

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Exeter		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 28 History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Sex & History Method: Delivering transformational Relationships and Sex Education through creative approaches		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000-2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Professor Kate Fisher	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2000-ongoing
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>For decades, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) has been deemed to be unhelpfully negative, focused on disease or pregnancy prevention, with an over-emphasis on basic biological information. The 2013 Ofsted Report noted that inadequacies in RSE can leave young people 'vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation'. Fisher's pioneering research into the history of sex has informed the development of an award-winning approach to RSE, based on a curated, dialogic discussion of historical material/objects to inspire reflection and provoke discussion about vital topics such as consent, body image, and pornography.</p> <p>The Sex &amp; History method has been widely adopted across the UK and beyond as an effective means of delivering RSE in schools, museums, pupil referral units and youth clubs. Impacts include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering young people, teachers, youth workers and charities with innovative RSE resources.</li> <li>• Informing the development and delivery of curricula and new statutory requirements for comprehensive RSE provision in the UK.</li> <li>• Generating new ways for museums to enhance health and wellbeing outcomes.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Underpinning the Sex &amp; History method is a framework for the delivery of sex education focused on the discussion of values, stereotypes, cultural expectations and codes of femininity/masculinity. This is informed by Fisher's prize-winning monograph and co-authored book on the history of sex advice, sexual learning and education, contraceptive use and personal identities in the twentieth century. Her research highlights the limitations of negative messaging, such as a focus on disease and pregnancy prevention, and an emphasis on basic biological information and the importance of cultural values in shaping and identities and behaviours. Also core to the Sex &amp; History method is the use of open-ended discussions. This is informed by the research methodology in Fisher's books which demonstrated the efficacy of open-ended unstructured interviews in stimulating discussions about sexual attitudes and practices [3.1, 3.2].</p> <p>At the heart of the Sex &amp; History method is a belief in the value of a dialogue between past and present to the development of sexual knowledge and identities. This is shaped by Fisher's monographs and also by a body of research on the uses of the past in shaping sexual knowledge, undertaken by Fisher in collaboration with Rebecca Langlands (Classics), Jen Grove (History, Classics and Museum Studies), Jana Funke (English) and Leon Rocha (Chinese Studies), as part of the <i>Sexual Knowledge, Sexual History</i> project from 2008 to 2015 and then since 2015 within the Sexual Knowledge Unit at the University of Exeter [3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6]. This research has shown that claims about the past have been crucial in articulating sexual morals, in driving political, legal and social change, in informing sexual science, in shaping individual identities, and in constructing and grounding knowledge about sex. A key and original finding of this interdisciplinary research is that</p>		

material from past cultures has functioned perennially as a productive and challenging stimulus through which people explore sexual questions. For example, Langlands and Fisher demonstrated the impact of sexually-themed material found at the archaeological sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum on understandings of sex. They revealed that visual material such as pictures and artefacts are particularly effective media, providing an immediate and arresting point of engagement with the past [3.3, 3.4]. Research into collecting practices, including Grove's PhD, supervised by Fisher and Langlands, revealed the importance of objects on the development of Western and scientific understandings of sex and sexuality [3.5, 3.6]. The research has also examined the history of museums, and explored the significance of displays that foregrounded gender, sex and sexuality in public debate and in engaging with varied audiences [3.3, 3.5]. This research informs the Sex & History method by offering thought-provoking evidence about human practices and encouraging people to reflect on similarities and differences between cultures. The research reveals that in the context of sex education, historical material is valuable in enabling multiple interpretations, and allowing people to test ideas against their own preconceptions. It empowers people with an awareness that sex has been talked about, thought about and depicted for millennia, and provides historical distance that depersonalises discussion and reduces embarrassment.

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

- 3.1 \* 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).
- 3.2 \* 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 (R000236621) £107,697.00 and Wellcome Trust Project Grant (059811/2/JM/HH/SW) £49,559.
- 3.3 \* Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands 'The Censorship Myth and the Secret Museum' in S. Hales and J. Paul (eds), *Pompeii in the Popular Imagination from its Rediscovery to Today*, (OUP Classical Presences Series, 2011), pp. 301-315.
- 3.4 Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands (eds) *Sex, Knowledge, and the Reception of the Past* (Classical Presences series, OUP 2015), including co-authored essay by Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands, 'Bestiality on the Bay of Naples: The Herculaneum Pan and Goat', pp. 86-110. *Submitted to REF2021*.
- 3.5 \* 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.
- 3.6 \* Kate Fisher, Jana Funke, Jen Grove and 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.

### 4. Details of the impact

*Sex & History began in 2008 and involved the trial of a pilot teaching resource in Cornwall, the base of a 2014 REF impact case-study. The impact outlined below is the result of entirely new teaching materials based on new objects and new collaborations, informed by additional research.*

#### **Empowering young people, teachers, youth workers and charities with innovative RSE resources**

Fisher and her collaborators have created a new suite of resources for teaching RSE in the UK and around the world. In 2015, Fisher, Langlands and Grove, in collaboration with two professional sex educators, devised an educational method based on historical objects, which they embedded in a series of RSE resources for Key Stages 4 and 5. Now with an additional set of dedicated LGBT resources, produced in 2017 in collaboration with national

educational charity *Schools Out*, these have been available in the UK and globally online [5.1].

Teachers as far and wide as Chicago report that the resources ‘worked incredibly well’ [5.2]. Leading sex educationalists highlight their value in promoting cross-curricular approaches and giving teachers confidence by incorporating the way they are used to teaching into the delivery of sex education [5.3]. They emphasise the benefits of ‘distancing the discussion’ around topics like pornography, making them easier to approach. This encourages students, who might otherwise be too embarrassed, to talk, leading to a ‘much better and safer discussion than an open debate’ [5.3]. They add that the resources are unusual in providing ‘interesting and challenging resources that extend learning’ for pupils in Key Stage 5, making RSE more ‘than just a pastoral intervention, but actually an intellectual and interesting part of the curriculum’ [5.3]. This is supported by teachers’ and pupils’ experience of using them: ‘It is fascinating to see historical objects used to discuss modern-day issues with clear links for students to follow. This will allow students to develop critical thinking and analysis skills’ (supporting teacher); ‘I overheard a boy telling his mum about it at the end of the day. He was really fired up about it. Sounds like an awesome session’ (teacher, Bath); ‘Really, really great. Inspired a good discussion’ (pupil) [5.2].

Sex & History has also proved effective in specialist educational settings. In 2016 a pupil referral unit in Exeter used the method in a week-long drama project with three pupils who had experienced forms of sexual exploitation. Reported outcomes included increase in confidence and ‘bonding [...with] potential to create a newly supportive environment for the future’ and ‘promoting relationships between staff and students...so vital in these units’ [5.2]. In Cornwall, sexual health charity Brook used the method with a group of young fathers, reporting increased confidence in discussing sexual issues [5.2].

Since 2015, these resources have been freely accessible worldwide via the *Times Education Supplement* website, from which they have been downloaded 1,318 times (as of December 2020) with a 4.8/5 star rating. These materials have also been supplemented with an additional set of dedicated LGBT resources produced in 2017 in collaboration with national educational charity *Schools Out*. The LGBT resources hosted by University of Exeter have been downloaded 2,468 times (as of December 2020) [5.1]. The resource has been downloaded worldwide (e.g., in September-December 2020 alone, in Ireland, France, Iceland, Hong Kong and New Zealand). In France, the resources are being used in the creation of an association for the promotion of inclusive sex education [5.2]

Fisher and the team have worked directly with more than 50 schools (2014-20) to deliver both training to teachers and RSE lessons to pupils [5.2]. However, the Sex & History method has been more widely disseminated across the country through its enthusiastic take-up by highly regarded external agencies. The Sex Education Forum (SEF) is the foremost umbrella network for RSE in the UK, dedicated to quality and equitable RSE, delivering lessons directly in schools across the country and in-depth training to teachers. For example, one member of staff estimated she had delivered lessons to over 400 children and trained over 200 teachers in the past two years [5.3]. In addition, since 2015 SEF have integrated Sex & History resources into various training programmes, including: the government-funded anti-homophobic, -biphobic and -transphobic bullying programme delivered to over 800 schools through face to face training (2015-9); the core training package in all 38 secondary schools in East Sussex over a two-year period; and SEF’s national training portfolio, including approximately 20 one-day training sessions (each attended by c.30 people) per year, reaching roughly 600 teachers annually and 1000s over the past 5 years [5.3].

Another key organisation, the School of Sexuality Education (formerly, Sexplain), developed its programme in consultation with Sex & History, using the resources as part of its portfolio to deliver intersectional, feminist and sex-positive workshops since its inception in 2016. It is now a leading sex-education provider in the UK, working with 33,000+ young people in 200+

schools and delivering training for 250+ teachers. Sex & History also features in a PGCE short course at UCL's Institute of Education [5.3]. The organisation's Co-Founder and CEO notes that 'Sex & History materials are cleverly crafted to allow young people to objectively discuss relevant social issues such as bodily autonomy, gender and sexual pleasure in a way that is removed from their personal lives and experiences... We have found Sex & History particularly useful in addressing anxieties around discussing porn... [it has] influenced our own practice in delivering sex education' [5.3]. These organisations also highlight the uniqueness of Sex & History in its allowing teachers to integrate it into the broader curriculum, and helping them deliver LGBTQ-inclusive RSE, 'a challenge for many teachers, particularly those who have not received training or who do not have support of senior leadership. The Sex and History resource filled a gap in that it looked more broadly at the social and historical context.'

In 2020, Fisher and the team delivered teacher training via webinars, reaching an international audience: 20 members of the National Youth Agency (UK) (with the video of the webinar having been viewed 453 times since September 2020), 90+ teachers through National Education Union, 40 teachers in Hong Kong via the English Schools Foundation and 31 members of the UK Army Welfare Services (working in Cyprus, Kenya and Belize). [5.2]

### **Informing the development and delivery of curricula and new statutory requirements for comprehensive RSE provision**

The impact of the Sex & History method on the delivery of RSE across the UK is widely acclaimed. In December 2017, it was commended by national charity the Family Planning Association for innovation and good practice in RSE [5.4]. In 2018, it was highlighted by Public Health England as a creative approach to health education that addressed inequalities [5.5]. It is one of the featured resources on the PSHE Association website, and Sex & History lesson plans are highlighted in the Department for Education-recommended handbook *Great Relationships and Sex Education* (Hoyle and McGeeny 2019) [5.6].

As part of the development of a new statutory RSE policy in Wales, the team were invited to provide evidence to a Welsh Assembly Expert Panel in June 2017. The policy document informing the development of the new Welsh curriculum, including detailed guidance for schools, cites Sex & History as a case study of innovative and inclusive RSE [5.7]. The team also attended a UK parliament event in November 2017 that informed the new UK guidelines on statutory RSE issued in 2019. Fisher and Langlands are regularly invited to contribute to policy and curriculum-building events for teachers, third-sector practitioners and government officials. These include: the Healthy Sexual Development event for practitioners and teachers (Westminster, June 2017); Delivering Outstanding Sex and Relationships Education by Inside Government (provider of continuing professional development for effective policy implementation to the public and third sector, December 2018); Countdown to Statutory RSE with Sir Antony Seldon (Kingston, March 2019); and PSHCE 200 Secondary Subject Leader Network (Hackney, July 2019) [5.8].

### **Generating new ways for museums to enhance health and wellbeing outcomes**

In 2014, the Sex & History team curated the Intimate Worlds exhibition at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Exeter (April 5-June 29). With over 63,000 visitors, it was an important and innovative exhibition for RAMM [5.9] whose collections and content lead testifies that 'Intimate Worlds provided an opportunity for RAMM to demonstrate to audiences and stakeholders the value and appeal of this type of subject matter, and its relevance... [it] helped to establish the status of the museum as a place for debate within Exeter.' [5.10]

The exhibition and its potential to inform sex education attracted national and international media attention. It was the most-read story in BBC Education news for a week in April 2014 and showcased with vox-pop reactions on BBC Devon's flagship breakfast show. Its

success shaped subsequent activities and policies at RAMM, including the sector-leading LGBT Rainbow Trail and the Queering the Museum project [5.9]. Following the exhibition, Fisher and the team were contacted by people across the museum sector, nationally and internationally, for advice on the display of sexually themed material, modes of youth engagement and the relationship between museums and RSE. Curators at the Wellcome Collection sought their assistance in the development of the Institute of Sexology exhibition (London, 2014-15, 200,000 visitors) [5.10]. They also collaborated on the 'Sex in Six Objects' project in Cambridge in 2016 and in 2015 they were approached by the Women's Museum of Denmark in Aarhus to consult on an education programme regarding sexual health [5.10].

Since 2018 the Sex & History method's applicability to museums has featured on the Museum Studies MA programme at University of Leicester [5.10]. Stuart Frost, of the British Museum, evaluated the Intimate Worlds exhibition in a study discussing the potential for attitudes to sex and sexuality to be explored in UK museums [5.10]. The British Museum subsequently developed its own Let's Talk about Sex programme, and has since collaborated with Fisher and the team in advising a group of museums in Berlin (2015 to present). This has resulted in: a permanent activity for visiting schools at the Bode Museum; a major exhibition, 'The Eroticism of Things: Collections on the History of Sexuality', displayed first at the Werkbundarchiv in Berlin in 2018 and subsequently at the Erotic Art Museum (WEAM) in Miami Beach, Florida in 2019; and the introduction of object-based learning about sexuality at the WEAM, including indexing, researching, curating and exhibiting many objects from the Naomi Wilzig collection that have never previously been displayed [5.10]. The 2018 *Museums as Spaces of Wellbeing* report, produced by the UK's Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, features Sex & History as an example of best practice - further evidence of its wide-ranging impact on the museum sector [5.5].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 *Times Educational Supplement* resources: download data and review score (screenshot, Dec 2020); LGBT+ resources: download data (screenshot, Dec 2020).
- 5.2 Teacher and pupil feedback for RSE sessions and teacher training; school-based sessions; webinar evaluation data; webinar video screenshot; Brook workshop, Redruth (notes and transcription, Aug 2016).
- 5.3 Testimonials (letters, Dec 2020): Head of Training and Practice at SEF (2015-19); Co-Founder and CEO of School of Sexuality Education; and Dr Eleanor Draeger.
- 5.4 University of Exeter news story about Family Planning Association's Pamela Sheridan Award for innovative relationships and sex education (screenshot, Dec 2017).
- 5.5 *Museums as Spaces of Wellbeing* report (2018)
- 5.6 PSHE Association featured resources (screenshot); extracts from Alice Hoyle and Ester McGeeney, *Great Relationships and Sex Education* (Routledge 2019).
- 5.7 Welsh Assembly Report, *Informing the Future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales* (Dec 2017).
- 5.8 Details of RSE conferences and events (invitations and programmes, Oct 2017-June 2018).
- 5.9 Visitor figures for Intimate Worlds (e-mail, Sept 2014); testimonial from Julien Parsons, Collections and Content Lead, RAMM (e-mail, Dec 2020); media coverage (press excerpts, April 2014); BBC Education news (screenshot, April 2014); BBC Radio Devon report (audio file, May 2014).
- 5.10 Correspondence with representatives of the Archive of Sexology, Humboldt-University Berlin, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, Women's Museum in Denmark (e-mails, Mar-Sept 2014); 'Sex in Six Objects' blog (screenshot, Sept 2020); testimonial from Nuala Morse, Lecturer in Museum Studies, University of Leicester (e-mail, Dec 2020); testimonial from Andreas Kraß, Director of Forschungsstelle Kulturgeschichte der Sexualität, Humboldt-University Berlin (Jan 2021); Stuart Frost article.