



---

## “INSTITUTIONALIZED STATES OF INFORMATION ABSTINENCE”: CUT-UP INQUIRY OF SEX EDUCATORS’ ERASURE POEMS

---

**Kathleen (Kaye) A. Hare**  
University of British Columbia  
[hare.kathleen@gmail.com](mailto:hare.kathleen@gmail.com)

**Kaye Hare** is a SSHRC-funded Ph.D. Candidate and Public Scholar at the University of British Columbia. She has taught as a sessional faculty member at the University of British Columbia and University Canada West. Her research interests include embodiment, sex education, and arts-based methods. She loves documentaries and small stories.

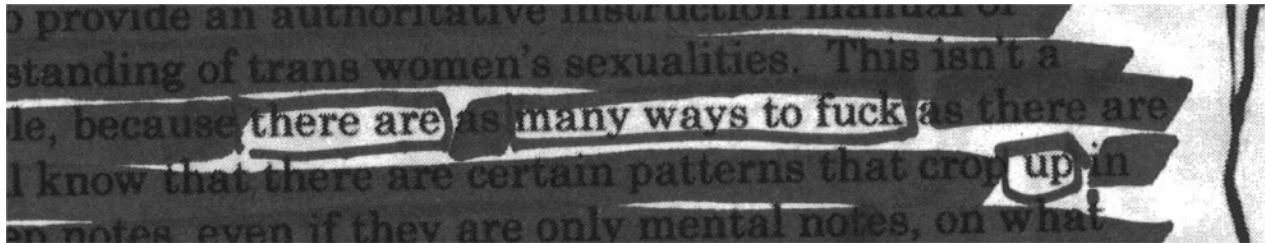
**Abstract:** In this study, I provide applied examples of using cut-up poetic inquiry as an arts-based research method for analyzing erasure poetry. The erasure poetry was composed by five poet-participants and me during a sensory ethnography that explored embodied experiences of a sexual educator training program. I first overview erasure poetics in the context of sexuality education. I explain how erasure poetry as method can interrupt authoritative proclamations of truth, while also providing a technique to grapple with complex, corporeal data – central topics in sex education research. I then theorize cut-up poetic inquiry as an additional form of erasure, asking and illustrating how the processes of cut-up can distill information to enable emergent analytic insights in the context of my research. Throughout, I meditate on how erasure poetry as an arts-based research method can contribute to discussions of language, discourse, and embodiment in sex education research.

**Keywords:** poetic inquiry; sex education; erasure poetry; arts-based methods; embodiment

## Beginnings

### Figure 1

#### *Cut-up Poetic Unit*



This research inquiry stems from my academic grappling with a challenge faced by many scholars doing corporeal, affective or sensuous work – facing the limitations of apprehending the intricate textures of participants’ experiences in description and analysis (Vannini, 2015). In my current research, I explore novice educators’ embodied experiences of a community-based, sexual health educator training program. I seek to document relationships between the educators’ bodily experiences, discourse/language and meaning-making. I am particularly interested in the ways in which educators’ felt-sense [defined as body-based senses, feelings, and emotions] shapes how they understand and take up the training program, focusing inquiry on factors that “provoke, enable, shape and constrain what is said and what is brought into relation” (Fortun, 2020, p. ix). To do so, I employ a range of qualitative and arts-informed methods, including the central method of this paper – erasure poetry (James, 2009a).

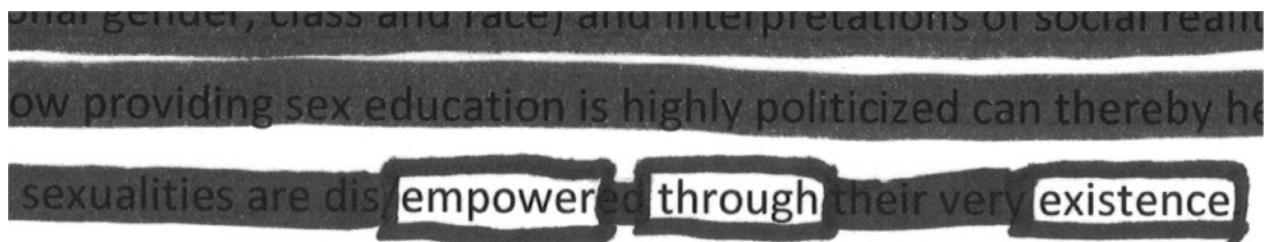
From the outset, I, like others, work with acknowledged constraints on being able to methodologically capture felt-sense experience. I seek to “better understand what counts as representation, rather than representation itself, as illustration of the way people put things together and imagine the nested systems they move within” (Fortun, 2020, p. ix). As I often remark when colloquially explaining my research, it is not as though I can bottle the substance of the educators’ bodily experiences and import them into my project as data. I alternatively employ methods as “sensuous enactments” (Stevenson, 2017) or embodied practices that provide insights into, rather than representations of, the participants’ ways of embodied knowing. In an effort to better support the identified needs of future sex educators, gaining insights about the capacities of different forms of experimental, arts-based analyses for conducting embodied sex education research is thus a valuable prospect.

In this paper, I explore the use of cut-up poetic inquiry (James, 2009a) and apply interpretive analysis to a series of erasure poems composed by novice educators about their embodied experiences of learning and teaching sex education. I first overview and theorize the resonances of erasure poetry in the context of sex education research. I next detail how cut-up processes can also be conceptualized as a form of erasure poetics. I argue that engaging in poetic inquiry involving these dual forms of erasure can add methodological depth to analysis by simultaneously intensifying and thickening description, while also compounding authorial ownership through multiplicity (Nyman, 2018). Drawing upon 36 erasure poems composed by 5 poet-participants and myself, I present 4 cut-up visuals to example the possibilities of such analytic inquiry in sex education research. Detailing the composition of the 4 cut-up visuals, I illustrate how research using erasure/cut-up poetry can interrupt single-voiced proclamations of “truth” about sexuality (Fahs, 2014), as well as help researchers grapple with complex, corporeal data (Faulkner, 2017). With this scholarship, I seek to extend support to fellow scholars by elucidating the ability of erasure poetry for methodologically grappling with ever-shifting embodied expressions of sex education.

## Poetic Inquiry in Sex Education

### Figure 2

#### *Cut-up Poetic Unit*



Recent academic focus in the field of Canadian sex education has sought to address the ways in which discourse-based curricula and pedagogical approaches can limit sexual expression and overgeneralize lived experiences (for details see Mamo, 2019; Ng et al., 2017; Slovin, 2016). In order to create more resonant and salient sex education (Gubrium & Shafer, 2014; Trimble, 2009), it has become vital to develop richer avenues that address and explore the complexities involved in the learning and teaching of sex education.

I agree with scholars who contend that poetic inquiry is a particularly useful arts-based method for sex education research (Moore, 2017), as well as the related fields of

feminist embodiment (Faulkner, 2016; 2018) and critical sexuality (Machado, 2016). I build on Vincent (2018) to view poetic inquiry as a means for providing embodied, material interactions with language and expression, which can provide a different way to know and document experiences. Poetic inquiry brings attention “to silence (or as a poet might say, to space) and also relies on emotional evocation as part of meaning making, while simultaneously exposing the fluidity and multiplicity of meaning” (Leavy, 2015, p. 66). This can unearth connections and insights that might not have otherwise been spoken in sex education research.

Poetic inquiry also aligns with contemporary scholarly emphases on creative, collaborative methods in sex education (Allen, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018); sensuous approaches to sex education (Gubrium & Shafer, 2014; Waskul 2009); and affective (Ringrose & Renold, 2014) and embodied (Fahs, 2015) approaches to sexuality and sex education research broadly.

## Perspectives on Erasure Poetry

Of the many forms of poetic inquiry (Galvin et al., 2016; Vincent, 2018), erasure poems are particularly useful for this study. *Erasure* poems, also called *blackout* poems, are a form of found poetry composed by selectively eliminating or obscuring material components of a text (e.g., letters, punctuation, words, sentences, or paragraphs) to convey ideas, meanings, and feelings (Kleon, 2010). Debates on the definition of erasure poems are reviewed by Cooney (2014) and Macdonald (2009). For my purposes, I understand an erasure poem to be a new text that is birthed from an existing text, using a poetic voice. I see the rhythms, sounds, structures, intents, and play of erasure poetry as encouraging deeper felt-sense reflection on the content and possibilities of sex education.

Using post-structural theory as a guide (Alexander, 2008; Faulkner, 2018; Leder, 1990), I contend that erasure poems provide a way to grapple with how first-person, embodied experiences might be analyzed in terms of post-structural “fields of knowledge” about sex education. Drawing upon Nyman (2018), I conceptualize erasure poems as having a theoretical “doubleness” (p. 2) that can be productive for such analyses. Erasure poems exist as “sprawling, decentralized texts [that] do not have a clear sense of authorship” (Nyman, 2018, p. 3), as they come into being via multiple and multiplicitous poets composing in embodied ways. Accordingly, “meaning is dispersed, branched, or thickened across multiple dimensions as texts are constituted in space and time” (Nyman, 2018, p. 3). Erasure poems also begin to diverge or vary from themselves “as soon as they engage with the readers they anticipate,” because readers’ embodied experiences also shape the plurality of readings that constitute a poem

(McGann as cited in Nyman, 2018, pp.12-13). Mirroring sexual education in all of its formal and informal forms, meanings are iterative, evolving, conglomerates of knowledge. Erasures intensify these variances indefinitely, with each erasure embedding several readings within each poem.

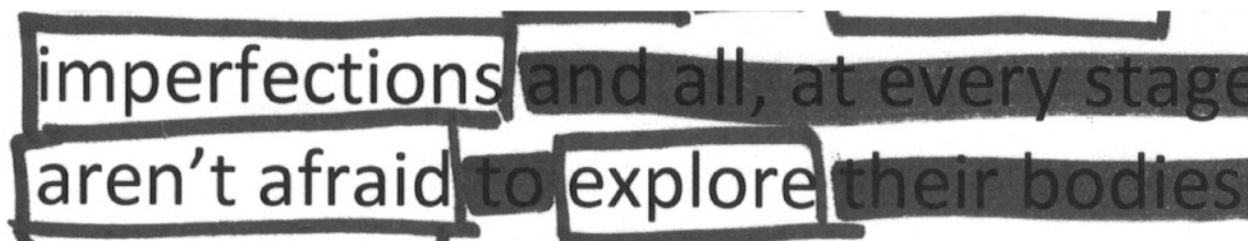
I conceptualize erasure poems as stemming from material negotiations whereby the experiential, physical qualities of source texts, the way texts are disseminated, and the social positioning of texts embed meanings into the poems (Nyman, 2018). Indeed, although I use the theoretically-linked term erasure poetry rather than the colloquial term of blackout poetry, the term blackout conveys more accurately the visual effect of this form of poetry. The source text does not fully disappear as erasure might suggest, but still exists on the page under a multiplicitous blacking-out. This recognition of the source text invites analysis that considers the authority of the source text “as the ground” for the erasure poem (Cooney, 2014, p. 19). Erasure poetry can help render visible mechanisms for analysis by drawing attention to who or what is being erased and/or foregrounded in sex education.

From this theorization, I view erasure poems to be thickly composed by participants materially and symbolically locating embodied experiences (about sex education) in “networked language environments” that help provide meanings (James, 2009a). Erasure poems link felt-sense experiences of being a sexual educator to be linked to wider political contexts in ways that are simultaneously collective and personalized. The multiplicity of erasure poems facilitates analysis into fluid, changing expressions of embodiment and holds potential for “interrupting the centuries-old project of proclaiming truth in a single voice” (Nyman, 2018, p. 2) about sexuality. This potential aligns with approaches (i.e. critical, queer, feminist) to sex education research that hold the political objective of unsettling singular discourses about sexuality, and as per this research project, emphasizes the importance of foregrounding the embodied experiences of feeling, sensing bodies.

### Methods for Poetic Sex Education Erasures

#### Figure 3

##### *Cut-up Poetic Unit*



## The Larger Study

The erasure poems are a subset of data generated during a sensory ethnography (Pink 2015) I carried out documenting my own and five focal participants' embodied experiences of a community-based, sexual health educator training program in Vancouver, Canada. The study took place from October 2018 to April 2019. I completed the study in partnership with Options for Sexual Health Association, who provide the training program. Options is the largest social profit provider of sexual health care services and education in Canada. To carry out a sensory ethnography on this program, my study methods included ethnographic content analysis (Howes & Classen, 2014); body maps (Sweet & Escalante, 2015); a book of expressive undertakings (James et al., 2013); body enactions (Winters, 2008); sensorial interviews (Pink, 2015); and of course, erasure poetry (James, 2009a). Ethical approval for the study was obtained from my institutional ethics board.

Options has designed the training as a professionalization and certification program for those interested in teaching sexual health. The program employs and teaches sex-positive, comprehensive sexual health education pedagogy. Comprehensive sexual health education pedagogy is often recognized as an optimal standard of practice within Canada (SEICCAN, 2019), especially for school-based education (for discussion of challenges of the approach see Gilbert, 2014; Gilbert et al., 2018). The focus of the program is on preparing novice educators with the knowledge and skills to work primarily within public schools in the province of British Columbia and beyond. Educators are taught information on topics such as human rights, gender and sexual identities, anatomy, reproduction and contraception, as well as how to enact value-neutral, evidence-based sex education (Options, 2020). Educators are provided with a wide-range of optional, general knowledge resources on sexuality. The program is highly interactive, with educators completing a prerequisite workshop before attending five weekend-long modules (Friday morning through Sunday afternoon) containing both theoretical and practical components. Homework, group work, and quizzes are conducted between modules. Educators may elect to complete a formal practicum.

## Composing the Poems

I was enrolled as a student in the training program, as part of cohort of 12. Coordinating with Options' Education Director and Education Coordinator, I introduced myself to the others in my cohort as a person conducting dissertation research, and as a person with 15 years of involvement in the sexual health field wanting to improve her capacity for providing sex education. I approached the study mindful of how my many privileges would shape my research: White Canadian, multiple degrees, English as a

first language, cis-gender woman, and often being read as straight, despite my own sense of complex sexuality that is intertwined with trauma and difficulties. Likewise, I was aware that my feminist and critical sexuality lens would orient my inquiry.

Following ethical procedures around free and informed consent, I recruited five focal participants: three were in my cohort completing the course, while two were completing their practicum. Graduates of the training program constitute a small, identifiable pool of fairly homogenous people (primarily white, cis-women with relative privilege). I thus describe participants' identities to provide insights into their positionalities, while not revealing key identifying characteristics.

The participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-fifties. Each possessed an undergraduate degree or higher, and had experience working in a sexuality-related discipline. The participants self-identified their gender – three women, one gender non-conforming person, and one gender-open person. The social economic status of the participants ranged from low to elite. For ethnicity, three participants self-identified as broadly white Canadian, one participant identified as growing up in a conservative, religion-oriented culture and one participant identified as growing up in an insular community with religious and socialist values. English was an additional language for two participants. All the participants embraced feminist, sex-positivity, sexuality and gender equity values. I use the term participant/poets for the remainder of the paper.

Temporally, erasure poetry was used in the second-to-last data collection session of the ethnography. To accommodate scheduling needs, three participants/poets did the data collection with me one-on-one, while two participant/poets did the data collection with me as a small group. In total, 36 poems were composed by the participant/poets and me. To compose the poems, I first provided an overview of erasure poetry to orient the participant/poets to the process. This orientation included examples of erasure poetry and a video of an interview with noted blackout poet Austin Kleon (Texas County Reporter, 2010). From this video, I highlighted Kleon's (2010) procedure for composing poems and his contention that each poem is unique to the person who composes it. I stressed that there is no wrong way to compose an erasure poem.

I next described four poetic prompts with which the participant/poets could engage, which are detailed in Table 1. The participant/poets and I each selected four source texts from 12 choices to respond to these prompts (one text per prompt). Each of the 12 potential choices was from the educator program content.

**Table 1***Poetic Prompts*

<i>Prompt 1</i>	<i>How do you feel about the sexual health educator course?</i>
<i>Prompt 2</i>	<i>What matters in sex education?</i>
<i>Prompt 3</i>	<i>Who do you want to be as a sex educator?</i>
<i>Prompt 4</i>	<i>Freestyle.</i>

To ensure a selection of texts reflective of the range of course materials and topics, I provided texts that were excerpts from my study proposal; the course syllabus; course textbooks (Corinna, 2016; Noon & Hickling, 2016; Rathus et al., 2015); a policy document called the *B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* (Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia, 2017); as well as excerpts from the general knowledge content provided in class, such as a press release (Ministry of Health, Province of British Columbia, 2018); a zine called *Fucking Trans Women* (Bellwether, 2010) and Smitten Kitten's (2015) "Shopping Guide to Lube." The participant/poets greatly enjoyed picking their texts, sharing that they often tried to pick a range based on length, topic, and aesthetics.

There were seven minutes per prompt to compose the corresponding poem. After each prompt-poem round, we each read our poem out loud and provided an explanatory narrative, which was recorded. In these explanations, participants discussed meanings, observations about composition (e.g., "*this poem was my favourite!*"), and connections they made with the poems. The recordings were very valuable for my analysis as they captured intonations, spaces, emotions layered in the readings and explanations of the poems (O'Dell & Willim, 2013). I then collected the poems. As all of the participant/poets expressed connecting deeply to their poems, they often took photos for their own purposes or recreated one to two of their favourite poems with extra texts I provided. This resulted in a valuable opportunity for connecting with the participant/poets around the ethics of the co-generated data; we discussed the implications of the different ways we each might use and disseminate the poems.

### **Cut-up Erasure Poem Analytic Inquiry**

I join Rapport and Hartill (2016) in thinking there is great value in Eisner's (2005) advice to "think within the medium we choose to use" during analysis (p. 218). As such, I conducted analysis using cut-up processes (James, 2009a), which is a second erasure-based form of poetic inquiry. Providing another way to grapple with erasure in



sex education research, cut-up processes experiment with the structure of poems in order to liberate and make visible different properties, degrees of author voice, and semiotic states, without extrapolating beyond the original poem. Cut-up processes look to the language of the poem, rather than beyond it, to continue and intensify the inquiry that took place via the initial composition (James, 2009a). The aim is to re-structure, re-organize, and experiment with the poems in ways that let “the poems speak for themselves in their transformation” (Rapport & Hartill, 2016). It is the poems, not the participant/poets, that act as the organizing principle of my inquiry.

Researchers often adopt one of two positionalities to investigate poems using cut-up processes (see James 2009a). The positionality I align with, is to “dwell within the text(s) until its resonances become audible and interpretable” (p. 62). Dwelling poetically is marked by a procedural openness that asks inquirers to bodily inhabit texts. Meanings become illuminated by researchers engaging with “language through the lens of the poem,” as well as bodily experiencing negotiations of materiality and discourse (James, 2009a, p. 62). The point is to not only “see” the poems as part of analytic inquiry, but to experience the poems in bodily ways as one creates using those poems. Mirroring the original composition of erasure poems, my and the participant/poets’ interpretation of the poem is not separate or different, but a hybridization. It is for this reason that I choose to also include my initial poems in this cut-up inquiry.

To conduct the cut-up processes, I first grouped the 36 poems into the prompts to which they responded. This was to help center the poems as the unit of analysis and ensure I was working within the thematic categories outlined by those prompts (i.e. feelings about the course; priorities about sex education; felt-sense of educator identity; topical considerations). I then conducted a fine-grained reading for each prompt by selectively cutting the poems into smaller poetic units that corresponded to the main ideas presented by the participant/poets in their narrative overviews (e.g., cutting up the poems into the participants’ stanzas). I combined and sorted these units based on language and/or content, including being mindful of felt-sense expressed in the reading. Through this sorting process, I occasionally further cut-up the ideas to capture or express emergent key words, ideas, or connections between the poems. To interpret the poems in the context of my study, I recombined these cuts to create the four cut-up visual poems, working outwards from the poems-in-process (James, 2009a). I used key bits of the appropriated texts to compose my visual expressions of the erasure poems, within which both words and visuals are important. The four final poems are provided below with additional commentary on my cut-up process for each prompt.

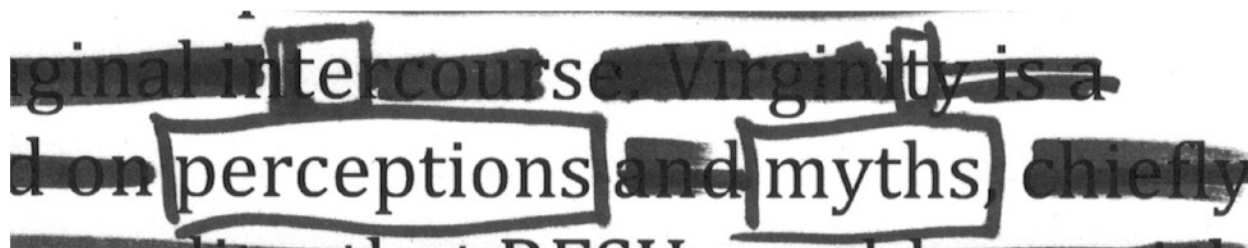
I provided the poems to the participants for feedback and received affirmative comments from those who replied. I am not suggesting my cut-up inquiry has produced the singular interpretation of the erasure poems. My cut-up process suggests one

reading of the poems; other insights from analysis are possible. Readers will also have their own understandings of the cut-ups, which multiplies the ways that these poems can be interpreted and the insights they provide.

## Cut-Up Poems: Being a Sex Educator

### Figure 4

#### *Cut-up Poetic Unit*



### Prompt 1: How Do you Feel About the Sexual Health Educator Course?

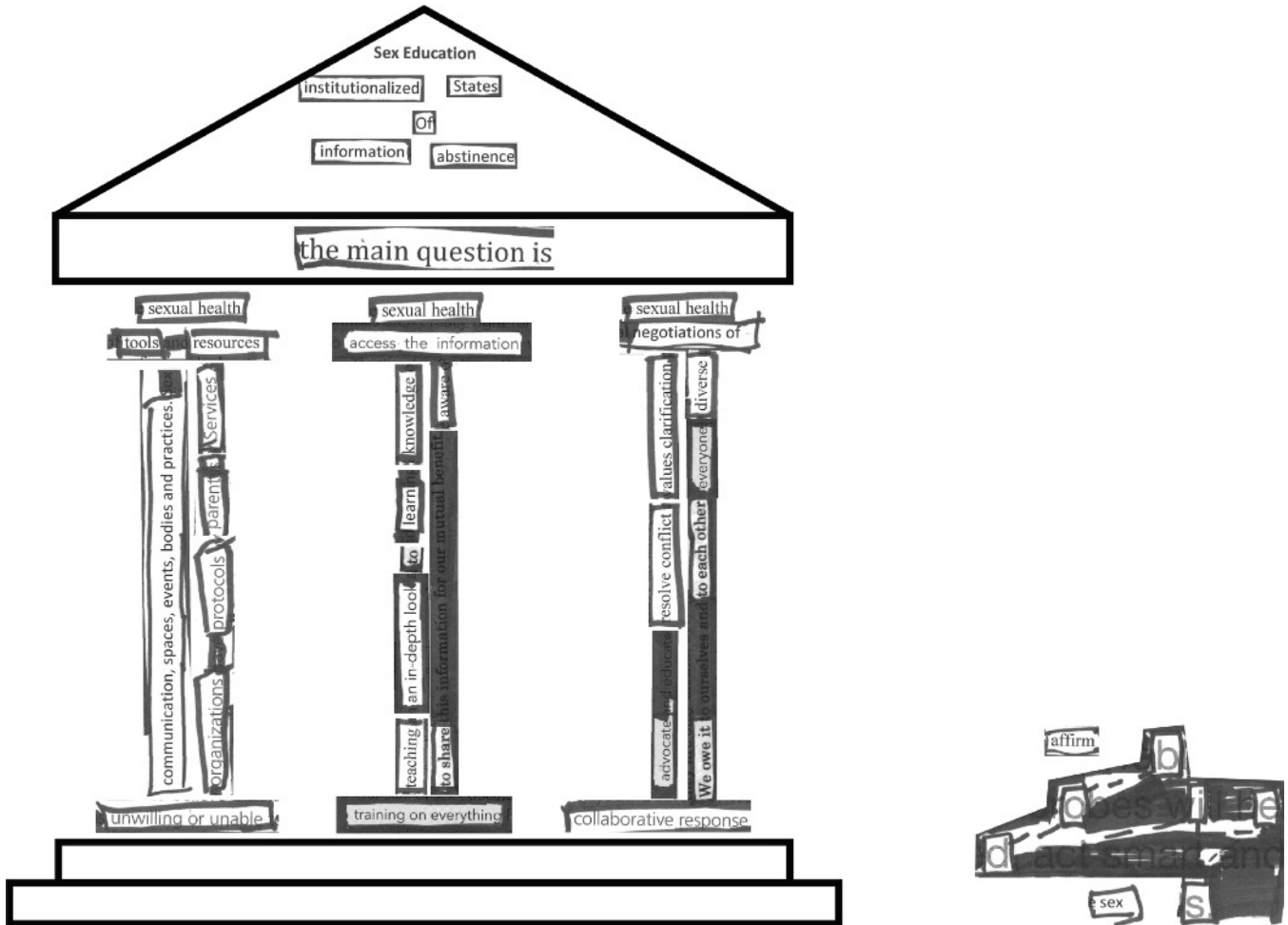
In this visual (Figure 5), I convey how the educator training program can be experienced as a process of sexual health professionalization aimed at combating systemic forces contributing to sexual under-education in Canada. Drawing inspiration from the poetic unit “*institutionalized states of information abstinence*,” I express this dynamic using a symbol representing an institutional building. In the institution roof, I also have the unit “*sex education*” and unit “*the main question is*.” Each of the bases of the three pillars have a different focus expressed through short phrases or words from the poems. The pillars identify what supports under-education: the de-prioritization of sex education, insufficient training for sex educators, and sexuality as a site of social conflict. Each pillar also contains what participants/poets identified as major educator course tenets aimed at combating these issues.

The language of this cut-up reads as technical and officious – something that conveys my impression of most poems’ overall tone for this prompt. Despite being a “feeling” based question, there were very few emotion-based reflections for this prompt; content primarily focused on the institutional purpose of the course. In the corner, I have “*affirm B-o-d-i-e-s sex*.” These ideas are removed from the institutional symbol and occupy a small space on the page. This reflects the limited and fragmented presence of these more individual topics in the poems for this prompt. While present, this did not

seem to be a key perception of participant/poets' overall sense of the course; instead, focus was on the societal need for the provision of effective sexual educator training overall.

**Figure 5**

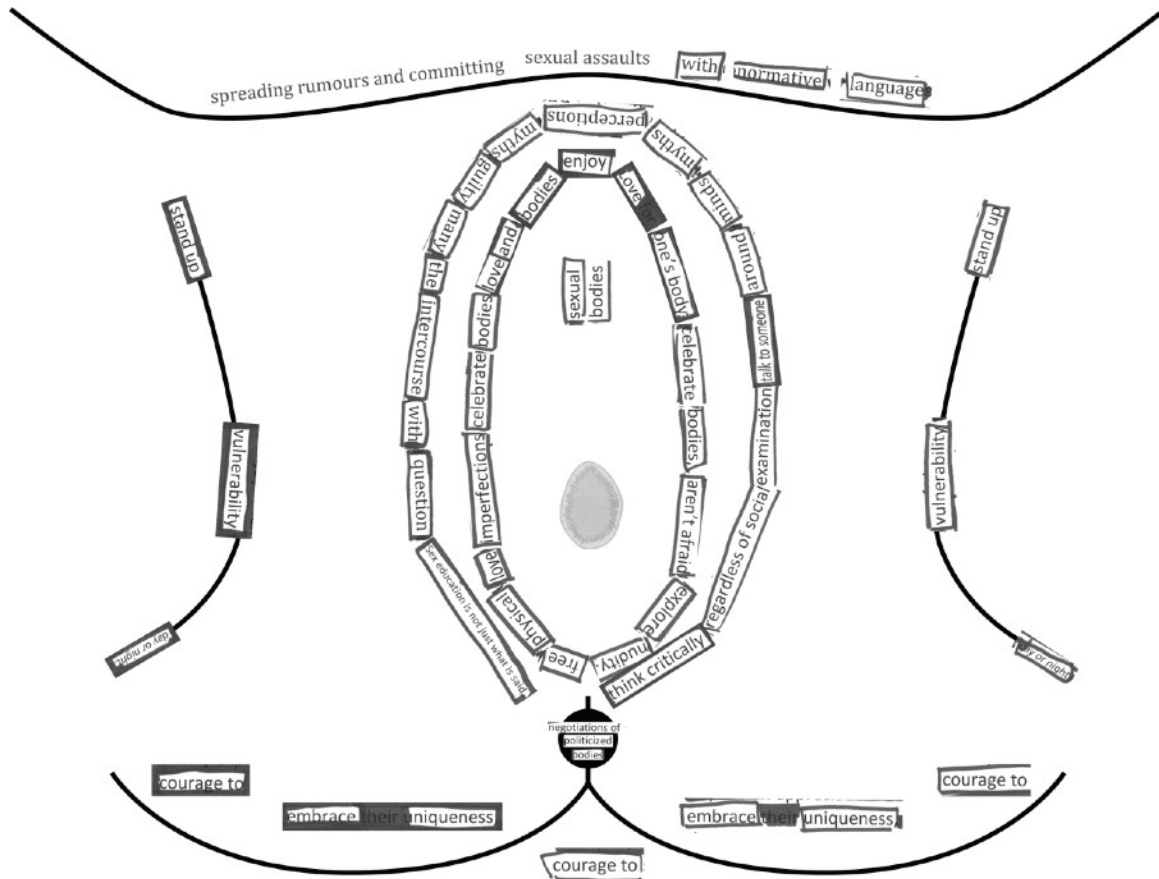
*Cut-up Poem 1*



## Prompt 2: What Matters in Sex Education?

Figure 6

*Cut-up Poem 2*



I was immediately struck during my cut-up process that the poems contained two main patterns. The language focused on loving and celebrating bodies and countering social discourses that can limit sexuality, including sexual bodies. There was also a great deal of concentrated language with the particular words and phrasing being identified and repeatedly utilized across various source texts. This prompt in particular seemed to spark similar embodied reflections for the participant/poets.

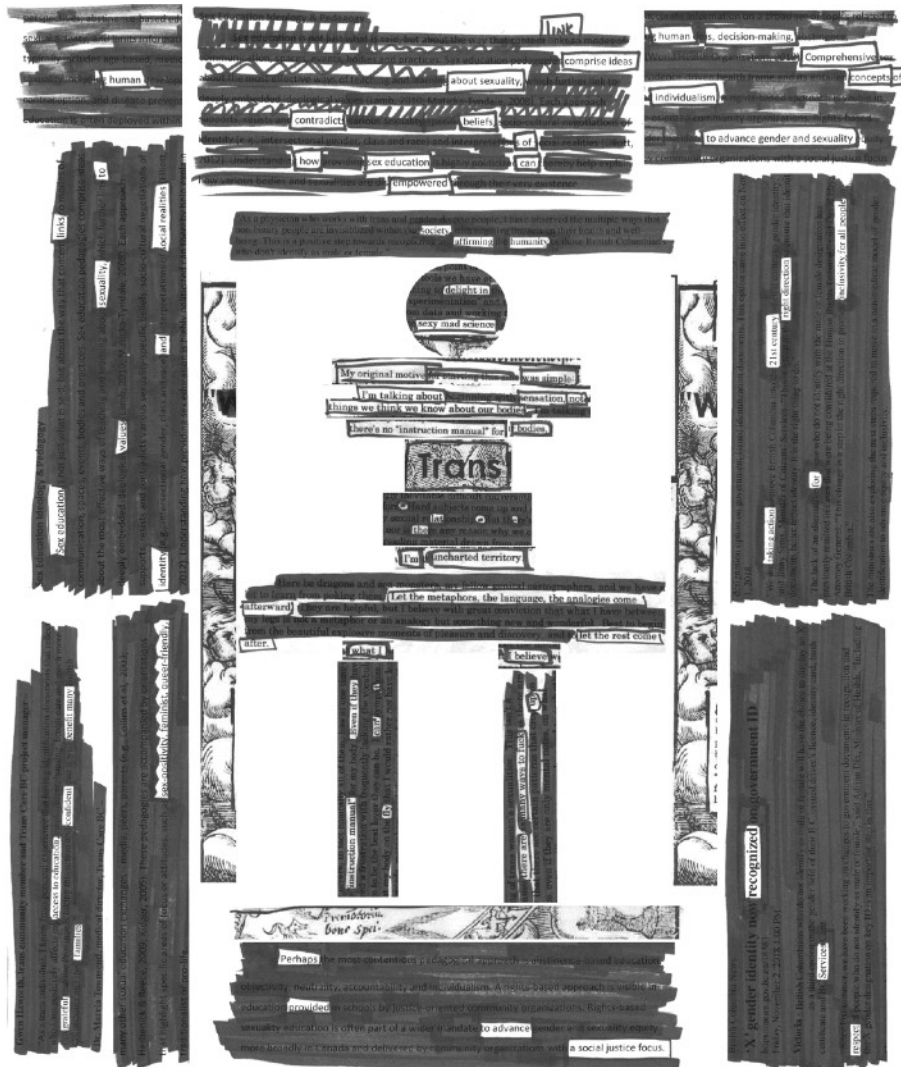
As part of cut-up, I began arranging the words in concentric circles, when I realized that they could also form the shape of a vulva – a word that was discussed at length in the course as an example of the historical, patriarchal erasure of female sexuality (e.g, the failure to teach previous generations of Canadians that “vulva” is the

correct anatomical term for external female genitalia). Adding to this image, one of the participant/poets had included the image of a vaginal opening in one of her poems. From this image, I interpreted that the participant/poets were specifically discussing the need for destigmatizing and promoting body-positivity about female bodies – something I could extend with my cut-up visual. Here, I position all the language at celebrating bodies as the inner lips/circle and language that highlights discourse as the outer lips/circle. Around the sides and bottom, I highlight language that was repeated across poems around vulnerability and courage. At the top, I included the phrase “*spreading rumours and committing sexual assaults with normative language*” – a topic that summarizes the need to address the two central matters expressed in the poem.

### Prompt 3: Who Do you Want to Be as a Sex Educator?

Figure 7

Cut-up Poem 3



A distinct dualism emerged from my cut-up process exploring “who do you want to be as a sex educator.” A couple participant/poets had selected the same source text to engage with the prompt – the *Fucking Trans Women* zine (Bellwether, 2010) that discussed bodies and sensation from a first-person perspective. The poems stemming from this source text described deep, fleshy corporeal states, and described emotional personal reflections about “being” an educator. The poems also showed highly differentiated phrasings that were not repeated across the poems. On the other hand, the poems that stemmed from other source texts that reflected comprehensive sex education discourse, while still intensely personal, made use of shared educator values and beliefs espoused within the program. The poems included terms like “sex-positivity,” “social justice,” and “empowered” – words that are part of the discourse of comprehensive sexual health education. Such terms were also much more common across the poems and were often singularly identified out of larger blocks of text.

I intensified this dualism in my visual by constructing the educator body out of the poems that employed personalized language, and then surrounding this body with blocks of erasure text containing the identified key values. It was my intent to have these words visually exist as light squares that have come to the forefront of an oppressive sense of darkness and impenetrability around the body. The resulting poem is an apt visual expression of how researchers might conceptualize different layers of sexual educator embodiment. It provides differential components of embodiment as emerging from and being imprinted on the body. It also highlights that other discourses and ways of knowing currently in the dark are possible, as current discourse utilizes select words out of expansive possibilities.

## Prompt 4: Freestyle

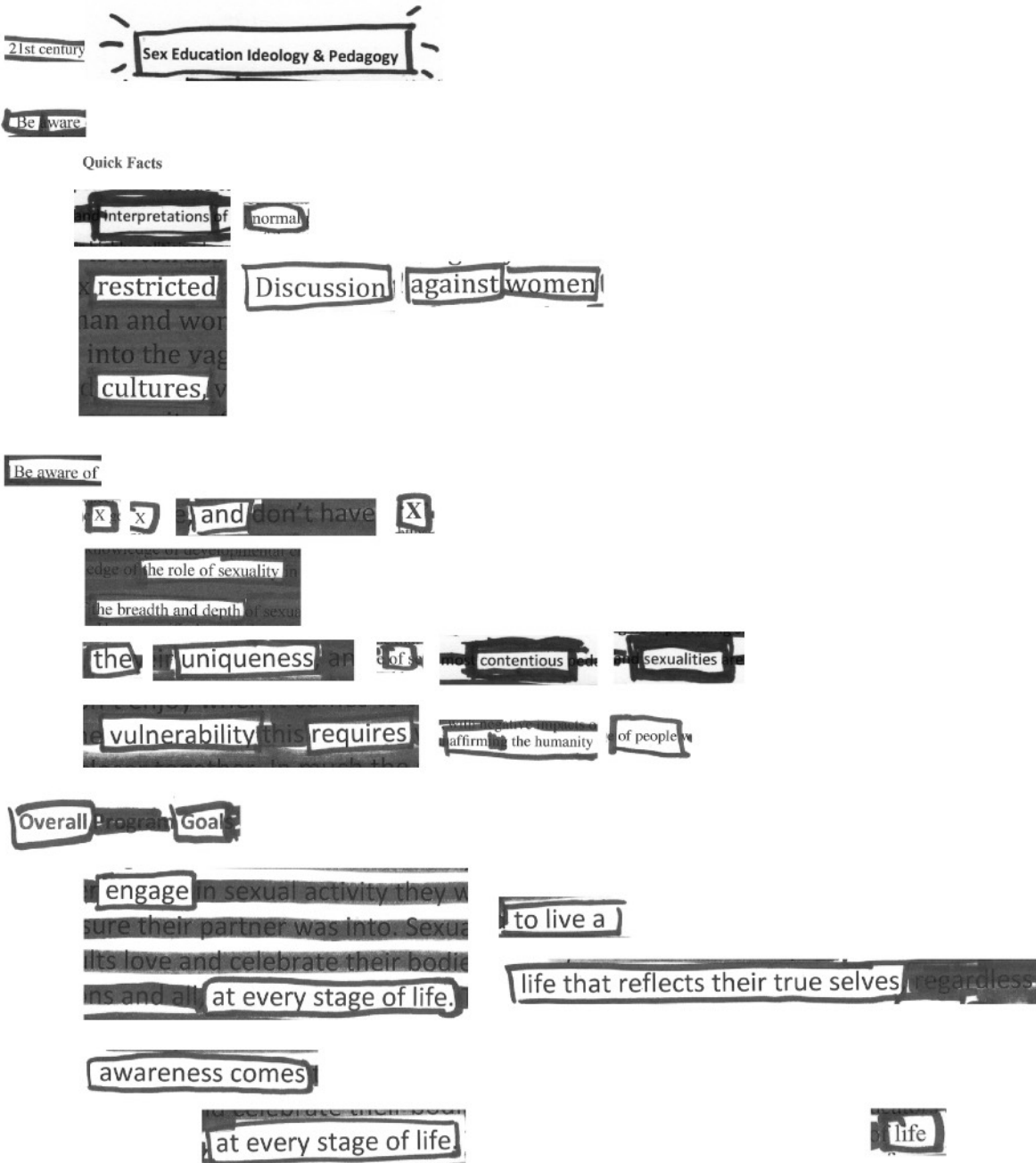
I had anticipated that the fourth cut-up process would have the most varied content, as the prompt was completely open and “freestyle.” Upon beginning the physical process of cutting up the poems, it became apparent that while the content was varied, there was a striking structural similarity between almost all of the poems. While the poems for the previous prompts were often lengthy (and required many, many small cuts), the freestyle poems were much more compact. Most poems comprised one cut-up unit with few words. Furthermore, the units were also concise phrases that shared a decisive reflection about sex education.

To reflect the more pointed poems, I created this fourth visual in the style of a political manifesto. I kept longer phrasing and ideas from the poems intact and organized them into an overarching statement on current state ideology and pedagogy. I articulated three categories: “*Beware*” (avoid); “*Be Aware*” (embrace); and *Overall Goal*

(purpose). In this way, I didn't break and remake this visual in the same way as the others prompts, but rather structured the poems into a cohesive articulation of sex education in general. I concluded the manifesto by bringing forward a focus on sexuality being connected to "life," overall.

Figure 8

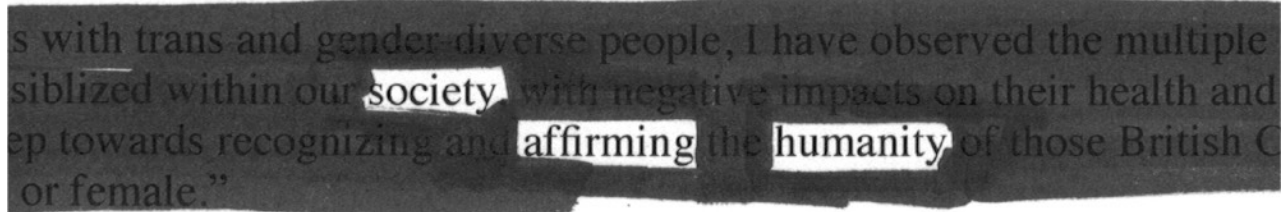
Cut-up Poem 4



## Processing Cut-up Inquiry

### Figure 9

#### *Cut-up Poetic Unit*



s with trans and gender-diverse people, I have observed the multiple  
siblized within our society with negative impacts on their health and  
ep towards recognizing and affirming the humanity of those British C  
or female."

The insights for sex education research generated through my cut-up analysis stemmed from “asking questions well beyond what is easily represented and understood through our traditional... methods” (Gleason, 2018, p. 18). For prompt 1, the commonality of language, values and beliefs shared in the poems resulted in a cut-up on the complicated process of professionalization, wherein the sex educators learned to advance sexual health within tightly controlled parameters of acceptable discourse. Extending my shared learning experiences with the participants/poets, the cut-up inquiry for prompt 2 highlighted the need to socially celebrate female bodies in particular. My cut-process for prompt 3 helped depict layers of embodiment and explore sexual education pedagogical possibilities that might exist beyond discourse. The focused poetic units of prompt 4 helped intensify the participant/poets’ felt-sense of what should be included in sex education via key priorities for the field, so individuals may live as their “*true selves*.”

In this final discussion section, I consider my cut-up processes more broadly across the four prompts in relation to the concept of erasure. I ask what are the procedures involved in un-making and re-making erasure poems that can distill and shift information to enable the emergence of insights within this sex education research?

### Lines of Erasure

As evidenced by the four cut-ups, the erased text proves to be an important element of analytic inquiry. The amount of erasure I incorporated existed on a spectrum; I incorporated very little erased text in the visuals for prompt 1 and prompt 2; incorporated some erasure throughout prompt 4 and incorporated a great deal of erasure in prompt 3. This spectrum of erasure can be understood, in part, as materially highlighting various discursive and embodied relations in the hybridized cut-ups. The limited use of erasure in the cut-up poems 1 and 2 intensifies the consistency of the



participant/poets' responses that: 1) spoke to the specific social need for sexual health educator training opportunities; and 2) countered the stigmatization of sexual bodies by invoking sex-positive language on "celebrating" bodies. Indeed, the poetic responses to these prompts often reflected one authorial voice – a voice that used established, strategically deployed language/discourse about the purpose and priorities of comprehensive sexual health education (Fahs, 2014). The participant/poets embodied the discourse-based pedagogy of comprehensive sexual health education to repeatedly articulate similar messages, using the same phrasing to express sentiments.

While the shared discourse of comprehensive sexual health education visually evidenced its cohesive strength for enabling more inclusive and rights-based sex education, the singularity of its value-neutral, evidence-based framing can also be limiting (Lamb, 2013). More specifically, the limited erasure in the cut-up poems suggests that complimentary, alternative pedagogical and practice-based possibilities are not being actively explored. This can exclude approaches that incorporate body-based, visual or other creative approaches – something emphasized in cut-up 1 by the sequestered, sole "*affirm B-o-d-i-e-s sex*" text with fragmented blackout. When considered through this lens, the cut-ups provide striking visuals on the dilemma of how to not lose the gains of the long-fought battle to institutionalize comprehensive sex education, while attempting to expand pedagogy and practices. For additional thinking on this topic see Lamb's (2013) theorizing on ethics-based curricula and Gilbert et al.'s (2018) work on intimate possibilities.

This is not to suggest with my inquiry, however, that erasure is always or only linked to silencing. As evidenced by cut-up 4, erasure can also be used as a form of intensification, including for political expression. While composing this cut-up in particular, I noted that some of the words in the original poems were very lightly blacked out, which rendered them still visible and able to add more complexity to the inquiry. James (2009b) refers to this cut-up procedure as obliteration, which is the poet's ability to make the apparent texts transparent to varying degrees. Obliteration can counter the balance of discursive power with a key, privileged form of personal knowledge – something participant/poets would occasionally invoke when communicating in a "free style." These erased words offered alternative readings (e.g., "*XX and don't have X*" and "*life that reflects their true selves regardless*") that disrupted notions of singular discourses about feminine sexuality and the stigmatization of particular sexual identities. Erasure can help activate poetry's political potential (Faulkner, 2017), by engaging a "political voice" (Orr, 2008, p. 416) that confronts sites of ideological struggle about gendered regulation, cultural inequities, and hegemony.

The plentiful presence of the erased text in the prompt 3 cut-up also amplified the complexity of embodiment in sex education. The dualism of the body surrounded by

blacked out text showed how sex educators' bodies can be used as a means for knowing (e.g., "*there are many ways to fuck...up*"), while also being shaped by external societal forces via discourse (e.g., "*taking action for inclusivity for all people*"). Visually, the cut-up helps to illustrate that both components of embodiment have elements that have found language, while other elements remain under erasure, existing as complex, illusive, and sometimes silent. The inclusion of non-text images helps emphasize that, as per Wetherell (2015), embodied-discursive relations are not concrete, but porous and penetrable. Accordingly, there is a need to continue to advance empirical methods that more fully elucidate how macro (ideological) and micro (individual) forms of embodied meaning-making are fused.

## Under Erasure

Considering the physical erasure also extends to the ways in which the source text being "erased" grounds, shapes and continues to be present in the poem. Erasure poems produce complex, often contradictory expressions about sex education that escapes the past, while simultaneously recalling it through fragments of appropriated text (Cooney, 2014). In my cut-up inquiry, I noted that participants/poets worked with the source texts in two distinct ways to express ideas related to bodies, embodiment and embodied experiences. In one way, participant/poets often identified key anchor words that relate to their bodily-held values, motivations and beliefs (e.g., "*sex-positivity, feminist and queer-friendly*") to create phrases based on these words (e.g., "*perhaps to advance a social justice focus*"). In the other way, participant/poets communicated deep, corporeal, fleshy experiences using many unique phrasings to express thoughts and feelings (e.g. "*Begin the beautiful moments of discovery. What has changed? What has this project become?*"). It became apparent during the cut-up that these patterns corresponded to the source texts. More specifically, the second pattern primarily linked to the *Fucking Trans Women* (Bellwether, 2010) texts that were written not only using a first-person perspective but also contained evocative, descriptive language.

It is not especially surprising that this pattern emerged via inquiry; first person pronouns have been previously identified as elements of writing key to helping express embodied experiences in poetry (Walmsley et al., 2017). What is notable, however, is that my limited inclusion of first-person perspective materials in the source texts stemmed from a constrained choice as a researcher. As described in the methods section, while I selected the source texts, the texts first determined what content was included in the educator course. Accordingly, the lack of personal language that can help facilitate expressions of embodiment was reflective of content typical in comprehensive sexual health education – health-based, seemingly neutral forms of knowledge that are explicitly aimed at de-personalizing sexual content (Lamb, 2013).

The various erasure processes of this study thus intensified what existed (or what had been previously erased) in that content.

Understanding the relationship of erasure and source text in this way can help explain some confusing patterns seen in Canadian sex education research. For instance, youth report not learning about their topics of greatest interest, such as pleasure and intimacy (Hare et al., 2014) despite conflicting information that educators are engaging with such content in their classroom (Canadian Federation for Sexual Health, 2007; Cohen et al., 2012). This suggests that teaching practices may not be helping youth forge deeper embodied connections with content. It may be useful to focus on the continued development of teaching practices that help youth engage their whole bodies (e.g., doing erasure poetry, drama-based pedagogies, body-mapping).

The ways the source texts ground how the participant/poets can engage with a given text has further implications for educators trying to provide effective education. At times, participant/poets would assert their embodied understandings within an authoritative, discursive text in order to make content more personally relevant. For instance: "*engage at every stage of life/awareness comes regardless*" was composed out of a text on hymens. Reflecting this, source texts can be under-cut through erasure: conversation, interrelation, subversion, and refraction between authorial voices in the erasure poems, rather than direct and total dissolution of source voice (Nyman, 2018). These are essential skills for educators as they navigate, and help students navigate, ideological disputes that cross-cut disciplines, professions, and politics related to sex education (Allen & Rasmussen, 2017).

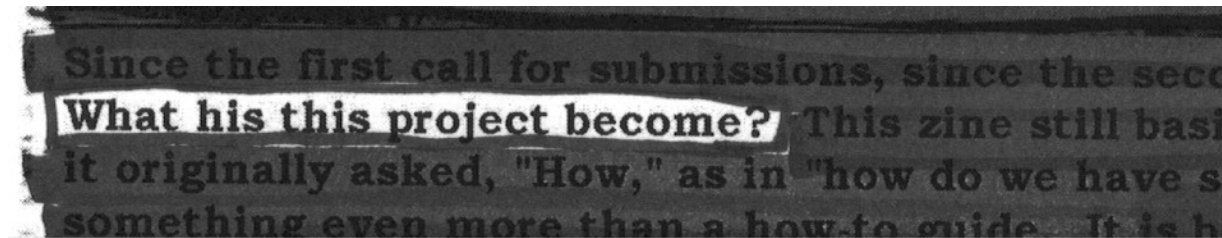
Undercutting is not always simple, however. Extending theorization through personal reflection, I found that expressing my embodied positionalities and subjectivities during my own composition was at times not only grounded, but bounded, by the source text. For one poem, I worked with the *B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* (Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia, 2017) text, which I found quite difficult in terms of tone and rigid language. Despite my best efforts, I could not break through the language to express softer and more flexible content nor could I find a way to subvert the source text through erasure. I ended up expressing my educator identity in a way that does not align with reconciliatory values I hold as educator, researcher, and person; I created the poem "*Your duty overrides the unwilling or unable. Wellbeing is in danger.*" And worse, although I felt frustration and dismay while composing the poem, I could not change the end result. Erasure can sometimes remain powerful, even and especially when we understand the mechanisms by which it operates. I was grateful that in the cut-up inquiry, I had the participant/poets poems to not only provide authorial multiplicity but

material imagery and aesthetics from other source texts. These different modalities of knowledge helped enable me to make alternative meanings for the final cut-up.

## Cutting Out

### Figure 10

#### *Cut-up Poetic Unit*



Cutting tools evoke the capacity to limit, articulate, release and cut to the core (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010). As researchers using erasure poetry and cut-up process as an arts-based method, we engage with analysis in novel ways that can help our readers see data from alternative or multiple perspectives that may challenge their existing assumptions or spark new questions. We can also use cut-up to elucidate “what” is being erased and provide a reminder that erasure occurs along lines of gender and alternative sexual identities. Erasure is not eradication however – much like expressions of sexuality, whatever was seemingly erased still exists in traces. Erasure invites us to critically examine what grounds a given text and examine possibilities for how that text can be embodied in different ways.

In the sex educator context of this study, attention to erasure through cut-up processes helped surface what can be lost and gained through the pedagogical approaches used in comprehensive sexual health education. In particular, erasure poems and cut-up analyses illustrated that when foregrounding embodied experience in sex education to approach long-standing issues differently, such as the missing discourse of desire, subtleties in language can both enable and restrain. Erasure poetry helps us delineate the complex discursive, material, and embodied relations in comprehensive sexual health education.

Finally, from my perspective as a researcher, the cut-up/erasure poetic inquiry process is a compelling and effective way to activate not only participants’, but researchers’, reflective awareness of their felt-sense experiences. By engaging in analysis, like erasure-based poetic inquiry, we are invited to think within the medium of our research (Eisner, 2005). Embodying data can help researchers activate body-based ways of knowing to reach novel conclusions about our topics of study.

## Acknowledgements

---

I would like to thank Dr. Kedrick James and Dr. Theresa Rogers for their insights on this scholarship, as well as the three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments. As well, thank you to Amber Moore for her unending support and Yaseen Mottiar for helping me always.

## REFERENCES

---

- Alexander, J. (2008). *Literacy, sexuality, pedagogy: Theory and practice for composition studies*. Utah State University Press.
- Allen, L. (2018). Sexual choreographies of the classroom: Movement in sexuality education. *Discourse*, 39(3), 347-360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2016.1263184>
- Allen, L., & Rasmussen, M. L. (2017). *The Palgrave handbook of sexuality education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bellwether, M. (2010). *Fucking trans women* [zine].
- Canadian Federation for Sexual Health. (2007). *Sexual health in Canada: Baseline 2007*. SIECCAN.
- Cohen, J. N., Byers, E. S., & Sears, H. A. (2012). Factors affecting Canadian teachers' willingness to teach sexual health education. *Sex Education*, 12(3), 299–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2011.615606>
- Corinna, H. (2016). *S.E.X: The all-you-need-to-know sexuality guide to get you through your teens and twenties*. Da Capo Lifelong Books.
- Cooney, B. C. (2014). "Nothing is left out": Kenneth Goldsmith's sports and erasure poetry. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 37(4), 16-33. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.37.4.16>
- Eisner, E. W. (2005). *Reimagining schools: The selected works of Elliot W. Eisner*. Routledge.
- Fahs, B. (2014). 'Freedom to' and 'freedom from': A new vision for sex-positive politics. *Sexualities*, 17(3), 267-290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460713516334>
- Fahs, B. (2015). The body in revolt: The impact and legacy of second wave corporeal embodiment: Body in revolt. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(2), 386-401. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12117>
- Faulkner, S. L. (2016). *Poetry as method: Reporting research through verse*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315422411>

- Faulkner, S. L. (2017). Poetry is politics: An autoethnographic poetry manifesto. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 10(1), 89-96. <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2017.10.1.89>
- Faulkner, S. L. (2018). *Real women run: Running as feminist embodiment*. Taylor and Francis.
- Fortun, K. (2020). Foreward. *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition*. University of California Press.
- Galvin, K. T., Prendergast, M. & Biley, F. C. (2016). *Poetic inquiry II: Seeing, caring, understanding : Using poetry as and for inquiry*. Sense Publishers.
- Gilbert, J. (2014). *Sexuality in school: The limits of education*. University Of Minnesota Press.
- Gilbert, J., Fields, J., Mamo, L. & Lesko, N. (2018). Intimate possibilities: The beyond bullying project and stories of LGBTQ sexuality and gender in US schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, 88(2), 163-183. <https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-88.2.163>
- Gleason, M. (2018). Metaphor, materiality and method: The central role of embodiment in the history of education. *Paedagogica Historica*, 54(1/2), 4-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2017.1355328>
- Gubrium, A. C., & Shafer, M. B. (2014). Sensual sexuality education with young parenting women. *Health Education Research*, 29(4), 649–661. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyu001>
- Hare, K., Gahagan, J., Jackson, L., & Steenbeek, A. (2014). Perspectives on “pornography”: Exploring sexually explicit Internet movies’ influences on Canadian young adults’ holistic sexual health. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 23(3), 148–158. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2732>
- Howes, D. & Classen, C. (2014). *Ways of sensing: Understanding the senses in society*. Routledge.

- James, K. (2009a). Cut-up consciousness and talking trash. In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. 59-74). Sense Publishers.
- James, K. (2009b). *Writing post-person: Literacy, poetics, and sustainability in the age of disposable information* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of British Columbia]. Circle: UBC Theses and Dissertations. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0067170>
- James, K., Dobson, T., & Leggo, C. (2013). *English in middle and secondary classrooms: Creative and critical advice from Canada's teacher educators*. Pearson Canada.
- Kleon, A. (2010). *Newspaper blackout*. Harper Perennial.
- Lamb, S. (2013). *Sex ed for caring schools: Creating an ethics-based curriculum*. Teachers College Press.
- Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Leder, D. (1990). *The absent body*. University of Chicago Press.
- Macdonald, T. (2009). A brief history of erasure poetics. *Jacket* 38, n.page. <http://jacketmagazine.com/38/macdonald-erasure.shtml>
- Machado, S. (2016). Faggot speaks: A poetic inquiry into the experience of antigay mistreatment and sexual prejudice. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 1(1), 65-87. <https://doi.org/10.18432/R23W2M>
- Mason, G. (2002). *The spectacle of violence: Homophobia, gender, and knowledge*. Routledge.
- Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia (2017). *B.C. handbook for action on child abuse and neglect* [White Paper] [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/protecting-children/childabusepreventionhandbook\\_serviceprovider.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/protecting-children/childabusepreventionhandbook_serviceprovider.pdf)



- Ministry of Health, Province of British Columbia (2018, November 2). 'X' gender identity now recognized on government ID [Press Release]. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018HLTH0079-002116>
- Moore, A. (2017). Teaching sex education with poetry: An intimate coupling. *English Education*, 50(1), 90–95. <https://library.ncte.org/journals/EE/issues/v50-1>
- Noon, S., & Hickling, M. (2016). *Talk sex today: What kids need to know and how adults can teach them*. Wood Lake.
- Ng, C. K., Haines-Saah, R. J., Knight, R. E., Shoveller, J. A., & Johnson, J. L. (2017). "It's not my business": Exploring heteronormativity in young people's discourses about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues and their implications for youth health and wellbeing. *Health*, 23(1), 39-57.
- Nyman, J. (2018). *Double/Cross: Erasure in theory and poetry* [Doctoral Dissertation, Western University]. Scholarship@Western: Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7443&context=etd>
- O'Dell, T., & Willim, R. (2013). Transcription and the senses: Cultural analysis when it entails more than words. *The Senses and Society*, 8(3), 314–334.
- Orr, D. (2008). The politics of poetry. *Poetry*, 192(4), 409–418.
- Options for Sexual Health Association (2020). Sexual Health Educator Certification (SHEC). <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/sex-ed/shec/>
- Pink, S. (2015). *Doing sensory ethnography* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Rapport, F., & Hartill, G. (2016). Making the case for poetic inquiry in health services research. In K. T. Galvin & M. Prendergast (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry II— Seeing, caring, understanding. Using poetry as and for inquiry* (pp. 211-226). Sense Publications.
- Rathus, S. A., Nevid, J. Fichner-Rathus, L & McKay, A. (2015). *Human sexuality in a world of diversity* (Fifth Canadian ed.). Pearson Canada.
- Ringrose, J., & Renold, E. (2014). Fk rape!: Exploring affective intensities in a feminist research assemblage. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 772-780. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414530261>

- Ronnberg, A. & Martin, K. (2010). *The book of symbols: Reflections on archetypal images*. TASHEN.
- Slovin, L. (2016). Learning that “gay is okay”: educators and boys re/constituting heteronormativity through sexual health. *Sex Education*, 16(5), 520–533.
- Smitten Kitten. (2015) Shopping guide to lube.  
<https://badvibesdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/lube-guide-every-body-edition.pdf>
- Stevenson, A. (2017). Arrival stories: Using participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography to explore the making of an English city for newly arrived international students. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(5), 544-572.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241615619994>
- Sweet, E. L. & Escalante, S. O. (2015). Bringing bodies into planning: Visceral methods, fear and gender violence. *Urban Studies*, 52(10), 1826-1845.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098014541157>
- Taylor, E. T., & Bryson, M. K. (2016). Cancer's margins: Trans and gender nonconforming people's access to knowledge, experiences of cancer health, and decision-making. *LGBT Health*, 3(1), 79-89. <https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2015.0096>
- Trimble, L. (2009). Transformative conversations about sexualities pedagogy and the experience of sexual knowing. *Sex Education*, 9(1), 51–64.
- Texas County Reporter (2010, February 22). Blackout poet [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqB9kXzJ0UA>
- Vannini, P. (2015). *Non-representational methodologies: Re-envisioning research*. Routledge.
- Vincent, A. (2018). Is there a definition? Ruminating on poetic inquiry, strawberries and the continued growth of the field. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 3(2), 48-76. <https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29356>
- Walmsley, H. L., Cox, S., & Leggo, C. (2017). “It’s a trash”: Poetic responses to the experiences of a Mexican egg donor. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 2(1), 58-88. <https://doi.org/10.18432/R2QG9Q>

Waskul, D. D. (2009). "My boyfriend loves it when I come home from this class": Pedagogy, titillation, and new media technologies. *Sexualities*, 12(5), 654-661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460709340374>

Wetherell, M. (2015). Tears, bubbles and disappointment- new approaches for the analysis of affective-discursive practices: A commentary on "researching the psychosocial". *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Researching the Psychosocial*, 12(1), 83-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.958399>