

**Sexuality, Culture and Society:  
Building a Foundation for Sexuality Research and Training in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
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**Executive Summary**

Over the course of recent decades, increasing attention has come to focus on the social and cultural dimensions of sexuality. It has become apparent that sexuality is not only a key aspect of human experience, but that it is linked to and implicated in many of the most important social policy issues of the contemporary world. Whether in relation to sexual health and well-being, sexual education and human development, or sexual rights and diversity, sexuality has become a central area of debate both within the United States and internationally.

While issues related to sexuality, and the social and cultural debates that they have engendered, have become increasingly central in recent years, the development of social science research and training focusing on sexuality has for the most part failed to accompany the fast-paced transformations taking place in these issues and debates. Due to a long-standing neglect, and at times even the outright marginalization, of sexuality as a focus for serious academic and social scientific attention, there still exist few institutional spaces capable of nurturing the kind of research that is needed in order to make a contribution to contemporary policy debates related to sexuality – and available theoretical frameworks and research agendas for work in this field have failed to accompany the pace of rapid social change in relation to sexual diversity, values, and expressions.

This proposal would provide support for a range of activities aimed at exploring the broader relations between sexuality, culture and society, and at strengthening existing institutional bases for the development of sexuality research and training activities. The proposed project would be led by faculty in the Center for Gender, Sexuality and Health, linked to the Department of Sociomedical Sciences of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. It would focus on a number of inter-related goals: (1) the development of a new research agenda and theoretical frameworks aimed at providing support for policy relevant research related to sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century; (2) the development of more effective social science research and training curricula focusing on sexuality; and (3) the development of greater understanding in relation to sexuality and diversity, particularly among different ethnic populations, as well as of the processes of sexual development of young people within diverse population groups, cultures and communities.

To achieve these goals, the project would provide support for the organization of seminars and workshops, the development of academic training programs, and publications over a two-year period. In addition, it would provide support for the basic infrastructure of the Center for Gender, Sexuality and Health at Columbia University, thus strengthening a key institutional base capable of contributing to the long-term development of the field of sexuality studies and research.