

# Learning to Listen: An Analysis of Applying the Listening Guide to Reflection Papers

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## Abstract

The Listening Guide (LG) is a relational, voice-centered method to analyzing qualitative research data. This article provides an account of how the LG was modified for a study that examined personal critical reflection papers written by 27 fourth-year dietetics university students after they participated in an arts-informed module on body image in a dietetics professional practice course. By relying on the main principles of the LG, we demonstrate how the LG can help us to listen and hear previously unnoticed and underappreciated voices. The purpose of this article is to serve as a source of guidance and support for researchers looking to implement the LG method beyond its original purpose, which was for transcribed interviews.

## Keywords

Listening Guide, qualitative research, reflexivity, challenges, dietetics, university students

## Introduction

This article is based on a study that involved a unique application of the Listening Guide (LG). The LG, developed by psychologist Carol Gilligan and associates, is a relational, voice-centered method to analyze qualitative research data (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003). It emerged as a powerful research tool in the 1980s to address the concern that women's voices in particular had not been adequately represented or heard in research studies (Gilligan et al., 2003). As such, the LG provides an appropriate channel for listening carefully to, capturing underlying themes in, and presenting women's voices. Recognizing that the researcher is an active instrument within qualitative research, the LG's design requires the researcher to partake in reflexivity throughout the entirety of the research process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Richards & Morse, 2007). Further, it places participants' voices at the heart of the research (Cruz, 2003; Woodcock, 2005) by providing a space to listen to voices of those individuals who are otherwise suppressed in society (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Its intent is to "[capture] the layered nature of psychological experience" and meaning making (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 11). The LG process involves four steps called a "listening." These are (1) listening for the plot, (2) constructing *I* poems, (3) listening for contrapuntal voices, and (4) composing an analysis (Gilligan et al., 2003). These steps are discussed in detail below.

The LG's inherent flexibility is depicted by the practice of coding a specific segment of text multiple times, corresponding

with each step's particular goal, which other qualitative coding schemes are not able to equally accommodate (Cruz, 2003; Gilligan et al., 2003; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). While the LG has largely been applied to the analysis of transcribed face-to-face interviews, in this study, we extended the LG's application to written narratives. Such use of the LG has only been briefly cited in published research (Gilligan et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 1995).

The purpose of this article is to serve as a source of guidance and support for researchers looking to implement the LG method beyond its original method, which was for interview transcriptions. We provide an account of how the LG was modified for a study that examined personal written critical reflection papers written by 27 fourth-year university students enrolled in a dietetics professional practice course. The reflection papers were course assignments written by students after they participated in an arts-informed module, which focused on body image in the field of dietetics.

This article is based on a research study that was conducted by the first author, Sanja Petrovic, for a master's thesis. The second author, Dr. Daphne Lordly, acted as the thesis advisor, and the third and fourth authors, Drs. Brigham and Delaney,

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comprised the graduate thesis committee. In these latter two roles, the research team: Lordly, Brigham, and Delaney, provided expert input and guidance. Each of the authors draws on different disciplinary backgrounds and all are active qualitative researchers.

Lordly's practice and research include an interest in examining emerging pedagogical approaches to education practice to expand notions of what counts as dietetic knowledge and how dietetic knowledge is acquired (Lordly, 2014). Dietetics is a profession deeply rooted within science and the values associated with objective, abstract, and scientific knowledge. Gingras and Atkins (2010) describe how dietetic practice is primarily organized to "privilege science-based epistemologies, is constituted by professional nutrition discourse and it neglects to acknowledge the emotionality dietetic practice" (p. 304). Lordly and colleagues had previously used aspects of the LG in an earlier study (Lordly, Mclellan, Gingras, & Brady, 2012). The LG, as a voice-centered relational method, is in keeping with Lordly's belief that research participants' stories are rich sources of overlooked knowledge that can be unraveled and explored contributing to a more fulsome understanding of theirs and others experiences as they related to dietetic practice. From a theoretical perspective, implicitly and explicitly, she draws frequently on theories of socialization and role; adult education; and more recently feminist theory.

The third author, Dr. Susan Brigham, is a professor in a faculty of education, specializing in adult education. She positions herself in the critical postpositivist research paradigm as a feminist, antiracist scholar. She uses arts-informed methods in her research with diverse marginalized groups (cf. Brigham et al, 2014; Brigham, 2012, 2011a, 2011b) to attempt to understand how research participants view the world, and how and why they hold their views. She is interested in exploring the role of emotions, the embodied nature of learning, and the political role of research. She believes that bringing voices of often silenced groups from the margins to the center has the potential of empowering the speaker as well as the listener (Delgado, 1988-1989). Her interest in the LG is in the way it can assist researchers to more fully attend to the "multiplicity of voices" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 165) of research participants, provoke new insights, challenge our positions as researchers and educators, and unsettle meanings that are often taken-for-granted in words.

The fourth author, Dr. Mary Delaney, holds a cross-appointment in the Departments of Women's Studies and Psychology, where she teaches courses in research methods in both disciplines. At this specific disciplinary juncture, she addresses diverse and often conflicting epistemological positions, which is a focus of much of her research. Of greatest relevance to this project is her research on the use of autoethnography as a method to study chronic illness in women, with its focus on the power of language to shape understandings of self and social location, particularly cultural imperatives to erase disability and illness (Delaney & Bell, 2008).

The first author partook in the reflexive journaling component of the study as her lead role involved frontline analysis of

the data set. When the first-person pronoun, "I," is utilized in the context of this article, it is referring to the first author's experiences and voice, whereas the first-person plural pronoun, "we," captures the collective team's experiences.

For the logistical implementation and application of the LG to our research scope and data set we note a general lack of guidance in the literature. One of the challenges we found, as did Mauthner and Doucet (2003), centered on the manner in which researchers incorporate their reflexive accounts within their data analysis and final research write-up. Also, the manner in which the last step of the LG, appropriately titled "composing an analysis," takes form was found to be a challenging area. This step integrates the entirety of analyses generated up to that point in a cohesive, integrative manner.

This article documents the research process of navigating the steps of the LG. We believe, as qualitative researchers, that research is equally characterized by the results as it is by the process. By disclosing the inherent learnings and challenges we experienced in using the LG, other prospective researchers may benefit by having more available tools to be able to better recognize and address such difficulties in their own studies and enrich their research experience.

## Our Study's Purpose

The "Understanding Adolescence Study," carried out by Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995), was one of the pioneering research studies utilizing the LG as a means of providing an inclusive place "to listen to and understand voices ... [of individuals] ... that have been missing from or inadequately represented" (p. 17) in research. Following the purpose of the Taylor et al. (1995) study and other studies (e.g., Brown, 2001; Brown & Gilligan, 1992), we used the LG to gain insight into the underexplored experiences of senior-level undergraduate dietetics students stemming from their immersion into the arts, through an arts-informed module that was part of a fourth-year course.

The arts-informed module focused on the theme of body image and the field of dietetics. After the module was completed, students were asked to write personal critical reflections, in which they would "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" (Lordly, 2010, p. 8). The purpose of the assignment was to elicit a personal examination of their progressive understanding, thought processes, and other acquired learnings in relation to the "significance, influence or potential" of the possibilities that art holds in dietetic practice (Lordly, 2010, p. 8). In also examining the types of connections that were fostered from the arts module, we found that the development of professional, interpersonal, and individual connections to be the most poignant. After the assignments were completed, Lordly recognized them as a source of rich data that required careful analysis for their deep meaning. We found the LG to allow us to most effectively be attentive to the students' "voices" within their written reflection course assignment. The

second author's role in this research was multifaceted, including that of professor and researcher, adding an additional layer of understanding of the context of participants' experiences.

We applied the LG to analyze the 27 written critical reflection papers. Reflection papers ranged from two to eight pages in double spaced and typewritten format. They lent themselves ideally to the application of the LG for framing the data analysis. This was amplified by students' use of the first-person perspective, for example, using the "I" pronoun, in the composition of their reflection papers, which is not widely encouraged in a science-focused dietetics program. Moreover, students were asked to integrate their learnings and connections in a personally meaningful way so as to demonstrate their progress through the art module. Lordly's (2010) goal of eliciting students' reflections created an entryway for gaining access into their experiences and thought processes to which we would not have otherwise been privy.

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Mount Saint Vincent University research ethics board. Participants in the research signed a letter of informed consent (IC) that stated the results of the research would be disseminated through publication or at conferences. Participants agreed to have individual data used for illustrative purposes as part of IC. Within the IC process, participants were also made aware that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed.

## The LG

The majority of published studies utilizing the LG as their main method of analysis did so with in-depth interview transcriptions, which was the original design implemented by Gilligan and associates (e.g., Balan, 2005; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Paliadelis & Cruickshank, 2008; Raider-Roth, 2005; Taylor et al., 1995; Woodcock, 2010). Yet, the LG's inherent flexibility has allowed for its application to different sources of data such as novels and diaries, although these sources are used and reported in the literature to a lesser extent in comparison to the conventional interview transcripts (Gilligan et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 1995). In our study, as noted above, written reflection papers were analyzed.

The LG process involves four listening steps: (1) listening for the plot, (2) constructing *I* poems, (3) listening for contrapuntal voices, and (4) composing an analysis (Gilligan et al., 2003). It involves the examination of the manner in which individuals speak, write, and otherwise articulate their thoughts (Brown, 2001). Embedded within each of these steps is the researcher himself or herself, an active instrument within the research process (Williams, 2010) as captured through his or her reflexive writings. As such, each listening step is comprised of in-depth examinations of participants' voices as framed by the researcher's inherent subjectivities.

Through the application of this method's detailed, layered listening, we were able to closely study the manner in which participants speak about themselves. In this section, we discuss each of these steps, followed by an in-depth discussion of the application of these steps to our data.

## Description of the LG

The qualitative researcher is wholly part of the research process. For this reason, his or her emotional reactions and personal involvement with the data, in whichever way these manifest during the analysis process, are relevant to the study. Specifically, determining the manner in which these emotional reactions interplay with the data and participants and utilizing them to strengthen the overall data analysis are important factors to consider. The ongoing reflexive process has enabled me, the first author, to have my own voice heard through an appropriate channel (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). However, it is this same reflexive practice that rightfully places me under "critical scrutiny by [my] readers" (Bloom, 1998, p. 9), as an integral component of ensuring accountability of the research. As researchers, our position of power within the research relationship renders it important to remain aware of our own emotional reactions (Bloom, 1998; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). For this reason, Brown and Gilligan (1992) suggest we continually ask ourselves the following questions:

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).

It is such questions that guided my reflexive journaling throughout the study.

### Step 1: Listening for the Plot

Step 1 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 (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 2003). He or 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 (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Cruz, 2003; Gilligan et al., 2003). Starting in this step, the researcher partakes in reflexive writing. Mauthner and Doucet (1998, p. 126) expound:

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.

These reflexive accounts are then integrated into the final analysis stage, Step 4, composing an analysis.

## Step 2: Constructing I Poems

The second listening involves creating *I* poems, which is a distinguishing feature of the LG (Gilligan et al., 2003). During this step, the researcher reviews and underlines each first-person singular “I” pronoun utilized by the participant accompanied by the subsequent words. This is done in an effort to become better acquainted with the manner that the participant speaks of and describes himself or herself (Gilligan et al., 2003). Particular attention is directed toward possible racial, cultural, and class differences and uncovering what may not be explicitly stated by the participant (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Cruz, 2003; Gilligan et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 1995; Woodcock, 2010). The participant’s voice is given precedence to be heard prior to being influenced by the researcher’s personal views of the narrative, facilitating a more thorough understanding of his or her world (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Paliadelis & Cruickshank, 2008). The second step provides “a way of coming into the relationship that works against distancing ourselves from that person in an objectifying way” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 162), enabling the researcher to gain deeper familiarity with the participant’s understanding of himself or herself (Gilligan et al., 2003).

Although there is no set number of words required to be included in each *I* statement, it must be able to provide a degree of context on its own (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 2003). The *I* poem subsequently is constructed by compiling all *I* statements in the same order that they appear in the narrative, each forming a separate line in the poem (Gilligan et al., 2003). A trail of evidence results from this process (Woodcock, 2010).

As a flexible research method, the LG allows the researcher to modify certain details. For instance, Balan (2005) acknowledged her use of an “interpretive license” (p. 7) during the creation of her *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. She reasoned that these self-references were equally applicable. In agreement with Balan, we also included these additional pronouns in our research study as they extend the focus of our analysis. Doing so equipped us to better explore participants’ shifting “perceptions of self” as well as provide an additional opening into discovering their own understanding of self and their identities, and others’ views of them (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Paliadelis & Cruickshank, 2008).

## Step 3: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

The third step in the LG involves listening for the participants’ contrapuntal voices (Gilligan et al., 2003). The researcher seeks to capture the different voices, or themes, that are interacting and coexisting with one another so as to more fully understand the participant’s view of himself or herself in relation to society (Gilligan et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 1995; Woodcock, 2010). Additionally, it “trace[s] the movement in [individuals’] understanding of themselves and others” (Brown, 2001, p. 97).

In completing the third listening, Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch (2003) recommend that a minimum of two voices be sought in each narrative to adequately capture a participant’s multiplicity of voices (p. 165). The researcher must identify those voices in addition to their identifying markers. Gilligan et al. (2003) state, “[t]he 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” (p. 167). This, in the end, is the relationship that the researcher is seeking to explore (Cruz, 2003).

The LG allows the researcher to identify and later analyze a participant’s use of multiplicity of voices that may be layered through their narratives so as to capture the distinct strands of his or her feelings, thoughts, and understandings (Cruz, 2003; Woodcock, 2010). 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. (Cruz, 2003 and Woodcock, 2010 cited in Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 157)

This exploration of the multidimensional voice is at the core of our research; it provides a gateway for gaining insight into each student as unique individuals.

## Step 4: Composing an Analysis

The last step of the LG involves analyzing the entirety of data generated in each step, namely, incorporating, synthesizing, and considering all interpretations and reflexive notes (Gilligan et al., 2003; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008).

## Application of the LG

### Step 1—Listening for the Plot

Prior to embarking on Step 1 of the LG, I read 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 (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 160).

In writing my reflexive notes, I sought to remain mindful of these varied aspects of my response (Woodcock, 2010). Further, my reflexive writing facilitated my exploration of the initial discomfort felt in the beginning stages of my analysis (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). I also examined and documented personal information that may impact the manner in which I approached the data (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 2003).

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. The following excerpt captures a reflexive response to one of the reflection papers:

In my undergraduate fourth-year professional practice class I, too, was required to partake in an arts-based module, which was rather out of my comfort zone. Simply put, it incorporated nutrition and the arts, two areas of inquiry that I had only been previously immersed to separately. It was initially frightening because I was worried about maintaining my high grade-point average and did not believe in my ability to flourish in this realm ... All in all, the experience was marked with a myriad of different and oftentimes conflicting feelings, such as apprehension, fear, and guarded excitement ... From reading this participant's reflection paper, I gather that he also experienced a very similar experience as I did, which provides me with additional insight into his journey. Knowing this, it gives me a clear indication of how powerful the art module was in triggering such a transformation, and also how powerful he must have felt at the end (Petrovic, p. 15–16).

Topic coding, a descriptive coding technique 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,” was employed on each reflection paper (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 140). It allowed us to represent the ideas being communicated as well as to capture the essence of participants' descriptions in a more analytic manner (Richards & Morse, 2007). The guiding purpose for employing this technique was to ensure that the entirety of the themes found within each paper was identified in order to inform our in-depth analysis (Richards & Morse, 2007). The 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” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The LG, after all, focuses the researcher's examination of the content found within the data as well as the manner in which they are communicated by participants (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). It “codes specific portions of narratives but still examines them holistically (i.e., in context)” (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008, p. 499), which is what characterizes the LG and sets it apart from other qualitative methods.

Within this scope of the LG, coding and the ensuing categorization of data occur in conjunction with the analysis of contrapuntal voices (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). Although traditional thematic and pattern analysis, as attained from the first stage of coding, is not the primary purpose of the LG (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008), it is nevertheless one component that enabled us to capture the major themes and ideas discussed by participants. We then integrated the generated codes within the fourth step, composing an analysis, along with the data from Steps 2 and 3, constructing *I* poems and listening for contrapuntal voices, respectively.

In line with Gilligan et al.'s (2003) instruction for the LG's application, areas of text corresponding to each step's particular goal were underlined with a different colored pen. We focused on a different aspect of the narrative during each listening (Cruz, 2003; Gilligan et al., 2003). Once all of the listenings were completed, the multicolored narrative provided a unique visual representation of the various components and highlighted those areas that necessitated greater attention in the in-depth analysis phase (Cruz, 2003; Gilligan et al., 2003). It is this multilayered aspect of the LG that strengthens its approach to data analysis.

To begin creating categories, we grouped 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, a module activity, in that segment of text. This allowed for easier management in ensuing steps (for art project description, cf. Lordly, 2014). This particular step was completed for each of the 27 reflection papers. Some codes in papers were not necessarily categorized in this step if they were deemed to not pertain to any surrounding coding categories.

Next, we 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.” Once the codes from each paper were moved to their appropriate overarching category, we continued to create subcategories so as to further refine them. The refining process involved breaking down the broader categories into more specific expressions. For instance, the category of “Art and Dietetics” branched into such subcategories as “initial understandings” and “gained understandings.” We were then able to examine the most detailed communications within and between each reflection paper and their relation to the guiding research questions.

The vast majority of text from the reflection papers was coded. Exceptions included referenced material, such as peer-reviewed journal articles in which the participant restated and summarized the arguments made in an article without evidence of his or her own critical thinking. Moreover, if a participant did cite a journal article that was subsequently incorporated into his or her personal arguments or statements, then this segment of text was coded. Such incorporation was found to demonstrate the participant's own interpretation of the article and thereby demonstrated his or her critical thinking. Our reasons for choosing this distinction was to ensure that participants' summarization of material did not automatically get labeled as being their own reflective thinking. We wanted to examine the true effect of the 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 to *reflect* on and *analyze* the significance, influence or potential of the arts in dietetic practice (Lordly, 2010). 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* (emphasis added).

The italicized sentence at the end of this excerpt was coded because this participant made a personal reference to herself. She also expressed her understanding of the situation. Similarly, Participant 019 recounts her experience in listening to Lorlady's recounting of her personal challenges with breastfeeding and a guest speaker's story regarding a family member's body weight dilemma. The participant's description of these events was not coded, but 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 (Participant 019).

In these examples, there is a clear distinction between what is considered to be a participant's own reflective, critical thinking and that of a general description.

Within the scope of our research, the end goal of this first step was to categorize and explore categories in order to "locate a pattern" and give "a very accurate account of what is going on" (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 154). Whenever coding is utilized to examine textual data, the resultant categorization allows for the identification and subsequent examination of the data (Richards & Morse, 2007).

My reflexive writing extended to generating memos to capture the specific process involved in category development and management through the different stages of abstraction, starting with coding. This step demands reflexivity due to its inherent interpretive analytical nature (Richards & Morse, 2007).

## Step 2—Constructing I Poems

Similar to Balan (2005), I incorporated the pronouns "you," "we," and "they" into my *I* poems so as to add another level of depth to the study. The possessive pronoun "your" and "yourself/yourself" extended the "you" pronoun. For the personal pronoun "we," the words "us," "our," and "ourselves" were included. And finally, with the personal pronoun "they," the words "their," "them," "themselves," and "others" were included. I sensed that it signaled a distancing stance, thereby providing greater insight into the research study's main questions: the link between participants' type of disclosure (personal versus impersonal) and the types of relationships that were fostered from the arts module. This interpretive license yielded several benefits. First, I gained a deeper understanding of my participants, enabling me to gauge the impact of the art

module on their learning. Second, I was able to develop a profile of the participants "as individuals and as a collective body" (Schonmann & Kempe, 2010, p. 321). 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 of personal information in their reflection papers. This addition provided me with the ability to closely examine their shifts in perceptions as discerned through their alternating use of the different pronouns.

Several questions guided my analysis and reflexive writings: When the participant uses "I," what and to whom is he or she referring? When the participant uses "we," "they," or "you," to what is he or she making reference? What are some of the underlying assumptions associated with the use of these personal pronouns? What differences and what similarities with regard to the level and type of self-disclosure are found between the use of "I," "we," "they," and "you" in the narratives (Stanley, 2002)? Finally, what do these differences indicate? Reflecting on these questions enabled me to examine participants' shifts in perceptions.

Following the identification of all pronouns and their extensions in participants' papers, I proceeded to create an inclusive heading to structure each participant's *I* poem. This heading may be seen below:

First person singular (p.s.) I/me/my/myself	Second p.s. You/your	First person plural (p.p.) We/us/our
Third p.p. They/their/them/others		

Within each "I," "you," "we," and "they" statements needed to construct the *I* poems, I included the accompanying verb, as stipulated by the LG method (Gilligan et al., 2003) in addition to several accompanying words. As such, each line in my *I* poems varies slightly. However, 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" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 163). The underlying goal of the *I* poem is to allow the primary listener, (the researcher), "the opportunity to attend just to the sounds, rhythms, and shifts" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 163).

A felt disconnection with their peers was noted by many participants prior to their involvement in the art module. The *I* poem excerpt below, which captures Participant 012's prompted self-reflection, demonstrates the impact that the art module had on her in establishing interpersonal connections with her classmates 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 distant identity.

First p.s. I/me/my/myself	Second p.s. You/your	First p.p. We/us/our	Third p.p. They/their/them/others
Connect with <i>my</i> feelings Connect with <i>my</i> classmates <i>I</i> did not understand this fully <i>I</i> realized that despite spending nearly three years Working closely with some of <i>my</i> classmates <i>I</i> actually knew			Very little about <i>them</i> Until <i>they</i> were given the opportunity To express feelings through <i>their</i> art <i>They</i> did not have the opportunity to express any other way

Participants acknowledged the openness of their classmates to share a personal part of themselves through their artwork as well as the accompanying courage to do so. It was such sharing that prompted the development of interpersonal connection building. The significance of this transformative change is particularly noted when considering the disconnect participants initially felt with one another.

In framing Participant 012's reflection and her uniquely gained insights, this *I* poem allows me to hone in on her intimate views of her peers more closely. This enables me to appreciate the full significance of this experience as felt by the participant herself, which is a strength that the *I* poem, and thus the LG, contributes to qualitative research.

By listening to the manner in which the participant speaks of himself or herself, as determined through his or his shifting use of the personal pronouns (Balan, 2005), 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" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 162).

### Step 3—Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

Like Balan (2005), I listened for the "loudest" voices (i.e., those that were easiest to discern or occurred most frequently). In an effort to not only create a trail of evidence, in which an outsider is able to track my evolving reasoning, decision making, thought processes, and emotional reactions (Balan, 2005 cited in Jasper, 2005, p. 254; Gilligan et al., 2003; Woodcock, 2010) in relation to my data analysis, I needed to listen to all of the contrapuntal voices that are present in each paper, regardless of whether they were the loudest. 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" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 165). Emulating 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).

In embracing this initial openness to listening for all discernible contrapuntal voices in each participant's paper, even if they differ within each paper, I sought to listen to the data itself rather than impose my own preconceptions. This was accomplished by reading through each reflection paper and underlining corresponding text that captured each contrapuntal voice. At the end of this analysis, I stepped back to determine which of the identified voices were the loudest and most significant for each participant. I then aggregated patterns across participants so as to determine the loudest contrapuntal voices within the data set, that is, those voices that were heard across from all participants. It was these loudest voices that were at the core of the study: the voices of conviction, vulnerability, and transformation. Once the reflection papers were thoroughly analyzed for the presence of contrapuntal voices, I transcribed all of the corresponding voice excerpts from each reflection paper, organized by each identified contrapuntal voice.

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 (Gilligan et al., 2003). 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 (Shapiro, 2003).

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 multicolored narratives that Gilligan et al. (2003) prescribed as the goal outcome, capturing the interrelationship of the contrapuntal voices. The following table is intended to serve as a tool for the reader to

**Table 1.** Contrapuntal Voices.

Contrapuntal Voice	Description	Example
Conviction	<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>	<p>"... one <i>should</i> 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 <i>should</i> learn how to express freely and <i>listen</i> to people carefully and be receptive emotionally" (Participant 011, emphasis added).</p> <p>"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" (Participant 022).</p>
Vulnerability	<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>	<p>"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" (Participant 009).</p> <p>"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" (Participant 013).</p>
Transformation	<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>	<p>"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 naive about the realities of their real world. However, the opportunity to see them <i>through their own eyes</i> through their art was a revelation ... it was meaningful" (Participant 012, emphasis added).</p> <p>"Initially I was nervous entering the class presentations ... however after the first couple [of] 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" (Participant 029).</p>

guide the sections that follow, allowing for easy reference to the table when needed:

In this step, I was also listening for the presence and absence of participants' emotional input via their personal self-disclosures in the reflection papers. This was identified 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 layers 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 of the participants, their experiences, and the impact of the art module on them.

#### Step 4—Composing an Analysis

One of the pillars of the LG is the continual reflexive writing undertaken by the researcher, particularly within the data analysis stage (Gilligan et al., 2003). As the primary author of this study, I recorded my notes, thoughts, interpretations, connections, disconnections, and other comments throughout the four listenings. The resultant trail of evidence allows me as well as

others to examine the actions taken by our research team and those not taken and identify potential areas that may require further attention (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Richards & Morse, 2007).

Further, the reflexive writing provided a means of addressing potential prejudices and personal factors that may have influenced our data analysis (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, 2003). Such ongoing reflexivity within qualitative research is essential in maintaining transparency (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), acting as an important validity check of the formulated interpretations (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Richards & Morse, 2007).

However, this fourth step is labor intensive. It involves analyzing the entirety of data generated in each step, namely, incorporating, synthesizing, and considering all interpretations and reflexive notes (Gilligan et al., 2003; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). Throughout our study, we found this step to be the most challenging one. This was primarily attributed to a lack of logistical explanations within literature as to *how* to integrate the reflexive notes with the research write-up. Simply, integrating the culminating data was not as straightforward as the literature purported.

Published guidelines in the literature helped to inform me as to the purpose and application of the LG, but it was imperative that I make my own way through the implementation itself. In misguidedly believing that the LG was to be applied in a rigid and prescriptive manner, my felt constraint rendered this last



step of analysis increasingly difficult. However, upon realizing that there was no “cookie cutter” approach to its application and consequently giving myself permission to wholly immerse myself into the listenings, I was able to devise my own plan. I wanted to ensure that no loss of valuable detail occurred through the process of data condensation.

Balancing timelines and grappling with stagnancy and unanswered questions led me to utilize my reflexive writing to its full potential. Like Watt (2007), who in her paper on the benefits of reflexivity in qualitative research, my journaling enabled me to tap into and unleash ideas that I may not have consciously been able to articulate. The more I reflected on the data, the more I began to make connections. This painstaking process was necessary as it pushed me to write down every thought, reflection, and idea that passed through my mind without interruptions or breaks to review my formulated thoughts. Once it was recorded in free flow prose, I would repeatedly reread this text and assemble related sections to begin the first of many draft analyses. Initially, there were many such individual sections examining each of my research questions and subsets of these questions too. Though they appeared disjointed from one another at these early stages, they acted as a foundation that I used to guide my next analysis to repeat the outlined process as often as was warranted. Once there were sufficient sections written up, I began connecting them through a sequential flow of ideas. It proved to be an essential step during this time of lack of clarity and mental block. For example, I reflected

on particularly poignant quotations from participants’ reflection papers that examined their journey through the art module. This would be followed by the assimilation of contrapuntal voices and *I* poems related to these quotations and the overarching arguments being made in relation to the study’s research questions. Here is a modified excerpt from such a write-up:

Throughout their involvement in the art module, participants gained significant insights regarding the application of the arts within the dietetic field and its role in the professional development of dietitians. In examining these professional connections, the contrapuntal voice of conviction was loudly heard. Little personalization is noted within participants’ narratives and is heard through a rational and objective, rather than emotional, tone. Participants’ dominating use of the more impersonal pronouns “you,” “we,” and “they” further captures this voice:

... *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. (Participant 016, emphasis added)

The voice of conviction is further heard through participants’ usage of strong, prescriptive language, namely, “have to,” “should,” “must,” and “need to,” as shown below in Participant 005’s *I* poem excerpt:

First p.s.  
I/me/my/myself

First p.p.  
We/us/our/ourselves

Third 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

Although participants hold strong positions when reflecting on the professional expectations dietitians face, their distanced voices highlight an indirect self-identification with their statements. As documented elsewhere, “Narrators often shift away from the use of first-person when experience or knowledge is difficult to claim” (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008, p. 504) or are even taboo in the positivist realm.

This free flow of thoughts proved to be a powerful outlet, having provided me with a structure to incorporate findings from each step of the LG with my reflexive writing. In the end, I was able to achieve the ultimate goal of Step 4 of the LG: incorporate, synthesize, and consider all interpretations and reflexive notes that otherwise seemed like an insurmountable task (Gilligan et al., 2003; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008).

From my experience in utilizing the LG, I contend that researchers must be cognizant of the following elements that make up the foundation of this complex qualitative method: time and patience, continuous reflective thought, and the faith that the connections are embedded within the layers. In the throes of my own analysis when I felt most lost, confused, and doubtful, I have only now come to realize that these were not signs of failure but another part of the cyclical nature of qualitative research, a part that requires the analyst to adopt an open and allowing state of mind so that deep listening is provided a space from which layered meanings can emerge had I harbored this awareness then, I would have utilized it as my daily mantra to propel me forward. It would have helped me appreciate that I must continue to wade through the depths of

the data to get to the crux of the research, that is, to thoroughly understand the connections of each listening step in relation to my study's objectives. However, such learned insights are the very definition of experiential learning; they bequeath the privilege upon journal articles to inform other researchers utilizing the very same research method in their work.

The LG is an adaptable research method that unearths the previously unnoticed and unheard voices in the participants' written reflection papers. The qualitative research process is neither black and white nor straightforward. Instead, it thrives in the gray regions that are filled with nuance, detail, and richness. It is the process of unearthing these dynamic grey regions that are the most challenging and most rewarding.

## Conclusion

We submit that the application of the LG is a powerful tool for research offering significant potential for data analysis in many disciplines, including, as this article demonstrates in the area of dietetics. We suggest that the LG can be extended for use with written reflection papers, in this case course assignments.

The second author contends that the LG approach enabled the authors to elevate important voices and knowledge that may have otherwise remained silent. In disciplines that are science based, attention to the relational aspects of practice can contribute to an expanded understanding of that practice. The LG enabled us to tease out the strands of the narrative that spoke to our research question (Gilligan et al., 2003). As "listeners" we became intimately involved in the research process and reflexively were able to attend to our thoughts and feelings about what we were hearing. This enables researchers to consider how our own impressions and subjectivities might affect the analytical process. Understanding our analysis and findings as complex and multidimensional serves as an example to the dietetic profession, and others, as to how a relational process like the LG can liberate important knowledge and enhance science-based professions' understandings of participant experience as a contributor to professional knowledge.

The third author submits that using all or even some of these steps can help a researcher learn to listen to her data in a fresh way. For example, Brigham has used Step 2, constructing *I* poems to listen more attentively to the interview transcripts of African Nova Scotian graduate student learners. This, combined with written researcher reflections of the data along with on-going dialogue with a co-researcher, enabled a heightened sense of listening to and *the hearing of* the research participants' voices and perspectives. Brigham suggests that the LG reflects not only a feminist perspective but a critical race theoretical perspective which advocates for a careful listening of voices from the margins especially those voices that counter the (more often heard) norms (cf. Brigham, 2013). Brigham proposes that a sharing and discussion of the LG data with each of the research participants, such as the *I* poems, can lead to another fruitful layer of research analysis. Such involvement of the research participant in the LG process is reflective of an Afrocentric perception of research (cf. Brigham, 2012).

We contend that our study sets the path for future research projects employing the LG in a manner that goes beyond the initial intentions of Gilligan et al. The LG is valuable for exploring other arts-based initiatives in dietetics and beyond. As explored in this article, the step-by-step details from our data analysis process provide additional insight into the LG for other researchers to consider and enrich their research.

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