

Advanced Research Methods Research Memo
Fr:Hakeemah Eileen Ahmed
To:Professor Angela Mitchell
Re: Interview With Sharon Charde/Primary Research Data/Qualitative

November 14, 2023

Activity 6: Research Interview

“ How can Slam Poetry be employed-as a therapeutic tool-for healing trauma in adolescent incarcerated populations, and also-call the larger community-towards compassion and understanding of the plights of society that often contribute to juveniles finding themselves incarcerated?”

Items of Importance

[Interview Transcription](#) [Interview With Sharon Charde \(Video\)](#) [Research Memo With Questions](#)

In preparation I drafted the following questions and sent them to Sharon for reflection. The questions were asked in order of appearance here.

- 1.) *What personal trauma, if any, inspired you to go inside of correctional facilities and conduct poetry workshops with incarcerated females; and could you give a few examples of types of trauma they expressed through their work and any noticeable feelings of relief or upliftment?*
- 2.) *Specific to the subgenre of poetry, Slam Poetry, what elements of this genre make it an effective genre for providing a sense of community and calling for action towards social justice?*
- 3.) *Lastly, in your compilation of incarnated youth poetry in the anthology I Am Not A Juvenile Delinquent, what effects did being published have on the girls and also on the larger community-how did showcasing the heart wrenching pain of the girls draw compassion and understanding for incarcerated youth and call the larger human family to action?*

I first proposed my research question and thought out carefully crafted questions that could bring about useful information that I can use to support my claims that the subgenre of Poetry-Slam Poetry-is unique in the rhetorical tools it possesses to aid in community engagement, healing trauma, raising compassion and calling to action towards social justice. I wanted to gather qualitative data through interviewing an expert. I needed to find a research participant that is both an expert on Slam Poetry and working with adolescent incarcerated populations. I contacted Sharon Charde, whom in addition to the upper two requirements, also has background expertise as a therapist. Upon her agreement, a research memo was sent with thanks providing my research question and the questions to be answered during the interview.

The remote interview via zoom was recorded and transcribed, both of which can be accessed by their hyperlinks above, under the research question/title/Items of Interest. What was to be a ten minute interview turned out to be a 34 minute interview. In retrospect, my questions were very extensive and as stated also by Sharon that these questions require a lot of time to answer. The data gathered from our conversation and Sharon's in depth responses with real life examples is representative of qualitative, primary research material including audio and visual. The use of open ended questions allows a non restrictive flow of information to be exchanged that give accounts and provide a circular view of connectivity.

As Sharon answered the questions, she recalled to me her years of experience as a poetry mentor for numbers of incarcerated women, both old but mostly young, and her championing an anthology of poetry to herald them to the world - *I Am Not A Juvenile Delinquent*. These roles allowed her to see into a world of young women that were traumatized and crying out for the world to hear them, see them, know them-maybe even help them. The anthology is a two way street where girls exposed their deepest hurts and others considered their pain. In the interview Sharon shares how she was a privileged white woman and she wanted women like her to hear their sisters, who were from another world, within the two worlds they lived in; oddly together. This relates to how poetry can contribute compassion to our communities by allowing ourselves to experience the emotions of the poet upon hearing accounts of experiences that are so heartbreaking and hard to fathom. Sharon gives a good example here of how poetry can bring different communities to gather. Also, here it can be noted how this further implies the call to action nature of Slam Poetry, when communities who may have historical or demographic divides can see the plights of the other group by hearing their story. This is exacerbated by the element of emotional exchange from the slam poet to the ears of their recipients. Slam Poetry is shown here to have the rhetorical prowess of infusing emotions from one human to another-when the poetry is slammed down with tone and body language, the effects are tremendous on the psyche of both the newly traumatized listener and the relief getting reciter. Because of this power element of emotion in the subgenre, communities normally in divide can begin to understand each other. On this point, Sharon mentions how the teenage girls were drama queens and often assertive, ready to get their chest out into the world and fulfill their roles of drama

queens the best they can. The natural fire, pain from adversities and rage at society; made them so eager to try slam because they could let it all out and be dramatic while doing it. These speak to the rhetorical elements of theater, (drama) and use of body language that Slam Poetry utilizes so well and makes it so effective and engaging.

Sharon relays that in her workshops, no structure was ever forced upon the girl's writing. Giving them this autonomous power to express whatever and however they needed was the total opposite they had as prisoners with no autonomy save self determination. Again, here we see that the laxical space for complete creative expression and own personal invented structures are a powerful set of rhetorical features of Slam Poetry that can be good therapeutic tools for working with incarcerated populations and the spiritual freedom it could bring to them while lacking physical freedom.

On the subject of trauma, the interview is numerous on this topic. Sharon Charde discusses how most of the girls were traumatized in many ways by different facets of societal ills they have been victim to. Such atrocities experienced by the young women she mentored were, rape, incest prostitution, abusive mothers, absent fathers, extreme poverty and hungry siblings that lead to selling drugs, witnessing homicides, suicides and more. Sharon also shared that the traumatic unexpected death of her son was a part of the exigence that sent her to work with youth, who like her, were traumatized and in need of healing and support. The trauma she experienced as a women in a society that treated women like prisoners gave her further exigence to see the world from an other-side-of-the-tracks type of view.

The girls releasing their pains and howling at the society that turns a blind eye on them, and those of that blind eyed society that have vision to see them, became one sisterhood through the plights they shared with each other, all by utilizing the interpersonal nature of Slam Poetry. Some accounts of the effects Sharon noticed on the girls in her poetry workshops were increased self esteem, help with ptsd, a new heightened sense of worth and the realization that they were so much more than a criminal. Allowing others to hear their stories empowered and uplifted them.

I would gather the interview, while long, is inviting in its personal tone and an informative watch. More of Sharon Charde's insights can be found in her nationally recognized anthology of poetry of incarcerated youth, *I Am Not a Juvenile Delinquent*.