

CfP: “Sex and Publics”: Interdisciplinary Debates in Southern Africa (20-21 October, Johannesburg, South Africa)

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Call for Papers

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Call for Papers

“Sex and Publics”:

Interdisciplinary Debates in Southern Africa

20-21 October, 2022

Johannesburg, South Africa

Hosts: GALA Queer Archive, University of Exeter, Governing Intimacies Project, Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER)

Sex has conventionally been understood as a private act that unfolds in intimacy and secrecy. However current in the popular imagination, this view has been highly contested by scholars, artists and activists from various locations and backgrounds, who have all insisted in the both public and socially mediated nature of sex. In what is today an influential queer text, Laurent Berlant and Michael Warner argue that “there is nothing more public than privacy” (in “Sex in Public”, *Critical Inquiry*, 24/2, 1998). Since then, the theme “sex in public” has invited further explorations of the public-ness of sex, its politics and mediality, and its entanglements to both heterosexist cultures and to emergent counter-publics and world-making projects.

In Southern Africa as elsewhere in the Global South, sex has often entered public spaces and the public imagination through the spectacular tropes of sexual violence and disease. While the contemporary prevalence of gender-based and queerphobic violence and HIV means that these issues remain as relevant as ever, the last twenty years have seen an explosion of means and media by which the problematic of “sex in public”, or “sex and publics”, can be revisited and interrogated. The expansion of digital cultures and the rise of social media certainly raise new questions about the currency of sex in Southern African publics and counter-cultures, but these contemporary discourses

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on sex - and the sexual practices they necessarily represent - co-exist with longstanding legacies from colonial and apartheid-era sexual cultures, including discriminatory legislation and the pathologisation of sexual and gender variance. The ways in which sex emerges (or remains hidden) in our archives - and the historical narratives that these archives make possible - are thus consequential to our present engagements with these issues.

This conference wishes to invite scholars, artists, and activists to think about “sex and publics” in Southern Africa from various interdisciplinary perspectives. We are especially interested in bringing historical research and present-day critique into the same analytical space. Topics of interest include:

- Sex and exhibition cultures (in museums, film, the arts, etc)
- Sex and digital cultures (social media, dating apps, online spaces, etc)
- Sex and writing (print media, literature, etc)
- Sex and legal cultures (sodomy laws, immorality laws, etc);
- Sex and public history;
- Sex and/in archives;
- Sex and/as spectacle;
- Sex and world-making;
- Sex and urban geographies;
- Sex and transactionality;
- Sex and intersectionality;
- Sex and citizenship;
- Sex between secrecy and publicity;
- The public-ness of sexual violence;
- The ethics of disclosing secrets in academic research;

We will accept submissions based on academic research, on policy work, and on activist and artistic projects. To submit a proposal, please send an abstract (300 words max) and a short bio (150 words max) to caio.simoedearaujo@wits.ac.za and e.j.bridger@exeter.ac.uk by July 11th. We will notify participants by July 22nd.

We have funds to cover a limited number of travel grants to **doctoral students** and **early career scholars, professionals or artists** travelling from within the region. Please let us know, in your submission, if you need funding for travel and accommodation.

Contact Email:

caio.simoedearaujo@wits.ac.za