

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Exeter		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 28 History		
Title of case study: Transforming the lives of at-risk young people in the UK through the co-curation of historically informed creative productions		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Kate Fisher	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2000-ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Professor Kate Fisher, in collaboration with Professors Rebecca Langlands and Jana Funke, developed an engagement method combining reflective exploration of the history of gender and sexuality with intense creative co-production, to empower marginalised and 'at-risk' young people (aged 12-20) to develop new narratives of self and community. Two programmes, <i>HOLD</i> and <i>Transformations</i>, made life-changing impacts on 'at-risk' young people and their families. Creative interpretations, collaborative working and professional artistic production benefitted participants' skills, wellbeing, identities and confidence, improving their life prospects through, e.g., enhanced educational achievement, training and employment opportunities. The projects have also shaped working practices of partner organisations and informed practice across health and childcare services. The success of the schemes has led to commercial and business growth for key creative partner Effervescent Arts, named as one of the UK's leading 100 social enterprises in 2020. The <i>Transformations</i> drama podcast and website have been recommended as an affirmative resource for trans people with media coverage reaching audiences of more than 80,000.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p><i>HOLD</i> and <i>Transformations</i> were two-stage intensive programmes of engagement with disadvantaged and 'at-risk' young people, based around conversations sparked by material relating to the history of gender and sexuality. The programmes were informed by research into pioneering methods of working with young people (including 'at-risk' groups) in educational and therapeutic contexts conducted with Langlands, Dr Jen Grove and Eloise Malone [3.7] The first stage relied on workshops using innovative historical material to provoke reflection on themes such as power, gender, sexuality and identities. The workshops provided young people with critical approaches to the differences and similarities between the past and the present, and reflective group explorations which empowered participants to re-think their own identities. In the second stage, participants worked with creative professionals to transform their reflections on historical material into high quality creative outputs (performances, podcasts, websites, artworks, installations and exhibitions).</p> <p>The engagement methods and historical themes underpinning the programmes build on a substantial body of new research into the history of gender, sexuality, identity and sexology, the role of history in shaping attitudes and identities, and the value of historical material in stimulating deep reflection and analysis. Fisher's research as part of the Rethinking Sexology project (funded by a Wellcome Trust, Joint Investigator Award with Funke, £845,667), considered the impact of medical authority on the emergence of identity categories and on individuals' experiences [3.1; 3.2]. By exploring the development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century medical constructions of sexuality and gender, including reinterpreting the evidence employed by sexual scientists to understand transgender cases, and by investigating the power relationships and forms of authority accorded to different voices in issues of roles and identities, this research has provided young people with new ways of thinking about gender in contemporary society.</p> <p>The methods pioneered in both programmes were further informed by research into the meaning of history to individuals and the value of historical debate in shaping opinion.</p>		

Fisher's research on individual sexual subjectivities had previously demonstrated the centrality of historical perspectives to individuals' self-understanding [3.3; 3.4]. These findings were developed into in-depth research on the receptions of the past in the historical construction of ideas about gender and sexuality. The work of Fisher and her collaborators demonstrated the perennial power of history to open up new ways of thinking, and legitimate alternative ways of being. This research informed the development of a model of engagement based on the carefully curated exploration of historical objects or material that was employed by both *HOLD* and *Transformations* [3.5; 3.6].

Transformations also drew on Fisher's pioneering application of oral history to obtain testimony on sensitive topics and explore the history of personal identities [3.3; 3.4]. Young participants were trained to collect testimonies that underpinned their creative outputs. The methodology involved the use of unstructured but carefully choreographed, open ended interviews to enable individuals to reflect deeply and contextually on their experiences, choices, values and identities.

3. References to the research (*available on request)

- 3.1 * Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, "'Let us Leave the Hospital; Let Us Go on a Journey Around the World': Sexual Science and the Global Search for Variation and Difference", in Veronika Fuechtner, Doug Haynes, and Ryan Jones (eds), *Towards a Global History of Sexual Science, 1880-1950* (University of California Press, 2018), pp. 51-69
- 3.2 Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, "British Sexual Science beyond the Medical: Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Historical, and Cross-Cultural Translations", in Heike Bauer (ed.), *Sexology and Translation* (Temple University Press, 2015), pp. 95-114. Submitted to REF2021
- 3.3 * Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage in Britain, 1918-1960* (OUP, 2006). Won several awards including the RHS Whitfield Prize; proxime accessit in the Longman/History Today Award; ALA/CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title; on the basis of it Fisher was shortlisted for Times Higher Young Academic Author of the Year Award 2007. Funded by a Wellcome Trust Project Grant (£49,559).
- 3.4 * Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution. Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (CUP, 2010). Longlisted for BBC Samuel Johnson award, funded by an ESRC project grant (£107,697) and Wellcome Trust Project Grant (£49,559).
- 3.5 Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands (eds.) *Sex, Knowledge, and the Reception of the Past* (OUP, 2015) Submitted to REF2021
- 3.6 * Kate Fisher, Jana Funke, Jen Grove, Rebecca Langlands, "Illustrating Phallic Worship: Uses of Material Objects in Antiquarianism and Sexual Science" in special issue of *Word & Image* 33 "Mediating the Materiality of the Past, 1720-1930" (2017): 324-337.
- 3.7 * Rebecca Langlands, Kate Fisher and Jen Grove, "Sex and History': Talking Sex with Objects from the Past' in Mary Lou Rasmussen and Louisa Allen (eds.) *Handbook of Sexuality Education* (Palgrave, 2016), pp. 29-51.

4. Details of the impact

Two projects - *HOLD* and *Transformations* - helped 69 young participants respond to difficult experiences, including trauma, abuse, gender-dysphoria and transphobic discrimination through creative engagement with historical research, and the production of powerful works of art. The creative outputs informed audiences and changed the practice of experts (e.g. teachers, youth-workers, carers, therapists and clinicians) charged with protecting young people. Third sector support organisations developed new ways of working and expanded their reach.

Changing the lives of 'at-risk' young people and their families

HOLD, a collaboration with pioneering social enterprise Effervescent Arts, involved 39 young people aged 12-17 with experiences of childhood trauma (including domestic violence, alcohol/drug abuse and sexual exploitation). They participated in day-long collaborative historical and arts-based sessions (30 in total) over a 3-month period. One element of the process involved investigating 150 year old Chinese foot-binding shoes which prompted in-

depth and highly personal reflections on issues of power, abuse, parent-child relations, gender roles, body modification, pain, deformed growth, beauty, forms of resistance, diversity and cultural difference. These ideas were further workshopped and found articulation in four separate installations at Radiant Gallery in Plymouth. No-one dropped out and attendance was over 80% despite the high demands of the programme on a cohort selected for poor school attendance. [5.1] A six-month review found continued improvement in all measures: school performance (attendance, behaviour and educational achievement), mental health, problem solving, emotional expression and anger management, risk appraisal, ability to cope with difficult situations, self-reported happiness, sense of agency, aspirations for the future, self-esteem, and ability to trust others [5.1]. As one participant commented: *"I remember thinking, 'oh no, not another mental health camp with a bunch of sad kids & a really serious therapist' but the whole experience has been so life changing, I can't even put into words...It helped me find hope."* [5.1]. The exhibitions also had a powerful influence on family members: *"It was amazing. I loved it. It shocked me up a bit I'm not gonna lie. To realise that's what B has been going through most of his life. That show needs to be seen by alcoholic and drug addict parents"* [5.1; 5.2].

Transformations involved young trans people in historical workshops, an oral history project, and in the writing and recording of a professional new podcast drama series *Adventures in Time and Gender* (broadcast in October and November 2020), a time-traveling exploration of trans and queer history. This accompanied a dynamic website of historical research and artistic responses to it. The project improved participants' sense of empowerment, identity and communal belonging. The project was *"a big boost to my mental health...at the moment where things are really backsliding for trans people...it feels empowering...to be doing what oppressed people have always done to get back control of their lives and their narrative and their place in the world"*. Learning about trans history gave many *"a sense of belonging that I've never felt before"*, which was *"really validating and special"*. [5.3] Participants reported an impact on their creativity, and research abilities, curation and performance skills, and on their longer-term motivation and prospects, one reporting that being *"part of a writers' room for a play...should be an enormous help professionally"* and another that they *"...feel like I have a purpose in life...stories and research...so I want to pursue that in some way."* [5.3]

Some participants made life-changing decisions based on their experiences: one enrolled on a MA in Contemporary Identity, while another stated *"I have been referred to GIC [Gender Identity Clinic] and came out to my family because I was motivated by the workshops'.* Another made the decision to exit sex work and sought assistance to do so [5.3]. In the context of a global pandemic, the project provided community and support: *"I have felt very isolated from trans people during this period and a lot has been happening in my personal life. These sessions really made me feel seen and heard."* [5.3].

Shaping working practices of partner organisations and informing practice of health professionals, clinicians, therapists, and childcare services

HOLD's installations were hard-hitting and left a powerful impression on those working with 'at-risk' young people, especially in mental health and child protection. Representatives from NSPCC recommended one exhibition be incorporated into their Continuing Professional Development programme for staff [5.1]. Other visitors reported similar impacts: *"I am a youth worker and think this will help and further my understanding of hidden harm..."*. Another stated: *"I work with children who suffer from developmental trauma in schools. I think you could achieve a shift in educational understanding if you presented this in schools. It would beat the powerpoint presentations I deliver on the subject"* [5.1; 5.2].

Similarly, *Transformations* has encouraged medical professionals to rethink their practice. Clinic staff reported feeling *"better equipped"* to understand *"how difficult and problematic"* it is for young people in medical/clinical settings *"facing labels and intrusive questions"* and that this work allows them to explore *"how we can make those kind of relationships [with*

clients] better.” GIC professionals were surprised that the podcast did not reinforce critical and antagonistic representations of the medical profession: *“I have to admit when I first started listening I was nervous... I thought, we are going to be seen, dare I say, as the enemy.”* They welcomed that it helped *“move the conversation on”*, a *“gentle and kind way of involving everybody”*, helping avoid conversations which *“walk this tightrope”* and are frequently *“not gentle”*, *“not open”*, *“not curious”* and *“not respectful”*; instead *“the podcast opens those dialogues and sees it from so many angles”* [5.3].

As a result, the podcast is having a transformative effect on the relationship between GIC clinicians and their trans clients with impacts on reflective practice, induction materials, interagency education, training and awareness work. One professional *“suggested to our manager that we look at the website and listen to the podcasts and then have session to reflect as a whole team.”* To another, *“as a newbie, I think it would have been great to have had it as part of our learning material...[with] trans history being part of our training in some way and actually that podcast would be a lovely way [to do this].”* They explained that the podcast *“helps us understand more about current experience and certainly things like language, I think that’s got to be helpful for professionals.”* Other professionals, including therapists, LGBT youth practitioners and sex educationalists found the podcasts *“insightful”*, *“intriguing”* and *“inspirational”* and left feeling *“fascinated”*, *“enlightened”* and *“hopeful”*. *“I am a psychotherapist that works with trans people and I will recommend the podcast!!”* For a practitioner of reproductive and fertility education the podcast has filled *“a missing piece in my understanding”* and inspired me to work harder *“to make sure my offerings are inclusive and supportive.”* [5.3].

Transformations’ key partner Gendered Intelligence (GI), the sector-leading organisation for young trans people and their families, who deliver training/support to schools, therapists and counsellors, agencies and businesses, and lead national campaigns, ran guidance for staff in Dec 2020 to embed lessons from the project into their service delivery, and staff reported feeling inspired to use historical material when working with young trans people or delivering awareness training. [5.3] For Jay Stewart, the CEO, the project is providing *“an important and life changing experience for [our young members]”* and is making *“trans lives and communities visible, in ways that are playful, joyful and beautiful.* Sharing the outputs to *“change the conversation around trans people”* will be a key element of GI’s future work: *“I feel like my responsibility now is to be the platform and to be getting that out and making sure that people have access to it... I really want to share it with people who are academics or clinicians and be like - look this is what trans is- ...it’s not a 12-year-old sitting crying in a room and you’re passing tissues. It doesn’t have to be that, it can be something else...[this] harnessing [is something] we need to focus on”* [5.3].

Commercial and business growth for key creative partner

For Eloise Malone, CEO of Effervescent Arts, the key partner in *HOLD*, the growth and success of the organisation has been achieved via the *“nourishing, nurturing, stabilising, and exciting...relationship between University of Exeter”* which has *“contributed to the development of our practice over the past 10 years, during which time we have gained national recognition for our work in both the arts sector and child support services”* [5.4]. Effervescent is now a sector-leading voice, achieving genuine benefits to ‘at-risk’ young people whom authorities struggle to help. In 2016, the Assistant Director of children’s charity Barnardo’s, commented that Effervescent had *“profoundly changed our approach to service design for the future and uncovered a need to evaluate the impact of the arts process in therapeutic recovery from type two trauma”* [5.4].

Effervescent were Plymouth UK Company of the Year in 2015 and 2016, and finalists in the National Lottery Awards for Outstanding Art. In 2017, TEDx Plymouth invited Effervescent to showcase their work, including *HOLD*. In 2018 they were selected as a case study by the Department for Digital, Cultural, Media and Sport and by Arts Council England as a ground-breaking UK creative agency. In 2020, they were named as one of the UK’s leading 100

social enterprises. The pioneering methodology used by Effervescent was also singled out by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations [5.1]. Effervescent's growth and reach has been enabled by the long-term and sustained collaboration with Fisher (and team): "*The multi-year programme and project work we have undertaken with Kate and Rebecca afforded us the impact evidence base, methodological insights, confidence, and credibility to attract contracts including government funding to deliver our first national-scale creative advertising campaign with children and young people, Lonely Not Alone. In its first year the campaign reached more than 2.8 million people; and in its 2020 follow-up campaign, reached an audience of 130 million through more than 100 media mentions; social media reach; and billboard reach*" [5.4].

Impact on communities and audiences

Adventures in Time and Gender has been welcomed by young audiences. A focus group of 14-17 year olds found it "funny, interesting and informative", "thought provoking, witty and grounded". All said they would recommend the podcast and website to their friends and one said he would recommend it to his sister because "*She'd find it funny but interesting and she's not sure about her gender*" [5.3]. Other cis browsers and listeners also praised *Adventures in Time and Gender* as "enlightening" and "insightful and educational": "*Almost all the historical stories, characters and information was new to me. I have an adult trans daughter and want to keep educating myself*" [5.3]. Surveys found trans audiences feeling "*affirmed and more comfortable in my own genderqueer skin*". Another remarked: "*A resource like this is so incredibly important! There are not many podcasts by and for trans and non-binary people, and even less focused on our history - it gives me a sense of belonging, of solidness, of knowing how the path before me has been shaped.*" Others have deemed the project outputs "*SOOOO affirming... like looking at aspects of my trans self through a kaleidoscopic mirror ... Wonderfully therapeutic.*" [5.3]

The podcast and website have been recommended as an affirmative resource for trans people by key organisations, including Gendered Intelligence, LifeHacker, Gender Construction Kit, Sexing History and Sabah Choudrey Support Hub [5.5]. The podcast reached 2,148 listeners across Europe, Australia, North and South America between 1 Oct and 31 Dec 2020, and the website was accessed more than 12,461 times. It had 972 Instagram followers and 829 Twitter followers. Tweets received up to 94,400 impressions and 3,000 engagements. PR analysis found that the media coverage, including in Forbes, OutNews and Diva, to have reached an estimated total of 80,600 readers [5.6].

Audience evaluation of *HOLD* creative outputs revealed powerful effects on exhibition visitors. One reported: "*I'm going through a process of separation and felt that if I'd bring my daughter with me it would be a very positive experience. She totally loved it and now feels confident to talk about her feelings and her emotions as well as how to be kind*". Another stated that "*...it made me remember to be kind to everyone as you never know what someone is suffering with*" [5.1; 5.2]. Media interest in the *HOLD* exhibitions further demonstrated their reception as powerful and thought-provoking. Miro Magazine described one as "*an emotional rollercoaster – it is very real and completely chilling. The audience are forced to think very deeply about the sensitive issue, one that many of us have not realistically faced before*" [5.7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1. HOLD Final Report (June 2020, provided by Effervescent).
- 5.2. Effervescent Twitter and webpage screenshots.
- 5.3. Transformations Final Report: Independent evaluative report (Spring 2021).
- 5.4. Effervescent Arts testimonial.
- 5.5. Screenshots of organisations recommending Transformations podcast.
- 5.6. Transformations media coverage (external PR Coverage and Social Media Reports).
- 5.7. HOLD media coverage (*Plymouth Herald*, *Miro Magazine*, *Manor Magazine*).