



Harm has been done: Ethical transgressions in becoming and being a dietitian

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In this paper, a work of testimony and memory, the authors consider the pedagogical implications of harm in becoming and being nutrition professionals i.e. dietitians. In recounting a dream, the effects of harm become visible to an audience of dietetic students, practitioners, and academics. The telling of this experience is not intended to naturalize, but to subvert the status quo of dietetic education.

Key Words: pedagogy, harm, memory, ethics, becoming, health profession education

Introduction

This paper is about making something invisible, yet embodied and emotional, come out of the shadows. It represents privileging knowledge that is stored in a memory or dream chamber (Josephs, 2008); something that is never done in dietetics. We want this paper to surprise those individuals who have never heard of such things, but also to resonate with those who have felt similarly harmed and harmful through the actions of others and selves in the name of pedagogical imperatives.

In June 2009, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded research workshop was organized and attended by a small group of dietetic students, scholars, and practitioners. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together individuals who had made significant contributions previously to dietetic theory as well as those who were interested in taking up a critical perspective towards dietetic education, training, and practice. Attendees presented their work that was then made open for discussion among the entire group. The possibilities for future transdisciplinary work, including research and scholarship was offered as one outcome of these discussions. A further outcome was the development of Critical Dietetics as a radical call to invite other scholars, practitioners, and learners

to further the disruptive scholarship initiated at the workshop. A declaration was published in Practice (professional association communiqué) late in 2009 to describe the overarching principles of Critical Dietetics (Aphramor, et al., 2009). Additionally, a discussion paper was submitted for peer-review that further detailed the impetus for naming Critical Dietetics, its relation to critical work in other areas of health scholarship, its future possibilities, and our intention to invite others to offer new contributions. Another specific motivation of the research workshop was to explore the ethical dilemmas of dietetic education, training, research, and practice. One of the ethical dilemmas that arose in the workshop was the process of becoming a dietitian through the education and training processes unique to our profession. In a situation that is not limited to our particular context in Ontario, Canada, undergraduate students wishing to become dietitians must compete with each other in fourth year for limited positions for practica. If students do not secure a practica placement in three attempts, they cannot become licensed dietitians and they must return to university for upgrading. This process has remained intractably live for decades, held in place by the professional association, the College of Dietetics, and all others involved in making decisions about dietetic education and training. The emotional

distress long kept silent for fear of reprisal is now coming to light through mixed methods research that promises confidentiality (Brady, et al., 2013; Brady, et al., 2012). This paper represents an attempt to understand the emotional and embodied responses to the harm that has been done as a result of these ethical dilemmas through critical perspectives.

What have we forgotten from our past experiences that still live in our cell's memories and constitutes our actions however subconscious those actions are? How does memory constitute dietetic culture? What stories do we tell and re-tell in a way that serves a more individualistic purpose and less so a collective aim? What lies do we need to say to get through our difficult days and to sleep at night? This paper will be a "testimony of witness" so that those who read it will also feel they have witnessed something that they cannot turn away from for if they did, the memory of it would linger. This paper will excavate and surface our complicity in doing harm in the name of individual and group preservation; preservation of the rigid contours that are opposed to or in favour of the erasure at risk if that complicity is named. Lorde (1984) calls us to transform silence into language and action and we heed that call in this paper.

Authors' positions in relation

At the time of the workshop, I (Jacqui) was an untenured professor at a mid-sized urban university in Ontario. I had previously participated as an applicant for a dietetic internship almost fifteen years prior when I was a dietetic student on the West Coast of British Columbia. I had been successful at obtaining an internship and then gone on immediately to begin a master's degree in Nutrition followed by a PhD in Education back on the West Coast. In my current role, I was contributing to the internship application process by helping to write reference letters for prospective student applicants. I remember many years ago, as a student sitting in the hallway at that West Coast university, bemoaning what I perceived was a decidedly unfair internship selection process. I had stated that when I became a dietitian, I would do whatever I could to change it for future generations of students. A professor sitting in her office overheard our conversation and joined us in the hallway. She shared that she had heard other students saying they wished it was different too, but as soon as they secured their internships, their motivations to change the process shifted. As it had turned out in my case, this professor was right and I did not return to that idea of

change for a long time, but I continued to be bothered with a system that selectively and arbitrarily decided who would become a dietitian and who would not. I had now found myself complicit in that system and it was becoming more and more difficult to live with my ongoing participation at reproducing that process that I believed did harm.

At the time of the workshop, I (Jenna) was a student in the master of health science program in nutrition communication program at the same university at which Jacqui was a faculty member. The year prior I was an undergraduate nutrition and food student, but more importantly, I, like most of my peers, was also an internship program applicant. It was April of 2008 that I learned all three of my applications were unsuccessful; I would not be receiving an internship position. Looking back, at that time I know I was devastated. I was overwhelmed with trying to figure out what I had done wrong, why I wasn't good enough? What else could I have sacrificed? I find it difficult now to really connect with the rawness of the emotions I felt then since so much has changed and now, as a doctoral student, I have some distance between the dietetic profession and myself. I went on to complete the Master's program and secure an internship position the following year. The decision to pursue doctoral studies rather than follow what might seem like the logical end to the practical training I had completed (i.e. clinical dietetic practice) was a matter of protecting myself against the further harm that I felt was imminent should I continue as a dietitian. I felt that doctoral studies would allow me to make use of the grief and frustration left lingering after my experience by helping to put an end to the cycle of harm. Doctoral studies would also afford me the space to reconnect with the critical, feminist theory I knew from my bachelor of women's studies and explore new questions about the culture of the dietetic profession that arose throughout my master and internship programs.

In relation to each other, we had worked together on two research projects. One was an action research project on creating a guide to support students and faculty in conducting course-based team work (Brady, Farrell, Fleming, Liu, Smith, & Dejonge, 2009) and the other was a research project exploring the effectiveness of Relational-Cultural Theory in nutrition counseling (Gingras & Brady, 2010). Through these collaborations we came to understand and share our challenges and difficulties of becoming and being dietitians. As we

worked together, we were better able to understand the intricacies of the challenges that were surfacing. Through a shared experience and appreciation for feminist theory and women's food writing (Fisher, 2004), we were better able to language our complex realities and positions within those realities; although our experiences were still not easy or reconcilable with our personal values and ethics.

Although Jenna's position as a doctoral student in Health Studies has enabled some distance from the visceral pain associated with these ethical dilemmas, Jacqui remains tied to the processes required to perform necessary functions in order to uphold the status quo. As much as she tries to disrupt the status quo, the structures are uniquely rigid and resistant to change. Being part of this structure still has embodied implications that surfaced in the form of a dream on the eve of her paper presentation at the Beyond Nutritionism research workshop.

The dream

Jacqui's remembering of her telling (remembering the workshop – June 2009)

I had not intended on sharing my dream with our group that morning. To the contrary, I had prepared a response to the three papers in relation to what Herzfeld (2009) describes as a "cultural politics of gesture," since the three papers represented to me three discursive gestures towards the ways and means that knowledges are subordinated. The three papers offered compelling gestures regarding the subordination of knowledge; transdisciplinary knowing, experiential knowing, and knowing of Other.

Instead, during the dark folds of night, my subconscious offered up another gesture – a dream, a nightmare. It was a gesture so vivid that I would not ignore it when it came time for me to perform my discussant role at the workshop. I had not written down anything about my dream, but I recounted the experience with clarity and calmness. I claimed the power of the feminine in her wisdom to reveal what my body held as the gesture that was needed in that moment (Anzaldúa, 1999; Josephs, 2008).

The dream started with me among a group of university colleagues and students in a large banquet room. The tone was celebratory; we were dressed up, tables skirted, fine china, warm lights. It was internship selection night and we were all gathered to acknowledge

and congratulate the students who would be deemed worthy of an internship.

The selection process was a matter of life and death. I seem to recall that faculty members would give instructions on how the selection process would unfold. It was then up to the student to make the final decision. I shared how I had passed a rifle over to Jenna with the instructions that she was to shoot and kill a number of students that she deemed unfit to be interns. My direction to Jenna was impassionate and detached. It was a matter of cold fact that she was to carry out this violence. I smiled patronizingly as she took the gun from my hands. In my dream, she looked doubtful, but resigned to kill.

[my stomach is in knots and my breathing shallow as I remember and revise this story]

Her first shot erupted in a ball of white light. There was no blood, only light and piercing noise. The light from the shot exploded across the chest of a dutifully prim sister student. She was gone. Dead. But, before Jenna took aim at the next student, she slowly turned the barrel of the rifle towards me. My smile quickly faded. I was scared. I shook my head and told her to follow instructions and reminded her of what she needed to be doing. She deliberately turned the gun away from me and aimed at another student peer. She didn't fire, but instead, once again turned the gun methodically towards me. This time she didn't heed my terrified plea to not point the gun at me. I noticed a look in her eye as she bent to peer through the scope – something had changed in Jenna. She had turned cold and calculating. I was certain she was going to pull the trigger and I begged her to stop. I realized I was going to die and I could hear myself screaming "No!"

As I cast my eye towards those in attendance at the workshop, I could see Jenna and another participant wiping tears away from their faces. I became aware of the impact of my words and felt a twinge of remorse. I thought perhaps I should have changed Jenna's identity in the dream, but it was too late. I finished recounting my dream preparing for the consequences of the telling.

Jenna was now taking delight in my fear. I could see the curve of a smile play across her mouth. Very quickly, event security surrounded her and pried the gun from her hands. I was gasping for air, realizing how close I had come to death. As they led her past me on their way out

of the room, I quietly asked Jenna, “Why?” She replied slowly and calmly, “Because...I wanted you to know... what it felt like.” My hand flew to my mouth in horror. I woke up. My dream was over.

The room was silent. I may have repeated, “I wanted you to know what it felt like” for emphasis since that was the entire meaning of the dream for me; that as educators we have forgotten what it feels like and we are enacting extreme violence in that forgetting. I then indicated that much harm had been done and I wanted to report myself to the College of Dietitians of Ontario as the perpetrator of that harm – that my actions must be considered unethical and such I was to be disciplined. This self-accusation was more than hyperbole since the Registrar of the College of Dietitians of Ontario was present at the workshop. When I uttered that claim, I did so not only as an individual making a singular assertion against myself, but as a collective of educators and gate-keepers who are complicit in a process that does harm. My indictment was read in different ways by those in attendance, but what I recall was how clear, calm, and convinced I felt that my claim be taken seriously as more than a gesture, but as a long-overdue acknowledgement and apology. I was determined to stand strong in that vulnerability because I remembered what that felt like and I was too mad to turn away. Then the witnesses spoke.

Jenna’s remembering and reaction

It was during the morning session of the second day of the three-day workshop that Jacqui recounted a dream she had had the previous night. The morning panel assembled at the front of the room and in turn, each presented the papers they had prepared to share at the workshop.

I can’t remember who the presenters were that morning; although I have lingering feelings of regret for them since the events that ensued meant their work was not taken up by the group.

Jacqui was the discussant. I don’t recall her addressing the papers as the other discussants had done. Instead she began by telling us about her dream.

Recalling the violence in Jacqui’s dream still makes an uneasy knot of regret, sadness, and anger take residence in my throat. Tears still pool in the rims of my eyes. I wonder if the other workshop participants

understood then how real the violence in Jacqui’s dream actually is?

For me, the energy generated during the first day of seemed to come to a head-I felt that the collegiality of this like-minded group was threatened. Jacqui’s retelling of her dream touched a collective nerve, which marked a turning point in the workshop. Finally, after the niceties of the first day, we were getting down to business.

Feelings left over from being rejected the first time I applied for internship of course, has made my reaction to hearing Jacqui’s dream even more real. Since then I have consoled and commiserated with many other students who have been turned down for internship.

They wonder as did I, ‘What did I do wrong?’ Their questions echo that chastising inner voice that plagued me for months afterwards. I looked forward to the respect, validation, fulfillment, and professionalism that being an RD had promised. I had worked so hard and sacrificed so much to so completely squeeze myself into the nutrition student prototype; I had the grades, I volunteered, I worked, and I dutifully made daily trips to the gym to make sure I looked the part.

The dream, as I recall it, began with a group of soon-to-be graduates of the nutrition program. We had been gathered (herded?) into a gymnasium where we were to compete for the few coveted internship spots available the following year. I was one of the student competitors. During Jacqui’s retelling I pictured a gregarious group of young women festooned with pleased-to-meet you smiles and suffused with the same nervous excitement that percolated my own classes during the lead up to internship announcements. Jacqui was there to referee the competition. The students were to decide amongst themselves who deserved an internship and who was to be left behind; who had measured up, worked the hardest, smiled the widest, played the part, and who did not. Not getting an internship meant literally facing fire from the other students and I was the executioner. I aimed and fired. In the dream Jacqui tried to stop the violence she was witnessing but I turned the gun on her. She asked what I was doing and I stated flatly: “I just wanted you to know what it felt like”.

This image provoked in me so many feelings that have long stewed in my body. Anger with a system that is permitted by faculty, internship coordinators, Dietitians of Canada, and the College of Dietitians of Ontario that pits students against themselves and others

and that punishes those who fail with rejection and reticence. Lingering guilt about my own complicity—the result of small acts of omission and chosen silences—that were required to survive. The physical and emotional violence that I had witnessed, suffered, and inflicted on myself and others confronted me. I couldn't hold back; these feelings bubbled over and streaked my face with searing tears.

Two workshop attendees sitting on either side of me took turns rubbing my back as Jacqui told us about her dream. Someone passed tissue.

I was so embarrassed and ashamed. I was ashamed at the violent role I played in Jacqui's dream and embarrassed that it made me cry. I was embarrassed for the other attendees; that they had to witness this feeble, blubbing student break down over a dream. I felt that I had made people uncomfortable. I took it too far. I felt the room stiffen as everyone realized I was crying.

Making sense

Jacqui's response to Jenna (today)

I don't remember things exactly that way, but more importantly your retelling has kindled a tight knot of trepidation and regret in my jaw and belly. I am aware of the tightness in my chest, the shallowness of my breath. I am more fearful now than when I was actually recounting the dream – because I know the effect the telling has had. That is my hope for our paper, I suppose, to have others reading it to feel the effect the telling has had.

I was so impulsive in telling this dream, of implicating you by name, of not asking first. It was by some standards (my own?) an ethical breach, and an empathic rupture. I risked many things in that telling that I didn't even consider until now and that makes me feel small and unfeeling towards a friend and respected colleague. Like Mosselson (2010) who shared her nightmares elicited by the trauma of the stories told to her by her research participants with her supervisory committee, I fear “my reflection was actually narcissism” (p. 490), but my recounting of my own nightmare was not intended to draw the focus to me, instead to the conditions that would make such a nightmare possible.

Moving out from the individual impacts, I can see how my telling was a political move, a provocation that happened despite my respect for Jenna. Can I make

a political gesture without jeopardizing treasured relationships? Indeed, but sometimes my actions don't reflect that belief.

The dream is a powerful embodiment of my complicity. I held it out to all for the viewing. People had different reactions. Some spoke, some didn't. Holding it out like that was so typical of me – self-aggrandizing for the purpose of shock and awe and disruption. It often works best that way. Our collective writing process holds the potential of me doing things differently (less narcissistic) and for that I am grateful.

Jenna's response to Jacqui (today)

There are two components here that I must respond to; first is the content of the dream itself and the second is your action/agency in the telling of it. A word in your last line summarizes for me what this dream in itself and then the telling of it is about and can spark in others. That is, witnessing - the opportunity, the ability, the willingness to bear witness and then to speak a truth about taking that responsibility.

I think the dream speaks to your willingness to witness - to call yourself complicit. Also, in telling of the dream you are making yourself vulnerable in telling of how you have been complicit in inducting students into oppressive roles - as students vying for internship position and then, eventually as dietitians. How you told your dream to the group also reveals your desire or perhaps need to bear witness and to have others bear witness to your complicity.

Another point stuck me in your response to the question we posed ourselves. That is, your question “how does memory constitute dietetic culture”? I say it is a memory marred by harm and violence and silences. The silence has allowed that harm to fester and harden. It cloaks that un-named thing that I want the radicalness and shock of this paper to reveal. I picture the reveal of a painting-dramatic-and the painting captures the hearts and minds of onlookers.

How else does this dream speak to who you are? You are complicit in the machinery that does harm, but yourself have come out of that machine. Are you as well a student in that room? Do you place yourself there as well? Now, over three years after that original telling of your dream, what now? Are you consciously complicit?

Jacqui: I believe that I am consciously complicit; working to undo the structures that harm, but not quite having the power to achieve that in the most emphatic way

needed. While I remain suspended in the space between what is and what could be, I want it to be true that “Accurate scholarship can/unearth the whole offence” (Auden in Forche 1993, p. 164). I believe that there is a place for social justice in the academy, a place for creative resistance, a place for taking a stand and speaking up. I want change, but it is lonely, arduous work. Butler (1999) confirms “While we continue to try to change the world, we remain deeply tied by desire and the need for recognition to the world as it is (as quoted in Love, 2004, p. 18-19). I am bound by my desire for change and recognition simultaneously and I am exploited because of my longing by positioning myself as an instrument of (self) abuse.

We invited another workshop participant (a witness) to contribute to the dialogue we had initiated about the dream through this paper. Lucy Aphramor, a poet, offered this poem as a means of further deepening our discursive understanding of the incident under exploration. The poem was initially drafted during the research workshop while Jacqui was recounting her dream and the ensuing reaction from witnesses in attendance. It becomes another means for understanding the experience under scrutiny.

Bulletin

I want you to know how it feels
it feel like this terror is a muscle you just need to
work on it

these moves are slick as obsequious
my heart is a fist full of tips and hints and check lists
I could scream or cry
I am all smiles
personable as soup

fanatical happens we have all taken aim and polished
off and oiled ourselves I am a specimen I am defined
by eyes I stripped myself down and fished about in
the bits

oranges are a fruit

on the kitchen table got everything labelled my name
escapes me temporarily But I have grammar, the
language

on my side *It's a steal*
my body so fits I think I can pass for one
where's the harm

I want you to know how it feels
reaching this rank seeking
standing
with lungs like emptying drip feeds

out of the blue a patient once said
I dreamt my breast floated by me are you equipped?
I dieted myself up to this. If only. emphatic trying for
trust
knowing we have all been complicit. As if

Where did you get that gun? I like it. We too have tools,
a practice target for bodies. A regimen. A licence
that applies, outsiders. Capital! People remember guns.
What else was said that day? You didn't believe me.
Drilling it in.

Oranges are rich in which vitamin?

We had a lesson once where words were messier I
couldn't work out what
was expected. When a pregnant woman eats oranges
she bites in through
the skin. She is on the youngish side, on a poor side
walk. Side kick comes
to mind, I don't know why. She is spitting pips. The sun
is a dusty blood orange
up for sale. I want to help her, to teach her to budget.
How much caffeine I ask
you. Counting
myself lucky.
It was another time something dripped down my cheek.

Oranges are not what?
remind me of how

I used to be

Writing poetry and reflecting on the meanings of our
dreams are interconnected. As Freud (quoted by Neale,
2012) suggested “The unconscious mechanisms familiar
to us in the ‘dream-work’ are . . . also operative in the
processes of imaginative writing” (p. 3). The emotions
that this poem evokes for me (Jacqui) are as real as
my dream; in reading this poem, I am affirmed that the
sharing of my dream with witnesses was heard in the
way I had intended. And moreso, the meaning of this
one dream has been artfully extended in the depths of
Lucy's poem. Being a dietitian herself, she has illustrated
the myriad injustices I have also experienced as “another
time something dripped down my cheek”. Poem and
dream together explain how feelings of professional
powerlessness are inscribed on and through my body
and my psyche.

Discussion

Through memory work, dialogue, and poetry we have come to recount and re/member a violent dream that was shared at a research workshop involving discussions about what it means to become a (healthcare) professional, a dietitian more specifically. From this line of inquiry, a testimony of witness, we now read further into the experience, but all the while recognizing that “the concept of women’s experiences risk stabilizing - instead of deconstructing or challenging - existing identities and gendered power orders” (Jansson, Wendt, & Åse 2008, p. 229). By surfacing our experiences we do not wish to stabilize our particular situatedness as gendered professionals. Instead we intend to risk disrupting those identities, calling them into question, and firmly acknowledging the influence of the social forces that inscribe those identities. As Josephs (2008) offers, “To write is to reiterate experience, and so to transform it. In the process the ‘story’, or meaning, is also transformed and a new insight may arise” (p. 263). In particular, we would like to acknowledge three prevailing themes that have surfaced in the sharing of our experiences within the social fabric of what it means to become (and be) a professional; horizontal violence, complicity, and the erotic.

Horizontal violence in dietetic education

My (Jacqui’s) earliest awareness of horizontal violence came by way of Lucy Aphramor when she recommended I read Dawn Freshwater’s (2000) work. In her paper, Freshwater (2000) explains horizontal violence as the aggression that is enacted by members of oppressed groups towards each other due to the frustrations inherent in being part of a system that has excluded them from accessing power. The examples drawn from Freshwater’s (2000) experience pertain to nursing, but could be applied to dietetics, although nothing has been published about horizontal violence in our profession until now. Although horizontal violence as a phenomenon has not appeared in dietetics’ professional literature, we acknowledge our own experiences dealing with “hostile undercurrents” and “professional terrorism” as practitioners, educators, and researchers in our field. With bringing violent dreams into the light for close and critical examination, we intend to give a language to the suffering we have endured, we have been complicit in, and we wish to end. In order for these painful manifestations of intra-group hostility to stop, we must recognize the structures that make

possible the violence; the “uncritical acceptance of the dominant groups’ system within the health care culture” (Freshwater, 2000, p. 482).

The irrepressible and incompatible forces of competition between and isolation from each other occur within structures that continually and ruthlessly situate students as vulnerable targets. Competition juxtaposed with isolation from social supports provides opportunities for anticipated, but shameful consequences; painful, avoidable, and destructive actions. The dream described above brings into sharp relief the lateral (horizontal) violence that exists for students who are pitted against their peers in competition for limited internship spots required for licensure as dietitians. But equally as troubling is how leaders in our field enable the violence by reinforcing damaging patterns of professional socialization. Roberts (as quoted in Freshwater, 2000) “notes that leaders generally adopt the values of the dominant group and further oppress their own kind” (p. 482). How can we have been so blind to the harm we have caused others in attempting to quench our own angry thirst for authority?

The competition between students as the most vulnerable of our professional community is the antithesis of the culture we wish to embolden, but as the decades pass with no proposed changes to the system in sight, we verify our collective stranglehold on being recognized by the world as it is (Love, 2004). Nothing changes and more and more people are harmed, internalizing feelings of anger and rage until one day, these feelings explode. Those who remain unharmed (or, more accurately, less harmed) find themselves working alongside those who have been subjected to violence. Black and blued by these cycles, we lose sight of why we entered the field in the first place. We begin to look for a way out.

Returning to Freshwater (2000), we read that the means to begin healing by breaking cycles of harm is to become conscious of our individual and collective contributions to the status quo through transformative education, reflexivity, and conscientization. Friere (1972) described the process of conscientization as “education that frees the oppressed to ‘see through’ the consciousness imposed by the dominant group” (as quoted in Freshwater, 2000, p. 483). Although Freshwater (2000) calls for critical reflection, we extend that call instead for reflexivity; the iterative process of self-exploration, contextualization, examination, observation, action, and change. It isn’t enough in our view to become aware

through critical reflection; we must be willing to have our self-examination lead to personal and professional transformation (Ellis, 2005; Mosselson, 2010). A comparison with the efforts of disability studies scholars may be fruitful here, “For when disabled scholars of disability studies tell us that some of the truths we face are not pretty, it is the job of audiences, the public and institutions to listen and learn, to act with us and join in the Unruly Salon of social transformation” (Roman, 2009, p. 9). This active process resists complicity, collusion, and the prevailing order of things. There are great risks to be sure, but none greater and more stultifying than acting in our own subordination.

Complicity

Theories of complicity have been employed across several disciplines including literary, cultural, and communication studies, as well as gender and queer studies (McPhail, 2009). Common applications of complicity theories have sought to elucidate contemporary issues including race, gender, and class oppression. Applied to racism, Orbe (2008) explains that complicity theory rests on two ideas: 1) racism is the product of a binaristic language that creates false divisions among individuals and groups based on discursively constituted, fictitious racial identities; 2) racism is the result of complex social relations in which the oppressors and oppressed are erroneously reduced to dichotomous, uni-dimensional groups (quoting McPhail, 1994, p. 137). Complicity occurs when individuals use or accept language that emphasizes difference and privileges dominant groups, or acquit themselves of the oppression and violence that are the result of discursively constituted differences. Nevertheless, complicity theory posits that we cannot escape the complex social relations that result in oppression since we all, intentionally or not, exist and operate within oppressive systems, but as a first step in addressing oppression we must recognize our unfailing complicity (McPhail, 2009). Finally, complicity theory posits that by discursively, cognitively, and spiritually popularizing our inherent interconnectedness and interdependence as humans we might overcome racism and other forms of oppression (Orbe, 2008).

Applied here, complicity theory provides a strong case for each of us to acknowledge our own complicity in perpetuating the harm that has been (and is being) done in the name of dietitian education. One failing of complicity theory, however, is that it does not specify how to translate the acknowledgement of complicity

into practice. How might I (Jenna) actually help change the oppressive systems in which I am complicit, in this case dietitian education and the culture of dietetics? In her research on the possibilities of anti-oppressive practices for feminists doing international aid work, de Jong (2009) explores the possibilities, dangers, and intersections of two theoretical responses to questions of translating acknowledgement to practice: reflexivity, taken from feminist theory, and ‘constructive complicity’, from post-colonial theory. Primarily used in research, reflexivity has stipulated “an interrogation of Self and Other that both paid attention to the power structures that influenced the research (e.g. sexist, racist, class structures) and to the relational aspect of (research) identity (the position of the researcher versus the researched)” (de Jong, 2009, p. 389). Constructive complicity similarly demands introspection, but “argues for a responsibility that is articulated through an acknowledgement of complicity” (de Jong, 2009, p. 390). While de Jong finds that these theories share some propitious commonalities such as the need, particularly among dominant groups, to reflect on one’s power and privilege in the production of knowledge, she concludes that to avoid the pitfalls of each theory (ie. guilt, cooptation, assumed transparency), “a constructive complicity needs a rigorous reflexivity” (p. 399). In other words, being reflexive about our complicity is never a completed project, but must be continuously exhumed in contemplation of our daily practice.

Neither reflexivity nor constructive complicity provides a ‘how-to’ for putting an end to oppressive structures, let alone those in dietetics. This is not however, the intention of these theories. These theories urge us to explore our practices as dietetic students, educators, practitioners, and researchers and acknowledge our own involvement in upholding the status quo. Realizing the way forward means putting reflexivity and constructive complicity into practice as individuals and as a profession to devise our own approaches to creating more relational, supportive, and sustainable means of educating dietitians. For myself (Jenna), this means refusing to forget my experiences as a student and internship applicant now that I have completed the final stages of licensure; refusing to forget by being reflexive about my being and becoming a dietitian means not contributing to the culture of complicity that has sustained the current structure of dietetic education and training for decades or longer. Moreover, claiming responsibility, to me, means doing so in a sincere and

public way; it is not enough that I keep hidden, for fear of erasure from the profession, my realization that I have benefitted from the oppressive structures by which I have also been harmed. Sharing this writing is part of my effort to be accountable for my role in creating change.

The erotic

In the face of power-over relationships, violence, and complicity, Lorde (2000) urges a return to erotic power. She calls not for a the small-minded sexual expression of eroticism, but reminds us that the erotic comprises “The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.” She cautions us that not doing so fertilizes fear and oppression:

The fear that we cannot grow keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women...In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being what are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.

Lorde’s (2000) vision of erotic power offers a way to begin imagining an alternative to the power-over relationships and complicity that have upheld the reiteration of harm, which reverberate throughout our profession. McAllister (2009) and colleagues write, “Through narrative, one can appreciate embodied knowing: what an experience feels like in a subjective and close way, rather than what it looks like in an objective and dispassionate way; one can learn facts as well as social impacts; one can be moved towards action rather than simply understanding” (p. 157). It is by storying our experiences through dream-telling and dream-remembering that we have endeavored to share the embodied experiences of becoming and being a dietitian, becoming and being complicit.

It is through storytelling and truth telling that we may emancipate dietetics from the continual reiterations of harm. Through storytelling we may imagine a dietetic erotic. In line with Lorde’s vision, Razack (1993) proposes that storytelling promises to foster greater knowledge and understanding of self and others. Storytelling lays bare the emotional, embodied, and relational aspects of our experiences and provides a foundation from which we may collaboratively create and integrate critical theory to spark change in dietetics. Moreover, by

embracing stories we reject the privileging of knowledge solely based on claims of objectivity, empiricism, and expertise and the power-over relationships inherent in these entitlements (Gord, 2010). Storytelling a dietetic erotic is a call to another reality; an emancipatory dream for our collective future.

Conclusion

In this paper we endeavoured to make visible damaging educational structures through the sharing of our own experiences within those structures. In sharing a dream and our responses to the telling and retelling of that dream, we emphasize that this not an attempt to accomplish “a sort of naturalization of ‘the way things are’”, but a means to make possible “a radical understanding, or an emancipatory politics” (Jansson, Wendt, & Åse, 2008, p. 229) of the situation as a means for transformation. Although we cannot guarantee what will come from our endeavour, we remain steadfastly committed to change given the harm that continues unabated in our profession.

We have asked ourselves, “Can we ethically recommend/advise in-coming students to pursue dietetics as a career?” This is a loaded question given how we have benefitted from the status that being a member of this profession has offered. However, with becoming more and more aware that harm is being done in the name of becoming such a professional, we have now come to the realization that it is impossible for us to continue to recommend this profession to those considering it as a future career. This puts Jacqui in an ethical dilemma particularly since she is a faculty member in a program that prepares future dietitians. How does her refusal to recommend dietetics square with the institutional imperative to recruit students to the program? Is it possible to encourage people to seek a professional degree in nutrition and not seek a professional career in dietetics? Is it more advisable to encourage students from their first days in the program to research the process required to become a dietitian and to provide the support and resources by which to conduct this research? It seems that there are no simple answers to this dilemma that prevent complicity with a system that does harm to those wishing to become dietitians in Ontario.

In sharing our truth of this experience, we quickly realized that we each remembered the sharing in slightly different ways. This reminds us that memory work is fraught with difficulties and tensions.

Our interpretative stance, like Jansson and colleagues (2008) “has consistently been a focus on the interaction between social and power structures such as gender, nation/ethnicity, and knowledge/truth” (p. 230). We have not set forth “the truth”, but a story and a poem with which we can invite alternative interpretations and theorizations. We see this as one of many ways of resisting the *status quo* and likely the only way this intractable situation will ever shift.

We have been changed by sharing this story through the writing of this paper. By setting our story for interrogation by theories of horizontal violence, complicity, the erotic we have come to a more complex understanding of the influences that have shaped and will shape our experiences. We hope, as indicated in our introduction, that readers of this story will be moved to a new frame of understanding as well and grapple with us in determining a new way forward.

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Bios

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