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Macaulay-Rettino, Xander; Banderob, Simon; Carson-Apstein, Emily; Johnson, Helen

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"You Kind of Have to Listen to Me": Researching Discrimination Through Poetry

*Helen Johnson, Emily Carson-Apstein,
Simon Banderob & Xander Macaulay-Rettino*

Abstract: Arts-based research approaches, such as poetic inquiry and autoethnography, are attracting interest for their ability to engage wide-ranging audiences with creative, emotive, and thought-provoking outputs. In this article, we discuss a new method, which draws on these approaches, combining them with collaborative research principles and practices. The "collaborative poetics" method was developed in a pilot study, where one social scientist/poet and seven young spoken word artists worked together to explore their lived experiences of discrimination and privilege. We focus here on one aspect of this research; namely, the analysis of responses to two key questions: "Where do you see discrimination in your daily life?" and "How do you benefit from discrimination?" These questions were posed initially during semi-structured interviews with five of the co-researchers, and subsequently as mini questionnaires which evoked short, written statements from 39 participants. The interview data were analyzed using collaborative poetics and the wider dataset with a "pure" thematic analysis. These different approaches are compared here, and we argue that this comparison reveals the transformative potential of collaborative poetics for both co-researchers and the intended audiences of research.

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1. Introduction

> The font on their signs is smaller now
>
> It's crammed into the margins of government forms
>
> health insurance, job applications, student registration, lease
>
> agreements
>
> not dripping wet paint
>
> not screaming, just echoing in memory not quite laid to rest
>
> Whispers still sound like shouting when they're aimed at you
>
> Notes written in lemon juice still turn brown in the oven,
>
> still burn your fingers
>
> as you hold them up to the light (Fine Print II, Emily CARSON-APSTEIN)

This poem is taken from a chapbook "You Kind of Have to Listen to Me," which was produced as part of a collaborative, arts-based study, hosted by McGill University's Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL). The aim of this study was to use spoken word poetry to create social scientifically-informed poems, exploring the co-researchers' experiences and understandings of discrimination. More broadly, the study acted as a testing and development ground for an innovative, new method of "collaborative poetics" in which social scientists work as part of a "research collective" with poets and members of community groups to explore and communicate about issues of social significance. The research collective for this study was composed of seven young spoken word artists and one poet/social scientist, Helen JOHNSON. [1]

In this article, we focus on the analysis of data derived from responses to two key questions formulated during this eclectic research project: 1. "Where do you see discrimination in your daily life?" 2. "How do you benefit from discrimination?" These questions were initially posed during semi-structured interviews designed, conducted, thematically analyzed, and poetically rendered within the research collective. Following this collaborative work, written responses to the questions were sought from 39 additional participants. These combined datasets were then thematically analyzed by the lead author. The existence of these two parallel analytical procedures within a single study enables direct comparisons to be drawn between the analysis/output of collaborative poetics and those proffered by more mainstream approaches to social scientific research. [2]

2. Researching Discrimination: Lived Experience and Microaggressions

Discrimination and prejudice are well-researched topics which have concerned scholars for many decades. Prejudice is defined as a negative attitude or emotional response towards a group, while discrimination is its behavioral correlate, with individuals being treated negatively because of their membership of the disliked group (CORRELL, JUDD, PARK & WITTENBRINK, 2010). Privilege is the counterpoint to discrimination. Historically, privilege has been an under-researched area, though this is starting to change with the burgeoning field of privilege studies (see for example CASE, IUZZINI & HOPKINS, 2012). Where discrimination describes disadvantage and subordination, privilege describes advantage and domination. CASE et al. (p.3) define privilege as a relational term which "involves unearned benefits afforded to powerful social groups within systems of oppression." These benefits are made invisible by the structures of oppression and inequality which support them. [3]

Mainstream psychological theories locate discrimination within one of three key sources: cognitive processing, with stereotypes portrayed as an efficient, if sometimes unfortunate, way of dealing with complex information (e.g., MACRAE & BODENHAUSEN, 2000); personality differences, such as ADORNO, FRENKEL-BRUNSWIK, LEVINSON and STANFORD's (1950) classic work on the "authoritarian personality"; and normal group processes, for example TAJFEL and TURNER's (1986) oft-cited social identity theory. [4]

In contrast, critical psychology characterizes discrimination, not as emanating from individual flaws, or as an unfortunate side effect of efficient interpersonal/cognitive processing, but as socially constructed norms and values which serve the interests of powerful groups in society (GOUGH & McFADDEN, 2001). Critical psychologists argue that mainstream psychology is complicit in this process, marginalizing important structural factors in favor of a focus on individual flaws and responses to discrimination. This is exacerbated by the disempowering tendency of psychologists and other "experts" to define people's reality for them, reclassifying discrimination experiences as symptoms, traits, and cognitive deficits (BURTON & KAGAN, 2003). [5]

Feminist scholars, queer theorists, and critical race theorists have raised similar concerns over the misuse of academic and professional power. These combined perspectives suggest there is a need for an alternative approach to discrimination research, one which emphasizes the experiences and understandings of people who live with discrimination, and which dethrones academics from their position as the sole, authoritative creators of knowledge. This need is addressed, in part, by a growing body of literature which explores participants' lived experiences of discrimination relating to race and ethnicity, religion, age, class, poverty, employment status, illness, disability, gender, and sexuality, as well as the intersection/overlap(ing) of different identities (e.g., FEREIRA, 2014; HANCOCK, 2007; MINIKEL-LACOCQUE, 2013; STOUDT, FOX & FINE, 2012). While this work identifies some important distinctions between individuals, it indicates that

discrimination is widely experienced as all-pervasive, and often subtle/elusive and unintentional in character. These cross-cutting themes cohere around the concept of "microaggressions." [6]

The term "microaggressions" was coined by PIERCE in 1974, but only became prominent more recently through the work of SUE and his colleagues (e.g., SUE, 2010; SUE et al., 2007). SUE's early work in the field focused on "racial microaggressions," which he defines as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (SUE et al., 2007, p.273). As this quotation indicates, microaggressions are widespread, commonplace and difficult to "pin down." In addition, while they may be conscious and intentional, they are frequently unintended, even well-meaning in nature. [7]

SUE et al. outline a taxonomy of these microaggressions, covering four core categories: "Microassaults" (conscious and intentional actions/slurs, racist nicknames or symbols); "microinsults" (subtle, often unconscious rudeness and insensitivity, such as assuming a person of color is a criminal); "microinvalidations" (often unconscious comments or behaviors that exclude or negate the thoughts, feelings and experiences of people of color, for example by ruling out racism as an explanation for a given incident); and "environmental microaggressions" (racist attacks, insults and invalidations which occur on macrolevel, systematic and environmental levels). [8]

Much research on the lived experience of microaggressions has followed this racial focus, with studies exploring groups such as Sikh men in the United States in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks (AHLUWALIA & PELLETTIERE, 2010); students of color in North American schools and colleges (e.g., CLARK, KLEIMAN, SPANIERMAN, PAIGE & POOLOKASINGHAM, 2014; HAYNES, STEWART & ALLEN, 2016); and migrant nurses in the United Kingdom (ESTACIO & SAIDY-KHAN, 2014). In 2010, however, SUE widened his scope to include microaggressions related to gender, sex, and sexual orientation. This expanded focus has been followed by others, with research covering areas like the intersection of race and gender (e.g., HAYNES et al., 2016); microaggressions within and against the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, plus) youth community (ROFFEE & WALING, 2016); and biphobia across a range of contexts (e.g., TARASOFF & ROBINSON, 2016; TODD, ORAVECZ & VEJAR, 2016). As well as work on disability within the field of critical disability studies (e.g., HICKEY-MOODY & CROWLEY, 2011). Accordingly, microaggressions are now considered to characterize the experiences of a range of oppressed groups. [9]

Researching the lived experiences of members of these groups can provide an important mechanism for social justice (MINIKEL-LACOCQUE, 2013). Listening to their voices and telling their stories help to make stigmatized groups visible, muting the sense of their "otherness" and embodying them instead as "full," relatable human beings (see for example ABBEY, CHARBONNEAU &

TRANULIS, 2011; FERREIRA, 2014). Furthermore, attending to the experiences of people who live with discrimination can help us to tackle our own underlying assumptions and biases around the marginalized group (ABBEY et al., 2011). While this research goes some way towards enabling participants to re-author their experiences, however, the majority of work in this field is researcher-led, with the researcher having control over the aims, focus, methods, analysis, and dissemination of participant data. Thus, it is the researchers, not the participants, of these studies who determine what stories are told, how they are told and to whom they are told. As STOUDT et al. (2012) note, this in itself is a form of privilege. [10]

Participatory research seeks to tackle this privilege by bringing participants into research as co-researchers of equal status, with the power to shape a study's direction, methods, outputs and/or dissemination. STOUDT et al. argue that this approach can foster a sense of connectedness with others. In addition, it goes some way towards addressing FREIRE's (1970) critique that most political/educational interventions fail because they do not take into account the perspectives of the individuals they seek to help. Participatory research which facilitates the exploration of the co-researchers' lived experiences is particularly valuable for its ability to provide robust "counterstories," which challenge popular marginalizing narratives and make silenced voices heard.[1] In doing so, it offers a route by which we can tackle discrimination across a broad spectrum, from overtly prejudiced narratives to the more insidious and pervasive forms of microaggression which characterize the daily experiences of many. [11]

3. Collaborative Poetics: A New Approach for Troubling Times

Collaborative poetics builds on this base, providing a new way of addressing old issues around discrimination and privilege. With this innovative method we seek to produce meaningful, emotive, and creative texts, which actively engage larger and more diverse audiences than those typically targeted by standard academic outputs. The need to reach and inspire wide-ranging audiences is particularly pressing in a political and social climate where discrimination against a wide range of groups, from ethnic minorities, to women, to LGBTQIA+ and differently-abled people, appears to be becoming increasingly brazen. As one participant in this study said, responding to the question "Where do you see discrimination in your daily life?," "This is a big answer because (1) Trump (2) America (3) Brexit [and] (4) UK are all on my mind" (Facebook post). [12]

The collaborative poetics method fits under the broad banner of arts-based research, alongside a wide array of approaches which draw from the arts as tools for data collection, analysis and/or dissemination (LEAVY, 2009). These approaches disrupt established frameworks, collapsing distinctions between author and audience, researcher and researched, output and dissemination, theory and practice (JONES, 2012; LEAVY, 2009). Arts-based research stretches the bounds of the traditional academic form, with "outputs" ranging from poetry

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1   See McCOY (2015) for more on "counterstories" in the context of critical race theory.

books and novels to theatrical performances, films or interactive websites (see DOORNBOS, VAN ROOIJ, SMIT & VERDONSCHOT, 2008; GLASS, 2008; and JONES et al., 2008 for some examples). This can open up social scientific knowledge to larger and broader audiences, exposing them to something which is more accessible, playful, emotional, meaningful and, above all, *human* than the typical journal article, conference paper, or textbook (JONES, 2006). Such innovative forms of representation have the ability not just to *convey* knowledge differently, but to express *different kinds* of knowledge that cannot be represented adequately through other means (EISNER, 2008). [13]

Collaborative poetics draws specifically on the arts-based research methods of poetic inquiry and autoethnography, bringing these together with the principles and practice of participatory research. It takes from poetic inquiry the use of poetry as a research tool, and from autoethnography a focus on personal experiences to describe and transform the world. Collaboration with participants (the co-researchers of participatory research), and with poets, allows these features to be combined and strengthened. These three methodological strands are described briefly below and in greater detail in JOHNSON et al. (in press). [14]

3.1 Inspiration from the arts: Poetic inquiry and autoethnography

Because poetry condenses language, imagery, and narrative into a relatively small space, it has the ability to deliver powerful, high impact messages, which can attract and hold the audience's attention (e.g., COUSIK, 2016; FAULKNER, 2009; HAPPEL-PARKINS & AZIM, 2017). As a research tool, poetry can be both flexible and robust. It can enable researchers to emphasize the emotional, experiential, and relational, to highlight new perspectives and hidden narratives, and arguably to achieve a deeper level of insight than more traditional research tools typically permit (FENGE, HODGES & CUTTS, 2016; LANGER & FURMAN, 2004). FEATHERSTONE and SANDFIELD (2013, §22) talk about this in terms of "diamond cutting," contending that poetic inquiry has the capacity to chip away at data to get to the core of the phenomenon. [15]

Using poetry as a research method allows for the retention of ambiguity, the exploration of liminal spaces, and the reflection of silence; all of which are challenging for more traditional research methods (DUMENDEN, 2016; RAPPORT & HARTILL, 2016). In addition, poetic inquiry can act as a form of political activity by embodying the notion that "the personal is political"[2] (FAULKNER, 2009; FAULKNER & NICOLE, 2016; FURMAN, LANGER, DAVIS, GALLARDO & KULKARNI, 2007). Arguably, spoken word poetry is particularly relevant here, with its emphasis on accessible texts and frequent focus on socio-political issues (GREGORY, 2009, 2015). [16]

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2   This call of "the personal is political" dates back to the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and seeks to highlight the interconnectivity between the individual (and intersubjective) realm of personal experience and broader socio-political issues (HANISCH, 1970). It is a cry which has been heeded, not only by artists and activists, but also by social scientists from a variety of backgrounds, amongst them critical and community psychologists (e.g. CAHILL, 2007; NELSON & PRILLELTENSKY, 2010).

As with arts-based research more generally, poetic inquiry has a long history, reflected in a surge of recent outputs. These cover a range of different topics, voices and participants (GALVIN & PRENDERGAST, 2012) and go under a variety of names, including "poetic rendition," "ethnographic poetry" (see RAPPORT & HARTILL, 2016) "research poetry" and "investigative poetry" (FAULKNER, 2009), as well as sheltering under broader umbrellas for art-based research, like a/r/tography (e.g., SPRINGGAY, IRWIN & WILSON KIND, 2005; SPRINGGAY, IRWIN, LEGGO & GOUZOUASIS, 2008), ethno-mimesis (e.g., O'NEILL, 2008) and performative social science (e.g., JONES, 2006, 2012). One key distinction within poetic inquiry research is whether the poems created focus on the voices of the participants or the researcher. PRENDERGAST (2009) refers to the second of these as "vox autobiographia/autoethnographia." Work carried out in this tradition could be considered to be a form of autoethnography, and indeed, poems that use this approach are sometimes referred to as "poetic autoethnographies." [17]

Autoethnographic texts place the lived experience of researchers center stage, producing what ELLIS and BOCHNER (2000, p.739) describe as "an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness." This contrasts markedly with mainstream social science, where the researcher is often invisible, the emotional connections that inspire and drive their work written out as, at best irrelevant, at worst corrosive, to the "true" business of science (JEWKES, 2011). Importantly, autoethnographers seek to move beyond evocative accounts of their personal experiences, making analytical connections between these and broader social contexts/issues (ELLIS, 2009; ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000). [18]

MORIARTY (2013) argues that autoethnography offers a complexity and messiness which is more authentic and insightful than traditional academic writing. It allows room for plural meanings and fragmented understandings, for evocative, challenging, and informative texts which connect with audiences in more meaningful, visceral ways. Arguably, this is particularly important for the exploration of privilege, since having our own power in relation to other groups directly highlighted can feel personally threatening and lead to a "closing down" of communication (e.g., KNOWLES & PENG, 2005; LOWERY, KNOWLES & UNZUETA, 2007). Accordingly, autoethnography answers a need to connect with people emotionally through more implicit, *felt* understandings. These connections can foster empathy, stimulating cooperation and healing (CUSTER, 2014). For MORIARTY (2013), this means that autoethnography holds the potential to transform, not only academic research/writing, but also the world which this writing seeks to describe. Thus, writing and reflecting on autoethnographic compositions leads us to explore why we think and act in the ways that we do, to challenge our assumptions, and ultimately to act differently. In this way, autoethnography becomes a project, not merely for delineating the world, but for critical engagement with it (see also ELLIS, 2009; HOLMAN JONES, ADAMS & ELLIS, 2013). [19]

3.2 The added value of collaboration

While these methods clearly have many strengths, however, they are not without their limitations. One of the main criticisms which has been leveled at autoethnography (and "autoethnographia" poetic inquiry) is that it can produce work which is narcissistic and limited in scope (e.g., ATKINSON, 1997; COFFEY, 1999; JONES, 2014). Indeed, CHANG, NGUNJIRI and HERNANDEZ (2013) suggest that the exclusive focus on the author's lived experience can lead to work which lacks critical insight, threatening both the validity and depth of the analysis. Another prominent critique of these methods is that they can be aesthetically weak, falling short as artistic and creative products (e.g., FAULKNER, 2009). Thus, it has been argued that many researchers fail to fully grasp the extent of the skills and knowledge they require to work successfully in the artistic domain (GERGEN & JONES, 2008; JONES, 2012). [20]

One response to these criticisms is to carry out research which is collaborative. This collaboration can take place across fields (social scientists collaborating with artists) and across roles (researchers collaborating with participants). Collaborating across fields acknowledges the specialist skill, craft and knowledge which it takes to produce high-quality creative pieces, while collaborating with participants can broaden the ethnographic lens, illuminating multiple subjectivities, as well as the *inter*-subjectivity of their intersection (e.g., CHANG et al., 2013). This second form of collaboration is associated with a range of different methods, including "participatory research," "collaborative inquiry" and "participatory action research" (REASON, 1994). These approaches all seek to dissolve power inequalities between researcher and researched, by reconceptualizing participants as co-researchers, with the power to shape a study's design, conduct and outputs to varying degrees (CORNWALL & JEWKES, 1995). [21]

In this context, the research process is conceptualized as being one of knowledge/skill exchange. This means that participants can benefit from not only from research outputs, but also from the skills, knowledge and sense of power/authority they gain from the co-production of these outputs. Research professionals, in contrast, lose something of their unique status as authoritative knowledge producers (GAVENTA & CORNWALL, 2015; TANDON, 1981). As discussed previously, then, participatory research answers the critical psychology call for academics to actively work with participants, and avoid defining their reality for them. Additionally, it aims to empower co-researchers to make positive social changes that are meaningful to (and realistic for) them, striving for both personal and social transformation (FREIRE, 1997; KAGAN, BURTON, DUCKETT, LAWTHOM & SIDDIQUEE, 2011; PARK, 1993). [22]

Collaborative poetics seeks to capitalize on these strengths, advocating a means for social scientists to collaborate with both participants and poets in an interdisciplinary "research collective." Within this collective, all participants are valued equally for the unique experiences, perspectives, skills, and knowledge that they provide. This interdisciplinary, collaborative, and community focus has

much in common with that of performative social science, a form of arts-based research which draws on work by DENZIN (2001), BOURRIAUD (2002) and others (see GERGEN & JONES, 2008; GREGORY, 2014). The collaborative poetics method is elucidated further below, in the context of the PCL pilot study. (The pilot study itself is described in greater detail in JOHNSON et al., in press.) [23]

4. The "Researching Discrimination through Poetry" Project

The PCL pilot was a six week long study, with two core aims: 1. to develop the use of poetry as a research tool, exploring ways in which spoken word artists and social scientists could work together as a "research collective," to elucidate personal experiences and inform positive social change; and 2. to use this emerging method to explore co-researchers' lived experiences around discrimination and privilege. It was approved by ethics committees at both the University of Brighton and McGill University. [24]

The core research collective consisted of the lead researcher (a performance poet, social scientist, and lead author of this article), and seven spoken word artists, between 16 and 25 years of age. Five of the co-researchers participated for the entirety of the project, and two withdrew for personal reasons approximately five weeks in. Co-researcher recruitment and formation of the initial study design/aims were led by the first author. All other aspects of research design were carried out as a collective, including defining the research timetable, activities, and outputs, and further refining the project's focus. [25]

The collective worked together in a series of knowledge/skill exchange activities, aimed at enabling innovative combinations of social scientific theory/methods and poetry writing/performance. These activities were wide-ranging, and included seminars on topics such as arts-based research, critical psychological theories of discrimination, and research ethics; research methods workshops; poetry writing, editing and performance exercises; and the design, production, and promotion of a live spoken word show ("*The Struggle is Real*") and chapbook ("*You Kind of Have to Listen to Me*"). One particularly rich activity centered on semi-structured interviews, exploring co-researchers' experiences and understandings of discrimination. In this exercise, we blended thematic analysis with poetic inquiry to create composite poems which represent the diverse voices of five of the collective. [26]

The poetic autoethnographies which were created through this process could be likened to "data poems" or "found poems." These constitute perhaps the most popular form of poetic inquiry, and are generally created by following a more standard qualitative analysis of interview data, with poetic renderings of interview quotations. HORDYK, SOLTANE and HANLEY (2014), for example, created data poems following a thematic analysis of interviews with homeless migrant women, while SJOLLEMA and YUEN (2017) used a similar process to create poems focusing on Aboriginal women's experiences of leisure and healing. (Other examples of this form of poetic inquiry can be found in BUTLER-KISBER, 2010; FEATHERSTONE & SANDFIELD, 2013; HAPPEL-PARKINS & AZIM, 2017;

MILLER & BROCKIE, 2015; WASHINGTON, 2009.) This work is typically researcher-led, however, with participant involvement limited to responses to interview questions. Thus, it remains an academic commentary on a participant group. Indeed, SJOLLEMA and BILOTTA (2017) argue that poetic inquiry is rarely characterized by a commitment to, and immersion in, the community of study. We seek to address this limitation with the collaborative poetics approach adopted here. [27]

4.1 Participatory interviews: Design, data collection, and analysis

The semi-structured interviews were carried out four weeks into the six week project. They were preceded by two research methods workshops, led by the first author: the first on thematic analysis, and the second on interview design and facilitation. Following this, the collective worked together to draft an interview schedule, addressing the overarching question: What are participants' experiences of discrimination? The schedule included questions related to both discrimination and privilege, such as: "Can you give me an example of a time you were discriminated against?" and "Are there some places where you feel more powerful?" (See the Appendix for the full interview schedule.) [28]

The interviews were carried out in pairs at the PCL, with participants switching between interviewer and interviewee roles within the pair. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. Four interviews were conducted in this way. In addition, written responses were provided by one co-researcher, who could not be present at the data collection session. The data were then thematically analyzed individually by the poet co-researchers, with support from the lead researcher. This was an iterative process, where the text was read repeatedly, with the researcher seeking to identify recurrent patterns of meaning within the data (see BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible method, which is generally regarded as being more intuitive and accessible to novice researchers than other common methods of qualitative analysis, like discourse analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis. This flexibility and accessibility make it well suited to participatory research. [29]

Once each co-researcher had elicited a set of proto-themes, these were discussed in the group, and a final set of overarching themes was agreed upon. Each co-researcher then selected between one and three key quotations from their transcript to illustrate each of these themes. These quotations were compiled into a single document by the lead researcher, and co-researchers worked individually to create poetic autoethnographies which drew on these data extracts. Three poems were created in this way. [30]

Co-researchers were given the option of not participating in this aspect of the research, without jeopardizing their involvement in the project overall. Ethical concerns, such as the right to withdraw or to not answer any specific questions that were put to them, were also addressed at the start and end of the interviews. It was made clear to co-researchers that their names would not be linked to specific data extracts and that any personal information through which they could

be identified would be changed. In the case of creative and academic works, however, co-researchers were given the option of remaining anonymous or being identified as co/authors. This allowed for the recognition of creative (and academic) contributions, while still abiding by the principles of social scientific research ethics (see GREGORY, 2014). All co-researchers wished to be identified as authors of their poems and three chose to be credited as co-authors on this article. Thus, these individuals are identified by name here. [31]

4.2 Widening the net: Further data collection and analysis

When reflecting on this activity, the co-researchers noted two key questions which had proven to be particularly thought provoking. These were: 1. "Where do you see discrimination in your daily life?" and 2. "How do you benefit from discrimination?" The collective decided to ask these questions at the spoken word show, which we held at the end of the research project. The questions were typed onto slips of paper, and placed on the seats of the theater where the show was held. Audience members were asked to write down their responses. These were collected in the intermission and read out as a group poem at the start of the show's second half. Subsequently, the first author posed these questions on her Facebook page (in a publically accessible post), and in two undergraduate psychology lectures at a university in the south of England. [32]

At each data collection point it was made clear to participants that any responses they provided would be used for research on experiences of discrimination and privilege. They were told that their names and any identifying personal information they provided would be changed in order to preserve anonymity. Participants were also given the option of providing responses without these being used for the research, by simply noting this either on the back of the paper slip or the bottom of their Facebook comment. No respondents chose to withhold their responses in this way. [33]

The written responses were collated, along with data from the original interviews, to give a total of 87 statements from 44 participants. These statements were thematically analyzed by Helen JOHNSON. This thematic analysis is presented below, followed by a presentation and discussion of the three poetic autoethnographies. These respective analyses are then considered in a comparative discussion, which weighs the merits and applications of each approach, with reference to both existing understandings of discrimination and to key methodological concerns. [34]

5. Living the Theme: Thematic Analysis

In the final thematic analysis the first author elicited six overarching themes, which provide a broad overview of participants' understandings and experiences of discrimination and privilege. These are: discrimination is all-pervasive, discrimination is often unintentional, discrimination is elusive, absence/visibility, unequal distribution of resources, and type vs person (see Figure 1 for a full map of themes and subthemes). We focus on a discussion of the first three of these themes here. These themes were chosen because they allow a ready comparison to be drawn between the poetic inquiry and thematic analysis aspects of this research—"discrimination is often unintentional" and "discrimination is elusive" because they remained constant across both stages of data analysis/collection, and "discrimination is all-pervasive" because it was highly salient in both the interview data and written statements.
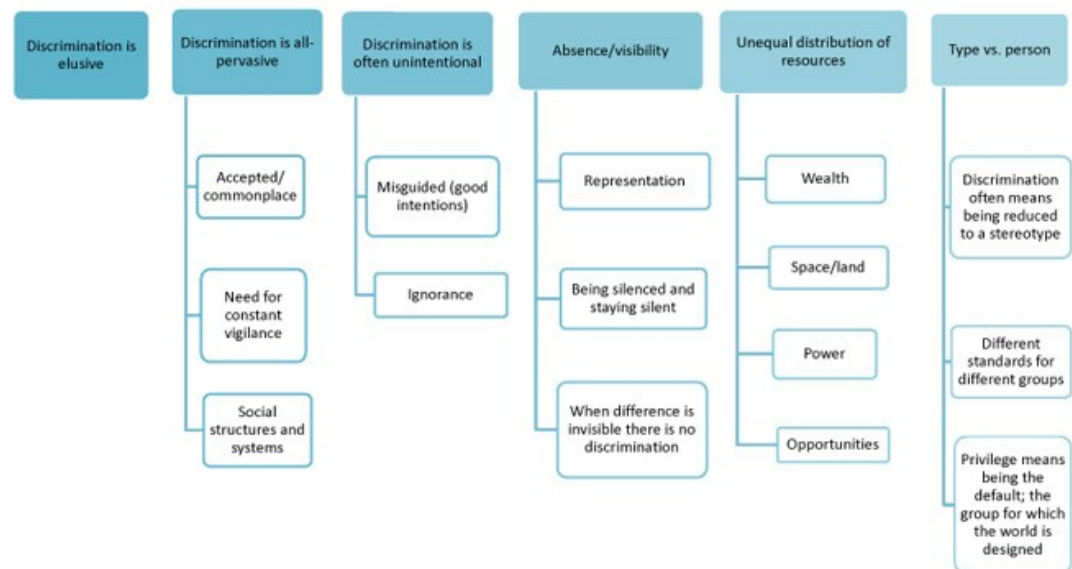

Figure 1: Map of final themes [35]

5.1 "It's everywhere, like dead people and Starbucks": Discrimination is all-pervasive

As the quotation above (taken from "*The Struggle is Real*" show) makes apparent, participants experienced discrimination as something which is ever-present and unavoidable. For many, it is a feature of daily life. Thus, participants recall encountering discrimination "everywhere and every day" (Facebook post), from shopping centers and schools, to mainstream and social media, to the privacy of their own homes. This all-pervasiveness of discrimination is such that it is typically accepted as ordinary and unremarkable. It is also viewed as being deeply entrenched. As one undergraduate respondent puts it: "I think that discrimination can be seen everywhere in daily life, either overtly or covertly. This is because it's such a built in part of society ... ." [36]

For participants, discrimination should be understood as "built in," not just to everyday interactions, but also to the social systems and structures which underpin these. One Facebook respondent, for instance, highlights discrimination "in the health service, the benefits service, the government .... ." Recent incidences of police brutality in the United States were particularly prominent in the data, with participants in both England and Canada mentioning this as indicative of widespread, institutional racism: "I certainly see discrimination in how, basically, black people are allowed to be killed by police in the US and somehow it is permissible ..." (Facebook post). [37]

This omnipresence means that participants were ever-vigilant to the possibility of discrimination:

> "I can't turn off the part of me that thinks 'it's because I'm a woman' when a bus driver is patronizing, when a man gets served first, when I'm not believed, when I'm interrupted, when my ratings are poorer or not even given, when I feel I need to be twice as good ... Maybe it was not 'because' I was a woman, but it happens often enough and it may as well be" (Facebook post). [38]

Discrimination, then, can taint every aspect of life, pervading society from the minutiae of everyday interactions to macro level social systems and structures. It seems that there is no time or place which is free from this specter. Accordingly, daily events are easily interpreted as being the result of discrimination, regardless of their intent. [39]

5.2 An "unconscious bias": Discrimination is often unintentional

Participants were keen to emphasize that much of the discrimination they saw and experienced was unintentional, a kind of "unconscious bias" (Facebook post) or unreflective response to them or those around them. As one interview participant puts it: "... usually if I'm witnessing something that's discriminatory it's not because there's a person who thought very clearly to themselves 'I want to discriminate against this other person'." Often this was viewed as being out of ignorance of a "lack of awareness" (undergraduate lecture) about what it means to belong to a particular group. [40]

Participants also highlighted their experience of discrimination under the guise of well-intentioned words or actions, which bely an underlying assumption that individuals are less strong, intelligent, or able, by virtue of their membership in a particular group. As one interview participant puts it, recalling the behavior of her male boss: "He refers to all of us as 'the girls' and tries to lift heavy things for us or open doors when we go by. It's well-intentioned but comes off as condescending." Similarly, one Facebook respondent criticizes people who carry out tasks "for" her clients (who have developmental disabilities), declaring: "Every day I see such discrimination and its debilitating effect on the people it is intended to help." [41]

5.3 "I don't see it. I feel it": Discrimination is elusive

As this headline quotation (taken from "*The Struggle is Real*" show) indicates, discrimination was often experienced by participants as subtle and elusive, something which is "felt," rather than seen, heard, or touched. Accordingly, discrimination was not typically experienced as a direct or explicit attack, but as something much more vague or intangible, so that "... most people don't usually give you a hard time or disrespect you in front of your face, but their eyes say it all" (interview participant). [42]

A number of participants called attention to the unspoken (and often unchallenged) assumptions which produce discrimination, by providing the framework through which the world is understood and made sense of. Thus, one interview participant highlights the need to ask: "Why does that joke make sense in the first place?" These assumptions were also viewed as being key to understanding privilege, with one interview participant saying that they benefited from discrimination by "... being afforded certain assumptions, because I'm white and male." [43]

This vague, insidious character of discrimination means that many participants felt pressure to produce evidence for their claims about being subject to discrimination, while simultaneously struggling to find this concrete evidence. Thus, one interviewee states "... it wasn't just in my head." This difficulty in pinning down discrimination meant that participants were sometimes reluctant to cite particular incidences as indicative of discrimination. As one undergraduate respondent, writes: "I often feel underestimated or assumed to be somehow inferior. A lot of the time you are made to feel like a sexual object, but I'm not sure if that's discrimination." This trepidation is striking given the very clear illustration of discrimination expressed in this student's account. [44]

Taken together, these themes provide an account of the lived experience of discrimination which fits well with existing literature on this topic and with work on microaggression in particular. These narratives remain at odds with popular accounts however, which tend to emphasize more isolated, explicit, and intentional acts of aggression. Unlike such extreme and highly visible acts, the all-pervasive, implicit, and often unintentional microaggressions which participants describe here make discrimination difficult to pin down in clear, concrete and precise terms. Accordingly, claims of discrimination can feel shaky and illegitimate, not only to those who are *doing* or *witnessing* the discriminating, but also to those who are being discriminated against. This can make it very difficult to challenge discrimination in terms of both micro-level, everyday interactions and the broader, macro-level social systems and structures which underpin them. [45]

6. Poetic Autoethnographies

This section presents the three poetic autoethnographies which were composed during the collaborative stage of the research. Each is displayed in a format which preserves that of the original. All three pieces were included in both the spoken word show "*The Struggle is Real*," and poetry chapbook "*You Kind of Have to Listen to Me*," and responds to the initial six themes elicited by the research collective, namely: tangibility, power and authority, intentionality, privilege, responding to discrimination, and identity. The differences between these themes and the final set of themes are largely due to the limited amount of time which was available for the initial analysis. These can thus be thought of as proto-themes which the later analysis was able to further refine (see Figure 2 for a diagram which maps the two sets of themes onto one another).
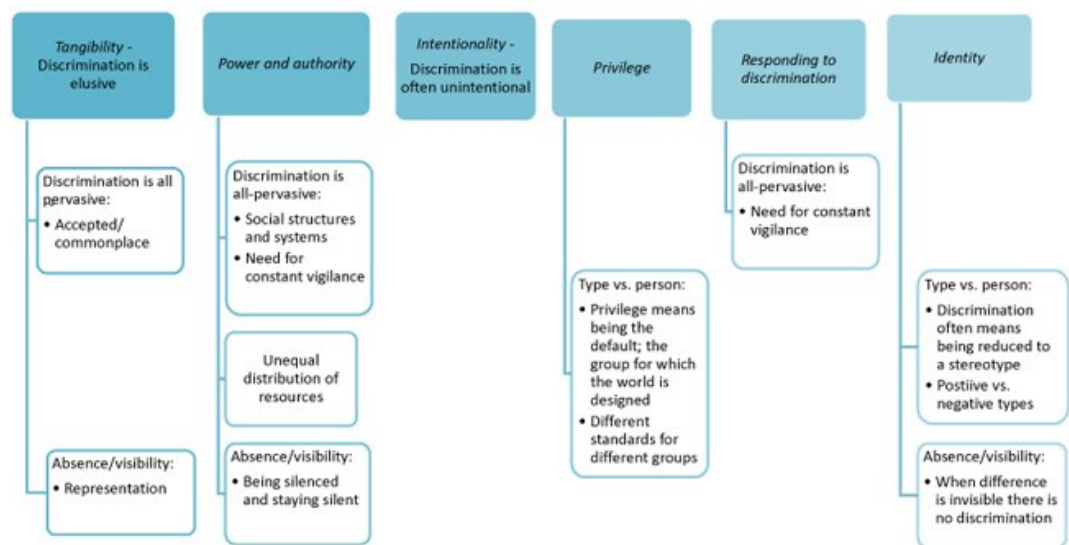

Figure 2: Map of initial themes cross-referenced to final themes[3] [46]

The poems' authors each approached the task of poetic inquiry differently. Helen JOHNSON's piece is formed almost entirely from interview quotations, with only two minor changes to the original data. In addition, there is a clear attempt to preserve the context and meaning of these excerpts. Matt SHI's piece also makes few changes to the raw data; however, he works with smaller chunks of text, juxtaposing words and very short phrases against one another, so that the original sense is disrupted somewhat and thrown into a new light. Finally, Emily CARSON-APSTEIN's poem offers a midpoint between these two styles, preserving much of the original context of data extracts, but playing around with this at times to create new layers of meaning. [47]

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3   This figure shows the initial themes from the collaborative research work (in italics). These are mapped onto the final themes and subthemes, elicited from the later phases of data collection (in bold).

6.1 Poem one. I'm not hiding / Relief (Helen JOHNSON)

Listen to me.

It wasn't just in my head,

just a bad experience.

There's something really wrong here.

Control is a big thing,

built into the stones.

Walking down the street

is a revolutionary act.

It's the vague stuff,

the small stuff,

a wave of 'excusable' actions.

Erasure is a thing too,

wrapped up in a joke,

so you need to laugh it off,

not important.

People still ask—

"You're not really—?"

tut,

and stare

at that 'potentially problematic' part.

Their eyes say it all.

There are dynamics,

in the conversation.

You just let people think,

quieting yourself.

We are isolated.

Some people are hurt less.

I get to choose my battles,

choose when or if,

I want to put myself in danger.

I know where I am not wanted,

where I want and need to be,

who has authority,

feels entitled to my attention, time,

body.

But when I'm on stage,

I feel powerful,

from the inside looking out.

I feel safe.

Nothing can touch me.

I'm one of the ones who's right,

has a voice,

Then, I have no choice,

but to take

whatever may come my way. [48]

6.2 Poem two. Untitled no. 1 (Matt SHI)

most people don't usually

burn out

in front of your face

it's the vague stuff

it can be hard to tell

most people don't

wrap this stuff up

obviously

feels almost like a cold

while walking down the street

to save the world

some people are hurt less obviously

it can be hard to tell

non-"visible" self-quieting

maybe you hear the narrative

no choice but to take on

other people's animals

some people, because they've been denied

have built something

built into the streets

a revolutionary act

& i feel a lot safer [49]

6.3 Poem three. From: Interviews about discrimination (Emily CARSON-APSTEIN)

This is how a horror movie starts

from the inside looking out,

my psychiatrist was like

"maybe you just had a bad experience ..."

(Authority in any given situation creates power imbalances.)

As a white person,

I've been told my whole life that I'm smart

I'm the one who is right and who has a voice.

I'm not having to try and avoid saying or being anything

I can't fully understand

to be clear,

to be indelicate,

It's built into the streets you're walking on.

It's the vague stuff,

This big stuff is happening because of the small stuff.

I don't think you can separate them, really

And it never went away.

I'm onstage.

Ask me for my consent to touch me.

Why does that joke make sense in the first place? [50]

6.4 Exploring the poems

The three themes discussed in Section 5 are clearly visible in each of these poems. The "discrimination is all-pervasive" theme, for instance is evident in extracts such as "It's built into the streets you're walking on" and "This big stuff is happening because of the small stuff. / I don't think you can separate them, really / And it never went away" (both from Emily's poem). Both of these excerpts can be read on multiple levels. The second, in particular, hints at much of the complexity that lies within this theme, highlighting the omnipresent and enduring nature of discrimination, as well as the interconnectivity of micro level interactions and the macro level social systems and structures which underscore them. [51]

These micro-macro links are echoed elsewhere in Emily's piece, when she writes: "my psychiatrist was like / 'maybe you just had a bad experience ...' / (Authority in any given situation creates power imbalances.)" These lines also illustrate the frequently unintentional nature of discrimination, as the psychiatrist in question dismisses their client, in a misguided attempt to explain their experience as isolated and personal, rather than due to discrimination. Matt's piece speaks to

this unintentionality too, with the words: "most people don't / wrap this stuff up / obviously." [52]

Here, Matt suggests that discrimination is rarely presented as a carefully gift-wrapped package, but is instead something which is incidental and unconsidered —an aside or an afterthought, something which "feels almost like a cold" (Matt's poem). As with the previous quotations, this last line is multi-layered, illustrating different aspects of discrimination in a short phrase. Thus, it emphasizes both the unintentional and elusive nature of discrimination. Discrimination is not a sharp, obvious, targeted body blow, but the incidental, insidious germ of a common cold. [53]

This elusiveness is apparent elsewhere in Matt's poem too, for example, he writes that: "it can be hard to tell / non-'visible' self-quieting / maybe you hear the narrative." Meanwhile Helen's poem talks of the subtlety of discrimination in lines such as: "Their eyes say it all. / There are dynamics, / in the conversation." Finally, Emily's poem calls attention to the unspoken assumptions which underlie discrimination, asking (as in the interview extract presented previously): "Why does that joke make sense in the first place?" [54]

7. Comparing the Methods

These analyses map clearly onto the existing discrimination literature, supporting previous findings around lived experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice. They highlight in particular the pervasive, intangible, and often unintentional nature of discrimination which characterizes many microaggressions (see e.g., SUE, 2010; SUE et al., 2007). Both forms of analysis are arguably equally cogent in this respect, offering clear, succinct, and appropriately evidenced accounts of the core themes. It would be fair to say, however, that the themes presented here *echo* rather than *add to* this field. Furthermore, as noted previously, the existence of a widespread literature on discrimination seems to have done little to address the prevalence of discrimination and prejudice. This suggests that it is not sufficient merely to present these themes effectively. Instead, research must exert its impact by changing the participants and/or audiences of research in some way. It is here that the differences between the two approaches become apparent. [55]

The standard thematic analysis was low on participant involvement. Participants in this stage of the research responded to researcher-designed questions with brief, written responses only. It is unlikely that this process had a lasting or deep impact on them. The collaborative poetics research, in contrast, was a highly emotive and involved process. Thematic analysis of focus groups and interviews with co-researchers suggests that this research was transformative for them, prompting changes in how they focused, explored, communicated and acted on issues related to discrimination (see JOHNSON et al., in press). [56]

The final quotation in Section 5 illustrates this comparison well: "I often feel underestimated or assumed to be somehow inferior. A lot of the time you are

made to feel like a sexual object, but I'm not sure if that's discrimination..."
(undergraduate lecture). This uncertainty about what "counts" as discrimination
and who has the authority to make this claim, is something which was expressed
periodically throughout the "researching discrimination through poetry" project. It
led to a number of discussions within the group about who has the authority to
create knowledge, who we should listen to and whose voices matter. As one co-
researcher said: "I spent a lot of time thinking 'is this actually about
discrimination?' and the conclusion was always 'yes it is'" (interview data). [57]

This second quotation begins with the same uncertainly and trepidation as the
first, but ends with a defiance which dispels this doubt, staking a claim for the
authority and authenticity of the participant's experience. This mirrors the journey
co-researchers travelled through the project. As one co-researcher said of the
project lectures:

> "[They] were helpful ... especially the critical psychology stuff, just being someone
> that's been like in the mental health system for such a long time there were a lot of
> ideas that I had, I mean internalized stuff I had, that it was like 'Oh yes, I'm allowed to
> challenge this.' ... it gave me a personal allowance to be like 'no, that's messed up'
> and like I don't need to be all freaked out about diagnostic stuff if I really don't believe
> that that's the right way to deal with or categorize my experience. So that was really
> personally affirming and helpful" (interview data). [58]

While both methods can effectively *illuminate* the all-pervasive, elusive, and often
unintentional nature of discrimination, collaborative poetics is better placed to
challenge this, enabling transformations in how co-researchers think and feel
about discrimination. There is some suggestion that this impact extends to
research audiences too. The poetic autoethnographies have certainly reached a
larger and broader audience base than is typical for academic research, with 48
people attending the spoken word show and over 90 copies of the chapbook
distributed to date. Most of these people were not academics; they are unlikely to
read this article, or even be aware of its existence. [59]

While a formal evaluation of audience response to these outputs was not
conducted, informal feedback suggests an overwhelmingly positive response.
Audience members at the show, for instance, commented that it was "beautiful"
and "one of the most powerful shows I have ever been to." This suggests that the
poetic autoethnographies are a potent, evocative tool, with the capacity to
engage and connect effectively with audiences. In addition, these poems have a
portability and flexibility which academic texts lack. They can be, and have been,
printed and performed in a variety of contexts, including conferences, workshops,
in videos and online, as well as in academic publications. [60]

8. Conclusions

In this article, we have explored the application of two different, qualitative methods within the context of a single study. We have argued that both thematic analysis and the new approach of collaborative poetics are able to present robust and clear analyses, which effectively illuminate participants' lived experiences of discrimination. Collaborative poetics, however, has the potential to go beyond this, offering an empowering, transformative experience for both "research collectives" and their audiences. This method enables the expert skills/knowledge of research participants, artists and academics to be collectively harnessed for the production of creative, engaging texts which have the potential to appeal to wide-ranging audiences. [61]

This is not without its costs of course. Indeed, co-researchers must invest considerable time, effort—emotional and physical— and resources in this kind of research. It is easy to underestimate the extent of this investment. This is evident here in the less developed themes which characterize the first stage of analysis, compared to the second. (We simply did not have time to carry out thematic analysis to the same level of depth during the collaborative stage of research, as when analyzing the wider data set independently.) Furthermore, the scope, nature and import of a given collaborative poetics study will necessarily vary depending on the resources, abilities, motivation, and group dynamics of the research collective concerned. [62]

In addition, this method is still in its nascent phase, and there is a great deal of room to enhance its flexibility and impact further. One key area for development relates to the scope of the research collective. The PCL pilot was a two-way collaboration between seven young spoken word artists and one artist/academic. This model needs to be extended to enable individuals who do not have expertise in poetry writing/performance to tell their stories. This would entail a three-way collaboration, between social scientists, poets, and individuals whose lived experiences form the focus of the research. A second key point of development relates to the impact of collaborative poetics work. More needs to be done to ensure that this fully realizes its potential for touching (and transforming) large, wide-ranging audiences. This means thinking carefully about the routes and forms through which poetic autoethnographies are disseminated, as well as conducting detailed, systematic evaluations of their impact. [63]

In conclusion, collaborative poetics is an innovative, new approach which holds the potential to transform research communities, research audiences and perhaps even the nature of research itself. This is not a power which academics hold alone however. Rather, it derives from the joint actions of participant/co-researchers, artists, and academics. Working together, we have the capacity to challenge the insidious, subtle, and pervasive messages which surround us, by creating counterstories that are equally poignant and powerful. To borrow from Emily CARSON-APSTEIN's opening poem, we too can write notes which "burn your fingers / as you hold them up to the light." [64]

Acknowledgments

Appendix: Full Interview Schedule

Research question: What are participants' experiences of discrimination?

Warm-up:

1. What comes to mind when you think of discrimination?

Main Body:

2. Where do you see discrimination in your daily life?

3. Can you identify any different kinds of discrimination?

   a) Do any of these affect you?

   b) Do some affect you more than others?

   c) Do any of these benefit you?

4. Can you give me an example of a time you were discriminated against?

5. Are there some places where you feel more powerful?

... more powerless?

   a) Is that about the place?

   b) Is that about the people you're with?

Cool Off:

6. Where do you feel safe?

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Authors

Helen JOHNSON (formerly Helen GREGORY) is a senior psychology lecturer at the University of Brighton. Her work centers around creativity and the arts, with research focusing on areas such as spoken word and slam communities, educational applications of youth poetry slams, and arts interventions in dementia care. Helen is particularly interested in arts-based research and performative social science, exploring innovative cross-fertilizations between social scientific theory/research, and a range of art forms including poetry, collage and photography. She is also a spoken word poet and stage manager for the Poetry&Words stage at Glastonbury Festival.

Contact:

Dr. Helen Johnson

School of Applied Social Sciences
University of Brighton
Village Way, Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9PH, England

Tel.: +44 (0)1273 641116

E-mail: h.f.johnson@brighton.ac.uk
URL: http://www.hgregory.co.uk/
Project URL:
https://www.brighton.ac.uk/ssparc/research-projects/researching-discrimination-through-poetry-developing-a-method-of-collaborative-poetics.aspx

Emily CARSON-APSTEIN is a musician, writer, activist, and performance artist based in Montreal. She grew up in the moss and lichen of the Canadian west coast youth poetry scene, and has competed in poetry slams from Victoria to Ottawa. She captained the Esquimalt High School team at the 2014 Hullabaloo Spoken Word Competition, and is a two-time member of the Throw! Poetry Team that represents Montreal at the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word. She studies music and English literature at Concordia University.

Contact:

Emily Carson-Apstein

Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

E-mail: ecarson.apstein@gmail.com

Simon BANDEROB is, in roughly chronological and mostly alphabetical order, an editor, poet, playwright, podcaster, storyteller, disgruntled dishwasher and itinerant landscaper. Simon was the one-time host of the Discordia Poetry Slam, a two-time member of the Throw! Poetry Collective's slam team and is a past poetry editor of Soliloquies Anthology. Simon collaborated in Dr. JOHNSON's "*researching discrimination through poetry"* project in the summer of 2016 and is a contributor to that project's anthology, "*You Kind of Have to Listen to Me*." Since 2011, Simon has inflicted his work upon audiences in Canada, the United States and Germany.

Contact:

Simon Banderob

No institutional affiliation

E-mail: tb.peterborough@gmail.com
URL: http://alturl.com/uzsio

Xander MACAULAY-RETTINO is a queer poet, artist, photographer and musician from Montreal. Their work draws in part from their experiences as a chronically mentally ill, non-binary transgender person. Xander has competed and performed in poetry shows in Montreal, and has had their photos published in "Scrivener Creative Review." They also co-authored "You Kind of Have to Listen to Me," the poetic autoethnographies project chapbook. Currently, Xander works as a freelance photographer and busks in the Montreal metros.

Contact:

Xander Macaulay-Rettino

No institutional affiliation

E-mail: xander.i.macaulay@gmail.com
URL: xanwriteswords.tumblr.com (poetry),
xandermacaulay.tumblr.com (photography)

Citation