

Mount Saint Vincent University  
Department of Applied Human Nutrition

**Employing the Listening Guide to Explore Relationships that Senior-Level  
Dietetics Students Hold with their Bodies, Each Other, and the Dietetic  
Profession**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents and my sister: you have been my inspiration for continuing to pursue my dreams, goals, and ambitions in not only academia, but also in life.

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Through this research, I gained a deeper understanding of the relationships that a group of undergraduate dietetic students hold with themselves and their bodies, each other, and the dietetic profession as fostered by their participation in a course-based art module. It further focused on their understanding, perceptions, impacts and complexities of body image within the realm of dietetics.

**Methods:** The Listening Guide method was applied in the form of a secondary data analysis of reflection papers written by senior-level undergraduate dietetic students who were enrolled in a senior-level Professional Practice course at Mount Saint Vincent University. This enabled access to their individual reality by examining the multiplicity of voices found within their narratives.

**Results:** A complex interrelationship exists between participants' strongly felt responsibility to meet holistic, client-centred professional expectations and the unforgiving bodily expectations imposed upon them by societal norms. The contrapuntal voice of conviction captures participants' distanced stance to their perceived future role as dietetic professionals, providing indication into their felt discomfort in directly identifying themselves in this capacity. Through the integration of self-exposure, the art module further fostered strong connection-building, strengthening participants' development of authenticity, compassion, and understanding for themselves and each other. The inter-relationship of the contrapuntal voices of vulnerability and transformation captures the significance of their emotionally-laden, personal journeys. Finally, participants' involvement in the art module provided them with powerful skills in effectively navigating their evolving professional and personal identity.

**Conclusion:** This research contributes to the understanding of the professional, interpersonal, and bodily connections fostered from an arts module. This allows for a more thorough understanding of the dietetic student as a learner and individual who embodies a complex identity: an identity that closely follows transitioning into their role as future health professionals. The academic community is provided with emerging results from a previously understudied facet of dietetics: the use of the arts in enhancing learning and the manner in which the arts contribute to the development of emotionally in-tuned dietetic professionals.

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## CHAPTER 1

### **KEY TERMS**

**Body Image:** Refers to “A person’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body” (40, p.1).

**Listening Guide (LG):** Refers to the examination of the manner in which individuals speak, write, and otherwise articulate their thoughts (66) so as to further “bring the researcher into relationship with a person’s distinct and multilayered voice” (48, p.157). A detail-oriented process consists of four steps, or listenings: 1) listening for the plot, 2) constructing *I* poems, 3) listening for contrapuntal voices, and 4) composing an analysis (48).

**Listening:** Refers to each of the four steps in the LG requiring the researcher to focus on specific aspects of the narrative, as guided by the goal(s) of each step (48). The researcher pays close attention to the different contrapuntal voices being used by participants when narrating their story (43, 48).

**Multiplicity of voices:** Refers to an individual’s use of multiple and distinct voices as found layered throughout his/her narrative (48, 53, 54).

***I* poems:** Refers to a poem that is unique to the LG, and is part of the second step, or second listening of the method (48). Statements in the narrative utilizing the first-person pronoun (“I”) are underlined and placed in the same order they appear into consecutive lines (48). The *I* poem allows the participant’s voice to be heard first prior to being influenced by the researcher’s own views of the narrative (55).

**Contrapuntal voices:** Refers to the third step in the LG whereby the researcher focuses on capturing the different voices, or themes, that interact and co-exist with one another in the narrative so as to become more capable of understanding the participant’s view of him/herself in relation to society (43, 48, 58). It is recommended a minimum of two voices to be sought in each narrative in an effort to better capture the participant’s “multiplicity of voices” (48, p.165).

**Interpretive summary:** Refers to the recording of a researcher’s thoughts, interpretations, connections, disconnections, and emergent emotions that he/she experienced during the listenings on a separate piece of paper (47, 48). These interpretive summaries are used to aid in the data analysis phase and also serve as the “trail of evidence” (48, 58).

**Trail of evidence:** Refers to a researcher’s recording of his/her evolving thought processes over the course of the research study and as the four separate listenings are occurring. Following each listening, the researcher must record his/her own notes, thoughts, interpretations, connections, disconnections, and any other comments on a separate piece of paper, termed the interpretive summary, that will be used in the analysis phase and serve as the “trail of evidence” (48, 58).

**Reflexivity:** Refers to a process in which the researcher records his/her own standpoints, opinions and any other personal influencing factors that affect the manner in which he/she approaches the data and the participant (48). It also captures the manner in which the researcher represents the participant in the final study or the themes he/she chooses to hone in on during the analysis phase (51, 52, 68). This reflective process allows for the tracing of the researcher's evolving thought processes, interpretations, decision-making throughout the entirety of the study as well as for the identification of any prejudices (51, 52, 59).

**Medical humanities:** Refers to “[A]n interdisciplinary field of humanities (literature, philosophy, ethics, history and religion), social science (anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, sociology), and the arts (literature, theater, film, and visual arts) and their application to medical education and practice” (21).

**Professional connections (professional relationships):** Refers to participants' gain in understandings of and close connections with the field of dietetics, as well as the role the arts play within it. It captures the manner in which they view themselves within this professional field, the manner in which the art module fostered this development, and its role in the professional development and practice of dietitians.

**Interpersonal connections (interpersonal relationships):** Refers to the development of close connections, or relationships, between participants as facilitated by the art module. The exposure of their vulnerabilities, fears, and insecurities triggered a sense of support, respect, and mutual understanding, challenging the interpersonal disconnections previously felt in the undergraduate program.

**Bodily/individual connections (bodily/individual relationships):** Refers to participants' gained insights into and understandings of their relationships with themselves. They began to face and resolve their body insecurities, body image and painful memories. They also connected with their vulnerabilities and fears, their personal traits, thoughts, emotions and/or other parts of their character. In doing so, they gained a better understanding their actions and themselves.



## INTRODUCTION

The field of dietetics, a professional area of health established within the last century, is historically grounded within home-economics, traditionally considered to be the sole realm for women's work (1). Contrarily, the more positivist-focused area of food science, which carries greater authority in the development of knowledge, is largely made up of men (1). Dietetics continues to be dominated by women in not only the educational setting but also the practice setting and is therefore regarded as being subjectively based (1). In order to establish this latter field as being as credible as other scientific, male-dominated fields, those working with the discipline favoured objective knowledge and minimizing the importance of subjectively based knowledge (2, 3). However, the need to begin questioning and challenging this imposed emotional distance has been targeted for change, with several efforts being taken to initiate it (see Berenbaum, 2005; Mager, 2011; Martin et al., 2010; Lordly, 2007; and Fox, 2009). For instance, the competencies for the entry-level dietitian stipulate that he/she must provide comprehensive care to all clients:

through the integration, translation, and application of food, nutrition and social sciences, and management theory, [work] with individuals and populations to create strategies to enable clients to achieve their food and nutrition related goals (4).

My research contends that this competency requires that dietetic education teach and allow students to strengthen both their rational and emotional understandings so as to better enable them, as future dietetic professionals, to fulfill the diverse needs of their clients as well as to treat them as whole individuals. These needs extend beyond the physical ailments to include, for example, the social, cultural, and psychological.

The Dietitians of Canada (DC), the professional association encompassing all Registered Dietitians in the country, accredit the dietetics education programs that support their educational training (5). Within the undergraduate dietetic programs across Canada, the Professional Practice courses are mandatory for all students who plan on pursuing their dietetics designation. These courses, which are taken throughout the entirety of the program, are the ones that offer arts-based initiatives to dietetics students. It is from such a course that my research dataset originates. The responsibility remains with the instructor to implement arts-based components, which are not a mandatory component of the program (6).

Over the last several decades, the dietetic profession has experienced significant changes and improvements in practice in line with scientific innovations. However, as Gingras (2010) and DeVault (1999) highlight, dietetic education continues to favour the objective over the subjective whereby value is placed on remaining emotionally-removed from the subject matter. This recent change within dietetics lags behind other larger, more influential health fields of medicine and nursing that have already begun to systematically integrate medical humanities courses and/or modules within their educational programs (7, 8). Possibly the most prominent driving factor behind their change was the recognition of the value of qualitative research. Further, the recognition of the arts in promoting greater sensitivity and reflection among health professionals (9) is a factor that significantly contributes to improving quality of patient care, an area of professional practice that has been highlighted as being in need of change (10). The arts are an appropriate method of addressing the increased need for holistic and affectively attuned

health professionals through the supporting of such skills as compassion, empathy, awareness, reflection, as well as caring and quality patient care (8, 9, 11-15).

As a profession, healthcare professionals are only beginning to understand the benefits of including the arts in both education and practice. It is for such reasons that recent efforts exploring various arts-based methods and modules have been undertaken; my research, too, adds to this building knowledge base. It is imperative for dietitians in training, namely dietetic students, to explore their own relationships, particularly with their bodies, as facilitated through the use of arts-based methods in their undergraduate training. In enabling this exposure earlier in professional careers, students can explore this creative area of inquiry alongside core dietetics courses in order to become future health professionals who are better able to form more rounded and holistic views of themselves and others in relationship with dietetics.

This facet of dietetics, which is currently in its infancy, is necessary for several reasons. It addresses the known higher prevalence of disordered eating behaviours among dietetic students and dietetic professionals compared to other majors of study (16-19). Research (16, 17, 19) demonstrated the potential conflicts that this segment of the population encounters in terms of their relationships surrounding food and eating. Secondly, there is a need for dietetic professionals, much like their medical counterparts, to improve their standards of professional practice through the provision of quality, sensitive, compassionate care to clients. In line with these demonstrated needs, my research adds further understanding into the professional, interpersonal, and individual and bodily connections that were fostered in students from their participation in an arts module. Collectively, this provides a more thorough understanding of the dietetic student as a learner, an individual, and as an individual embodying a complex identity, an identity that transitions into their role as a future health professional. Such in-depth accounts provide the academic community with emerging results from a previously understudied facet of dietetics.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***The Arts and the Health Professions***

It is argued that the sciences and arts need not be diametrical; they both seek to enhance understanding of human nature in complementary ways, albeit using differing methods (20). These two areas of study are often viewed as being distinctly opposite, sharing little similarity, and being mutually exclusive. However, this line of thinking is limited as it does not take into consideration that the arts and the science not only inform one another, but enhance each other's field of study.

Medical humanities, defined as “[A]n interdisciplinary field of humanities...social science...and the arts...and their application to medical education and practice” (21) enable the development of imagination, curiosity, and creativity (7), as well as understanding, compassion, empathy, emotional capacity, and reflection (22). In studying the arts and humanities, it has been found that students gain a deeper understanding of patients and their experiences in a myriad of situations in such a way that would not be possible through more positivist methods (11). Not only is the exploration of multiple interpretations supported, but greater awareness, reflection, understanding of empathy, as well as caring and quality patient care are also fostered

(8, 9, 11, 12). It is in the arts that the concept of “other ways of knowing” is supported (13). Bolton (2005), for instance, draws our attention to the power of literature in engaging the reader to relate to characters’ experience(s) thereby allowing them to gain “understanding of, and competence with, the infinitely complex human condition” (p. 173). Literature provides a means for exploring a diversity of life events and their corresponding emotions that one may not otherwise have been exposed to (9).

It was only prior to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that many students entering medical education held arts and humanities based degrees, a reality that has since then shifted (7). To date there has been increasing push from both medicine and nursing for a greater incorporation of an arts-focused approach in the curriculum (7, 8), with some medical schools requiring the completion of a minimum of one course in the humanities as a pre-requisite to admission (23). The incorporation of the medical humanities is more widely found within American medical schools than within Canadian ones (23). Additional medical fields of study including nursing, midwifery, and more recently dietetics are experiencing similar trends (8, 11, 24, 25). Their incremental push for change stems from many reasons, one of which is the arts’ ability to help promote greater sensitivity and reflection among health professionals (9). In recent times, there has been ongoing public criticism regarding the medical profession’s general lack of compassion, empathy, and understanding towards patient care, which are fundamental aspects of ethical and quality professional practice (10). As such, there is an increased need and a call for more holistic and affectively attuned health professionals (9, 11-15).

In her study whereby intervention groups were exposed to various visual art pieces, Wikstrom (2001) sought to explore the effects of visual art dialogues on nursing students’ understanding of nursing care, a concept that she described as a complex nurse-patient relationship. The author concluded there was an increase in students’ abilities to adequately “express what was most typical of good nursing care” due to exposure to the arts (26, p.30). These results demonstrate the arts’ capacity to positively affect change and improve holistic knowledge in its users. In line with such attributes, formal art observation has been found to help improve both complexity and accuracy of visual diagnostic skills in pre-clinical medical students (27). Similarly, through studying poetry and literature, individuals learn to hone in on nuances, subtleties, and ambiguities of human experience, which is an asset for helping health professionals to better understand their patients (14). Perry et al. (2011) cited a study in which two groups of medical students’ observation and pattern recognition skills were evaluated based on their participation in two experimental groups, with one involving clinical photograph cases and the other consisting of a fine art-based intervention. Of the many outcomes of the study, it was found that students partaking in the art intervention were rendered “more aware of the patient as a person rather than as a collection of symptoms” (p.146), which is a very important outlook in patient-centred care (28).

Research addressing and studying the incorporation of the creative arts in dietetic practice and dietetic education has been scarce in comparison to the larger fields of medicine and nursing. Nevertheless, work from each area can inform those undertaken in another, enhancing understanding. The above-mentioned findings demonstrate the extent and range of possibilities that are enabled by the incorporation of the arts and humanities in health related fields. These possibilities can be further extended to include supporting the formative stages of a holistic and well-rounded dietetic professional. There is an evident need for the implementation of a creative arts focus for students enrolled in dietetics so as to enable the strengthening of a range of important skills extending beyond that of clinical knowledge, such as that of empathy,

compassion, and understanding. These skills, among others, distinguish a successful health professional from that of a mediocre one, and it is these skills that cannot be learned through textbooks. After all, “the arts recognize medicine as a deeply human endeavour and foster an embodied approach to learning” (22, p.27). The arts may be viewed as challenging dietetic students to expand their existent worldviews.

### ***Dietetic Education***

Within the Dietitians of Canada (DC) accredited undergraduate dietetics programs across the country, the primary courses that may potentially incorporate the arts within their structure are the Professional Practice courses. These courses are mandatory for all dietetic students intending on writing the Canadian Dietetic Registration Examination (CDRE) following graduation from an integrated program or a post-degree internship (see <http://www.dietitians.ca> for more information). As an alternative option to the Professional Practice courses, students can enrol in courses based at Mount Saint Vincent University external to their faculty as liberal arts options. Or, instructors need to individually implement such components into their Professional Practice courses. The remainder of courses built into each dietetics program are similar across the different universities and have a strong foundation in basic science, social sciences, communication, as well as food, nutrition, and foodservice courses (6). Mount Saint Vincent University’s undergraduate program in Applied Human Nutrition, for instance, strives “Towards understanding and responsibility for food, nutrition and health issues in social, political, and economic contexts, through integration of classroom and community learning” (29), which is in line with the mission of DC (30).

In their qualitative study examining Ontario dietetics students’ experiences of partaking in the internship application process, Brady, Hoang, Siswanto, Riesel and Gingras (2012) show that strong feelings of naïveté, competition, devastation, and frustration marked participants’ journeys throughout the span of their four-year undergraduate degree. The strong feelings of competition between student applicants in their final year of study, in particular, were cited as breeding secrecy, silence, and suspicion as each student was striving for the attainment of one of the available internship spots (31). Within the context of my research, this latter finding is particularly poignant as connection building may mitigate the development of mutual understanding and empathy. It is such connection-building that ultimately assists in diminishing this interpersonal distance imposed by the ultra-competitive and alienating internship selection process that Brady et al. (2012) describe. As they state: “the ‘culture of competition’ negatively impacted relationships among peers...[and] that peers “distanced themselves” to avoid sharing their experiences” (p.9). These latter findings bear much significance for the dietetic education and professionalization process because:

The degree of competition that characterizes the learning environment in which future dietitians are socialized more than likely has a long-lasting negative impact on practitioners and the culture of the dietetic profession (31, p.9).

The incorporation of the arts within the undergraduate dietetic education program can play an integral role in creating and sustaining an inclusive environment for dietetic students. In doing so, this would help propel a long-lasting *positive* impact on the culture of the dietetic profession.

## *Arts in Dietetics Education and Practice*

The present-day field of dietetics has evolved over the last century from its historical background in home economics (1). Over the course of the last several decades, the dietetic profession has experienced significant changes and improvements in practice in line with scientific innovations. However, as Gingras (2010) and DeVault (1999) highlight, dietetic education continues to favour the objective over the subjective whereby value is placed on remaining emotionally-removed from the subject matter. In my study, the art module challenged this by increasing student awareness of the more subjective way of knowing, as fostered through their participation in the arts.

Recent efforts have been undertaken by Canadian dietetic academics to bring to light and explore innovative qualitative methods and arts-based methodologies within the field of dietetics. Firstly, as dietitian Shawna Berenbaum (2005) expressed at the Dietitians of Canada Ryley-Jeffs Memorial Lecture in 2005, it is imagination that is at the core of the significant strength, progress, innovation and discoveries that the dietetic profession has accomplished over the course of the last century, as well as being the principal driving force for its continued advancement. Notably, she calls dietetic professionals to ask themselves “What have we never done before in the dietetics field?” (p.195), in an effort to propel further progress and challenge the status quo (32). I contend that incorporating creative measures within dietetic education is a means of challenging the status quo; that is, introducing and exploring the benefits associated with supporting rounded, holistic learning. This, after all, aligns with the Dietitians of Canada value statements that: “DC strives for excellence, and is guided by these values in our dealings with colleagues, associates, clients and the public” whereby “[S]trategic leadership that uses *forward thinking* to provide vision and anticipate changes in our environment” and “[I]nnovation and up-to-date ideas that demonstrate *growth, creativity, mentoring and learning*” are sought (33, p. 1, emphasis added).

In line with this call for creativity within the advancement of knowledge, several research projects relating to dietetics were presented at the 2011 Dietitians of Canada Annual Conference Research Event in Edmonton, Alberta (34). Within the realm of qualitative dietetics, for instance, Brady, Gingras, and Fitzpatrick’s work utilized the “Cooking as Inquiry” research method to explore the manner in which “we come to understand how art-making through meal-making reveals our desire, emotionality, power, and bodily authorities” (34, p.e169). Similarly, Okafo, Vettese, Cuddy, Martin and Gingras explored the use of Photovoice, an “arts-informed, participatory-based methodology” (34, p.e170) in its application to the field of dietetics. Further, Martin, Garcia, and Leipert (2010) expanded on the applicability of the Photovoice method to nutrition and dietetic research describing its potential for improving patient care and professional development. Cividin, Cabrera, and Eppler’s project examined the implementation of a blog for dietetic interns whereby the intent was to “encourage writing, critical thinking, reflection and sharing of ideas” on mutually agreed upon topics (34, p.e186). Lastly, Rudolph, Bloch, Qureshi, and Gingras shared their project that “examined the transferability of narrative practice as learning in an educational context to that which was applied in a professional context” (34, p.e186). These projects highlight the evolving exploration of the arts within dietetic qualitative research, a trend that is slowly gaining momentum.

Two notable studies examined the impact of the arts on dietetic students' learning in specific. In her study, Lordly (2007) examined the application of a storytelling methodology in a second-year nutrition through the lifespan course to enhance dietetic students' learning. Results indicated that storytelling supported dialogue between students, which allowed them to gain knowledge about one another, the course material, applications and connections to practice, and to develop meaningful connections with the topic being discussed (36). The use of storytelling enriched students' empathy and understanding of the emotional complexity of others' experiences, fostered connection-building, and enhanced moral reasoning skills (36). This study supports the value of fostering dialogue and reflection within dietetic education and practice via the lesser-explored means of storytelling. Similarly, Fox (2009) implemented a pilot arts-module that aimed "to introduce graduate community nutrition students to the arts as strategies for understanding and addressing community health issues" (p.81) whereby students participated in several in-class sessions, completed assigned readings, engaged with guest speakers, attended an art exhibit, and created their own art piece (24). Analysis of students' completed questionnaires showed that they were very receptive to the arts module and the benefits associated with the arts' application to both educational and professional domains.

This progressive momentum of exploring the effects and benefits of the arts in stimulating learning in students as well as improving patient care is building. My research, too, aims to provide additional insight into the under-explored facet of dietetics and the creative arts in order to continue to build upon this movement.

### ***Dietetics and the Body***

Over the years, studies have documented the risks that first-year university students encounter with disordered eating behaviours. Significant life changes, such as moving away from home and increased academic pressures, mark this transition period, further adding to individuals' complicated relationships with food, particularly for women (37). Such stressful situations can trigger "[T]he use of eating as a mechanism to cope and to empower" (37, p.83). In a study carried out by Beukes, Walker, and Esterhuysen (2009) of first-year, South African undergraduate females that looked at perceived stress and disordered eating, it was determined that perceived stress was a significant risk factor for their drive for thinness, bulimic behaviour, and body dissatisfaction. Striegel-Moore et al. (1988) and Delinsky and Wilson (2008) found significantly higher rates of disordered eating among students in their first year of undergraduate studies to be attributed to their increased perception of stress compared to prior to university enrolment. McVey et al. (2010) cited the need for creative approaches to be put into place in an effort to help further "eating disorder prevention research" (p.204). This can be extended to include targeting precursor factors such as that of body image and healthy approaches to eating. Through a variety of creative means built into their prevention program on disordered eating, the research team was successful in "[promoting] body satisfaction and [reducing] the internalization of the thin ideal" (p.202) as well as other health enhancing skills among their target group of university students (41).

Transitioning into an undergraduate program coupled with the very nature of their chosen major, dietetics, students themselves are at an increased risk of experiencing problematic body-related issues. Although it is not the intention or scope of this research study to delve further

into this area of inquiry, it is worthy of mention because this adds to the pressures that dietetics students likely already feel with regards to their body image.

Worobey and Schoenfeld (1999) compared the prevalence of disordered eating behaviours across different undergraduate majors and determined that the experiences of “distress” and other food and weight loss related concerns were more pronounced in the female dietetic student population than in females enrolled in exercise science, psychology, biology/nursing, and was most similar to those majoring in dance. The men in the study were not compared across the different majors but rather amalgamated into one group, as they did not form a significant percentage of the overall participant pool (16). However, 20% of men were found to be concerned with possessing excess body fat (16). Kiziltan and Karabudak’s (2008) study looking into the abnormal eating behaviours of dietetic students in Turkey found that 19% of their sample scored high on the Eating Attitudes Test indicating the presence of worrisome eating-related behaviours. They concluded that the dietetic student population is a particularly susceptible group to such negative eating attitudes (17). Finally, Hughes and Desbrow (2005) found that Australian students interviewed for admission to a post-graduate dietetics program expressed particular interest in using their knowledge to help others. Among other commonly cited reasons for choosing to enrol in a dietetics and nutrition program, one third of those studied identified being affected by obesity and/or eating disorders, either directly or indirectly, as having played an important role in their decision (19). The benefits of addressing such issues lie in developing targeted, effective approaches to helping students resolve them and to equip students to be able to identify and properly channel their own issues so as to enhance their work in the professional setting.

The arts module that Lordly (42) incorporated within her senior-level Professional Practice course challenged the way her students viewed and interpreted mainstream beauty ideals through the use of a variety of arts related methods. In doing so, a greater self-awareness of body image and self-esteem were harnessed, which can be argued to be one of the first steps in challenging unrealistic societal expectations of beauty. This, in turn, can help foster the development of future holistic dietetic professionals. It is for such reasons that my research study sought to explore dietetic students’ relationships with themselves, their bodies, each other, and the dietetic profession. Doing so will help the dietetic and the wider health community better understand the thought processes of this group. It will also help them to determine how dietetic students perceive the various issues they encountered within their arts module and the impact that the arts module had on their learning.

### ***Body Image***

The problems of distorted body image and disordered eating prevalent in today’s society has been explored and debated by many academics. Over the last century, societal perceptions of what is considered to be the “ideal” female body shape have undergone many changes (37, 43). Physically and emotionally painful ideals of female beauty are not new concepts to the 21<sup>st</sup> century; in fact, they are deeply rooted within history (37). As Hesse-Biber (1996) elaborates, Chinese girls and women of a certain upper or elite class have been subjected to centuries of foot binding, a so-believed “beautification” process in which a young girl’s feet are tightly wrapped so as to cease further growth. The result would be a “severely deformed clubfoot, only a few inches long” (p.20) that would cause much suffering in the name of beauty

(37). More recently in history, the 1950s marked the end of an idolized fuller figure and the beginning of society's obsession with slimness (43). Shifts to increasingly skinny female body expectations were and continue to be the norm (37, 43). Today, media and industry are increasingly exerting pressures on both men and women to beautify themselves by relaying potent messages of inadequacy and imperfection so as to target their vulnerabilities (45). The individual is seen as one requiring improvements promised by the purchase and on-going dependency on the marketed product (45). Such experiences of increasing disconnection with oneself and our bodies is further perpetuated and exploited by the for-profit beauty, fitness, food, and health industries (45).

Several studies' results led to conclusions that women's perceptions of their body size are significantly skewed; this trend was observed for both younger and older women who perceived themselves to be larger than they indeed were (see Grogan, 1999, chapter 3). It can be concluded that women seek to be slimmer so as to better meet the societal ideals of beauty as epitomized by popular media (43). With regard to men, muscularity and an overall larger body frame were cited as prevailing physical ideals that were sought after and deemed ideal (43). These highly troubling patterns of distorted body-image in men further corroborate the need for on-going collective efforts to tackle the trend of body dissatisfaction, which is not isolated to women. Through his position as an artist and culture critic, Kirkwood (2005) sought to challenge society's distorted idealization of beauty by creating and showcasing body casts of women who embody varying body sizes and shapes. These body casts strived to "focus on aesthetic appreciation of the human form and to deal with self-worth by exploring the concept of beauty" (46, p.S126). Beauty, namely our physical exterior that meets societal and media's expectations of thinness and weight, is a reflection of our perceived self-worth, power, and "...for many of us, our skin has become the wrapping for our self-esteem" (46, p.S125).

### ***Gaps in Literature***

This current study applied the Listening Guide (LG) to analyze secondary data retrieved following the completion of a senior-level course that explored body image, the arts, and the field of dietetics. This, to date, has not been done. In applying the LG method, my goal was to provide a unique and thorough analysis of the complexities that the dietetic student population articulated. There remains a need for qualitative, in-depth analyses exploring the worldviews of this group about the role the arts can play within their study and practice of dietetics, such as the development and strengthening of empathy, compassion, and listening skills. Further, I sought to closely examine the different types of relationships, including bodily/individual, interpersonal and professional, that were fostered as a result of participants' immersion in the art module. Bodily/individual connections, or relationships, refers to participants' connections with their vulnerabilities, fears, a past memory or experience, their personal traits, thoughts, emotions or other parts of their character as a means of better understanding their themselves. Interpersonal connections, or relationships, refers to the development of close connections, or relationships, between participants as facilitated by the art module. The exposure of their vulnerabilities, fears, and insecurities triggered a sense of support, respect, and mutual understanding, reversing the interpersonal disconnection previously felt in the program. Finally, professional connections, or relationships, refers to participants' gain in understandings of and close connections with the field of dietetics, the role the arts play within it, the manner in which they view themselves



within this field, and the manner in which the art module had fostered this development. This study is unique in that the analysis provided me with an in-depth understanding of the way the participants viewed these emergent relationships (47) and their overall significance within the context of participants' roles as current students and future dietetic professionals.

The viewpoint underlying this research study is that it is imperative for dietitians in training to explore their relationships with: their bodies and themselves; their peers, future colleagues and clients, and others; and their profession as facilitated through the use of arts-based methods in their undergraduate training. Martin's (2007) statement that: "[T]here is no social change in isolation" (p.284) highlights the need for collective efforts to be taken within the academic environment by starting with change implemented in the classroom. Such efforts can be geared to help dietetic students deal with their needs and vulnerabilities in a safe, supportive and inclusive space. This study's hope is to yield insight into the specifics of this process. After all, the development of these relationships and skills transfer into the practice setting, allowing participants to become well-rounded, emotionally in tune and effective professionals.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH METHOD

#### *Overview of the Listening Guide*

The Listening Guide (LG) is a qualitative method established by psychologist Carol Gilligan and associates (49). It emerged as a powerful research tool in the 1980s following the discovery that women's voices have not been adequately represented or heard in the past (49). As such, it provided an appropriate channel for listening to, capturing, and presenting their voices (49). The uniqueness of qualitative research is that it based on the concept of examining individuals' lived experiences (50) through a myriad of different methods that do not rely on statistical analysis (51). Rather, it is exploratory and values participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of day-to-day events (51). Possibly most notable is its focus on the researcher being an active instrument within the research itself (51), which is strongly the aim of my work. This latter characteristic is evident in the LG's design, which encourages the researcher to partake in reflexivity throughout the entirety of the research process (52, 53). This relational, feminist method employs a voice-centered approach to qualitative data analysis in which participants' voices are at the heart of the research (54, 55). It further provides an opportunity to listen to voices of those individuals who are otherwise suppressed in society (44) so as to best "capture the layered nature of psychological experience" (56, p.11).

The LG allows the researcher to focus on and further analyze a participant's use of multiplicity of voices that may be layered through their narratives, termed the multiplicity of voices, so as to capture his/her distinct feelings, thoughts, and understandings (54, 55). After all,

...each person's voice is distinct – a footprint of the psyche, bearing the marks of the body, of that person's history, of culture in the form of language, and the myriad ways in which human society and history shape the voice and thus leave their imprints on the human soul (as cited in Gilligan et al., 2003, p.157).

This exploration of the multi-dimensional voice is at the core of this study; it provides a gateway for gaining insight into each student as unique individuals.

The process involved in applying the LG consists of four steps, with each step called a "listening", including: 1) listening for the plot, 2) constructing *I* poems, 3) listening for contrapuntal voices, and 4) composing an analysis (49). While focusing on a different aspect of the narrative during each listening, the researcher underlines areas of text that correspond to that step's particular goal with a different coloured pen (49, 54). Once the entirety of listens has been completed, the multi-coloured narrative or text provides a unique visual representation of the various components uncovered during the listening and also highlights those areas that will necessitate greater attention later in the in-depth analysis phase (49, 54). This can be extended to include what Denzin (1994) refers to as the "art of interpretation" (p.500). The inherent flexibility characterizing the LG is depicted by the ability for a specific segment of text to be coded multiple times, which other qualitative coding schemes are not able to equally accommodate (49, 58). It is this characteristic that renders this research method well-suited to the purposes of my research.

## *The Listening Guide*

Step one of the LG, listening for the plot, requires that the researcher first become well acquainted with the details of the narrative, or plot, so as to help orient her in knowing the who, what, where, when, and why (49, 56). Here, he/she must look for prevailing themes, metaphors, contradictions, omissions, repetitions as well as any other element that may not be explicitly articulated by the participant (49, 54, 56). This allows the researcher “to remain close to his/her own reactions to the story” (56, p.146). Secondly,

The researcher reads for herself in the text in the sense that she places herself, with her own particular background, history and experiences, in relation to the person she has interviewed. The researcher reads the narrative on her own terms – how she is responding emotionally and intellectually to this person (59, p.126).

Beginning in this step and continuing throughout the entire process, the researcher must actively partake in reflexivity in which he/she openly discloses his/her own thoughts and ideas generated in listening (or reading) the narrative, as well as disclose personal information that is likely to impact the manner in which he/she approaches the data (49, 56). This ensures the accountability of the researcher as he/she is someone who, by virtue of his/her role, is located in a higher position of power within the research relationship (56, 60). Therefore, reflective practice enables her to be alternatively placed under “critical scrutiny by [her] readers” (60, p.9). Brown et al. (1992) suggest that researchers ask themselves the following questions to remain aware of this latter reality:

In what ways do we identify with or distance ourselves from this person?  
In what ways are we or our experiences different or the same?  
Where are we confused or puzzled?  
Where are we certain?  
Are we upset or delighted by the story, amused or pleased, disturbed or angered? (p.27).

The second listening to the narrative involves creating *I* poems, which is a distinguishing feature of the LG (49). During this step, the researcher reviews and underlines each first-person “I” pronoun utilized by the participant accompanied by the subsequent words in an effort to become better acquainted with the manner that the participant speaks of and describes him/herself; particular attention is directed toward possible racial, cultural, and class differences and acknowledging what may not be explicitly stated by the participant (44, 49, 54, 56, 61). This allows the participant’s voice to be heard first prior to being influenced by the researcher’s own views of the narrative, which allows for a more thorough understanding of their world (56, 62).

Although there is no set number of words that are required to be included, each *I* statement must be able to provide a degree of context on its own (49, 56). The *I* poem is then constructed by compiling each *I* phrase in the same order that they appear in the narrative thereby forming each line in the poem (49), which also serves as the trail of evidence that will be of benefit in later stages of the analysis (61). This particular step provides “a way of coming into the relationship that works against distancing ourselves from that person in an objectifying way” (49, p.162), thereby enabling the researcher to gain deeper familiarity with the participant’s understanding of him/herself (49).

It should be noted that the inherent flexible design of the LG further enables the researcher to modify some details in the method. For instance, Balan (2005) acknowledged her use of an “interpretive license” (p.7) during the creation of the *I* poems by incorporating additional words such as “my”, “me”, and “myself” in conjunction with the original first-person pronoun “I” to expand her analysis as she believed these self-references to be equally applicable. This extends the researcher’s ability to further explore participants’ shifts between these pronouns, which has not only been posited to denote shifting “perceptions of self”, but also to provide another opening into discovering the participants’ own understanding of self and their identities, as well as ‘others’ views’ of them (62, 64). This latter flexibility extends researchers’ interpretive license (63).

Similar to Balan (2005) who extended her *I* poems to include the pronoun “you”, I too followed a similar path. The pronouns “we”, “they” and “you” were incorporated into the *I* poems within my data analysis so as to add another level of depth to the study. Some questions that I sought to explore during this stage of my analysis included: When the participant uses “I”, what and to whom is he/she referring? When the participant uses “we”, “they”, or “you”, what are they making reference to? What are some of the underlying assumptions associated with the use of these personal pronouns? What differences and what similarities with regards to the level and type of self-disclosure are found between the use of “I”, “we”, “they”, and “you” in the narratives? (65). Finally, what do these differences indicate? In doing so, I would be provided with the ability to examine participants’ shifts in perceptions as discerned through their alternating use of the different pronouns.

The third step in the LG involves listening for the participants’ contrapuntal voices (49). The researcher focuses on capturing the different voices, or themes, that are interacting and co-existing with one another so as to become more capable of understanding the participant’s view of him/herself in relation to society (44, 49, 61). This focus allows for the careful examination of two or more voices that may be in relationship with one another that otherwise may not have been easily discerned and to further “trace the movement in [individuals’] understanding of themselves and others” (66, p.97). It is generally recommended for a minimum of two voices to be sought in each narrative in an effort to better capture the participant’s “multiplicity of voices” (49, p.165). As Gilligan et al. (2003) suggested, the researcher must identify those voices that are being sought in addition to their identifying markers (p.165) so that in listening for these contrapuntal voices, the research question will be adequately addressed (49). After all, “The contrapuntal voices within one person’s narrative are in some type of relationship with one another, and this relationship becomes the focus of our interest” (49, p.167), which is the relationship that the researcher is seeking to explore (54).

Balan (2005), for instance, noted her search for the “loudest” voice (being one that was easiest to discern) or one that “occurred most frequently” in the narrative when identifying particular voices on which to focus her analysis. As the different listenings in this step occur the researcher is at liberty to add, change, or otherwise modify the identifying markers or even the voices being sought, as deemed necessary (49). This latter flexibility is similar to an emergent method in which on-going modifications during the data analysis steps are encouraged so as to enhance the quality and depth of analysis. Contrapuntal voices in the narratives are examined through “shifts in language” that participants employed, whether consciously or subconsciously, in order to access the multiplicity of the psyche (10). Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) cite this multiplicity of psyche in adolescent American girls, for example, who hold:

...a yearning to share stories about planning and carrying out sexual desires [which] can be overridden by the sense of indecency that permeates girls' sexuality in our cultural context (p.497).

The fourth step of the LG involves analyzing all of the data that was generated in each step, which includes the researcher's reflexive notes in relation to the study's research question (49). The entirety of steps involved in properly applying the LG is labour intensive because the researcher must incorporate, synthesize, and consider all interpretations and notes generated up to that point (58).

On a final note, Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) highlighted the exploratory properties of the LG as stemming from "the existence of multiple potential interpretations of the findings" that "can be quite adept at generating new questions that should be explored" (p.512). In fact, this is one of the identifying traits of the LG: the demand for continued and further inquiry.

### ***Reasons for Employing the Listening Guide***

To date, studies employing the LG as the principal method in data analysis have centred on the field of psychology from which it originates, ranging from Carol Gilligan's original study of moral development in girls (49), to girls' transition into womanhood (44) and their adoption of silence and disconnection (56). However, as the popularity and knowledge of the LG becomes more widespread, studies are expanding to other fields including education, nursing, and business (62, 63). Paliadelis and Cruickshank (2008), for instance, sought to explore and gain understanding of the complexities encountered and lived by nursing unit managers in addition to the roles they embodied in their positions. The researchers were able to successfully establish an "integrated picture" of the nursing unit managers and their strong nursing identity by using the LG, citing the ability to "uncover layers of understanding" as a key aspect of their knowledge acquisition (62, p.1451). Within the field of education, Raider-Roth (2005) and Woodcock (2005) guided the reader through analyses of school-age children's trust of their own developing knowledge and the meaning-making of literacy and knowledge construction, respectively. Lastly, a study that explored the experiences of depression among black women also found the LG, namely its voice-centeredness, to be imperative in allowing for the exploration of this phenomenon (68). To date, only one published that I was able to retrieve was traced that employed the application of the LG within dietetics. In her study Gingras (2010) engaged twelve registered dietitians in several in-depth interviews so as to "further understand dietetic subjectivity, dietitians' experiences of their education and relationships between educational and practice discourses" (p.437). Using the LG to frame her analysis, passion and melancholia were found to characterize their professional dietetic experiences as well as being strong contrapuntal voices (2).

The LG not only examines the manner in which individuals speak, write, and otherwise articulate their thoughts, it also studies the multiplicity of voices in their narratives. For this study, I sought to gain a more in-depth understanding of the manner in which the participants view the outside world and themselves in relation to it, as well as gain "access to their reality" (69, p.33) that may not have been rendered possible had I employed other means of data collection and research method (69). After all, through "the medium of social negotiations about truth and reality, language thus determines what we see and know" (p.33) and the LG allowed

me to tap into the reality of this group of students from both an outsider's and insider's perspective (69). The LG was ideally aligned with the very purposes that I sought to explore in my research, that is, the experiences and relationships of dietetic students with themselves, their bodies, and their surroundings stemming from their immersion in an arts module. This is because this method seeks to “approach and understand...understudied experiences...The method actively encourages researchers to begin to unravel some of this complexity” (58, p. 498).

The multiplicity of voices, which is seen to be embedded in communicative expressions, is considered to be the representation of the complex and “layered nature of the psyche” that each individual embodies (56). The LG, which operates under “the assumption that the psyche, like voice is contrapuntal so that simultaneous voices are co-occurring” (49, p.159), examines the multiplicity of voices found within participants' narratives. Studying participants' narratives allowed me to “hear psychological truths embedded in language and culture” (44, p.28). The multiplicity of voices alludes to the presence of an inter-related understanding of the self in relation to self, others, and the world (49). This is the nuanced complexity that I strived to capture, comprehend, analyze, and ultimately disseminate to the wider research community. In using the LG, I set out to examine and preserve the complexity of their experiences without losing any detail during the analysis phase (58).

### ***Modifications to the Listening Guide***

The majority of published studies utilizing the LG as their driving research method have documented the use of in-depth interviews as the primary mode of gathering participant data, which follows the original design implemented by Gilligan and associates (e.g. 44, 56, 61, 62, 63, 67). The LG's inherent flexibility has allowed for its application to different sources of data such as that of novels and diaries, which has been relatively under-used in comparison to the conventional interviewing method (44, 49).

The original design of the method involved utilizing a transcribed interview in which the researcher listens to his/her recorded interview that was previously conducted with a participant and simultaneously reads the corresponding transcription when progressing through each of the four steps of the LG (49). Through the application of this method's detail-oriented steps to listening through participants' narratives, the researcher is able to look at and closely study the manner in which participants speak about themselves. However, within my research, written reflection papers alone are used. The intended goal of the reflection papers was to encourage students to consider and incorporate their vast amount of acquired knowledge and experiences in relation to the “significance, influence or potential” of the possibilities that art holds in dietetic practice (42, p.8). To note, of particular significance is that students were strongly encouraged to employ the singular first-person “I” pronoun when composing their narratives, which is not widely seen in this otherwise science-focused program. This latter characteristic lent itself ideally to the application of the LG for framing the data analysis (42). Lordly's (2010) intent to elicit students' reflections created an entryway for me to gain access into their worldviews that I would not have been privy to otherwise. This latter detail is noteworthy as I had not had involvement in Lordly's initial study before the data collection phase. In analyzing the reflection papers, I was able to broaden the current body of knowledge of this otherwise underexplored facet of dietetics.

## *Reflexivity*

Like many methods within qualitative research, the LG is based upon the researcher partaking in continual reflexive writing throughout the course of the study and particularly within the data analysis stage (49). In detailing my thought processes over the course of the research study and as the four separate listening occurred, I created a trail of evidence that allows me as well as others, to examine the actions taken and those not taken, and identify potential areas that may require further attention (52, 59). I recorded my own notes, thoughts, interpretations, connections, disconnections, and any other comments on a separate piece of paper, termed the interpretive summary, that were used in the analysis phase and also served as the trail of evidence (49, 61). In essence, it enabled me to identify potential prejudices and intervening personal factors (53, 59). This ongoing reflexivity is essential in maintaining transparency within the study itself (53) thereby acting as a validity check of the formulated interpretations (52, 59). Moreover, this enabled me to keep an open mind to new discoveries in the data and to recognize when their “interpretations of the data reflect personal beliefs rather than those of the participants” (70, p.150). As Watt (2007) explained in her paper on the benefits of reflexivity in qualitative research, writing reflective journals throughout the span of her research allowed her to explore her emerging reactions, insights, and thought processes that occurred throughout the different stages of her research. She underscored the benefit that her reflections bore on her work as they enabled her to tap into and unleash ideas that she may not have consciously been able to articulate (71).

Because the position of a researcher is, in itself, a position of power, qualitative researchers are advised to take steps to minimize their distance to participants (59, 72). As Mauthner and Doucet (1998; 2003) articulated, the researcher ultimately decides what to write in the final document and how to represent the participants. Due to this reality, he/she has the final say in what will be represented to the audience (53, 59). It is preferred to shift from doing “research on” participants to that of doing “research for” participants so as to help close the gap between the two positions of power (73, p.14). In acknowledging this, the importance of fostering inclusivity of participants within the research process is asserted with the goal of treating participants as co-creators of knowledge and meaning (74). After all, reflexive practice ensures the accountability of the researcher as she is someone who, by virtue of her role, is located in a greater position of power within the research relationship (56, 60). As the researcher, reflexive practice enabled me to be alternatively placed under “critical scrutiny by [my] readers” (60, p.9).

At the core of qualitative research also lies the need to assert mutuality in participation (74). Due to the fact that my research utilized written reflection papers rather than face-to-face interviews traditionally seen in studies employing the LG, the manner in which such inclusivity was fostered was through reflexive practice my part as the researcher. The act of interweaving my personal background into my data analysis helped to decrease the power distance between myself and my participants. For instance, I brought my own experiences from having once been a fourth-year dietetics student into perspective so as to help put me in the frame of mind that is similar to that of participants at the time of writing their reflection papers. Reflecting back on that time brought me closer to better understanding their views and also strengthened my insider perspective on their experiences. In addition, I was also enrolled in a fourth-year professional practice course that incorporated the art of storytelling in which I composed a 20 page auto-ethnography exploring personal experiences of my struggles with body image. Such experiences

add a layer of personalization to the research, sharpen my own awareness as the researcher, provide the reader with greater knowledge of both myself as the researcher and my work with the dataset.

My contrasting yet simultaneous roles as a researcher and as a post-graduate dietetic student converge here as I embody the position of both an outsider and that of an insider, respectively. Firstly, my outsider role is evident in the fact that I was not enrolled in the NUTR 4444, Professional Practice course, I did not partake in the arts module, and I was not a participant in Lordly's study. In fact, my role in her study was that of a graduate research assistant who completed preliminary qualitative data analysis. However, being a graduate nutrition student who is not only similar in age to that of my participants but also one who has spent the last several years immersed in the world of food, health, and dietetics, I am privy to an insider's awareness and like-mindedness of the world of senior-level dietetic students that may not be the case for other researchers. As such, this dual perspective into the worldviews and expressions of my participants provided me with a further enriched and deep understanding of their world that also adds a unique nuance to the study. Finally, my position as a qualitative researcher helps to balance this insider relatedness by enabling me to maintain focus on applying the LG's methodological steps. In doing so, I have gained valuable and new insight that is not overshadowed by my own experiences and understandings. These latter factors are assets to the current research study.

### ***Feminist Theory***

Feminist theory guided my research, allowing me to closely examine the relationships that were developed from participants' immersion in an arts module. It further provided me the opportunity to listen to voices of these individuals who are otherwise suppressed in society (44), or more specifically, who are poorly represented within research of the creative arts in health-related fields. It is the voices of the participants, dietetics students, comprising of both women and men that guide the analysis and that are at the heart of the research (54, 55). As Flemke (2003) stated:

Through feminist practice...[w]omen are given an opportunity to be placed in the center of vision, where individual stories and voices are heard and valued. There is no woman's voice or story that is representative of the whole; rather, there are a multitude of voices that may speak collectively, but often must speak individually (p.9).

I extended this analysis to include men as well because my research contends that it is both women and men who face significant pressures regarding body expectations. Although women are pressured to be slimmer, men are taught to value muscularity and an overall larger body frame in order to better meet the societal ideals of beauty (43). These troubling patterns of distorted body-image in both women and men highlight the plight of both in the trend of body dissatisfaction, particularly within the field of dietetics. These pressures do not discriminate against these two sexes within the dietetics field as they are strongly felt by all individuals regardless whether they are women or not. Finally, the LG's historical roots in feminism that sought to provide a channel for listening to women's voices in research (44, 49, 56) is captured



in this research. Each dietetic student-participant and his/her voices were given opportunity to be heard and adequately portrayed in my thesis, a facet of dietetic research that has been lacking.

Within feminist research, there is a particular emphasis on the relational aspect of the research relationship whereby both the researcher and the study participants are continually interacting. By documenting my reactions and thoughts to the data, researchers who position themselves from a feminist stance are encouraged to disclose their particular social location, power, class, ethnicity, research relationship in relation to participants among other factors in relation to their participants as this also undoubtedly affects their interpretation of the data, whether it be consciously or subconsciously (53, 59). The secondary data analysis posed a few challenges on my ability to establish a connection with my participants. I addressed this challenge by disclosing my own social location, power, class, and ethnicity in the written thesis so that the readers are aware of the position from which my analyses were based. Readers will, then, be able to have a background understanding of my approach and views that may have shaped my analysis. This allows my readers to independently and critically evaluate the portrayed research (60). The continual self-assessment underlying this self-disclosure forms a foundation of “feminist philosophy” in which the LG is grounded (54, p.7). This assisted me in being able to identify when or if my own assumptions were clouding my ability to stay true to the participants’ narratives (54) and to identify how these assumptions informed my work as well.

### ***Subjectivity***

Underlying qualitative studies is the subjectivity that the researcher brings to her endeavours. Within the scope of this study as framed by the LG, as the researcher I analyzed a participant’s sense of self and his/her relationship with self and others (49) so as to capture the nuance in participants’ self-expressions. In keeping with this, I recorded my own standpoints, opinions, and any other personal influencing factors that may affect the manner in which I approached both the data and the participant, represented the participant in my account, or even the themes that I chose (49, 52, 53, 70). In doing so, I needed to be forthcoming about making these feelings and reactions to the data and/or research participants explicit and transparent to my readers through ongoing disclosure of my subjectivities (49, 52, 56). The acknowledgment of my inherent subjectivities is explored and evident in my ongoing reflexive writing, thereby rendering analyses more deep, comprehensive, and nuanced.

It is understood that no researcher can remain completely detached from the research process; in fact, he/she is inherently tied to all aspects of the research (56) and assumes that all “knowledge claims are subjectively situated and historically contextual” (60, p.148). Within the scope of the LG, as the researcher, I established a personal connection with my participants, which contributes to the subjective nature of this area of research (56). This connection is normally found to occur during the interviewing stage that comprised the original LG design. In my analysis of written documents, this interaction simply constitutes the formation of a unique researcher-participant relationship. Specifically, it allowed me to closely examine the manner in which participants expressed themselves and to study their level of openness to self-disclose, self-expose, and reflect within the overall context of my research questions. This provided me with a different perspective that yielded unique insights into their experiences.

The reality that “...locating ourselves socially, emotionally and intellectually allows us to retain some grasp over the blurred boundary between the respondent’s narrative and our interpretation.” (53, p.419). As Mauthner and Doucet (1998) acknowledged, the importance of this ongoing process is that it enables the researcher to have his/her *own* voice heard through an appropriate channel, being that of the final research report. Underlying the LG is that it is a co-creative process in which the roles of both researcher and participant(s) are both important (62). In the scope of the current research, this takes form in my analysis and interpretation of the reflection papers.

### ***Researcher as Primary Listener***

Feminist research calls for the continual interaction between the researcher and the study participants. However, the actual form in which this relationship is manifested is dependent upon the method used for data collection and data interpretation (76). For instance, the dynamic and form of the relationship that occurs in a semi-structured interview with participants is different from that encountered in this current research study whereby the interaction occurred indirectly with participants through their reflection papers (76). There is the possibility of a sense of holding back in self-disclosure present in students’ written work. At the time, the student participants were aware that their compositions were solely a course requirement. They were made aware that the papers would be included as part of Lordly’s dataset once her initial data analysis had commenced, which occurred several months after the conclusion of the course, specifically in the winter 2011 semester. Bearing this in mind, the participants were aware that Lordly would be the sole audience member for their reflection papers. It is possible that this knowledge may have prompted them to disclose either more, less, or an equal amount than they may have had the situation been different. This can be seen as a manifestation of the very power dynamics that are present within the research relationship (76). Way (2001) further explained that:

What is said and not said is determined, in part, by the power dynamics within the research relationship...Attuning myself to who is speaking and from what vantage point...encourages me to see and hear the unexpected (p.114).

At the time of data collection, Lordly was the primary listener. However, by virtue of my role as a researcher utilizing the LG to closely examine the reflection papers during the data analysis stage, I transitioned to become the primary listener. For this latter factor, the most authentic application of the LG requires that the primary listener make herself known to those who will also closely engage with the research data, being the academic community. After all, it is the primary listener who is analyzing the reflection papers with the explicit goal of studying the writings of the participants. Equally important is that I, then introduce myself so as to allow for transparency; in doing so, the audience is presented with complete information that is as accurate of a portrayal of the research as possible. It would seem almost negligent to have proceeded through the remaining stages of data interpretation without showcasing one of the fundamental components underlying feminist, relational, interpretive research: the researcher herself. In order to address this component that, among others forms the backbone of the LG, I introduce myself, namely who I am, what I bring to this research, and why I have chosen to

pursue this rather unique and under-explored area of dietetics. I strongly believe that in knowing who I am, the audience will be able to get a clearer understanding of how I have approached the data during the interpretation and analysis stages, how I have come to form certain conclusions, and how my own assumptions, subjectivities, background, and experiences have come to influence my approach to the study. After all, this is what forms the very essence of a rich and sound qualitative study and what also provides the analysis with that much more depth.

Currently, I am enrolled in my third year of the Master of Science in Applied Human Nutrition program, having begun in autumn of 2010. I embarked on this journey immediately following the completion of my undergraduate studies in nutrition and food. As someone who has been deeply absorbed in dietetics for many years, I am highly passionate about all issues surrounding holistic health and nutrition, particularly those of body image and disordered eating. Interwoven with these interests is my natural magnetism to learning and reading about, and partaking in qualitative research. As an individual who prefers to explore the under-explored and less conventional aspects of life and who enjoys “thinking outside the box,” I was particularly drawn to Lordly’s study for which I completed preliminary data analysis. Having worked closely with the data for several months, I became quite excited at the many prospects that the entirety of data held. I wanted to apply it in such a way that would allow me to further knowledge within the scope of dietetics, which was enabled by the suggestion of employing a cutting-edge method that was rarely applied within this particular field of study: the Listening Guide. From my initial exposure to this method, I immediately saw the cross-over of psychology and dietetics as holding much potential; the possibilities for forwarding knowledge seem to be endless. This research method, through its origins in psychology, has allowed me to delve deeper into my participants’ written words and get to know them at a much deeper level. I continue to be fascinated at the amount of insight one can gain by paying close attention to the manner in which others write and express themselves and their ideas. It is often said “there is more than meets the eye.”

As a nutrition and dietetics student, my interest in food and health is multifaceted and layered throughout the various stages of my life. As a prime example, my early roots in cooking and baking stem back to childhood whereby I frequently assisted my mother in the kitchen, who has always been an avid cook. However, my enjoyment of eating was not nearly as deep because like many children, I was a very picky eater who could not find enjoyment in foods other than the select few meals and many desserts I adored. And like many of my fellow nutrition colleagues, I have encountered my own struggles with body image over the years.

From a young age, I was highly involved within the world of competitive rhythmic gymnastics that extended to my high school years. Having attended an arts high school for the dance program, I also developed a deep interest in ballet and modern dance. These particular sport forms highly value slimness and agility, which was never consciously on my mind at the time. But, as I entered adolescence, the messages to which I had been constantly exposed from within my immediate environment finally became clearer. It wasn’t until a fellow peer developed an eating disorder that the repercussions of valuing slimness sank in for me. I could not fathom how such a talented individual could possibly think herself to be inadequate. Interestingly, up to that point in time, I had never encountered eating disorders or disordered eating and was quite stunned by the phenomenon. Coupled with this, being surrounded by the same group of peers over the course of four years in high school had also rendered me more aware of the reality of the body being fraught with perceived imperfections, delusions, and obsessions. It is not surprising, then, that my own distortions slowly began to develop.

In my last two years of high school, I began pursuing modeling. My sudden interest in this body-conscious industry was glamorized by the promise of beauty, new adventures, and the opportunity for international travel. I quickly realized that all was not what it seemed, and it was not until I entered my undergraduate studies that I began to see the distortion that the fashion industry was perpetuating. I would often find myself knowing in my mind that I was of normal size in the real world, but within the world of fashion I always felt incomparable to the other waif-like models. The absurdity of feeling this way prompted me to make a decision that, to date, I have not regretted: I chose to solely pursue my higher education in nutrition over a short-lived, anxiety-ridden professional life of a model. Looking back on it now, I can clearly see the irony in my choice; despite what I was told by others, nutrition did not seem to be a priority in the industry. It seemed that the avoidance of an eating disorder was what mattered to the industry, as no one desired to shoulder the responsibility of having endorsed unrealistic image expectations and unhealthy eating habits.

I strongly believe that it is highly beneficial for the qualitative researcher to have a strong foundation of knowledge into the phenomenon that she is studying. It may not always be the case that she has personal experience within the study's area of interest, but it does strengthen her ability to comprehend her participants. Further, her own background and experiences add to the subjective nature of qualitative research (56) and enriches the data analysis. My personal experiences provided me with a heightened understanding of those that my participants described in their reflection papers. My ability to relate to and identify with such experiences has rendered my data analysis more deep and personal, which adds to the insider aspect of my role as the researcher. In fact, I view my life encounters as strengthening my ability to not only listen to the multiplicity of voices that the participants expressed, but also to capture the complex connections they hold with their own bodies.

In my fourth year of undergraduate studies, I was enrolled in a senior-level professional practice course similar to that taken by my participants, appropriately named "The Art of Storytelling." For our final assignment we were asked to write an auto-ethnographic piece relating our personal journeys and experiences with food while incorporating dietetic literature. Through this powerful personal journey, I not only learned to enjoy writing, I also learned the powerful and therapeutic effects of reflective writing. I was able to connect to parts of myself that I was never fully aware of having embodied, such as resilience, creativity, and both willingness and a desire to share my stories with others. Many of my own experiences were comparable or even parallel to that of my participants through their journey in the art module and particularly the creation of their end-of-term art piece.

Coupled with similar undergraduate training, alongside being close in age (as discerned by their enrolment in a fourth-year, undergraduate course), I have been able to delve deeper into the data than someone who has not had such experiences. After all, a researcher's own background, experiences, knowledge, and all other factors in her life have inevitably played a formative role in shaping and influencing her decisions leading up to and during the study. In the end, this allows for the discovery and exploration of the complexities that are inherent in human beings as unique individuals.

This dynamic background provides a glimpse into the many life events that have led me to where I am right now: writing this thesis for a research study I feel most passionately about. Each experience and lesson I have learned over the years has contributed to this passion. It has helped to shape me into the individual that I am today.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

### *Purpose*

The purpose of the “Understanding Adolescence Study”, as originally carried out by Taylor et al. (1995), was to provide an inclusive place within the research study “to listen to and understand voices” of individuals “that have been missing from or inadequately represented” (p.17) in research. Even though my research intention was to gain insight and access into the underexplored *experiences* of dietetic students stemming from their immersion into the arts, the LG provided me with the tools to effectively do so in a manner not previously encountered. Specifically, the purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships that a group of senior level undergraduate dietetic students hold with themselves, their bodies, each other, and the dietetic profession by focusing on their understanding and perceptions of body image. It sought to look beneath the physicality of participants’ written words by examining the contrapuntal voices that are embedded within their reflection papers and to uncover not only what *is* expressed, but also what is *not* expressed by participants. This has allowed me to explore and gain a more thorough understanding of the dietetic student as a learner, an individual, and above all, as an individual embodying a complex identity; in essence, their “voice of self” (63). Similar to Schonmann and Kempe (2010), I sought to “draw a profile of the students as individuals and as a collective body” (p.321).

The dataset that I analyzed includes 27 individual critical reflection papers that the fourth-year dietetic students composed in November 2010 following the completion of a creative art module focusing on the theme of body image. The flexible nature of the LG allows for its ease of application and extension to areas of study beyond its origins in the field of psychology (56). With respect to the field of dietetics, there have been limited published studies employing this method. As such, my own research builds the application of the LG within this dynamic and equally complex field. Participants’ reflection papers served as a supplementary source of information on the characteristics of the group as well as the program itself, which allowed me to further explore the dynamic world of dietetic education from students’ perspectives and bodies.

### *Research Questions*

Throughout this research, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the prevailing themes that participants reflected upon and addressed in their reflection papers in relation to the arts, body image, and dietetics?
  - a) What is the relationship between these emergent themes and the type of disclosure (personal vs. impersonal) found in their written reflection papers?
  - b) What do these prevailing themes tell us about the participants, the impact of the arts module on their personal and professional development, their understanding of the applicability of the arts and the relevance of body image within the dietetic profession?
2. What types of relationships were fostered from the arts module?

- a) What is the relevance of these fostered relationships for participants personally, and within the scope of dietetic education and practice?
- b) What do participants' type of disclosure (personal vs. impersonal) indicate about these relationships and the participant?

3. What are the implications of this study for dietetic practice?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### ***Participant Selection***

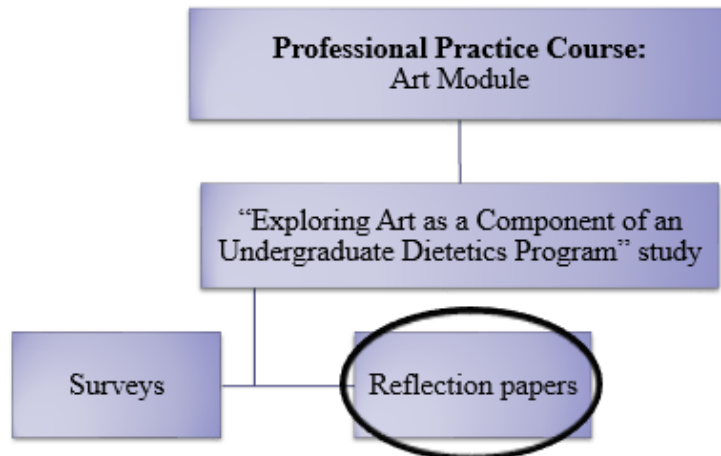
This research originates from a senior-level, undergraduate course NUTR 4444 - Professional Practice that was facilitated by Daphne Lordly within the Department of Applied Human Nutrition at Mount Saint Vincent University in the fall 2010 semester taken only by dietetics majors. Nested within this course was a study that Lordly implemented, titled "Exploring Art as a Component of an Undergraduate Dietetics Program" (42). The participants were initially drawn through purposive sampling from the total of 30 students enrolled in the NUTR 4444 course. A total of 27 students participated in Lordly's study. These individuals were chosen as the targeted participants due to their direct participation in the course and their knowledge of the area of inquiry at hand (arts in dietetics) by virtue of their participation in the art module and course (78). They represent the entire available and eligible participant pool within the setting of the University at the time of data collection.

### ***Data Collection***

Lordly's (42) original study, "Exploring Art as a Component of an Undergraduate Dietetics Program," initially involved the collection and analysis of three separate semi-structured, open-ended surveys that were administered to students at the beginning, middle, and end of the art module. In her Ethics Review Application, Lordly (42) outlined her goal to capture her students' thoughts and overall experiences from their engagement in the art module so as to gain "an understanding of the impact of arts on both the individual and the education process" (p.2) specific to the field of dietetics (42). She emulated the general structure of the arts and health module that Fox (2009) developed in her graduate level nutrition program at the University of Toronto. The goal was to further knowledge in this underexplored area of dietetics by also incorporating Donald Schön's "framework for reflective practice" (p.2) as an overarching structuring guide (42). This initial data collection commenced in September 2010 and concluded in December 2010. The surveys were designed to capture students' evolving experiences within the course itself, in addition to their reflections and views of artistry in dietetics, of the art module as a whole and of its individual components (42). They also sought to capture the impact of these components on students' acquired learnings and perceptions of the role that the arts play in their dietetic education and future practice (42). Among those components of the art module was a variety of course readings, in-class discussions, guest speakers (e.g. artists Cathy Morley and Lucy Aphramor), students' art production and ensuing art show (42). A national body image conference appropriately titled "Breaking the Mold, Breaking

the Silence”, which was organized by Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University coincided with the concluding portion of the course. The majority of students presented their art pieces at the conference to delegates that included university faculty and students, youth, community members and professionals from various parts of Canada. Figure 1, below, depicts the flowchart of this data collection process, including the dataset that are utilized in my research: reflection papers.

Figure 1: Data Collection Process



At the conclusion of the Professional Practice course in November 2010, students were also required to individually submit a critical reflection paper. The purpose of this assignment was to elicit a personal examination of their progressive understanding, thought processes, knowledge and experience acquisition, connections made, as well as other acquired learnings in relation to the “significance, influence or potential” of the possibilities that art holds in dietetic practice (42, p.8). More specifically, they were asked to “reflect on [their] experiences using the arts as a way of understanding and addressing body image as it relates to dietetic students as well as professional dietetic practice” (42, p.8). After commencing qualitative data analysis in early 2011, Lordly submitted a “Change to Protocol” ethics form to the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) seeking approval for the inclusion of students’ reflection papers to her study as this was not a part of her initial data collection. This request was approved in March 2011. These papers were found to add an additional layer of depth to the analysis of the surveys. Following this approval, students were contacted by the departmental secretary via e-mail seeking their informed consent to release their papers. Of the total 27 participants who took part in the “Exploring Art as a Component of an Undergraduate Dietetics Program” study, all 27 provided consent. Due to my role as Lordly’s graduate research assistant in her study at the time, I was also authorized to have access to the papers. It is these 27 papers that comprise my dataset.

Of particular significance is that students were strongly encouraged to employ the singular first-person “I” pronoun when composing their reflection papers, which is not widely seen in this otherwise science-focused program. This latter characteristic lent itself ideally to the

application of the Listening Guide for framing the data analysis (42). Students were asked to integrate the entirety of learnings and connections that transpired in a personally meaningful way so as to demonstrate their progress through the art module. Lordly's (2010) intent to elicit students' reflections created an entryway for me to gain access into their experiences and thought processes to which I would not have otherwise been privy. Consequently, my data analysis allowed for the broadening of the current body of knowledge of this otherwise underexplored facet of dietetics.

### *Assumptions of the Study*

This research is based on a few assumptions, primarily relating to participants' writing of their reflection papers. Firstly, this research is based on the belief that the arts are a means of representing one's own beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and hopes in a way that would not otherwise be possible (26) and that the arts encompass a variety of expressions, including writing. Also, it is believed that an artistic creation is emotionally charged and highly personal for its creator (26). Thirdly, it is assumed that the reflection papers were an additional creative outlet for participants to openly express themselves and their experiences, in addition to their creative art pieces, and that the reflective pieces, like art, are emotionally charged. Finally, it is assumed that participants were honest and candid in their expressions even though the reflection papers were created as part of a mandatory assignment within the Professional Practice course. This latter assumption is particularly significant within the context of this study as its design does not allow me to de-brief with participants, nor does it allow for any other means of ascertaining the honesty of their expressions. The levels and depth of disclosure found within each reflection paper suggest assumption.

### *Data Analysis*

#### *Data Management*

Copies of originally submitted reflection papers were provided to me by the departmental secretary upon commencing my initial work with the dataset in May 2011. At the time, my role as a graduate research assistant with Lordly had enabled me to gain access to these papers as they were part of the dataset in her initial study. Each reflection paper was previously coded with the participant's unique identification number, which was assigned upon the commencement of Lordly's study. Only the departmental secretary was granted access to the index list containing participants' identifying information. As such, my participants' identities are unknown to me. The initial copies of the reflection papers that were provided to me served as my personal "original" copies so as to ensure that a back-up was always available.

I proceeded to photocopy all 27 reflection papers which I then used directly in my data analysis. Each reflection paper was marked up in accordance with the LG's methodological stipulations. All of my generated reflexive notes were typed out in several Microsoft Word 2007 documents. Theme generation, as part of the LG's step 1 – listening for the plot – was also managed in this same program. All generated notes and analyses stemming from each of the



LG's analysis steps were transcribed in a document on my computer to allow for easier data management in addition to their initial recording on the reflection papers themselves. Finally, hard copies of all reflection papers were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home whilst all transcriptions, notes, and writings were stored in a password-protected personal computer to which only I had access.

### *Analysis Procedures*

Due to the nature of my research questions, I sought to examine the voiced and non-voiced expressions of my participants collectively. Each paper was first individually and thoroughly analyzed following the LG's four steps; these listenings were guided by my main research questions.

#### Step 1 – Listening for the Plot

Before embarking on step 1 of the LG, listening for the plot, I began by first reading each reflection paper to gain a preliminary understanding and overview of the ideas, thoughts, and learnings discussed by participants. In line with Gilligan et al.'s (2003) outline of the LG method, I proceeded to:

...also attend to [my] own responses to the narrative, explicitly bringing [my] own subjectivities into the process of interpretation from the start by identifying, exploring, and making explicit [my] own thoughts and feelings about, and associations with, the narrative being analyzed (49, p.160).

In writing my reflexive notes (see Appendix A), I sought to remain mindful of these factors (61). Additionally, my personal goal was to make sense of each participant's array of experiences, thoughts and reflective writings, thereby bringing me closer to working through the discomfort that I felt in those beginning stages of my analysis (59). The length of each reflexive note ranged from one page to four pages single spaced depending on the depth of the particular participant's reflective writings and my own reactions to them. There were certain papers in which I explored my thoughts, responses, and explorations with great ease and during which I felt I could continue writing for pages before exhausting all that I had to say. However, this is contrasted with other reflection papers with which I struggled as they were more distant in their tone and challenging to connect with. My difficulties in connecting with these papers stemmed from the more distant approach those participants took in composing their narratives, such as structuring their papers as academic essays. It was in these papers that I sensed a lack of "the personal," that is, the participant's own thoughts, personal experiences, and/or opinions. Nonetheless, each of the papers in my dataset and my corresponding reflexive notes provided insight into better understanding my participants.

Step 1 of the LG method requires that I look for and note prevailing themes, metaphors, contradictions, omissions, and repetitions details of the narrative (49, 54, 56). I employed topic coding, a descriptive coding technique that is used primarily within the scope of qualitative research where the emphasis is "on finding *all* the data about an aspect of the...experience studied, or on accurately portraying the distribution of different attitudes, experiences" (52,

p.140). It allowed me to best represent the ideas being communicated as well as to best capture the essence of participants' descriptions in a more analytic manner (52). My guiding purpose for employing this technique was to ensure that I identified the entirety of the themes found within each paper in order to inform my in-depth analysis (52). My unit of analysis was expressed either "in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph" and was assigned to "a text chunk of any size...that...represents a single theme or issue of relevance" (79). Necessitating particular attention is that the LG focuses the researcher's examination of both the content found within the data in conjunction with the manner in which they are communicated by participants (58). Although "it codes specific portions of narratives but still examines them holistically (i.e., in context)" (58, p.499), which is what characterizes the LG and sets it apart from other qualitative methods. Keeping in mind that thematic and pattern analysis, as attained from the stages of coding, is not the primary purpose of the LG (58), it is nevertheless one component that enabled me to capture the major themes and ideas discussed by participants. Within the scope of the LG, coding and the ensuing categorization of data occur in conjunction with the analysis of contrapuntal voices (58). I acknowledge that the LG method holds that categorization is too restrictive and that it seeks to go beyond this structured scheme; in fact, it is "designed to go beyond questions of predominance and theme" (58, p.499). However, I nevertheless employed it within the scope of my analysis only as a means to capture the themes and patterns that are present in participants' reflection papers (52).

While focusing on a different aspect of the narrative during each listening, I underlined areas of text that corresponded to each step's particular goal with a different coloured pen (49, 54), which includes step 1's requirement of capturing prevailing themes. Once I completed all of the listenings, the multi-coloured narrative provided me with a unique visual representation of the various components uncovered in my listenings and also highlighted those areas that necessitated greater attention later in the in-depth analysis phase (49, 54). It is this aspect of the LG that strengthens its approach to data analysis not commonly seen in other qualitative research methods.

When I first embarked on creating categories, I started by grouping related codes that were found to be in similar sections of each paper. This was done by assigning an appropriate title, such as "Art Project," to include all codes speaking to the participant's reflections on the art project in that segment of text so as to allow for easier management in ensuing steps. This particular step was completed for each of the 27 reflection papers. Some codes in papers were not necessarily categorized in this step if I felt that they were isolated, or not pertaining to any surrounding coding categories. Next, I devised more abstract and broad categories. For instance, some of these initial categories included "Media," "Body Image," "Body Image Conference," "Presentation of Artwork," "Art Project," and "Definition of Art" to name a few. Once the codes from each paper were appropriately re-located to their appropriate overarching category, I continued to create sub-categories so as to further refine them.

With regards to coding the reflection papers, the vast majority of text was coded except for the referenced material in which the participant re-states and summarizes the arguments made in another research article without inputting his/her own critical thinking. Moreover, if a participant did cite an article that was subsequently incorporated into his/her arguments or statements, then this segment of text was coded as it demonstrates his/her own interpretation of the learning. My reasons for choosing this distinction was to ensure that participants' summarization of material did not automatically get labeled as being their own reflective thinking; I wanted to isolate the true effect of art module on their learning by focusing on their

perceptions and ability to make meaningful connections between the various components of the art module and themselves. This latter objective is in line with the assignment's original instruction (42). For example, in participant 005's statement:

This method was used in the article of a 15 year old Korean girl with anorexia nervosa...In this case, the patient whose name was Rose, had difficulties making connections with the staff members...was much more comfortable with drawings and this is how they communicated...*I can see that with many patients, but most specifically the younger population, could best express their emotions with the use of art.* (005, emphasis added).

The only portion that I coded was the italicized sentence at the end of the excerpt because she had made a personal reference to herself and had expressed her understanding of the situation. Similarly, participant 019 recounts her experience in listening to Lordly's recounting of her personal challenges experienced in breastfeeding and Dr. Gingras' story regarding a family member's body weight dilemma. The participant's description of these events was not coded, however, her ensuing insight was:

I feel that both examples of the personal stories told by both individuals in this course have provided me with a new acceptance of how others view and accept the body image of both dietitians and dietetic students. These personal stories allowed us as dietetic students to make sense of the held professional perceptions that can conflict with our personal experiences (019).

As can be seen, there is a clear distinction between what is considered to be a participant's own reflective, critical thinking and what, simply, is a description of the event.

In many reflection papers, participants included formal definitions of the terms "art" and "body image" as a means of setting the stage for their ensuing arguments and learnings. In line with my previous stipulation, inclusion of referenced material was not coded. However, in the case where the participants incorporated their own definition and/or understanding of these concepts, I attributed them as being products of their own mind and did in fact code them. I do realize that the possibility exists that participants may have simply cloaked formal definitions and concepts as being their own without directly referencing the material. In this case, I considered them to be their own because I do not have any way of distinguishing what constitutes their own personalized understandings and what does not besides this method. As such, it is here that I am making an assumption that unless a definition or understanding was appropriately cited in-text, I considered the understanding as being the participant's personal own. This is the easiest way for me to make this distinction thereby enabling me to appropriately answer my research questions.

As Richards and Morse (2007) stipulate, "All qualitative researchers aim to create categories that are more general, drawing together the complex immediate messages of the data in more abstract topics or groups" (p.154). Within the scope of my research, the end goal of this particular step was to categorize and explore these categories in order to "locate a pattern" and give "a very accurate account of what is going on" (52, p.154). Whenever coding is utilized to examine textual data, categorization ensues as it allows for the identification and subsequent examination of the data (52).

Following the coding of each reflection paper and at the conclusion of step 1, I then captured my thoughts, ideas, and ensuing reactions stemming from my “listenings” in my reflexive notes, as well as sharing personal information that may impact the manner in which I approach the data (49, 56). Separate to the reflexive notes were memos that I generated to capture my thought processes, ideas generated, and decisions made regarding category development and management through the different stages of abstraction, originating with coding; this step demands reflexivity due to its inherent interpretive analytical nature (52). It also serves as my trail of evidence, allowing others to examine the actions taken and those not taken, and identify potential areas that may require further attention (52, 59).

### Step 2 – I Poems

In this step of the LG, I constructed an *I* poem for each reflection paper by compiling each phrase containing the first-person pronoun, “I,” in the same order that it appeared in the paper whereby each “I” statement formed one line in the poem (49). It is the first-person pronoun, “I,” that is very much a personally-centred pronoun (65) and one that demonstrates an individual’s sense of self. I also incorporated additional words such as “my,” “me,” and “myself” in conjunction with the original pronoun to expand my analysis in an effort to provide an additional layer of depth. I also extended my *I* poems to include the pronouns “you,” “we,” and “they.” Specifically, for the “you” pronoun, I included the possessive pronoun “your” and “yourself/yourselves.” For the personal pronoun “we,” the words “us,” “our,” and “ourselves” were also included. And finally, with the personal pronoun “they,” the words “their,” “them,” “themselves,” and “others” were included. This flexibility to make such modifications is termed an interpretive license (63). This not only provided me with a deeper understanding of the participants, thereby allowing me to gauge the impact of the art module of their learning and to develop a profile of the participants “as individuals and as a collective body” (77, p.321), but it also extended my ability to explore their shifts between these pronouns (62, 64). These shifts have been posited to denote shifting “perceptions of self” and to provide another opening into discovering participants’ own understanding of self and their identities, as well as others’ views of them (62, 64). This interpersonal meaning-making provides greater insight into understanding the significance of the different types of relationships fostered in the art module. In my reflexive notes, I incorporated my interpretations stemming from constructing *I* poems that elucidated the relationship between participants’ use of the personal pronouns, “I,” “you,” “we,” and “they” and their level of self-disclosure.

Lastly, I created a heading containing each of the personal pronouns that formed my *I* poems that I then used as a guide to organize each participant’s *I* poem. This heading may be seen below:

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> p.s</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b>
<i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<i>You/your</i>	<i>We/us/our</i>	<i>They/their/them/others</i>

Within each “I,” “you,” “we,” and “they” statements needed to construct the *I* poem for each participant’s reflection paper, I included the accompanying verb, as stipulated by the LG method (49) in addition to several accompanying words. The LG does not stipulate the inclusion of a specific number of words within each line of the *I* poem (49), which provides the researcher

with a certain amount of flexibility (49, 56). Within the scope of my research, each line in my generated *I* poems varies slightly depending on the particular sentence in which it was found and the sentence structure. However, I ensured that each “I,” “you,” “we,” and “they” statement contained adequate context on its own so that when the *I* poem is read, the reader is able to follow the “associative stream of consciousness carried by a first-person voice” (49, p.163). In addition, the *I* poem is thought to allow the primary listener, being myself, “the opportunity to attend just to the sounds, rhythms, and shifts” (49, p.163). This may be seen in the following *I* poem excerpt from participant 003:

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b> <i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b> <i>We/us/our/ourselves</i>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b> <i>They/their/them/themselves/others</i>
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I strongly agree

How **we** feel  
 About **ourselves**  
 Not be controlled by what **we** see  
 But by how **we** truly  
 Feel about **ourselves**  
 Regardless of what **we** are told  
**We** “should look like”

This step of the LG, that is, listening to the manner in which the participant speaks of him/herself as determined through his/his shifting use of the personal pronouns (63), “I,” “you,” “we,” and “they,” and “listening to what this person knows of her- or himself” is “a way of coming into relationship that works against distancing ourselves from that person in an objectifying way.” (49, p.162).

### Step 3 – Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

The LG allows the voice of the participant to be heard above and beyond that of the researcher, and is this focus that distinguishes this research method from its counterparts (49). Moreover, it is the act of documenting all of the contrapuntal voices found within each individual reflection paper that “helps maintain differences between the respondents” (p.134), which bears particular importance in maintaining respect for “individual respondents within the research context” (59, p.135). In its third step, listening for contrapuntal voices, the researcher focuses on capturing the different voices that are interacting and co-existing with one another so as to better understand the participant’s view of him/herself in relation to society (44, 49, 61). This focus allows for the careful examination of two or more voices that may be at odds with one another that otherwise may not have been easily discerned and to further “trace the movement in [their] understanding of themselves and others” (66, p.97).

Similar to Balan (2005) who listened for the “loudest” voice (i.e., one that was easiest to discern or one that “occurred most frequently”), I, too, listened for the loudest voices when identifying particular voices on which to focus my analysis. In an effort to not only create an audit trail, or trail of evidence, in which an outsider is able to track my evolving reasoning, decision-making, thought processes, and emotional reactions (as cited in Jasper, 2005, p.254; 49,

61) in relation to my data analysis, I also sought to listen to all of the contrapuntal voices that are present in each paper, regardless of whether they were the loudest or not. The reasoning behind this decision is that I had to identify the voices present in order to determine which was the loudest. Further, in embracing this initial openness to listen for any contrapuntal voice that is discernible in each participant's paper, even if they may differ between each paper, I sought to listen to the data itself rather than impose my own preconceptions. Following this initial analysis, I was then able to step back and determine which of the identified voices were the loudest and most significant for each participant. At the very end of my analysis of voices in each reflection paper, I was able to aggregate patterns across participants in order to determine which contrapuntal voices thread throughout the dataset.

In this step, I was specifically listening for the presence or absence of participants' emotional input via their personal self-disclosures in the reflection papers. This was discerned by participants' interweaving of relevant past experiences and personal characteristics that would help me get better acquainted with them and their personality. Those self-disclosures that were more sensitive in nature provided a richer context to the contrapuntal voices identified and rendered them louder. Additionally, the identified lack of personal self-disclosures in other reflection papers provided another layer to my analysis as it, too, impacted the identification of other contrapuntal voices. Doing so helped me to forge a closer researcher-participant connection; the reflection papers provided me with greater context and understanding into the participants, their experiences, and the impact of the art module on them.

I first began by reading the entire reflection paper in order to refresh my mind on the ideas that were expressed by the participant writer. Following this, I embarked on a second listening during which I listened for a specific contrapuntal voice that I had isolated in the first listening, and underlined the corresponding segments of text with the corresponding coloured marker. I underlined each different voice with a different coloured marker. Following Balan's (2005) path, I analyzed "the similarities, differences, and contradictions" (p.6) between the different voices across all of the participants' reflection papers in an effort to provide "a richness of context for my overall interpretations and findings" (p.6). Following the identification and listening of each contrapuntal voice, I always returned to the beginning of the paper and listened for that particular voice to ensure that I had not omitted anything. Focusing on only one voice at a time "allows for the possibility that one statement may contain multiple meanings...and also allows the researcher to begin to see and hear the relationship between the first-person voice and the contrapuntal voices" (49, p.165).

Once the reflection papers were thoroughly analyzed for the presence of contrapuntal voices and underlined accordingly, I transcribed all of the corresponding voice excerpts from each reflection paper, organized by each identified contrapuntal voice.

### ***Reflexivity Process***

Throughout the analysis phase of my research, the reflexive journaling process was essential for me, particularly during times in which I encountered confusion, difficulty, and lack of clarity. I specifically struggled with integrating the mountainous amount of data that I was faced with, not to mention the complexity of it. The more data that I interpreted, the more that I kept uncovering. The challenge lied in integrating it all in a concise manner that would not only capture, but also preserve participants' rich experiences. During those difficult times, I

continued reflexively writing because I knew that eventually, I would obtain some clarity and answers to my own questions. Reflexive journaling enabled me to make connections within the data; the more I wrote, the more my thoughts flowed and the more clarity I began to obtain. It allowed me to critically reflect upon my reactions to the dataset and make sense of it within the broader scope of my research. After all, the qualitative research process is anything but black and white or straightforward. Instead, it thrives in the grey regions that are filled with nuance, detail, and richness that need to be unleashed. And it is the process of unearthing these grey regions that prove to be most challenging, confusing and labour-intensive as the researcher is fully immersed into it. The qualitative researcher is part of the research process and so, her emotional reactions and personal involvement with the data, in whichever way this manifests itself during the analysis process, is relevant to the study. It is simply a matter of figuring out how these emotional reactions interplay with the data and participants, and utilizing it to strengthen the overall data analysis.

### ***Ensuring Qualitative Rigor: Confirmability, Credibility, Dependability, & Transferability***

Within the scope of my research, ensuring rigor was based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of trustworthiness within qualitative research, which consists of confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability.

#### ***Confirmability***

Like many methods within qualitative research, the LG is based upon the researcher partaking in continual reflexive writing throughout the course of the study and particularly within the data analysis stage (49). This allowed me to create a trail of evidence that allows me as well as others to examine the actions taken and those not taken, identify potential areas that may require further attention, and allow any outside party to be able to trace my progressive decision-making and interpretations (49, 52, 59, 61, 82). In essence, it enabled me to document potential prejudices and intervening personal factors so that it is the realities of the participants that are at the forefront of my analysis (53, 59, 82). This ongoing reflexivity is essential in maintaining transparency within the study itself (53) thereby enhancing confirmability (83).

#### ***Credibility***

Denzin (1978) defines qualitative rigor as making "data and explanatory schemes as public and replicable as possible" (p.7). It is this same definition that I, too, employed within my research study. In response to Constat's (1992) statement that qualitative researchers all too often and extensively privatize their analytical methods from public scrutiny when they themselves delve into their participants' privacy, I further sought to provide depth of detail into my analysis process in an effort to address this privatization of analysis methods. Specifically, it is through my detailed reflexive writings that provided the reader and external auditors with a clear view into my progressive interpretations in an effort to ascertain their credibility and trustworthiness (83). In order to allow for this critique of rigor, the researcher must provide ample detail in her

writings (86). It is ultimately the reader who determines whether the researcher may be “trusted” in her written accounts (86).

To further substantiate credibility, Anfara et al. (2002) highlight the strategy of performing member checks. Within the scope of my particular study, member-checking was not an available option as I employed secondary analysis. For this reason, I consulted my interpretive community, comprising of my thesis supervisor and committee members, as an alternative method in providing additional verification of my analysis (86). My team and I share a common professional interest and familiarity in the application of the LG method within research (44, 61, 67). Such consultations occurred via regular e-mail correspondence involving the transfer of my reflexive notes and write-ups, which was subsequently reviewed through the use of the “Track Changes” option in Microsoft Word, enabling me to directly view my thesis supervisor’s comments, suggestions, corrections, clarifications, in addition to any further commentary provided. The write-ups that I forwarded for consultation included sections of my drafted thesis document, namely the results and discussion sections, qualitative rigor section, participant profile section, data analysis section to name a few. Due to time constraints and the extensive length of my reflexive notes (totalling approximately 100 pages single-spaced), select excerpts from these notes were forwarded to Lordly; these excerpts were representative of the overall structure, depth, and reflective quality of the remainder of my notes. Moreover, it is Lordly’s familiarity with the dataset and in advising my interpretive process within the scope of my research that enhances the level of quality and insight of her input. Once the thesis write-up was drafted in more substantial form, it, too, was forwarded to Lordly for further input.

### ***Dependability***

The issue of ensuring dependability of interpretations was achieved through several means. Firstly, each of my in-depth reflexive notes generated during the analytical process of my research corresponding to each step in the LG serves as my trail of evidence (61). My detailed description of these steps, namely the “operational detail” as written within the thesis itself, coupled with my “reflective appraisal of the project,” further adds to enhancing dependability (82). Within the write-up of my thesis, the methods section clearly and in detail elaborates on each step that was taken over the course of my analysis thereby allowing others to replicate the same process if they choose to do so (82). Lastly, peer examination via the successful defence of my thesis to the University’s academic community is another strategy that ensured dependability of my interpretations (83, 87).

In a move to ascertain the dependability of my codes generated in step 1 of the LG, I consulted with my interpretive community, namely my thesis supervisor, Lordly, who was also the main researcher in the study on which my current research is based. Lordly is a seasoned qualitative researcher with extensive exposure to and deep understanding of the LG method. Coupled with this strong research background, her strong familiarity with the dataset itself was an asset in verifying my coding consistency (52). Through regular correspondence, I shared my evolving coding and ensuing category development so as to obtain input and eventually, establish agreement and accordance of the final themes. As an additional method of ascertaining consistency and dependability, I went through each reflection paper on two separate occasions, marked by a period of one month in between, to check the accuracy of my initial codes (83).



This entailed reviewing each paper, from beginning to end, and ensuring that no code was omitted or improperly labeled.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability of findings is conducted through the detailed description of the research context and underlying assumptions that were central to the research (82). In order to ensure that sufficient context was provided, I detailed each step that was taken in my interpretive process in addition to providing a thick description of the data within the thesis (82). In doing so, I wanted to ensure that the reader would be able to “transfer” the detail and data into alternate environments and situations with sufficient confidence (82). As Shenton (2004) highlights, providing such information as participant description, data collection methods, and the time period over which my collection occurred are pertinent in enabling for the realization of transferability. It is such details that provide context to my research study (82). However, there are limitations to this.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Research ethics clearance for use of secondary data pertaining to the release of participants’ reflection papers was obtained from Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board in March 2012. As previously noted, the use of the reflection papers for this research study is an extension of Lordly's original study under which I was also the graduate research assistant; Lordly obtained authorization for the release of the reflective papers for her study. Only my thesis advisor and I had access to the data during the span of the current research.

The most important ethical considerations that this research study acknowledges are respect for privacy and confidentiality of participants (88). In reference to these latter considerations, each of the 27 participants whose reflection papers are being utilized has been coded with a unique identification number to protect their identity. In the reflection papers, participants disclosed personal information that may be deemed identifying information, such as references to personal experiences, background references, and details regarding their unique experiences and creations during the class in which they were enrolled. Having already accessed and read these papers in the role of graduate research assistant, I am aware of these personal details. However, I am not personally acquainted with the participants nor do I know who they are as a result of the disclosed personal information. Nevertheless, as the researcher, I do acknowledge the need to protect participants’ confidentiality. As such, the departmental secretary removed participants’ names from their respective reflection papers and has them replaced with a unique identification number before I had access to the data.

The index sheet containing all participants’ contact information is retained in the Office of Applied Human Nutrition at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and will be shredded following the completion of the research study. All student participants signed a consent sheet allowing for the release of their papers for use in Lordly’s study. This particular information is not accessible to me or to my thesis supervisor; it is currently being held in the Office of Applied Human Nutrition by the departmental secretary. As such, the confidentiality

of the student participants is ensured in this regard. In the thesis as well as thesis defence presentation, the study participants are referred to solely by their identification numbers.

Participants were initially made aware of the intended use of their written papers in Lordly's study. Although they were not made aware of the use of these papers for further study in my research because this research had not been formulated at that time, this research does not misuse participants in any way. Instead, it is an extension, albeit a distinct one, of Lordly's study in the sense that it is also analyzing the effects of the arts module on participants.

Participants disclosed personal information in their reflection papers that may be identifiable by others who are acquainted with them. In response to this reality and in line with ethical research practice, I removed all identifying information such as locations, names, and specific references to details that may render the participant's identity known. Although protection of participants' confidentiality is of utmost importance and care was taken by the researcher to preserve that, some context and perspective nonetheless needed to be retained in the data in order to ensure relevance, depth and uniqueness to the study. It should be noted that, as with any qualitative study, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed as a participant's unique experiences may be recognizable to those reading the thesis document itself, which contains narrative excerpts. This is both a risk and an inherent part of qualitative research, but one that can only be minimized through methods described above. In addition, I was unable to discern the identity of my participants for the main reason that I have not had any mutual undergraduate classes with them and thus was not aware of who they were. My time at Mount Saint Vincent University included two semesters of graduate level course work only; I may have only met a couple of the students briefly through colleagues.

Upon completion of the study, all data will be passed to my thesis supervisor and stored for up to five years in a locked filing cabinet in the department office as per standard protocol. Copies of the physical data that I used during analysis will be shredded and disposed of securely following the five year mark. Similarly, all electronic versions of the data will be deleted from the researcher's password protected, personal laptop on which it is stored. Further, study results will be disseminated through a final thesis. In addition, an article may be submitted for review to the *Journal of Critical Dietetics*, the *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research* following the completion of the research study, and others as well.

As Marecek, Fine, and Kidder (2001) noted, a qualitative approach to research requires its own unique approach to minding and ensuring the ethical safeguards of participants. Namely, researchers need to ensure that not only confidentiality is consistently enforced throughout the entirety of the research process, but that the researcher also fairly portray participants in the written report and maintain transparency in his/her data analysis approach by disclosing all relevant details (69). This trail of evidence serves as a gateway for others, including other researchers and readers alike, to follow the decision-making process that was taken so as to better understand how the researcher approached his/her data analysis.

Potential benefits to participants include an act of goodwill, support for their chosen profession, as well as personal and professional satisfaction for contributing to an ongoing research inquiry into an otherwise under-explored facet of dietetics, that is one that involves the arts. Participants are part of an emerging dietetics niche that seeks to forward knowledge and understanding, in neglected areas like dietetic students' personal and emotional experiences of being immersed in an arts and humanities based curriculum. This would complement their clinical nutrition knowledge and assist in developing such skills as compassion, empathy, listening, trust and rapport-building, all of which are essential for effective practice.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *Introduction*

In this section, I begin to explore the professional expectations encountered and professional connections that were fostered in participations from their in-depth involvement in the art module. I then move to examine the interpersonal connections and finally, conclude with the individual and bodily connections so as to illuminate the complexity of dietetic knowledge. In light of the large amount of detail present in my dataset coupled with its depth and richness, I have chosen to structure the presentation of my findings around the research questions that guided my analysis. I first present my findings from each of these research questions, which is subsequently followed by an analysis of their underlying meanings whilst keeping in mind the contrapuntal voices that permeate the reflection papers. As such, the interplay of the multiplicity of contrapuntal voices that was heard in the dataset, including the voices of conviction, transformation, and vulnerability, should be from an integrated perspective, providing insight into the “theoretically relevant shifts...[that open] a novel window for understanding both the existence of [the] multiple layers of psychic life and what they can reveal about lived experience” (58, p.497). The contrapuntal voices are indicative of these multiple layers of psychic life, allowing the primary listener to understand how “participants make meaning of their experiences” (58, p.497).

Table 1 lists and explains the nature of the contrapuntal voices that were heard throughout the reflection papers. Physical copies of the reflection papers are multi-coloured narratives that Gilligan et al. (49) prescribed as the goal outcome, capturing the interrelationship of the contrapuntal voices. Finally, the following table is intended to serve as a tool for the reader to guide the sections that proceed, allowing for easy reference to the table when needed.

Table 1: Contrapuntal Voices

<b>Contrapuntal Voice</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Conviction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Captures a reserved and distanced stance with little personalization</li><li>• Underlying assertive and convinced voice</li><li>• Voices participants’ strong beliefs that are rational and objective rather than emotional in nature</li></ul>
<b>Vulnerability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Captures feelings of intimate self-exposure, demonstrating the relinquishment of control and some fear</li><li>• Discerned by highly personalized writing with personalized expression of emotions</li><li>• Raw, unguarded self-reflections</li></ul>
<b>Transformation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Captures participants’ evolving journeys and self-discoveries</li><li>• Discerned by their transforming perceptions, feelings, emotions, and attitudes</li><li>• Unexpected awakenings</li></ul>

## *Participant Profiles*

At the time of initial data collection, specifically during the fall 2010 semester, the 27 participants in this research were enrolled in a fourth-year, senior-level professional practice course for dietetics majors at Mount Saint Vincent University. Of this total, 4 of the participants are males and 23 are females. Since this time, I postulate that they have all likely graduated from the undergraduate program. However, due to my lack of access to their identities and personal information, this latter factor cannot be fully confirmed.

Within their reflection papers, each participant in my dataset reflects on the most personally meaningful experiences he/she encountered during the different stages of the art module, examines those activities that left a lasting impression on their learning, as well as discusses the learnings that they have acquired. However, participants' unique experiences and individual perspectives are evident in their narratives, and are captured by their distinct contrapuntal voices in this regard. It is such individuality that enhances the richness of the data. As unique as the participants are from one another in personality, they are equally unique in the backgrounds that shape who they presently are. These individual differences enriched the powerful transformations and relationships that transpired during their involvement in the art module.

In their reflection papers, a range of highly personal experiences are disclosed by participants, including the death of a close family member, eating disorders affecting a close family member, painful experiences of the challenges encountered in breastfeeding, and desires to inspire positive body image in others. There is also a self-identified artist, several participants who are older than traditional students, and the vast majority of participants who have experienced conflicts with their bodies at one point in their lives. Such ethnic backgrounds as Asian, South Asian, and Aboriginal heritage were included in my participant group, as determined from their disclosures in their reflections papers.

There was a strong commonality of self-consciousness felt among participants directed at their own bodies and the unavoidable influences of the media to correct perceived imperfections. A few participants indicated having encountered painful experiences during their adolescence that directly related to their body weight dissatisfaction and to nutrition. One participant indicated that her interest in nutrition began with her struggles with a negative body image in her early teenage years. Similarly, another participant also struggled with her negative body image due to a period of sudden weight gain, coinciding with a lack of self-esteem. Another participant expressed that despite having a physically similar body to that of her mother, she always felt unhappy with her body.

Within the body of this thesis, each participant is referred to by his/her unique identification code, which ranges from 001 to 030. These identification codes are also utilized as in-text referencing for quotations that were extracted from participants' reflection papers. In this case, the quotation is followed by an in-text insert, such as: "(001)," which indicates that it is located in participant 001's reflection paper. For clarity, all participant codes begin with the number zero, thereby distinguishing them from literature referencing. For example, as seen above, "(001)" is indicative of a participant's reflection paper reference whereas "(1)" is indicative of literature referencing, corresponding to the reference list at the end of this document.

## *Professional Expectations and Professional Connections*

Throughout their involvement in the art module, participants gained significant understandings regarding the application of the arts within the dietetic field in addition to its role in the professional development and practice of dietitians. This occurred through their involvement in class workshops, completion of literature readings, participation in class discussions, interaction with guest speakers, immersion in art production, and participation in the Body Image Conference held on campus. In their reflection papers, participants also explore some of the felt professional expectations that beset dietitians both from a body image standpoint, communication and professional practice. While some of these expectations relate to dietitians' responsibilities in ensuring that clients receive the most quality care through the incorporation of the arts within their practice, others hint at a reality in which dietetic professionals must exemplify perfection in order to be respected health professionals. These reflection papers demonstrate an appreciation and strongly felt responsibility to these professional expectations. Participants also demonstrate an eagerness to embody this envisioned incorporation of the personal by incorporating their newfound learnings of the arts in their future practice. Such learnings include art's abilities in enhancing connection building, effective communication, empathy and listening skills just to name a few. This personally felt responsibility to meet and exceed these professional expectations exemplifies an eagerness that is loudly heard by the contrapuntal voice of conviction.

DeVault (1999) highlights the highly relational facet of food. Individuals' complex and often confusing relationships with food, including but not limited to that of disordered eating and weight and body distortions, provide a glimpse into this relational confusion. Even though food serves as our most primal need for the physical sustainment of our bodies, the effect of media and societal idealizations of "ideal" beauty, for instance, convolutes one's relationship with food. Further, the politicization of food to which DeVault (1999) also makes reference may relate not only to the gendered power dynamics inherent to the field of food, nutrition, and dietetics but also to the manipulative effects that external influences have on our perceptions of beauty, which oftentimes conflicts with the meaning of health.

Many participants indicated what they believed dietitians, in their capacity as health professionals, should be doing, aiming to do, and/or needing to do; namely, their professional responsibilities as related to the incorporation of the arts within practice. Specifically, dietetic professionals need to remain aware of the warning signs of body image displeasure, remain aware of their own negative thoughts so as to try to avoid being affected, be capable of providing methods to increase self-esteem and promote positive body image, understand the role art plays, and finally believe in and encourage art in their daily practice (028).

For clarity, this research question, which addresses the professional connections fostered from the art module and the professional expectations that beset dietitians, is broken down into the following subsections: Bodily Expectations; Expectations to Incorporate Art; and Professional Expectations: Learning Empathy and Understanding. I continue to examine each section individually followed by an overarching analysis into participants' expressed levels of disclosure in relation to this research question.

## *Professional Expectations*

### Bodily Expectations

Expectations for dietitians to meet societal perceptions of the ideal weight, size, and body shape were addressed by many participants as being a significant issue that they face on a regular basis. Even as nutrition and dietetics students themselves, they felt an unspoken pressure within their program to eat healthy, be healthy, and remain physically active, encountering particular pressures in attaining a healthy relationship with food and body image. These pressures were even cited as extending to a dietetic professional's family, as captured by participant 019.

The media were highlighted as being a key external pressure in influencing participants' past and current body image issues. Pressures felt within the program and perceived external pressures directed at nutrition students and professionals were cited as being significant influencers to conform to a stereotypical image. This stereotype involves meeting body weight expectations in order to be authenticated and perceived as credible, as well as needing to consume "healthy" foods for fear of judgment. Participant 006 communicated that nutrition students are expected to meet both behaviour and appearance based stereotypes. In the case that a dietetic student does not meet and exceed these felt expectations, he/she is likely to be judged by others, including his/her peers, or feel that he/she is being judged. Participants further reflected on the common judgement that dietitians face from the public and/or society based on their physique, particularly their body weight. In essence, they are expected to be thin (005). Irrespective of whether he/she is thin or heavier-set, credibility as a practicing dietitian is directly tied with his/her physical appearance. This is captured by participant 006, who states:

Being in a nutrition program whereby food, fitness, and health are constantly areas of importance, students may oftentimes feel pressured to look or act in a certain way in order to meet stereotypes branded by society regarding nutrition professionals.

These aforementioned pressures and conflicted relationships that dietetic students have with their bodies and the perceived expectations to meet them are channelled through their created artwork. Participant 025 notes sensing her peers' negative body image experiences directly through their art, which portrayed such conflicts in relation to body parts, facial features, as well as depicting pressure imposed by the self to be thin and others' pressure to be thin. She feels that most of these negative feelings are influenced by media's portrayal of beauty (025). During the span of her dietetics degree, participant 016 felt influenced by media to look a certain way and felt intimidated by these expectations. These behavioural pressures to remain thin are cited as propagating amongst her peers, thereby resulting in self-imposed expectations to stay thin and eat healthy (016). She describes this phenomenon:

This is just reality. In this world, we all get intimidated by our peers to look or act a certain way. It is just a part of life and we have to confide to ourselves to overcome this discrimination which we all may face (016).

As dietetic students we are taught to be tolerant, understanding, and non-judgmental toward others, particularly our clients; this is only one part of ethical professional practice. However, as many participants noted in their reflection papers, judgment from within themselves

as well as from their peers is widespread, whether it is voiced or not. Participant 020 contends that the dietitian needs to learn about the social history of her patients in order to better understand their circumstances and in turn, to be better equipped to counsel them accordingly to their situation. Within the context of the undergraduate program, this participant touches on the dichotomy that is currently existent in relation to a dietetic professional's credibility being tied directly with her physical appearance. She describes how as a dietetics student, she feels judged and pressured to meet unspoken physical expectations. However, she continues to express a hypothetical scenario in which she states that if she was a patient who was being counselled by an overweight/obese dietitian, she would not find that dietitian credible due to her body size.

As demonstrated, the perpetuation of bodily expectations transcends all levels of profession and care, including dietetic students, dietetic professionals, and society as a whole. According to participant 005, individuals' conflicts with their body image stem from body dissatisfaction whereby media exposure conditions people to internalize their ideal idea of beauty. Adding to the many differences that exist between individuals and their unique beauty are cultural differences. Perhaps most notably was participant 024's newfound realization of her own beauty following a previously troubled relationship with her body image. After all, what others believe should be of no consequence to us (024) even though "We live in a society where we are taught to judge others and ourselves by appearance" (028). This is where the arts hold much potential in positively changing the current situation. Not only do they enhance unbiased opinions (017) and foster humanistic qualities (017, 030), they may also be used to communicate and help instil positive body image in others and to raise awareness so as to allow for the appreciation and understanding of the beauty in differences (028). Perhaps most importantly is the role that that art in shaping the development of holistic, well-rounded nutritional professionals. Participant 019 was able to make sense of conflicting professional and personal experiences that dietitians may encounter through hearing personal stories recounted by Dr. Gingras, a Registered Dietitian at the Body Image Conference, sharing her challenges with being informed of the overweight status of her child, in addition to Lordly sharing her own past challenges with breastfeeding. As she captures,

...it is ok if we are not perfect in all areas surrounding this health field. We are human too and we much accept ourselves and our loved ones for who they are not the body image they portray (019).

Struggling with this conflict between personal, societal and professional expectations was also echoed by participant 023 who, in his art piece, delves into his struggles with body acceptance and using food as a stress mechanism. He further explores the felt pressure in needing to live up to expectations of being a dietetic professional who is "supposed" to be free of flaw:

I kept conjuring up feelings of guilt. I felt out of control, after all, I'm studying to become a dietitian and to admit that I myself deal with body image and food issues seem like an oxymoron, they just don't go together (023).

The issue of body image is an ever-present topic in not only society but the dietetic profession, with the idolization of thinness being the primary driving force. Participant 018, for instance, is convinced that exposure to "perfect" portrayals of men and women's bodies leads to attempts to change one's own perceived imperfections. She believes that the role of dietetic

professionals lies in their responsibility to recognize clients' perceptions of body image and to appropriately teach them about healthy weights with the emphasis on bodily differences. For participant 028, the need to embrace these differences is important and whereby art holds the ability to demonstrate that there is no one perfect body type.

Participants' understanding is that negative body ideals, perpetuated by the media, negatively affect almost all individuals and have direct implications for dietetic practice. According to participant 004, dietitians are expected to raise awareness of the importance of health and healthy lifestyle decisions. It is not lost on her that advertisements elicit insecurity, obsession, and unhealthy decisions in their target audience. Further, as another participant believes, it is important for the dietetic professional to attempt to understand clients' personal meaning of body image (010). According to participant 018, dietitians need to be aware of others' perceptions of body image allowing them to better understand influencing factors, thereby enabling them to be able to help more effectively.

When participants reflect on the expectations that they themselves or other dietetic professionals feel in relation to body image, there is a sense of assertiveness underlying their communication. This is discerned by the contrapuntal voice of conviction that also captures the seriousness of their beliefs. This voice captures a reserved and distanced stance whereby there is little personalization noted behind participants' narratives. With an underlying assertive and convinced voice, it voices participants' strong beliefs that are rational and objective rather than emotional in nature. This is heard by participant 016, when she states:

...you are a future dietitian and you *have to* stay thin and eat healthy all the time. This is *just reality*...we all get intimidated by our peers to look or act a certain way. It is *just a part of life* and we have to confide to ourselves to overcome this discrimination (emphasis added).

Through her usage of such phrases as "have to stay thin" and "This is just reality," it becomes apparent that this participant's belief exemplifies a strong personal view of an unforgiving reality of the situation in which dietitians find themselves, that is, feeling required to "stay thin and eat healthy all the time." The contrapuntal voice of conviction is loudly heard in this excerpt, highlighting her own strongly held belief in the expected role that she too must embody. The lack of an affective quality in the participant's reflective writing is evident as she does not incorporate the emotional journey she experienced nor does she provide the emotional context of her learning. Instead, she provides the reader with an insider's look into the more structured, concrete learnings she acquired, which are captured by this specific contrapuntal voice. This personal belief is also echoed by participant 008 who touches on the reality that her body image will be a factor by which she will be judged in her future profession, sharing: "...I have come to realize that body image will play a significant albeit subtle role in how I am perceived in this profession" (p.4). The pressures and bodily expectations that beset this group are widely felt by many of them, a reality that is not lost on participant 005 either who states: "As a potential health professional it is most definitely pressuring to be thin." The presence of the contrapuntal voice of conviction brings our attention to the fact that over the course of their education, these participants seem to have absorbed the harsh messages of bodily expectations as being a contributing factor to the manner in which they are perceived by others. In essence, their credibility as dietetic professionals is closely tied to their physical appearance.



It is also apparent that their involvement in the art module increased participants' awareness of this trend of strong professional expectations. It provided them with hands-on skills to grapple with this challenge. The positive tone of this ability is heard in the following excerpt: "With our profession...[i]t is extremely important to be aware of negative thoughts towards our own bodies" (028). Participants 004 and 005, respectively, state that:

...as dietitians we must make the client aware that not everyone is built to look the same, and what is important is your health and with making healthy realistic lifestyle decisions, and changes, you can be happier in your own skin (004)

and: "As possible future health professional, when talking about body image, we should focus on health" (005). It is here that we also loudly hear the voice of conviction demonstrating a resilient side to these participants. Although the current climate in dietetics may be negatively focused on bodily expectations, this does not mean that change is not possible. The reflection papers show participants' eagerness to improve their future professional practice, propelled by their recent immersion into the arts and body image. This latter factor is captured by participant 029 who demonstrates a realization of the need for "dietetics students to learn coping strategies or ways to deal with feelings of guilt and anxiety associated with disordered eating." Not only do dietetics students and professionals face bodily expectations from others, but they also experience greater rates of disordered eating and body image problems (16, 17). Participant 029 captures this need for dietetic professionals to first tackle their own personal issues with body image:

...by using art in dietetics it will allow students to better understand their own feelings toward body image as well as learn ways in which clients can express their feelings and concerns on this topic.

Participant 021 challenges dietetic professionals' ability to help those clients battling "body image demons" if they themselves have not done so. As he points, out, there are inherent difficulties encountered in such a situation since higher rates of disordered eating and body image problems are common among dietetic students/professionals. He states:

When one is battling ones [sic] own demons it is difficult to advise someone else that they should be making choices based on improving personal health status and not because it will change the body image (021).

The role of the dietetic professional in practice encompasses a variety of responsibilities in supporting the well-being of their clients. In addition to the more traditional, foundational roles of providing sound clinical nutrition advice, participants also communicate the dietetic professional's extended responsibility in promoting a positive, healthy body image. This particular belief was enhanced by their recent immersion into the realm of body image, arts and dietetics through the art module. In their reflection papers, the contrapuntal voice of conviction is loudly heard, highlighted by their usage of such key words as "is important," "need to," and "should." This may be heard in participant 018's following statement,

...it *is important* for dietitians to spend time with their clients teaching them about BMI and what a healthy body image is for them. We *need to* remind clients that everyone is different (emphasis added).

This voice is also heard in participant 011's assertions of his beliefs of the need for dietetic professionals to be engaged and nonjudgmental listeners and their need to work as interdisciplinary professionals. These statements embody an idealistic and convinced stance in which the participant knows what needs to be done. The following excerpt also captures this contrapuntal voice and its described qualities:

...one *should* try to respect and try to deal with the clients halfway and to try not judging them for their choices and decisions...For this to happen one *should* learn how to express freely and *listen* to people carefully and be receptive emotionally (011, emphasis added).

In addition to the key words listed above, usages of directive-related statements that show a command being placed upon the reader are demonstrative of the voice of conviction. As the primary listener, it provides me with an understanding of where the participant finds himself in relation to his views on the arts, the field of dietetics, the arts in dietetics, and body image.

The responsibility for promoting a positive body image is communicated to lie with the dietetic professional, as captured in the following quotation: "As dietitians, our mission is not as simple as telling what a healthy body weight would be and what should one do to achieve or keep it" (010). This statement highlights the adamant stance that the participant takes in her beliefs of the roles that dietitians can play in shaping their clients' body image understandings.

Further, participants communicate a professional responsibility for dietitians to identify and address body image concerns in their clients: "Body image displeasure is increasing and as dietitians we need to be aware of warning signs of this dilemma" (028). This expectation is loudly echoed by participant 024 as well, who shares: "...it is so important for dietitians, and any professionals to address the correct body image to the society." On an individual basis, participants strongly advocate for the need to gain a deeper understanding into clients' views of themselves and their body image:

We are also expected to try our best to understand how does one's body image mean to him or herself before we get involved in the helping process...It is important for health professionals to be aware of the sensitivity around the issue (010).

The need for extending the role of the dietitian to the school setting so as to be able to work with college-age and younger students is voiced by participant 014. Participant 024 also asserts that it is highly crucial that dietitians work with adolescents to address the issue of positive body image as this is a vulnerable, shaping period in life. This is echoed by participant 028 who places a high importance on communicating with children about body image so as to initiate positive change through awareness and assist in the prevention of negative body image. In line with these reflections, my research contends that it would be most optimal to begin exploring the benefits of the arts with dietetic students from their initial entry into the undergraduate program so as to allow for ample time to strengthen and build upon their knowledge and confidence levels in this regard. Once they reach entry level to dietetic practice, it is the assumption that they would be better prepared to further apply their knowledge with their

clients. This may take the form of directly implementing different modes of art, such as utilizing storytelling within the counselling sessions, encouraging clients to partake in personal journaling and poetry composition. Such elements of the arts can be incorporated within the overall counselling structure so as to provide a means of better understanding the client and the context of their lives. This would, then, help further elucidate their current behaviour, viewpoints, and attitudes, allowing the dietetic professional to be able to better target their counselling approach.

### Expectations to Incorporate Art

Participants' resiliency is heard in their desire to continue to improve their professional practice by incorporating the skills that the arts teach, including relationship building, listening skills, and empathy. This resiliency and determination is captured by the voice of conviction in a positive light. Participants express their earnest beliefs in the responsibility of dietetic professionals to incorporate elements of the arts within their practice as a means of improving their clients' care.

The strength in using the arts in practice is believed to originate with the dietetic professional. To elaborate, by personally using the arts to improve their own well-being, emotions and stresses, therefore attaining a deeper self-understanding, participant 022 believes that the dietetic professional is then able to better support his/her clients' well-being. As she further explains, this is an important aspect of practice as personal emotions may aid or hinder their work performance. Participant 024 also recognizes that through sharing her own personal struggles with weight and weight-loss with future clients, it will help her bridge the connection between herself and her future clients by promoting mutual understanding and empathy. It is, after all, the emotionally in tuned dietitians who will have the most significant impact in assisting clients in their journey of attaining positive, health-enhancing behaviour change. Participant 023's strong belief of the power of the arts in connecting people was solidified following his presentation of the poem, stating that: "It may also provide a way to show that all of us have common problems that connect us and that the common line is that we are humanly flawed."

The voice of conviction is heard in relation to participant 029's professional expectations of dietitians and dietetic students. Specifically, she believes that dietitians' need to be educated on the application of art in their field and the need to be able to meaningfully connect with clients. This voice indicates that the participant is reasoning out and explaining her newfound learnings in an assertive, determined way. For instance, she states:

...dietitians should be educated on the importance of art in practise as we often play the role of counsellor [sic] in the clinical setting...we also have to be able to listen in order to make the best suggestions for improving our clients' health (029).

In this statement, it becomes clear that she is a firm believer in the role that art plays in dietetics. The use of words such as "should be" and "have to" demonstrate this assertiveness, or conviction. This voice also captures the learnings that the participant embodies and is now expressing, such as the fact that "[A]rt is an accessible medium for all people to express their feelings and experiences about any aspect of their life" (029), which was something that she was not previously aware of.

The professional expectations, or as many participants view it, responsibilities, to incorporate the teachings and extended benefits that the arts teach dietetic professionals, have considerable benefits for clients. Participant 028 shares her belief that:

It is therefore imperative for a professional dietitian to not only understand the role that art plays – but also to believe in and encourage this mantra in our daily practice; this will help change the attitudes of people and improve their overall self image [sic] and health.

The need for continued openness to incorporate the arts within dietetic professionals' learning and practice is also communicated. It is clear that participants acquired understandings from their own immersion in the art module influenced their realization of the need to expand their knowledge of dietetics beyond the scientific scope as a means of providing the best care to their clients as possible. This is captured by the following excerpted reflection whereby the contrapuntal voice of conviction is simultaneously heard:

...it is important to be open to all forms of therapy including therapy through the arts. I feel that as dietitians it is our responsibility to use a multidimensional approach to aid clients in the best way we can (019),

and is echoed by participant 015, who too strongly believes that “It is important for us, as future professionals in dietetics to help contribute to this expansion of knowledge and not freeze out ideas.” This professional responsibility, as a means of enhancing care, is also viewed as a means of educating the public and promoting health-related issues, as participant 024 contends. This collective identity, as discerned through her use of the pronoun “we” when making references to being dietitians, highlights the lack of personal ownership of this belief (57), which is characteristic of the voice of conviction. Ownership would instead take the form of self-identification using the first-person pronoun, “I,” that also shows evidence of lived experience (57). In this case, though, the participants appear to embody collective identities as future dietetic professionals, utilizing other pronouns besides “I” to express their experiences and understandings in this regard.

Participants express their newfound learnings and realizations into the need to incorporate the arts within their scope of practice. They communicate this as being closely intertwined in their successful practice: “...as future professionals it is imperative that we are constantly aware of the art in our surroundings and that we explore this area with our clients on a more frequent basis” (028). Participant 028 further maintains that the use of art facilitates the communication of positive body image, thereby allowing for the appreciation and understanding of the beauty in differences. She asserts that dietitians should increase awareness of media's influence on body image and to educate clients about it (028) because media has been cited to be a significant influencing factor on individuals' body image. For participant 005, the dietetic professional's responsibility lies in helping others with their body image, as this is a frequently encountered problem in practice.

Finally, as participant 020 shares: “...in order to become a successful health professional, you need both art and science because together they create different meanings through the emotions of each individual.” The significance of this latter realization is furthered by the fact that participants were initially unknowledgeable, unaware, and rather closed-minded to the incorporation of the arts within the dietetic field at the start of the art module. This significance

is further captured by the following statement: "...the investment in ourselves through the arts will result in deeper understanding" (022).

### Professional Expectations: Learning Empathy and Understanding

Participants highlight the need for fostering connection-building with clients as a means of better assisting them in their care. The voice of conviction is heard when they reflect on this perceived professional expectation, exploring the need for this closer relationship between professional and client. This is captured in the following few excerpts: "...working with people we require ways to better understand our clients and build relationships with them" (015); "...we have to be able to discover and interpret these in order to aid in their needs and form relationships with our clients" (016); and the "dietitian needs to think as the clients' brains and to be connected with them in order to best understand their feelings and make the best plan/or changes for them" (024). Participants also stress the expectation for and responsibility of dietetic professionals to be able to thoroughly understand and empathize with their clients. This adamant stance and personal belief is captured by the voice of conviction. My research study contends that the ability to fulfill this expectation is enabled by an immersion into the arts, which foster the development and enhancement of these skills. As participant 011 states:

...one should try to respect and try to deal with the clients halfway and to try not judging them for their choices and decisions...For this to happen one should learn how to express freely and listen to people carefully and be receptive emotionally. Here, the practicing [sic] various kinds of arts can plays [sic] an important role...in overall development of nutritional professional as capable and reliable professionals.

This line of thinking is echoed by participant 022, who believes that:

We need to feel the confidence to help others using our own strengths. We owe it to ourselves and our clients to give the best knowledge, empathy, understanding, and compassion we can. I feel this will be an investment that will have dual rewards, for ourselves and our clients.

Participants further highlight the dietetic professional as being an important agent of change in their clients' care. But in order to be successful in this role, they point out that they must be adept at listening and responding to clients' individual needs: "Clients need to be heard in order for us, as dietitians, to help them change" (029). Moreover, as participant 029 states: "...being able to understand and relate to clients will help you to gain their trust and you can therefore help them make the changes they want to make." This requires that they have insight and the ability to understand their individual capabilities and individuality:

As future dietitians, I believe that it is our job to find those differences among our clients and know that what one person is capable of doing, might not be what another person can achieve (016).

In practice, dietetic professionals are taught to make connections with clients through fostering compassion, empathy, sincerity, authenticity, and communication, as shared by participant 023. For participant 011, it is the belief that art plays a role in the creation of trust, strong relationships, and an atmosphere of security for clients. These are essential components that ultimately play an important role in fostering open communication with clients. Participant 007 further acknowledges the potential difficulty clients may face in completely opening up with a health professional, often due to one-sided sharing on the client's part. For this reason, the necessary trust and comfort level may not be present to allow for effective communication and treatment. The arts are a suitable and highly effective method of addressing this issue, and one whose use in professional setting is largely untapped (007). Different modes of art, such as self-disclosure via storytelling, may be used by the health professional to create an environment of mutuality and rapport-building. As participant 029 captures:

Clients need to be heard in order for us, as dietitians, to help them change. When a person feels as if their concerns have been clearly communicated they will hopefully be more willing to make a change and art can be this communication method.

The arts enable the professional to abstain from imposing judgment, but instead to listen intently, and remain emotionally receptive (011), thereby further assisting them in becoming more humane and understanding (025).

### *Levels of Disclosure*

Levels of disclosure were examined in participants' reflection papers to discern how directly or indirectly they expressed themselves in their writing. Their expressed beliefs of professional expectations for the practicing dietitian are marked by the usage of strong language and the contrapuntal voice of conviction. This strong language is discerned by such assertive words as "should," "must," and "need to," which are also markers for the voice of conviction. In examining the reflection papers for this particular theme, it became apparent that participants thoroughly internalized the learnings from the art module and are strong believers in the direct benefits that the arts hold for both the practitioner and client when mobilized within practice. However, since they were all undergraduate students who have not entered professional practice at the time that data collection occurred, this present research cannot determine whether they will indeed implement these artistic measures within their own practice. This would be best explored through a subsequent study specifically designed to track these participants.

Participants' reflection papers provide a detailed look into the manner in which they view such professional expectations. Firstly their views appear to be idealistic in nature. This was determined by their seemingly clear cut views into practice whereby they do not touch on the grey areas in practice. Such grey areas may include the possibility that their idealistic views may not be easily implemented in the workplace when compounded with certain challenges. Additionally, due to their distanced stance, the underlying voice behind participants' reflective writings is more rational than emotional. The emotional is discerned through the inclusion of personal self-disclosures and other self-exposures that would provide further context to participants' writing. This was not found when they reflected on the professional expectations facing dietitians, which is assumed to be for the reason expressed earlier: they are not practicing

dietetic professionals yet and have not yet formed their professional identities that allows them to share lived experience through the usage of the first-person pronoun, “I” (58). Further, since self-expression through the use of language captures the writer’s personality, it provides insight into their inner selves. At the time and within the context participants wrote their reflection papers, their self-expressive voice came across as distant. Within this context, their objective and neutral style of writing captures their personality as well as their positivist educational upbringing.

Those participants who embodied a more structured and distanced approach were those whose reflection papers were more generalized and de-personalized; they shared their thoughts on various aspects of the art module and focused on voicing opinions and convictions on this topic in a manner similar to a research paper. This writing style was interpreted as representing their personality and writing styles as well as their lacking ability and/or willingness to open themselves up through their writing. This, along with the dominating lack of usage of the first-person pronoun, “I,” were the characterizing factors of the contrapuntal voice of conviction, which by the nature is detached and reserved. These reflection papers were more distanced in that participants did not openly relate their learnings to their own personal experiences and feelings. Instead, they reflected on topics where there was less direct personal self-identification: professional expectations and professional connections.

As Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) note:

The Listening Guide...duly acknowledges that people may...resist talking about...experiences, especially experiences that reveal violations of acceptable or conventional thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, given the teller’s positionalities and those of the subjects of the narrative...Other experiences can be difficult to put into words because revealing these experiences can have social or material implications and consequences (p. 497).

In keeping with this reality, the participants in my study seem to have exhibited this very phenomenon. To elaborate, the reflection papers, rooted as initial graded assignments, puts participants’ reservations to completely and openly share their innermost thoughts into perspective. This is because the original intended audience was the course professor, Lordly, who held the power in assigning a final course grade to the participants. Further, the “subject of the narrative” was directly related to the course professor and the professional field that she represents. Lordly not only occupied the position of representative of the dietetic profession, which in itself holds much power, but she also represented the academic figure head of the graded course in which the participants were enrolled. It is probable, then, that participants guarded their reflections as a means of preventing the potential of “jeopardizing” of their image as the “ideal” dietetic student. This image may be viewed as being crucial in securing and remaining competitive in the coveted dietetic internship, which may have led them to “resist talking about...experiences that reveal violations of acceptable or conventional thoughts, feelings, or behaviors” (58, p.497). However, it bears reminding that one of the very purposes of the art module was to push participants to expand their boundaries, comfort levels, views and understandings, and above all to think *critically* about the world around them, and explore emotions, insights and meanings through the facilitation of art (42).

Although participants held strong positions when reflecting on the professional expectations dietitians face, they nonetheless remained distanced in that they did not directly

identify themselves within these statements, as would be discerned through the use of the pronoun “I.” As is documented elsewhere, “Narrators often shift away from the use of first-person when experience or knowledge is difficult to claim” (58, p.504) or are even taboo in the positivist realm. Participants’ expressions are instead marked by the third person pronouns “we” and “they,” as seen in the following *I* poem excerpts:

Participant 005

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

**We** should focus on health  
Regardless of what **we** look like  
Dissatisfaction with **our** bodies  
The media that **we** are exposed to  
**We** are conditioned to believe  
What **we** see in these photos is beautiful  
**We** are aware  
**We** are exposed to are “fake”  
**We** still strive and want to look that way

Participant 015

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

**We** are aware that although clients will be exposed  
**We** are also aware these are not the only images  
**We** cannot be close minded  
Vulnerable to present, in front of **others**  
Strong feelings **they** had on the subject  
**We** get too caught up in the facts  
Better understanding of **their** experiences and feelings  
Important for **us**, as future professionals in dietetics



Participant 029

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

**We** often play the role of councillor [sic]

**We** often think of **ourselves**

Just giving advice to **our** clients

**We** also have to be able to listen

Improving **our** clients' health

If **we** are unable to provide clients

Medium through which **they** can communicate

**We** are unable to do our job properly

One possible reason for this phenomenon is that due to their lack of professional dietetic practice, by virtue of their role as students, participants are only able to view themselves from a more removed and theoretical stance. A different outcome may have been experienced had seasoned registered dietitians been the subject of this study; in that case, their involvement with clients might provide them with firsthand experience of examining the benefits of using art in their practice. The participants of this study, on the other hand, were provided with many opportunities to learn *about* the application of the arts in practice as well as the ensuing advantages to client care. Also, in creating their own artwork and viewing those of their peers, they were provided with the opportunity to directly experience the emotional input and outcome of the arts for *themselves* thereby providing them with experience with the power that art holds in connecting individuals. Additional practice based experience may further extend or build on their initial learnings.

The voice of conviction is showcased by participants' statements of what expectation, including what should be done, what is expected, and how individuals should act. This voice is characterized by a sense of certainty. The words "should", "must", "expected to", and "required to" are some key examples of the types of statements that would be considered as having met the "requirements" of portraying this contrapuntal voice.

"...as dietitians we *must* make the client aware that not everyone is built to look the same, and what is important is your health and with making healthy realistic lifestyle decisions, and changes, you can be happier in your own skin" (004, emphasis added)

"As a dietitian, if you are full of knowledge, dietary recommendations, diets, etc, you *must* be able to communicate this with the client in a delicate reasonable matter, without coming on too strong" (004, emphasis added).

When touching on the bodily expectations that dietetic students face from their peers and society, participants incorporated more personalized language and stance toward their writing. In having directly experienced these bodily expectations, they can relate and attest to their presence. Such expressions were more marked by the usage of the first person pronoun, "I" and the collective "we" pronoun. This provides further insight into the manner in which

participants view themselves in relation to the expectations facing them as dietetic students and as future practicing dietitians. The following *I* poem excerpts demonstrate this theme. For instance, participant 016 self-discloses a personal experience, namely that she was previously bullied by her classmates. She then follows this self-disclosure by a consistent use of the first person pronoun, “I,” providing a personalized context in her reflections and connections to her acquired learning from the art module:

### Participant 016

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

I not only realized that body image is just about the body itself

I would be bullied

I had slightly darker skin than **my** peers

**My** families [sic] Inuit background has resulted in **me** being born

I love my skin color

I embrace it

Beauty is about how **we** perceive **ourselves**

As well as **other** people

It is **our** compassion and determination

**Our** confidence

**Our** beliefs

Following **our** dreams

Being who **we** are as individuals

I have gone through experiences

I have been influenced by the media

Whether **you** think of it as good or bad

Is circulating amongst **your** peers

If **we** eat something

Has an impact on **you**

**You** are worrying

What **others** will think

Of **you**

**You** have this image

**You** are a future dietitian

**You** have to stay thin

**We** all get intimidated

By **our** peers to look, a certain way

**We** have to confide to **ourselves**

**We** all may face



Participant 019

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b> <i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b> <i>We/us/our/ourselves</i>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b> <i>They/their/them/themselves/others</i>
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I feel that both, personal stories  
Provided **me** with a new acceptance

How **others** view and accept **their** body image  
Allowed **us** as dietetic students to make sense  
Conflict with **our** personal experiences  
Public expects **us** as well as **our** families  
**We** are very knowledgeable in food and nutrition  
**We** are not perfect  
**We** are human too  
**We** must accept **ourselves** and **our** loved ones  
Who **they** are  
Not the body image **they** portray

This collective self-identification is also seen in participant 028's *I* poem, as seen below:

Participant 028

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b> <i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b> <i>We/us/our/ourselves</i>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b> <i>They/their/them/themselves/others</i>
---	--	--

**We** are bombarded with images of beautiful people  
Every day of **our** lives  
As dietitians **we** need to be aware of warning signs  
Greater risk of developing disordered eating issues  
**themselves**  
Compared to **other** health professionals  
With **our** profession  
**We** are always discussing foods  
Aware of negative thoughts towards **our** own bodies  
Try **our** hardest to not let this affect **us**  
**We** need to be healthy  
Able to provide valid information to **our** clients

In their references to learnings relating to professional connections of the arts within dietetic practice, and as the *I* poems indicate, participants' identities as future dietetic professionals are directly tied with those of their peers' and future colleagues; their identities are collectively based. This is seen through their usage of the first person plural pronoun, "we," when reflecting on situations in which they might find themselves in as professionals or the applicability of the arts in their practice. Additionally, it was this apparent collective stance that provides further indication that they may not have been able to directly identify themselves in the

role as dietetic or health professionals, but rather as *future* dietetic professionals. Not only does this collective stance indicate an existing distance between participants in their perceived future role as dietetic professionals and their relationships with future clients, but it also captures their felt discomfort in directly identifying themselves in this capacity. Further, it suggests a potential avoidance of taking personal ownership of the significant accountability that accompanies this role and what it represents, that is, being regarded as “the most trusted source of nutrition information” (5). This is likely due to the fact that they simply have not had the opportunity to do so yet. These characteristics are demonstrative of the collective identity that was noted by the absence of the first-person pronoun, “I,” when reflecting on such themes.

In conjunction with their collective identities as future dietetic professionals, participants oftentimes employed a distant stance when referring to clients and patients as “others,” or when they used the detached pronoun, “they,” and its associated pronouns (them, their). The interplay between the uses of these two main pronouns (“we” and “they”), the apparent lack of the first-person pronoun “I,” and participants’ lack of personal self-identification within their learnings in the context of professional connections suggests that they may not have a high level of confidence in this capacity. As Atkins and Gingras (2009) found in their study, the professionalization process in which dietetic students are immersed and through which they learn to embody the discourse and norms of the profession stemming from their education, “necessitates a particular loss of relationship with the self” (p.181). This may help explain the current findings from this research. Namely, participants, in their present role as dietetic students, seem reluctant to identify themselves directly within their role as dietetic professionals. This reluctance may then, in fact, be a resulting inability to do so.

It is such distancing and participants’ aversion of personally locating themselves within their reflective writings that alludes to the more hands-off approach that they experienced. To elaborate, they did not *experience* the arts’ application with clients in practice. Nonetheless, participants were actively involved in a variety of arts-based activities, such as creating and presenting artwork, which allowed them to directly experience the emotional investment that would be involved in practice. This provided them with a firsthand understanding into the potential value of art-based treatment for their future clients. The follow *I* poem excerpts demonstrate these aforementioned phenomena:

Participant 005:

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

I can now see

How it could expand **our** methods of counselling

-----

Express **their** feelings

Whichever form works for **them**

How **they** communicated

I can see that with many patients

Could best express **their** emotions

-----

I do believe

Increase **our** knowledge

Help others in ways **we** never imagined

Opens up many possibilities for **us** as future health professionals

Participant 015:

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

Important aspect of **our** practice

Working with **people**

**We** require ways

To better understand **our** clients

Build relationships with **them**

Scripted meeting, may cause **them** to be guarded

Arts could help **me** to better connect with clients

Understand different, perspectives **they** may hold

About **themselves** and/or **their** situation

**Their** potential uses were able to be compared

Participant 022:

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

I feel art

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

Help **us** communicate in different ways  
Create a deeper understanding of **themselves**  
As **we** become more acquainted  
With those **we** care for  
Emotions may, aid or hinder **our** work performance  
**We** can also heal and deal with stress  
**We** are all very different  
Experience, throughout **our** lives  
Appreciate the diversity of **our** physical and mental selves  
Among **others**  
Then can **we** be free  
Help **others**

Participant 029:

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

In order for **us**, as dietitians  
To help **them** change  
If **their** concerns have been clearly communicated  
**They** will hopefully be more willing  
Accessible medium for all people to express **their**  
feelings  
No matter what **their** culture  
**They** are able to create art  
Articulate feelings **they** may not be able  
**We** often play the role of councillor [sic]  
**We** often think of **ourselves**  
Just giving advice to **our** clients  
**We** also have to be able to listen  
Improving **our** clients' health  
If **we** are unable to provide clients  
Medium through which **they** can communicate  
**We** are unable to do our job properly

The art module served as an introduction to the vast array of potential benefits stemming from the application of the arts within dietetic practice. Participants gained significant learnings with regards to the arts' abilities to foster the development of holistic, understanding professionals, as well as to foster communication, relationship-building, and inclusive counselling environments. They demonstrated the ability to connect their in-class learnings to theoretical future application in the practice setting. However, it is my contention that it will be participants' continued future immersion in the arts in their practice setting, extending beyond their undergraduate program that will better enable them to be able to directly identify themselves within this role and to make the necessary professional connections within their own practice. After all, learning extends well beyond the structure of undergraduate training.

Atkins and Gingras (2009) contend that an "embodied curriculum" is required in order to enable dietetic students to develop their professional identity as nutrition experts that ultimately influences their future professional practice. Barab and Duffy (2000) define "embodied curriculum" as:

participatory learning environments [that] support the natural complexity of content, avoid oversimplification, engage students in the construction of products requiring practices that embody complex contexts, encourage collaboration, and present instruction within both simulated and real-world contexts (as cited in Barab & Dodge, 2008, p.99).

I maintain that the implementation of an arts module, such as the design that Lordly created for her course, is one component of attaining such an embodied curriculum that would aim to not only actively engage students in their professional development and professionalization process, but would also foster the reconnection with their individual selves that was initially severed. This reconnection would be in the form of re-gaining that "relationship with the self." After all, there remains potential within the dietetic program to positively shape identity development in students (91).

Permeating participants' reflections, the professional connections fostered in the art module, is the contrapuntal voice of conviction. The presence of this voice captures the general distant stance that they held when reflecting upon such learnings, outcomes, and applications within dietetic practice. Participants' distancing is noted through their dominating use of the pronouns "we" and "they" (as well as other associated pronouns) and a lack of the usage of the first-person pronoun, "I." This particular contrapuntal voice, by its very nature, captures moments in which participants are showcasing a more cautious side whereby they do not divulge personal information or provide sensitive self-disclosures that would allow the reader and primary listener to gauge their level of self-identification as a professional. The contrapuntal voice of conviction is most oftentimes marked by the pronouns "you," "we" and "they," all of which have an evasive and depersonalized undertone (58). The "person may not represent ownership of those thoughts and beliefs (i.e., speak these thoughts or beliefs in the first-person voice)" (58, p.503).

Within the scope of fostered professional connections, the voice of conviction was loudly heard. Its presence signifies several realities. First, it brings to the forefront participants' newfound learnings as gained from their active participation in the art module. However, as mentioned earlier, they may not be able to personally identify themselves within the role as "dietetic professional", which is seen in their specific use of the personal pronoun, "I," to shape their thoughts and learnings. The use of this particular pronoun signals that they *do* identify with



the thought and/or belief but the succeeding statements do not personally include them, as discerned by the inclusion of more distant pronouns, “we” and “they.” For instance, when participant 022 states: “I believe that art has an important role in all of the health care professions and more importantly, the education that prepares *us* for those professions” (022, emphasis added), she begins by personally identifying herself as “I” (direct self-identification) but later employs the pronoun “us” to denote her *collective* identity as a dietetic professional, therefore an evasive statement. By virtue of doing so, she is evading this self-identification within the role as dietetic professional in practice. This is also seen in the following excerpts where participants employ the “I” pronoun as concealment:

“I am confidently thinking that all of *us* have our own potential to apply art in *our* future dietetic practice” (010, emphasis added)

“As future dietitians, *I* believe that it is *our* job to find those differences among *our* clients and know that what one person is capable of doing, might not be what another person can achieve” (016, emphasis added)

“I believe that art has an important role in all of the health care professions and more importantly, the education that prepares *us* for those professions” (022, emphasis added)

In these cases, the voice of conviction, reflects a reserved and more objectively focused tone of participants’ reflections, is heard by their evasive self-identification. This evasiveness is seen when making certain references to professional responsibilities and expectations. However, in other times, this is contrasted with the more direct self-identification of participants who situate themselves within dietetic practice. Such excerpts also capture the voice of conviction in the sense that it highlights their strong intents and beliefs:

“I will consider using art as a professional because *I* believe in its ability to facilitate understanding, compassion, and empathy” (009, emphasis added)

“I strongly feel that *I* can use this art form...and include it with tradition forms of educated [sic] the public as well as clients about any dietetic issue that arises” (023, emphasis added)

“When going in to practice, *I* will incorporate as much as *I* can of what *I*’ve learned throughout this course in to *my* counselling” (003, emphasis added)

## *Interpersonal Connections*

In their reflection papers, many participants note feeling a disconnection with their fellow classmates throughout the entirety of their undergraduate dietetics program (009, 012, 017). They cite that they had previously not had the opportunity to become better acquainted with their classmates on a deeper a level due to strong feelings of competition in the program (017). This feeling of competitiveness was also echoed by participants in Lordly and MacLellan's (2012) study examining professional socialization of dietetic students, which was carried out at both Mount Saint Vincent University and the University of Prince Edward Island. Atkins and Gingras (2009) also found that the pressures put on students to successfully obtain an internship position impede their development of sincere, close relationships with fellow classmates as well as negatively affects professionalization. They noted that the dietetic education itself, through its mode of promoting competition among students, leads to feelings of isolation amongst students (DeVault, 1999, as cited in Atkins & Gingras, 2009, p.182). My research, too, contends that competition further impedes the development of connectedness between dietetic students through the creation of an environment that is predominantly positioned for the successful attainment of an internship spot. This provides a base understanding of the experiences that participants in my research describe in their reflection papers. This connectedness holds much potential for enhancing the development of meaningful relationships between students, who, after all, share many of the same educational and professional stressors, goals, and desire to succeed. This is an important factor as it helps support the development of relatedness and support that also transfers to their work with future clients.

The art module, through its exploration of the applicability of the creative arts within dietetic education and practice, fostered strong connection-building between participants. This, in turn, strengthened their development of authenticity, compassion, and respect for themselves and each other, and also challenged the feelings of isolation, disconnection, and competition between students that were cited as being present within the program. In developing open relationships with their classmates, participants enhanced their empathic skills, obtained their own sense of security, as well as became more sensitive to others' vulnerabilities. It is my contention that these skills will assist in their development into emotionally in tune and understanding dietetic professionals who are more in tune with their future clients' needs. As such, they will be better able to meet the diverse needs of their client base leading to the development of stronger relationships.

This section, addressing the fostered interpersonal connections, begins by orienting the reader to the background and outcomes stemming from participants' involvement in the art module in this respect. I then examine the levels of disclosure present in the reflection papers that provide further insight into the underlying meanings of participants' self-expressions.

### *Fostered Connections*

Permeating participants' reflections is insight into interpersonal connections that were fostered from the art module, which is heard by the contrapuntal voice of vulnerability. This voice captures feelings of intimate self-exposure, demonstrating the relinquishment of control and some fear. It is discerned by highly personalized writing and expression of emotions. Self-

reflections embodying this contrapuntal voice are raw and unguarded. Vulnerability is a state of being exposed whereby one's deeply personal feelings, thoughts, memories, and experiences are in some way shown to the outside world. It demonstrates the relinquishment of control or the desire to (re-)gain control. When an individual expresses their emotions (e.g. of hurt, betrayal, sadness), they are placing themselves in a vulnerable position. The contrapuntal voice of vulnerability highlights the highly emotional and thus highly impactful means of connection-building, an outcome that bears much significance in the field of dietetics. It is the ability to form meaningful connections that allows dietetic students and professionals to strengthen their humanistic skills in practice, such as empathy, understanding, and the ability to see others as emotional beings. In turn, this may be viewed as helping to strengthen efficacy of practice.

Participants' active involvement in the art module, with specific components exerting a major impact, allowed for interpersonal connection building to occur. As their reflection papers indicate, participants noted the experience of viewing their classmates' presentation of their individually-created artwork in addition to presenting their own as having played a significant role in fostering such connection-building through the elicitation of emotional reactions, self-exposure, and vulnerability. Experiencing art as a class brought them closer and connected them, which was fostered through the deep and personal aspects of art. It wasn't until the implementation of the art module, coinciding specifically with the individual art presentations, that participants began to feel the development of a new bond; the exposure of oneself and one's vulnerabilities, fears, and insecurities, triggered a sense of camaraderie, support, respect, and mutual understanding, leading to a feeling of connection (006, 007, 009, 012, 024, 025, 029, 030). These feelings played a significant role in fostering the development of stronger connections between participants in their mutual role as dietetic students, which had previously been absent. As participant 017 explains: "Every piece...allowed the class to relate at a personal level...people...learned about themselves and their own body image...besides working in group projects I think most students feel slightly threatened by one another, perhaps from being compared and scaled for internship placements."

Participants further indicate that they felt respect for and sensitivity to others' intimate experiences (006), and experienced increased connectedness through intimate sharing (006, 007, 009, 010, 012, 024, 029). Participant 024 highlights the strength of the bonds and the emotional influences that transpired:

...lots of us connected this art piece with personal experience and feelings. It was not easy for them to do it and it was harder for them to share all these personal privacy to the entire class...The tears involuntarily coming from our eyes were the best evidence to prove the power of art.

Showing emotions, after all, is a vulnerable state in and of itself; it is a human state of being that exposes our inner selves to others. She continues to highlight the connection that she felt and continues to feel as stemming from the presentation day, stating:

I can still feel all the touching and the burning tears on that day right now, because everyone's heart was truly connected by these different forms of art. I felt exactly the same sadness, and touch from each person in the class (024).

The voice of vulnerability is heard in participant 012's reference to the presentations of artwork, triggering the development of empathy toward her classmates, something that she had not previously felt. This connection was established through the sharing of personal, emotionally-laden art that subsequently led her to develop a protective feeling of her peers. Participant 006 also captures this same connection-building that transpired for her:

There I was, vulnerable and nervous, yet I felt a connection with the class as I saw them smiling back at me, urging me with support to continue on...I believe that as nutrition students, they understood my struggle and could empathize with the feeling of self-consciousness that is oftentimes felt in our program.

This connection also included the strengthening of empathy because after all, the ability to empathize with others is foundational for building connections with them. Participant 006's reflection paper captures those key moments in which the level of vulnerability, sensitivity, compassion, and empathy were all present in the room among the participants, as seen in the following excerpt:

I felt honoured to be a part of such an intimate sharing of personal experiences and feelings about such controversial and touchy subject matter... Although we have all been in classes together for four years now, we all learned new things and saw a whole new side of each other in this very sensitive environment.

The voice of transformation is heard in this latter excerpt, highlighting the previously absent feelings of deep connectedness between the participants. This contrapuntal voices captures participants' evolving journeys and self-discoveries. It is discerned by participants' transforming perceptions, feelings, emotions, and attitudes, as noted over the course of the awakening, reflective journey that transpired.

Participant 003 examines the manner in which the arts enable self-reflection. The art module provided a unique opportunity for participants to share their personal struggles that they may not have otherwise had the opportunity to do. This was viewed by participant 013 as the class's invitation to reach out. The depth of meaning and connections that were fostered from the sharing of participants' artwork is captured by participant 009:

During the presentation tears were shed, compassion was felt, understanding was acquired, and a deeper meaning was found. I left that class feeling closer to students I had been going to classes with for four years, some whose names I didn't even know. Something special happened in that room and I will forever be grateful for having an opportunity for such a rich and truly meaningful experience.

She further divulges that the sharing process increased her respect for their experiences, with art bridging the gap that had previously existed between them. It is the emotional reactions that appear to foster the development of connections with others. Emotions, particularly as elicited through artwork, are highly personal and reveal one's vulnerability, which in turn, help to forge those connections and render the process of art sharing more poignant. For participant 017, who initially felt disconnected from her classmates, the voice of transformation was loudly heard in her account of the art presentations:

No one expected that the emotions in that classroom would be brought out like they were. Tears were shed, laughter was made, and everyone in the room found themselves in deep contemplation.

This brings our attention to the strong significance that this experience held in her evolving identity and understanding of self and others. Similarly, participant 030 experienced an increase in respect for her peers' experiences "through the creation of cognitive and emotional connections" following her interaction with their art.

The unexpectedness of the power of creating and sharing their art pieces, as personally experienced through the evocation of strong emotional reactions, was strongly felt by participants. This unexpectedness of their own emotional reactions as well as those of their peers left lasting impressions. For participant 029, it was through the presentations that really fostered the development of a bond with her classmates and that prompted her to learn more about her peers than she originally expected. The contrapuntal voice of transformation, which is heard in the following excerpt, is discerned by the expression of suddenness and surprise. It requires that I, as the primary listener, reflect on the personal journey that the participant shared throughout her reflection paper. In doing so, I was able to distinctly hear the underlying emotional contrast from the beginning compared to the latter portion of the participant's emotional journey. Further, the participant's own admission, or rather reflection, enhanced the loudness of this contrapuntal voice. The following excerpt shows this contrapuntal voice that also speaks to the participant's formation of interpersonal connections with her peers:

I feel that through the presentation process I was able to learn a lot about my peers and learned much more about their personal struggles with body image than I thought I would. It was a very emotional experience and my reactions were much different than I expected (029).

This voice is also heard when the participant expresses having experienced the feelings of pride and empowerment knowing that "[her] art was being displayed and that people were interested in what [she] had to say" (029). This is strengthened when looking back at her initial admission of uncertainty in her artistic abilities, further highlighting the significance of this outcome. The presence of the voice of transformation captures her evolving, unexpected confidence. Interestingly, she points out that "I also had the impression that invited presenters and speakers at this conference felt their voices were being heard and that people understood them" (029). Her reference to having their "voices heard" is exactly what the LG accomplishes, a similarity it strongly bears with art.

Participant 029 admits that the experience of making and presenting her art piece was a scary and emotional experience. This is also echoed by participant 028, who too, initially felt an apprehension but found her stance toward the sharing of personal artwork change toward acceptance. She elaborates:

Initially I was nervous entering the class presentations...however after the first couple students presented, my feelings drastically changed. The talent of my fellow students amazed me. The room opened up and the front of the classroom became a stage. Everyone was able to demonstrate art in such remarkable ways (029).

In this excerpt, we hear the voices of vulnerability and transformation interlaced. It is here that this feeling of nervousness embodies the voice of vulnerability. Although the participant does not elaborate further as to the underlying reasons for her nervousness, I expect that the task of sharing a part of herself through her artwork (art was defined as being a personal creation earlier in this research) was likely the cause. After all, it is this sharing and opening herself up that is understood as a personal risk she took when allowing her audience to experience her artwork. Secondly, the voice of transformation was heard in her statement of her feelings having drastically changed upon hearing the first few students share their artwork. Particularly striking is her referral to the room transforming into a stage, a vision that shows how powerful this environment must have been. This latter contrapuntal voice is especially relevant as earlier in her reflection, the participant shared how she “certainly did not see how the arts related to the field of nutrition” (028), much like the vast majority of the other participants in this study. This sharing opportunity may not have occurred under usual circumstances, thereby leaving the state of distance between the participants untouched. The ability for participants to openly share a part of themselves with their classmates “encouraged [them] to come out of their box and share with the class some experiences that otherwise may have never been told” (025).

Art facilitated the relationship building between participants, who prior to this art module indicated that they had not been close and nor had they known each other at such a personal level. The voice of transformation resonates so significantly here. Participants continually expressed their surprise in the power that art holds in evoking strong, emotional reactions in them. It was through personally *experiencing* these emotional outcomes that fostered both the development of their interpersonal bonds as well as captured this contrapuntal voice. This is heard in the following excerpt whereby participants 004, 009 and 017 share their reflections: “It wasn’t until I heard the poems that were written and presented by some students, that I realized how powerful and touching art can be to not only the eyes, but the ears” (004); “Art is very powerful and can evoke feelings and understanding unknown to a person until they are exposed to it.” (009); and “The reactions and transformations shows in class provide a perfect example of how effective art can be. All of us really opened up to each other and to ourselves” (017). These excerpts highlight the participants’ own unexpectedness in grasping the potential that art holds in fostering these connections and transformations.

Not only did participants realize their own creative potential, but an important realization of their peers’ strengths also emerged. This was significant as it assisted in this closer, interpersonal connection-building: “From the art display in our class, I surprisingly found that everyone around me, including myself, could be very creative and insightful” (010).

In having the opportunity to view each other in a more exposed, vulnerable, yet highly emotional manner through the modality of art, participants were taken aback by the surprising openness of their peers. This openness contributed to the development of their interpersonal connections. Participants 017 and 025 capture this transformative experience by stating:

I was very taken aback by the way everyone opened up in their art pieces. The presentations really revealed true human emotions and everyone’s individual character (017),

and:

I was very surprised as to how open some people were when presenting their art. Many people came out of their shells and express their feelings to the entire class (some people they may not have known that well) (025).

The voice of vulnerability is also heard when this latter participant reflects on her surprise at the depth of openness of her classmates when sharing their artwork. It is this openness to self-expose that embodies this vulnerability: "...many people may be scared to express their feelings" (025). Participant 004 highlights the deep connection that transpired for the class during their presentation. The interplay between the voices of vulnerability and transformation is heard in this statement:

When the class displayed their art I had no idea I would become so emotional...The class's presentations of the art made me emotional because of the deep passion and feelings that were poured into them (004).

By viewing and experiencing others' artwork, she was able to relate to or feel the inherent vulnerability that the artists felt and their emotional input.

The sense of gaining a deeper insight and understanding into the individuals as real, whole persons with stories was an outcome of the connection-building that many participants identify may not have otherwise been discovered (003, 012, 022, 025). Participant 012 notes the deep connection-building facet of the arts that is not paralleled by other components in the dietetic program, stating:

Through their art, some of my classmates became "real" people to me for the first time. Daily exchanges about course work did not accomplish that. Their art made me feel protective of them; it was painful to hear that their youth is being poisoned by these issues.

Through her classmates' self-exposure of vulnerability, this participant developed a deeper understanding of them that she previously did not have further strengthened by her felt need to embody the role of protector. The development of this interpersonal connection was enabled through the sharing of personal emotions that added to the strength of this bond. Similarly, participant 007 speaks to the connection that he felt during the class presentations of art pieces, stating "...when this feeling was followed with others sharing similar experiences, I felt the instant development of some sort of trusting bond," which had not been present prior to the sharing of their individual art pieces. This was also echoed by participant 025 who notes the experience as having brought the class closer and stronger as a group through its support for the sharing of feelings.

Several personally significant realizations were experienced by participants throughout the art module. For participant 012, this realization came in the form of a deeper understanding and appreciation of the goal of the art project, which was to connect with her own feelings and subsequently with her classmates through the means of personal expression. For her, this transpired on the day of the class presentations, an experience that was enhanced by her personally poignant realization that she knew very little about her younger classmates. In fact, she mentions having had many difficulties in making meaningful connections with them prior to the implementation of the art module. She reflects how "Their art made me feel protective of

them; it was painful to hear that their youth is being poisoned by these issues” (012). It is evident that the art project touched a deep part of her in prompting this shift in focus, resulting in viewing her classmates through a different lens, that is, through their own eyes. For the first time, she began to consider them as “whole individuals” and real, authentic beings, which was significantly contrasted by her initial assumptions of their naïveté and assumed simplicity in life. Their deep self-exposure taught her empathy, resulted in her feeling moved by their degree of feeling and willingness to share personal information, and led to her development of deeper understanding of them. Similar to participant 012’s journey, participant 029 describes the process of sharing artwork as being a very emotional experience and one that connected her to her classmates. She gained a deeper understanding of her peers as whole individuals and their struggles with body image: “I feel that listening to others [sic] stories helps me to get to know about them outside of the classroom and get to know more about them as a person (029). Similarly, participant 022 cites having felt empathy and understanding for his peers through experiencing their exposure of vulnerabilities via their artwork, an occurrence that prompted participant 021 to feel humbled by such exposures.

The intimate sharing prompted several other participants to reach profound realizations as well. Participant 022, who identifies herself as an older, returning student, explored her tendencies to judge others based on their appearances and visible traits, stating “[B]y experiencing their art, creating my art, and through reading and learning about art in health care I have become awakened to this embarrassing personal trait.” She was prompted to face her previously judgmental, assumptive tendencies upon experiencing her peers’ vulnerability and exposure of their true selves through their art. Taking into consideration her initial judgment toward her classmates, this was a revelation that she likely could not have previously anticipated and was quite unexpected. Similarly, participant 012, another self-identified older student, explains her past tendency to make assumptions about her classmates:

I have been guilty of assuming that because my classmates are young, their lives are somehow less complicated than mine, or that their youth makes them naïve about the realities of their real world. However, the opportunity to see them *through their own eyes* through their art was a revelation...it was meaningful.

Listening to her peers’ written poems led participant 004 to realize she was not alone in her self-dislikes, losses, and problems as well as needing to be more understanding of those around her. Through experiencing and being a recipient of her classmates’ artwork, she was led to this lesson, connecting it to her future professional obligation:

I know that as a dietitian, this lesson would be extremely necessary in order to not judge a client, while being more passionate and understandable of the client’s feelings and everyday struggles (004).

As she explains, feeling the emotional inputs and resulting effects of her peers’ artwork was touching “to not only the eyes, but the ears” (004).

In presenting and partaking in presentations of their artwork, participants experienced a highly transformative process. In sharing his personal thoughts and experiences, participant 007 notes how it was his felt vulnerability in sharing his artwork that fostered the development of a connection and trusting bond with his classmates. He describes this experience as being both



powerful and overwhelming to the point of experiencing difficulty in articulating in words. However, his observation that the powerful connection he felt in the room with his classmates on the day of their presentations, their increased likelihood of truthfully sharing and the authenticity of his peers was rather short-lived, having ceased upon the conclusion of the class. This highlights an area of inquiry worth further exploring within this same context. Evidently, the development of emotional connections between participants transpired in moments when participants sensed the artist's input of emotions, feelings, and deep passion into the artwork. As participant 004 expresses, there was much unexpected emotional reactions arising from the class display of art, which led her to feel equally emotional. It was through this experience that she realized the need to be more understanding and less judgmental of others, a lesson that translates into client care, namely the importance of remaining understanding of clients' feelings and struggles. This transformative experience was also echoed by participant 006, who, in sharing her art exposed her vulnerability to her peers. This moment was met with support and understanding, and a feeling of interpersonal connection building. She describes this unfolding situation: "I became emotional and my eyes filled up with tears, and I had difficulty getting the words out that I had planned to say" (006). In relation to viewing her peers' artwork, she describes feeling moved by and developing respect for her peers' expressions in addition to developing sensitivity to their experiences. This new, deep discovery of her peers was something she had not previously experienced.

The voice of transformation is most evident in these aforementioned self-reflections as it captures participants' journeys from initial skepticism and disbelief to significant realizations. Additionally, the unexpectedness of feeling deeply connected to their classmates following experiencing their self-exposures of vulnerability via the mode of art, further precipitated this powerful journey. This significance is put into further perspective by the understanding that previously to the art module, these participants felt deeply disconnected from one another.

The exposure of her classmates' insecurities and vulnerabilities as a means of self-expression was viewed by participant 017 as being brave and courageous. She describes this experience as having been accepted with respect and applause by the class that denoted support and the development of meaningful connections. For participant 019, it was upon hearing a large number of her peers open up through their artwork and discuss their personal stories and struggles that prompted her realization of the true power and effectiveness of art expression. With the higher prevalence of eating disorders within the dietetic field (16, 17) coupled with being made more aware of this phenomenon through the art module, such realizations rendered this phenomenon more real for participant 014, who notes: "To look around and think that a handful of my peers in the room at any given time could have an eating disorder and this is really upsetting." As participant 024 articulates, she was able to feel the artists' sadness and touch, in addition to feeling a sense of empathy. This personally meaningful experience is captured by her observation that "everyone's heart was truly connected by these different forms of art" (024). It is ideal for dietitians to be in tune with their clients' thinking and feelings, as is their ability and to empathize with them in an effort to deliver best suited care (024); such capabilities are enhanced through immersion and exploration of the arts. In gaining firsthand exposure to the experience involved in presenting her own art piece, participant 029 cites acquiring a small gain in insight and empathy into others' potential feelings of discomfort when sharing personal information. This process of creating and presenting allowed her to be able to understand others' emotions better, which in itself strengthens her ability as a future dietetic professional to deliver client centred care.

The effectiveness of the art module on students' learning is captured in the following excerpt whereby participant 029 highlights the underlying powerful emotional aspect of art as having played a crucial, effective role in communicating a powerful message to the audience:

You can read about eating disorders or disordered eating in a text book or listen to a lectures [sic] on the topic, but hearing real and personal experiences is a much different, and powerful, way to learn...I do believe it can be quite intimidating to present such personal art pieces to a classroom full of peers. However, having now experienced myself that uncomfortable feeling of having to share something personal, I feel it has given me a small amount of insight into how a client or even a friend might feel if disclosing personal information about distorted body image or disordered eating to me as a professional.

Following an in-class storytelling activity in which Lordly shared her own past experiences and encountered challenges with breastfeeding, participant 014 was able to share her own painful experiences, noting the development of an interpersonal connection. Of note is that Lordly was the participant's course professor, which highlights the deep level of connection that transpired and storytelling's ability to minimize distances between individuals. As seen in this case, a deeper level of learning can transpire when the two roles can meet at or close to the same level of "humanness" irrespective of roles, as enabled through the means of art and vulnerability. Further, this sharing also allowed participant 014 to feel less alone in her experiences as a student in the nutrition field where breastfeeding is highly regarded.

Participant 006, who notes having felt empathy through Lordly's highly personal story sharing, acknowledges the "intimate and personal manner" (006) in which this experience was recounted. After all, the ability to empathize with others is a defining feature of a holistic health professional who is able to provide his/her patients with quality, focused care. The voice of vulnerability was loudly heard in her reflection surrounding the experiences of being privy to Lordly's intimate sharing. Specifically, the participant reflects on the moment during which Lordly presented her art piece to the class, putting herself "out there" for them to see and taking a personal risk in doing so. She elaborates:

Hearing such a personal account on how what her perceived image of herself as a mother was before the birth of her child, versus how she then saw herself as a mother unable to breast feed her own child touched me and made me feel that she was exposing herself to the class in a very intimate and personal manner (006).

When someone shows their vulnerability(ies) to those surrounding them, they may be met with compassion and understanding or with rejection and judgment, which elucidates as to why exposing oneself is considered to be a risk. However, taking such risks in certain instances may prove to be powerful moments, as was the case with this participant. This vulnerability played a role in participant 006's development of feelings of connectedness with Lordly. The significance of this occurrence is further understood by the realization that despite the inherent student-professor distance that is present in academic relationships, Lordly's self-exposure helped bridge that distance through the development of interpersonal connections with participants.

For one particular participant, the opportunity to experience the emotional reactions stemming from the art module also contributed to a powerful re-connection with her mother, an

authority figure with whom she oftentimes clashed during her adolescence. This experience was a very powerful outcome for the participant particularly as her primary tensions with her mother revolved around her insecurities with her body size. In her reflection paper, she poignantly shares her significantly altered perception of beauty in herself stemming from the art module, accepting that beauty exists in individual differences. The contrapuntal voice of transformation is loudly heard when the participant recounts:

...I talked to my mom right after the art display class. I asked her:”do [sic] you still want a boy instead of me? Am I such an ugly product produced by you?” She was laughing at me after hearing this question, and she said:” I [sic] am so grateful to have you as my daughter in my life. I am proud of you...”Instead [sic] of misunderstanding and fight, we had so many tears in this conversation (024).

In addition, seeing her classmates’ art creations as well as attending the Body Image Conference led to participant 024’s realization of “the incredible power of art in body image and dietetic practice.” The profoundness of this outcome, that is her realization of the true meaning of beauty, is reflected in the participant’s newfound desire to promote a healthy body image to her children and others. This realization of the meaning of true beauty was counteracted by her rich memory of her twelve year old self who did not know the meaning of beauty. The participant’s ability and strong willingness to apply her personal experiences with weight and body struggles in her future practice as a dietitian so as to help clients with similar experiences further shows the extent to which the art module impacted her personally and through that, professionally.

As demonstrated, participants’ deep immersion into the art module resulted in highly transformative, yet unexpected, experiences. These experiences prompted the strengthening and development of important insights about themselves and those around them. Participants were provided a unique opportunity to have their own voices heard in an artistic medium that fully supported their individuality, personality, and unique experiences. They were encouraged to immerse themselves wholly into this experience, challenging the self-distancing that the dietetics program had previously favoured up to that point. In essence, they were given an invitation to explore themselves within the context of this open, artistic learning environment and to have their voices directly heard. After all, students’ educational journeys allow them to make meaningful and personally relevant connections in this regard, which hold significant implications.

### *Levels of Disclosure*

In their references to the development of interpersonal connections with fellow classmates, participants’ expressions were highly personally-charged. This latter characteristic was discerned through their active usage of the first-person pronoun, “I” and its associated pronouns, “me,” “my,” and “myself,” and with a lesser degree of usage of the more impersonal pronouns, “they” and “we.” This enables me to understand the extent and power of the connection-building that transpired. The usage of the first-person pronoun centres participants’ reflections onto themselves, demonstrating their direct involvement within the interpersonal relationships that transpired during the art module. It also highlights the personally relevant connection-building, an outcome that was experienced during the present moment. To elaborate,

participants' abilities to envision themselves as dietetic professionals and the ensuing professional relationships is less strong, as discerned through their predominant usage of the impersonal pronouns, "we" and "they." This was seen in their reflections of their more distanced future role as dietetic professionals and their development of professional connections.

By centering their learnings on themselves, it becomes clear that participants were not only able to gain an overarching understanding of the arts' ability to foster such connections, but they were also able to *personally* and *actively* experience this connection. This level of personal disclosure, as evidenced through the *I* poems, provides an indication of participants' strong ability to identify themselves, both as presenters and as viewers (audience members), directly within the learnings as well as within the emotionally charged outcomes stemming from the art project. It is assumed that had they simply read about the impact of art or otherwise learned about the experience through other indirect means as opposed through their active participation, they would not have experienced the same level of impact.

A felt disconnection with their peers was noted by many participants prior to their involvement in the art module. Initially, participant 012 was not very well acquainted with her classmates. The *I* poem excerpt, which captures her prompted self-reflection, demonstrates the impact that the art module had on her in this regard and the level of personal meaning it held. It is the dominating use of the personal pronoun "I" that provides a clear indication into the personally-charged, personally-relevant, and personally-meaningful outcomes of the module. This would not have been captured to the same effect had she primarily used the collective "we" pronoun or the more distant pronoun, "they," when making such references. These latter two pronouns embody a collective and more distance identity. Participant 012's *I* poem excerpt captures these aforementioned characteristics:

### Participant 012

#### **1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

#### **1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

I was missing at the start of the project

Connect with **my** feelings

Connect with **my** classmates

I did not understand this fully

I realized that despite spending nearly three years

Working closely with some of **my** classmates

I actually knew

Very little about **them**

Until **they** were given the opportunity

To express feelings through **their** art

**They** did not have the opportunity to express any other way

Participants were open in acknowledging the openness of their classmates to share a personal part of themselves through their artwork as well as the accompanying courageousness to do so. It was such sharing that prompted the development of interpersonal connection-building between them. The significance of this transformative change is particularly noted

when considering the initial disconnection participants initially felt with one another. Participant 017 reflects upon this openness in the following *I* poem excerpt:

Participant 017

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b> <i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b> <i>We/us/our/ourselves</i>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b> <i>They/their/them/themselves/others</i>
---	--	--

<b>I</b> have always felt a bit of disconnect <b>I</b> think most students feel slightly threatened <b>I</b> was very taken aback	Everyone, found <b>themselves</b> in deep contemplation  Opened up in <b>their</b> art pieces Learned about <b>themselves</b> and <b>their</b> own body image
---	--

Her alternating usage of the reflective “I” pronoun and the pronouns “they” and “their” demonstrates her developing understanding and empathy of her classmates as she is able to reflect on her classmates’ actions back to her understanding of them. Participant 003 expresses a similar experience:

Participant 003

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b> <i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b> <i>We/us/our/ourselves</i>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b> <i>They/their/them/themselves/others</i>
---	--	--

This has shown <b>me</b> Opportunity to listen to <b>my</b> classmates  Gave <b>me</b> a chance to see	Share <b>their</b> art To have shared <b>their</b> stories with <b>others</b>  Other means of communicating feelings, to express how <b>they</b> feel Not all, are comfortable with sharing <b>their</b> feelings
---	---

References to others, that is, their classmates, were used as a manner of explaining their experiences. Even though these are more impersonally-charged pronouns, they nonetheless hint at a deeper understanding of their classmates, tracing their developing empathy and compassion. When they used these pronouns, participants did not identify themselves individually within their reflections, so there is that de-personalized characteristic present. The very meaning of a “collective identity” is the erasing of the sole individual self within that context, and adopting a more inclusive stance. For example, participant 024’s *I* poem shows not only this outcome but also her ability to reflect her acquired learnings back onto herself and her future application of these learnings:

Participant 024

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

Lots of **us** connected this art piece with personal experience

Not easy for **them** to do it

Even harder for **them** to share, to the entire class

I believe this is the magic power of art

Tears involuntarily coming from **our** eyes

I can still feel all the, burning tears

I felt exactly the same sadness

Reminds **me** some ideas in dietetic practice

Be connected with **them**

Best understand **their** feelings

Make the best plan/or changes for **them**

Participant 006's *I* poem excerpt shows the depth of the interpersonal connections she felt. This is reflected in the openness of her self-disclosure of the emotional reactions she felt and the manner in which she personally experienced the connection-building with her classmates:

Participant 006

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

Wave of sentiment came over **me**

I became emotional

**My** eyes filled up with tears

I had difficulty

I had planned to say

All of **my** peers around **me**

I was putting **myself** out there

I realized the effectiveness of this exercise

I was, vulnerable and nervous

I felt a connection with the class

I saw

**Them** smiling

Back at **me**

Urging **me** with support to continue on

I saw

**Their** response

To **my** reaction

Additionally, participant 007's self-disclosure was evident in her open acknowledgement of her feelings of vulnerability, a phenomenon that is demonstrative of the highly personal interpersonal connection-building that occurred for her. The following excerpt highlights this occurrence:

Participant 007

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b> <i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b> <i>We/us/our/ourselves</i>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b> <i>They/their/them/themselves/others</i>
---	--	--

By sharing **my** personal thoughts  
I was left feeling very vulnerable

**Others** sharing similar experiences

I felt the instant development of, trusting bond  
Extremely hard for **me** to put into words  
I can also say, this feeling ended  
But, **I** could feel

People had **their** guards completely lowered

I believe at the conclusion

Talk about **their** feelings

I can now see

Participant 022's *I* poem also shows this openness to share personally felt emotions, as captured by the dominating use of the first-person pronoun, "I:"

Participant 022

<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.s.</b> <i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> p.p.</b> <i>We/us/our/ourselves</i>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.</b> <i>They/their/them/themselves/others</i>
---	--	--

Experiencing the artwork of **my** peers  
I was reduced to tears  
I felt empathy and understanding  
For all of **my** peers

Who shared **their** selves through **their** artwork

In using her own experiences to communicate the depth of interpersonal connection-building that transpired coupled with the usage of the first-person "I" pronoun, participant 009 captures this personalization. This may be seen in the following *I* poem excerpt:

## Participant 009

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

I left that class feeling closer to students

I had been going to classes with for four years

Names I didn't even know

I will forever be grateful

“That was not what I expected”

Adding to Atkins and Gingras' (2009) finding that the development of close relationships with classmates is impeded for dietetic students and that feelings of isolation are common, my findings hold that participants' interpersonal connection-building is beneficial for their professional development. This research also holds that the strength of such connections was rendered so through participants' willingness to self-expose, self-disclose, and reach out to their peers. It was also through having the opportunity to view each other as authentic human beings replete with emotions, struggles, and vulnerabilities that prompted this connection-building. Although exposing such a personal, vulnerable side of themselves was a risk that they had taken, thereby demonstrating their courage to do so, it was nevertheless met with positive outcomes in this case. The strength of such fostered connections is easily viewed in participants' comfort and affinity to employ the “I” pronoun when reflecting on them. Here, the use of the “I” pronoun denotes a sense of ownership of the statements, thereby capturing participants' ability, and therefore comfort, in claiming these reflections as their own. In the case that they had largely employed the third-person plural pronoun, “they,” which is a more impersonal and detached pronoun, it would have been more indicative of their discomfort and inability to directly self-identify within the learnings. This is because their individual sense of self is not as clearly visible by virtue of being included as part of the larger group; therefore, there is a diffusion of ownership.

### ***Individual and Bodily Connections***

Participants' personally charged journey through the art module involved the development of important self-revelations and the establishment of strong connections with their bodies and themselves. Through these individual and bodily connections, they gained insights into and understandings of their relationships with themselves through a variety of means. They connected either with a past memory or experience; their personal traits, thoughts, emotions or other parts of their character; or found inspiration from family members. They developed closer connections with themselves by beginning to face and resolve their body insecurities, body image and painful memories, and connected with their vulnerabilities and fears as a means of better understanding their actions, thoughts and feelings. As many discovered, doing so enabled a creative process that was personally therapeutic, cathartic, and personally significant. My research holds that such self-discoveries and development of individual and bodily connections



will help shape these individuals as future health professionals who have rounded and holistic views of themselves and others. Such holistic views will better equip them for professional practice.

The contrapuntal voice of vulnerability loudly marked participants' reflections. Specifically, this voice was primarily heard in their expressions of creating and presenting their art pieces, highlighting the vulnerabilities they felt when faced with such situations. Interlaced in this was also the voice of transformation, which permeates the vast majority of reflection papers. As the participants' writings show, this latter contrapuntal voice is loudly heard in their recollections of not only the beginning of their journey through the art module, but all throughout and at the end of their journey as well. This was, in essence, an awakening journey for the majority of them in that they discovered new aspects about themselves (or in some cases, re-discovered), discovered new aspects about their classmates, and discovered new aspects about the dietetic field and the significant role that the arts can play within it.

This section examines the development of individual and bodily connections that participants developed through their active involvement in both the art module and art project. The latter involved the individual creation of a piece of artwork that represented participants' understanding of body image. Finally, this section looks at the levels of disclosure that their reflection papers capture, providing the reader with greater insight into the significance of these fostered connections.

### *Fostered Connections from the Art Module*

In one of the course's first lectures, participants were introduced to Pablo Picasso's "Maternity" painting, portraying a woman breastfeeding her baby. For participant 014, who describes herself as a new mother, this painting immediately evoked an emotional reaction in her including tears, pain, and happiness. She expresses how "It really touched me, as well as brought on some painful and joyful memories" (014), referring to her own difficulties in breastfeeding her newborn baby. She expresses feelings of inadequacy due to an inability to fulfill both societal and professional expectations to breastfeed. Viewing this painting within the context of the art module brought to the forefront the participant's conflicting feelings between knowing professionally what "should" be done in terms of breastfeeding and feeling the inability or perceived "failure" to do so. The voice of vulnerability is captured in her evocative statement explaining with emotion that "I attempted for 6 weeks and for many reasons it just was not working and I had feelings of inadequacy and failure" (014). Interestingly, she notes her surprise at having been so emotionally affected by viewing Picasso's painting as part of an activity in the art module whereby the voice of transformation is also heard:

This brought tears to my eyes because it really touched me, as well as brought on some painful and joyful memories...I was hit with a jolt of pain because I wanted to breastfeed more than anything...I was shocked at how this art was able to affect me (014).

The journey through the art module for participant 009 was marked with strong emotion, self-realizations, and above all, connections with herself. In partaking in the in-class activity involving reflections of the family kitchen, the participant expresses having experienced a cascade of triggered memories and emotions relating to a specific memory, namely dinnertime at

her home. She cites this particular class as having been an opportunity to reflect on both the happy and painful memories her family recently experienced, which prompted a “sudden emotional response.” Further citing a tendency to repress painful emotions, I postulate that her body’s manner of processing such repression was triggered through this activity. Further, it may be likely that she was subsequently set on a path to continued exploration of her “unexplained sadness” and “so many repressed emotions inside me that I have never dealt with properly” (009). This chain reaction of emotions and increased self-awareness highlights the significant process that this participant experienced through her immersion in the art module and continued to experience following the conclusion of the class. This latter observation is seen in her admission that thinking about this in-class experience in her reflection paper “...brings tears to my eyes” (009). The amount of personal detail she shares with the reader in her reflection paper conveys the depth of the impact that the art module had on her. This kitchen assignment provoked an unexpected release of these repressed emotions. It is here that the voice of transformation is loudly heard.

Participant 009’s increased self-awareness stems from having developed a better understanding of the influence of the arts in connecting the audience with the underlying message portrayed by the artwork. The relevance of this development is seen in her following expression:

Art is very powerful and can evoke feelings and understanding unknown to a person until they are exposed to it. The potential art can have in dietetics is evident having experienced its power myself (009).

The triggers from the art module mobilized her intent to help others; she now envisions using storytelling in her future practice by sharing her own private story of losing her father to heart disease as a means of influencing positive change in clients’ lifestyles. The following excerpt demonstrates this finding:

One form of art I am thinking of incorporating into practice when I become a dietitian is storytelling...Before ever knowing that storytelling was a form of art, I had thought about the impact sharing my story might have on the people if I told it...I wanted to tell my story to help motivate people to change diet related behaviors conducive to developing heart disease...Story telling [sic] can open doors that may otherwise remain closed (009).

I would also add that this realization likely strengthened her confidence to take this professional step forward. Her merging of an evidently painful experience with the intent of preventing future clients from experiencing the same outcome shows this increased growth and stronger connection with herself.

The contrapuntal voice of transformation permeates participant 009’s reflection paper relating to the creation of her poem. She dealt with a very personal and unpleasant experience in which “...creating the poem helped [her] deal with the emotions that were present, but pushed away somewhere deep” (009). Her initial attempt to create an impersonal art piece proved difficult, whereas this latter attempt was released with surprising ease. The use of personalized poetry acted as a coping mechanism to her self-identified tendencies to repress painful emotions. She describes this catharsis:

The process was very therapeutic and enabled me to gain a greater awareness of my feelings towards the event...art gave me the freedom to express my emotions in a non-threatening way...I have learned a new way to express my feelings and deal with experience in a way I am more comfortable with (009).

Possibly most notable in her journey through self-realization, self-exploration, and self-discovery is her ability to come face-to-face with the emotions that she could not face beforehand; art acted as a tool that rendered it safe for her to delve deeper within herself in an effort to resolve previously unresolved issues. This was unexpected because she had been unable to express her feelings or deal with them. It is here that the voice of transformation is loudly present, further capturing the emotional significance of the experience.

Participant 024's emotional journey to self-discovery, self-appreciation, and the development of a strong bodily connection was evidenced throughout her reflection paper. In being an active contributor and receiver in the art process, the art module helped her develop newfound strength and self-confidence. As she details in her reflection paper, she had a very negative self-image and was ashamed of her body size during her adolescence. Later on in her university years, she yearned to look like everyone else around her; in essence, she was unable to appreciate her physical differences stemming from her different ethnicity and did not know the true meaning of the word beautiful. However after experiencing her classmates' artwork, this participant reached several significant realizations, which are captured in her following statements:

The world is beautiful because of the diversity. Be different, be unique, be proud of what I have and be appreciated...I am beautiful because there is no other person as same as me in the world and even out the space (024).

Her particular journey through the art module captures the significant facilitative role that the arts played in her re-connection to herself.

The in-class activity whereby participants were asked to draw their portrayal of hunger, participant 013 experienced an unfolding of unexpected emotional reactions including shaking hands and the pooling of tears. Her portrayal of hunger had triggered a recollection of her experiences from Thailand:

Before I had time to think I started explaining my picture and it wasn't long before my hands were shaking and tears were pooling. This was emotional for me due to my experiences in Thailand and the topic effected [sic] me in an unexpected way (013).

We hear the voice of transformation interlaced with the voice of vulnerability here. The participant indicates having embodied a strong stance on her topic and certitude in her message about hunger and the outcome of her art creation. She initially felt panic at being unable to portray her ideas of hunger despite her passion for this area. However upon presenting to her classmates, she experienced an unforeseen outcome, a strong emotional reaction, which captures the voice of transformation. Because no further detail was provided by the participant, I can only infer that it was related to poverty and the resulting hunger in the individuals with whom she was in contact. This type of emotional reaction provides an indication into the strong, evocative effect that participation in the arts can have, especially when it is personally driven and

personally relevant. Particularly striking is the fast and unexpected onset of the emotional reaction that presenting this creation had triggered in her coupled with the supportive reaction of her peers.

The catalyst for participant 021's self-realization of his prejudices and body image issues occurred following his viewing of the piece "NORMAL? A Feminist Artist's Exploration of Body Image and Self-Esteem" at the Body Image Conference, which was a shocking moment as his initial attitude was negative and close-minded. He divulges:

I was uncertain about the conference as my preconceived impression was that it was going to be mainly a group of women with body image concerns blaming it all on the influence of male preferences of what constitutes a perfect body (021).

The artwork inspired his learning and the realization that the female artist was producing her "raw and unpolished drawings showing her own body in all its imperfections" (021) as a means of healing herself. This subsequently prompted him to develop the desire to enable others to reach the same realization, expressing: "What anyone else thinks should not be able to influence another persons [sic] feeling of self worth" (021). The entire journey through the art module proved to be powerful and highly impactful on him, leading to some very important self-realizations and self-growth that he may not have reached otherwise. Specifically, he developed significant connections with his body, realizing that his previously dismissive attitude toward the Body Image Conference "...show[ed] [his] own predigests [sic] and [his] own body image problems. Surprisingly and even shockingly to [him] this actually led to [his] light bulb moment" (021). These self-revelations and changes in attitude toward the use of the arts within the course embody the voice of transformation. This is particularly highlighted when considering his evolved understanding and appreciation for the evocative powers of the arts in stimulating the development of important self-revelations and the establishment of strong connections with the body, an understanding that he had not initially held so fervently.

### *Fostered Connections from the Art Project*

Heard loudly within many reflection papers was the feeling of vulnerability and expressed struggles in not only creating their artwork, but also presenting them. The fear of ridicule and judgment (014), the fear of foolishness (012), the lack of self-confidence in their artistic abilities (012, 014) and the feeling of discomfort in opening themselves up to the public (015, 017, 029) was marked by hesitation, vulnerability, anxiety and uncertainty. All of these self-identifications within the reflection papers loudly bear the voice of vulnerability.

In creating their artwork, participants struggled with capturing authenticity and dealing with their emergent emotions from this same process. Participant 012 references her conflict of presenting her artwork, stating: "...how I could express something that felt authentic without appearing foolish." Participant 015 shares that creating her art piece and displaying it for her peers left her feeling vulnerable: "Body image, compounded with the discomfort felt toward creating art made for an intimidating project" (015). Similarly, participant 030 was initially apprehensive in her artistic and creativity skills, a self-perception that was rather pronounced particularly upon learning of the art project. Following the experience of partaking in the project, this self-perception changed dramatically. The contrasting in the outcomes is further

seen when we compare the process she underwent, that is, the initial resistance to the final embrace of creativity. This is captured in her following statement:

When I saw the assigned art project I said to my self [sic] that I am not an artist I don't like art, I don't have any creativity. But after the experience...It made me realize that everyone is an artist in his own way...Creativity...allowed me to begin to make a connection between how artistry and creativity can be part of dietetic practice" (030).

The feeling of vulnerability was heard in participant 009's reflection paper when she states that:

When the concept was first introduced, the use of art in the dietetic practice, I was...intimidated to create a piece of art as it was something I hadn't done many times before.

Her use of the word "intimidated" shows her initial state of vulnerability stemming from a previous lack of immersion into the arts. In addition, as participant 017 captures,

To do well at expressing this subject takes some opening up which I believe most of us were not ready for. I agree that it was difficult to come up with something creative related to body image without showing insecurities...some brave students chose to really show themselves through their art.

Both vulnerability and courage were displayed through participants' ability to recognize and acknowledge their fears in their reflection papers. The use of art throughout the entire module required that they explore their inner selves, which proved to be a new and sometimes intimidating opportunity for some of them. As the following participant shares: "When we started taking part in activities...it became way outside of my comfort zone..." (021), we hear that the voice of vulnerability marked a significant portion of her journey through the art module.

Similarly, the voice of vulnerability is heard in participant 029's fear of exposing herself to her peers through the presentation of her art piece. It is likely that the fear of rejection or ridicule is at the core of this vulnerability, as can be seen when she states: "I was unsure of how my peers would react to my piece" (029). This is particularly noted as she was feeling unsure of her artistic abilities prior to embarking on the creation of her art piece. This participant acknowledges having acquired a greater understanding into the discomfort that clients may feel when sharing personal information about their disordered eating with health professionals. She states that this occurred through having experienced the feeling of intimidation when presenting her art piece to her classmates. This state of vulnerability, then, served almost like a catalyst to lead to her development of empathy.

This contrapuntal voice also highlights the powerful self-connections and self-discoveries that were fostered as a result of the art module as a whole. Participants were significantly influenced by the creation and presentation components of the art project that also led to significant self-discoveries. For instance, a self-discovery that she is not alone in her personal struggles with self-dislikes, losses, and problems was reached by participant 004. The presentation of her art piece prompted participant 020 to experience an unexpected emotional response, releasing emotions that had been hidden from within her. The voices of vulnerability and transformation intertwine here demonstrating the emotional significance of her newfound,

awareness-raising realization of the insecurity she has surrounding her physical appearance. This close interaction of the two contrapuntal voices also uncovers the participant's previously hidden aspect of herself, which was seemingly hidden from others as well. It may be possible that this was a form of self-protection from the sensitive and impactful nature of her poor body image. This reaction triggered a reflection on her subconscious choice of topic, subsequently leading her to realize her felt insecurity in her own appearance; as she discovered, she previously chose to hide away the concept of ideal beauty from herself. Participant 015 describes the creation of her art piece as having been a therapeutic experience, allowing her to express her innermost feelings.

For participant 022, it was the experience of viewing and hearing about her classmates' artwork that triggered her to see herself for who she was, inclusive of her flaws. She became more acutely aware of her tendency to judge others based on their physical traits, stating:

It has dawned on me that before this class (art project) I had a terrible habit of assuming things about people...while this self-realization has always been just below the surface I was not able to address it until learning how art made me see myself (022).

In having an opportunity to see her classmates through *their* own eyes, namely through their created artwork, she was able to gain a deep insight into their world, and as a result also enhance empathy. Through the difficult process of creating her art piece, she also realized that unlike she previously thought, it was not others who impose judgment on her, but rather it is she who judges herself. She states:

I realized I was judging myself more than anyone else. My own self expectations were stronger and more detrimental than the perceived thoughts of others. In a way I was projecting my thoughts about myself onto those around me. Learning these aspects about myself will help me be a more effective health care professional (022).

By experiencing her peers' artwork, she was forced to confront herself and make a conscious decision to make positive changes. This self-revelation otherwise may not have come to fruition as poignantly and through such an impactful means had the arts not been involved. Such self-discoveries will help shape this participant as a future health professional who has rounded and holistic views of herself that, in turn, will better enable her to help her clients.

In creating her poem, participant 006 sought to draw on her personal experience with negative body image via her connection to her mother's body. By capturing the dichotomy of bodily perceptions (others' versus her own), she stimulated a self-reflection of her own negative body views. She reflects, "[W]riting this poem allowed me to think deeply about the reasons I view myself in a bad light when everyone around me sees beauty" (006). The significance of the participant's realizations is captured in her statement that:

Had I not contributed to the class presentation I may never [have] felt the full extent of the connection to or the important message that my poem really possessed, and how it affected me (006).

This demonstrates the level and depth of impact of the art module on her learning about her inner self and the power of art in eliciting such reactions. Finally, it is evident that in presenting her

art piece with her classmates, she unleashed and connected to a part of herself that had been previously hidden away from consciousness. The contrapuntal voice of vulnerability was heard at the moment in which she presented her art piece to her peers, putting herself “out there” for them to see and taking a personal risk in doing so. Interestingly, she was able to recognize her state of vulnerability, which, when compounded with the realization of mutual support from her peers, led to a powerful moment of connection with them, as well as with herself.

The connection with the self that participant 006 notes was also experienced by participant 014 who connected with her past self, that is, her adolescent self, when seeking inspiration to create her art piece. For her, the art module, particularly creating and viewing others’ art, touched something within her to make her feel and exude her inner vulnerability. In terms of presenting her artwork, she felt apprehensive and feared judgment from her peers, even though most were close acquaintances. She states that she had not expressed her artistic side in a long time, and was apprehensive it would be seen as inadequate. It is in such expressions where the voice of vulnerability is loudly heard. Similarly, it was upon completing her art piece, which sought to challenge societal views of beauty by comparing real versus fake beauty that participant 020 came upon the realization of her own distorted view of natural beauty.

In the process of creating her art piece, participant 004 moulded a paper-machéed face upon which she imitated her own facial structures. She re-created, but in reverse, the notion of perfection by creating a collage of isolated images of “different models [sic] eyes, skin, nose, lips, etc, just like the magazine cover” (004) in order to create something that is not viewed as “beautiful.” This creation was sparked by having viewed “The Face of America,” a picture of the “perfect face” that was only a digital creation. Subsequently, the participant developed a personal connection to her piece, expressing “...once it started to resemble a face and I was continuously smoothing and caressing it. I thought of my own face” (004). This tactile connection with a facial representation of herself had previously held no material form for her. It was in this moment that I felt connected to her. In acknowledging her feelings, such as her realization that she is not the only person suffering from insecurities, I was provided with a gateway into her vulnerable side, even though it was for a brief moment. This disclosure of the feelings and emotions that she felt in relation to the creation of her art piece embodied the voice of vulnerability. The vulnerability is evident in her direct use of her own face in such a way that it would be open for all to see and scrutinize in the form of art.

It is when the participant states that in the process of creating her art piece she built “layers upon layers of the paper-machée” (004) that I interpreted this statement as her building a layered understanding of her own self. This is further substantiated by her expression that “When creating my art piece there was a point I felt a little vulnerable and emotional, thinking of my own face” (004). The contrapuntal voice of vulnerability is loudly heard in this expressive portion of the reflection paper where she reflects upon the driving force behind her art creation. Although there is a clear connection between her art piece and herself, this is not fully captured in her writing, as discerned through a lack of incorporating her personal views. This latter characteristic is seen in her description of the meaning behind the piece whereby she only employs the generalized pronouns “you,” “they” and “you” as opposed to the more personal “I” pronoun:

The significance of the title is that *everyone* can find flaws and label *their* insecurities. These insecurities may have a huge impact on *your* life but it is important to see past

these, because it's not only *you* that experiences them. *Everyone* can find something that *they* dislike about *themselves* whether it be physical or not (004, emphasis added).

This may be interpreted as depicting a conflict that she is facing with herself; for some reason, she is holding back in personalizing the creation process for herself, potentially due to a fear or insecurity of exposing herself to her peers or of facing her insecurities in her beauty. After all, when creating her art piece, “[she] thought of [her] own face and tried to imitate [her] portrayed facial structure...Taking beautiful things, and creating something that to the general public, is not viewed as ‘beautiful’” (004). Again, I hear the voice of vulnerability loudly in this section. Challenging societal views of beauty, art provided her with the flexibility and choice to determine how much and what to share with the outside world. Nonetheless, questions remain as to why she is not prepared to take personal ownership of the message behind her art piece; I posit that even though she does not directly state it, she, too, has flaws and insecurities that bear an impact on her life. This evasion of personal identification may simply be one manifestation of such an evasion. Despite her reluctance, or perhaps more accurately her unpreparedness, to openly expose her own vulnerabilities via her art at that point in time, the participant does disclose in her reflection paper that she felt vulnerable and emotional during the creation her piece, specifically in “thinking of my own face” (004). It is important to take note that it can take a while before new insights are felt with enough intensity that one can share them, which may very well have been the case with participant 004.

Several participants sought to create personally meaningful poetry as part of their art project. Participant 007's poem was a means to express feelings of helplessness in situation of a family member's eating disorder. Through incorporating a personal connection to his piece, he not only wanted to increase awareness and insight of this condition, but also to process his own complex feelings in the situation. This is heard when he expresses: “I drew on my personal experiences dealing with this difficult subject, as my [family member] suffers from an eating disorder” (007). This captures “the personal” characteristic of art and its creation whereby the participant-creator connects with a part of his life in order to drive the emotional aspect of the art creation. In this case, the participant initially sought to write his poem to create awareness of this illness, which also evolved into a coping strategy for himself. He also expresses having felt “very vulnerable” (007) when he was presenting his deeply personal poem.

For participant 023, the transformation process of his art piece brought to the forefront and prompted a self-discovery of his fears, vices, feelings, emotions, and insights relating to his complex relationship with food. The evocation of raw emotions led to the realization of his tendency to use food to cope with stress, a feeling he describes as being out of control and in contradiction to his intention to become a dietitian. It is here that the voice of vulnerability is heard, highlighting his conflict between feeling and knowing, that is, the conflict between the emotional and the rational side of himself in his future capacity as a health professional. Despite coming into the course with an open mind and as a self-identified artist, he nonetheless experienced profound realizations about himself. He shares his inner turmoil of feeling “out of control” in terms of using food to deal with stress when studying to become a dietitian. He touches on a very poignant issue: dietitians facing pressures from themselves and society to embody perfection when it comes to their eating practices, body esteem, and health. Through his research into eating disorders, this participant connected with this more vulnerable side of himself, including his insecurities about his body, which he shares as being a powerful revelation.



The voice of transformation was loudly heard in participant 023's reflections of the evolving transformation of his artwork. He describes this process as:

A revelation of feelings, emotions and insights about my own fears and vices emerged along with a better understanding about this complex issue of body acceptance, self love [sic], self acceptance [sic] and tolerance (023).

However, this personal journey was hidden behind his art form due to his reluctance to openly expose his vulnerabilities about his body with others, even though they inspired his art creation. The voice of vulnerability is heard in his need to connect with his insecurities in order to create his poem as part of the art project:

I...prepared myself for exposure of my art and some of the feelings of how I really feel about my body under the guise of [art]...The medium [art] allowed me protection and shielded me from anyone knowing that a lot of what I was talking about I really could relate to on an indirect level (023).

This excerpt highlights his current unpreparedness and also potentially his fear of complete self-exposure. Interestingly though, in order to deflect the full transparency of his artistic message away from himself, he states that “[I] direct[ed] my attention on people who struggle with eating disorders...I had to pull at my fears and insecurities and immerse myself into the mind of a sufferer of these afflictions [anorexia and megarexia]” (023) in order to better capture their essence. Doing so allowed him to connect with parts of himself that he was not in touch with prior to the experience, demonstrating bravery on his end: “This brought out raw, genuine emotions on how I deal with stress” (023). The voice of vulnerability underlies this participant's self-reflection of his emotional journey. It is clear that he felt a need to express his complex emotions with his body through his artwork. However, he still had a need to protect himself from potential harm stemming from self-exposure “under the guise of art.” This confrontation of his “demons” in this private-public domain was profound for him as he was met face to face with his emotional eating and body image problems, an outcome that he had not initially expected.

A spectrum of emotional reactions transpired for participants during their art creation. Participant 017 experienced a calming connection to her art creation, as captured in her following statement: “Painting the canvas for my project felt almost like a Zen garden as the brush flowed against the board and as I mixed the colors,” capturing the connection she felt when creating it. She expresses how the arts fostered this connection with herself through alleviating stress, calming and making her feeling powerful.

Demonstrating the influence that the art module held for him, participant 021 shares:

...my understanding of body image issues learned during this course will help me to deal with my hang-ups over my own body image and to know what hurdles a client is facing,

Recognizing that connecting to the self enables him to help others, he continues: “To me the link between the arts and client care or improved professional practice is not the one with the client but with us” (021). Change cannot occur at a societal or group level if the change is not embodied and personally modelled. Participant 030 feels that:

...art courses should be required to be taken in science majors especially in nutrition...The art project had a great impact on me. It is stuck in my mind and I will never forget it.

The voice of transformation is loudly heard here, highlighting the dramatic change in her perception of the role that the arts play in dietetic education and her views of the merits of artistry in dietetic education.

### ***Levels of Disclosure***

The voice of transformation permeates the majority of reflection papers and is accompanied by the voice of vulnerability. Individual differences in personalities and writing styles exist between participants, their willingness to share personal experiences through their reflection papers. Those participants who appear more at ease and open at voicing their personal experiences, feelings, and emotions from the art module wrote reflection papers in which the voice of vulnerability, a more emotive contrapuntal voice, could be loudly heard. This was also discerned by their dominating usage of the first-person pronoun “I” and less use of the more *impersonal* pronouns “we” and “they.” The interplay of the contrapuntal voices of vulnerability and transformation alongside participants’ highly personal connections with themselves further substantiates the significance of and the emotionally-involved learning journey they experienced.

When reflecting on the individual and bodily connections that were fostered from participation in the art module, participants frequently employed the first person pronoun, “I.” Their reliance on this pronoun demonstrates the significant impact that the art module exerted on them. This is also seen through their ability to directly expose themselves and their inner feelings, thoughts, and learnings by utilizing a personal pronoun that embodies a strong personal ownership. In addition, it signals that participants internalized the learnings in a personally meaningful way and that they were personally relevant to them. This would have been contrasted had participants employed and relied more heavily on the other more detached pronouns, “you,” “we,” and “they.” In the cases where the first-person pronoun is used, as the primary listener I begin to develop a deeper understanding of the participant, how he/she thinks and approaches different situations, and as a result, felt more connected with him/her. The distance between us, as researcher and participant, begins to diminish, a reality that is in contrast to the findings for the fostered professional connections whereby participants did not do this.

As the following *I* poem excerpts show, participants’ reflections on the individual and bodily connections demonstrate the strength of these connections in addition to their enhanced understandings of themselves. This is seen by the dominating usage of the first-person pronoun, “I”:

Participant 004

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

Creating **my** art piece

**I** moulded the image of a face

**I** used a manikin's head

As **my** base

Moulding the facial features, was **my** favourite part

**I** felt connected to **my** piece

**I** was continuously smoothing and caressing it

**I** thought of **my** own face

Imitate **my** portrayed facial structure

Came from a magazine cover **I** saw a couple years ago

When **I** saw this computer generated image

**I** felt upset

-----

Creating **my** art piece

**I** felt a little vulnerable and emotional

Thinking of **my** own face

**I** also felt this

To **me** this demonstrated how emotion can be experienced

Additionally, in their reflections of the individual and bodily connections fostered in the art module, participants' highly personalized language and disclosures of emotions highlights their strong and close relationship with themselves. For instance, participant 014 reflects on the range of emotions she felt and the reactions she experienced from one specific activity including feeling happiness, pain, and shock:

Participant 014

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

I do have to mention

Causing **me** to reflect

What the arts have meant to **me**

Allowed **me** to open **myself** up

Idea of expressing **myself**

**We** were asked to reflect

This brought tears to **my** eyes

It really touched **me**

Made **me** feel the happy, content feeling

**I** feel when holding and looking at **my** new [baby]

**I** was then hit with a jolt of pain

Because **I** wanted to breastfeed

**I** wanted to have that bonding experience with **my** baby

**I** attempted for 6 weeks

**I** had feelings of inadequacy and failure

**I** was shocked at how this art was able to affect **me**

Participant 009 also touches on a highly emotional phenomenon, referring to the development of her personal art piece. As can be seen in the following *I* poem excerpt, there is much usage of the “I” pronoun, which in turn, better enables the primary listener and reader to connect with the participant herself:

Participant 009

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our/ourselves*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/themselves/others*

I just started writing

I had two verses

I knew it

I was going to write a poem

Came surprisingly easy to **me**

-----

I created my art

Process, enabled **me** to gain a greater awareness

**My** feelings towards the event

I tend to repress feelings

Art gave **me** the freedom

To express **my** emotions

I didn't talk about the issue very much

Not because **I** didn't need to

I didn't want to bother anyone

I didn't want to be a burden

I didn't want to think about it **myself**

I would consider writing poetry again

I really enjoyed doing it

I enjoyed expressing **my** feelings

The ones **I** repress and don't like to talk about

-----

I always teared [sic] up in the classes

Repressed emotions inside **me**

I have never dealt with properly

**You** begin to relate

Powerful feeling overtakes **your** mind and body

## *Implications for Dietetic Practice*

In this next section I divided it into the following subsections: Implications in Undergraduate Education, Creativity: The Opportunity for Educational Re-Connection, and Implications in Future Application of the Arts within Dietetic Practice. In each of these subsections, I provide the reader with an analysis of the outcomes from the art module and the manner in which it influenced participants with implications for their future journeys.

### *Implications in Undergraduate Education*

The arts, as a leisurely activity or mode of learning, are generally regarded as being most suitable for individuals of younger age. The lack of creativity extending beyond childhood highlights the specific need for students to reconnect with their previously artistic sides (013). In their reflection papers, several participants indicated that they had been interested in the arts in their younger years (014, 017, 024), but had ceased doing so as they transitioned into young adulthood, coinciding with their entry into post-secondary study. Participant 013, who notes that adult learning does not embrace creativity, proposes the implementation of a “kindergarten approach” to learning (see Resnick, 2007) within the university setting. It bears mention that this approach was introduced to the participants through a module reading; it involves creation, reflection, imagination and sharing as key components (92). Creativity, after all, is enabled through participation in the arts (020, 025, 028). Participant 012 provides further insight into this phenomenon:

In my experience, adults are not comfortable with sharing creative pursuits with others unless they are fairly accomplished at them. Amateurish efforts are generally not celebrated...the lack of appropriate media and technologies which are available that can help older learners realize their vision...I certainly felt that way while creating my art.

Further supporting this line of thinking is participant 017 who calls for the re-integration of visual imagery as a means of enhancing learning, an occurrence that the entire NUTR 4444 class experienced during the creation process of their individual art pieces:

We created, displayed images, and shared ideas by presenting our pieces and our emotions by interacting as a class. Creative thinking is important in all occupations. Developing new inventions, collaborating inspiring ideas, and designing interesting projects are all encouraged by thinking ‘outside the box.’”

In line with these recommendations, the dedication to continuing integration of arts-based, creative components within the dietetic curriculum would go a long way in supporting the development of an embodied curriculum whereby students’ professional identity would be developed and their future professional practice would be positively shaped. As Barab et al. (2007) explain:

Situative embodiment involves more than seeing a concept or even a context of use; it involves being in the context and recognizing the value of concepts as tools useful for understanding and solving problems central to the context in which one is embodied (p.2).

They contend that “displacing to-be-learned content from the situations in which it has value undermines the very understandings that educators aim to foster” (p.2). In line with Barab et al.’s recommendation (2007), it is important to note that dietetic students’ involvement in the arts would better enable them to develop and strengthen necessary skills and knowledge learned in the classroom and transfer them to the practice setting.

Students’ participation in the arts holds potential for fostering the development of a range of skills that course outlines and marking schemes cannot accomplish, including creative thinking, compassion, empathy, and the exploration of alternate means of providing care for clients/patients. Greater exposure to creativity is necessitated in the education process because otherwise, students may miss out on acquiring valuable insights about themselves, their peers, and their future clients/patients. As participant 017 poignantly captures: “Just as the arts contribute to science by revealing new healing methods, the sciences discover new explanations to the astonishing creations in the universe that artists can expand upon.”

The predominantly science-focused undergraduate degree in nutrition and dietetics offers few opportunities for students to partake in arts-based initiatives within the dietetics department. It is only through the implementation of such initiatives within the Professional Practice courses, a mandatory set of courses which all dietetic students are required to successfully complete, that this has been actualized. Students have the alternate option of seeking non-departmental arts courses, which may not hold the same synergistic benefits that an integrated study of the arts within the field of dietetics promises in terms of transfer to professional practice. The art module that was implemented by Lordly in her senior-level Professional Practice course was one such case in which a successful integration was achieved with momentous results and positive outcomes on student learning. This dominating exposure to dietetics as a science undoubtedly influences the manner in which students view themselves in their professional role; that is, as scientific professionals. My research study contends that involvement in the arts has the potential to stimulate students to be well-rounded health professionals with strengths in both the sciences and the arts. Ultimately, this dual role assures strength in these future dietetic professionals’ practice.

The scientific mode of thinking is balanced and complemented by a connection with the emotive, intuitive, and artistic side of dietetics. Many participants believed that the undergraduate dietetics degree is heavily grounded in the objective, positivist, fact-based approach (005, 010, 014, 015, 022, 025, 028). Although this is of significant merit in the field, it cannot be the sole focus. This is captured by participant 028 who says that: “the arts are not often looked at in depth and this semester’s workshops and projects have provided me with skills I did not believe I was capable of acquiring,” and perhaps even did not know she had. Similarly, participant 013 highlights the newfound liberated experience fostered through the sharing of the class’ personal artwork:

Art as an outlet was very evident in the class presentations as there were many emotions flowing that day. It was very refreshing to force our science oriented brains into another realm. For once we weren't told what is right or wrong, black or white. We were able to express our feelings and not back them up with a scientific paper and piles of literature.

The openness to share a personal part of oneself was also noted as being a new experience within the program:

This gave many students an opportunity to express themselves in a way that they normally would not have the chance to do in a fourth year nutrition class. It encouraged people to come out of their box and share with the class some experiences that otherwise may have never been told (025)

Gauging from the successful incorporation and reception of the art module, it is evident that change is possible. The role that the arts play in the lives of dietetic students and students in general, cannot be ignored. The importance of reconnecting to this part of oneself is best captured well by participant 013, who states: "As university students it is easy to become distant from our artist side and it is important to bring it back. Having an art module incorporated into the curriculum gives opportunity for those who are not in touch with their artist side." Participant 009's statement that "creativity has been beaten out of the student from the start" further highlights the general disconnection that students currently face with creativity and the arts. She asserts that greater exposure to creativity is necessitated in the education process because otherwise, students miss out on acquiring very valuable insights about themselves, their peers, and their future clients (009). For her personally, "This experience has taught me a lot about myself and how art can be useful in the dietetic practice" (009). Participants' own expressed reactions to the art module are particularly demonstrative of their previous lack of exposure to the creative side of the profession. Upon the art project's initial introduction, many participants expressed that they held negative views, were rather close-minded, hesitant, and unwilling to delve into this area of inquiry (006, 011, 012, 014, 017, 019).

The ability of dietetic students and dietitians to effectively and positively impact their patients is based on their communication skills, which the arts can play an important role in shaping. As participant 004 states, "You must be able to communicate this with the client in a delicate reasonable matter, without coming on too strong." She highlights that solid professional skills do not include the ability to "memorize a text book or make straight A's" (004), but rather, it is the personal skills a dietitian holds that sets her apart; such personal skills include empathy, compassion, listening, and communication skills. For these reasons, it is imperative that such foci are extensively explored and practiced throughout undergraduate dietetic education.

Within the current study, many participants expressed a current lack of creativity, such as exploration of body image and communication through the arts, within the undergraduate dietetics program (004, 005, 008, 009, 014, 015, 025, 028). This was also echoed by participant 009 who believed that:

...creativity has been beaten out of the student from the start. There is a right and wrong way to do things. I have been minimally exposed to the arts in my many years as a student. Students panic if they aren't given an outline, clear guidelines, or a marking scheme.



This is particularly troubling as research has demonstrated the higher prevalence of this segment of the population in encountering issues with disordered eating and struggles with body image (see Worobey & Schoenfeld, 1999; Kiziltan & Karabudak, 2008; Hughes & Desbrow, 2005). There is large potential for change with research demonstrating the efficacy of various art initiatives in helping individuals re-connect with themselves and healthily learn to engage with their body image issues (see Brooke, 2008; Hill, 1998; Levens, 1995). Participant 029, in particular, believes that it is highly beneficial for dietetic students to learn coping strategies fostered through participation in the arts for disordered eating to not only help others, but also to help themselves as well. This was also echoed by participant 022 who holds that in helping the dietetic professional connect with him- or herself, the arts in turn better enable them to help others:

Because it is not always possible for us to articulate our thoughts and emotions I feel art can help us communicate in different ways. For the health care professional art can create a deeper understanding of themselves , [sic] and therefore will be better equipped to communicate with those being cared for.

It is believed that the arts help dietitians become more humane, understanding, and knowledgeable (025), whereby “the link between the arts and client care or improved professional practice is not the one with the client but with us” (021). This participant contends that it is the effect of art on the practitioner that subsequently influences his/her counselling approaches to help his/her patients; professionals and clients are alike in their perceptions of body image (021). It is not only very difficult to advise clients when the health professional may be unhappy with his/her own body image, but it is also hypocritical as well (021). It is for such reasons that it is imperative for dietetic students, whilst they are still immersed in the early, formative stages of their professional and education development that an art module be implemented. Doing so would allow students to explore, connect, and begin addressing their own relationships with themselves and their body image so as to better prepare them to be able to effectively assist their future clients. This sentiment is also echoed by participants 004 and 020.

The lack of creative endeavours, including foci on communication, psychological, and emotional aspects of the dietetic field has been described as not only existing within the program but also as occurring hand in hand with a lack of open-mindedness (025, 028). As participant 025 notes, the field of nutrition requires a variety of different means of addressing issues, which extends beyond the traditional scientific method. Within dietetic practice, the arts are equally important as the science component due to the strong need for effective communication and empathy on the part of the future dietetic professional. Participant 028 is convinced of the value that art projects similar to the one that was executed; for her, it opened up viewing dietetic practice in new ways. Communication and relationship-building are important parts of profession (025) especially those that involve working with others that need to be taught and practiced throughout the duration of the program in order to better prepare students for the practice setting. This was further re-iterated by participant 030,

In our major in total four years we just get scientific and nutrition information but we don't learn a lot about how when we are working in our profession in [sic] our own we can deliver this information that we learned to our client in a way that they will understand.

She contends that such integration of both areas of knowing would improve client relationships and stimulate the necessary understanding dietitians require. Participant 022 also highlights the need to bridge the distance between the patient and the professional through the re-integration of the “human” aspect into dietetic and general healthcare practice. The benefit that an arts-based educational approach holds in assisting in connection-building with future clients is one means of accomplishing this goal:

Often with a science based program we get too caught up in the facts and figures and there becomes disconnect with clients. As shown with the emotions that surfaced when discussing art dealing with body, an approach based more in the arts tends to be more holistic and actually help to better connect with clients by providing insight and better understanding of their experiences and feelings (015).

### ***Implications in Future Application of the Arts within Dietetic Practice***

#### **Arts: The Opportunity for Professional Re-Connection**

The use of art in dietetic practice is found to be therapeutic (006, 028), holding much promise to help clients with healing (006) and promoting growth (022). As a strategy for use in practice, it is beneficial in understanding and addressing practice issues, as well as making sense of the human condition through the exploration of emotion, ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty (017), which are said to increase one’s understanding of others’ feelings and their perspectives on problems (025). Art allows not only for a non-conventional self-expression, but also for emotional expression (008) that reflects one’s personal identity (030). This is further echoed by other participants who find that art encourages creativity, alternate communication (participants 028, 029, 030) allowing for articulation when words fail (029), and participation by all at their own levels (028). For participant 013, it is a less threatening means of exploration and expression that indirectly encourages the surfacing of emotions (013) through the creation of a supportive environment for opening up. Finally, it teaches understanding and cultural competence, which helps dietitians to better reach diverse people (030). As participant 015 highlights:

Expanding our thought to include approaches based in the arts could be therapeutic for clients, acting as a mechanism to better express themselves and their experiences and give us insight to better understand and have empathy for these experiences.

Participants expressed that their understanding of the application of the arts within dietetic practice is nested within several key aspects. First, it is the arts’ ability to foster the development of powerful, deeper connections between individuals participating in the arts exchange, that is, the artist-creator and the viewer that plays a significant role in enabling this connection. Within the context of dietetic practice, these roles are of the dietetic professional and client/patient, respectively. The emotional aspect of the arts, related to its ability to evoke such reactions in the artist-creator and the viewer, strengthens this connection particularly within the scope of an emotionally-charged topic, such as body image:

Incorporating the arts can bring in more of an emotional characteristic. Rather than just having a scripted meeting with clients which may cause them to be guarded and uncomfortable...incorporating use of the arts could help me to better connect with clients and understand different thoughts, ideas and perspectives they may hold (015).

Because it may often be difficult for patients to completely open up with healthcare professionals as a result of one-sided sharing, a sufficient trust and comfort level may not be present (007). One means of addressing this issue is through the incorporation of the arts within practice. For participant 011, it is the belief that the arts support the creation of trust, strong relationships, an atmosphere of security and equality, and abstinence from imposing judgment. They allow dietetic professionals to remain emotionally receptive, further assisting them in becoming more humane, understanding, and knowledgeable (025).

Secondly, as participant 028 expresses, she originally did not view herself as an artistic individual. However, as she progressed through the different stages of creating and presenting her art piece, she experienced a profound change in perception:

Learning about the arts and how it affects dietetic practice provides a new way to explore and understand the world around us. The use of art as an expression tool means much more to me than it did before September. I did not originally think of myself as an 'artistic' person; however, this quickly changed as I proceeded through stages of how art relates to our practice (028).

Her participation within the arts module has rendered the application of the arts as an expression tool more personally meaningful than before. Similarly, participant 029 believes that the application and exploration of the arts within dietetics leads to a gain in understanding of self as well as one's own feelings toward body image and into how others express their feelings. Within the practice setting, this may translate into the dietetic professional being more aware and perceptive of clients' emotions, feelings, and thoughts thereby enhancing her counselling role. It is the communication aspect of a dietitian's responsibilities that connects her to creating and supporting the provision of a safe environment conducive to communication with the client (029). This is further echoed by participant 011 who expresses his belief that art plays a role in shaping the development of capable and reliable nutritional professionals by: creating trust and strong relationships; an atmosphere of security and equality; abstaining from imposing judgment; learning to express freely and listen intently; and remaining emotionally receptive.

### Participants' Future Application of the Arts in Practice

Irrespective of the significant learnings and gains in understanding that participants expressed as having acquired, some uncertainties still remain in a handful of participants' own perceived readiness to transfer their learnings to their future practice. It is perhaps participant 009's expression of regret that captures the reality of application and the necessary skills that require ongoing and prolonged nurture, support, and exposure that truly highlights the necessity of the situation:

...students haven't been taught to think creatively or outside the box throughout their education. I have only been recently asked to do that in my last year of study and I believe creativity needs to be exposed more often throughout the education process. I would like to use the practice of art when I am a professional, but wish I have had the opportunity to learn throughout my education.

Additionally, while participant 012 is certain that the experience of partaking in the art project and module has helped to see future clients as whole persons with stories to tell, that it has awakened a desire in her to continue learning about integration of art in practice and rendered the degree more meaningful; she nevertheless expresses a similar uncertainty. Specifically, there are remaining unanswered questions that she holds regarding the application of the arts in the larger scheme of her professional practice:

...I am still left with questions about how this type of project could benefit my experience of practicing dietetics in the larger sense, outside of body image for example...our art project...gave me a new perspective...I'm not sure that it made me more perceptive or more skilled in a general sense. I believe there is more work yet to be done before I can claim to be a better practitioner through careful and unbiased observation (012).

Participant 005's increasing understanding and view of art, including its application in practice, can be compared to her initial shallow knowledge of art. In line with participants' expression of a lack of an artistic focus and/or opportunities within the dietetics program, it is not surprising, then, that uncertainties in her perceived ability to apply art in future practice is present. As she expresses:

Prior to this Professional Practice class...my thoughts on art were mostly "pretty" things that are appealing to the eye. I had very little previous knowledge on art and this short time spent on art has opened my eyes to art and the endless possibilities associated with art...I am still a little eerie on how I would personally use art in my future personal practice. I believe that one must know art to be able to use it efficiently in practice, and I do not believe that I am there thus far (005).

Contrasting the aforementioned uncertainties felt by some participants with respect to applying the arts in their future practice, others expressed keenness and felt confidence in their abilities to carry forward their learnings into practice. Whereas participants 009, 017, and 023 expressed personal intent to apply the arts within their practice, participants 010, 022, and 015 expressed generalized benefits of doing so. Further, participant 010 believes that everyone has individual potential to apply the arts in their future practice. Participant 022 adds that art plays an important role in healthcare professions and education.

Firstly, participant 009 acknowledges the arts' ability to facilitate understanding, compassion, and empathy as well as stimulating a greater awareness of feelings. She contends that the arts hold great potential for creating change in dietetics (009). It was her own personal experience of the painful loss of a close family member from heart disease that further enhanced her connection and desire to incorporate the art of storytelling in her future practice as a dietetic professional; it allows for sharing her own story so as to increase awareness and positively impact others:

I wanted to tell my story to help motivate people to change diet related behaviors conducive to developing heart disease. After sharing my story, I could emphasize that if you don't want to make changes for yourself, at least do it for those you love so you don't leave them alone in the world without a parent too early. My (close family member) will not see me graduate, will not meet the man I will marry, will not attend my wedding, will not see my children...Storytelling can open doors that may otherwise remain closed (009).

Participant 017 was able to connect her appreciation of the use of music in stimulating appetite in seniors with dementia to her future practice. In directly experiencing the influential effects of the arts through the art module, she became more convinced of its merit:

I can use these ideas in my future practice not only because the research hypothesizes it works but because I believe it does. I have seen art act as a way of educating, connecting with people, and releasing personal emotions for myself and I have seen it work for our class (017).

This is also consistent with participant 015's shared personal experience of using music to calm an elderly family member suffering from dementia. It was this experienced that proved to her the potential for arts' applicability in health care practice.

Participant 023, who identifies himself as an artist, strongly feels that he can apply his art form to educate others on dietetic issues by breaking walls and barriers, enhancing development of connections between people. This is achievable via the simple quality that art equalizes people through the commonality that we are all "humanly flawed":

I can see how the implantation of my art form within the nutritional educational forum can break walls and barriers to assist in better knowing one another. This can be a wonderful way to understand the ways and predicaments of people...The potential of art affecting on how we communicate, connect, teach and relay issues in regards to nutrition can be phenomenal (023).

## **CONCLUSION**

Traditionally, the science-based, undergraduate education system has valued the positivist, objective, and personally detached method of education whereby the student is discouraged from incorporating their personal selves into their learning (97). This educational training strongly shapes students' writing style by valuing the personally distanced voice, most notably in research papers. It is here that research findings are given a loud and dominating voice through written and oral methods of presentation. In this capacity, students lack the opportunities to have their voices heard and to channel them through their writing because the positivist approach to learning is given precedence.

The significant value of emotional input and connection-building in enhancing learning was shown in my research, having challenged this very issue of emotional distance. Students developed powerful professional, interpersonal, and bodily connections that allowed them to experience the transformative outcomes of emotionally-charged learning from these various

perspectives. In turn, they gained in-depth understanding and appreciation for more inclusive and personalized education. The learning process welcomed every perspective brought forth by students, including the subjective and emotional. As such, it was the students' personal experiences and emotional input that helped shape the process and render it rich with nuance and meaning. The goal was not to mainstream their learning, but rather embrace the inherent differences that emerged.

The voice of conviction was loudly heard in reflections of distantly-related realms (professional expectations and professional connections) whereas the more personally charged voices of vulnerability and transformation were loudly present in reflections of personally involved realms (interpersonal and bodily connection-building). This provides greater insight into the personal significance of participants' fostered connections (professional, interpersonal, bodily) within the immediate scope of their lives.

The loudness of the contrapuntal voice of conviction shows that participants were more detached in their reflections on the dietetic professional aspect of the module, which represented a more distant reality for them. Not surprisingly, the more immediately-felt interpersonal and bodily connection-building was laden with personally and emotionally charged undertones, as captured by the voices of vulnerability and transformation. In order to actively and meaningfully partake in this latter connection-building, I found that participants needed to direct self-expose parts of themselves through their art. A necessary and unavoidable requirement of this self-exposure is the feeling of personal risk, which adds additional insight into the significance of these experiences.

### ***Implications for Future Research***

Due to the nature of secondary data analysis, I am left with some questions that I cannot delve into more deeply due to the inherent restraints of my research design. Such questions include the reason why certain participants were reluctant to consistently utilize the first-person pronoun "I" when speaking to specific topics and identifying themselves, their opinions, and feelings when they were instructed to do so. It is likely, however, that their educational training to date has not accommodated such a personalized manner needed to support such a comfort level. And as Woodcock (2005) articulates in her work, it may be a manifestation of "institutional restraints and cultural norms that potentially silence voices, or constrain expression" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, as cited in Woodcock, 2010). It would also have been helpful to have been able to gather detailed demographic and other personal information directly from participants so as to allow me to paint a more integrated profile of them. In this study, some participants disclosed a significant amount of personal information about themselves through their reflection papers, some who did not disclose any, and others who were between these two points of this continuum.

The questions that have been generated from my research are potential areas of study by future researchers, including those who employ the LG. After all, the LG's exploratory nature and ability to generate new questions stemming from the conclusion of one study has been noted by researchers (58), which further substantiate the need for on-going exploration and discovery into this area of inquiry. It is my position that future researchers should consider the application of primary data collection and the implementation of focus groups and/or de-briefing of participants in order to fully elucidate these unanswered areas of inquiry. Doing so would allow

for this gain in insight in order to better understand and gauge participants' comfort level in self-disclosing, their readiness to open themselves up to others and examine themselves, and in their level of self-insight. This would allow the researcher to examine participants' understanding of themselves and their identities (62, 64). It is possible that participants simply have not reached a comfort level in writing in the first-person for a course-based assignment stemming from their strong educational background in the positivist area of the sciences that values distancing of the self in writing. This is further put into perspective when considering that participants were involved in the art module, which encouraged personalized learning and writing, only in their final year of studies. In addition, future research into this area of study should consider building a research design that includes a set of face-to-face interviews with participants. The opportunity for participants to verbally express themselves in this manner will provide researchers with the opportunity to inquire about any remaining questions they may hold in addition to examine participants' body language and other non-verbal cues as assistive communication tools so as to add further interpretive depth to their analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### **CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS**

Despite best efforts, all research studies encounter certain limitations in their design. Although such limitations are generally unavoidable, they nevertheless require open acknowledgement and a genuine effort on the part of the researcher to appropriately address them. My own research study is no exception to this reality. As with many qualitative researchers, the primary challenges that I have encountered throughout my journey is the lack of tangible and specific demonstrations of the manner in which others before me have incorporated their reflexive accounts within the data analysis itself and within their final research write-up, as echoed by Mauthner and Doucet (2003).

Other inherent limitations are related to the utilization of a dataset that was not initially intended for purposes beyond the classroom setting, namely the use of secondary data. This means that I did not have any input in designing the research method of data collection, which the reason as to why certain assumptions were made to guide my research analysis. These assumptions were previously outlined in the section titled, “Assumptions of the Study” of this document.

My reliance on written critical reflection papers is another limitation worthy of mention. The LG’s methodological design originated from the use of face-to-face interviews whereby the researcher would analyze both her audio recording and interview transcript simultaneously (49). In this context, the researcher’s ability to tune in to her participants’ narratives is further strengthened by her ability to physically listen to their voice intonations, nuances, pitch, and rhythm that in turn, provide her with a more comprehensive and revealing portrayal of the participants (49). This latter characteristic becomes a bit limited when a study is relying on written compositions simply because the researcher is unable to physically hear the participant’s voice, as is the case in my proposed study. Nevertheless, the LG’s strength lies in its ability to delve beneath words and capture participants’ contrapuntal and multiplicity of voice(s) that is discernible through written work as well (49). It can also be viewed as a more accurate portrayal of participants’ thoughts and experiences in that their written words provide a glimpse into their selves at a specific point in time. In essence, once their thoughts are captured, that is, written, they cannot be changed, which is not the case in face-to-face interviews whereby participants can take more time to think about and filter their answers.

Further, the nature of secondary data analysis renders me unable to consult my participants to explore emergent data themes or complete member-checking of my interpretations throughout the analysis phase of my research. Member-checking is oftentimes incorporated into qualitative research designs by involving participants throughout the analysis process in “checking” the researcher’s work so as to obtain input on the developing interpretation and to ascertain credibility (98). This then relates to the reality and possibility of multiple interpretations of the participants’ written ideas and self-expressions (59), which is in line with what Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) described. Namely, the exploratory properties that define and individualize the LG stem from “the existence of multiple potential interpretations of the findings [which] can be quite adept at generating new questions that should be explored” (p. 512). In fact, the demand for continued and further inquiry is an outcome of using the LG, albeit also posing certain challenges within the scope of the original study. However, some caution



against the reliance on and use of member-checking for verification of accuracy due to its actual “threat to the validity” (p.7) of the study as participants may not be able to easily recognize themselves in the decontextualized nature of the data (98). It is for these reasons that I relied on my own thoroughness as well as on-going consultation with my thesis advisor and committee. It was my intent to portray a comprehensive representation and analysis of the data found within each critical reflection paper.

Validity in interpretive claims was ensured through the application of several elements. For instance, the incremental trail of evidence that is built throughout the LG process allows outside parties to trace my progressive decision-making and interpretations (61). Furthermore, I engaged with an interpretive community to assist with and support my on-going interpretative activities. This consisted of individuals who share a common professional interest and familiarity in the application of the LG method, which includes my committee (44, 61, 67).

My lack of access to additional personal, background, or demographic information of my study participants other than what they have disclosed in their papers is an additional limitation. My analysis of the data and understanding of the participants will be strictly informed by the handling of the reflection papers. As such, because participants chose how much and what to disclose in their writing, some shared a lot whereas others very little; my understanding of some participants is greater than of others. In having access to this additional background information, I believe I would be able to have a more comprehensive understanding of the participants individually and collectively. This would allow me to be able to add another layer of analysis of their reflection papers, thereby rendering my analysis more comprehensive.

On a final note, my pioneering with the application of the LG with written narratives when recorded audio interviews have been the norm helps to explain my encounter with unique challenges during my data analysis that have not been addressed in previous studies. Albeit this is a limitation, it is also a source of innovation as I believe that I am setting the path for similar projects that may be undertaken in the future by other researchers employing the LG in a non-traditional manner. I acknowledge and accept that it was my responsibility to manoeuvre my way through this unknown with the intent of making new discoveries and expanding the LG’s application. This rather young method bears much potential for further growth and development.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Greater focus on the “emotional, relational, spiritual, cultural, psychological, historical and sociological epistemological perspectives” (p.444) has been highlighted as being greatly needed within dietetic education (2). The continued application of an arts module, comparable to that of Lordly’s (2010) is recommended so to help foster the development of dietetic learners and future dietetic professionals who are more adept at fostering meaningful connections with patients (2). Doing so may help enhance the development of more holistic, well-rounded professionals.

As participant 014 recommends, the journey needs to continue well beyond the scope of the NUTR 4444, Professional Practice course and its art module in order to affect the needed change. She points to the need to promote similar arts-based courses within the undergraduate program, increasing students’ and professionals’ exposure to arts-based methods, working with community to increase reach, and working alongside media to make positive changes, reasoning

that “we may need to ‘fight fire with fire’” (014). This is in an effort to incorporate art into the dietetic profession, merge the rational with the emotional, and support the development of healthy body image in our scope of practice (014). After all, it is the incorporation of the sciences and arts that help build connections with and help clients (014). Several recommendations can be made to further the incorporation and enhancement of the arts within undergraduate education in the field of dietetics, including:

- a) Martin’s (48) statement that “[T]here is no social change in isolation” (p.284) highlights the need for collective efforts to be taken within the academic environment by starting with change that is implemented in the classroom. This may be achieved through the introduction and implementation of arts-based learning at the very beginning of the undergraduate dietetics program. Doing so may enable students to have greater time and experience to enhance their skills, and to have sufficient confidence levels to apply the arts in their future professional endeavours independently and outside of a structured classroom setting (005). Such efforts can be geared to help them address their needs and vulnerabilities in a safe, supportive and inclusive space. Integrating mandatory arts-based approaches through the means of an undergraduate course in each of the four years of the program is the first step to accomplishing this goal. This may take the form of implementation within the current set of professional practice courses or in other, newly created courses. After all, emotional intelligence skills may be strengthened through ongoing immersion into the arts, which enable the student as a future health professional to be better equipped at making “appropriate decisions and [giving] effective treatments” (017). This has direct implications in the development of competent, effective dietetic professionals.
- b) The integration of artistic approaches and/or modules within other core nutrition courses of undergraduate dietetics programs would provide added benefits to enhancing students’ learning, retention and internalization of material, and for the creation of meaningful connections between the realms of science and arts. This could be one of many measures leading to the development of an embodied curriculum (89, 90). It is important for students to partake in courses within the dietetic program that holistically integrate the arts into its curriculum in a variety of ways. The arts can be used to enhance learning of clinical nutrition, research, food science, and other courses in a meaningful way. This can occur by stimulating students to think outside the box so as to make connections between their various learnings that they may not have otherwise had the opportunity to do. In doing so, the goal is that students’ learning of the arts, body image and other affectively-charged foci would be understood and integrated within the larger scope of their education rather than existing as isolated learnings. Such isolated learnings would not benefit nor shape their evolving professionalization as significantly since they would not be able to reap the benefits of such synergistic learning. Further, as this research demonstrated, this integration of arts and dietetics would assist in narrowing the distance between dietetic students and their perceived future role as dietetic professionals so as to enhance their current self-identification in this capacity.
- c) Within each of the proposed courses exploring the arts within dietetics, a different area of inquiry (relevant to the field of dietetics and dietetic students/professionals) should be

explored so as to provide students with a greater exposure to different facets of the field. Just as Lordly's senior-level Professional Practice course explored the arts in relation to body image, thereby increasing students' familiarity, comfort, and understanding with respect to this specific area of inquiry and building their dietitian identity, exploring others may provide added benefit. The goal in doing so is for students to be better equipped in applying their knowledge in a variety of scenarios within their future practice and to be more effective in their capabilities as dietitians in practice.

- d) Academic institutions should consider fostering the merging of its science and arts based programs through more workshops and inter-professional projects and/or modules. These types of interactions would prove to benefit learning in both groups of students, who in turn, can teach and expose one another in ways they would not have otherwise privy to.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

Professional identity is shaped not only by the attitudes and values inherent with our chosen profession (91), but also by certain guiding expectations. For the dietetic professional, the expectation is to be fit, healthy, slim, and exude the image of overall wellness. In practice, he/she is also expected to be able to create an inclusive and trusting environment for clients so as to enable deeper connection building to occur and ultimately, deliver quality care. The dietetic professional must be emotionally engaging, understanding, compassionate, and empathetic. Ironically, the dietetic education and professionalization process, as it currently stands, does not fully support the development of such a professional. Instead, its preference for personal and emotional detachment during the educational process challenges this very expectation. Ultimately, it becomes difficult for the dietetic professional to be able to automatically embody such affectively-based characteristics upon entering practice when the necessary foundational development has not been adequately nurtured. For this reason, it is essential that the formative stages of professional development, that is, undergraduate education, begin to embrace the personal and emotional elements that students bring with them. It is only in doing this that the disconnection between the current professionalization process and professional expectations can be bridged, and that the dietetic professional identity can become more holistic. As such, future research should explore the manner in which the affective can be incorporated into undergraduate education so as to help shape the development of a more inclusive dietetic professional identity. Identifying the specific emotions that foster such an identity should be explored in conjunction with exploring the roles that emotions play in this regard. This would allow the researcher to closely track and explore the manner in which emotions influence the identity formation of dietetic and other health professionals.

Finally, future research should consider further exploring the manner in which art could be utilized throughout the entirety of an undergraduate dietetics program to foster sustained authenticity, feelings of trust and mutual sharing between dietetic students. As participant 007 observes, the initial powerful connection he felt in the room with his classmates on the day of their presentations ceased immediately upon the conclusion of the particular class.

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## **APPENDIX A – Sample of Researcher’s Reflexive Journal**

### Participant 003

The participant identifies the learning process encountered throughout the art module as being one that was both familiar and foreign. For the most part, the participant's references to acquired knowledge relate to the practicality of using the arts in a future practice setting, such as stimulating communication with a client as well as using art to increase their comfort in doing so. The participant also self-identifies as someone who is "constantly seeking for ways to improve my interpersonal skills" (003), which denotes a sense of ownership of personal learning and development. In the reflection paper, the participant outlines the progressive steps and resources that had incrementally contributed to learning, firstly starting with the class lectures that piqued her interest and prompted greater self-exploration of the topic, followed by articles upon which the art creation, the individual art presentations, the body image conference, and others were based.

The participant was particularly struck by the high level of impact that the Photovoice method possesses in affecting its audience, particularly herself, and the manner in which she was able to gain insight into the inner feelings of those individuals living in poverty via the Photovoice method. This, in turn, prompted her to gain insight about herself and her own life: items that "[I] normally take for granted are survival tools to others" (003). The participant shares a significant realization regarding art in general, namely that "It gave me a chance to step outside of what I know and learn about something new" (003), which in itself, is fairly significant as stepping outside one's comfort zone is often a disconcerting experience for many individuals. As can be seen, this participant has gained deep and significant insights into the lives of the less fortunate, which has assisted in the development of empathy. This latter characteristic is an essential component of an effective, approachable dietetic professional as it also enables him/her to become a more effective communicator, and also plays a vital role in creating a comfortable, supportive environment for clients. Further, the realization that different communication techniques are needed to enable individuals to express themselves and their feelings in a way that is most effective for them was prompted by experiencing her classmates' art presentations. It was during these presentations that he/she noticed and subsequently realized that:

"Some people shared very personal struggles, that, if not given this opportunity may have never shared their stories with others...Not all individuals are comfortable with sharing their feelings in direct ways..." (003).

However, the participant's lack of self-disclosure of personal information relating to who she is as an individual, including past experiences, personality characteristics and other details, renders me unable to formulate a complete picture of her in my mind and to put her learnings into context. The lack of personalization within the reflective paper tells me that she may be more of an analytical type of person, or at the very least, a student who is unfamiliar with composing personal reflections employing the first-person (and very personal) pronoun, "I". Or rather she simply may not have been at a stage in her life in which she was able to articulate and personalize these experiences. As the researcher and primary listener, I can only postulate the reasoning behind this reality; however, it seems fitting that she was simply unable to do so.

Having read this reflection many times, I cannot help but sense the lack of a personal quality to the reflection paper. Many references were made to "others" and few were made in

reference to her “self”. In the occasions that self-references were made, they do not provide deeper insight into herself:

Displaying **my** art  
Made **me** discover things  
How **I** express myself

Overall, the learnings that transpired for this student centred on more concrete based knowledge acquisition. For instance, art allows for the discovery of others, gain of insight into their world, as well as the opportunity to step out of one’s own comfort zone to foster learning. Another challenge that I encounter here is that, as the primary listener, I do not know what those particular self-discoveries were and how she in fact expressed herself. Why is this participant so reluctant to share a piece of herself? Is it the constraints of having to write a mandatory, class assignment rather than expressing herself through art which enables indirect self-expression? I wonder if this is a product of having to write a “final paper” or if it is indicative of the participant’s reluctance to disclose personal information? This may be a limitation of using secondary data analysis, namely my inability to ask the participant directly and become better acquainted with her as a person beyond the constraints of the written assignment. Or, as Woodcock (2005) articulates in her work, it may be a manifestation of “institutional restraints and “cultural norms that potentially silence voices, or constrain expression” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, as cited in Woodcock, 2010).

Nonetheless, this latter factor is something that future research studies employing the LG should consider exploring through the application of primary data collection and the implementation of focus groups and/or de-briefing of participants. Doing so would allow for this gain in insight in order to better understand and gauge participants’ comfort level in self-disclosing, their readiness to open themselves up to others and examine themselves, and in their level of self-insight. After all, the LG’s exploratory nature and ability to generate new questions stemming from the conclusion of one study has been noted by researchers (58), which further substantiate the need for on-going exploration and discovery into this area of inquiry.

I was particularly struck by this participant’s statements using a collective “we” to denote a presumed collective understanding in which there is little personal ownership of the learnings. For example, the following *I* poem excerpt highlights the shifts from the personal pronouns “we” to “I,” with a dominating usage of “we” to describe *his/her* assumed, collective learning, gained insight, and personal belief:

1 <sup>st</sup> p.s.	1 <sup>st</sup> p.p.	3 <sup>rd</sup> p.p.
<i>I/me/my/myself</i>	<i>We/us/our</i>	<i>They/their/them/others</i>

I strongly agree

How **we** feel  
About **ourselves**  
Not be controlled by what **we** see  
But by how **we** truly  
Feel about **ourselves**  
Regardless of what **we** are told  
**We** “should look like”

This personal belief is wrapped within a collective statement that I interpret as relinquishing power for ownership of the statement. It denotes an agreement between her and other individuals in society in not being manipulated by the effects of media anymore.

Throughout the reflection, the participant also makes several references to certain discoveries that she had made but does not offer further explanation. This prompts me to wonder what were some “personal feeling that had motivated me to create what I did”, in terms of her art creation? In not acknowledging her own encountered feelings or which emotions were elicited in her during the presentations of art pieces, as the primary listener, it is difficult to gauge the significance of these learnings and of the art module. This is seen in the following *I* poem excerpt whereby the listener is not given further detail into *how* it is that the participant expresses herself, leaving me with questions unanswered:

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/others*

Displaying **my** art

Made **me** discover things

How **I** express myself

As can be seen in the emergent *I* poem, there was a mixture of usage of the “I,” “we,” and “they” pronouns. As mentioned earlier, the participant’s “I” statements relate to his/her acquired learnings and realizations as stemming from the various components of the art module. They give the primary listener, in this case being me, a look into the prompted realizations she acquired:

**1<sup>st</sup> p.s.**

*I/me/my/myself*

**1<sup>st</sup> p.p.**

*We/us/our*

**3<sup>rd</sup> p.p.**

*They/their/them/others*

Made **me** realize

Things that **I** take for granted

Are survival tools to **others**

**I** learnt on this journey

Impacted by the things that surround **them**

Gave **me** a chance to step outside

Of what **I** know

**I** realized that this was a chance for a small voice to be heard

Give **them** an insight in to someone else’s life

This has shown **me**

Opportunity to listen to **my** classmates

In this latter excerpt, I also notice that the participant’s realizations were made in response, or rather in reference to others. This alerts me to the realization that the participant’s acquired learnings were centred more on the needs of others (as clients/patients) as opposed to her individual self-discoveries. An example of a self-discovery could be that she is an emotional individual who feels drawn to and finds inspiration in assisting clients in their journey to self-

acceptance. Further, in her reference to the “small voice to be heard,” the participant draws attention to the power of Photovoice in eliciting and *voicing* this “small voice,” namely someone living in poverty, who is, generally speaking, a silenced member of society. Her ability to draw attention to this is impressive, showing me that she is an empathic, understanding individual who has come to the important realization that “other means are needed in order to communicate a message” (003).

Possibly one of the most moving realizations that the participant has gained is the understanding of the depth and potential that art holds in increasing awareness of important topics (e.g. body image), as well as its role as a key source of motivation, expression and discovery in its active participants. Her strong intent in further applying her learnings and putting them into practice is evidenced by her assertive, resolute statement, as characterised by its use of strong key statements as “I will,” that:

I *will* incorporate as much as I can of what I’ve learned throughout this course in to my counselling because I *believe* it *will* greatly benefit both myself and my clients, as well as the general public (003, emphasis added).

The participant points out that listening to her classmates share their art was a significant experience because she was able to hear stories that may not have been shared under different circumstances. Interestingly, she states:

Not all individuals are comfortable with sharing their feelings in direct ways, but may be more open to doing so in indirect ways such as through art (003).

I posit that the participant may be in fact referring to herself when she refers to the discomfort that her peers felt because he/she does not make direct reference to him/herself in any way. It is evident here that he/she is distancing herself from her discoveries by relaying them onto others as seen through the use of indirect statements. Although she did in fact gain some insightful realizations about the significant potential art holds in strengthening the development of empathy and more effective communication techniques, I am still left wondering what this participant learned about him/herself specifically in relation to these *external* learnings.

From my personal experience, participation in the arts allowed me to make many self-discoveries. For example, in an undergraduate professional practice class “The Art of Storytelling” in which I composed a 20 page auto-ethnographic piece, similar to the NUTR 4444 course in which my participants were enrolled, I drew on my own challenges with self-image and my conflicting relationship with food, that being one of both love and hate. The process of writing this whilst exploring my fears and sharing an excerpt with my classmates, which was both a frightening and empowering experience, I felt that I had begun to discover some very important things about myself. Firstly, I untapped my passion for writing as it turned out to be highly therapeutic. Secondly, I finally understood firsthand the emancipatory qualities of storytelling and of the production of art. In learning about myself, my needs, and my qualities, I was better able to appreciate the importance of self-discovery as a bridging point in allowing me to better help and understand *others*. The participant’s citation from Malinda Hill that “art is a less threatening and more controlled means of expression” (003) resonates with me as art allows the artist-creator to choose what he/she wishes to portray, to what extent to self-disclose and to

what extent to render it transparent. The beauty of art lies in its flexibility and artistic freedom, which was what I had discovered in my experience, too.