

## SECTION 4: BEYOND INCLUSION: HUBS OF LGBTQ+ SCHOLARSHIP AT COLUMBIA

LGBTQ+ faculty, staff, and students not only are significant constituents with needs related to equity, diversity, and inclusion, but also include scholars who provide unique contributions to the academy, its scholarship, its community, and society at large. Here we feature a number of hubs of LGBTQ+ scholarship at Columbia to illustrate these contributions.

*“I haven’t been successful in spite of being an LGBT researcher. I actually feel like I’ve been successful because I’m an LGBT researcher. I’m studying an understudied topic.”*

(Junior faculty member, Medical Center)

The leadership of the various units at Columbia University, Teachers College, and Barnard College active in LGBTQ+ scholarship is represented on the [Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Council](#). The Council provides opportunities for communication, coordination, and collaboration across these units and the University at large. The Council hosts a breakfast meeting every semester and supports programming, including the Queer Disruptions conferences sponsored by the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement. Yasmine Ergas, Patricia Dailey, and Walter Bockting serve as the Council’s Co-Chairs. For more information, please contact the Council at [WGSSC@columbia.edu](mailto:WGSSC@columbia.edu).

### 4.1: INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY (IRWGS)

IRWGS is the primary locus of interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship on women, gender, and sexuality at Columbia University. The Institute draws its faculty from many disciplines, not only from all three divisions in Arts and Sciences, but also from the school of International and Public Affairs, the Mailman School of Public Health, and the Law School, providing rigorous training in interdisciplinary scholarship to both undergraduate and graduate students. It has collaborated closely since its inception with the Department of English and Comparative Literature, a department that has for decades helped foster feminist studies and today includes internationally recognized feminist scholars across several subdisciplines. Courses in IRWGS provide in-depth knowledge of the history and theory of gender and sexuality studies in both local and global contexts, helping to prepare students

for professional work and to further academic engagement in a vast array of fields. IRWGS is also the primary location for the study of sexuality and of queer theory. In classwork, in programming, and in research groups, IRWGS demonstrates a lasting commitment to investigating bodily practices, gender norms, and sexual preference in a global context.

In the US, scholars working under the banner of “queer theory” or “queer studies” comprise a wide-ranging group of thinkers with projects that range across numerous fields including disability studies, the politics of austerity, militarism and masculinity, urban planning, transgender surgeries in a global frame, queer diasporas, immigration, sex work, digital capitalism, racial violence, and so on. Most significantly perhaps, US-based scholars have been vigorous in opposing the notion of a “global gay” or of a singular model of gender, sexuality, and desire and have even critiqued the cultural imperialism inherent in both the circulation of queer theories globally and the circulation of queer bodies within circuits of sexual tourism.

Queer faculty at Columbia University are currently building a working group to consider how best to resituate queer studies to respond to shifts in sexual politics that have occurred over the past decade. The Institute has already received a three-year commitment of funding from Columbia’s Center for the Study of Social Difference, and it plans to apply for more funding as the group develops its core project. For the moment, its main focus will be in considering the place of sexuality and gender both in the spread of global capitalism and right-wing populism and in the activist and aesthetic responses to these new forms of authoritarianism. For example, while we sometimes find white gays and lesbians at the forefront of anti-Muslim groups articulating a fear of religious homophobia (this happened in the Netherlands), we often also find that improvised queer anarchist groups lead the charge against state violence (this happened in Turkey). This working group at Columbia, in conversation with other key centers and organizations in Brazil, Chile, and France, will attempt to map a set of potential futures for queer studies, queer politics, queer art, and queer activism.

New hires at Columbia have resulted in the expansion of queer studies offerings and research. In addition to the LGBTQ+ cluster hires (see [Section 7.2](#)), Columbia University has hired Vanessa Agard-Jones in Anthropology, Gil Hochberg in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies, and Tey Meadow in Sociology. Together, these scholars have changed the culture of the University with regard not only to intellectual life but also in terms of social life and the lively exchanges between campus life and the busy worlds of New York City. Queer life and politics and art in New York City is richer for the presence of active queer scholars on college campuses here, and, in a post-COVID world, IRWGS looks forward to collaborative projects on and off campus. For further information, please visit <https://irwgs.columbia.edu/>.

## 4.2: CENTER FOR GENDER AND SEXUALITY LAW



[The Center for Gender and Sexuality Law's](#) mission is to formulate new approaches to complex issues facing gender and sexual justice movements. Founded by Professor Katherine Franke with co-director Suzanne Goldberg, the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law

has established Columbia Law School as the preeminent law school for the study of and specialization in the law of gender and sexuality. The Center is the base for many research projects and initiatives focused on issues of gender, sexuality, reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, and gender identity and expression in law, policy, and professional practice. A core focus of the Center's work is to provide students with opportunities to supplement their curricular learning through lectures, panel discussions, conferences, and guest speaker series on a multitude of contemporary issues regarding gender and sexuality law, including civil rights; bodily autonomy and reproductive justice; the rights of transgender, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming persons; the rights and experiences of intersex persons; and gender norms in public space.

The Center sponsors a speaker series, "Frontlines of Gender Justice"; a visiting scholar program; and courses including Gender Justice, Reproductive Rights, Sexuality and the Law, Family Law, Domestic Violence, and Law and Masculinity. The Center also includes the Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic, as well as the Law, Rights, and Religion Project, a think tank that promotes social justice, freedom of religion, and religious plurality.

## 4.3: HIV CENTER FOR CLINICAL AND BEHAVIORAL STUDIES

*"I met my husband in a gay sports league in the late 1980s, and we were all men except for two women. By 1990, more than half of them were dead. [I realized] life is too short to get caught up and worry about [homophobia]. It was certainly a very difficult time . . . but it also propelled me and people of my generation who survived. [I feel] less vulnerable because we felt like we had seen the worst of things."*

(Medical Center senior faculty who arrived at Columbia at the height of the AIDS epidemic)



From its inception in 1987, the [HIV Center](#) has supported an expanding portfolio of research grants that has led to a greater understanding of the mental and sexual health of LGBTQ+ people. The HIV Center was an important, welcoming environment in which LGBTQ+ researchers and trainees

bravely took on a terrible pandemic that for years killed many, particularly gay/bisexual men and transgender women. HIV Center allies and collaborators with well-established research careers at CUIMC stepped forward to help "flip" prevailing models of homosexuality at Columbia from models espousing psychopathology to a model envisioning homosexuality and bisexuality as normal variants of human sexuality. With time this was expanded to include transgender and other queer communities.

With this new model in mind, HIV Center faculty, in turn, became involved in teaching and consulting at CUIMC and other academic settings, professional and scientific conferences, and community-based organizations. Faculty also became involved in HIV mental health policy formulation and advocacy at local, national, and international levels such as the AIDS Commission of the American Psychiatric Association and the NYS Psychological Task Force on AIDS.

HIV Center faculty were instrumental in starting the Columbia Center for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Mental Health at CUIMC and consulted with the Gay Health Advocacy Project and Mentorship Program on the Morningside campus. Perhaps most importantly, the HIV Center sent a clear message in the early years of the AIDS epidemic that, rather than turn away AIDS patients for fear of discouraging other patients from seeking

care at CUIMC, it would take on this epidemic, providing hope to stigmatized populations and support to a large number of us who were contending with the threat of discrimination within our fields and the intolerable prospect of an ongoing loss of patients, colleagues, and loved ones.

The HIV Center became a thriving environment in which scholars, community activists, and individuals infected with and affected by HIV worked synergistically to promote social progress in areas where inequities compounded its effect. Established researchers with prestigious careers worked hand in hand with creative, committed, young investigators to find novel solutions to urgent problems. Their openness about their diverse sexual orientations and HIV status facilitated a deep understanding of factors fueling the progression of the pandemic. Throughout the decades, the Center's investigators not only adapted but also rode the wave of social changes, drawing from its energy to push science into new areas of inquiry that went far beyond the limited problem of a viral disease. The postdoctoral Fellowship program of the HIV Center significantly contributed both to the training of new investigators and the challenging of the older ones to think in new ways.

In recent years, the emergence of new biomedical approaches to HIV prevention presents us with a defining moment in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We have seen breakthroughs in the use of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) for prevention. These and other biomedical advances provide us with a new arsenal of strategies in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

However, these approaches cannot reach their full potential without rigorous behavioral and social science research to ensure proper uptake and adherence, while also addressing the accompanying social and personal determinants of health, including intersectional stigmas (homo-, bi-, and transphobia; HIV; racism), mental health, substance use, and culturally appropriate access to prevention and care. HIV Center members are at the forefront of leadership in a range of "Ending the HIV Epidemic" (EHE) initiatives, including the New York State Governor's Task Force and Blueprint for EHE, the Federal Plan for EHE across the US, and global EHE programs. Optimism is high in our ability to end the HIV epidemic, ensuring that no population is left behind and simultaneously advancing the mental and physical health, and the social and sexual well-being, of the LGBTQ+ community. For further information, please visit <https://www.hivcenternyc.org/>.

## 4.4: PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY OF LGBTQ HEALTH



In 2012, Jeffrey Lieberman, Chair of Psychiatry, and Bobbie Berkowitz, then Dean of Nursing, initiated the Program for the Study of LGBTQ Health, an across-schools, interdisciplinary collaboration. They appointed

Anke Ehrhardt as the Program's first Director and recruited Walter Bockting to Columbia to serve as the Program's Co-Director. The Program's vision is a world that respects diversity in gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, in which LGBTQ+ people and their families can thrive and have access to competent, evidence-based healthcare. To realize this vision, a comprehensive understanding is needed of the development of gender identity and sexual orientation; the characteristics and health status of the LGBTQ population; the risk/protective factors and processes of resilience; and key components of effective interventions, treatments, and health and public policies. The Program set out to pursue the research agenda outlined in the 2011 Institute of Medicine Report "The Health of LGBT People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding." The Program brings together a critical mass of investigators, teachers, service providers, and policy makers from various disciplines to work in synergy to advance LGBTQ+ health. The Program's clinical footprint includes the Columbia Gender Identity Program and LGBTQ+ Health at the Nurse Practitioner Group.

Initial priority areas included youth and families, LGBTQ+ aging, and transgender health. In 2017, Tonda Hughes was recruited to Columbia to lead the fourth priority area of sexual minority women's health. That same year, neuroscience of gender was added as a fifth priority area. Currently, the Program has funded research and training opportunities in each of these areas.



An example of a project in the priority area of transgender health is Affirm, a longitudinal study of transgender identity development across the lifespan that established a diverse cohort of 390 trans and nonbinary individuals in New York City, San Francisco, and Atlanta. The focus is on understanding how they respond to the challenges they encounter and learn to thrive over time. Gender-affirming healthcare, social support, and identity pride were shown to be associated with resilience, and interventions are being developed to reduce employment discrimination and improve economic opportunity. Students and postdoctoral fellows in psychiatry, psychology, sociology, nursing, and public health

are involved in research with this cohort on topics ranging from intersectionality; sexual orientation and relationships; sexual and reproductive health; mental health; and well-being. The next four years will include a focus on the prevention of cardiovascular disease. For further information, visit [LGBTHealthProgram.org](http://LGBTHealthProgram.org).

## 4.5: SOCIOMEDICAL SCIENCES AT THE MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

In 1968, Columbia University became the first institution in the country to offer a graduate degree in sociomedical sciences (SMS). Dr. Jack Elinson, the inaugural Chair of [SMS](#), coined the term “sociomedical sciences” to incorporate the social sciences of sociology, anthropology, economics, history, political science, and social psychology into a multidisciplinary study of health and medicine. The department’s strength in research related to LGBT health includes decades of faculty and doctoral work on HIV and sexual health, but SMS has also been the home to field-defining work on minority stress, structural stigma, mental health, substance use, and other areas related to queer health. The department currently has a number of LGBT senior faculty and is proud to have trained some of the nation’s leading researchers in LGBT health.

Current structures to support work in this area include the Gender, Sexuality, and Health training grant, the nation’s only predoctoral-level training grant funded by NIH specifically for interdisciplinary social scientific work on those topics. In addition, department faculty (first Constance Nathanson, now Jennifer Hirsch) have served as co-directors of the University-wide Columbia Population Research Center (CPRC), which brings together an exceptionally diverse group of researchers across the campus working on population health and inequalities; in a 2018 survey, one-third of CPRC’s junior faculty self-identified as LGBT. Both within SMS and through structures that link SMS to other academic units, the department provides an environment in which work on LGBT health is supported and faculty and students who are themselves LGBT find a welcoming home.



## 4.6: SEXUALITY, WOMEN, AND GENDER PROJECT (SWG) AT TEACHERS COLLEGE

[The Sexuality, Women, and Gender Project \(SWG\)](#) at Teachers College was co-founded in Fall 2012 by Drs. Aurelie Athan, Melanie Brewster, and Riddhi Sandil, three professors in the Counseling and Clinical Psychology Department, with funding from a Teachers College Provost Investment Grant. SWG’s mission is to envision and implement the next wave

of theories and practices to improve well-being for LGBTQ+ individuals and women, and to play a vital role in the creation of research initiatives, innovative curriculum, and institutional programming on campus and with partners beyond Columbia University. The goals of SWG are to (1) promote learning through innovative pedagogy and implementation of LGBTQ+ and gender-specific coursework; (2) provide intensive research mentorship and production; and (3) apply gender and sexuality theories to practice settings across New York City and the tristate area, such as local schools, mental/health facilities, and community organizations. SWG works across departments and schools (e.g., Education, Counseling and Clinical Psychology, Public Health, Gender and Queer Studies, Reproductive Psychiatry, Sociology, and Law) to promote the transdisciplinary dialogues needed to solve complex, real-world problems.



## 4.7: BARNARD CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN (BCRW)

The [Barnard Center for Research on Women \(BCRW\)](#) brings scholars and activists together through its working groups, public events, publications, and multimedia projects to advance intersectional social justice feminist analyses and to promote social transformation. BCRW is committed to vibrant and engaged research, pedagogy, art, and activism, supporting the work of scholars and activists to create new knowledge and to challenge and refine how we understand the world around us. Since its founding in 1971, the BCRW has cultivated collaborative and accountable relationships with community organizations, activists, and cultural workers in New York City, across the US, and transnationally. From its signature annual Scholar and Feminist Conference to its peer-reviewed journal *S&F Online*, unique collection of feminist social movement ephemera (housed in the Barnard College Archives), constantly expanding video archive (available on the Center’s website), and recently inaugurated Social Justice Initiative, BCRW remains committed to critical feminist engagement with the academy and the world.

Central to BCRW’s long-standing commitment to intersectional, social justice feminism is the generative and transformative work of queer and trans activists, artists, and scholars. BCRW has long-standing partnerships with former Social Justice Initiatives residents Tourmaline, Dean Spade, and CeCe McDonald and opportunities for students to work as research assistants on their ongoing projects. Moreover, BCRW has a long history of providing space to student groups working on pressing activist and creative projects related to queer and trans politics.

## The State of LGBTQ+ Health Research, Scholarship, and Representation

### Billy Caceres, Assistant Professor of Nursing

Over the past decade, there has been increased attention from national organizations to the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. This has attracted greater interest in LGBTQ+ research and scholarship from both researchers that identify as LGBTQ+ and those who identify as allies to the community. Despite these gains, clear challenges remain for LGBTQ+ researchers. LGBTQ+ research remains a stigmatized field with concerns about the legitimacy and value of LGBTQ+ scholarship as an area of inquiry. Non-LGBTQ+ researchers in academia generally recognize the importance of studying HIV/AIDS as an issue that affects LGBTQ+ populations, but do not necessarily show a similar regard for other areas of inquiry such as mental health, aging, and chronic conditions. This is reflected in the disproportionate funding that HIV/AIDS has received over the past 30 years compared with other health concerns for LGBTQ+ people. For instance, although the total number of LGBTQ+ health research projects at NIH has increased by 28 percent from 2015 to 2018, more than 60 percent of total funded projects focused on HIV/AIDS. Thus, although growing, research on LGBTQ+ disparities in areas other than HIV remains low. In 2018, only 3.6 percent of NIH-funded LGBTQ+ health research focused on depression, 2.1 percent on suicide, and 1.0 percent on tobacco use.

At a time when there is great attention to social injustice in our country, it is important that we acknowledge as a research community the role that social factors play in explaining health disparities in marginalized groups. The prevailing explanation for health disparities observed in LGBTQ+ people is that they experience greater exposure to social stressors (such as discrimination and bias-motivated violence) that can negatively impact their health and well-being. Greater exposure to social stressors underscores that LGBTQ+ health issues cannot be understood simply by examining sexual behavior or attraction. Because of the ubiquity of HIV/AIDS within the field, there is limited understanding among non-LGBTQ+ scientists that health disparities in LGBTQ+ populations, including the disproportionately higher incidence and prevalence of HIV in Black and Latinx sexual minority men and transgender women, are driven in large part by social determinants of health (such as poverty, discrimination, and violence). Non-LGBTQ+ researchers should understand that, although LGBTQ+ people have unique exposures, many of the drivers of LGBTQ+ health disparities also contribute to disparities in other minority groups.

Further, LGBTQ+ researchers often face concerns about their ability to maintain objectivity in researching a community to which they also belong. In my experience as an Afro-Latinx gay man studying various marginalized groups, but with a primary focus on LGBTQ+ populations, I have never been questioned about my desire to examine cardiovascular health disparities in people of color. My objectivity in studying people of color has never been questioned. However, throughout every stage of my career, I have had to defend my reasons for conducting research on cardiovascular health disparities in LGBTQ+ adults and whether as a gay man I could be truly objective about LGBTQ+ research. This is an experience shared by other LGBTQ+ colleagues conducting research in this area. These experiences can likely be attributed to a number of factors, including an increased recognition among researchers of the importance of studying Black and Latinx populations but less understanding of LGBTQ+ scholarship. Yet, this also highlights prejudices and misconceptions about what motivates LGBTQ+ people to do research that centers members of their community. These types of messages, especially from senior faculty, can discourage individuals early in their careers from pursuing academic careers focused on LGBTQ+ scholarship.

Another area of concern is the lack of racial/ethnic and gender diversity among LGBTQ+ researchers in the field. Although there is increased attention to the needs of racial/ethnic minority individuals within the LGBTQ+ community, research teams generally do not reflect the racial/ethnic diversity observed within the larger community. This lack of diversity in academia is not unique to LGBTQ+ scholarship, but it is particularly striking how few senior researchers of color are doing this work. This is also a concern for researchers who identify as transgender and gender nonbinary who remain underrepresented in the field. University-wide initiatives to recruit and retain LGBTQ+ researchers from underrepresented groups are needed across all career stages, particularly those working in understudied research areas. In addition, more opportunities to build community within Columbia University are essential for supporting LGBTQ+ researchers. This is especially important as LGBTQ+ researchers of color and gender diverse persons may face unique issues as members of multiply marginalized and underrepresented groups in academia. Pipeline-building efforts and mentoring programs targeted to LGBTQ+ students, trainees, and faculty can help offset this disparity. For more information, see [Section 7.3](#) (Pipeline) and [Section 6.4](#) (Mentoring).