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Transcript

Edgar Fields

For as long as the healthcare field, the western healthcare field as we understand it has been interacting with the trans community, there's been this, like imperialist, sexist binary understanding of what gender is that pathologizes trans people and you know, the criminalization of transness. And gender nonconformity has been going on forever in the US and continues to get worse. So how do we? As a. Change these institutions that are so rooted in studying trans people like we're bugs and this weird fetishizing othering fascination of us like how do we turn that into something that can do us any good at all?

Rosemary Ferreira

Welcome to the table podcasts. This is still the place where we invite guests to unpack questions regarding social identities and social issues, culture norms, and current events. My name is Rosemary Ferreira.

Courtney Jones Carney

And I'm Courtney Jones Carney in our last episode, we discussed the current state of LGBTQ plus legislation in the United States, shedding light on the concerning wave of anti trans bills that have been introduced this past year. When we published the episode in late May 491, anti LGBTQ plus bills have been introduced across the country. And I'm sad to say that as of late July, the number has climbed to 562 bills.

Rosemary Ferreira

While not all of these bills may become law, it's important to understand that they have a very real impact on the lives of all LGBTQ. Plus people, especially transgender folks. The mere introduction of these discriminatory bills creates an atmosphere of hatred and fear, further marginalizing an already vulnerable group of people. Well, Courtney, why should higher education institutions like our very own institution, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, Care about what's happening?

Courtney Jones Carney

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the future leaders of our society. These are places where aspiring medical professionals. Lawyers, social workers, researchers, policymakers are molded. After all, most of the leaders making decisions that impact transgender folks have college degrees. So while students are here, it's our responsibility to ensure they understand the unique challenges faced by transgender people. So they can go into the world with a commitment to promoting equality, acceptance and respect for all gender identity. It's also our responsibility to create a safe and inclusive environment for transgender students. It's not enough to simply admit trans students. Universities need to provide resources, support networks and policies that affirm their identities and protect their rights. But I might be getting ahead of this episodes conversation.

Rosemary Ferreira

In this episode, we speak with Edgar Fields, a recent graduate of the Masters program at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. I've had the great honor of working with Edgar for the past few years, developing a gender affirming letter, writing training as well as supporting events such as the Trans Day of Resilience Community Center and Lavender Graduations. We invited Edgar to the table to discuss his lived experience as a trans student in higher Ed and to talk about how higher Ed institutions can create supportive and inclusive spaces for trans students to thrive both academically and personally.

Edgar Fields

My name is Edgar. As you heard, my pronouns are here. They just finished my masters in social work here at UMB. My sort of stick in social work has been making spaces for trans people in education, healthcare and justice. Social work in general. My thing has been understanding the social determinants of health that affect trans people. We do have these barriers of like, yes, it's really hard to get access to surgery because the healthcare system is very like tedious and complex. There's also things like the community is really poor, you know, so looking at the larger structures of what affects trans health. And then I just sort of ended. Up doing social work about social. Your work from being in grad school for three years and seeing how trans issues weren't brought up. What happened when they were brought up that we were making, you know, a whole new generation of social workers that didn't have any knowledge or experience on how to work with the trans community. So through doing that and just like coming to this knowledge, I started doing more educational. Things around trans issues in the school social work here at. The so that's sort of my like professional me me as you know, Edgar, the person I didn't realize I was trans until I had finished my bachelors basically right after I finished my bachelors. And I like to think that some kind of part of my brain had put it in a box until I wasn't busy. I think that changed my experience too. I got my Bachelors of Women's and gender studies, so gender has always been something on my mind and something really important to me. I'm thinking about like social, political, economic issues, but as far as the trans part to it of my own experience, that really only came out, no pun intended, when I started grad.

Courtney Jones Carney

Can you talk a little bit about some of your experiences in undergrad and Graduate School and what that was like specifically because you stated that you did not realize that you were trans until after you finished your undergraduate program? And then I believe you're coming into your graduate program and completing your graduate program identifying as transgender. What were some of the similarities or differences? Any noticeable barriers to access or any positive outcomes from either one of those experiences?

Edgar Fields

I think not knowing I was trans in undergrad definitely made it pretty different for me. There were trans people around me in college and undergrad, and I could tell it was a weird experience for them. Like I was friends, a lot of trans people at that point, which kind of was something I did to learn about trans things before I transitioned, but their experience was just I want to say invasive. We talked about gender a lot in my classes, and I noticed that the trans students weren't. Really advocating for themselves, advocating for trans issues in classes, and I thought that was bizarre. Here we are talking about your community and you all have nothing to say. But I realized later it was just. No one wanted to have that label and that target on them of like for someone to talk about trans stuff or being the trans person in

the room being the representative of trans issues. I just thought it was really interesting how people of my community wanted to distance themselves from these topics and I think now having gone through my grad program, being out and like most of the work that I do, being related to trans issues, I totally see why I've had a very fulfilling experience all through grad school. I wouldn't trade it for anything. I've loved the work. We've done, but there's definitely, you know, there's the experience of being like the trans person in the room. The hey, you're a representative of the transes. What do you think about this kind of thing? It's extra work. Having to be the trans voice in the room and it gets exhausting. A lot of things were different just because of where I was. I started undergrad at a very small school in southern Virginia. We had like 700 students or something, so everyone knew everything about each other. I think we had maybe two out trans people on campus and even that was like, wow. And I saw the way they were treated as sort of the public reputation they had and the lack of privacy was pretty like striking to me. I noticed this pattern of people seem to be so confused or bewildered about transness, just in general that their manners go out the window. It's such a confusing or exotic maybe thing to people who haven't had that. Experience or don't know any trans people close to them that they kind of forget that you still ought to respect people's personal. I've had classmates I barely know. Ask me about, like, my journey or whatever. I don't mind a ton, but it's just sort of the principle of like, would you ask this to assist person? I remember in disclosure with Laverne Cox how she was saying that in interviews she just refuses to talk about her transition. I think it's a really powerful way to force people to see you as a person before they see you. As a trans. They started embracing that more recently. I'm still very open about trans things. I'm talking to y'all, but I'm not going to give people detail about, like, my body. Things like that.

Rosemary Ferreira

And the training that we do together, so we do a gender affirming surgery, letter writing training and we have a statistic at the start right around visibility in 2015. And I don't want to date you, but I don't know if that was like the time you were in college or not. There were in the US more people had seen a ghost that had known a trans person, and now there's been a shift. Where I think it was like one in four Americans. No, a transgender person here in the US. What does it mean that trans people are culturally is shifting from like visibility to this hyper? Visibility that you're seeing.

Edgar Fields

What is very different, you know, going from most people didn't think they knew a trans person at all. Most people do. They just don't know an out trans person is what I like to tell people. Sometimes I wonder when will people know they're markers of trans masculinity. Enough that I can get clocked on the regular. I don't know if clocks is in the common vernacular, but like in the trans community, to say that someone clocked you as someone like sees that you're. It's weird to have this experience as a trans person, where especially when you're coming to terms with being trans, it feels like there's no one else in the world that feels the way you do or is what you are and it used to be that sort of was the message you got from society to now. They're more messages. About what it means to be trans, what trans people are, how we act, what our values are, whatever that always precede us. There's no walking into a room introducing yourself. A person knows you're trans and you just get to be you before I'm at your fields. I am trans and having to grapple with that. It's a weird experience. Throughout grad school, I've used it to my advantage because I do a lot of work in trans issues with the trans community, but I dream of a day where that's not a thing for my community where you can just mind your own business. Not all

of us want to do that. Some of us do. Having that control over your identity and how people read you and understand you. Just something we don't really get as trans people. Well, it's different to depending on if people can tell you're trans from looking at you. It's a totally different thing. To tell people. I have the privilege of getting to my my own business. A lot of people can't tell I'm trans from looking at me, I get to choose whether or not people know I'm trans. A lot of times and I make that choice all the time to have people know that I'm trans, but I do that here because. I feel safe in doing that here at UMB. Yeah, there aren't many other people like me or whatever, but I. Always know that I've had that. For what kind of visibility trans people get is really different depending on our genders too. There's this hyper visibility for trans women, trans fems in general and for trans mass sort of this invisibility, trans women have always been, you know, the target of so much like hatred. And that's the like mechanism of like control and power. Trying to stamp out trans femininity, but for trans mask people, it's kind of like pretending that we. Don't exist. We enforce these gender roles on not just trans people and all of us of, like, punishing gender nonconformity in such different ways, depending on what kind of genders we perceive people. Across the trans spectrum, we have such different experiences, like my partner is trans FEM. If we walk down the street, all eyes are on her. I'm standing there right next to her. Trans can be and people leave me alone when I'm with someone transform. People, even. Look at me within the trans community. It makes it that much more important for us to advocate for each other and to. Understand our experiences. Because they are so different, there's this advocate activist that I love. His name is Lou Sullivan from San Fran. He used to be involved in a lot of like trans support groups and early on before he created the first FCM female to male Trans Support group, he was just in this group where it was always just a bunch of trans women. And he wrote in a letter to one of his trans mass friends. One time he said something to the effect of there are only so many times that you can say I feel the exact same way, but the opposite.

Courtney Jones Carney

Some of what you said has me thinking is. There are more transgender men in different sectors of employment compared to trans women. Just because you were talking about how people treat it as if trans men don't exist. And then if trans men are able to not be clocked, as you said, then does that contribute to different work outcomes and then access to work in different ways?

Edgar Fields

Off the top of my head, I don't know a ton about that. There's kind of the stereotype that there are. A ton of trans women in tech. I know that my experience in social work, I see a lot more trans mask people than I do transfer. But I think that there is more of a prevalence of trans people in human service kind of jobs than in others. We go into healthcare, education, retail, food service, things like that. The pessimist in me is thinking it's because like we're so used to being people pleasers. Like you spend that much of your life trying to hide. Parts of yourself and tailor literally your body and what identity you present to people with just to get them to leave you alone so you can go about your day. Of course, you'd be good at stuff like food service. I think there's something about the experience of transcending gender and making this whole new understanding and relationship and shape out of your body is very healing. Something to the trans experience about changing what you look like, changing who you are, changing these things about you in order to be a more true and genuine version of yourself. Is a very like spiritual experience. Honestly, being whole is so important. I think that's really fundamental to the trans experience, so I can understand why people who have that experience go into health care, mental

health, things like that. It seems like right now there's this sort of boom of queer and trans and gender nonconforming therapists I love to see it not just because, selfishly, I love therapy and mental health things, but you have to have a very deep relationship with yourself, not just like with you, but with a deep part of you in order to understand that you're trans. Except that you're trans. Act on that love that part of yourself and other people. I don't know. I think if I were a more loose person, I would say that we have like healing energy that we have that power and that we would do that with other people.

Rosemary Ferreira

As assist person, what you shared about the spiritual edness about being trans and this power you just stated it so beautifully and I feel like again, as if this person like that is so much of the beauty that I see in trans people and what I admire and I love and I respect about trans folks.

Speaker 4

If you're listening to this episode, you're probably someone who cares deeply about building a more inclusive and equitable world. Get ready to become a true champion of change by enrolling in the Master of Science and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion leadership at the University of Maryland, Baltimore Graduate School. In this online program, students will develop strategies to address issues related to diversity and their workplaces and organizations. The Ms. and dei leadership is more than just a degree. It's a transformational experience that will shape you into a visionary leader of change. Visit [graduate.umaryland.edu/diversity equity inclusion](https://graduate.umaryland.edu/diversity-equity-inclusion) and discover how you can lead the charge toward a more equitable and inclusive.

Edgar Fields

Trans people are just forced into poverty, so of course we're going to be in retail foodservice, things like that more often, especially food service is such a racist and homophobic industry like so misogynistic too. I was in food service for like a year before. I like I just like, can't do this even in this area. Baltimore is pretty blue, and I've had friends who were turned away from John's just because they were visibly.

Rosemary Ferreira

We had an interview with the legal director of Free State Justice, which does advocacy work for LGBTQ plus folks here in the state of Maryland, and she talked a lot about Maryland being this kind of safe haven for LGBTQ plus folks for trans folks. More specifically, you just talked about workplace discrimination for trans people. In the. Blue liberal state of Maryland, more specifically in the city of Baltimore. What does it mean to navigate this like political spectrum that's happening in the country where some states are very explicitly harming and targeting LGBTQ plus folks? And then some states, like Maryland, are being more progressive, but obviously there are still these. More insidious, maybe more implicit ways that LGBTQ plus folks, trans people more specifically are being harmed.

Edgar Fields

We're lucky to live in a metropolitan area. Cities are usually pretty safer space for trans people. We've always kind of been city dwellers, not really by choice, but just because cities are historically and now this place where queer and trans people could go and mind their own business, I definitely feel that here in Baltimore, like we have multiple gamer hoods. Honestly, they're not super gay, but like they're gay. Mount Vernon is my favorite. I'm biased and like the few remaining gay bars and Balmer here you have

Charles Village. A lot of Korean trans people in that area. I'm gonna call it like blast radius around micas just full of queer and trans people because, you know. Art school there's also like Walterson and Hamilton, which I've heard people calling like the old LGBT people neighborhoods. When you're bored of living in the city and you want a yard, but you like, still wanna be able to, like, just be queer and trans and mind your own business. Like, that's where you go and you can have chickens there. You know, a lot of people, chickens in those neighborhoods. So cute. So trans people sort of always thrive in these metropolitan areas. Because of the privilege of privacy, and I wish I didn't have to be that way. I have been volunteering at my best friend's barn for about two years now and it's always like that's one of my favorite little like. Party trains to pull outs with people because. Everyone like Boo. You were gonna burn? Because no one expects queer trans people to be like out in the country as if these are some mutually exclusive things. But it really shouldn't have to. There's something so healing about nature. I think queer and trans people just like belong there, like we ought to be able to spend more time there, but we stay in these spaces like these cities and stuff like that, because we just want that privacy. Not all of Maryland is like that. The Eastern Shore is pretty rough for queer and trans people. It's not a safe place to be out. We have our spaces where we can be, and we can be comfortable and safe. I wish we weren't limited to that.

Courtney Jones Carney

Maryland is very different depending on what area you're in, and then even Baltimore, like Baltimore, is a city historically of oppression and of segregating neighborhoods. And you name specific neighborhoods and the safety attached to those neighborhoods, particularly for folks identified as trans, and then also for, like, the broader LGBTQ plus community. And I think that's very true about Baltimore. Baltimore is indeed a city of neighborhoods. And then the neighborhoods. Potentially can define whether or not you feel safe. You feel welcome. You feel like you belong. You feel a sense of community. And so while it's really important to have access to these different cities, there is something about knowing the nuances of that city and knowing what neighborhoods someone can go to, particularly trans folks, and know that they can be safe.

Edgar Fields

Here so often of people like just living in the same neighborhood intergenerationally, it feels like a small town, and the transmitting is kind of like that too. It's sort of the stereotype that all trans people know each other, but I laugh. About it cause it's. A little true, like trans people. Are so well connected to each other because we. Have to be and that's like kind of the same of like living under racism and poverty in a city like Baltimore. You have to have your community and you have to know like where you're safe and where you're not gonna be safe in order to, like, do well here. Trans people have just this great vine for each other of knowing where to go, knowing where not to go for everything you can think of. I found my surgeon for my top surgery. Through just asking other trans people what do you know about this place? And I've been able to provide that for lots of other trans people too. Everything down to like haircuts. I see a post online every other week. That's like, can you please help me and direct me to a Barber that's not going to make me look like a lady? The transmute is great at that in Maryland and the Baltimore area especially, we've really gotten that down. We have this organization here, Trans, Maryland, that has really played such a big role in beefing that up and making that a more powerful resource. I think it started as Trans Healthcare Maryland and it was for basically just that Grapevine, but for finding healthcare resources. And then as what they changed their name to just trans Maryland, they do lots of

other stuff too. Have a legal name change program. That's how I was able to get my name changed. Legally, it was through trans Maryland. I owe them my life. They have a Facebook page no one really uses Facebook that much anymore, but it is like. The gold mine. Of Facebook. You can go on there and ask about anything. Where can I get a haircut? Do you know anyone who does bottom surgery and doesn't have a BMI limit? Things like that. The trans community is so good at finding that information for each other and keeping that like social database alive, and that's been a thing for as long as there's been a trans community. I think about again, Lou Sullivan, the activist in San Francisco. He I think was kind of just a dude trying to mind his own business and for the got all the support groups and things like that and saw that there wasn't much of A trans mass community. And all of a sudden he sort of got this reputation in the community and had pen pals across the country. It was just trans dudes from around the US, some people in Canada mailing him physical letter paper mail asking him, who do you know, in the Boston area who I can get hormones from? And This is why I think more trans people should be social workers, because like that's case. Management right there, but. We've always had to do that for each other.

Courtney Jones Carney

As is this black woman like this is really familiar to me in the black community. Historically, we've had the Green Book which operated between the 1930s and the 1960s, and that let folks know black folks know where they could go. Motorists would know, like, where they could stop, where they would be safe, and even though that book stopped in the late 60s. That informal networks still exist. The OB GYN that I go to was recommended to me by other black people and I just love the fact that communities find ways to share information and to let folks know this place is safe. These are the folks who are going to take care of you. This is where. You don't have to worry.

Rosemary Ferreira

How can colleges and universities tap into these strengths of marginalized communities more specifically, and students who are navigating higher Ed to really support them? Uplift them, create environments where they feel safe so that they can not just be that one trans student who has to advocate for all trans people, but be Edgar in a social work class or be whoever they want to be.

Edgar Fields

What comes to mind is that quote from Andre Lord, the Masters tools will never dismantle the Master's house. Being someone from a historically marginalized community in an environment like education, it was never set up for us. It was never set up for people of color, was never set up for disabled people, was never set up for queer. Those people, so we're reinventing it. I think that's our only option is to reimagine what any of these institutions even look like. Do we even want to keep them? Do we want to make something else entirely off of the skeleton of what even can be useful for? Us everyone's going to have a different answer for that. There are some salvageable parts and some parts that aren't. I think for social work it's a difficult, complex answer, because on the one hand, social work was made as this direct reaction to capitalism, with people literally not being able to survive capitalism, keeping the working class alive long enough to very literally reproduce the workforce. That was this, like resistance. Against capitalism and poverty and racism and xenophobia and things like that queer. People have had like. A huge foundational role in making social work, creating the field of social work. And there are a lot of trans people in social work now. But making a field like that inclusive, affirming for trans people, is

that make it easier to get a letter for surgery. Is it get rid of letters in the 1st place, you know, socialize the health. System with the kind of fields that we have at UMB, it's a difficult question too because for as long as the healthcare field, the western healthcare field as we understand it has been interacting with the trans community. There's been this, like, imperialist, sexist binary understanding of what gender is that pathologizes trans people and you know, the criminalization of. Transness and gender nonconformity has been. Going on forever in the US and continues to get worse. So how do we as a? Change these institutions that are so rooted in studying trans people like we're bugs and just weird, fetishizing othering fascination of us like how do we turn that into something that can do us any good at all? I think putting people from these minority populations, like in control of that and thinking about that. All is step one, hire more trans people. Listen, when we talk in classes and meetings. There's also some of. Just like anticipating the existence of trans people at all is a big part of it. In a university in a school, how are you collecting information from applicants about their genders on the form? Does it say male and female? So automatically, if you're not male or female, or if you were one time male and now you're female, or vice versa, or there is already this understanding of, OK. People like me are not welcome here. They don't even know people like me. Also, how do they collect information about people's names and forms? Is it only their legal name? I know when I was applying to UMB for the MSW program. I just lied. I was in the middle of my legal name changed, so I just wrote on everything that my name was Edgar, and if I had to, I put a little sticky note on to whom it may concern, and if you see this name, it's for Edgar Fields. And I got a pretty passive aggressive e-mail about that. But I frankly don't care. Because I wasn't going to risk getting into whole last entire grad school and then having my dead name for my e-mail address, it's still an issue here at UMB for some of our trans faculty where e-mail addresses with their dead names still show up in the little like Outlook, search for e-mail. I've seen professors dead names show up on like serfs or thing to register for classes. There's the teaching about trans issues, but then there's the actual like walking the walk. How are you treating the trans people around you? That makes a huge difference in if we feel welcome talking about us in classes too, like talking about trans issues is a thing that's come up a lot in the School of social work. In the Queer Community alliance, our LGBTQ student group of the school social work, we have been doing this research project where we were asking students about their experiences on how faculty talk about LGBTQ issues in classes. And when we got to the qualitative part of it, we got this resounding answer from students of, like when trans issues come up in class, it's never been in the curriculum. When it is, it's some student and oftentimes it's someone saying like some, like, ridiculous, bigoted thing. And the response and the professor a lot of times. It's just like. Oh, that's interesting. What do you all think about this? You know, to have that experience of having your rights and your, like, very existence, your identity debated in class with this like just blase quote, UN quote, curiosity. So dehumanizing. My boss and my field placement right now taught a class this semester and she was asking ahead of time like what should I know and one of the things I told her was about this, you know, that a lot of the faculty have a hard time. I don't know understanding that they need to stand up for trans people at all and she genuinely like practiced. Like if someone says something negative about trans people or trans issues in class, how to respond. And that alone made such a difference in.

Courtney Jones Carney

You provided some great examples of how systems need to change. Hire more trans folks, right? Like maybe admit more trans folks, but then also make sure that you're shifting the system and changing the system, because if your forms are male, female and you're not allowing for any other marker like,

especially when you recognize that in the State of Maryland the drivers license has three birth certificates across the country. They're not just on the binary. There are many states that have three options as. Or as legal sex is concerned. So then it's. Like if that exists. Then why do our forms not match that? Why does the process for having an e-mail address? Why is that not affirming? Why don't people just get to pick their e-mail address? Why don't e-mail addresses that have the wrong name the dead name? Why don't those go away permanently? Why this? Why is the information still visible and so it sounded to me like you gave like some really tangible things that folks can do. Actually don't seem like they're that difficult. Just to begin to create an affirming environment. So hopefully some folks are listening and they'll say. You know what? Yeah, we.

Edgar Fields

Could do that. God, I hope so. That would be great, but you're right. Like a lot of it is. It's very simple things add one more line on the form. What name do you want to go by? It's that easy. I think the school, social work. We were changing it with. Like when guests sign in for the building, they would just scan their license. So whatever name is on your license. That's what's on your ID. And so I brought like a couple of my friends into the university a couple of times, like people who were either looking at the MSR or things like that. And that's how they sign in. And they were like hell, no, you know, I mean, that's the impression they get to the school right away. It's easy, things like that. They seem small until it's your experience until it's someone you know. Little things like that make a huge difference on whether or not. And we know that we belong somewhere. And opens doors.

Speaker 4

The table is a production of the intercultural center and the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. It's hosted and produced by Courtney Jones, Carney and Rosemary Freda. This episode was also written by Rosemary and Me. Angela Jackson, senior marketing specialist in the Division of Student Affairs and producer and editor. Office podcast. West, a big thank you to our guest Edgar Fields for joining us at the table For more information about the intercultural center, including events where students can learn more about social identities and social issues, culture norms and current events. Visit youmaryland.edu/thetable. Thanks for listening. See you next time.