

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: Classics
Title of case study: Sex and History
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The research of Dr Rebecca Langlands (Department of Classics, University of Exeter) into sexual identities, choices and behaviours both ancient and modern has informed a pioneering approach to improving young people's well-being and sexual health. Working with schools, museums and charities, this methodology, which involves showing young people historical 'erotic' objects from museum holdings, has had a positive impact on young people's mental and physical wellbeing, personal identity, social skills, personal resilience, confidence, sexual health and life chances. Its success has attracted further investment, and influenced sex education policy discussion. It has also enhanced the role of regional museums in effecting social change and well-being, informed debate on the relationship between the health and cultural sectors, created new economically beneficial partnerships, and shaped museum policy.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Dr Langlands' research into sexual morality (see section 3, references 1 and 2) demonstrated how sexual identities and choices in ancient Rome were shaped by the engagement of individuals with shared cultural products such as literature, law and education and that sexual ethics was not a separate sphere of operation but was embedded in wider structures of power and status. It demonstrated that material from and narratives about the past played a significant role in such acculturation. Her research also articulated the benefits for modern awareness of human diversity of this detailed study of ancient Rome, describing a culture with a different way of thinking about sex and ethics and with different preoccupations, revealing the culturally contingent nature of some of our current dominant controversies around sex. Langlands joined Exeter in 1998.</p> <p>These findings fuelled her subsequent collaborative research with Professor Kate Fisher (Department of History, University of Exeter since 2000), which is focused on elucidating the power of the past in the construction of ideas about sex. This research has demonstrated that the past continues to be used as a means of legitimising, articulating and disseminating knowledge about sex (section 3, reference 6). As a case-study, Langlands and Fisher researched the impact of sexually-themed material found at the archaeological sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum, especially the Brothel and the Secret Museum, on visitors' understanding of sex. Two major articles have established the effect of such material on the shaping of sexual identities over the centuries (see section 3 references 3 and 4).</p> <p>A key and original finding of this interdisciplinary, collaborative research is that material from past cultures can act as a productive and challenging stimulus, through which people can explore, develop and think about sexual questions. The research into tourists at Pompeii and Herculaneum demonstrated the ways such visits were experienced as eye-opening and empowering encounters which expanded people's horizons, opened up new ways of thinking about sex, sexual customs, morality, codes, power and autonomy, and legitimated alternative ways of being. Material culture from past societies such as ancient Rome continues to be beneficial in the development of sexual identities in several ways. It demonstrates cultural and historical diversity, allowing people to reflect on similarities and differences between cultures. It offers thought-provoking evidence about human practices, yet provides historical distance that depersonalises discussion. It can be interpreted in many different ways, enabling people to come up with their own interpretations and test theories against their own preconceptions and it also empowers people with the awareness that people have been talking about, thinking about and depicting sex for millennia, encouraging them to feel it is all right for them to do so too. Visual material, such as pictures and artefacts, is revealed by this research to be a particularly effective medium, providing an immediate and arresting point of engagement with the past. This research also explored the issues at stake in museums displays and the challenges museums face in engaging with their varied audiences.</p> <p>Together, these research findings underpin the Sex and History project, directed by Dr Langlands</p>

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and Professor Fisher. The project reconstructs the kind of productive engagement with the past experienced by tourists in Pompeii and Herculaneum, through a variety of public and school-based interventions, workshops and museum visits that use sexually-themed historical objects as a springboard for creative discussion, debate and reflection in groups of young people. The methodology used in these sessions also draws directly on the results of Langlands' research into moral education in ancient Rome, where open-ended debate about scenarios from which they have some cultural distance is shown to have been a particularly effective method of engaging young people in productive discussion about controversial issues of the day (see section 3 reference 3). Sex and History pioneers a new approach to sex education; it provides a wider social and cultural framework for the assimilation of biological and practical information about sexual health, and empowers young people to make healthy choices about sex and relationships.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Evidence of the quality of the underpinning research may be ascertained by the fact that it has all been peer reviewed, and has won funding from the AHRB and a Wellcome Trust Strategic Award.

1. Rebecca Langlands, (2006) *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge University Press). Major peer-reviewed monograph published by leading press.
2. AHRB grant of £12,035 from for the project *Pudicitia: Sexual Ethics in Ancient Rome* in February-June 2003 under its Research Leave scheme.
3. Rebecca Langlands, "Reading for the Moral' in Valerius Maximus: the case of *Severitas*" in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society/Cambridge Classical Journal* 54 (2008), 160-187. Peer reviewed article in leading Classics journal.
4. Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands, "This way to the red light district": the internet generation visits the brothel in Pompeii" in Kim Shahabudin and Dunstan Lowe (eds.) *Classics For All* (2009), 172-194. Peer reviewed article. Research funded by Wellcome Trust Strategic Award.
5. 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). Peer reviewed article in edited volume published by leading press. Research funded by Wellcome Trust Strategic Award.
6. Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands eds., *Sex, Knowledge and Receptions of the Past* (OUP, 2014 forthcoming). Research funded by Wellcome Trust Strategic Award.

4. Details of the impact

The development of an improved sex and relationship education service is a key priority in the South West where rates of sexually transmitted disease infection are increasing, and the teenage pregnancy rate is both higher than the national average in many areas (especially Torbay and Plymouth) and not reducing in line with national targets. Agencies in the South West have highlighted the need for such education to take place not only in formal educational settings, but also within the wider community (youth groups, drop-in centres, museums and libraries) and to include a broad range of issues to do with emotional health and well-being, including self-esteem, communication skills, life skills, understandings of power and consent, positive relationships, and social pressures. Recent Department of Education guidelines highlight the importance of sex education which helps 'children and young people develop confidence in talking, listening and thinking about sex and relationships'. The research of Langlands and Fisher speaks directly to these agenda and through the Sex and History project is having a direct impact on mental and physical health (with particular relevance to sexual health) in Devon and Cornwall in two distinct ways: directly (through work with young people and their teachers/educators) and indirectly (by making a contribution to policy discussion). In December 2008, Langlands and Fisher established Sex and History, and developed their particular methodology of using museum objects to facilitate the exploration of contemporary issues around sex, gender and personal identity, in collaboration with five regional museums, in excess of 30 schools and colleges, sexual health charities, sex

education experts, local authority youth services, young people's charities and arts organisations. The project's methodology has since been implemented in a variety of settings, with positive long-term impacts. Sex and History has involved museum-based workshops, creative responses (linked in some cases to coursework, including film making, soundscapes, dance, animation), museum visits, intergenerational discussion, exhibition curation, sex education sessions within schools (totalling in excess of 1,000 young participants), and a sex education resource pack, developed with Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro, trialled in 20 schools in Cornwall (totalling in excess of 15,000 pupils).

An independent evaluation by Hope Stone Research [1] (drawing on over 100 interviews) has concluded that the project has delivered significant social outcomes for the young people involved: 'it empowered participants to talk honestly in a trusting environment (through the projective techniques – discussing in the third person, and exploring historical objects and behaviour in the past, rather than the embarrassment of talking about sex directly); opened up discussion of topics that are particularly difficult to address, concerning issues such as consent, pornography and power within relationships; provided young people with an awareness of historical difference that encouraged them to challenge contemporary attitudes or resist peer pressure; fostered greater understanding of cultural difference; encouraged social and familial ties (many reported that they were able to have discussions with their peers and in particular their parents, often for the first time); encouraged healthy lifestyles and contributed to mental and physical well being (some projects had a noticeable impact on participants' body image and self-esteem) [1, 3, 7]. A participant from Exeter's state tertiary education college stated: *"We found it inspirational...The historical objects opened our minds to new ideas. It made us more mature in the way we thought about sex. We all discovered things about ourselves."* A Team Leader from Plymouth Youth Service commented: *"In every young person in our group we can see how this project has developed and moved them to a different place."*

The effect of using the Sex and History methodology in projects with vulnerable young people was particularly profound. A long-term evaluation report [3] which traced the lives of 35 participants referred by Plymouth Children's services over a 3 year period, concluded that the Sex and History methodology had enriched their lives, ameliorated some of the effects of structural disadvantages and provided a sustained transformation in future opportunities and personal well-being. One, who was in trouble for shoplifting, was deemed by a magistrate to have successfully turned his life around, as a result of his involvement in Sex and History, and subsequently obtained work as a child-care apprentice. Another, who enrolled in a media course and secured employment as a producer with an arts company, commented: *"It gave me direction; it showed me what I was capable of. It changed me to the person I am now. It was a major turning point in my life."*

A report on the trial of a sex education resource pack [2] found it to be attractive and useful, and this initiative is now informing policy debate. A teacher from Exeter Academy of Music and Sound said: *"We have to deliver certain SRE targets in college and we use college tutorials ... [but] it's hard. This provided a new way of meeting these requirements. The objects are surprising... They facilitate discussion, they make it okay to talk about sex...We've never found a better way to do it. It was a revelation."* Langlands and Fisher are continuing develop the methodology and methods of delivery, and work towards embedding it in national sex education policy and delivery, in collaboration with regional co-ordinators of PHSE and SRE in Bristol, Cornwall and Devon and with the newly-formed national RSE Hub, and have recently been invited to showcase the project at the national Sex Education Forum.

In all its many manifestations (object-based workshops in schools and colleges in Devon and Cornwall, museum/archival visits, exhibition curation and creative object-response projects [1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10]), the Sex and History project has brought young people into close collaboration with five regional museums (Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth City Museum, RCM Truro, RAMM Exeter, Russell Coates Museum, Bournemouth) their collections, and the Wellcome Trust collection in London. A third party report concluded that the use of the Sex and History methodology in museum settings transformed relationships between museums and young people (already identified as an important but hard to reach audience). Young people reported a change in

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their attitudes towards what museums can offer, a new appreciation of the value of historic objects and their relevance to their own lives, and some are now working towards future careers in the cultural sector [3, 10]. Museums reported a change in the ways in which they use their collections, a rethinking of their archiving and cataloguing practices, and new learning about their objects from the research. Museums found the methodology a refreshing and effective way of working with young people, engaging them on a deep level, e.g. through co-curation, which produced impressive creative outputs that enhanced the museums' displays and reached new audiences [1]. In Truro the methodology informed a reshaping of the ways in which the museum staff work with their collections. Staff were retrained and a report published by Truro has been promoted nationally by the Collections Trust as an example of best practice within the nationwide Revisiting Collections' agenda [10].

Through the Sex and History project, Exeter University, young people's charities, sexual health agencies, arts organisations and museums have developed new, mutually beneficial long-term connections and partnerships. The Sex and History project has received positive media attention, it won an award for Outstanding Social and Cultural Impact at the Exeter Impact Awards (2011) and was put forward for an EngageU award for European innovation in university public engagement. Since 2009 Sex and History's innovative methodology has been widely recognised as an effective and adaptable model, and has attracted a wide range of partners who seek to make use of it. The third party report also highlighted the economic benefits to partner organisations of working with the Sex and History methodology: *Fictional Projects* is using the methodology to construct a marketable games-based resource, youth facilitators have used to project to develop consultancy work, and the dynamics arts company *Effervescent* attributed the increase of its turnover by 320% between 2010-11 and 2012-13, its increased regional visibility and its showcasing by the Arts Council to its work on the Sex and History project. [1] The methodology is currently being developed with leading children's charity Barnardos as a way of working with very vulnerable young people. The Arts Council has showcased the project as a model for using the arts to enhance health and well-being. It was presented at a workshop on Strategic Commissioning for the Arts, Health and Wellbeing, a keynote provocation on Next Steps in Commissioning Arts and Health practice to symposium of regional experts in Health, Wellbeing and the Arts, and showcased at the Devon Museums Forum 2013.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Third party evaluation of whole Sex and History project, undertaken by Hope Stone Research on the basis of over 100 interviews.
2. Report on the trial of the *Talking Sex* pack in schools in Cornwall, (developed with Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro and head of PSHE Cornwall).
3. Impact Review <http://tinyurl.com/phhq438> by *Effervescent: Social Alchemy* of short and longer term impact of Plymouth-based *Lust in Translation* project.
4. The *Sex and History* blog <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/sexandhistory/> containing direct feedback from participants in the project as well as links to further websites showcasing material and feedback from the project.
5. Evaluative report <http://conversation-pieces.net/?p=79> by our collaborator *Fictional Projects* of *Playing with Objects: Conversation Pieces*, a REACT-funded collaboration games designers.
6. Commissioned evaluative report of REACT-funded *Playing with Objects* play tests and facilitator-led sessions with Exeter College.
7. Case report on the *Bourne Fairies* project, by the Russell Coates Museum, Bournemouth.
8. Evaluation Reports commissioned by the Royal Albert Memorial Museum on the *Revealing Collections* Creative Workshops (2011), involving Exeter College, Academy of Music and Sound and Exeter Foyer.
9. *Lust in Translation* Website <http://eff.org.uk/lit> showcasing the outcomes and feedback from the 2011 project with vulnerable youth and elderly, Plymouth City Museums and Archives and *Effervescent: Social Alchemy*.
10. "Revisiting Collections" case-study promoted by national charity the Collections Trust using the 2010 *Revealing Collections* project with Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro. [Read the project case study here.](#)