

Poetic Pedagogy: Emancipatory Spaces of Slam Poetry for Marketing Education

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This paper explores the potential of Slam poetry to serve as a transformative and emancipatory pedagogic tool for marketing education. An under-researched style of poetry within the field of marketing pedagogy, Slam's ability to foster compassionate criticality through the creative presentation of subjective voices, feeds into the broader business school agendas of responsible management education and decolonisation. Through situating the audience, Slam poetry offers a resonant method to harness critical reflexivity away from the traditional conventions of academic expression. Extending extant research on the role of poetry, the paper argues that the efficacy of slam poetry through meaningful, accessible dialogue rooted in vernacular, becomes an important dialogical encounter for individuals to understand other subject positions. Through the application of Slam as an emancipatory tool, individuals are afforded intellectual freedoms as critically reflexive citizens, engaged in the serious business of emotion.

Keywords: slam poetry; emancipatory methods; marketing; critical; education

Summary statement of contribution

As an under-researched style of poetry within the broad marketing discipline, Slam poetry offers a new way of considering the emancipatory role of poetry as a pedagogic tool. Feeding into calls for responsible management education and the decolonising of curriculums, the paper presents Slam poetry as a youth-centred, creative, and critically reflexive approach which enables students to understand the multiplicity of subject positions in the world as critically reflexive, and intellectually open citizens.

Introduction

What are we doing to our women?
From our neanderthal and nomadic days to present day evolution,
nothing has changed and women are still baby producing machines meant for reproduction.
Is the life of a woman still measured through the miracle of her body than her plight?
If that is the case, will she ever see the unveiled light?
Are women still positioned in terms of fertility control and reproductive choice?
If that is the case, then a girl is always going to lose her voice.
In a society where ill-treatment and exploitation of women is endemic at all levels,
the society's accusing finger always points towards a woman making her the devil.
Rapes and molestations-despicable truths behind fictitious virtuosity,
those rape case were just the common, general reality of our obnoxious society.
All those pleas for justice and shattered dignity went unspoken,
and yet we Indians, a land of spiritual people, boast of our culture and values that remain
unbroken.
All those candle marches and posters were hollow,
as her dignity, one thing prized most by her, she had to swallow.
All those muffled screams,
still haunt her in her dreams.

Poem excerpt: *Unspoken, Unheard, Unnoticed* (Female, undergraduate student, New Delhi, India)¹

The poem above was authored by a young Indian woman as part of an empowerment-based skills development project I am currently undertaking in India. Upon reading the poem, I was reminded of Sheers' (2008:173) reflections on poetry, of the power invested in condensed written form and of the internal geographies of history and memory inherent in our own understanding of the world. One of the significant shared qualities of poems, he asserts, is "their ability to situate us by translating abstract world of thought and feeling into physical language". Poems have the power to convey emphatic, multi-sensory subjectivity (Paiva, 2020) and a situatedness of experience only truly accessible through the introspection and reflection of the author. Poetry is rebellious and unconventional in form. Despite the debates on its efficacy, poetry's ability to unveil lived experience (Canniford, 2012) and reach diverse audiences

¹ Excerpt shared with consent from the author.

(Richardson, 2002) is one of the primary reasons for the present discussion of its use within pedagogic practice. The aim of this paper is twofold: to firstly contribute to the extant and emergent discussions on the exploration of poetry as an emancipatory pedagogic tool for critical marketing education, and secondly to share a reflexive case of its application within the (virtual) classroom setting.

Historically, poems – as song, rhythm, and rhyme - have provided the basis for storytelling and the development of language over time (Tannen, 2007). As an educational tool, the Department for Education and Sciences (2007) identify poetry as “a central example of the use human beings make of the world to explore and understand...[lending] shape and meaning to our experiences and [helping] us to move confidently in the world we know and step beyond it”. Poetry has been examined in ethnographic research (Phipps and Saunders, 2009); geography (Lorimer and Parr, 2014; Paiva, 2020; Curry, 1991); education (Foire, 2013); literary studies (Perloff, 2004); Indigenous education (Thaman, 2003); and nursing (Cronin & Hawthorne, 2019) and there continues a growing interest in the use of poetry across a range of disciplines. With respect to marketing and consumer research there is a growing body of work examining the use of poetry as research method (Downey, 2019; Tonner, 2018; Canniford, 2012) with a view to capture the multiplicity of voices of the consumer experience. The use of poetry across disciplines underscores its agentic value, allowing for alternative forms of cognitive expression with the potential to supersede mere transmission of knowledge. Through offering crucial ‘thinking spaces’ in which to reflect on our lives, poetry aids an understanding of the self (Simecek & Rumbold, 2016), reaffirms the self as central to critical enquiry, and melds emotion and prose to produce an “authenticity born of intimacy” (Sherry and Schouten, 2002:229). With an emphasis on achieving authenticity of voice, Sherry and Schouten (2002:218) posit that

poetry has the capacity to “represent honestly and authentically the truth”, bringing to view cultural experience, memories, meanings, and embodied experiences (Prendergast, 2006). It is not simply a case of private spaces becoming public, but where the inner thoughts, feelings and processes involved in articulating an experience can be shared through an emotive fluidity, away from the conventional discourses of meaning-making.

The marketing discipline boasts a rich repertoire of novel approaches utilised to investigate consumptive behaviour (see Rojas-Gaviria, 2021; Kozinets, 2012; Dholakia, 2005; Shankar, 2000; Holbrook, 1995; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992; Dion et al., 2014; Wallendorf and Belk, 1989; Patterson, 2005), yet the discussion and application of these approaches into marketing curricula and pedagogy remain limited. Extending Canniford’s (2012) assertion of poetry’s ability to ‘unfix’ language, its potential to cater for the development of critical beings (Barnett, 1997), as part of the broader push for responsible management education (PRME), can aid the pursuit of greater reflexivity, solidarity, and pluralism. The alternative subject positions being encouraged through disruptive pedagogies (see Mills, 1997; San Pedro, 2018) requires a range of methods through which to engage with tensions, disruptions, and self-discoveries (San Pedro, 2018) within hegemonic discourses (Litts et al., 2020). Poetry as a pedagogic tool has often been overlooked as soft practice, placing it as peripheral to the development of more ‘scholarly’ approaches to critical thinking. Poetry’s roots in the literary tradition often limits it to romanticised, whimsical artistic prose with limited relevance for critical enquiry, adding to existing disciplinary reluctance. However, when considering non-western perspectives of poetic traditions, this form is closely intertwined with philosophy, morality, culture, and religious practice. Within South-Asian society, for example, it is not uncommon for poetry to feature within everyday conversations and

popular culture (Dhand, 2006). Hindu and Sikh religious scriptures are often recited as poetic storytelling (Bhakti poetry), and the interweaving of Islamic teachings with dramatic events from regional narratives are evidenced within the traditions of Sindhi Sufi poetry (Bond, 2020). The rich oral traditions of South Asian poetry and literature was understood to be an embodied experience where oration was the primary medium. Hess (2015), discussing the oral traditions and performance of poetry in India, notes how “as purely textual scholars, we dealt only with words; now words and music are inseparable. Mind and body interact...the meaning of the text change when we hear it sung”. Poems are the craft of emotion, of engagement with context and multiple subjectivities. Faulkner’s (2007:230) comprehensive analysis on research poetry as craft further highlights the need to engage with the embodied experiences that “make audiences feel with, rather than about a poem”. It is this very notion which positions poetry as a resonant method (Paiva, 2020:4), capable of revealing the ways in which “bodies echo in the world”. Changes in worldviews, political struggles, social justice, marginalities, have all operated as stimuli for poetic expression. The importance of these spaces should not be limited to artistic expression but should be understood as sites of emancipation.

Emancipatory Spaces

Recent calls for decolonising curriculums and inclusive approaches to education have gained significant traction (see Bhabra, et al., 2020; San Pedro, 2018; Gay, 2010; Litts et al., 2020). These calls have presented universities with new ways of thinking about pedagogy, in particular “questioning the political and epistemological authority...[by] interrogating theoretical canons” (Morreira, et al., 2020:6). These calls assume the liberatory potential of education, where curriculums encourage and nurture

critical enquiry through the shifting power dynamics within the classroom setting. Although what decolonisation means in practice is still contested, the term itself refers to the unravelling of colonial and imperial practices (Saini and Begum, 2020), as a process of ‘crushing canons’ and bringing to the fore a sense of authentic intellectualism. Arday et al. (2020:2) emphasise the importance of academic instruction in light of these debates and suggest that there is a need for current gatekeepers of knowledge to surrender the monopolies to knowledge creation and dissemination. Arguably, some of the early roots of understanding education as a truly emancipatory process stem from the work of Paulo Freire (1970). He noted that the pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery and that liberation can only be achieved through pedagogy forged *with* the oppressed through true reflection and action. Oppression is, of course, a loaded term, however its definition can be broadened to include those individuals whose voice, expression, and very being is stifled by the structures of contemporary educational instruction. Freire (1970) advocated dialogical approaches to pedagogy where the essence of education was in its practice of freedom. Poetry, as an emancipatory form (Downey, 2019) and dialogical tool, has the potential to serve as an agent of change through its ability to connect to the audience and create the kind of transformative impact that traditional assessments fail to do. In naming the world that individuals inhabit, and making meaning of that very world, human beings can achieve significance (Freire, 1993).

Emancipatory pedagogies are approaches aimed at developing the creation of a critical consciousness through identifying oppressive systems (Young, 2017). Since criticality alone does not inevitably materialise into moral thinking (Noddings, 2002), an approach which is emphatic, authentic and reminds students of the inter-connectedness of our very being is a step closer to what Heath et al. (2019) term

‘sincere care’. As already discussed, poetry’s capacity to reveal inner subjectivities helps to provide the foundation for compassionate criticality where students become the custodians of transformation “through reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970:24). Heath et al. (2019) emphasise the disconnect between profit-maximising marketing rhetoric and the push for sustainable, ethical approaches to management and marketing education. The ethics of care heightens the sensitivity to one’s actions and helps to raise the kind of questioning which disrupts the status quo (see Tadajewski, 2016). As part of the framework proposed by the authors, acknowledging the student as ‘concrete other’ encourages them to question their own views and practices through a reflexive agenda. I extend this element to include what Freire (1993) terms an ‘act of creation’, where dialogue as an encounter becomes the space where individuals make sense of the world they live in, rather than naming this world on behalf of others. He notes that the act of creation through dialogical approaches must not serve as an instrument for the domination of one person by another (Freire, 1993) but must be nurtured through pedagogic humility. He further postulates “...how can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others – mere “its” in whom I cannot recognise other “I”s” (Freire, 1993: 63).

Taken together, emancipatory spaces which promote: i) humanization- through authentic dialogue, ii) critical conscientization – through transformative learning, and iii) a problem-posing education (Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014) serve as fertile soil for the application of poetry as a critically-reflexive pedagogic tool. Poetry enables the merging of “different subjectivities [to] express pluriversal worlds” (Paiva, 2020:3). Through creating an outlet for experiences in situ, the development of a sensuous scholarship (Sherry and Schouten, 2002) helps to create a sense of solidarity with the world. Maibom’s (2020:9) work on empathy is especially insightful here; she notes that

affective empathy is a form of emotional contagion with a robust self-other differentiation. For example, being angry on behalf of a friend is an anger which is not an internalised state. What is important here is the emphatic effect that can be “aroused simply by imagining being in [someone else’s] situation” (Maibom, 2020: 10). In a similar vein, psychological research on multiculturalism and race relations suggests that one way of promoting mutual understanding between various racial and ethnic groups is through the use of ethnocultural empathy (Wang et al., 2003; Ivey et al., 1987). Although we can never fully succeed in seeing the world through another’s perceptual lens, what can be forged is an emphatically grounded, mutual understanding of conditions of existence.

A truly emancipatory agenda requires a movement away from convention, specifically the structures which govern those conventions in the first place. Poetry inadvertently carries the connotations of being ostentatious prose for the English-speaking elites. Riley (2012) notes how for a long time the “standard pattern was for the poet to be discovered by an upper – or middle-class person...and introduced to polite society...the possibility of publication would be directed towards a readership among the urban educated”. Conventions determined how poetry was both produced and consumed, for example, formal poetry readings would dictate audience participation, emphasising the need to be silent during the recital (Gregory, 2008: 66). However, in the latter part of eighteenth-century Britain, poetry of the working classes was gaining traction, in particular, the radical movements of Chartism -accessible poetry with the aim of fighting for justice (Riley, 2012). Poetry has a rich history in resistance across the globe (see Plys, 2013; Hassan et al., 1995), for example, during anti-colonial movements, poetry was utilised as a tool to detail the horrors of colonialism and to recruit individuals to resistance movements (Plys, 2020). Poetry as healing (Carroll,

2005), poetry as power (Freeman, 2005), poetry and philosophy (Barfield, 2011), poetry and race (Jocson, 2011). There are few disciplinary arenas where poetry has not featured in some form, yet what all of these examples have in common is the communicating of internal geographies within a given context or space – in situ. As Canniford (2012:393) notes, “intense experiences of pleasure, pain, desire, joy or fear require spaces for expression and inquiry beyond the regular modes of representation”. Slam poetry or spoken word poetry as it is alternatively known, has become an increasingly popular form of expression among youth, promoting critically reflexive citizens (Fiore, 2015). Slams are the competitive arenas for where poems are orated, but the style of slam poetry offers spaces beyond the regular modes of representation that Canniford (2012) speaks of and operates beyond the conventions stipulated for ‘proper poetry’. Cultivating what Gutierrez et al (1999) calls the ‘third space’ allows for the recognition of alternative and competing discourses where students have the chance to engage with praxis (Freire, 1970).

Slam Poetry: Uncomfortable Truths

Slam poetry has received both praise and criticism among various academic circles. Its high-energy, theatrical performance melding elements of hip-hop and rap that “privileges a Black aesthetic” (Winn, 2016), encourages audience participation and breaks the conventions of more traditional poetic styles. What makes slam poetry relevant for youth audiences is not only it being attuned to popular culture, but also that youth as a category has historically carried with it a set of qualities – for example, being rebellious and experimental (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006). The breaking of convention has often been attributed to youth cultures across the globe and the very makeup of slam poetry, it could be argued, is in sync with the supposed experimental rule-breaking which has been attributed to this group. It is a blatant disruption of

prescriptivism and linguistic hegemony (Alim, 2011) with the aim of creating impact through meaningful, accessible dialogue rooted in vernacular. Gregory (2008:68) cites stand-up poet Jude Simpson's views on slam and its marginalisation in the literary world noting how "... a slam will usually be part of the fringe of a literature festival, sort of looked at almost like the noisy toddler of the poetry world". In contrast to traditional convention, the written poem is secondary to performance. What makes this style of poetry come alive is the human voice. as Dyson (2005:159) reminds us, spoken-word poems are incomplete until they are immersed in the rhythms and melodies of the human voice. Jeff Mahoney's (2021) coverage of slam poets featured in Canada's Hamilton Art Gallery reflects the impact of the poets' voices, writing

"it's not just the voices. It's the words themselves, so often lit up with the passion, anger, confusion, indignation, pain, heartbreak and humour...these poets perform their words. They drive them like horses, or dragons, or rockets".

The exhibition titled '*Break the Vault*', is an attempt by the Hamilton Art Gallery to provide platforms for historically under-represented, marginalised individuals into the enterprise of community and culture. Juxtaposed against the gallery's prized, permanent collections, the poetry is scribed across its walls and performed.

The poetry slam has been considered a discursive arena for the counterdiscourses of marginalised groups (Somers-Willett, 2014), similar to the resistance poetry of the working classes in eighteenth century Britain. Understanding the slam as a form of 'counterpublic' where individuals recognise their subordinate or marginalised status (Warner, 2002) feeds into Freire's (1970) notion of recognising the oppressive states that individuals find themselves in. Only through this recognition can there be any transformative potential within pedagogy – or what Freire terms liberatory

potential. However, as Somers-Willett (2014:3) reminds us, not all members of this counterpublic will identify as marginalised or subordinate since “rather than [being] organised exclusively by and for marginalised people, the poetry slam seems to be organised by a shared value of difference, expressed primarily through identity performance”. The poems strive for a raw authenticity (Williams, 2018), which can only be accessed through an introspective, highly subjective account of an individual’s view of the world. Making the subject and the topic relevant and engaging has also allowed for its commercial use. Take, for example, the spoken-word poetry of George the Poet for Coca-Cola’s ‘*Open Like Never Before*’ campaign addressing the challenges of the pandemic. Or Nationwide Building Society’s ‘*our members have a voice*’ campaign featuring the poetry of Sugar J Poet and Hollie McNish. When heard back, the content of the poems are purposefully designed to be relatable and emotive with a view to prompt an emphatic response - which they do. The notable efficacy of slam poetry requires an engagement with deeper conversations (Jocson, 2011), yet the high versus popular culture debate (Adorno, 1991) that pervades the discussions of spoken-word poetry versus its more refined academic sibling continues to stigmatise slam as style over substance. As a native of emancipatory spaces, slam poetry is an exciting, provocative, albeit necessary force for radical change. To borrow the words of Gregory (2008), it is an attempt to dust off ‘academic detritus’, transporting those ideas and concepts into contemporary and relevant spaces for those individuals who have remained peripheral them.

Pedagogy which strives to make visible the disenfranchised, marginalised, minority voices beyond the institutional confine feeds into the decentering of traditional knowledge bases. Rather than an ‘us’ and ‘them’ approach, slam poetry’s fluid orthodoxy allows for the ownership and recognition of the self as a viable space. There

are no strict rules. As Damon (1998:336) recognises, there has been a resurgence of serious attention to oral and performative literatures “with a concomitant imaginative refiguring of communities”. The emotional contagion (Maibom, 2020) cultivated through the performance of slam poetry centralises an ethics of care by making the world visible in ways traditional social science writing fails to do (Denzin, 2014). This emotional sensitivity and heightened awareness of our own human inter-dependencies through “looking at a particular other rather than the abstract, generalised other (Gilligan, 1982) encourages us to imagine the other’s frame of reference” (Heath et al., 2019), helping to guide action centred around the well-being of others. Additionally, what should not be overlooked is the ‘political task’ of poetry (Faulker, 2017) through speaking back to the reality of the very social problems (Freire, 1970) that serve as catalysts for emancipatory praxis. This approach could be considered an awakening of critical consciousness, where individuals are afforded the reflexive spaces in which to understand their own position within the world through addressing “the modern human condition by bringing to life...personal, political, social and spiritual concerns while knocking the socks off an audience through the artful and entertaining application of performance” (Smith and Kraynak, 2009:5).

Marketing and its relationship with society requires a questioning and untangling of its practices and structures (see Murray and Ozanne, 2009; Tadjewski, 2010, Hutton and Heath, 2020) however, what must be central to this questioning is an embracing of the difficult and uncomfortable. The role of educational instruction in light of this becomes one of unsettling students’ perceptions of knowledge, identity, and power where an embodied, affective approach brings to light the lived experiences of others (Boler, 1999). These affective approaches help to fuse empathy, care, and compassionate criticality through an engagement with the emotional states expressed

and vocalised through the use of slam poetry. The importance for students to de-construct their worldviews is the basis for critical thinking but also challenges the epistemic pushback (Bailey, 2017) which can emerge through an unsettling of paradigms for dominant groups through their exposure to new (unknown) material. (Case and Cole, 2013, in Bailey, 2017). The systemic, privilege-preserving approaches to educational instruction have become invisible, to the point that they are difficult to even recognise. Bailey (2017) argues that critical philosophical practice is required in order for these privileges to be seen, but also points out that ignorance is the avoidance mechanism for discomfort. Berlak (2004:123) provides an apt illustration of the importance of engaging deeply – as lived - with subject matter stating:

“...how is it possible for many white students and students of color to be present in a university classroom where they read about, see videos documenting, and engage in activities that demonstrate the pervasive and ubiquitous realities and effects of...racism, and yet fail to become engaged with racism at a deep emotional and analytical level?”

Put simply, discomfort is the catalyst for transformation. Rarely, throughout history has comfort been the driving force behind challenge, radical change, or justice. As Davis and Steyn (2012) remind us, when people expect comfort the possibility for growth is severely curtailed. What is required for a compassionate pedagogy is not just the hearing of other voices but the process of listening deeply and engaging with the intent of learning and acknowledging a worldview different from one's own. These voices may not always present a sanitised view of the world, but this is precisely slam's aim. Amid the critiques of discomfort in the classroom (see Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009) what slam poetry offers is a safe space – for the speaker and the audience – it

becomes an acceptable rebellion of the inner states of individuals who decide to traverse its terrain to communicate the serious business of emotions.

In the following section I provide a short reflexive vignette for the application of slam poetry with a group of final year undergraduate students in the UK. It should be noted that in this specific case the sensibilities and style of slam poetry were the key elements adopted by students. In this sense, their contributions were original and personal; written with the intention being for them to be performed; adopted the free verse approach to composing; and made use of the vernacular and specific rhythms (as evidenced by those who recorded audios of their poetry). The performativity for the slam poems here is derived from the power of the language to communicate those inner spaces of the poet. Although a slam performance did not take place, the sensibilities of slam were adopted to help simulate the performativity. As a genre of poetry and spoken word, the mode of expression was what allowed students to engage in the ways that they did, reinforcing the power of the words beyond physical performance. I have approached the following sub-section through adopting the sensibilities of an autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011; Hackley, 2015) where my experiences and thoughts are assembled using hindsight (Denzin, 1989). I would like to reiterate that this is not a fully-fledged autoethnographic account but a purposeful reflection which has allowed me to think deeply about the application of slam poetry within my own pedagogic practice.

Vignette: Stepping into Poetry

Picture the scene. You are stood in a classroom or lecture theatre, desperate for feedback, commentary, or discussion from students. As they skilfully avoid eye contact - I would even be tempted to say that some have mastered the art - you find yourself meandering back to one of two places: the student who is always eager to share their

thoughts or the notes written up for the session as a contingency for ‘lack of engagement’. I have often had these conversations with colleagues, the ones where students have been labelled as disengaged, not bothered, disinterested or just plain lazy. I never believed that there was a simple answer to this and began to ask myself: am I even asking the right questions? Am I creating the right spaces and using the right methods for them to express themselves? Am I merely sticking to a script where students read a case study, answer a few rudimentary questions, and are no further enriched than before they entered the room? This was a final year module which focused on critical components of the sociology of consumption. At its core, the module was an attempt to provide students with an opportunity to un-learn marketing and reconsider its role and (un)intended consequences for individuals across a range of contexts. This new way of thinking, or unlearning, required a different approach to engaging with the course content, and this was the challenge.

My own interest in slam poetry came from an accidental discovery some years ago whilst caught in a YouTube rabbit-hole. I had originally been searching for a video to share with students on our reliance upon technology, and it was here that I stumbled upon Marshall Davis Jones performing ‘Touchscreen’ as part of a poetry slam competition. I am no poet, but I was overwhelmed at the impact. There was something alluring about the style in which he expressed our collective vulnerabilities through an effortless honesty and simplicity I had rarely come across before. I went on to utilise this video as part of a lecture at a previous institution and its impact was palpable. For the majority of the students, this was their first experience of slam poetry – both the content and manner in which Marshall Davis Jones executed the poem became the topic of discussion within the lecture. This discussion revolved around the themes that had been powerfully presented in the poem and it did something remarkable, it organically

prompted discussion. Rather than finding myself asking students what they thought, the responses flowed. Upon reflection, I do not believe that students were merely telling me what they thought, they were expressing how they felt, and this became the difference. At the time I was unsure of how to integrate poetry more fully into the learning experience for students. Fast forward five years, a pandemic, and an overhaul of ‘teaching as we know it’, I decided to take a leap of faith with a new cohort of final-year students at my current institution.

During the early part of the Covid-19 pandemic, online sessions had replaced a good majority of face-to-face teaching. Although this came with its challenges for many, it forced a re-thinking of pedagogic practice, flipped sessions, blended learning and the use of technology. It was during one week of my online seminar sessions, approximately half-way through the course, when I had decided to introduce students to Slam. My reason for its inclusion was driven by a need to encourage students to share their voices and understand their own subject positions in preparation for the second piece of coursework – a Ted talk. My previous attempts at facilitating a seminar session for this purpose with the traditional question and answer format were never really as fruitful as I had hoped. Scrutinising my own approach to previous sessions, and inspired by the approaches advocated through emancipatory pedagogies, I believed that poetry had more to offer. By now students were proficient at utilising the supporting apps and were comfortable and familiar with the mode of delivery. Furthermore, there were a good number of students who were highly engaged in the module, which I believe, added to its success for this session. This was very much an experiment to ascertain whether students would even engage in an activity so different to what they were used to. As part of the one-hour seminar session, I introduced students to poetry within the context of research and marketing more broadly. To provide an illustration of the style

of poetry I wanted the students to engage in, I shared a video of George the Poet performing his poem '*Open*' as part of the Coca-Cola campaign. It was timely and the emotions expressed in relation to the pandemic became a talking point across the groups. During the session, I asked students to think about the content we had covered in the lecture and seminar on the topic of youth culture, and to reflect deeply about their own experiences in relation to everything they had heard. I then requested students to spend 15 minutes writing their own poems titled 'youth'. No further instructions were provided except a gentle reminder to put their own emotions into words. Once written, I requested students to share their work onto a virtual Padlet wall – they were free to remain anonymous or to put their names to their poetry. I waited anxiously for the 'ping' that would be heard as students posted onto the Padlet page. In hindsight, I was ill prepared for the level of engagement, this was partially due to the experimental nature of the activity and my own fear that no students would not want to engage.

So many of the students responded positively to the task. The variation in content and approach to presenting feelings and emotions on the topic was overwhelming. The poems were creative, emotional, powerful, and impactful. We spent some time at the end of the seminar session collectively looking through the poems, discussing the themes covered. Even the style in which the poems were presented differed, for example, one student utilised large spaces between each line of their poem (see image 3). This seminar session was replicated a further three times in the week with different groups of students, and each session demonstrated similar levels of engagement with the task. In short, students were not holding back from sharing their thoughts. It was after the seminar sessions had all concluded that I reached out to the cohort and asked if anyone would like to produce an audio recording of their poem. I received some responses to this request, but fewer than I had anticipated. Two of the

students kindly recorded audios performing their poetry and gave consent for their poems to be included as part of this paper. Both of these poems have been shared below.

Youth

A changing economy
Has made the world an anomaly.
We are told to live within our means
But my means are not the means of
the generation before
Because I am today's youth.

Saving for a future that is uncertain
Dressing for a meeting that is unwritten
Planning for a legacy that cannot be set in stone
So, what am I to do with a student loan?
Because we are tomorrow's youth.

But until we right the wrongs of our predecessors
We will be stuck in a hopeless era
Wondering what is special about us
And not knowing how to right the wrongs of days past
Because we are yesterday's youth.
And now we sit amongst our peers
In the midst of certain uncertainty
Looking for hope in our degree
That maybe we can be free
But yet that may not be the case for many
Because we have only 1 and not 3
Because that is a problem for future me
Because we are the future's youth.

Written by Rachael

Youth

Misunderstood and misfits to the society.
They say we're full of rage
But we just want to change the world
Righteously.
We learn, we grow, we scream, we roar
But our voices still seem unknown.

Always being criticised, this world is a horror
Making us question our self-worth and our morals.
Face to a screen, they think we're just scrolling
But what we're doing is learning, debating,
questioning and speaking.

We are the generation of social media
They say it's all flexing, it's all pretending
But do they see us using these platforms,
to raise our voices and spread awareness on the
important topics which have been trending?

The future desperately seeks us and trusts
our generation
Because we are fighting for our beliefs.
We are transforming the toxic society's
thinking.
We are changing the world.
We are the youth.

Written by Raashi

It is unfortunate that I am unable to share the students' voices, narrating their own words. The pace, breaks, and emphasis has been lost on paper, diluting the impact somewhat. Nonetheless, I had rarely had this level of engagement from groups of students more than willing to share their words, unedited, unfiltered, and strikingly honest. Upon reflection, what I believed aided this process was the anonymity and distance that the online space offered, and that the topic of discussion was very much about them and the perceptions the world holds of them. Themes that were ignited across the variation of poems looked to tackle the assumptions created about youth; the changes and difficult decisions young people face, the culmination of social pressures that one student called a 'social disease', the issue of student debt, excessive consumption, education, and uncertain futures. Another theme which also featured prominently within the collection was a sense of hope and optimism. The vulnerabilities and pressures faced by this group were expressed in a fashion that engaged with key ideas that has been discussed previously. Some even referred to specificities of their own lives – God, family, expectations, race and ethnicity, and love. It became a set of highly subjective, intimate portraits of spaces rarely ventured into within traditional

educational instruction. The students managed to centralise their selves to examine their own embodied experiences, channelling these emotions through verse and allowing others to learn from and understand those spaces. Many expressed solidarities with the content expressed in a number of the poems and this was evidenced through their own acknowledgement of one another's words and worlds in the discussions that ensued. It was unfortunate that time was limited in the one-hour session since there was clearly potential to have done more with the poems produced, potentially having online performances as part of the session.

I wanted to learn more from those who participated and contributed to the session through understanding how they felt when engaging with slam and what kind of impact this had on their overall learning experience. This was a difficult task since at the time of writing this paper, many of the final year students who undertook this activity had left the university. I did, however, receive written reflections from the highly engaged students who agreed to share their poems on their experience of engaging with the activity. Rachel reflected, "poetry for me is about what goes unsaid. When writing poems, it's always about what can engage my point and the audience, but in saying the poetry you hear a different side to the story, the emotions are raw and unfiltered. Engaging with poetry helped me find my inner voice within the deafening loudness of what I was hiding behind. This exercise was one of my favourites because it had allowed me to voice the feelings that had no voice and motivated me to explore different ways to access my degree. It made me feel heard. A lot of the time lecturers and tutors talk at you and expect you to understand and just know because it's what your told, but this felt like we were being listened to and that we had a way to show our knowledge of the subject matter in our own way. It was a way of no judgement and no restrictions, so it allowed for open communication and a platform to freely express our

learning and our comprehension, so it instilled a lot of confidence for myself". Additionally, Raashi noted "the session was very insightful. We got to delve into the current topics which were significant to us and our generation. It was interesting to get to know about everyone's opinions and their viewpoints through this poetry. We really got to see emotions, opinions, and thoughts melding into one to bring about this powerful message of youth". Experimental as it may have been, the reflections above help to support the intention of Slam poetry into the teaching space. The references to voice, autonomy, freedom of expression, unfiltered emotions, and peer learning are all central components of the emancipatory space. Mahi reflected "we get to stop, which is difficult nowadays, reflect a bit harder and just share some feelings. I love the art, film, music industry... addressing important perceptions in [the] form of art. Brilliant". Given the practical restrictions due the pandemic, and the inability to implement a fully-fledged Slam experience, a number of students asked whether opportunities to perform their poems would be made available going forward. Students were able to perform and achieve a hyperawareness of self and identity which centred upon their own identity projects in light of marketplace cultures (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). These personal reflections not only reinforce the case for facilitating spaces where this type of engagement can take place but serve as a reminder that dialogue is an empowering, existential necessity (Freire, 1993).

Implementing Slam

Although there are no strict rules for the implementation of slam poetry into the classroom, there are some considerations around the context within which this can take place to avoid the approach becoming a mere 'bolt-on' activity. To borrow from the literature on decolonising research, what should remain essential in the design

of curriculums is a genuine, and deep concern “for the development of voice, participation, and solidarity within the context of our communities, institutions, and larger society” (Darder, 2019: 12). Slam poetry should aid an existing pedagogic purpose. The module within which the activity took place was one which was designed to challenge students’ world views and re-learn the function and purpose of marketing through inter-disciplinary enquiry. Furthermore, the second assessment was based on a Ted talk and required students to understand those issues most important to them and to be able to channel their emotions in a compelling way. Slam poetry enabled the facilitation of a space where those emotions could be tapped into and became an attempt to break away from the unilateral voice which so often fills the teaching space. Students were able to use this experience to feed into their formal assessment through a better understanding of their own subject positions, and many assignments demonstrated a passionate criticality. An understanding of the student body, and the fact that over fifty per cent of students belonged to Black and other minoritised groups, served as a catalyst to re-think the content, purpose, and relevance of the subject matter for those it was being shared with (Freire, 1993). There was a clear narrative which, week-on-week, evolved to become the story of the module and slam became a critical component of a much larger mission to raise-consciousness, challenge young people to develop an understanding of their world, and to allow them to see themselves as critical agents of change (Stovall, 2006). Of course, body and voice are integral to slam poetry, and the intention is ultimately performance, however, this particular iteration of slam allowed students to reflect and engage with the range of complex intersections of the self. The purpose was for students to engage with this reflexive agenda, and slam poetry became the space through which this was achieved. Ultimately, “slams are the embodiment of the idea that art belongs to people and not institutions...and demands their opinion be

known to be considered a genuine slam experience” (Woods, 2008: 19). Slam becomes a vehicle to further democratize the learning space, serving as a counterhegemonic approach of knowledge creation through the communicating of unimagined ways of knowing and being in the world (Darder, 2019).

I have been asked numerous times about possible ways in which slam poetry could be turned into formal assessment. I believe this question arises from a genuine place when instructors are thinking of ways in which to recognise and reward students who have engaged with novel and unusual approaches. As much as I welcome its incorporation into the journey of learning, or even as a possible component of a formal assessment - which may leave it open to tokenistic use - I have some reservations about its formalisation. Assessment is a fundamental aspect of students’ lives at university. As noted by the QAA², assessment “determines whether each student has achieved their course’s learning outcomes and allows the awarding body to ensure that appropriate standards are being applied rigorously... effective design of assessment ensures that course-level learning outcomes which themselves fulfil the requirements of...Subject Benchmark Statements, and guidance on qualifications’ characteristics are addressed through the assessment of the course”. The formalisation of slam poetry into assessment, in my view, would rid it of its emancipatory potential since dominant discourses of assessment requires students to conform to the rules and procedures of others (Boud, 2007: 17). Furthermore, formalisation runs the risk of institutionalisation, as embedded through formal systems and structures, often seeped in hegemonic disparities. Bearman et al. (2017:3) present an analysis of assessment development from an institutional perspective noting the complex and layered relationships in the

² <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/assessment>

assessment system which include, but are not limited to, “the assessment literature; professional regulatory bodies including programme review processes; the institution and associated strategic plans and policies; teaching staff...research, professional development...institutional resources, departmental culture...and the broader higher education context”. This process can stifle the kind of freedoms slam poetry boasts. The term ‘assessment’ also assumes some form of end point or conclusion, yet the value of slam poetry lies in being embedded through a critically reflexive journey of learning and un-learning. The act of formally assessing inadvertently requires an individual to evaluate the quality of a piece of work, as benchmarked against a range of criteria; this process could be deemed privilege-preserving and contradicts the context within which slam poetry should be embedded. Slam poems are healthily contestatory (Damon, 1998) where the act of assessing lays not in the rubric, benchmark, or learning outcomes, but in the process of learning to listen differently. The value of slam poetry’s inclusion should not be confined to grade-based outcomes, but through a journey which is as enriching as it is enlightening.

The realities of implementing novel or new approaches will inevitably come with risks – most notably, failure. Having a group of engaged students will benefit any attempt to embed an approach like this, furthermore, it should be noted that not all students engaged with the activity in the example discussed above. As educators there needs to be a normalisation of collective risk-taking and acknowledgement of failure as an opportunity to learn, strengthen, and grow. There is no guarantee that this approach with another cohort of students will produce the same results, but what can and should be guaranteed is the very existence of these spaces.

Conclusion

The aims of this paper were to contribute to the to the extant and emergent discussions on the exploration of slam poetry as an emancipatory pedagogic tool for critical marketing education, and secondly to share a case of its application within the (virtual) classroom setting. Slam poetry as a didactic tool presents a wealth of opportunities to engage the voices of students as critically reflexive beings, using their own subject positions to understand and articulate culture, memories, meanings, and embodied experiences (Prendergast, 2006). Although the nature of the example utilised in this paper is very much an experimental case, what it does showcase is the willingness of students to engage their own subjectivities through Slam. Affording students spaces which promote a humanised, critical, problem-posing education (Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014) not only feeds into the broad business school agendas of responsible management education and decolonising curriculums, but also serves to reorient marketing education with greater compassion, humanism, and solidarity (Freire, 1970). If the decolonising agenda seeks to bring to the fore those voices that very often remain absent or marginalised, authentic insights in the classroom space require new methods and approaches. Slam poetry bridges curriculum and engagement through creative means, where students have the opportunity to engage in a “performance of opportunity” (Madison, 2005 cited in Woodard and Coppola, 2018: 63) where they take ownership and control over the narrative space, challenging essentialist notions. As Akom (2009) notes, in an attempt to better understand how young people ‘read’ race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, and class stratification, there is a need to facilitate spaces where consciousness-building includes an examination of how individual’s experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions. Dialogical spaces where students are afforded the position of ‘agents of enquiry’ and as experts of their own lives (McIntyre, 2000), should be embedded as a fundamental democratic

activity within the institution (Bain, 2010). Through an understanding and implementation of arts-based research, there is much potential for re-conceptualising education in times of testing, standardization, averages, and accountability (Desai, 2009). Additionally, the role of the digital space in facilitating narrative-making, certainly warrants further inter-disciplinary discussion.

Although it was beyond the scope of this paper to examine the function, role, and purpose of marketing education, what must remain central to its aim is addressing the continuing transformation of reality (Freire, 1970) as an evolving temporality. Temporalizing space, as Furter posits (1966, cited in Freire, 1970: 65), is to understand it not as a “massive presence to which [one] can but adapt, but as a scope, a domain which takes shape as [one] acts upon it”. Acting upon this space is the very transformative, liberatory potential advocated by emancipatory pedagogy. Through the identification of oppressive systems perpetuating inequalities, injustice, discrimination, and racism (among many other isms), students are afforded the opportunities to articulate the realities of these systems and structures by addressing their own dormant emotional states through creative means. The moral responsibility of marketing education requires an intellectual open-mindedness that is ready to loosen the reins on privilege-preserving intellectualism. Slam poetry disrupts the traditional conventions of communicating academic knowledge (Paiva, 2020) and has the potential to function as a method to cultivate dialogue. As the poems from the students demonstrate, dialogue cannot exist without hope (Freire, 1970), and it is this very emotion upon which we hinge our optimism. In a world grappling with a multitude of pandemics, the future’s critically conscious practitioners have the potential to become part of the solution.

To this end, I say, let slam poetry be the noisy toddler of the poetry world. Let it run when you tell it to walk. Let it shout when you tell it to silence. Let its impertinence be the vehicle that raises the voices of those unheard.

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