crucial aspect that is distinctly different from coeducational universities.

As a gender theory, the problematic nature of the gender binary has long been criticized. From the perspective of positionality in the practice of college and university education in dealing with sexual-minority students on the gendered periphery, these colleges have documented admissions policies, stated whether they call themselves *women's colleges*, and have furthermore addressed the question of "who is a woman" in detail through their Frequently Asked Questions pages. In this phase of dealing with gender-fluid students, the new pioneering role played by these five Seven Sisters colleges in twenty-first-century America is evident.

V. WOMEN'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN JAPAN

The MOVE Project and the LGBTI Subcommittee of the Science Council of Japan

What have the conditions been like at women's colleges and universities in Japan? It has been reported that support for sexual-minority college students in Japan is extremely lacking as the following report indicated. In March 2015, the Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE published a report on a survey of national, prefectural, and private universities, including junior colleges, across the country under the theme of "Issues in Supporting Sexual-Minority Students" as part of the Gender Issues Survey and Research Support Project.¹⁵

The Summary and Recommendations section of the report found that half of the universities, including 80 percent of national universities, had received consultations from students, and it concluded that "efforts for

supporting sexual-minority students at university are far behind.”¹⁶ Considering the trends in the admission policies of the Seven Sisters women’s colleges that were developed from 2014 to 2015, one cannot help but feel that diverse gender identities are still invisible in Japanese colleges and universities.

In February 2015, the Protecting LGBTI Human Rights in Society and Education Subcommittee (LGBTI Subcommittee) of the Legal Studies Committee was established by the Science Council of Japan to focus on sexual-minority human rights issues. This subcommittee was the first one in the Science Council of Japan to address the rights of sexual minorities. Miho Mitsunari, vice president of Nara Women’s University as well as the Science Council of Japan, served as the chair, and as a member myself, I gave a presentation on new admission policies for transgender students at women’s colleges in the United States, based on what I have covered here, at a symposium held by the Science Council of Japan in May 2016.¹⁷

Symposium at Japan Women’s University and Media Survey

After the symposium, one professor in the audience asked me to give a talk on the same topic at his university. The professor was a member of the LGBT Society of the Faculty of Integrated Arts and Social Sciences at Japan Women’s University. In February 2017, Japan Women’s University held an academic exchange symposium entitled “Considering ‘Diverse Women’ and Transgender Students at Women’s Colleges and Universities.” Some faculty members of Japan Women’s University had been discussing the case of an inquiry received by their affiliated junior high school at the end of 2015. This inquiry was from the mother of a fourth-grade elementary school student who had been assigned male on the family register but self-identified as female. She asked whether her child, diagnosed with a gender-identity disorder, could sit the entrance exam for the junior high school.

A project team was established to consider an admission policy for transgender students. By the end of 2016, the team had concluded that the issue “needed more time to be discussed.” However, the actions of Japan Women’s University, which openly discussed this case with all the participants of the symposium, triggered a response from numerous women’s colleges and universities. They were willing to consider the same issue as something relevant to their own circumstances.¹⁸

The media have also had some impact. The issues discussed at the symposium at Japan Women’s University were covered by the *Asahi*

Shimbun on March 20, 2017, under the headline “Can Men Who Identify as Women Enter Women’s Universities? Japan Women’s University Is Considering This Issue.” This generated a notable reaction. The *Asahi Shimbun* also conducted a survey of seventy-six women’s university presidents in Japan in April 2017, asking whether they would consider accepting transgender students and about support for sexual-minority students. Sixty-four universities responded, for a response rate of 84 percent.

The results of this survey were reported in the *Asahi Shimbun* on June 19, 2017. Pertaining to accepting transgender students who were assigned male at the time of birth but identify as female, five universities replied that they are considering this issue, and three universities said they plan to consider it in the near future. In addition, forty-one women’s universities, over 60 percent, responded that this issue requires further consideration. This survey, which revealed the situation at women’s colleges and universities at that time, played a vital role for them in either “discovering” this issue for the first time or reaffirming that it needed to be dealt with sooner or later.

Basis for the Decision by Ochanomizu University

In October 2017, the General Assembly of the Association of Women’s Universities, held at Kyoto Notre Dame University, added the issue of admission policies for transgender students to the agenda. Japan Women’s University volunteered to serve as the executive at an information-exchange meeting with eighteen women’s universities, held in December 2017, to discuss topics such as initiatives in accepting transgender students.

The LGBTI Subcommittee at the Science Council of Japan has held a total of three symposiums as well. These resulted in a proposal titled “Toward Guaranteeing the Rights of Sexual Minorities: Marriage, Education, and Work” released in September 2017.¹⁹ Supporting admissions of male-to-female, or MTF, transgender students into women’s universities was also included. The proposal stated the following:

In accordance with the notification from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, if an MTF student, whose school lifestyle is protected according to the student’s gender identity, cannot enter a women’s university, this infringes on the student’s right to learn.

This part of the proposal by the LGBTI Subcommittee is the very idea behind the decision by Ochanomizu University.

The process of the first decision to guarantee the rights of transgender students at a women's university in Japan needs to be assessed from multiple perspectives. Although it was influenced by transnational movements linked with women's colleges in the United States, as I mentioned, this development was also influenced by a chain of events seen in movements throughout Japan. The road to this decision by Ochanomizu University included lively discussions and proactive engagement at many different stages.

Following Ochanomizu University, three more women's universities decided to accept transgender students in Japan: Nara Women's University; Miyagi Gakuin Women's University, starting in 2020; and Japan Women's University, starting in 2024.

CONCLUSION

Dealing with this issue has revealed the need to update the *raison d'être* of women's universities in the twenty-first century. These are institutions that do not admit students who were assigned as male and identify as male into degree-granting programs. One might question why a learning space for "diverse women" is necessary when coeducational colleges and universities are available for them.

Even today, women in Japan are extremely underrepresented in various fields of society, including economic participation and political empowerment, particularly when compared with the rest of the world. Japan was ranked 121 out of 153 countries in the global gender-gap index in 2019. To ameliorate this situation, "inclusive leadership" that is based on human rights and social justice and leaves no one behind is in great need. This can be fostered under an excellent liberal arts education that meets individualized needs and talents. Also, it is more important than ever to nurture women with a profound interest in social justice who are likewise willing to be leaders in making a difference in society. The positive experience of being at the center, surrounded by engaging faculty and staff in a space of higher education, can have a life-long impact on women students. It is a unique environment and is completely different from the rest of the society, where women in both Japan and the United States are still marginalized today. Women's colleges and universities must keep verbalizing their unique missions and articulating their core values, which

they have held firm since their foundations. As Mills' report stated, I would agree that "trans inclusiveness" is in accord with women's colleges and universities' "long history of countering gender oppression by centering the experiences, contributions, and leadership of women."²⁰

NOTES

On behalf of the Japanese Association for American Studies I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our colleagues at Hokkaido University as well as the program committee members of the JAAS board, who endeavored to plan the 2020 annual conference and its program for the JAAS, which was supposed to be held on June 13–14, 2020. We sincerely regret that we had to cancel the conference due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am so grateful to the *Japanese Journal of American Studies* editors for including my talk, which I could not give at Hokkaido University, as an article in this volume.

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¹ Seven historically important prestigious women's colleges located in the eastern part of the United States. Currently, five of the seven colleges—Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and Wellesley College—maintain their status as women's colleges.

² My research included a focus on the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP), which was undertaken in 2011 by these five colleges in partnership with the US State Department and then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton. The aim of this project is to increase the number of women in the field of public service to 50% of the world total by 2050. I was specifically interested in how institutions of higher education for women encourage women's participation in society and what role the US State Department plays in doing so. Tsuda University, to which I belong, is a collaborating institution on this project. In summer 2014, after returning to Japan, I had the opportunity to participate in a WPSP-sponsored leadership-training program for undergraduate students at China Women's University in Beijing. These research opportunities revealed that the innovative strategy of twenty-first-century women's colleges is the development of leadership specific to women and its unique characteristics. Wellesley College established the Albright Institute, named after Madeleine Albright, the first woman secretary of state in the United States (Albright Institute, *Wellesley College*, <http://www.wellesley.edu/albright/about>, accessed August 20, 2016). Consisting of small, competitive programs that incorporate problem solving, off-campus learning, and internships, it is especially committed to preparing women for work in the international field. Participation in lectures and other events on both campuses provided a precious opportunity to gain insight into the college.

³ The student was disqualified for admission at the time because it was found that a federal tuition aid application stated that the applicant was male. In response to this, students launched an opposition movement.

⁴ This student's preferred pronouns are he, him, and his.

⁵ "Convocation 2014," September 2, 2014, *Mount Holyoke College*, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/president/convocation-2014>, accessed August 16, 2016. For admission for transgender students at the university, see, "Admission of Transgender Students," *Mount Holyoke College*, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/policies/admission-transgender-students>, accessed August 16, 2016.

⁶ "A Letter from Bryn Mawr Board Chair Arlene Gibson," February 9, 2015, *Bryn Mawr College*, <http://news.blogs.brynmawr.edu/2015/02/09/a-letter-from-bryn-mawr-board-chair-arlene-gibson/>, accessed August 22, 2016. Several minutes later an announcement in letter form in the name of the president was also posted. "A Letter from President Kim Cassidy," February 9, 2015, *Bryn Mawr College*, <http://news.blogs.brynmawr.edu/2015/02/09/a-letter-from-president-kim-cassidy/>, accessed August 22, 2016.

⁷ "Reaffirmation of Mission and Announcing Gender Policy and FAQ," *Wellesley College*, <http://www.wellesley.edu/news/gender-policy>, accessed August 18, 2016.

⁸ "Admission Policy Announcement," May 2, 2015, *Smith College*, <https://www.smith.edu/studygroup/index.php>, accessed August 20, 2016.

⁹ "Barnard Announces Transgender Admissions Policy" and "Transgender Admission Policy & FAQ," June 4, 2015, *Barnard College*, <https://barnard.edu/barnard-announces-transgender-admissions-policy>, accessed December 12, 2015 (the former) and August 20, 2016 (the latter).

¹⁰ "Mills College Report on Inclusion of Transgender and Gender Fluid Students: Best Practices, Assessment and Recommendations," April 2013, *Mills College*, <https://www.mills.edu/diversity/Final-Report-on-Transgender-Inclusion-4-25-13.pdf>, accessed August 21, 2016.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Dean Spade, "Some Very Basic Tips for Making Higher Education More Accessible to Trans Students and Rethinking How We Talk about Gendered Bodies," *Radical Teacher* 92 (2) (2011): 57–62, quoted in *Mills College*.

¹⁴ "Gender-Neutral Pronouns," *Carleton College Student Organizations—Sexuality and Gender Activism*, updated April 1, 2016, <https://apps.carleton.edu/student/orgs/saga/pronouns/>, accessed August 21, 2016.

¹⁵ Shizuyo Kawashima, *Seiteki Mainoritī no Gakusei Shien ni Okeru Kadai: Heisei Nijū-roku-nendo Jendā Mondai Chōsa Kenkyū Shien Jigyō Hōkoku-sho* [Issues in supporting sexual-minority students: Gender Issues Survey and Research Support Project Report, 2014]. Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE, 2014.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁷ Yuko Takahashi, "Toransu Jendā no Gakusei Ukeire to Amerika no Meimon Joshidaigaku—Mō Hitotsuno 'Kyōgaku' Ronsōgo no Adomisshon Porishī [Accepting transgender students at historically significant women's colleges: Admission policies after another 'coeducation' controversy]," in *Kyōiku to LGBTI wo Tsunagu: Gakkō, Daigaku no Genba kara Kangaeru* [Connecting education and LGBTI: Considerations from schools and university sites], ed. Miho Mitsunari (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2017), 247–73.

¹⁸ The presentations of the symposium were published as a booklet: LGBT Society of the Faculty of Integrated Arts and Social Sciences at Japan Women's University, *LGBT to Joshidaigaku: Dare mo ga Jibunrashiku Kagayakeru Daigaku wo Mezashite* [Aiming for LGBT rights and a university in which anyone can shine like their true selves] (Tokyo: Gakubunsha, 2018).

¹⁹ Shakai to Kyōiku ni okeru LGBTI no Kenrihoshō Bunkakai, "Seiteki Mainoritī no Kenrihoshō wo Mezashite: Konin, Kyōiku, Rōdō wo Chūshinni [Toward guaranteeing the rights of sexual minorities: Marriage, education, and work]," *Nihon Gakujutsu Kaigi* [Science Council of Japan], September 29, 2017.

²⁰ "Mills College Report on Inclusion of Transgender and Gender Fluid Students: Best Practices, Assessment and Recommendations," 3.