

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Sheffield Hallam University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA23 - Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Influencing Debate, Design and Practice around Toilets and Accessibility		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> April 2014 - February 2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Jen Slater	Reader	2012 - present
Dr Charlotte Jones	Research Fellow	2015 - 2018
Jill Pluquailec	Senior Lecturer	2014 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> April 2014 - December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		

## 1. Summary of the impact

Working from the ethos that 'everybody has a toilet story to share', this award-winning interdisciplinary research has broadened and deepened discussions of toilets and accessibility with a diverse range of people in the UK, Europe and North America. These include those directly affected by the issues, those reached through public engagement, and people with institutional responsibilities who are in a position to instigate change. As a result, this work has: i) enabled activism, influenced communities and informed professional practice, ii) influenced policy and practice in toilet accessibility and design, iii) stimulated debate and shaped discourse, and iv) inspired methodological innovation in public engagement. The research has led to shifting and more holistic attitudes towards toilet accessibility, as well as changing infrastructure to allow a more diverse range of people access to public space. A legacy of project materials has enabled others to stimulate change on their own terms.

## 2. Underpinning research

Around the Toilet (AtT) is the umbrella term for a series of research projects led by Dr Jen Slater and funded by the AHRC Connected Communities Programme (April 2015 - February 2018, £176,222). Slater's previous research at the intersection of gender and disability, alongside experience of inclusive and creative research design [R5, R6], meant that they were well-positioned to lead research bringing together diverse and underrepresented groups. The resulting bid was rated as 'world leading' by the AHRC's review process. The research team, from across four universities, brought interdisciplinary expertise in: disability, gender, sex and sexuality studies (Slater, Jones, Pluquailec - Sheffield Hallam University; Liddiard - University of Sheffield), architecture (Procter - University of Sheffield and Manchester Metropolitan University), English literature (Cumings - University of Leeds), and youth and childhood (Slater, Pluquailec, Procter, Liddiard). Research design was responsive, arts-informed and co-created through close partnerships with a diverse range of grassroots and community organisations, activists, and others affected by toilet inaccessibility.

AtT found that although toilets are often considered mundane and private, they are integral to wider accessibility [R1, R2, R4]. Furthermore, discussions of accessibility are usually confined to 'red-tape' building regulations and assumed to only affect disabled people. Yet, many non-disabled people also have inadequate toilet access and therefore have limited access to public space. Whereas most toilet research comes from the perspective of a particular user-group (e.g. disabled or older people), AtT was unique in considering toilet accessibility holistically, particularly seeking to engage with under-researched groups, including trans people, mobile workers, toilet cleaners, parents and carers, children and young people, and people whose religion impacted upon toilet use. It is a rare example of a trans-inclusive approach to UK toilet research [R1].

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The research identified large and small-scale changes that should be made to improve toilets, and accessibility more broadly. This included improving toilets currently marked as ‘accessible’ but that remain inaccessible to many disabled people [R2]; and increased gender-neutral provision, which would benefit both transgender people [R1] and cisgender (not trans) people (e.g. for parents with children of a different gender, or by reducing queue sizes for women’s toilets). It also concluded that because toilets are a reflection of who is expected and welcome in public space, inadequate toilet provision is not only a matter of function and infrastructure, but also one of culture, relations and attitudes towards marginalised groups [R1, R2].

The wide range of organisations involved were able to both represent and disseminate to their diverse communities. Accessible outputs which could be put to practical use were created at every stage of the research. These included illustrated postcards detailing key findings, three short animated films (one of which toured film festivals), and a collaboratively written zine (mini magazine), which enabled international participation and design toolkits to help architects/design professionals and students rethink their approach to toilet design (all openly available at [aroundthetoilet.com](http://aroundthetoilet.com)). Data collection and dissemination merged, as participants were invited to write for academic and non-academic publications [e.g. R2]. Around the Toilet was awarded the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement’s (NCCPE’s) Engage Award 2016 for the ways in which it “took something seemingly mundane - the toilet - and used it to leverage profound change in how people think about and design toilets”. The NCCPE called it a “remarkable project... weaving the very best of the arts, humanities and social science disciplines” [E1].

### 3. References to the research

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- R1.** Jones, C. and Slater, J. (2020). The Toilet Debate: Stalling Trans Possibilities and Defending ‘Women’s Protected Spaces’. *The Sociological Review*. 68(4), 834-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934697>
- R2.** Jones, C., Slater, S., Cleasby, S., Kemp., G., Lisney, E. and Rennie, S. (2019). Pissed Off! Disability Activists Fighting for Toilet Access in the UK. In M. Berghs, T. Chataika and Y. El-Lahib (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Disability Activism*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351165082-18>.
- R3.** Slater, J., Jones, C. and Procter, L. (2019). Troubling School Toilets: Resisting Discourses of ‘Development’ through a Critical Disability Studies and Critical Psychology Lens. *Discourse*, 40(3), 412-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1316237>
- R4.** Slater, J., Jones, C. and Procter, L. (2018). School Toilets: Queer, Disabled Bodies and Gendered Lessons of Embodiment. *Gender and Education*, 30(8), 951-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1270421>
- R5.** Slater, J., Ágústsdóttir, E. and Haraldsdóttir, F. (2018). Becoming Intelligible Woman: Gender, Disability and Resistance at the Border Zone of Youth. *Feminism & Psychology*, 28(3), 409-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353518769947>
- R6.** Slater, J. (2015). *Youth and Disability: A Challenge to Mr Reasonable*. Routledge <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315546001>. Available on request

All articles were rigorously peer-reviewed prior to publication in leading journals in the field. **R2** is a chapter in a book published by Routledge. **R6** is a monograph, also published by Routledge. All of Routledge’s books are peer-reviewed at proposal and manuscript stage by respected academic specialists, who provide rigorous independent scrutiny of their quality.

### 4. Details of the impact

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The research has had impact in four main areas:

#### Enabling Activism, Influencing Communities and Informing Professional Practice

Varied and provocative outputs have created a legacy of project findings that are accessible to wide ranging audiences. Research outputs have been used at 23 researcher-led public events in the UK, Iceland and Canada, reaching around 800 people [E2]. Films have been screened at three international film festivals (audience approximately 200) [E2] and watched around 2800 times online [E3]. Leading national charities such as ERIC (the children’s bowel and bladder charity)

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and Colostomy UK have endorsed the outputs. Sharing the film, *The Toilet* on Twitter, Colostomy UK said, “A great film from [@cctoilettalk](#). Let’s talk about toilets and poo more and not be ashamed. No one should be worried about not being able to find a suitable place to go to the toilet!” [E4].

Outputs are designed to be used by activist, community and stakeholder groups, independently of the researchers. Materials, including postcards detailing key findings and 200 zines, have also been requested by and distributed to local councils, youth centres, community groups, libraries, galleries, hairdressers, student unions, and architecture practices - in England, Ireland, Scotland, France and the USA [E5]. Outputs have been used in workshops and events by four community/campaigning groups, two youth organisations, in training for educational practitioners and installed as part of museum and gallery exhibitions, reaching approximately another 3000 people [E2]. An organiser of Tabu Disabled Women’s Collective in Reykjavik said that using the findings postcards in workshops for disabled women made talking about people’s own experiences of toilet accessibility less taboo, and that she would “continue to use the project within activism to get different activists together” (specifically, disabled, queer and trans activists) [E6]. A staff member at Edinburgh Zine Library (where a copy of the zine is available to the public) said that the zine “opens questions about public spaces, how we use them, and who gets to use them. It’s a real conversation starter, not just for disabilities, but also for social issues like homelessness. Basically, love love love it.” [E6].

Kirklees council have been using AtT films and zines in training on equalities issues with primary and secondary school staff. A trainer reported that this has led to staff feeling “a lot more confident in working with trans young people to make school a positive environment”, including the provision of gender-neutral toilets. By 2020, 110 staff had encountered the materials through their training. [E7]

The diverse nature of the research, focusing on a multitude of access needs, meant that through engaging with resources, audiences reported learning about accessibility requirements other than their own. For example, after screening an AtT film, a member of Trans Pride Iceland said that although their members were knowledgeable about trans access needs, “no-one knew before that having running water in or near the toilet is important for many Muslim people. Many people admitted that they have always thought of ‘accessible’ washrooms as simply ones accessible with a standard sized wheelchair” [E6]. Many audiences reported the snowball effects of research engagement, where they went on to talk to others about toilet accessibility. Some were also inspired to do their own toilet activism. For example, a collaborator involved in creating the zine said that she learnt that emergency red chords in accessible toilets need to hang to the floor to be effective. Whereas she previously tied these up so as not to accidentally trigger the alarm, she now undoes them if she finds them tangled when using a toilet, so they can be used effectively [E6].

The research itself has also had a direct impact on an audience outside of academia, for example, a trans woman activist on Twitter wrote of the importance of R1 to trans people’s campaigning, as it is “full of vital elements of knowledge that we all know as trans people but rarely gets written down as data” [E6].

### Influencing Policy and Practice in Toilet Accessibility and Design

The research has influenced both debate and the design of toilets, as discussion and design are often interconnected. In 2016, G39 Gallery in Cardiff invited the research team to hold a workshop on accessible toilet design, which was attended by 20 artists. A new gender-neutral, accessible toilet was then designed as an ‘artist response’ to our research and installed in the gallery. Research artwork and stimuli was displayed at the gallery for two months as part of their ‘Does that include us?/ yn cynnwys ni?’ exhibition, attracting around 250 visitors [E2, E7]. Disability Collaborative for Museums, a national organisation of museum professionals which influences and advises museums about inclusivity and accessibility, called the AtT report an “incredibly useful document offering practical ideas; it does not just highlight the issue but offers solutions to how it can be addressed” [E7]. They use it as an auditing tool for museum toilets, and have shared it with others in the heritage sector and civil service.

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NHS England have consulted with AtT researchers and used the AtT report to write their 'Toilets for All' standards. Six 'toilets for all' were subsequently installed at a site in Leeds. The Diversity and Inclusion Manager at NHS England said that these toilets have *"impacted on employee wellbeing, as there are now adequate toilet facilities to meet a range of needs"*. Toilets for All are being considered for roll-out across NHS England's other 40 offices. The Diversity and Inclusion Manager also stated that the company contracted to install the NHS England toilets are now using the Toilets for All standards as a benchmark in other contexts, including oil rigs and prisons [E7].

The research was quoted extensively in a report used to justify a scheme to introduce 'culturally inclusive' toilets at Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU's) campus, including appropriate washing facilities and not facing the qibla [E8]. It has also been referenced in a trans-inclusion document, written collaboratively by University of Edinburgh students and staff to *"help staff understand and recognise microaggressions based on transphobia"* [E8].

Two design toolkits have been used in workshops with 20 architects, and 'design studios' with 30 architecture students at the University of Sheffield and the University of Creative Arts in Canterbury [E2]. When asked whether the workshop and toolkit were useful to her in practice, one architect attending a workshop said, *"well I'm going to be drawing some toilets later, so I'll look at the toilet toolkit before I draw them in!"* [E7] Another said the experience had *"definitely"* influenced her practice and inclusive toilet design was now *"in my consciousness"*. She confirmed that other architects often contact her to say *"oh we're just using [the AtT design toolkit]"* when designing toilets [E7].

Around the Toilet was referenced in a government consultation on accessibility, *Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment*, which will inform future government reviews of Part M of Building Regulations, by stipulating minimum accessibility requirements [E9].

### Stimulating Debate and Shaping Discourse

The breadth of debate stimulated by the project has been diverse. Mainstream press coverage in national tabloid and broadsheet news-outlets such as The Sun (print and online), The Daily Mail and The Guardian have resulted in over nearly 10,000 shares and around 2900 comments [E10]. The coverage has sometimes been controversial and demonstrated misunderstanding. Yet comments generated underneath articles, on media Facebook and Twitter sites, and on discussion forums such as Reddit, have reiterated our mantra that 'everybody has a toilet story to share', as commenters shared their own ideas and experiences. For example, one Daily Mail commenter shared that Scandinavian toilets are routinely mixed gender, while another suggested prioritising *"providing clean, un-vandalised facilities"*. A comment thread on the Facebook page of local newspaper, The Sheffield Star, discussed the more common use of unisex toilets in bars and clubs, and another commenter shared that mixed gender toilets were considered *"unacceptable"* in their former workplace. Reddit users discussing project press coverage suggested that toilet rooms could be merged to *"offer a unisex room for all, with individual toilet cubicles, communal wash, plus baby change"* [E10]. Press coverage has also come from targeted publications - such as in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) news-outlets, The Gay UK, Pink News and LGBTQ Nation - again resulting in further debate and comment (e.g. 3500 shares of the LGBTQ Nation Article) [E10]. Interestingly, Pink News commentators (presumably more likely to be LGBT people), were as conflicted as to the use of all-gender toilets as commentators in the mainstream press. When one reader commented that toilets should remain gender separated, but that people should be able to choose for themselves which to use *"as we have all done for hundreds of years"*, another asserted that separating toilets by gender was a more recent Victorian phenomenon, while a third entered to speculate that gender separation began after World War II. Sector specific press, such as The Times Educational Supplement and Museum Practice (an online magazine for museum professionals) have also covered the research [E10]. The project team have been interviewed and quoted in other media coverage, such as an article originally in Wired on toilets in the workplace, which was then reprinted and mentioned on mainstream television shows such as Have I Got News for You. The research team have also been featured on health and fitness podcast SHHH. R1 has also been cited in a long-read piece from The Atlantic [E10].

### Inspiring Methodological Innovation in Public Engagement

Innovative methodologies employed by AtT have influenced the ways in which public engagement research is done. As well as recognising the methodological significance through the

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aforementioned award, the NCCPE has used AtT as an ‘exemplar of collaborative research’ case study on their website, and in professional development programmes - which have trained 160 researchers and 120 engagement professionals. The Director of Business and Strategy for the NCCPE said that using AtT as a case study allowed them to “*evidence the key principles of high-quality engagement*” and provide a case study of the “*different impacts of collaborative engagement*” [E1]. A designer and researcher, involved in training 500 students and 90 educators and museum professionals in design, similarly commented that AtT had changed his approach to public engagement. He said, “*the focus on widening voices in design discussions pushed me to consider how I could offer more local and more diverse design challenges into my workshops and workshop materials*” [E7]. An educator at Edinburgh Zine Library running an ‘entry level zine workshops’, said that they often use the Around the Toilet zine as it is “*a perfect example of local activism and working together to make something happen*”. They added that it demonstrates “*to all ages... [that]... serious media can come in non-serious packages*” [E6].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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- E1. NCCPE press release and testimonial from Director of Business and Strategy
- E2. Details of 37 events featuring Around the Toilet materials/talks (both researcher and non-researcher-led)
- E3. Evidence of number of YouTube views from Around the Toilet YouTube channel
- E4. Screenshots of Tweets from ERIC (the children’s bowel and bladder charity) and Colostomy UK
- E5. Distribution list for 200 zines
- E6. Testimonials regarding the use of research outputs in four community settings
- E7. Testimonials regarding the use of research outputs in seven professional and practitioner contexts
- E8. Reports from Higher Education settings: 1) Manchester Metropolitan University Business Case: Culturally Inclusive Toilet Facilities (2020); 2) University of Edinburgh: Recognising and Counteracting Microaggressions against Trans and/or Non-Binary People (2020)
- E9. House of Commons, Women’s and Equalities Committee Report: Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment (2016-17)
- E10. Details of 23 media engagements and examples of subsequent public discussion