



3<sup>rd</sup> AISNA Graduates Conference

# Queering America: Gender, Sex, and Recognition in U.S. History, Culture, and Literature

September 30, 2022

Centro Studi Americani, ROME

PLEASE SEND ALL SUBMISSIONS TO

[events@aisna-graduates.online](mailto:events@aisna-graduates.online)

DEADLINE: June 15, 2022



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## CALL FOR PAPERS

On December 1, 1952, World War II veteran Christine Jorgensen became the first American to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Her long-standing legacy has helped reignite a fundamental debate on gender, sex, and recognition. Indeed, as historian Joanne Meyerowitz notes in *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2009), the redefinition of gender identity, “as opposed to biological sex,” was the ultimate product of a long process that “emerged from the medical discourse of the mid-1950s and as a result of the post-Jorgensen phenomenon.” Since then, the non-binary understanding of gender has featured prominently in an ever-expanding debate on American society as it struggled to achieve inclusiveness, freedom, and equality. These are the same ideas that have been central to U.S. history, society, and identity since the founding of the nation, and that echo in the 1776 Declaration of Independence, which states that “all men are created equal” and with inalienable rights such as “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

In embracing America’s call to freedom and equality, the use of the term *queer* has significantly evolved during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Used as a slur targeting homosexual people for much of the nineteenth century and the better part of the following, this umbrella term began to be reclaimed by American activists in the late 1980s. By overcoming dogmatic definitions of gender and sexuality, *queer* has offered, and continues to offer, an alternative to the mainstream public discourse centered on binary social hierarchies and heteronormative conventions for LGBT+ people. Furthermore, in the past three decades, seminal works by critical theorists as, for instance, bell hooks’ *Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness* (1989) and Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), have also contributed to challenge prescriptive norms of self-representation. Through their writings, these authors have invited reflections on a queer identity and the need to choose “marginality” and “failure” as necessary steps to achieve liberation and recognition.

As hooks and Halberstam have respectively posited, only by occupying “a space outside the binary” and reversing “the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development” can we create new possibilities and pursue our own true aspirations to freedom and equality. Therefore, we must ask: is there a space in U.S. society for a queerness that seeks liberation and recognition rather than simple admission to the status quo?

For its next biennial conference, the AISNA Graduate Forum invites graduate students and early career researchers to send abstracts that investigate the multiple ways in which history, literature, political science, and the arts explore the interplay between gender, sex, and recognition. Specifically, we are interested in papers that examine the challenges that the concepts of queerness have posed to traditional components of U.S. culture. For this reason, we especially encourage contributions based on cross-disciplinary approaches that offer innovative insights on queer and trans\* politics, history, culture, and literature.

The topics in the following list reflect the scope of the conference, but issues not included are also welcome:

- Landmark judicial cases (e.g., *Obergfell v. Hodges*; *Diaz v. Pan Am*)
- The interplay between race and class in queer politics
- Queerness as a marketable product in the capitalist society
- Literary depictions of queerness and trans\* identities
- Queerness in the arts and popular culture
- Narratives and spaces for queer history (archives, museums, expositions)
- Transnational perspectives on gender identity
- Queerness in medical and military history
- Queer activism and international solidarity movements

**SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:** We welcome individual contributions and pre-formed panels and roundtables. Proposals should include:  
a 300-word abstract for individual presentations; a 700-word abstract for entire sessions (panels, roundtables); speaker’s short bio (100 words each max)