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Beyond Disciplines: Spoken Word as Participatory Arts-based Research

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Abstract

For many, the arts and sciences stand at opposite ends of an unbridgeable divide: the sciences, rigid, objective, systematic and authoritative; the arts, fluid, subjective, dynamic and capricious. Yet, there is a long history of productive dialogue and interconnection between these fields. Arts-based research represents a particularly fertile form of arts/science interaction. This paper interweaves poetry, theoretical discussion and empirical research to make the case for spoken word poetry as an arts-based method of inquiry that can provide a radically different way of doing, being and collaborating in and through research. With reference to the innovative method of 'collaborative poetics' and to the work of youth slam/spoken word educators, I argue that social scientists and spoken word practitioners can learn much from one another's tools, techniques and ways of thinking, creating new forms of knowledge, redefining the audience/author relationship, and facilitating a 'critical resilience' which enables both individual fortitude in the face of adversity and a means through which to challenge the conditions that give rise to this adversity. The paper thus considers how spoken word as participatory poetic inquiry enables participants, researchers and poets to address the critical complexities and challenges of contemporary life.

Keywords

poetic inquiry, autoethno, graphy, spoken word, arts-based research, critical resilience

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Introduction

…We waited to get in

Guest list seems more like a hit list.

The lights go on

Flooding pink as the triangles sewn into our chests

We wear this colour with pride now, in our hair, our clothes.

We've been here before

Our trauma echoes.

How many times will they burn us to ash?

How many times will we have to rise?

Fire light reflected in our eyes

Pulse bleeding out until it dies

The lights go on.

The lights are on.

This spoken word extract reflects on the mass murder of 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando in 2016. The poem was created by three young spoken word artist/co-researchers with whom I worked over a six-week period at McGill University's Participatory Cultures Lab. Together, we mobilized spoken word as a form of 'poetic inquiry' to investigate and elucidate discrimination developing from this a method of participatory arts-based research, 'collaborative poetics' (CP). This paper uses CP to explore the background, underpinnings, benefits, applications and challenges of spoken word as a research method through which to explore lived experiences, promote resilience and work towards social justice.

The paper begins by introducing the field of arts-based research (ABR), with particular reference to autoethnography and poetic inquiry. It then moves onto spoken word, considering how this has been mobilized in social scientific research and how these applications compare with those of youth spoken word/slam educators. This is followed by a discussion of the CP method and the pilot study through which it was founded. The paper ends by reviewing some of the challenges raised by spoken word ABR. Throughout this discussion, I contend that we should strive to be *undisciplined*, to question, penetrate, perhaps even demolish the walls that separate different fields, sectors and academic disciplines. Arguably, it is only through encouraging such 'rule-breaking' that we will create anything truly new, revolutionary and capable of transforming our worlds.

A Brief Background to Arts-based Research

The arts and sciences are popularly portrayed as being at opposite ends of a continuum. At one end of this purported scale sit the arts – understood as performative, emotional, creative and subjective; while at the other lie the sciences, with their mission of systematic and objective fact-finding. Yet, both the 'hard' physical sciences and the 'softer' social sciences are creative, performative pursuits; scientific research is conducted and authored by subjective agents; and the arts, for their part, are frequently more systematic, rule-bound and research-driven than is often assumed (see e.g. Maeda, 2013; Roberts, 2008). Unsurprisingly then, there are many points of interconnection across these disciplinary realms, and dialogue between them has a long and complex history. ABR represents one such intersection.

The term ABR is often traced back to Eisner's Presidential address at the 1993 American Educational Research Association Conference (Forrest, 2017). ABR has seen a dramatic rise since then, with exponential growth over the last decade in particular (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Although Eisner focused on the potential of artistic forms of representation to re-model social scientific understandings, the term ABR has come to be used more broadly. It can now be said to incorporate a wide range of research approaches, which use the arts as tools for data collection, analysis and/or dissemination (Leavy, 2009). The 'outputs' of such research stretch the bounds of the traditional academic form, incorporating images, music and visual art into journal articles or presenting research through theatre, film, poetry and other creative formats. Through this, ABR exposes social scientific knowledge to larger and broader audiences, presenting them with something which is more accessible, playful, emotional, meaningful and relevant than typical academic outputs (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).

Much of this work challenges the positivist model of the social sciences as disciplines which should aim for a 'gold standard' of objective, controlled experimentation. Autoethnography and poetic inquiry fit within this critical tradition, embracing researcher subjectivity and emotionality, and subscribing to the view that there are multiple, equally valid ways of viewing the world (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Rapport & Hartill, 2016). These methods offer complimentary routes into spoken word as research.

Introducing: Autoethnography

Custer (2014, p. 6) describes autoethnography as 'an artistic tool of deep inquiry'. Autoethnographies can take the form of songs, plays and visual art, but are perhaps most commonly presented as short stories, creative essays and, increasingly, poems (Custer, 2014; Ellis, 2009). These texts place the lived experience of researchers centre-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 their personal experiences, making analytical connections between these and broader social contexts/issues (Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

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 affecting, challenging and informative texts which connect with audiences in meaningful, visceral ways. These connections can foster empathy, stimulating cooperation and healing (Custer, 2014). Thus, autoethnography holds the potential to transform, not only academic research/writing, but also the individuals, communities and issues with which autoethnographers engage.

Autoethnography has the potential to empower the authors and audiences of research, proffering new ways of telling stories, which challenge dominant discourses by interweaving critical, social analysis with personal accounts of lived experiences (Moriarty, 2013). This can spark a 'critical consciousness' amongst audiences, as they enter into the dialogue (Leavy, 2009). Faulkner and Nicole (2016) argue that poetic inquiry too can embody ideological struggle through the intersection of self and social issues/values.

Introducing: Poetic Inquiry

In poetic inquiry, researchers use poetry to help explore and communicate social scientific issues. As a research tool, poetry is both flexible and robust. It can enable researchers to emphasize the emotional, experiential and relational, to highlight new perspectives and hidden narratives, and arguably achieve a deeper level of insight than many more traditional research tools permit (Fenge et al., 2016). Poetry also allows for the retention of ambiguity, the exploration of liminal, marginal spaces and the reflection of silence; all of which are deeply challenging for more traditional social scientific research methods (Dumenden, 2016; Rapport & Hartill, 2016). Furthermore, because poetry condenses language, imagery and narrative into a relatively small space, it has the ability to deliver powerful, high impact messages, which grab and hold the audience's attention (Cousik, 2016; Faulkner, 2009). Research poetry can not only *communicate* lived experience, but also *uncover* it, so that we learn as we write (or read or listen), making connections between our experiences, participants' experiences and broader social contexts/forces.

Poetic inquiries typically focus on poetry on the page; however, there are a few notable exceptions which utilize spoken word, often with teenagers and/or young adults. Ayala and Zaal (2016), for example, conducted a wide-ranging study with 19 U.S. high school students, with the aim of influencing state educational policy. Their

research followed a participatory action research model, with students conceptualized as co-researchers. Spoken word was utilized here as a means of establishing, and setting a tone for, dialogue within the community. As with the majority of research in this field, however, Ayala and Zaal used spoken word as merely one (under-articulated) element of a broader package of methods (both creative and 'mainstream'). Other studies (e.g. Fletcher et al., 2016; Lashua, 2006; Skinner, 2012) bundle spoken word in with hip hop as a presumed synergistic artform or label their work as spoken word with little evidence to support this classification (e.g. Godwin, 2018; Sethi, 2012).

One exception to this is Fenge et al., (2016), who used spoken word to explore the lived experiences of adolescents and young adults living with physical impairments. They viewed spoken word as integral to their work, hosting a series of workshops with spoken word artists, which led to the creation and performance of collaborative spoken word pieces. As with Ayala and Zaal, the authors had a clear social justice focus, situating participants' experiences in the context of austerity-led budget cuts to core social and healthcare services, and applying learning from the project to inform their teaching of social workers and allied health professionals. Even here, though, there is little theorization of the particular benefits that spoken word poetry brings to ABR. Coemans and Hannes, (2017) argue that this failure to articulate a rationale for the specific artistic methods/techniques used is a common weakness of ABR. While the particular benefits of spoken word as ABR are under-theorized and under-explored, however, there is a burgeoning body of research into the applications and impacts of youth slam/spoken word (YSSW), which yields valuable insights into the use of spoken word as a tool for research, resilience and social justice.

Youth Slam and Spoken Word as Collaborative, Critical Inquiry

YSSW programs typically work with poets who are aged 19 years or under. They focus on poetry writing and performance, but may also cover forms of composition like journalism and script writing, as well as skills like documentary film making, music technology and video production. They may take the form of regular, year-round after school clubs or more short-term projects. In addition, some YSSW programs are integrated into school curricula as taught classes. The performance element of YSSW is incorporated through teaching content, in-class performances and showcase events (including slams) in which young poets perform for an audience of peers, parents, mentors and others. (For a more detailed discussion of the past and present state of YSSW see Gregory, 2015, on the U.K. and Weinstein, 2010, 2018, on North America).

YSSW educators often work with disenfranchised young people, including inner city youth and youth of colour. They aim to explore and reframe these problematized identities as powerful and positive (Ingalls, 2012; Weinstein, 2018). Thus, Davis (2018, p. 114) argues that YSSW plays a role in 'amplifying the voices of the oppressed', supporting young people in a political journey of identity exploration, which involves negotiating prescribed identities, crafting ideal identities and connecting with the

complex identities of others. YSSW also makes accessible alternative 'literate identities' where young people are able to call themselves poets without the need for institutional stamps of approval (Fisher, 2007; Weinstein, ibid).

Accordingly, YSSW programs seek a range of impacts for their students which outstrip a desire to merely enhance poetic craft. These include developing self-awareness and self-confidence (Weinstein, 2010; Williams, 2015); nurturing critical thinking (Camangian, 2008; Weinstein, 2018); empowering young people to enact social change (Davis, 2018; Ingalls, 2012; Weinstein, 2018; Williams, 2015); building individual and community-level resilience (Ingalls, 2012); fostering empathy, cooperation and healing (Davis, 2018; Weinstein, 2018; Williams, 2015) and encouraging young people to value and engage with formal education (Williams, 2015). Weinstein (e.g. 2010, 2018) argues that these impacts derive, in part, from the supportive, inclusive communities which YSSW programs help to develop and sustain (see also Gregory, 2015; Davis, 2018; Williams, 2015). These inter-generational networks involve not only young poets, but also the teachers, peer mentors, audiences and others who contribute to the running of programs and events.

Camangian (2008) notes that such spaces are often unavailable elsewhere in the students' schools, homes or local communities. While Davis (2018) argues that YSSW offers a relevance to the lives of marginalized young people that is otherwise lacking in the school curriculum. YSSW does more than just sit outside formal educational/ literacy practices; however, it also presents a challenge to the dominant model of what poetry/poets, school/students, and indeed, society/citizens can and should be (Low, 2006; Gregory, 2008). Accordingly, Carmangian (2008) urges us to acknowledge and build on the expertise which young people have in popular literacies like spoken word and rap, as a route to offering disenfranchised students dignity, a voice and the power to challenge social inequalities within the education system and beyond (and see Lashua, 2006).

In YSSW, the audience are called in as co-conspirators in this pursuit of social justice. Through this, Ingalls (2012) argues, the audience reflects, extends, validates and magnifies young people's voices. For Godwin (2018, p. 1), this is a 'dialogic relationship rooted in solidarity', which challenges traditional power differentials between performer and audience. Fenge et al., (2016) understand this relationship in terms of Bourriaud's (2002) concept of 'relational aesthetics', which emphasizes art as a situated, collaborative performance between equal status artists and audience. These encounters are characterized by a sense of 'conviviality' and reciprocally intertwined with macro level actions. While little has been written about the precise benefits of spoken word as a critically conscious research tool, then, there is a promising body of evidence indicating that spoken word can be used to explore, communicate and enrich participants' lived experiences. Weinstein (2018, p. xxii) observes that these benefits extend beyond young people, offering 'a site of intellectual, emotional, social, and artistic growth for people of all ages...' Furthermore, the methods that YSSW educators use, and the ways in which they conceptualize their practice, parallel closely the aims and approaches of many arts-based researchers.

Patmanathan (2014) recognizes this synergy when she theorizes poetry slam as a critical research methodology. Conceptualizing slam as both method and subject matter, she echoes the claims of YSSW scholars that slam enables participants (particularly those from marginalized and oppressed communities) to build a critical consciousness, challenge inequalities, develop collaborative relationships and foster empathy. Further, she believes that slam as research method can foreground under-explored perspectives and approaches, challenging dominant Western academic notions of what counts as knowledge and documentation, just as slam as artform works to decolonize the limited Western model of what the arts are and who they are for. The YSSW literature suggests that Patmanathan's arguments can usefully be extended to spoken word. While she makes some valuable points, however, her work does not live up to its promise. Rather than remodelling slam, she merely labels existing slam practice as a research process, analysing the content of slam poems and speculating on their potential impact. Collaborative poetics, in contrast, integrates spoken word with established research methods to create a new, robust and creative methodology.

Introducing Collaborative Poetics

CP hinges on the notion that ABR should be a true partnership between artists and social scientists. Spoken word practitioners bring to this relationship: an ability to connect with the disempowered and marginalized; to investigate and articulate lived experiences through the visceral, emotional and embodied; to speak the unspoken and to foreground the liminal. Social scientific theory, methods, networks and platforms, meanwhile, contribute: a theoretical and empirical basis for understanding our worlds; an ability to theorize links between lived experience and broader social contexts, issues and debates; validated methods of systematic inquiry and an authority which facilitates a pathway to social change (Johnson et al., 2017).

Uniting these arenas can produce knowledge which is embodied, emotional, relational and incredibly powerful, transforming how we understand and make our individual and collective worlds. Furthermore, this cross-fertilization follows methods like autoethnography and poetic inquiry in changing our notions of what research and art can/should be, challenging received wisdom around issues such as who has the authority to create art/research and what counts as knowledge, and collapsing distinctions between author and audience, researcher and researched, output and dissemination, and theory and practice (Jones, 2012; Leavy, 2009).

CP draws from poetic inquiry the use of poetry as a research tool and from autoethnography a focus on individual lived experiences to describe and transform the world. In CP, lived experiences provide the data through which social scientific topics can be explored and made concrete, while poetry provides the emotion, passion and creativity to engage an audience. The emphasis of spoken word on (particularly live) performance and on broadening the poetry audience makes it a particularly powerful tool in this respect.

The 'collaborative' part of CP references collaboration across both fields (social scientists collaborating with artists) and roles (researchers and artists collaborating with participants). Collaborating across fields acknowledges the specialist skill, craft and knowledge which it takes to produce high quality creative pieces (Faulkner, 2009; Jones, 2012). Collaborating with participants, meanwhile, broadens the ethnographic lens, illuminating multiple subjectivities, as well as the *inter*-subjectivity of their intersection. Collaboration, in this latter sense, is associated with a range of different methods, including 'participatory research', 'collaborative inquiry' and 'participatory action research' (Reason, 1994). These approaches seek to dissolve status differentials between researcher and researched, reconceptualizing participants as co-researchers, with the power to shape a study's design, direction and outputs (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). The research process is thus re-conceptualized as one of knowledge/skill exchange. This means that, much as with YSSW, participants in participatory research stand to benefit from both the project outputs, and the skills, knowledge and authority they gain from co-producing these outputs. Research professionals, in contrast, lose something of their uniquely privileged status as authoritative knowledge producers. This process aims to give voice to co-researchers, empowering them to engage in dialogue with groups that would usually be inaccessible to them and to make meaningful social changes (Kagan et al., 2011; Park, 1993). Collaborative research thus strives for both personal and social transformation.

This balance between individual and societal level impacts is captured well in the concept of critical (or social justice-based) resilience. Critical resilience is a reaction to mainstream resilience models, which effectively obscure structural inequalities, individualizing social problems (and solutions) by focussing almost exclusively on the individual's ability to cope with adversity (Hart et al., 2016; Traynor, 2018). Critical resilience, in contrast, takes individual and community strength as a pathway through to social justice and transformation. Thus, we can help people thrive in difficult circumstances without making them responsible for these or stultifying broader social change (Hart et al., Ibid). CP thus seeks to capitalize on the strengths of collaborative research, advocating a means through which social scientists, artists and participants can collaborate with one another, working towards critical resilience as a 'research collective'. Within this collective, all members are valued equally for the unique experiences, perspectives, skills and knowledge they provide.

Founding the Collaborative Poetics Method

As noted previously and described in greater detail in Johnson et al., (2017, 2018), CP was founded in a pilot study at McGill University's Participatory Cultures Lab. This study had two core aims: 1. to develop the use of poetry as a collaborative research tool and 2. to use this emerging method to explore co-researchers' lived experiences around discrimination and privilege. The core research collective consisted of myself and seven young spoken word artists. Over a six-week period, we collaborated to refine the study's aims/focus, outline a timetable, learn about/play with ABR, collect and analyse

data, and shape creative outputs. Spoken word was integral throughout this process. At the data collection stage, for example, activities like free writes were used to elicit discrimination experiences, while poetry composition and editing activities enabled us to organize, clarify and develop our understandings of the topic. During data analysis, we applied methods like the Listening Guide's 'I' poems (see Gilligan et al., 2003) to explore creative writing as an analytic, transformative process. Finally, poetry was harnessed as a tool for research dissemination through a chapbook, 'You Kind of Have to Listen to Me', and live spoken word show, 'The Struggle *is* Real'.

While we used a range of creative and research-based activities to compose poetry, not all of our creative work was rooted in this way. Rather, emersion in the CP process over a sustained period of time created porous project boundaries. Thus, I found myself writing poems in my lunch break, on the train home or in the days between sessions. 'Beautiful' is one such piece:

Beautiful

You tell me that my baby's beautiful,

"those eyes –" you gush.

I know.

They're the bright blue flashes

of a kingfisher in flow.

His skin is petal-soft

and orchid-white.

You're right,

maybe he should be in the movies.

Golden ringlets

curl this audience,

around his chubby, little finger.

"Beautiful."

I've heard it so many times now,

it's almost lost the power

to make me cry.

So I sigh and say,

"we know,

his Mama and I."

We know

he has to be perfect,

so thank God he is,

because two women with a baby,

you've got to get it right.

We've so much darkness here,

he is our light.

So when you say

he'll be a heartbreaker,

I don't protest.

What's an unrequited tear or two,

against the pride that we invest?

and there'll be years

of mothers' love,

between those broken girls and here.

(Please make it girls,

he is so near

to being flawless.)

He must be beautiful.

So thank God he is,

wears winsomeness,

like only white boys can.

"He should be in a catalogue."

It's true,

I see him there,

and on every brazen billboard,

every glossy page,

where beautiful is sold to us,

in shades of blonde and beige.

He is our moon,

our ever-waxing light.

So yes,

of course, you're right;

he's beautiful.

He is first class,

five star,

top notch,

top drawer.

It's stamped through him

like seaside rock,

sweetness to the core.

He's beautiful like your child,

(but just a little bit more).

This autoethnographic poem featured in the chapbook and show. Since then, I have performed it multiple times both within the Academy (at academic conferences, in workshops/symposia and in the classroom) and beyond (at festivals, open mics and shows). This gives the poem a reach which extends far beyond that of the typical academic journal article, while simultaneously grounding it in realms which remain inaccessible to many spoken word artists.

Evaluating Spoken Word Arts-based Research: Impact and Challenges

Co-researchers fed back on the CP pilot through interviews, email conversations and a focus group. Analysis of their feedback is described in detail in Johnson et al., (2017) and reviewed briefly here. Feedback indicated that CP transformed co-researchers' focus, exploration, communication and actions related to discrimination, prejudice and abuse, as well as impacting the audiences with which they engaged. This supports Coemans and Hannes' (2017) observation that community-based ABR can result in personal, institutional and audience level transformations. Furthermore, analysis of these data suggests that spoken word-based poetic inquiry can foster critical resilience, supporting individual fortitude in the face of adversity, while seeking to change the conditions which give rise to this. As one co-researcher commented:

> … just being someone that's been in the mental health system for such a long time there were a lot of ideas that I had, I mean internalized stuff, 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 I don't need to be all like 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…

This suggests that spoken word ABR can echo and enhance the work of YSSW educators, empowering co-researchers, facilitating the exploration of individual and group identities, supporting healing and agitating for social change through the development of critical consciousness. There is good reason to suppose that, just as with YSSW and community-based ABR more generally, this approach can be particularly valuable with sensitive topics, vulnerable groups and people who are underrepresented in research. (See Coemans & Hannes, 2017, for more about this within community-based ABR). Nonetheless, there are notable challenges in carrying out spoken word ABR. Four such challenges are considered here: the negotiation of ethical issues; the time required; ensuring all voices are heard and creating impact.

All research raises ethical issues, and there are established codes of conduct which guide researchers through these. (See e.g. the British Sociological Association guidelines at: http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf and the British Psychological Society guidelines at: http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/documents/code_of_ethics_and_conduct.pdf). ABR, however, charts new ethical territory. The default stance of granting anonymity to all participants, for instance, is problematized when presenting the artistic works of others and we could reasonably ask whether it is ethical to deny participants authorship of their creative work. Some researchers have approached this by using pen names (see e.g. Camangian, 2008), but this only really grants participants authorship if they use those pen names outside of the study, which, in turn, compromises anonymity. I chose to treat anonymity as an ongoing and multi-layered issue, giving co-researchers the option of being named or not in relation to each respective output (the chapbook, show and academic works). (See Coemans & Hannes, 2017; McCulliss, 2013, for further discussions of anonymity and confidentiality in ABR).

Vulnerability is also a key ethical issue in this kind of research. ABR requires a deep, emotional involvement from both participants and researchers, particularly when a project involves sensitive topics and/or marginalized groups (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). This is part of its power. Thus, when asked if they had any advice for future CP participants, the pilot study co-researchers responded with advice like: 'Let yourself be vulnerable' and 'Don't be scared of your most vulnerable'. This emotional openness is also risky however. Accordingly, Fletcher et al., (2016) argue that we need to balance vulnerability and risk of re-traumatization with the need to hear participants' voices and work through difficult issues.

Spoken word ABR implicates more than just emotional investment; however, it also requires a considerable investment of time. Many of the projects discussed in this

chapter took place over a sustained period. The poets in Fenge et al., (2016) study, for example, delivered their workshops over 2 years, while Lashua (2006) worked with his participants for four x four hour sessions a week over 3 years. Whilst more 'light touch' projects do exist, this depth of involvement is not uncommon for both arts-based and community-based research. Indeed, some have suggested that it is vital for the successful conduct of such work (e.g. Facer & Enright, 2016). This asks a lot of poets, academics and particularly co-researchers (who are often unpaid). In addition, lengthy projects can conflict with the expectations of funders and institutions, who typically want to see maximum impact for minimum outlay (Fletcher et al., 2016). As Coemans and Hannes (2017) argue, the open-ended, inductive nature of ABR can compound this issue.

A third challenge relates to the dynamics of the research collective. However laudable our intentions, it is difficult for researchers to totally avoid replicating oppressive structures in their relations with participants (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Furthermore, within the participant group itself there will inevitably be heterogeneous experiences, opinions, values and identities, which have their own implications for power relations and potential conflict. Accordingly, researchers must carefully manage the social relations within a collective to ensure that all voices are heard (Fenge et al., 2016).

Finally, some authors have questioned the grand claims that work in this field makes for enacting social change. Coemans and Hannes (2017), for example, cast doubt on the ability of a single project to enact radical individual or social change. Scholars of arts activism have made similar points. Buser and Arthurs' (2013, p. 5) use the concept of 'sanctioned transgressions' here to highlight the danger that arts interventions might actually reinforce inequalities by allowing people to 'let off steam' in a safe, unthreatening way. (See Gregory, 2009 for more on this in relation to poetry slam).

Conclusions and Future Directions

Arts-based researchers and YSSW educators break the rules and, in so doing, remake the world. Their work reveals the value of being *undisciplined* – talking across disciplines and using this dialogue to question taken for granted ways of investigating, mobilizing and representing the communities with which we work. Community-engaged social researchers, in particular, have a great deal to learn from spoken word artists, particularly YSSW educators who have decades of experience working with marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

YSSW educators are rarely content with the (albeit laudable) aim of enhancing the writing and performance skills of their students, seeking instead to support critical resilience. Young people are equipped to thrive in adverse conditions and, through voicing their personal, lived experiences, empowered to speak out against these inequities. This mirrors the aims of arts-based researchers using methods like autoethnography and poetic inquiry. CP builds on these combined strengths, bringing together the expertise of artists, academic researchers and community participants to

present a participatory ABR methodology, which draws inspiration from the principles and practice of spoken word.

CP represents the first steps towards developing a spoken word ABR, a journey which I believe should continue as an equal status collaboration between academics, artists and community co-researchers. We have much to offer one another after all and much to overcome together. As we travel, we will need to grapple with challenges around: ethics; group dynamics; negotiating the time we require in order to do justice to this work; establishing evaluative criteria (or agreeing whether we need these) and, perhaps most importantly, working to ensure we have impact with both significance and reach.

For now though, I close with an extract from a poem composed during the CP pilot (published in full in Johnson et al., 2017, alongside a discussion of the process through which it was composed). The piece contains the voices of five co-researchers, exploring common themes around discrimination. For me, it speaks to the great potential of spoken word ABR to facilitate and magnify co-researchers' voices:

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.

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