

Social relationships have been shown to have a causal association with positive health outcomes^{1,2,11}. This research has shown the critically positive impact of social networks and individual participation in these connections on both physical and mental health. Multiple studies have identified the predictive nature of self-perceived general health of chronic disease, use of medical services, disability, and mortality^{2,5,7,12}. Also, high levels of social capital have been linked to lower mortality rates and positive perceptions of health^{8,9}. In addition, studies of specific vulnerable populations (e.g., people of color, aged, disabled) have shown community-specific impacts of the connection between social relationships and health^{2,12}. While there is an emerging body of scholarship on the impact of social media on trans physical/mental health^{3,6,10}, there is a dearth of research on the impact of intracommunity support (specifically in-person connections) and community belonging for this community. Even while utilizing resilience and coping strategies, trans individuals continue to face stigma and discrimination in formal help-seeking contexts, though the acute and longterm health impacts of these experiences are still largely unknown^{3,6}.

My dissertation examines the ways trans communities use their social relationships and social support to fill the formal functions of social or mental health services, and the subsequent impact of community support on well-being for trans persons. As an alternative to the standard single dissertation study, I will be completing this dissertation as three substantive papers. The first paper is a grounded theory study exploring trans intracommunity knowledge and the ways it affects trans development and wellbeing. To develop a conceptual model of the process of knowledge and support sharing among transgender individuals, this study uses a constructivist grounded theory design and analytical method.

For the second paper, I am writing a conceptual piece arguing for methodological shifts in social/health science scholarship with a goal to minimize the harm of conventional research on and in trans communities. As increasingly more trans students fill our classrooms and academic spaces, the manner in which we conduct research can no longer continue down the same conventional path. Seizing this moment, wherein dramatic changes to trans rights are emerging, we should advocate for social welfare research to embody the stated values of our profession and discipline, and to ensure our research practices lift up trans and other communities that have long been ignored in the academy. This shift will ensure new ways of constructing and disseminating knowledge and interventions that work towards intersectional trans liberation.

The third paper will utilize a quantitative approach informed by the first two papers of my dissertation to explore and describe intracommunity support among trans individuals by illuminating the processes trans people employ to fill gaps in access to competent service provision. Participants will complete an online survey assessing social support, social service provision/access, community belongingness, and other variables of interest. Descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate statistics will be used to test associations between levels of social support and other variables of interest, and to predict use of social service provision and community belongingness based on categorical/continuous variables.

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