

Deviants, Sinners, and Rebels.
Sexuality Studies in Times of Trouble.

ESA RN 23 Sexuality Mid-Term Conference

Palermo, Sicily, Italy, Thursday, 11th and Friday, 12th September 2025

Department of Cultures and Societies, University of Palermo
Central Campus, Viale delle Scienze, 90128, Palermo, Italia.

Deadline for submission: Tuesday, 15th April 2025

CALL FOR PAPERS

Deviants, Sinners, and Rebels. Sexuality Studies in Times of Trouble.

The title of this Mid-Term Conference is inspired by the sociology of deviance and its surprisingly tight relationship with sexuality studies. As we know, sociological approaches to sexuality studies have found it difficult to establish themselves as a specific and autonomous field within the discipline of sociology. Attempts at doing so, paradoxically, fed into the tendency to study sexualities as 'taboo' and to focus on phenomena that deviate from (assumedly) 'normal' sexual practices. In the early days of sociological analysis, there was a strong focus on the 'normal' occurrence of things and the verification of social typicality. It does not seem a coincidence, then, that sociology approached sexuality by including it within the studies on deviant phenomena and conduct, with the main objective of normalising its structures, manifestations, and practices. In the sociology of deviance, the study of sexuality often meant the study of those labelled as deviants – or sinners, in the language of various conservative-religious groups objecting to sexual rights and liberties of those breaking the patriarchal and heteronormative constraints of societies.

Over the last decades of sexuality studies, our field has found many ways to break free of these labels and to imbue the studies of sexuality with rebelliousness that has questioned and challenged these norms and constraints – both of the sociological discipline and societies in general. Sociological sexuality studies became interested in 'dissident sexualities' and embraced the figure of sexual rebels, asking questions on how it is possible to 'resist' oppressive ideologies and practice, and gendered, sexual, and intimate normativities.

Still, new times of trouble now loom large on our horizon, with conservative and authoritarian movements and governments challenging and interfering into progressive work that takes account of gender and sexual diversity.

In our previous Mid-Term Conference (Zagreb, September 2023) we highlighted how gender and sexuality studies were subject to funding cuts and obstructive state and political interventions, which even led to the closure of entire university degree courses and departments in both Western and Eastern Europe. Moreover, in our society, we face oppressive and discriminatory practices together with a resurgence of traditional beliefs and values that seems to specifically target minorities, inside which the LGBTIQ+ community is undoubtedly the most affected and undermined. Two years later the panorama worsened. Reflecting on these challenges, the ESA Sexuality Research Network 23 wishes to stimulate productive discussions on how the sociological study of sexualities has been operating as a scholarly and activist tool for change and on how it can achieve even more by looking at the broader implications of sexual politics and the politics of sexuality.

Today, we face multiple challenges and attacks, from the new Trump's administration and his allies (such as Elon Musk) to Europe's quasi-dictatorship of Viktor Orbán and his 'patriots' allies scattered all around the Old Continent that we read as signs of neo-populism, neo-liberalism, and re-traditionalization. Therefore, our aim is to bring together scholars and activists to approach sexuality studies as a platform for resistance in these times of trouble.

We have been labeled as 'deviants', 'sinners', and 'rebels' by those who want to make us quiet and put us at the margin of our societies. We think it is time that we (re)claim the label of 'rebels' as for ourselves. We will continue to fight any injustice we and other minorities suffer to find a place for all in this World.

We look forward to sharing knowledge and to discussing ways in which we can contribute to the field of sociology of sexualities. We would like this Mid-Term Conference to be an opportunity to gather together and to be a place where our histories, cultural legacies, social and emotional dynamics, potentials, and future directions, all become a way to continue our struggle.

We invite scholars, activists, and interested parties to address these and other related issues. Specific topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Neo-populism and its impact on sexuality-related rights and studies.
- Re-traditionalization of family and values.
- Gender as a relational practice of power.

- The intersection of masculinity and sexuality.
- New methodological approaches to critical masculinities studies.
- Feminist theories in relation to masculinity and sexuality.
- New frontiers for deviance studies and their intersection with sexuality.
- Challenging LGBTIQ+ -related discrimination and inequalities.
- Anti-gender movements and their impact on sexuality studies.
- Patriarchy and sexual violence.
- Shifting notions of consent.
- New frontiers in sex work research.
- Sexual politics, social movements, and new practices for resistance.
- Sexual identities, communities, and the politics of belonging.
- Sexual norms and other normativities.
- Migration, multiculturalism, integration and sexuality.
- The Global South and sexuality research.
- New forms of intimacies, including digital intimacies.
- Care and caring in intimate and sexual relationships.
- Medicalization, de-medicalization, and re-medicalization and sexuality studies.
- Reproductive justice and the right of abortion.
- Bodies and embodiment.
- Youth, sexual rights, and sexuality studies.
- Any other themes of importance.

The conference will take place in person, in Palermo, Sicily, Italy. Unfortunately, we do not have the technical resources to organise a hybrid conference. However, we will do our best to live stream the plenaries and, where possible, to accommodate the needs of those who, for any personal reasons, are not able to attend the conference in person.

We welcome the following type of proposals:

- a) individual papers:
 - please submit an abstract (max 300 words) with your name(s), email(s), and academic affiliation(s) (if any) together with a short bio (max 50 words).
- b) full panels (3 to 5 papers):
 - please submit an abstract for the panel (max 500 words) and the abstracts of each presenter (max. 300 words) with names, emails, and academic affiliations (if any) together with a short bio (max. 50 words per each author).

The online submission form is available [here](#).

We are able to offer a limited number of fee waivers or fee discounts and cover travel expenses to a small number of applicants. These opportunities are for PhD students, independent and untenured researchers only. If you wish to apply for either or both, please send us an email at esarn23@gmail.com with a short supporting statement (max. 500 words).

Conference attendance fees are as follows:

ESA members:

- participants in secure employment: 100 €.
- PhD students, independent and untenured researchers: 40 €.
- students (undergraduate and master): 10 €.

Non-ESA members:

- participants in secure employment: 150 €.
- PhD students, independent and untenured researchers: 70 €.
- students (undergraduate and master): 30 €.

The fee covers lunches and coffee breaks, conference material, and all other organizational costs.

A conference drink reception and party will be organised on Friday evening (information will follow).

The names of the keynote's speakers will be announced in due course.

Presenters will be notified about the acceptance of their papers/panels around mid-May 2025.

For any query, please send us an email: esarn23@gmail.com

The conference is co-organised between the Department of Cultures and Societies of the University of Palermo, Conference Convenor Prof Cirus Rinaldi, and the European Sociological Association Research Network 23 Sexuality Board, Deputy Conference Convenor Dr Marco Bacio.