

THE USE OF POETIC TRANSCRIPTION TO DISCUSS POLICE BRUTALITY IN
THE U.S.

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by

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“I know that it's hard to believe that the people you look to for safety and security are the same people who are causing us so much harm. But I'm not lying, and I'm not delusional. I am scared, and I am hurting, and we are dying. And I really, really need you to believe me.”

— Ijeoma Oluo, **So You Want to Talk About Race**

INTRODUCTION

According to The Washington Post, 152 minorities have been shot and killed by the police in 2019 alone (Tate, 2019). This study aims to explore the lived experiences of African American males in the United States today in regard to Police Brutality using in-depth interviews, and an art-based research method. Today in the United States, the tragedy of innocent African American males being killed by a police officer has become accustomed and perpetual. Case after case, I have come to wonder when the people of the United States will ever have the opportunity to induce change against the blatant partisanship of police men who kill innocent minorities and are never convicted. Being a minority myself, who was raised in Texas, I have not only witnessed, but also faced the reality of the racism that still resides in American culture today.

In this study I will use a method known as poetic transcription to shed light onto the experiences of my participants. Poetic transcription can have a huge effect and influence on how the public understands and perceives the issue of police brutality. I am not, nor am I trying to discredit police officers through my research. I am only curious in discovering and examining the raw feelings African Americans have in particular toward the countless homicides of other innocent unarmed minorities in recent tragedies.

It is through this research study that I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the opinions African Americans have toward the issue of police brutality. I am conducting

this study because the issue of police brutality is a topic that has become de-emphasized, understated, and not discussed enough. As severe as police brutality has become I believe more people should be speaking about it and the importance of the Black Lives Matter Movement in my generation. Art based research in my experience has no limitations to the emotion and influences it can entice. It is through my discoveries and transcribed poetry that I hope I am able to further educate myself on the reality of being an African American in the U.S. Once, my study is complete I also hope to inspire others to be more optimistic and willing to empathize with the ongoing Black Lives Matters movement which advocates against police brutality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for my research study, “The use of Poetic Transcription to Discuss Police Brutality in the U.S.” consisted of 6 academic journals. The focus of the literature review was to first understand the influence art-based research has had; and secondly, how poetic transcription has previously been used to accurately tell other people’s experiences through poetry. Lastly, I used my literature review to further understand the issue of police brutality, and the ethnicities it predominately targeted.

Literature on police brutality was limited, but some research had been done by scholars, historians, and sociologist who examined the police homicide risk towards African American males in comparison to White Americans. Other research used also closely examined and compared past and current social movements conducted by people of color for equity pertaining to police brutality.

Art Based Research

The word ‘research’ means to study thoroughly. To ‘re-search’ is to ‘search again’ through a process of disciplined inquiry (McNiff, 1998). In most creative arts therapy researchers have collectively accepted that research and scientific investigation are synonymous. However, the issue is that by perceiving research and scientific investigation as synonymous we are limiting the word “research” and the possibilities of advancement through new and imaginative inquiries (McNiff, 1998).

From this study, I have learned that the process of the artistic creation during art based research largely assists in our ability to deeply reflect and understand new perspectives. Scientists before art-based research simply followed the standard behavioral science methods of establishing what we plan to do before we do it. Yet, the issue with the standard procedures of scientific research is that they only undermine the power other alternative methods of research could possibly offer.

One of the most vital themes in science and philosophy is the liminal space between what can and cannot be known or expressed. I believe that the discovery of this gap comes from the basic energy of the creative spirit we commonly overlook in standard scientific studies. Yet, if we could discover this gap through art-based research I see no reason why it should not be completely explored or examined. Therefore, art based research gives us the opportunity to discover beyond the end results traditional scientist hypothesize.

Poetic Inquiry: Poetic Transcription

Poetic transcription is one method of poetic inquiry that derives from art based research that is used to create poems that accurately tell people’s stories, using only their words. Poetry in art-based research has great power to tell a story without actually

“telling”. For many years, poetry has only been viewed as a way for one to express themselves, reflect, and make sense of the world around them (Martens, 2018). However, Poetic inquiry allows people access into the entanglement of the words that are spoken and not spoken by different people. Specifically, poetic transcription offers people an alternative way of hearing a topic someone is trying to convey in a language they are more readily able to hear and understand. It is through poetic transcription, that we as researchers are able to attempt expressing the human experience authentically using words other than our own (Martens, 2018).

Art based researchers also have come to see poetic transcription as a means of doing, showing, and telling all in one. Poetic transcription helps not only share another person’s story, but it also captures and emphasizes the most important points and emotions that can help educate others (Faulkner, 2018). Poems produced through poetic transcription have been seen as the best way to share someone’s reality without having to explicitly tell every single detail. Poetic transcription as a form of qualitative research not only aids people in a more reflective way of learning about others, but it also helps illustrates the true feelings and experiences of people we may not fully understand (VanWyk, 2012). Therefore, poetic transcription not only helps others understand someone else’s reality, but it only helps the researcher empathize with others unlike themselves.

Police Brutality Risks Toward African Americans

Research shows that minorities, specifically African American males, have twice the likelihood of being a victim of a police homicide when compared to a White American (Edwards, 2012). It is due to this, that police brutality is a part of the social life

of being an African American today. Evidence shows that race does play a powerful role in explaining most police-involved killings in the United States. Scholars and social movements have argued –as evidenced by the deaths of Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Renee Davis, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Eric Garner, Charleena Lyles, and many others — that routine violence against people of color is a defining feature of U.S. criminal justice system. Empirical studies also show that people of color are, and have historically been, at greater risk for experiencing police-involved harm than are Whites (Edwards, 2012).

The issue of police forces infringing on their oath to serve justice to all is more evident now than ever. On July 13th, 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement surfaced in protest of this specific issue. The Black Lives Matter Movement, like the Civil Rights Movement of 1954, received a lot of backlash from the American people (Clayton, 2018). Many Americans tried to argue that the Black Lives Matter movement was “too confrontational and dismissive” believing that the movement should be called, “All Lives Matter” instead. Although, that argument can be viewed as logical in a Nation that promises equality to all, it is also statistically apparent that the issue of police brutality and homicides against African Americans is higher than any other minority group.

White Americans attempt to emphasize that all lives matter in the United States to deprecate the Black Lives Matter movement in this current generation. However, it is still apparent that the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow laws has left a residue of systematic racism in the United States that has devalued the life of African Americans (Clayton, 2018). Just like the Civil Rights Movement of 1954, the Black Lives Matters Movement only aims to engage people in non-violent protests to bring an awareness toward the

African American families and citizens who have not been served justice due to the devastation of police brutality in the U.S. justice system (Clayton, 2018).

Although the literature review is broad as it informs my topic, no other studies have been conducted using art-based research to examine the African Americans and the feelings they possess in regard to police brutality. With that said, this study will be completely authentic and original as I begin the first attempt to understand and recreate the realities of African Americans who face the ongoing social issue of police brutality through poetic transcription.

DATA AND METHODS

This study utilizes in-depth interviews followed by an art-based research method known as poetic transcription to discuss police brutality in the United States. I recruited participants through my classes and Dr. Romero's classes at Texas State University. The criteria for my subjects was that they be males of African American decent, over the age of 18, who attend Texas State University. I aimed to interview 10 subjects and use a snowball sampling effect asking my first participants to help me recruit other valuable participants by listing their name and contact information.

I believed by targeting this specific group I would be able to magnify the severity of the issue of police brutality in contemporary society in regard to minorities. By excluding all other ethnic groups, and genders this study was able to make a more explicit statement about the ongoing realities of police brutality against African American males today.

After explaining to my potential subjects that their participation was completely voluntary, and anonymous I then scheduled interviews for the African American males who agreed to participate in this study. It was at that time that I provided my participants with a consent form that detailed the specific parameters of their participation in the study. The consent form also asked for permission to be audio-recorded during each interview for anonymous transcription that would then be used to create poetry.

Once the interviews were conducted in this study, I then closely examined the experiences and opinions these African American male students had in regard to police brutality. Drawing from the in-depth interviews, I then used poetic inquiry as method to shed light on the experiences of these participants. Poetic inquiry gave me the ability to use these in-depth interviews to create poetry through a method called poetic transcription. In addition to the in-depth interviews, I also asked the participants to draw a picture that described or depicted the fear they felt toward the reality of police brutality today.

In-depth interviewing was the best method for gathering detailed data when trying to discover the perceptions these African American males had toward police brutality. I used a semi-structured interview guide, using an initial set of questions for all participants allowing some room for the development of spontaneous inquiry depending on the responses shared by the participants. The interviews conducted included the following semi-constructed questions: (see appendix).

In addition, this study included the use of poetic transcription to create poems that illustrated the reality of the males interviewed using only their words anonymously.

I, the researcher, wrote the poems rearranging the words recorded during the interviews taking into consideration what parts of the interviews were the most influential on my own understanding. After the process of poetic transcription, I then categorized the poems in relation to different themes that emerged across each interview. Selected poems that were transcribed also stand beside the pictures each participant drew depicting how the realities of police brutality made them feel.

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to explore the feelings, opinions, and experiences that African American males had toward police brutality to further my understanding of what it is like to be in their position. To do this, I conducted interviews with 8 anonymous African American male students who attend Texas State University. The interviews consisted of 8 questions and sometimes probing further dependent on their responses. Upon finishing my interviews, I then conducted an art-based research method known as poetic transcription to further assist my understanding towards a different culture of people who face different adversity than myself.

It was through poetic transcription that three major themes emerged: (1) *The angst and stigma attached to being an African American*; (2) *The devastating reality of being an African American*; (3) *The Desperation of being an African American*. Below I will open up with a series of poems open up with a series of poems that describe how poetic expressions can enable one to understand sensitive issues. These poems also were crafted from the expressions of my participants. After this set of poems, I share another series, each which explores the major themes of my research.

The Influence of Poetry to Enable Understanding.

(1)

poetry hits people in a different spot.
we get a deeper feeling out of it.
it's more in tune to our feelings,
than somebody just telling you
what you don't want to hear.
you're put in their shoes
you understand it.
even if,
it's just for a moment.

(2)

art.
poetry is art.
and anybody can create art.

a black or white boy could make music,
and if it's good
everybody will nod their head to it.

just like anybody can make a movie
and if it's good
everybody is going to clap for it.

so, if the poetry is good,
no matter where if it's coming from
a black or white perspective

they will feel it,
and it will always
relay the message better,

than somebody sitting down,
just saying, "you should believe this"
or "you should stop being racist"

(3)

poetry is a way to inspire others
not everybody likes reading regular plain text.
art is what brings us together.

poetry is a beautiful art,

that makes people feel
and that's what really drives people.
feeling.

there has been a lot
of strong hate going on these days,
and I feel like poetry is more lighthearted.

It's only at a concert, or a show,
A whole bunch of mixed races get together.
and everybody is cool.

It is during art
that you'll look at somebody in the face
and they will finally see you
See you as another person.

When on any other day
That same person might scoff at you.

(4)
one of the best ways to share how you're feeling
is through art,
and poetry is art.
you can do anything with it
anything to try and get a point across
everybody relates to poetry.
feels poetry.
especially,
if it's real poetry.

THEME I

The Angst and Stigma Attached to Being an African American.

(1)
I am connected to it,
because
I am black.
even if I have not experienced it
it's happening.
and if it happens to one of us,
then it can happen to any of us.
and
just because they're choosing
to do it today
to people of color

doesn't mean
that they can't choose
to do to somebody else tomorrow.
so regardless
if it happens to you or not,
it's happening.
and it's scary.



(2)
as an African American

people have their assumptions
of you.
people already have a preconception
of you.

but they know nothing about you.
but because I look like this,
I am going to act like "that"
In their eyes, I am guilty until proven innocent.

even if I didn't do anything
even if I'm a good person
that maybe just made one bad mistake
they want to see me fall.

(3)
I understand some people say
"this is a football game"
but it's not,
it's more than that
it's our society.
you rarely see somebody sacrifice
their career for what they believe in.
most players in the league
just shut up about it.
they don't say anything about it.
because that is what
people expect out of our kind.
so I liked the fact that he did it.
especially at a time

where somebody needed to.



(4)

Black people for so long have lived with this certain stigma
that now they have this stigma on themselves.

they think that the only thing they're supposed to do
is be an actor
or be an athlete.

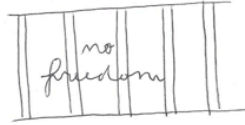
they look at being famous as the goal
rather than standing up for change
but maybe,
that is because they know it's pointless.

(5)

White people get away
with doing what they want
because they got a badge
protecting them.

it's frustrating.
I couldn't imagine being in the hood
and having to deal with that reality
almost every day.
six of them,
one of me.

The possibility
of being innocent
getting killed
and them getting away.
It's surreal.



(6)
police officers nowadays,
don't understand
what it's like to be black
to be terrified when the police roll up
i mean you know what you have to do.
our people,
our parents
tell us what to do all the time,
but when it happens,
it never gets less scary.
because when they see us
they don't see us like a white kid.
they wouldn't think
oh, that could be my nephew
or my son, or my daughter.
No.
they see the world's number one predator.
even if you're doing nothing wrong.

(7)
I come from a mom
who did very well for herself.
head nurse of her hospital.
so, I have nice things.
it is because of those things
that I feel scared
sometimes worried
if I get stopped by a cop.

-
I've been stopped by cops out here
who automatically thought I was selling meth
when I had nothing.
who searched my car
for an hour...
and found nothing.
who were still telling me
that I was selling meth
that they were going to catch me
that there was no room for me
in this town.

that this town was for college students,
not for meth dealers,

just because I drive a Cadillac.

THEME II

The Devastating Reality of Being an African American

(1)
a lot of people don't want to see you
see you do good.
you get a profiled
and it's hard if you're doing good for yourself.
the system is against you.
police brutality is real.
you see it all over social media.
be safe they say
because they shoot people for no reason.

(2)
when I first came to San Marcos,
before I attended the school,
I was staying at hotel.
looking
for an apartment.

five in the morning
woken up out of my sleep.
cops saying that I had shot a firearm
when at the time,
I didn't even own a firearm.

they pulled me out of the hotel
five cars around me, lasers on my back
no reason.
just because a description
of a black male.

They attacked me
guns pointed at me
before I even said a word.
they were speaking to me, as if I had a gun pointed at them.
When they had guns pointed at me.

I had nothing but my boxers on.

(3)

How is it that every school shooter ends up with no bruises,
no cuts,
no nothing.

The police somehow safely detain those
who are known to actively be shooting people.
detain them without a scratch.

While there is countless cases of a young black males
getting shot by police men
who "thought" they had a gun.
And it was a bag of skittles.
it doesn't make any sense.



(4)

personally,
I have experienced police brutality.
it's a real thing
I appreciate the ability
to be able to document it
I just don't know where to draw the line
in regards to them doing their job.
I don't know
where to make that distinction.
I guess everybody has that moment
where your innocence is dissolved
and you're like, okay,
the world is unfair.

(5)

I've only been affected by the police once.
I wouldn't say it was police brutality,
but I know it's a problem.
whether it's the suburbs
or the hood.
my view
is if you allow somebody
that already has inherit power over citizens

that have a certain stigma
attached to black people
to do something
and get away with it
without any repercussions
they're going to continue to keep doing it
until you give them a reason not to.

(6)
the other day,
this dude got shot,
he was sleeping,
sleeping in his car
six cops surrounded
he had a gun in his lap
they ended up shooting him
because he jerked.

I move when I sleep.
I don't know about you.
he moved, and they shot him
their life was not in danger.
He was sleeping.
I understand he shouldn't have been asleep,
but I don't know.

that's not even excessive force.
that's just,
not doing their job.

(7)
I think our society is equal.
That's the problem.
Say, you and I
are racing a one-hundred-meter race

and for the first 50 meters
you have to run with your feet tied together

and for the first 50 meters, I get to run regularly.
and then after that 50 meters, we both get to run regularly.

That's equal, but that's not equity.
I think that's the problem.

we need equity, not equality.

we as Americans now have to make up for the fact
that the first 50 meters,
what were you doing?

You were running with your feet tied together.

I'm not saying
that I got to run with my feet tied together for the next 50 meters,
but now we got to make up for the fact that
you did not run the same race as me.



(8)
I feel really conflicted
because ever since I was young
I had to deal with racism.
I can remember even small details
kids in school, telling me,
“Oh,
don't you wish you were born white?”
“are you sad that you're black?”

I was the only black kid in my elementary school.
I didn't even know life was supposed to be like that.
it's sad to know
that since I was young
till now
it has only gotten worse.

Police officers
still getting off charges
murdering innocent people.
While innocent African Americans
sit in prison
with a whole system
going against them.

(9)
generally
the cops have been pretty good
police brutality wise.

I am alive.
I only got thrown to the ground
and tazed in the neck.
It could have been a worse,
people get shot for things like that every day
and it's messed up.



THEME III

The Desperation of Being an African American



(1)
I hope that one day
the kids are able to live
not get shot for no reason.
I hope that cops stop
looking at African Americans,
as monsters,
ruthless animals
that one day
they can look at them
like another human being
handle them the same way.
no matter what their race is.

(2)
I try not to think in terms of hope
it's easy to set yourself up
for disappointment
when you dabble in hope.
It is beautiful
to see racism surface
within our government,
there is no secrets anymore.
But I don't think
things are going to be done about it,

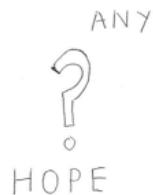
or that things are going to change.
I think this is the way it is.
It is the way life is,
and it is not going to stop.

(3)

I don't know if I got any hope.
you can't control people,
you can't end racism.
It's not going to stop
no matter where you go.
It's only up to us to know
that they're not going to stop us
that nobody is going to stop us
from getting to where we want to go
that's where I see this opposition.

We are going to get there regardless.
It just sucks to know -
that we have to go through challenges
that other people don't
that other people do not see
and I want to say
there's going to be a time
where the mass majority
of people don't feel that way.

but I don't want it to ever come
at the cost of sacrificing black identity
it's a double edge sword.



(4)

even though
we've been wronged throughout history,
I hope that we can still,
raise our children with love
that's the only solution
that is going to fix what is going on.

i can only dream...

i can only
DREAM...

(5)
there have been peaceful marches
led by great leaders
great black leaders
in the past
peaceful marches toward change
that have been effective
so there are peaceful ways
to achieve a better life.
I just hope
that they one day raise the bar
when giving jobs
that carry power over the people.

(6)
nobody,
well it seems like
almost nobody in the world,
understands what it really feels like
to be seriously discriminated against
since as early as they can tell us.
it's like blacks, or anyone with dark skin in our history textbooks
have been oppressed
since day one.
And now
it's 2019
And we're still reaching into our roots
trying to learn where we're really from.
or why this happened to our people.
And as we educate ourselves
we only understand
further that people
still truly
don't
understand
what it's like
being black.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of African American males in regard to Police Brutality. Using in-depth interviews and poetic transcription, I crafted a series of poems to illustrate the findings of my research. The analysis and transcription of 8 participant interviews revealed three significant themes that assisted in my own understanding of what it is truly like to be an African American today who may face the social issue of police brutality.

The first theme that stood out to me when transcribing the words of each participant was the angst and stigma attached to being an African American. The angst meaning their deep anxiety and fear of being an African American in today's society knowing the reality of police brutality. All of my participants mentioned fear, and the feeling of being scared and worried around police men. It is in this section that I was able to include transcribed poems to reflect the anxiety of being an African American who may have to face law enforcement for little or no reasoning. Secondly, I also attached poems in this section that discussed the stigma most of my participants mentioned that is believed to be commonly attached to African Americans. These poems helped me understand how most African Americans feel about this stigma and how this stigma not only influence's the public's opinion of African Americans but how it also influences their own.

The second theme was the devastating reality of being an African American. One of the questions I asked was if they could share a personal experience with me or someone they knew involving the issue of police brutality. It is in this series of transcribed poems I was able to recreate the real-life experiences of these 8 African

American males focusing on what happened in their encounters with the police. Only a few had experienced serious police brutality, but many of them did face unfair discrimination while being accused of something they were not responsible for. These poems moved me to feel the pain of each participant as they described their experiences with police men who were prejudice in their judgement.

Finally, the third and most important theme that emerged was the desperation of being an African American. One of the last questions I asked during the interview was “could you share with me some of your hopes for the future of America, in particular as it relates to People of Color, and their children?” A lot of the answers my participants provided me with touched on the theme of hopelessness. To my surprise, all of my participants mentioned having little or no hope toward actual change in the future. However, even though most of my participants did not think anything would be done to resolve the issue of police brutality, they still mentioned that the only hope they did have was that this current generation would raise their children focusing on love and not hate. All my participants believed raising children to treat everyone equally as human beings was the only realistic resolution to the issue of police brutality.

In addition to these themes, I included a series of poems about the influence poetry can have to help one understand. Because this study focuses on the influence poetic transcription could have on my understanding, I thought it would be interesting to use the last question of my interview to focus on the impact poetry can have in the process of discussing difficult topics. Consequently, I asked my participants to respond to how their story, feelings, and hopes could be best communicated through poetry to educate and inspire others. Many of their responses added to my insight of how poetry is

viewed by the public, and how it can convey a message to someone on a deeper level allowing them to step into someone else's shoes. From my findings I was able to see that people believe that poetry like many other art forms allows others to discover new perspectives that might not have happened otherwise.

Through these transcribed poems I was able to reflect and educate not only myself, but also others, that not everyone has the privilege of not having to fear the police of taking their life on any given day. Being raised in a household with similar individuals as ourselves, it can be difficult to step out of what we know and remember that not everyone lives the same life as ourselves. Yet, it is through art that we can help people like myself understand that although nobody lives the same life as us; we as humans are actually more similar than we are different by being human beings who all have the capability to sympathize with one another.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
Martin Luther King, Jr.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDANCE QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about the most challenging part about being an African American in the United States today.
2. How do you feel about Colin Kaepernick's kneel during the national anthem to promote an awareness for police brutality in the U.S.?
3. As an African American male what are your thoughts towards police brutality?
4. Have you ever experienced police brutality first hand? Could you share a personal story, or a story about something you witnessed, or heard from a friend or family member?
5. How does police brutality connect to your realization of inequality and injustice in our culture today? How does it make you feel?
6. Could you share with me some of your hopes for the future of America, in particular as it relates to People of Color, and their children?
7. Could you draw me a picture of how the realities of police brutality makes you feel? Once you are finished, name your picture in 1-3 words.
8. How do you think sharing your story, feelings, and hopes through poetry can inspire others?