

SYLLABUS

Reckoning with Trans Medical Care through Poetry

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About This Training

Welcome! The best way forward for busy medical practitioners to come to understand trans experience is through education and empathy—to embrace storytelling and being told stories—but these elements take time and vulnerability. By turning to your own witnessing (as cis people or trans people, as you are) and to others' experiences (of trans people), medical practitioners can offer more fitting, less stressful, and more rewarding care for trans patients, as well as further relationships with and understandings of trans colleagues, friends, and family. You do not need to be a poet! You do need to be open, respectful, and curious.

The overall goal of this module is not to teach the key terms or approaches important to trans people at this moment, but rather to instill in practitioners an open approach so they can omit and confront bias by a practice of careful listening. In this arts-based module, practitioners will create their own poems after reading through or watching three very different types of materials: 1) poems by and interviews with well-known trans poets, 2) YouTube videos by trans youth talking about their positive and negative experiences with medical providers, and 3) a chapter from an academic book on the history of trans medical care. See the end of the syllabus for info about the instructor.

Overall Questions This Training Wrestles With

Q 1	In listening to trans youth share their stories of medical care online, what hurt, frustration, violence, and other forms of lack of care do you witness trans people experiencing? And how does this resonate with you?
Q 2	In reading the poems of and interviews with well-known adult trans poets, what themes do you notice, and how do you see the same life experiences differently or similarly based on your gender identity?
Q 3	In reading about the history of trans medical care (or the absence and violence thereof), how can and will you change your own work to intervene in bias toward trans people?
Q 4	In using trans poets' words to create found poems of your own, how are you taken apart and put together again? How are you forced and/or delighted to fit into other forms? How are we always a version of one another, or not?

About These Modules

There are three modules you will need to do in order, which I recommend you do over the span of 2-3 days taking at least half a day per module to give you time for listening, reading, writing, reflection, and recovery.

You will be asked in each to write at least one poem about a trans text (video interviews and recordings, essays, or other poems) using a certain form of poetry.

The module topics are below in the detailed Course Progression. Each module has four parts that generally break down as follows:

Part 1: Intro to Module

Part 2: Text to Engage with re Trans People

Part 3: Poetic Form to Write

Part 4: Reflections

Required Resources

Module 1:

- Melt, H., ed. 2017. *Subject to Change: Trans Poetry & Conversation*. Little Rock, Arkansas: Sibling Rivalry Press, LLC.

Modules 2 & 3:

- Koch, Kenneth, and Kate Farrell. 1982. *Sleeping on the Wing: An Anthology of Modern Poetry with Essays on Reading and Writing*. 1st edition. Vintage.

Module 3:

- shuster, stef m. 2021. *Trans Medicine: The Emergence and Practice of Treating Gender*. New York: NYU Press.

Further recommended materials or mentioned throughout! Read widely and passionately for sanity and well-being.

About These Materials & Copyright

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Accessibility

All videos were transcribed, and although the transcripts are raw and not corrected, they are often correct to follow. If you prefer to listen via audio, these files are also available. See the “audio & transcript” files under each Module to proceed.

Course Progression

Module 1 – Part 1

- *Module 1 guiding question: What does it mean to take someone else's words and make them your own? How do we produce and reproduce gender in our ideas and work? And how can that shift when we speak, act, think, know differently?*
- Intro to entire training
- Background on some terms & where to find more info on trans folks
- Note: stay away from websites, social media, and other materials that tout detransitioning as the only way forward and/or other anti-trans rhetoric
- Mentioned materials:
 - *Trans Medicine*
 - Abi-Karam, Andrea, and Kay Gabriel, eds. 2020. *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics*. New York: Nightboat Books.
 - Peterson, Trace. 2013. *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics*. Edited by T. C. Tolbert. Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books.
- Other recommended materials:
 - <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>
 - <https://transgenderlegal.org/>
 - <https://www.erininthemorning.com/>
 - <https://read.dukeupress.edu/tsq>
 - <https://manifold.umn.edu/projects/trans-care>
 - <https://poets.org/poet/leah-lakshmi-piepzna-samarasinha>
 - Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah Lakshmi. 2015. *Bodymap*. Mawenzi House Publishers Ltd.

Module 1 – Part 2

- Required materials in this module:
 - *Subject to Change*
 - Videos in "Poet Interviews" folder
- Instructions on how to connect to text:
 - Read two poets' interviews and poems in *Subject to Change*
 - Watch at least one Poet Interview (Cameron Awkward-Rich, beyza ozer, and/or Joshua Jennifer Espinoza) who graciously shared their thoughts on trans poetry for this training – and sincere gratitude to the other poets interviewed who declined to share their recordings but deeply informed this project and your experience
 - As you read, select ~20 words/phrases from a poet's or poets' materials (poems, essay, or video)

Module 1 – Part 3

- Much about my personal trans journey until 7.30 – shared in the event you have never heard such a story directly from a trans person!
- Learn about found poems – from <https://poets.org/glossary/found-poem>:
 - "Found poems take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems. The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems. A pure found poem consists exclusively of outside texts: the words of the poem remain as

they were found, with few additions or omissions. Decisions of form, such as where to break a line, are left to the poet.”

- Mentioned materials:
 - Nordmarken, Sonny. 2023. “Coming into Identity: How Gender Minorities Experience Identity Formation.” *Gender & Society* 37 (4): 584–613.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432231172992>.
 - Espinoza – I Imagine All My Cis Friends Laughing At Tranny Jokes in *Subject to Change*
- Instructions on how to write poem:
 1. Pick a title for your poem (you can edit later) but lay out a purpose/topic
 2. Lay the words out on a page in any order you choose
 3. Set a timer for ~20 minutes (shorter or longer is okay but a great guideline)
 4. Write a ~20 line poem (shorter or longer is okay but a great guideline)
 5. Give yourself up to an hour to edit

Module 1 – Part 4

- Set a timer for about an hour
- Answer the *reflection questions* (see audio and/or transcript) in a journal format, audio dictation, or tell a friend or partner or even your dog – whatever you do, try to get the ideas out of you and not merely in your head
- Spend some time reconnecting to yourself

Module 2 – Part 1

- *Module 2 guiding question: How does it feel to embrace a form that was not your own? To reinterpret for yourself? To fit your words or ideas into that form?*
- Required materials:
 - *Sleeping on a Wing*
 - YouTube
- Mentioned materials:
 - <https://poets.org/poem/death-ball-turret-gunner>
- For those who want to learn more about poetic meter and rhyme
 - Boland, Eavan, and Mark Strand, eds. 2001. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. Reprint edition. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
 - Finch, Annie, and Alexandra Oliver, eds. 2015. *Measure for Measure: An Anthology of Poetic Meters*. Everyman’s Library.
 - Hirsch, Edward. 2017. *The Essential Poet’s Glossary*. Ecco.
 - Oliver, Mary. 1994. *A Poetry Handbook*. First Edition. San Diego: Ecco.

Module 2 – Part 2

- Content warning!: watching YouTube videos of trans folks
 - More about the 2013 DSM diagnostic change:
<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/diversity/education/transgender-and-gender-nonconforming-patients/gender-dysphoria-diagnosis>
- Instructions

- Search YouTube for transitioning videos — enter a term from each line:
“FTM” or “MTF” +
“Months” or “Weeks” +
“Transitioning”
→ then look for low production videos in kitchens and living rooms
- Sit and listen for 30 minutes (20 at the least, 45 at the most)
- Take notes, record words/phrases if you wish, and especially note your ideas, thoughts, feelings during and after watching
- More about state of trans experience today:
 - <https://www.genderpodcast.com/>

Module 2 – Part 3

- Instructions:
 - Select a poet from the Koch & Farrell book or use the poet I discuss, Frank O’Hara
 - Read the essay and poems, as well as the instructions on how to write like the poet
- Materials mentioned:
 - O’Hara - A True Account Of Talking To The Sun At Fire Island (Poems folder)
 - O’Hara - Having a Coke with You (Poems folder)
 - O’Hara - The Day Lady Died (Poems folder)
 - O’Hara – Today (Poems folder)

Module 2 – Part 4

- Instructions:
 - Writing the poem(s)
 - Pick a type of poem that Koch & Farrell discuss in their book – for example, the O’Hara poem could be about a dream, an average day, love
 - Write your own poem in this style! Don’t overthink it, but do sincerely try it.
 - Reflections (see audio and/or transcript)
 - Set a timer for about an hour
 - Answer the *reflection questions* in a journal format, audio dictation, or tell a friend or partner or even your dog – whatever you do, try to get the ideas out of you and not merely in your head
 - Spend some time reconnecting to yourself
- Materials mentioned:
 - DeRango-Adem, Adebe. 2014. *The Great Black North: Contemporary African Canadian Poetry*. Second edition. Calgary, Alberta: Frontenac House Ltd.
 - Ferguson, Margaret, Tim Kendall, and Mary Jo Salter. 2018. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Sixth edition. New York London: W. W. Norton & Company.
 - Soto, Christopher, ed. 2018. *Nepantla: An Anthology Dedicated to Queer Poets of Color*. Nightboat Books.

Module 3 – Part 1

- Module 3 guiding question: *What do you want to know, say, and/or do differently for your clients, practice, community, colleagues, office, and or self in regards to trans people?*

- Note: I say this is “the last part” but I meant the last module!
- Required materials:
 - *Trans Medicine*
- Mentioned materials:
 - Gill-Peterson, Jules. 2018. *Histories of the Transgender Child*. 3rd ed. edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press.

Module 3 – Part 2

- Instructions:
 - Read at least two chapters of *Trans Medicine* (or alternatively *Histories of the Transgender Child*) – recommend chapters 4&5 on modern trans medical care
 - Take notes or grab words/phrases that speak to you as you read
 - Spend at least 20 minutes after your reading jotting down any thoughts with how this material lands in your body, or doesn’t, and what/who/when/where it makes you think of
- Materials mentioned:
 - Malatino, Hil. 2020. *Trans Care*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
 - Malatino, Hil. 2022. *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*. Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press.
 - Shlasko, Davey. 2014. *Trans* Ally Workbook: Getting Pronouns Right & What It Teaches Us about Gender*. Think Again Training.
 - Shlasko, Davey. 2017. *Trans Allyship Workbook: Building Skills to Support Trans People in Our Lives*. Think Again Training.
 - Yehuda, Rene. 2022. *The Testosterone Survey Zine*.
<https://renayehuda.gumroad.com/l/TestosteroneSurveyZine>

Module 3 – Part 3

- Instructions:
 - Select a poet and poetic form from the Koch & Farrell book (or another if you, like I, would like some racial, heritage, disability, citizenship, language, gender, and sexual diversity ☺)
 - Read about 20-30 minutes of poetry about this poet
 - Read the Koch & Farrell essay about the poet if you are using their selection
 - If you aren’t using Koch & Farrell, still rely on how they taught us to read poems to look for the kind of poetic focus & form you seek to imitate
 - Spend about 30 minutes breaking down the gist of the poem re focus + form (line numbers, length, feel, rhythm)
- Materials read:
 - Abel – from *The Place of Scraps* (Poems folder)
 - Dickinson - I heard a Fly buzz - when I died
 - Vuong – On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous (Poems folder)
 - Belcourt – Love – from 2019. *This Wound Is a World*. Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press.
 - Williams - The Red Wheelbarrow (Poems folder)

- Williams - This Is Just To Say (Poems folder)
- Williams - Nantucket
- Materials mentioned:
 - Belcourt, Billy-Ray. 2020. *A History of My Brief Body*. Columbus: Two Dollar Radio.
 - Belcourt, Billy-Ray. 2022. *A Minor Chorus*. New York London: W. W. Norton & Company.
 - Koch - Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams (Poems folder)

Module 3 – Part 4

- Reflections
 - Set a timer for about an hour
 - Answer the *reflection questions* (see audio and/or transcript) in a journal format, audio dictation, or tell a friend or partner or even your dog – whatever you do, try to get the ideas out of you and not merely in your head
 - Spend some time reconnecting to yourself
- Materials mentioned:
 - <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43914/the-walrus-and-the-carpenter-56d222cbc80a9>

You did it! Congratulations and thank you.

Specific Healthcare Provider Bias(es) Addressed with This Project

Transgender approaches to care: ● Use of names ● Use of pronouns ● Transitioning as lifelong process ● Rethinking “being out” as fitting a gender identity ● “Coming into” your body ● Impossibility of knowing the “right” thing to say ● Possibilities of connecting without bias by knowing enough and learning and listening ● Cumulative effects of harm and hurt	Assumptions about trans experience of: ● Body parts ● Sex practices ● Sexuality ● Gender identity ● Imbrications with intersectional identities of race, heritage, class, citizenship, education, etc. ● Aging and generation
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About the Instructor

Jack Jen Gieseeking is a cultural geographer, and environmental psychologist whose first book is *A Queer New York: Geographies of Lesbians, Dykes, and Queers* (NYU Press, 2020). They are presently finishing his second book, *Dyke Bars*: Queer-Trans Spaces for the End Times* and running an international LBQT* dating and hookup app survey. Jack can be found at @jgieseking or jgieseking.org.