

How AHRC-funded Film RUFUS STONE Inspired a Project on the Next Generation

[AHRC Web Film](#), [Uncategorized](#) April 9, 2018 5 Minutes

In our latest blog, Dr Kip Jones – Director of Bournemouth [University's Centre for Qualitative Research](#) – describes how his short film RUFUS STONE captured the hearts of a new generation and how his next project hopes to understand why.

The short film [RUFUS STONE](#) – the production of which I led as part of a team at Bournemouth University – is seven years old this year. It's been screened widely over this time, seen by more than 24,000 people in 150 countries online and by many more in schools, universities, international conferences, community organisations, and health and social care settings.

It tells a tale of youth and same-sex attraction and what happens when gossip and insensitivity impinge upon young lives, changing them forever. Our screenings of this story, particularly to young people, have impressed upon us how a supposedly 'old' story – the film is set in rural Britain more than 50 years ago – still resonates with young people today. Beginning with the awards presented by the Youth Jury at the *Rhode Island Film Festival* (2012), interest and praise for the film and its story have often unexpectedly come from young people.

Presentations in the LGBT community (at the *Space Youth Group* in Dorset for example), and time spent teaching undergraduates have caused me to speculate as to why young people today are so moved by a story of youth from 50 years ago. One possibility is that peer pressure, and a heteronormative society 'coming out', all contribute to the difficulties of navigating life for LGBT youth today.

These observations raise the question: Is today's youth still troubled by issues of sexuality and identity in their interface with society?

My new project – entitled "Rufus Stone ... the next Generation" – will contribute to knowledge on the substantive topic of 'Post-Millennials' or 'Generation Z' (GenZ), focusing on their anxieties and ambiguous approaches around gender and sexuality.

GenZ's birth years range from the mid-1990s to early 2000s. Comfortable with technology, this cohort has grown up with a feeling of unsettlement and insecurity around the future, and ambivalence around gender and sexual identities. The project will explore how these attitudes may impact their mental health and general outlook for their future, as well as their relationships with each other and their wider communities.

Evidence so far indicates a fluidity of gender roles and dissidence towards traditional sexuality among those in Generation Z.

Inspired by a major US survey by the Centre for Disease Control on GenZ's concepts of gender and sexuality – our interest was further piqued by a major special issue on "The

Gender Revolution” in *National Geographic* (Jan 2017): “Unimaginable a decade ago, the intensely personal subject of gender identity has entered the public square”.

This openness to discussion of sexuality and gender begins to expose this latest generation’s ambivalence, even dissonance, around issues of gender and sexuality. Or are these insecurities similar to those of previous generations, but just more visible as a result of today’s no-holds-barred, often anonymous, engagement with social media?

This study has the potential to unlock this phenomenon, and, through an interface of Project GenZ’s attitudes with knowledge of the experiences of past generations, understand more fully individual anxieties and dissonance in regard to sexuality and gender.

Research Questions:

- *How do Gen Z youth see themselves in relation to the wider, more pervasive heteronormative culture?*
- *How do Gen Z young people perceive differences (or not) in their interface with identity, sexuality and gender than those of previous generations?*

Because GenZ is the first generation to be totally hooked up to technology since birth, I want to work with mobile phones and iPads and social media over several months in sessions with them producing their own film/video about their lives and relationships.

The project will use of arts-led research group work such as film screenings to generate discussion; and participants will take part in TV studio work and record video diaries to elicit personal takes on sexuality and gender issues. Students will be sensitively engaged in reflecting on their own experiences and anxieties around sexual identity through the various tools and methods.

The Project will involve GenZ students as both participants in the research and as “co-creators”. Data will be gathered in a congenial and participatory way, conducive with the principles of Performative Social Science and Relational Aesthetics.*

We’ll then take the stories from that, and some of the participants as well, into the TV studio at Bournemouth University and edit pieces for possible transmission on YouTube. All this from their input, stories and participation from young people at each phase.

In the end, we would like to end up with something like the Norwegian series SKAM** – a Norwegian TV series about Oslo teenagers and issues of self-identity and internalised homophobia – or at least with a similar look and feeling. Of course, things could change as we go along and that’s okay too.

We’re currently applying for funding to work with young people aged 16-18, involving them in telling their stories, through video recorded on their phones or iPads, then concluding with a series of internet broadcasts co-created by involving them in every stage of production. We’ve run one small workshop on ‘Gender & Sexuality in the 21st Century’ so far, and the participation from young people was fantastic.

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Notes

RUFUS STONE can be viewed in full here: <https://vimeo.com/109360805>

*Performative Social Science (PSS) is an arts-based method of research and dissemination developed by Jones at Bournemouth University over ten years and is recognized internationally. Relational Aesthetics provides the philosophical bedrock on which PSS has been built.

Relational ‘Art’ is located in human interactions and their social contexts. Central to it are inter-subjectivity (“the psychological relation between people” or social psychology), being together, the encounter and collective elaboration of meaning (Bourriaud, 1998). These are philosophical principles that are central to PSS as a rich methodological development in qualitative research. Recently lauded by Sage Publications, they described Jones’ Performative Social Science as pioneering work that will ‘propel arts-led research forward’ and be a “valued resource for students and researchers for years to come”.

**“*SKAM*”, the Norwegian TV series about Oslo teenagers, has influenced our concept and will be used to engage youth in telling their own stories. Set in Oslo, *SKAM*, (or *SHAME* in English), is coming-of-age TV drama that follows the lives of a group of teenagers and the challenges that they face throughout high school. The Norwegian series shows a deep understanding of the struggles with self-identity and internalised homophobia that so many LGBTQ+ people go through. This series has touched the hearts of many people and will certainly withstand the test of time, much the same as RUFUS STONE has done.