Researcher-Led Initiative Fund Application Form

Thank you for your interest in applying to the Researcher-Led Initiative (RLI) Fund.

Applications are invited from University of Sussex doctoral researchers and early career research staff for funding to support short-term, well-defined training and development or public engagement projects.

The deadline for applications is Friday 16th November 2018.

Please ensure that you have read the [guidance](#) before completing your application.

1. Name

██████████

2. Sussex e-mail address
██████@sussex.ac.uk

3. Contact telephone number

4. School and department of lead applicant
School of Media, Film and Music

5. Are you a doctoral researcher or early career research staff?
Doctoral researcher

Type of activity

Do you wish to apply for funding for a training and development initiative, or a public engagement initiative?
Public engagement initiative

About the public engagement initiative

Please tell us about the purpose of the public engagement initiative.

You may select any or all of the options below. Please explain your rationale when prompted.

Is the purpose of your activity to inform and inspire the public?
No

Is the purpose of your activity to consult and listen to public views?
Yes

Please explain your rationale
The main purpose of the activity is to listen to the opinions of female readers of the genre of domestic noir. The consultation will take the shape of reading groups and will ask participants to read a selection of six domestic noir novels. They will then come together in groups of five to seven participants to discuss themes, characters and narrative structures as well as if and how issues portrayed in the novels relate to their everyday lives. Consulting readers of the subgenre will allow for my project to gain a new, fresh perspective, that of readers. This will allow me to move beyond only textual interpretation and the ideas of the genre's authors.

Is the purpose of your activity to collaborate with the public?
Yes

Please explain your rationale

My project is secondarily about collaborating with the public library service of Brighton and Hove to make my research more accessible to people outside academia. Additionally, we hope to create a space for the discussion of crime novels in the libraries as the existing reading groups focus solely on traditional literature and the fantasy/ sci-fi genre. By doing so I hope to create a platform for women to feel comfortable to speak out about everyday sexism incidents, feel supported and empowered.

Why do you want to engage with the public? What do you hope to achieve by engaging?
My research focuses on the crime subgenre of domestic noir, its definition, characteristics, themes and most importantly, its popularity in today's society. The publishing industry claims it to be a newly 'invented' subgenre and its definition was given by the creator of the term, the author Julia Crouch. Popular novels falling within the subgenre are novels such as Gone Girl (2012) and Girl on the Train (2105). By placing the subgenre in its historical and literary context of the Female Gothic and the Female Woman's Thriller, it is revealed that the subgenre is not a newly emerged phenomenon but is part of a long-standing tradition of female writing giving voice to female fears and anxieties. Together with the narrative plots and themes, the same fears and anxieties including imprisonment, domestic and sexual violence and limiting expectations of femininity arise again and again. These especially emerge after social, cultural and economical changes. To examine the current emergence and popularity in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the thesis will place the subgenre within the current postfeminist and neoliberal climate investigating how these dominant ideologies shape the fears and experiences expressed within the novels. In order to do so, a close reading of the themes including the toxic marriage, the murderous and secretive husband and the dangerous house and home will be undertaken. However, to fully understand its popularity in today's society, I believe it will be highly beneficial to my research to facilitate discussions between female readers of the subgenre around how they understand and relate to the themes, fears and anxieties depicted in domestic noir. In this way, I hope for my research to stay in touch with concerns of real women and how popular literature is able to reflect, empower and raise awareness for current political and social concerns.

I would also like to understand if and how these fears relate to the women's everyday lives in regards to everyday sexism portrayed in the books. This in turn will allow me to explore a more in-depth and focused definition of the popular subgenre than the one offered by its creator, Julia Crouch. Even though the publishing industry and the authors use the term of domestic noir for the purpose of marketing their books, it is the readers and critics who oftentimes influence the categorisation of a genre. This is evident in websites such as Goodreads in which genre lists are created and updated by readers of the books. These list link novels to each other and are reviewed by the readers. Not only do readers influence genres but oftentimes, the relationship between the publishing industry and readers is understood to be through "genre as a social contract" (Lovitt in Dove, 1997, p.95). To then understand the whole picture of the relevance and popularity of domestic noir, consulting readers is as important as the authors and the books themselves.

Furthermore, with the book club I would like to create a friendly and supportive environment and platform for women to discuss their experiences with each other in an era where the #MeToo movement has become a significant part of our cultural lives. As Waldman (2018) observes in her article, literature and film are often reflective of the society we live in and are great starting points to discuss important political and social issues as well as support others going through similar things. Indeed, this is in direct reference to the women's book clubs that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. In these book clubs women would raise awareness for sexism in society and created a space for empowerment and solidarity through sharing experiences (Rehberg Sedo, 2004). Reading is often seen as solitary activity but coming together to discuss books can allow for discussion about shared interpretations and personal struggles but also what active steps could be taken to counter the everyday sexism culture. This is especially important for a genre that is being widely read and is filtering through to other kinds of media including film, TV and even games. Additionally, this activity also engages with the campaign of #ReadMoreWomen that was started earlier this year through the non-profit organisation, Electric Literature. This is to encourage readers to see the value of diverse reading and celebrate female writing talent.

Dove, G., 1997. The Reader and the Detective Story. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular

Press.

Rehberg Sedo, D., 2004. Badges of Wisdom, Spaces for Being: A Study of Contemporary Women's Book Clubs [online]. Thesis (PhD). Simon Fraser University.

Waldman, K., 2018. One Year of #MeToo: "He said, she said" is a literary problem, too. The New Yorker [online], 10 October 2018. Available from: https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/one-year-of-metoo-he-said-she-said-is-a-literary-problem-too [Accessed 13 November 2018].

What are the objectives of the activity? Please list the steps you will take to achieve these objectives.
The objective of this activity is to bring together a diverse range of women to discuss the subgenre of domestic noir to

1)   Understand if and how the books relate to the women's everyday lives.
2)   Understand the reason for the genre's popularity in the last few years (since 2012 with the publication of the genre's flagship Gone Girl).
3)   Create a discussion forum for women to discuss #MeToo moments in their lives through the lens of domestic noir books in a friendly and empowering environment.

I hope to achieve this by taking the following steps:

•   To engage with women from different backgrounds I will provide the books for the reading groups' participants (up to 25 women) free of charge. The groups will take place in different local libraries around Brighton and Hove (Jubilee, Moulsecoomb, Patcham and Hove), which present a neutral, accessible and friendly space.
•   The participants will meet every two weeks to discuss one of the books (a total of six books).
•   The discussions will be minimally structured to allow for participants to lead the discussions but initial discussion topics will be prepared in advance in case discussion does not flow.
•   The discussions will be audio recorded and transcribed. Participants will be informed about this ahead of time and will receive an information sheet and consent form.
•   Small activities within the sessions will also be planned to engage people in further discussion around the books and allow the participants to get to know each other. These will include icebreakers and inviting along the author of Her Husband's Lover (2017), Julia Crouch (she lives in Brighton) to the session on her book.
•   Coffee and tea as well as some biscuits will be provided to participants.
•   As some of the books touch on themes that could potentially lead to discussions around experiences of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, I will make sure that at each session signposting material and information of appropriate organisations and support groups will be available for all participants.

How will you evaluate whether you have achieved the objectives of the activity?
My evaluation will be split into two parts. Firstly, I will ask participants to write down on post-it notes one positive and one negative point of feedback after each session for me to monitor if the participants enjoy the sessions and what they would like to change.
Secondly, a short questionnaire (not more than one page) with open questions will be used to evaluate the readers understanding and awareness of the subgenre at the beginning of the reading group sessions and at the end. Participants will also be asked to evaluate if reading and discussing these books had a supporting and empowering effect on them.
Moreover, the discussions will be audio recorded with the participants consent to be able to use the data in my research project. The discussions will be transcribed and coded to understand patterns and themes in the discussions of the books.

Who are your target audience/participants and how many people do you expect to engage with?
The target audience of this project are women from different backgrounds over the age of 18. As domestic noir novels are mostly told from a female point of view, written by almost exclusively women and discuss women's issues and experiences, this study limits the participants to women only. I hope to engage with around 25 women from different ages, ethnicities, and sexualities etc. One of the challenges of engaging with a variety of women is disposable income to buy copies of the domestic noir books. The libraries also do not have stocked enough copies of the books, which is why I would like to provide all participating women with copies of the books to minimise barriers. This is to ensure that the activity is as accessible and inclusive as possible. The participants can keep the books for themselves after the study.
No previous experience is necessary but women that are interested in reading (members of other book clubs for example) will be specifically targeted. I am closely working with ████████ the Libraries Service Manager of Brighton and Hove Libraries, who will act as the audience champion establishing contact with existing book club members of Brighton and Hove Libraries. Furthermore, printed versions of the poster will be put in participating Libraries. To make the activity more accessible, I am planning to hold the reading groups in local libraries around Brighton and Hove (as mentioned above). The timings of the reading groups will also selected to fit around the participants' childcare and work commitments. To raise awareness for the activity I have created a poster/ flyer that will be posted to the Facebook and Twitter page of Brighton and Hove Libraries as well as appear on TV screens at the libraries.

What is the timeline of the project? Please include start and end dates, and key milestones.
The timeline of this project is set to be five months from the beginning of January to the end of May. Recruitment of participants will start in early January and the reading groups are set to start in the week commencing 25th of February. The participants will be given a book every two weeks to read and will then come together to discuss it with the rest of the group.

The initial schedule has been set up as following:

•	Initial meeting of participants to collect books and opportunity to ask questions and fill in short first questionnaire during the week of 11th February
•	Week of 25th February Book Club Meeting One – Gone Girl (2012)
•	Week of 11th March Book Club Meeting Two – The Silent Wife (2013)
•	Week of 25th March Book Club Meeting Three – The Girl on the Train (2015)
•	Easter Holiday Break
•	Week of 22nd April Book Club Meeting Four – Behind Closed Doors (2016)
•	Week of 6th May Book Club Meeting Five – Her Husband's Lover (2017)
•	Week of 20th May Book Club Meeting Six – Let Me Lie (2018) and another short questionnaire

How does the suggested project relate to your own research? Please indicate how the activity will benefit yourself and your research.
My research project is in a nutshell about finding a more in-depth and focused definition for the 'newly' emerged subgenre of domestic noir. To do so, I place the stories within their literary ancestry of the Female Gothic and the Gothic Women's Thriller that emerged during the time of the Second World War. A significant part of my research is looking at the historical, social, political and economical background of the subgenre as well as the way cultural institutions such as the publishing houses and authors work to sell copies of these books. To gain a more complex picture of what the genre of domestic noir represents, reflects and achieves, I believe listening to readers' experiences will be highly beneficial to my research allowing for another viewpoint to be included, that of the audience, and uncovering aspects of the subgenre that have not been previously recognised by my research.

Apart from opening up new avenues for my research project, I also believe that I will gain invaluable transferable skills through organising and undertaking this activity. It will certainly help improve my organisation, project management and time management skills. In addition, I will be able to practice communicating my research to people outside of academia and connecting it to the real and everyday lives

of women. I believe that this will make my research not only more impactful but also more relevant. Moreover, it will also allow me to practice important research skills such as recruiting and facilitating focus groups as well as transcribing and coding data.

What is the potential legacy of the project?
Having had an initial meeting with the Library Service Manager, there is scope for the reading groups to continue on a monthly basis bringing women from different backgrounds together to read and discuss domestic noir books. Currently Brighton and Hove Libraries do not have a crime fiction specific reading group and this group could be expanded and opened up to more members.

In regards to my research, I hope that this will become a significant part of my thesis elaborating on the experiences of women and how these are reflected in domestic noir novels. If the project is successful, I would also like to investigate further avenues into possible working with victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence together with the School of Psychology at Sussex.

Please outline your public engagement experience to date
I have very limited outreach experience as I have just started my PhD. During my MA I created my own interactive crime narrative as part of my dissertation that I then exhibited in the local student community to gain feedback on narrative structure and user friendliness of the project. This greatly helped my project and in turn, introduced my research into interactive storytelling to a variety of students. It was especially interesting to hear opinions I would have not considered before from students with backgrounds in computing, psychology and games design. I strongly believe that this was an important step for me to take in order to not only improve my work but also establish networks with others for future projects.

Budget

Please provide a detailed budget indicating what you would spend the funding on if you are successful in your application.

Your budget should include a breakdown of costs and justification for each item (e.g. lunch for 30 people at £6 per head from Sussex Food; accommodation for external speaker at £80 per night at a University approved hotel or guest house). See the guidance notes for further advice on your proposed budget.

Budget details

Item details	£
Second hand books in good condition (6 books x 25 participants at around £3 per book)	£450.00
Tea, Coffee and biscuits for all sessions (tea/ coffee purchased at local coffee shops and biscuits bought in Tesco or similar)	£250.00
Printing posters/ flyers (printing at Sussex)	£30.00

Total: £730.00

Total requested
£730.00

Budget code
I contacted the Research and Enterprise Coordinator for the School of Media, Film and Music but unfortunately have not received a reply yet. I will get in touch with you via email as soon as I receive the

code.

Supporting statement

You must submit a supporting statement (in PDF format) from your School's Director of Doctoral Studies (for doctoral researchers) or Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange (for research staff).

Your School's Director of Doctoral Studies or Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange's name, title and electronic signature should also be included.

If you have any difficulty with this, please contact researcher-development@sussex.ac.uk or call 01273 873366.

Upload your supporting statement here
██████████SupportingStatement .pdf